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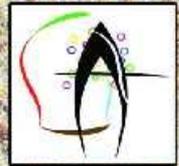**CODESRIA**

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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI
إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

Thinking democracy and political violence
in twenty-first century Africa

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Abstract

Political violence has not disappeared along with the rise of the democratic state in Africa at the end of the 20th century. Whether this violence seems to be connected to electoral processes (Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya), to ethno-religious tensions, (e.g. Nigeria, Sudan) to xenophobic chauvinism (South Africa, Cote D'Ivoire, etc), to the carving out of imperial and local fiefdoms (DRC) or to repression of popular upsurge (Burkina-Faso, Egypt, Tunisia), violence seems to be endemic to state rule. Rather than declining with the advent of democracy, political violence has arguably been linked to new contradictions related to new state forms of rule. A core contradiction has developed between democracy and state nationalism, with the former not being able to resolve the issues raised by the latter in a neo-colonial context. It is argued in this paper that dominant forms of political violence are the product of this contradiction. Yet a prevalent analysis in terms of socio-political identities can only provide a very partial account of this violence as it is unable to think politics beyond the given social 'places' of the politics of identity and interest. The paper analyses the different modes of rule which the African democratic state deploys today and suggests that the contradiction between democracy as a form of state on the one hand and state nationalism on the other is largely irresolvable without recourse to state (or supra-state) violence. Only when alternative politics exist can such violence be avoided. An alternative popular-democratic nationalism is proposed which is informed by the 'exceeding of place' within the political subjectivities of the oppressed, and some of its contours are elucidated on the basis of currently existing popular politics and their effects in the case of South Africa.