Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa: Violence and Transition in Post Settler-Colonial States — by Brian Raftopoulos, Solomon Mungure, Nicky Rousseau and Masheti Masinjila

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The recently concluded elections in Kenya against the background of the electoral violence of 2007, the anticipated election in Zimbabwe in 2013 with the memory of state led electoral violence in 2008 still fresh in the memory of the electorate, and the proclivity for state violence in South Africa witnessed in the Marikana killings, all point to different but connected legacies of violence in these countries.

Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa are three former British settler colonies where between 1963 and 1994 the countries witnessed the coming of independence and the end of white settler rule. However the forms of violence that characterised both colonial rule and the anti-colonial struggles in those countries have continued to haunt their political and everyday life. Thus the Mau Mau period in Kenya, the dominantly guerilla war in Zimbabwe and the widespread urban resistance and more limited armed struggle of the South African liberation movements have found continuing echoes in the contemporary violence in these countries.

One key factor in understanding the different politics of violence in these countries has been the role of the state. While the state has become conflated with the dominant political party and its violence in Zimbabwe this has been less apparent in Kenya and, with some exception, not the case in South Africa. Nevertheless violence in all three countries, whether perpetrated by the military, paramilitary or informal armed formations or protesting citizens is closely associated with the dynamics of anti-colonial nationalism and state formation. Moreover questions of sovereignty, nation-building and legitimacy lie at the heart of making sense of the forms and character of violence.

For example, the state has played a crucial role in determining the relative weight of ethnic identification as a factor of violence. Thus

colonialism, and more particularly its constructions of indirect rule or what the scholar Mahmood Mamdani refers to as "'decentralised despotism,' gave rise to ethnicity as a key marker setting the limits of the boundaries of political community in ways that have in many cases endured in the post-colonial period.

Of the three countries, the discourse and moral economy of this particular category have been most evident in Kenya where the battle and exercise of state power has been largely played out within the limits of elite alliances and the careful balancing of ethnic tensions. The weakening of such alliances during the period of liberalization in the 1990's, and the decentralization of control over state violence during this period through the informal employment of militias, laid the basis for a wider use of such militias by individual politicians desperate to ensure ongoing access to the levers of power.

This factor had a particularly devastating effect on the polity of Kenya in the aftermath of the 2007 elections. Prior to this, various groupings organized around differing claims of marginality were mobilized for violent purposes around the contested claims of the 2007 elections. As an example, the violent activities of the Mungiki arose out of the ethnically motivated political violence in 1992 and 1997 when government sponsored Kalenjin militia attacked, killed and uprooted thousands of Kikuyu in the Rift Valley. The Mungiki subsequently recruited its membership from among displaced Kikuyu in this area, later spreading its influence to the Central Province and then to the squatters and slum dwellers of Nairobi.

On the terrain of the contested 2007 Presidential elections the mobilization of Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnicities were at the centre of the bloody conflicts that followed that election. The Government of National Unity that was created in the aftermath of this tragedy, driven by national, regional and international players, prepared the ground for the 2013 Presidential election. It is significant that in the recent Kenyan election, the conflicts between these groups were largely subdued under the alliance between Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, a Kikuyu-Kalenjin agreement driven, in a significant way, by the ICC indictments against both leaders for their respective roles in the 2007/8 violence. Kenyatta's victory, notwithstanding an unsuccessful Supreme Court

challenge from his opponent, brings to a temporary close the recent phase of Presidential contestation in Kenya.

In Zimbabwe the contours of political violence have differed from the Kenyan situation largely because of the central role of the ruling party and state as perpetrators, even though nationalist parties and politics have also been fractured along ethnic fault lines. Here the central role of the armed struggle in the decolonization process placed the military at the centre of the political process in the post-colonial period. From the brutal suppression of the other party of liberation, ZAPU, in the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in the mid 1980's, to the persistent use of various forms of formal and informal state violence against members of the opposition and civic movement from the 1990's through the 2000's, the ruling party has made it clear that its legitimacy and sovereignty lie not in elections but in the legacy of the armed struggle. Zanu PF and Mugabe's refusal to accept electoral defeat in the 2008 Presidential election led, as in Kenya, to a temporary Inclusive Government, negotiated through SADC.

This Global Political Agreement (GPA) agreed on in late 2008 has been marked by a series of tensions, not the least of which has been the continued control of the coercive arms of the state by Zanu PF, and the latter's refusal to implement any form of security sector transformation, during the period of the GPA. Following a successful referendum on a new constitution in March this year, there remain key obstacles to the carrying out of a generally acceptable election, which was the major objective of the SADC mediation leading to the 2008 agreement. The central control of the military and security apparatus by Zanu PF, and the military-economic complex that has emerged from this in the aftermath of the radical restructuring of property relations on the land and in the area of mineral resources in the 2000's, means that any political solution to the country will now have to deal with this formidable power structure. The SADC Troika call in March 2013 for "˜security sector realignment' in Zimbabwe before a new election only served to confirm the more general concern over this issue.

In the South Africa case, while violence preceding the 1994 election bore some similarities to the recent electoral violence in Kenya and Zimbabwe, since that time electoral politics have by and large remained

free and fair, overseen and run by a strong and independent electoral mechanism. Even where the ruling party has lost control over either local or regional government, these electoral losses have been respected, even if begrudgingly. In this and many other respects South Africa remains a constitutional democracy, although the possible threat of electoral loss by the ruling ANC could set this process on a different path.

Having noted this, however, the point needs to be made that within the ruling party itself, where control of power is seen to be associated with economic opportunity and access to patronage, there has been intense intra-party competition both for party elections and in deciding on party representatives for government. This has led to fragmentation, factionalism and, at times, violence.

The fact that the 1994 transition was less dependent on the military role of the liberation movements, and more on the combination of internal protests, regional support and international pressure, has for the moment lessened the centrality of the liberation movement's military wing in the politics of the state, notwithstanding occasional vocal and even physical threats by organized military veterans. Indeed as a post-liberation movement, the imprimatur of the liberation struggle continues to mark current political practice. Additionally evoking the mantle of the struggle to mobilize support, and mobilize violence, is also a tool used outside of the formal party structures. Thus at a popular level various forms of political protest, especially post 2007, have returned to the language and tactics of the anti-apartheid struggle politics. Songs and slogans from the struggle have been revitalized, and repertoires of resistance-burning barricades, stoning vehicles, damaging or destroying public buildings- characterize current collective violence.

Such forms of protests, as well as the growing number of strikes in the country would appear to be not only ways of ensuring better service delivery. More than this they express a disgruntlement with, even rejection of, the social pact and forms of post-apartheid democracy that have been seen to produce growing inequality. While at one level these protests suggest that the crisis of accumulation, which was a key factor in driving the move towards democratization, has not been resolved; at another it may signal a rejection of the forms of democratic government

envisaged in the constitution. Thus the use of coercion that sometimes accompanies these protests proposes different forms of sociality and community, in which the social order imagined is not that which is enshrined in the constitution, but a radically delimited community in which violence would seem to be central. Disturbingly, the reactions of police to collective protest, which sometimes replicate that of the apartheid era, only serve to confirm the legitimacy of violence.

In assessing the common challenges of these countries it is clear that a combination of the colonial legacies of structural inequality and modes of political rule, as well as the limits to state legitimacy in the face of the assaults of global neo-liberalism, present formidable obstacles to the realization of democratic dispensations. Under these conditions the construction of state sovereignty through an increasing resort to violence and coercion remains a key resource for the making of states.

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