Introduction: Political Violence and Armed Conflict in Africa: People, Places, Processes, Effects

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Imagining the role of place in the lives of survivors of enduring political violence and armed conflict across the African continent constitutes the impetus for this special issue of the *African Geographical Review*. Endeavoring to conceptualize the importance of people and their geographic lives amid the violent course of rupture induced by sustained violent political contestation represents a salient scholarly initiative, particularly as the ubiquity of political violence on the continent, as elsewhere around the globe, engenders an abyss of damage to localized, personal lifeworlds, often at mass scales. The insistence on conceiving of the victim-survivor of violent political contestation as a person in place is not a new perspective. In the late 1980s’, geographers Nigel Thrift and Dean Forbes compellingly argued that the study of violent political conflicts must be grounded in a perspective which centers the human being amid the studies of actors, factors, spaces, processes and dynamics which spur and sustain protracted political contestation. Thrift and Forbes contended that “people in conflict in place” constitutes a vital grounding focus for geographic inquiry and analysis of violent political struggle (1983, 247). Fifteen years later, geographers Neville Douglas and Peter Shirlow (1998), writing from and on Northern Ireland, validated and advanced Thrift and Forbes’s insightful discussion of the deep and pivotal connections to how and why people—as social and spatial beings—co-exist in states of violent division and protracted struggles, specifically in places which are of inmost meaning and attachment. Douglas and Shirlow (1998, 125) thus argued, “The particular meaning and interpretation of the world set in a particular place conditions specific reactions to events and through these reactions gives individuality to conflict and struggle in that place.” The trenchant potency of this claim is evidenced by a map of the scope of internal displacement triggered by political violence in contemporary Africa (Figure 1).

Observing Figure 1 from the perspective posed by Neville and Shirlow (1998) suggests that from an immediate frame, the effects of un-resolved political crises and contestations are yielding great instability within many of the continent’s 54 nation-states, triggering massive ruptures in the everyday lived geographies of the people of Africa—while also provoking new geographies of terror, displacement and the pursuit of refuge and survival. Therefore it remains vital to deepen how we understand the production of political violence and its long and destructive legacies at the geographical scale of the specific in order to capture the transformative effects of political violence on local worlds.