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Local Violence and Politics in KwaZulu-Natal: Perceptions of agency in a post-conflict society

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Abstract

This article analyses the narratives of survivors of violence in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and addresses the relationship between local violence, politics, and agency in a post-conflict setting. In particular, the study advances an understanding of how local political violence serves to increase or decrease agency. In line with previous research on emotions and agency, our study suggests that fear and anxiety encourage risk avoidance and have a pacifying effect on survivors of violence. It also indicates that anger and enthusiasm are emotions experienced by those who have a strong sense of agency and have become politically mobilised after violence. This study contributes to the debate on local capacity for peacebuilding and democracy by showing how local agency is affected by violence and how survivors of violence can become agents of change through politics.

Keywords: local violence; agency; South Africa; post conflict societies; peacebuilding

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Introduction

How does local violence shape perceptions of agency in post-conflict societies? The literature on peacebuilding has increasingly recognized that sustainable peace requires broad-based legitimization and a strong bottom-up approach. Citizen participation in public affairs not merely at election time, but also in times in-between is crucial for legitimacy. Participation in politics provides civic awareness to groups and communities that otherwise remains peripheral to the decisions that shape their destiny. Such participation is also a way of strengthening local ownership and an approach to governance and development that rests on “going with the grain” rather than on imported blueprints. Localised processes, also including wider institutions and social networks, have shown successful in, for instance, Uganda, Cambodia, Somalia and Mozambique.¹ This research has contributed to a ‘local turn’ in the study of post-conflict settings. In this context, local agency has been highlighted as crucial for sustainable peace, because it awards legitimacy to the new political order and influences the propensity for peacebuilding.² While some studies suggest that “there is no shortage of agency in most post-conflict spaces at grassroots levels”,³ there are only a few studies which highlight the interlinkages between agency and violence. However, there are studies that show that individuals increase their political participation in the wake of violence.⁴ This is in contrast to the general notion concerning the influence of violence, which suggests that threats and violence decrease a sense of agency in post-conflict societies. For instance, after violent conflict, civil society is often shattered or non-existent and social capital is low. Moreover, residual violence of both a criminal and political nature may hinder progress towards reconciliation and democratic politics.⁵ In such a context, party campaigns and community work could be expected to attract few participants.

This article departs from the puzzling fact that the experience of violence sometimes lead to increased political participation, while it sometimes appears to undermine agency. Our study focuses on political participation in the wake of political violence and contributes to an understanding of how local violence shapes agency. We are interested in agency and political participation and in a broad sense, including both political party and community activities. Agency is a term that refers to a conviction that one's decisions and actions are important and can make a difference. How do individuals affected by political violence engage in politics, and what reasons do they provide for their increased or decreased participation in the aftermath of violence? The study is based on in-depth interviews in several 'hotspot' locations in KwaZulu-Natal affected by political violence prior to and after the first elections in 1994. Field research was conducted in 2009 and 2010 and includes over 50 in-depth interviews with survivors of violence.

The contribution of this article is both theoretical and empirical. We empirically map the different ways in which local violence influences agency and political participation in a post-war society by first identifying the type of political participation individuals affected by political violence engage in and analyse how the individuals in each category view politics. We also investigate the rationale individuals provide in the narratives for increasing their participation or for distancing themselves from participation. The main theoretical contribution is that we advance an understanding of how individuals perceive agency through emotional responses to violence. Emotions such as pride, enthusiasm, fear and anger shape agency and thereby influences mobilisation (increased political participation) and pacification (decreased political participation). In this way we make a novel contribution to the literature on 'everyday peace', local peacebuilding, agency and its influence on politics and local democracy.

We find that in the wake of violence, survivors engage with politics in three different ways: as voters and passive members, as political activists, including running for political offices, and by turning to other means of collective action, such as community activism. Our study suggests that agency is related to the emotions triggered by political violence and contributes to shaping views on politics and political behaviour. In particular, survivors of political violence who primarily expressed emotions of fear and anxiety in the narratives, describe a loss of or decreased agency and seemed to have become more risk averse and less engaged in politics. There is also some indication that individuals, who expressed either anger or enthusiasm as a result of violence, experience increased agency and can become mobilised and raise their level of political participation. These conclusions are in line with research on the role of emotions in political participation, which highlights how risk-seeking and risk avoidance is shaped by emotions.

Agency and Political Participation in Post-War Societies

Agency is a term that refers to a conviction that one's actions and decisions matter.⁶ The emancipatory approach to peacebuilding has highlighted the importance of local agency in the formation of sustainable peace.⁷ The 'local turn' in peacebuilding has contributed to a shift in focus, away from international intervention as the main remedy to violent conflict, to local capacity in the prevention of conflict. In this debate a focus on local agency is critical (Paffenholz in this issue). This literature is mainly concerned with local agency in the context of international interventions and discusses forms of peace which emerge when local agents resist or adopt international norms and practices of peacebuilding. We contribute to this literature with a focus on political participation,

violence and agency in a context which is relatively free from large-scale international intervention.

In this article we are interested in agency and its connections to political participation and violence after a war. Political participation includes activities such as voting, campaign activities, contacts between politicians and citizens, and demonstrations. While some scholars stress that such activities have to be directed towards influencing the government, others define political participation as actions aimed at influencing any political outcome.⁸ In this study we employ a broad definition of political participation and look at both direct involvement in politics and community work.

We focus on violence in different local sites, often carried out by individuals residing in the local area. Local political violence here refers to the physically injuring, killing or threatening of individuals, or the destruction of property, in which targets are attacked for political purposes. Political violence is occasionally perceived as expressing a political voice and as such could be seen as an extreme form of political participation.⁹ However, in this study, political violence and political participation are studied as two separate analytic concepts to investigate the linkages between the two.

A recent strand of research on the impact of war on societies has begun to probe the political consequences of violence. These studies suggest that stressful and traumatic events, such as direct or indirect exposure to political violence do, not have a one-sided negative effect on societies but can have varying influence on individuals and groups.¹⁰ Blattman's study of individuals who were forcefully recruited during the war in Uganda shows that "forced recruitment leads to greater postwar political participation—a 27 per cent increase in the likelihood of voting and a doubling of the likelihood of being a community leader among former abductees".¹¹ In a similar vein, Bellows and Miguel's

study on Sierra Leone, using data from a household survey, demonstrates that victims of the war were “more likely to register to vote ..., attend community meetings ..., participate in local political and community groups, and contribute to local public goods (serving on a local primary school committee)”.¹² By contrast, Balcells’ work on victimisation and political participation and identity in Spain among those exposed to that country’s civil war, finds that in the long run, survivors of violence do not increase their political participation to any significant extent.¹³

We build on this literature and propose that emotions are important in understanding the linkage between violence, agency and political participation. This is also in line with research on the importance of agency in explaining participation in insurgent activities. Wood suggests that ‘pleasure’ in agency is a reason why participants with little experience of political efficacy take part in collective enterprises.¹⁴ Previous research on emotions and political participation takes us one step further. This research has found that emotions can account for variation in political behaviour regarding, for instance, elections. Drawing on psychological research on information processing, decision making and risk assessment, it suggests that certain emotions prompt reward-seeking behaviour while other emotions encourage risk-avoidance.¹⁵ Previous research has shown that positive emotions (enthusiasm, joy, etc.) have certain implications for political judgment and learning. Moreover, different negative emotions, such as anxiety and anger, also have distinct political effects.¹⁶ In this study we explore how the emotions triggered by violence influence individuals’ sense of agency, which in turn influence political participation in different forms.

Exploring Agency: Case Selection and Research Design

We investigate the relationship between local violence, agency and political participation by exploring the narratives of survivors of violence in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Despite large-scale historical violence, South Africa is generally seen as a successful case of democratic society. In comparison to most African states, the level of political participation is high and the institutions are relatively strong. Nevertheless, there is still on-going political violence, especially in the province KwaZulu-Natal. In contrast to many studies which analyse peacebuilding in the context of a military operation, our study provides the opportunity to study local agency where there is no such international involvement. Whereas the asymmetrical relationship is central to understanding the lack of local ownership during military operations, the local dynamics are key to understanding how political participation varies in KwaZulu-Natal.

Our main objective was to interview supporters of different political parties affected by electoral violence to capture the reasons they provide for how their political participation and views of politics were affected by violence. During two rounds of fieldwork, in 2009 and 2010, relevant NGOs working with survivors of violence facilitated contacts with interviewees and assisted us in recruiting interpreters.

In the study we focus only on individuals affected by violence. The interview material contains a variation of experiences and political consequences, and in total 51 individuals affected by political violence were interviewed. The study covers the main hotspot areas in KwaZulu-Natal, and the interviewees reside or have resided in the following locations: Estcourt, Empangeni, Msinga, Richmond, Nongoma, Pongola, Pietermaritzburg, Mtubatuba, Eshowe, and Durban. 21 were women and 30 were men, with an age range from 17 to 91.

All interviewees had directly experienced violence either during apartheid or after the watershed election in 1994; they had either themselves been targets of physical violence, or their family members had been injured or killed due to involvement in politics. The violence included incidents such as being stabbed for not attending a party meeting, being beaten and having the house burnt down in an attempt to force them to send their boy to training camp, being shot after the act of voting and killings for being believed to belong to the wrong party. In addition, some of our interviewees had been implicated in acts of violence. More than half of the interviewees had experienced contemporary violence: 17 individuals referred only to violence after 1994; 13 of the interviewees had experienced political violence both prior to and after 1994; and 21 had only experienced violence before the 1994 election. The violence experienced by the participants in the study was carried out by the ANC, Inkatha, state forces and some additional political parties. An approximately equal share of those interviewed identified themselves as either IFP or ANC supporters. In addition, a few of the interviewees represented smaller parties such as Democratic Alliance (DA) and United Democratic Movement (UDF), and only a small share of the interviewees had changed political affiliation over the years.

To explore how individuals affected by political violence regard political participation and agency, we conducted semi-structured interviews seeking to capture both the interviewees' experience of violence and their relationship to politics. The issue of political violence was only raised after having explored issues related to political participation (such as their views on politics, if they voted and why they supported the party they voted for). We asked questions concerning how interviewees had been affected, why they believe that they were targeted, and if and how violence had affected their political participation in the direct aftermath of the violence. Finally, we asked

questions about how they coped with violence and the role of political parties, the police, NGOs, religious leaders and chiefs in preventing or managing violence. Many interviewees discussed emotional responses openly, for instance, in response to how violence had affected them. In addition, their body language, tone of voice, and choice of language (some also cried during the interviews) indicated the emotions associated with politics and the experience of violence.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic, any critical information that could be used to identify the interviewees, such as name and the location in which the violence occurred, is kept confidential. The survivors included in the study do not form a random sample of survivors of political violence in KwaZulu-Natal. The method of recruiting informants via NGOs may have influenced the type of survivors who were interviewed in this study. We have sought to limit this bias by using multiple entry points to recruit interviewees and using different interpreters. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that the interviewees in our study are more connected to networks than the average survivor of political violence. Another methodological bias influencing the information forming the basis for analysis is that politically active individuals are more often targets of violence. Self-reported victimisation may include over-reporting or other biases that are also relevant for our study, and lapses in time may shape how individuals remember.¹⁷ However, the sample serves the purpose of this article by displaying important variations in terms of political affiliation, type and timing of violence, age and gender.

Political Participation and Violence in KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa has a history of intense political violence. The transition period to end minority rule began after the release of the ANC leader Nelson Mandela in 1990. In the four years leading up to the first democratic election in April 1994, an estimated 15000

were killed in political violence.¹⁸ Both the South African Defence Force and the unreformed police force were involved in political violence. Such political violence with official connotations is often referred to as third force violence.¹⁹

The violent history in KwaZulu-Natal is closely related to apartheid policies concerning homeland politics. The KwaZulu homeland, established in the early 1970s, was not a clearly defined and unified territory but consisted of pockets and enclaves of territory. This apartheid structure provided incentives for ethnic organisation and violent mobilisation to gain access to power and resources.²⁰ In the black communities, the police had little reach. Instead, violent practices became a standard way of regulating disputes at the local level. In KwaZulu-Natal, violence has developed into ‘a chronic and ordinary state of affairs’ during the last two decades.²¹

At the fore is the conflict between the ANC and the Zulu-nationalistic Inkatha movement. During the transition, Inkatha transformed to a political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was forced into exile, and both the Inkatha movement and the ANC created self-defence units within the country. The different forms of violence also involved generational conflicts, clashes between migrant workers in hostels, succession of chieftainships and crime.²²

The main reason why the conflict worsened in the early 1990s was that Inkatha felt increasingly marginalised when the apartheid government and the ANC began to negotiate the transition to end minority rule. During this period, many residential township areas were transformed into no-go areas, where opposition supporters were not allowed to enter. In addition, rivalry over land intensified in the KwaZulu homeland and Natal province, as many South Africans needed a piece of land for subsistence farming. Parallel to the ANC–IPF violence, white right-wing Afrikaner movements also threatened

to destabilise the electoral process.²³ However, in the end, election day itself was relatively calm.

Since 1994, electoral violence has subsided in most parts of South Africa. However, some regions remain unstable, and KwaZulu-Natal contains several hotspots. Due to continued political violence in the province, the 1995 local elections were delayed for seven months. Furthermore, an extremely volatile situation arose in Richmond in 1996 due to intra-ANC struggles that resulted in the formation of a new political party, the United Democratic Movement (UDM). The national elections of 1999 and 2004 saw a clear reduction in violence, yet coercion and violence surrounding elections have continued.²⁴ In 1999, there were still no-go zones in KwaZulu-Natal, and 300 individuals were killed during the five-month period ahead of the elections. The 2004 election witnessed a further decline in violence. The presence of the military at polling stations in KwaZulu-Natal ensured a more voter-friendly environment.²⁵ However, the 2009 election experienced significant violence in KwaZulu-Natal, as a result of ANC's attempts to overtake IFP strongholds, but still at a lower level than in 2004. Intra-party violence was also a feature of the election.²⁶

The ANC has been the dominant party since the first elections in 1994. In KwaZulu-Natal, electoral support for the ANC has increased from 47 per cent in 2004 to 64 per cent in 2009. The main explanation is the 'Zuma factor'. The current head of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, has deep Zulu roots in KwaZulu-Natal. This neutralised the IFP's appeal on the basis of traditionalism and ethnicity.²⁷

The broad spectrum of participation by those affected by political violence in our study is captured in three different categories representing forms of political participation): 1) voters and passive membership; 2) political activists and professional politicians; 3) community activists.

The first group of survivors includes those whose political participation is limited to voting and passive party membership. Political participation in South Africa is high by global standards. Voter turnout (as percentage of registered voters) dropped in both 1999 (89 per cent) and 2004 (77 per cent) but rose again to just over 78 per cent in the 2009 elections, which is comparable to many established Western democracies.²⁸ One reason is the ideological struggle against apartheid, which affected everyone in the country. This means that South Africa is still highly politicised, where people in all parts of the country talk about politics and engage in other ways.²⁹

A second group of persons affected by political violence includes those who actively participate in politics and involves a spectrum from active party membership to having a political job. Some of our interviewees were active politicians or formerly held a political position such as local councillors or mayors. Others were actively involved in the party organisation at the local level or served as chairpersons or party secretaries of political parties at the local, regional or provincial level. There were also individuals in our sample who actively supported the party during electoral periods by assisting in organising local campaigns, by cooking food and providing facilities or being involved in the organisation of political rallies or door-to-door canvassing. Most of our interviewees were active in either the ANC or the IFP.

A third group of survivors are those who do not participate actively in politics but are active members of the community. These individuals were involved in different organisations and networks. Some were engaged in organisations working with survivors of violence, such as the Richmond Peace Project, Sinani, the Leadership Forum in Estcourt, or Bambanani (which brings together women affected by political violence) or different church-based organisations working in trauma counselling. For instance, the Richmond Peace Project was formed in response to lingering violence in the area, which

has been ravaged by violence, first relating to the ANC-IFP conflict and, subsequently, due to a falling-out within the ANC in 1997.

How Did Violence Shape Perceptions of Politics and Agency?

All individuals in our study had been affected by political violence, which in turn appears to have contributed to forming their view of politics. Did it also influence their sense of agency and political behaviour? In the wake of violence, some interviewees report decreased political participation – *pacification*, while others express a motivation to engage in politics – *mobilisation* – accompanied by a sense of agency. However, the majority did not allude to a change in their agency as a consequence of violence, but rather, their political behaviour was reportedly characterised by *status quo* in the wake of the violent experience.

Violence and Status Quo

The political behaviour of one group of respondents remained at roughly the same level or in the same form after their experience of violence and was thus characterised by the *status quo*. This is so for interviewees who were politically active at different levels before they became survivors of violence: both those who continue to have a low degree of participation and those who continue to be more active in politics.

First, many interviewees were primarily active as voters and passive members and continued to be so after an experienced of violence.³⁰ Intuitively, it might seem that voters affected by violence would choose to distance themselves from violence. However, interviewees provide several reasons for their continued voting and maintaining party membership. A motive for voting despite being directly affected by violence is that voting and a party membership is a means of accessing basic goods and services and is therefore

necessary for daily life (Interviews 2 and 4). Another interviewee says that you cannot get a job unless you have party membership (Interview 3). Some interviewees suggest that the political parties directly stop or deliver assistance in relation to elections: ‘Service delivery is stopped to force people to vote for IFP’ (Interview 2). Thus, voting and membership are seen as means of accessing basic goods.

All but one interviewee explicitly state that the violence that affected them was politically motivated. One interviewee was not certain that the violence that affected him was political—although it took place in 1995 during the large-scale political violence between the ANC and IFP in the area—and interprets the motive for the violence as revenge (Interview 9). Several of the interviewees in this group expressed anxiety as a reason for staying away from politics apart from voting (e.g., interviews 3 and 4). Some interviewees were very emotional during the interviews. A number of interviewees were so severely traumatised by violence that they were not capable of participating in politics because of the trauma (Interviews 26 and 14).

Second, some interviewees who had been active party members or even had political jobs at the time of the violence remained actively involved in politics after the violence. While a few of these interviewees also refer to access to basic goods as a reason for continued participation, they report either fear or the context of violence as the main reason for remaining involved in politics.

An example of fear as a driving force behind continued activism is a man who has been an active party member and was ambushed while travelling by car with some other people who were also involved in politics. He was shot and severely injured in the abdomen. The violence was part of an intra-party dispute that escalated into violence in 2010. After the attack, he wanted to leave politics, as his political views had changed dramatically. However, his family would not let him because of fears of what would

happen (Interview 46). In essence, they feared reprisals from fractions within their own party.

Some interviewees who continued to work for a party were primarily attacked prior to 1994 or in the mid-1990s when the conflict in KwaZulu-Natal was still intense. They view violence as something that should belong to the past, and the perpetrators should be forgiven: 'The situation forced people to kill' (Interview 39); 'it was a situation of war' (Interview 40) and 'it was difficult times, either you go to jail or you kill somebody' (Interview 36). The intra-party fighting within the ANC/UDM and IFP was perceived as a continued competition for political power (Interview 36). Other interviewees were clearly ideologically driven. For instance, a local chief, who was an active supporter of the ANC but resides in an area dominated by the IFP, was attacked and intimidated on a number of occasions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, in spite of describing a situation of an omnipresent sense of fear and insecurity, he remains a relentlessly outspoken ANC supporter (Interview 13). In contrast to most interviewees, he has support from the ANC both regionally and nationally, and has been able to directly involve high-level politicians to protect him.

In sum, the dominant motive reported for voting and passive membership was anxiety and a sense of uncertainty. A minimal level of political participation was perceived as insurance and necessary to access basic goods and to have a functioning life. It is clear that some interviewees would like to participate more actively. However, anxiety and trauma stand out as central motives for why the interviewees in this study refrain from more active political participation and appears linked to a lack of agency. For those who were more actively engaged as members, standing for political office or having a political job, the interpretation of the violence and the fear it triggered help us understand why they continued to participate politically at roughly the same level as

before the violence. Therefore, in line with previous research, anxiety and fear seem to have encouraged risk avoidance and hindered more active participation.

Violence as Pacifier

A second category of individuals affected by political violence is formed by those who feel a loss of agency and distance themselves from participating in politics after experiencing violence. Among those individuals who became pacified, are both those who were formerly active party members and who have scaled down their activism and former politicians who have withdrawn from politics. They might still vote or be members of a political party, but compared to their prior political participation have now decreased their involvement substantially. In contrast to those who have become politically activated, these individuals recount that they distanced themselves in the aftermath of violence. They provide two reasons for this: politics is perceived as too dangerous or meaningless.

Voting remained important also for this group, for the very same reasons outlined by those who are at the status quo, where access to basic services is an important motivator for at least minimal participation in politics. For instance, in the words of one interviewee: ‘You need to show proof that you are a party member to get the certificate needed for registration for a SIM card’ (Interview 1).

In this group, all interviewees expressed fear and anxiety of the consequences of continued public political participation. One interviewee was formerly a chairman and an IFP councillor from 1989 to 1993. He had become engaged in politics in the early 1970s. During the 1970s, he was involved in the ANC, but when the ANC was banned, he turned to the IFP so that he would not be subject to threats and intimidation. Although he formerly held a political position, he no longer votes due to a frustration with politics.

Now, he says, it is too dangerous to be involved in politics: ‘everyone is fighting, both between ANC and IFP, and within IFP’ (Interview 49).

Intra-party violence seems to have distinct implications. Some interviewees cannot understand why people in the same residential area, within the same political party, engage in violence against one another. A potential reason for the different meanings associated with different forms of political violence is that while inter-party violence can be understood as part of a broader political struggle, such as the struggle against the apartheid regime, intra-party violence does not primarily rest on an ideological divide. Intra-party violence – which has become a more common feature of South African politics – is simply viewed as a power game. As one man recounts: ‘Recently politics has changed a great deal, especially since I moved to [this area]. The party is divided in two. I do not understand why people from the same area are killing each other. There is this one man doing all the killings; he is like a snake; he has no conscience. I have decided to distance myself from politics’ (Interview 47). In this group, some individuals interpreted contemporary politics as meaningless and a fight for selfish ambitions, in contrast to a fight for freedom and democracy. A similar motive that was mentioned was jealousy (Interview 49).

In sum, the perceived change in the character of political violence from a means of achieving an ideological goal to selfish personal gains has changed the perception of politics into something that is meaningless and dangerous to engage in. The ideologically motivated violence during the anti-apartheid struggle is seen as legitimate, as it was an act committed for the public interest, whereas violence for personal gains is seen an illegitimate expression of self-interest. In line with our expectations, fear and anxiety were reported as critical factors for the pacifying effects of political violence.

Violence as Mobiliser

A third group stands out, as they have increased their political participation in the wake of political violence. Some were not at all politically active before experiencing political violence and are now active members or have taken up political jobs. Many of those who increased their political participation after experiencing violence had a rather high level of participation even before they became directly affected by violence. Their narratives suggest that political violence can motivate political involvement out of 1) a need for defence and 2) responsibility and duty. While the interviewees do not directly refer to emotions, the emotions that become clear from the interviews are anger and enthusiasm as important drivers for increased political participation.

Some interviewees report defending the community as a motive to become more engaged in politics (Interviews 25, 28, and 44). A former teacher recounts how, in 1991, he was shot on the way to school and his child, who was with him, was killed. This occurred when the ANC became active in an IFP-dominated area, and he was allegedly attacked because he was an ANC supporter. He still suffers from severe pain from a bullet that remains in his neck. This incident triggered him to engage politically, and he has supported the ANC ever since. He trained men to fight and to engage in politics. The violence in the area in which he resided continued until 1993, and ended ‘when most IFP supporters had died.’ Since then, he has not experienced any serious threats, not even during his time as an ANC councillor in the area. He states that ‘the violence forced me to become involved in politics: we had to defend ourselves’ (Interview 28).

Several interviewees allude to increased political engagement due to a sense of responsibility and duty, occasionally also linked to ideological conviction. Several interviewees explicitly report such motives (Interviews 22 and 55). One interviewee had been an IFP member since birth. As a child, he was trained in camps for several months

to be in the Special Defence Unit under the IFP to protect the party and defend themselves. They took turns patrolling the area to look after his family home and the neighbourhood. During these years, he witnessed violence against his family members and was himself subject to violence. His sister and mother were stabbed, and their house was burnt down. He was beaten and hospitalised for weeks. After the end of apartheid, he became an IFP ward councillor. His shift to peaceful politics is explained by a perceived change in politics. He also felt a responsibility to rectify certain wrongdoings in the past. He has not received any counselling but believes that it is important to change: 'it is only God himself who can change you ... I try to control my temper and to have a good heart. I used to be rude and wanted revenge. After becoming a leader I have changed a lot ... We are free now, what we need is development. We use democratic and development strategies. The violence is over now and we need to work for development ... The 'days of darkness' have passed. Now the political parties are sharing venues to share political ideas, are becoming more mature' (Interview 6).

Another interviewee is the chairperson of the local branch of a political party. He only began his political career after he was a target of violence. He claims that in 1998, his house was burnt down, allegedly by the local headman (traditional village leader), who belonged to a different party than he did. He was forced to leave, he returned in 2006 to rebuild his house, but he has not been able to move back because he does not feel safe in the area. Instead he has support from the Inkhosi (traditional leader), who has taken him under his protection and supports the same party. He reports that: 'The violence has made me stronger. I see it as an encouragement to change things' (Interview 11). He believes that he was forced from the area in 1998 because he was involved in a development project. Moreover, this interviewee expresses feeling a responsibility and a duty to work for political change.

A female respondent reports how violence first motivated her to enter politics and subsequently how she became engaged as a community activist. She became involved in politics after her husband, who was a high-level politician, was killed. The party assisted her in obtaining a political job, and the police provided tight security to ensure her family's safety. However, she has retired from her position as mayor and since 2002/03 has been engaged in a peace project that engages all parties. In addition, there are religious and traditional leaders involved. The project functions as a link between political prisoners, imprisoned due to a violent struggle within the community, and that resulted in the death of her husband. This interviewee expresses a feeling of duty and responsibility to prevent further violence, and this has driven her to increase her political participation, first within politics and then in community work (Interview 19).

A sub-group in this category clearly distanced themselves from politics but did not entirely shy away from activism. Instead, they became involved in community organisations of various sorts. Community activists interpret the political violence as part of the elite conflict over political power and violence as a means to gain such power (Interviews 24, 43, and 52). Often, interviewees claim that they were accused of belonging to a certain party, because of where they lived or worked, and they believed that this was the reason why they were targeted. An interviewee says that he worked for development in his area, and because of that had been accused of belonging to a party and targeted by violence (Interview 35).

The political activists and politicians primarily interpreted the violence as a continuation of the political violence that began during the anti-apartheid struggle. They believed they were targeted because they were actively working for a party or because they were believed to do so. They view the violence as ideologically motivated, and their role in politics as driven by public interest. Some of the interviewees in this group have

strong connections to a political party, and some have obtained a political job, security, protection, etc. due to these connections. However, several of them received no compensation after the violence, which has caused some disappointment and frustration (Interviews 22, 25, and 55). As a woman who became engaged in politics after her son was killed and had to leave the area she resided in expressed, 'I would expect that those who supported the struggle would get something' (Interview 22). Nevertheless, she has continued to work for the party. Another interviewee shows his enthusiasm for his party and says that 'you cannot live without politics'. He is engaged in a political campaign and has recruited new members to his party (Interview 55).

Overall, the interviewees express a willingness to take risks by engaging in costly political behaviour, as they were either angry with the situation and needed to defend themselves, or because they were enthusiastic about the cause and had a strong ideological conviction and a strong sense of duty. What we can say with certainty is that this group did not express fear and anxiety in the same way as the other survivors. The community workers form a special group of mobilised survivors, whose emotions toward politics was more difficult to gauge. The willingness to engage appears to be driven by either anger or enthusiasm, but they refrain from politics because they consider it meaningless.

Understanding Local Violence, Agency and Political Participation

South Africa continues to suffer from the legacy of apartheid and the struggle to end it. The experience of apartheid has contributed to a culture of violence and a strongly politicised society where political participation is high. In KwaZulu-Natal, the conflict between the ANC and IFP has clear roots in the anti-apartheid struggle and the affiliation of Inkatha with the apartheid regime. However, the violence has many layers. Not only

is it a political struggle, but it also has economic, territorial and generational dimensions and links to crime. By focusing on individuals affected by political violence and their association with politics, this study has generated important insights on how agency was influenced by local violence in post-conflict societies. From the survivors' narratives, we find that the experience of violence can have both mobilising and pacifying effects. Our interviews indicate that different interpretations of violence are related to increased or decreased sense of agency. How can we understand the reasons for divergent political behaviour and interpretations of violence?

Agency and Emotions

Our study suggests that local violence in a post-war context is associated with various emotions which have a bearing on the sense of agency. Here, we cluster these interpretations of political violence as expressions of fear, anxiety, anger or enthusiasm. When political violence is perceived as part of an ideologically motivated anti-apartheid struggle, it seems to trigger emotions of either anger with politics or enthusiasm for a specific political party. Such political violence can trigger a sense of agency among survivors of violence and lead to mobilisation in the form of increased political participation.

Our study also indicates that fear and anxiety can result in diminished agency and motivate individuals to abandon politics. Contemporary violence, especially intra-party violence, is interpreted as an expression of self-interest and a meaningless elite struggle. The narratives clearly demonstrate that such an interpretation is related to either a reduced sense of agency or status quo. Such violence appears to be more clearly linked to feelings of anxiety and fear, which encourages risk avoidance. Risk avoidance in this context would mean either withdrawing from costly forms of participation (pacification) or

continuing at the same level as before (status quo). This is in line with previous research which concludes that risk avoidance and emotion-focused coping are the result of anxiety, while risk-seeking behaviour and problem-focused coping accompany emotions of anger.³¹

For some individuals, political violence increases their ideological conviction to work for change through political channels. Individuals who believe that politics is driven by public interest provide different reasons for their political participation, such as ideology, duty and responsibility, and defence. These motives are all related to emotions of either anger or enthusiasm. From this perspective, political violence is regarded as proof that politics is so important that people are willing to take the risk of killing and dying for a higher cause. This can make some individuals even more convinced that their own political participation is important. Among this group, there is a sense of duty and responsibility to prevent further violence and leave the past behind. Political violence can also trigger a need to mobilise for community defence. These perceptions have increased agency and political participation among the individuals in this group. In this way, political violence can have mobilising effects and trigger political participation or increase the level of participation among those already active in politics or community work.

By contrast, there is a group of individuals who view political violence as an expression of self-interest. This interpretation is associated with emotions of anxiety and fear, of losing basic goods, and accusations of treason. This reduces the sense of agency. Some of these individuals refrain from politics, while others continue to participate at the same level as before the experience of violence. Both options can be interpreted as a means of avoiding potentially costly and uncertain alternatives, and as a means of coping with risk.

The fear of political violence can work in three ways to maintain the status quo. First, fear can prevent an increase in political participation among those that would otherwise wish to work more actively. Second, the act of voting is publicly known, and threats of violence uphold the level of political participation. Political parties have forced people to attend meetings and continue to work actively for the party. Third, once engaged by a political party, it can be difficult to withdraw, because of fears of being accused of spying for another party. In these three ways, political violence functions to stabilise political participation. From the perspective of agency, the two latter ones are particularly interesting, since they can be understood in terms of ‘scripted’ agency, in which ascribed roles are adhered to. This form of agency stands in contrast to ‘critical’ agency, which would indicate an independent choice.³²

Alternative Explanations

There is a wide range of potential alternative or complementary explanations for changes in political participation, such as type of recruitment, early socialization and identity formation, command of skills and resources for participation. One issue which warrants special attention relates to the outcome of the larger conflict which could be posited to influence the sense of agency experienced among survivors of violence. In particular, it might be expected that the survivors belonging to a winning side in the conflict might experience an increased sense of agency and engage more actively in politics. The transition and the agreement resulting in a shift to democratic rule in South Africa were the results of negotiations. In this sense, there were no clear winners and losers in the South African context. However, from the outcome of the elections held from 1994 and onwards, ANC has come out as a dominant party, and also increasingly gained ground vis-à-vis IFP in in KwaZulu-Natal. However, there are no clear patterns concerning

agency and the side to which the survivors in our interview sample belong. Instead, the narratives of ANC and IFP supporters mirror each other.

Several issues need to be resolved by future studies to further explore the relationship between violence and agency. First, while negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety and anger, have clear links to violence, threat and conflict dynamics, it is less certain how enthusiasms would be linked to political violence. Different interpretations are possible for how violence may be related to enthusiasm and agency. One concerns an alternative explanation, which would suggest that personality traits, such as basic enthusiastic orientation of an individual, may not be significantly altered in the face of political violence. Some people have a stronger sense of agency than others, regardless of any experience of violence. A second interpretation can be made with reference to the notion of ‘pleasure’ of agency.³³ Pleasure of agency suggests that subordinate groups have positive associations with active and intentional participation in the struggle for a more just society. Given the recent struggle against apartheid, it is very plausible that pleasure of agency-dynamics were at play in individual decisions to actively participate in politics.

Second, there are several additional factors that could be interesting to look into with regard to the relationship between local political violence and political participation. For instance, interpretation of violence may be partly shaped by whether or not the survivors of violence belonged to the winning or losing side in local politics. It probably matters for their engagement, if their party is in power and shifts in participation could therefore be related to changes in government. In addition, the recruitment patterns in the hotpot areas could play a role. Such locations are generally highly politicised and contested and the opportunities for political participation vary.

Conclusions

Political violence can act as a driver of agency or have pacifying effects. The analysis in this study has drawn on previous research on agency, political participation and the effects of violence to understand if and how people experiencing violence participate in politics. Our conclusions are in line with Blattman, who finds that different types of violence have different consequences and that violence during war is not always pacifying.³⁴

South Africa is in one sense a unique case given its relatively high level of political participation compared to many other states, not the least in Africa. The political mobilisation stems from the anti-apartheid struggle. Apart from fear being a driving force behind engaging at a minimum level, it thus needs to be recognised that many South Africans feel a moral obligation to vote and have a strong ideological conviction, and therefore feel that it is important to vote to continue to strive for freedom and democracy. However, our conclusions may have general application. The narratives show that political violence is interpreted in diverse ways and that the violence mattered for political participation. Another conclusion with general application concerns the meaning-making of violence. The group of individuals who are pacified by political violence expresses fear due to the new pattern of political violence. In contrast to the ideologically-motivated violence during the anti-apartheid struggle, contemporary intra-party violence is perceived as being driven by selfish, individual motives, rather than universal goals such as freedom, equality and democracy. Those who believe that politicians are driven by narrow self-interest, i.e., their own individual economic or political gain, view politics as meaningless and a dangerous endeavour and for this reason distance themselves from political participation. Thus, in line with previous research, the narratives concerning local violence and political participation suggest that fear and anxiety can lead survivors of political violence to become more risk averse and therefore have a dampening

influence on political participation.³⁵ When anger is caused by violence or when enthusiasm is retained, it may serve to mobilise individuals and increase their sense of agency. These are important insights which future research can build on to explore the relationship in greater theoretical and empirical detail.

Our study yields important insights to the debates related to the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding. It illustrates the divergent consequences of political violence which co-exist simultaneously in a post-war context and thereby have both positive and negative influences on the prospects of building peace and democracy. Most importantly, it shows how agency is shaped by the experience of violence and how survivors of violence can become agents of change through political and democratic participation in a post-war setting.

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Notes

1. Alexander, “The Local State in Post-War Mozambique”; Lederach, *Building Peace*; Menkhaus, “Governance without Government in Somalia”.
2. Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local ownership*; MacGinty, “Hybrid Peace”; MacGinty and Richmond, “The Local Turn”; Pugh, “Local Agency”; Richmond and Mitchell, “Peacebuilding”
3. Roberts, “Post-conflict Peacebuilding”, 421
4. Blattman, “From Violence to Voting”; Bellows and Miguel. “War and Local.”
5. Steenkamp, “In the Shadow”; Suhrke and Berdal, *The Peace in Between*.
6. We use the term agency in contrast to political efficacy which usually refers only to the belief that one can influence politics and policies.
7. MacGinty, “Hybrid Peace”; Pugh, “Local Agency”; Richmond and Mitchell.
8. Brady, “Political Participation”; Verba, S. and N.H. Nie, *Participation in America*, 45–54.
9. Barnes and Kaase. *Political Action*.
10. Balcells, “The Consequences of Victimization”; Bellows and Miguel. “War and Local”; Blattman, “From Violence to Voting.”
11. Blattman, “From Violence to Voting,” 231.
12. Bellows and Miguel. “War and Local,” 1145.

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13. Balcells, "The Consequences of Victimization."
 14. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 235, 246.
 15. Lerner and Keltner, "Fear, Anger, and Risk."
 16. Marcus, "Structure of Emotional Response"; MacKuen, "Civic Engagements"; Valentino, "Efficacy"; Valentino, "Election Night's."
 17. Bellows and Miguel. "War and Local Collective Action."
 18. Guelke, *South Africa in Transition*; du Toit, *South Africa's Brittle Peace*.
 19. Johnston, "South Africa."
 20. Bonnin, "Legacies of Political Violence"; Freund, "Violence in Natal."
 21. Krämer, *Violence as Routine*, 33.
 22. Johnston, A. "South Africa," 188; du Toit, *South Africa's Brittle Peace*.
 23. Friedman and Atkinson, *The Small Miracle*.
 24. Mottiar, "Turnover of Power"; Piper, "Democracy for a Bargain"; Taylor, *Justice Denied*
 25. Daniel and Southall, *Zunami!*, 241.
 26. Bruce, "Dictating the Local."
 27. Daniel and Southall, *Zunami!*, 236.
 28. Friedman, "Voice for Some," 47.
 29. Pahad, "Political Participation."
 30. Only a few of our interviewees stated that they did not participate in politics at all and did not vote. Only one of the respondents reported that he had never voted (Interview 50).
 31. Lerner and Keltner, "Fear, Anger, and Risk"; Folkman, "Dynamics."
 32. Björkdahl and Gustic, "Divided City."
 33. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*.
 34. Blattman, "From Violence to Voting."
 35. Lerner and Keltner, "Fear, Anger, and Risk"; Valentino, "Election Night's."

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