

# Explaining violence in strikes

**Crispen Chinguno**

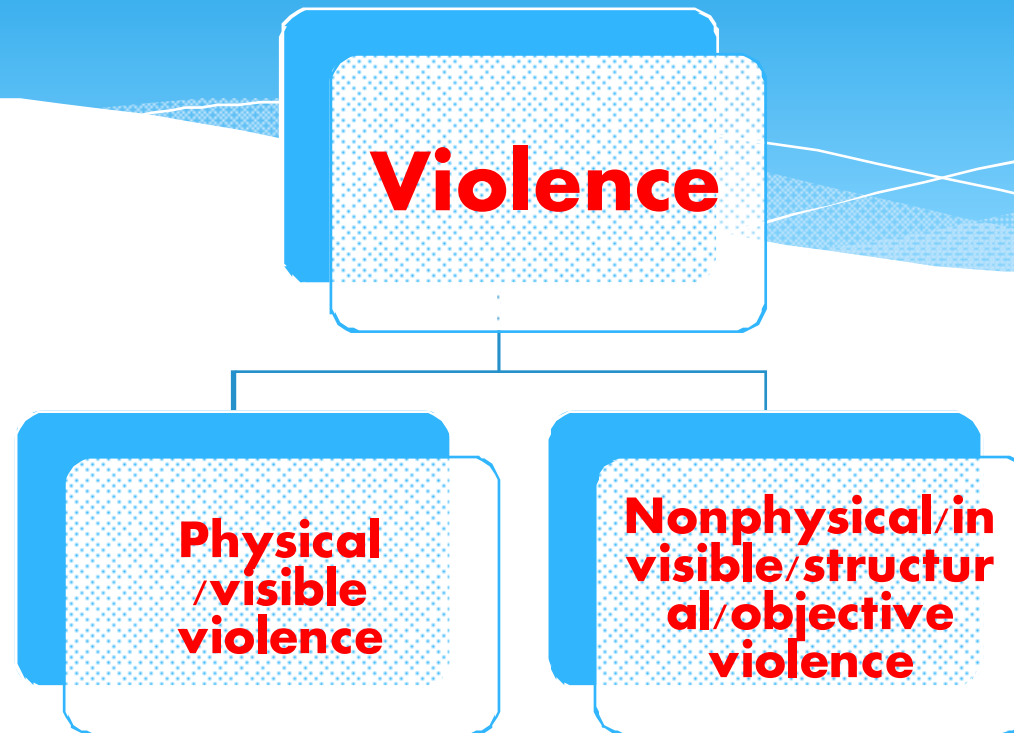
Society, Work and Development Institute  
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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# What is violence?

- **Violence (physical/direct/identifiable/subjective):** Use of physical force, threat or actual against a person or group that either result in injury, death or physical harm
- **Structural/non-physical/invisible/objective violence:** Social structure/system which harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Embedded in institutional practices and associated with social injustice. Results from the catastrophic smooth functioning of the economic and political system.
- NB: Violence needs to be understood in the broad socio-economic and political context. The two forms of violence are interdependent.
- (Cultures 1060, Bourdieu 1997 and Zizek 2000)

# The question of violence



# Questions

- Why violence in strikes?
- Does the use of violence serves its purpose?

# The complexity of strike violence

- Polysemic nature of strike violence
- Evokes various meanings and interpretations
- Problem of conceptualisation of violence:
  - What constitute violence ?
  - Whose violence?
  - Whose violence matters? :
    - State(Police)
    - Worker
    - Employer
    - Union
    - ETC

# Overview

How was strike violence explained in the past?

- Must be understood from the employer/employee production politics of control and resistance which is linked to broad socio-economic and political context
- Strike violence part of the organising order : Mining characterised by extra –economic coercion
- Workers connected strike action and violence to the broader political struggle against apartheid
- Lack of institutionalisation of industrial relations for black workers.
- Strike violence was expected to lose salience after democratic transition
- Declined in first decade after the democratic transition but remained significant and escalated in the second decade

# Source of evidence

- 2009 Aquarius –Murray and Roberts strike: 4000 workers dismissed 2000 never reinstated,3 killed/missing ,30 charged for murder ,trespassing ,attempted murder-strike committee active to date
- 2011 Lonmin Karee strike: 9000 dismissed 7000 reinstated
- 2012 Impala platinum strike 3 killed over 50 injured,100 charged for public violence,55 migrants spaza shop owners displaced after shops ransacked by workers and public
- 2012 platinum strike wave over 50 killed, several assaulted
- In all the strikes except Lonmin 2011 workers highlight marginalization/ exploitation ,substandard, pathetic pay

# Different forms of violence:

- Different forms serve different purpose and the justification may vary:
  - State violence (police )
  - Worker violence: Worker-on-worker eg targets scabs
  - Employer violence
  - Union violence : Intra and inter union, assassinations etc



# State violence

- 2009 Aquarius-Murray and Roberts strike : Police opened fire, several workers shot and 3 missing
- 2012 Impala police shot and killed one striking workers,9 injured 3 seriously 19 February 2012
- 16 August 2012 Marikana massacre :Police killed 34 workers and at least 78 injured-SAPS most lethal use of force after the democratic transition
- To maintain/restore order: state monopoly over legitimate use of violence . This is contested in South Africa
- Direct intervention by the state in industrial relations. Police repression of worker resistance – a characteristic of the apartheid workplace regime

# Worker violence

- Worker-on-worker violence- targets scabs- several killed
- Intimidation of non-strikers in all the strikes: Buses barred from taking workers to duty
- Arson: police post 2012 Impala strike, mukuku for scabs, company property e.g. offices
- Impala 2012 strike 55 migrants displaced and spaza shops looted

# Worker violence : The Rationale

- Part of strike repertoire to realize power
- Violence works- 'has worked in the past and will work today' i.e it brings results
- Response to work fragmentation- growing subcontracting/labour broking which undermines worker collective solidarity and is linked to neoliberal globalisation.
- Respond to structural violence in the labour processes
- Workers have competing views on violence:
  - Empowering and means of forging collective solidarity
  - Retrogressive

# A challenge to an order and a means of solidarity

- Violence a means of challenging an order of inequality and exploitation
- A means for forging worker collective solidarity and overcome fragmentation-violence brings workers together for a common cause
- “ Sometimes violence is the only way out .In a strike we are normally not supposed to use force but people take advantage and report for duty and the strike will flop and we may never get what we want...”
- “ A strike has its own rules and rule number 1 is that no one must report for work when a strike is called ....”

# Worker violence : The Rationale

- A strike is collective decision by majority usually after consultation. Scabs/strike breakers transgress against this collective decision
- Scabs/strike breakers represents reverse solidarity
- Killing scabs/strike breakers represent brother killing brother for the sack of worker collective solidarity
- Killing of Scabs/strike breakers perceived as a legitimate punishment to collaborators

# Union violence

- Impala 2012 strike union officials attacked by workers at a report back meeting at number 6 hostel accused of ‘selling out and hijacking a revolution’
- Impala 2012 union offices shut down in military style by a rival faction
- Became dangerous to be associated with a union. Worker sidelined for belonging to the wrong union. More dangerous for underground work teams
- Workers attacked and labeled impimpis for having t-shirts of a ‘wrong’ union
- Union competition: stewards crossed floors
- Union officials armed: M and R strike union official displayed guns and Lonmin strike union officials fired shot to workers in a march

# Union violence

- Intra and Inter union rivalry
- Before 2012 intra union violence was common: One dominant union in the platinum belt-NUM
- Intra-union violence was related to internal factionalism-reflected contestation for power and control of union circa 2000-2011
- Union has become a mean of social upward mobility and elite formation post the democratic transition
- Increased union competition and shift to Inter-union violence since 2012
- Assassinations

# Employer violence

- Manifest in various forms
- 2009 Murray and Roberts strike mine captain, OHS officer and security officers hunted down with live ammunition 35 striking workers after they occupied a shaft underground, several injured, 3 killed /missing
- Later assisted by SAPS to push out the workers. This battle lasted for two days
- Use of violence specialists: Private security guards ex-military in Mozambique and Angola (RENAMO and UNITA)
- Employer violence often covert and in collaboration with the state



# The representation of mineworkers and violence

	<b>Representation</b>
<b>Violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Historical notion</li><li>• Destructive : damages the economy</li></ul>
<b>Mineworkers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Primitive : use sangoma and muti,</li><li>• Traditionalist</li><li>• Unreasonable/irrational R12 500 demand outrageous</li><li>• Financially illiterate</li></ul>

# Representation and the significance

- Shapes responses eg Justified low wages
- Silenced/closed dialogue with the workers
- Justified the use of violence i.e use of live ammunition, violence specialists
- Reinforced the use of violence and certain stereotypes e.g. illiterate and ignorant justified the low salaries and use of excessive force
- Delegitimized workers demands i.e. they are unreasonable
- Certain representations become dominant

# Conclusion

- Violence in strike serves different purpose and the justification may vary
- Strikes has own rationalized rules of conduct and may include certain forms of violence
- Strike violence a means of forging compliance and worker solidarity
- The way people are represented is reproduced:
- Reinforces certain practices including the use of violence and its justification
- Shapes the response

# Conclusion Cont...

- The explanation of strike violence must be linked to the production politics of control and resistance and the broader socio-economic and political context
- This form of violence is linked to the neoliberal system which has created a competitive society in which some people are marginalized ,oppressed and are losers in the polity.
- The economic hardships and substandard living and working conditions force the marginalized groups to be discontent and this manifest as subjective/visible violence
- Strike violence is a means to assert/maintain/restore/control/ order or a form of resistance to challenge/reject domination/control