Rethinking resistance in African history: an introduction

Walraven, K. van; Abbink, G.J.; Bruijn, M.E. de

Rethinking Resistance covers a wide range of issues and constitutes an important step towards a better understanding of the phenomenon of revolt and violence in Africa, as argued by the authors in the introductory chapter.

Robert Buijtenhuijs

Rethinking resistance in African history: An introduction

Klaas van Walraven and Jon Abbink

Some conceptual and definitional issues

Throughout Africa's history, distant as well as recent, Africans have resisted forces of domination. The theme of Africans rejecting or fighting the rule of others, African or non-African, and their struggle against forms of domination, injustice or exploitation has been a closely studied subject ever since the inception of modern African studies in the early 1960s. The interest in this central theme emerged in the heyday of anti-colonial struggle that was itself generally articulated through modern nationalist discourse. Spurred on by what appeared as the unstoppable tidal wave of decolonization after the Second World War, which reinforced the already widespread feeling that colonialism was a grossly unjust dispensation, many scholars felt the need to investigate whether and to what extent Africans had, all along, resisted the forces of colonial or white settler rule.

Thus, in 1958 the study by Shepperson and Price appeared, appropriately entitled *Independent African*, about John Chilembwe and the rebellion in Nyasaland (Malawi) during the First World War.[1] This set the stage for representations of African reactions to colonialism as falling between resistance and collaboration – notions that were redolent of Europe during the Second World War.[2] It also preceded the theme, pioneered by Terence Ranger, of the modern nationalist struggles of the 1950s and 1960s somehow being connected with earlier forms of violent resistance to the imposition or maintenance of colonial rule. Besides collaboration, European settlement and occupation were

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[1] G. Shepperson & T. Price, *Independent African· John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh, 1958).
[2] S. Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance; With Special Reference to Madagascar'; paper for the conference Revolt and Resistance in African History, African Studies Centre, Leiden, 11-12 October 2001.

seen as having triggered, first, early forms of violent struggle (so-called 'primary' resistance) and, now, modern nationalist battles for independence ('secondary' resistance).[3] The concept of resistance thus became the historical dimension of African nationalism.[4]

Inevitably, in later years, questions started to be raised about this representation of Africa's twentieth-century history. By the late 1960s historians had accepted that the construction of this history around the two antipoles 'resistance' – 'collaboration' grossly simplified its actual complexities. Resistance and collaboration were now seen as rational, alternative strategies to[5] Africans trying to defend their interests in the face of the imposition of colonialism and capitalism[6] – comparable in some ways, perhaps, to analyses of European reactions to Nazi occupation in terms of varying degrees of *accommodation* rather than through the moral prism of collaboration and resistance. More fundamentally, and much later, it was opined by Glassman that the historical resistance literature was marred by a teleology that constructed all African protest as leading inexorably to modern nationalism and decolonization.[7]

Nevertheless, the early resistance literature as such could be said to have been a source of inspiration to some of the liberation struggles taking place in the 1960s or 1970s, and in that respect to have established a connection between early and later forms of resistance. This was certainly the case, at the level of elites, in the struggle for Zimbabwe, the early history of which had known a revolt against white occupation (1896-1897).[8] Another example of this is provided by the work of Bley and Drechsler,[9] which considerably influenced, at the level of nationalist propaganda, the struggle for independence in Namibia (see Chapter 11 in this volume).

Yet it is doubtful whether this connection represented more than, in the words of Ranger himself, the 'continuity of resistance *emotion*'.[10] Thus, in the midst of the 'second *chimurenga*' ('fighting in which everyone joins')[11] or struggle for independence, Ranger emphasized that this struggle in no sense represented a 'return to the values of the society engaged in the 1896 risings' and, more debatably, that the current struggle could not be informed by continuing Shona or Ndebele cultural forms.[12] He also criticized the other key, and politically committed, figure of the early resistance literature, Allen Isaacman, for replacing his own continuist thesis with a sort of 'instant continuity' that established a *direct* link between, in Isaacman's case, Frelimo's struggle against the Portuguese in the 1960s and peasant militancy in Mozambique in the 1910s.[13] Clearly, this sort of argument, which (implicitly) attributed proto-nationalist sentiments to early instances of resistance to colonial rule, carried the risk of anachronism.[14] Ranger therefore wondered whether the debate about continuity or discontinuity of manifestations of resistance should not be transcended by a periodization of African history involving a series of qualitative transformations.[15]

In defence of the initial resistance literature, it should be pointed out that it was in part a response to Eurocentric studies that preceded it and characterized resistance to colonial conquest as reactionary struggles against the facts.[16] The critics of these Eurocentric views saw resistance to be a forward-looking defence of African tradition against alien occupation, in the process assuming that the African societies involved were united in this common purpose.[17] This assumption also underlay many analyses of Africa's later struggles for independence, which were invariably labelled nationalist and sometimes even as Marxist, transformations, thereby attributing a unity of ideas and organization to

[3] T.O. Ranger, 'Connexions between "Primary Resistance Movements" and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, 9 (1968), 437-53 and 631-41.

[4] L. Vail & L. White, 'Forms of Resistance: Song and Perceptions of Power in Colonial Mozambique', in D. Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London & Portsmouth, NH, 1986), 193.

[5] J. Suret-Canale, '"Résistance" et "Collaboration" en Afrique Noire Coloniale', *Etudes Africaines Offertes à Henri Brunschwig* (Paris, 1982), 319-31.

[6] See on this Vail & White, 'Forms of Resistance', 194 and 221.

[7] J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH & London, 1995), 12.

[8] T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1897* (London, 1967).

[9] H. Bley, *South West Africa under German Rule, 1894-1914* (London, 1971) and H. Drechsler, *'Let us Die Fighting' The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)* (London, 1980).

[10] T.O. Ranger, 'Resistance in Africa: From Nationalist Revolt to Agrarian Protest', in G.Y. Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst, 1986), 49; emphasis added.

[11] *Standard Shona Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Harare & Bulawayo, 1987).

[12] T. Ranger, 'The People in African Resistance: A Review', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 (1977), 1, 130.

[13] A.F. Isaacman, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique* (London, 1976). See also A. Isaacman *et al.*, '"Cotton is the Mother of Poverty": Peasant Resistance to Forced Cotton Production in Mozambique, 1938-1961', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13 (1980), 614.

[14] Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance', 3-4.

[15] Ranger, 'The People in African Resistance', 145-46.

[16] Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 9-10, on R. Robinson & J. Gallagher, 'The Partition of Africa', in F.H. Hinsley (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 11 (Cambridge, 1962).

[17] See for a critique, Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 10.

them that in retrospect they seldom had. According to Norma Kriger, these labels at best betrayed some of the aspirations of the leading elites involved,[18] although the chapter by Klaas van Walraven in this book on *Sawaba*'s revolt in Niger shows that the relation between revolutionary ideology and elite aspirations may have been more complex.

A fundamental point of criticism of the early resistance literature was that the focus on resistance to white people or colonialism implied concentrating more on mere reactions of Africans than their true agency in historical development.[19] Moreover, historians of modern African nationalism stressed the role played by elites, just as writers on imperial history had done.[20] Hence, Allen and Barbara Isaacman in 1977 critiqued resistance studies as having been 'extremely elitist, a bias contemporary African historians share[d] with their Eurocentric predecessors'.[21] During the 1970s, therefore, scholars began to add a nuance to this elitist perspective by focusing increasingly on the issue of class structure, arguing that it was the specific configuration of class interests that determined whether Africans resisted or collaborated with colonial or white settler rule.[22] Marxist paradigms inspired a shift away from the search for the roots of nationalism to a search for the roots of underdevelopment, especially because by then so many African countries were stricken by growing economic malaise and political instability.[23] It was argued that the earlier focus on resistance and nationalism obscured the extent to which Africans had been unable to strike at what were held to be the real structures of oppression, i.e. not colonial administrations but metropolitan capital (on which more below). Studies on so-called 'modes of production' began the redefinition of proto-nationalist resisters in Africa's colonial history into peasants fighting international capitalism.[24]

One of the consequences, however, was that the concept of resistance began to widen steadily. Isaacman *et al.*, for example, portrayed the withholding of labour for cotton production by Mozambican peasants as an act of resistance.[25]

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[18] N.J. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge, 1992), 11.

[19] Ranger, 'Resistance in Africa', 34.

[20] Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 11.

[21] A. Isaacman & B. Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, c. 1850-1920', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10 (1977), 1, 39.

[22] Ibid. 41.

[23] Vail & White, 'Forms of Resistance', 194.

[24] Ranger, 'Resistance in Africa', 34-36 and Ranger, 'The People in African Resistance', 142.

[25] Isaacman *et al.*, '"Cotton is the Mother of Poverty"', *passim*, and Isaacman & Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration', 47 ff.

Crummey argued, more generally, that resistance could also be mute, with stealth being one of its principal characteristics.[26] Scott later took up the theme in a series of pioneering and highly influential sociological studies drawing attention to the social basis of 'everyday resistance' of the downtrodden and the powerless.[27] In a later study Achille Mbembe showed that even the world of dreams could be interpreted as relevant to resistance – in this case against the French in Cameroon during the 1950s.[28] By then others had already objected that the widening of the resistance phenomenon overextended the concept[29] to the point of including 'everything from footdragging and dissimulation to social banditry, arson, poaching, theft, avoidance of conscription, desertion, migration, and riot' – in short, 'any activity that helps to frustrate the operations of capitalism'; this frankly constituted an act of violence done to language, with 'resistance' and 'collaboration' blurring analysis of, instead of enhancing insight into, human behaviour.[30] While it is true that, say, tax evaders and smugglers resisted colonial governments in some sense, interpreting their activities as an attack on the underlying political order greatly expanded the notion of *political* action – in line with Marxist reasoning.[31] Often, this kind of approach also engendered evidential problems, which were 'resolved', to some extent, by reading political intent into actual conduct (see also below).

A positive aspect of the extension of the resistance concept was precisely that it took analysis beyond the political dimensions of struggle on which relevant studies had concentrated before. Moreover, early resistance studies focused too narrowly on revolts during the colonial era, thereby overlooking acts of resistance against the rulers of pre-colonial polities and seeing revolt in the post-independence era as a mere colonial hangover. The combined effect

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[26] D. Crummey, 'Introduction: The Great Beast', in Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest*, 10.

[27] J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven & London, 1985) and idem, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven & London, 1990). The reality of silent sabotage and cheating (by peasant serfs) is delightfully presented in the great nineteenth-century novels on feudal Russia by, for example, Turgenev and Gogol. Remarkably similar in tone is the epoch-making novel on pre-revolutionary Ethiopia by Haddis Alemayehu, *Love until the Grave* (Addis Ababa, 1973).

[28] A. Mbembe, 'Domaines de la Nuit et Autorité Onirique dans les Maquis du Sud-Cameroun (1955-1958)', *Journal of African History*, 31 (1991), 89-121.

[29] P. Geschiere, 'Le Politique "Par le Bas". : Les Vicissitudes d'une Approche', in P. Konings, W. van Binsbergen & G. Hesseling (eds), *Trajectoires de Libération en Afrique Contemporaine: Hommage à Robert Buijtenhuijs* (Paris & Leiden, 2000), 97.

[30] Vail & White, 'Forms of Resistance', 195.

[31] Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance', 3.

was to exaggerate the importance of the colonial period.[32] One concept that it was hoped during the 1970s and 1980s could help in 'de-politicizing' resistance studies and focusing more on the initiatives of the dominated was that of 'social banditry' as popularized by Eric Hobsbawm in European historiography. Inspired by the legend of Robin Hood, the concept of the social bandit arises in the dialectic of social demand and interdependence, leading the bandit to protect, redistribute, avenge and sometimes even lead wholesale rebellions against the political order.[33] Such revolt is mostly seen as defensive, inspired by a specific vision of the social universe as held by the lower orders of society, for example peasants,[34] that attempted to protect this vision – called the 'moral economy of subsistence' – against the hegemonic ideology of the ruling classes.[35]

Studies that applied the social banditry concept to African cases of resistance remained, perhaps, relatively few. Isaacman *et al.* presented robberies from cotton warehouses by discontented Mozambican peasants as 'a legitimate expression of peasant protest' that was 'clearly different from the predatory actions of criminals who preyed indiscriminately on all sections of society',[36] in other words, fulfilling those key conditions distinguishing the social bandit from the common criminal, i.e. the desire to destroy oppressive institutions perceived to threaten the traditional order and the intention to redistribute the loot of operations to 'the people'. To Isaacman, the social bandit could help us understand early rural resistance to colonialism and capitalism, arguing that this form of banditry was an important form of resistance in early twentieth-century Africa with rural alienation and a perception of colonial governments as illegitimate interlopers and the availability of sufficient geographical space as critical factors in the growth of this social and political activity.[37]

Hence, studies appeared that focused on social banditry besides the resistance concept as such. An early example is the study by Edmond Keller that constructed the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya in the 1950s as a form of social banditry,[38] and the volume edited by Crummey.[39] This volume provided, among

others, analyses of the *shifta* tradition in Ethiopia – a remarkable example of social banditry but always with a political overtone. The (Amharic) word refers to people who had a political reason to remove themselves from the authority or law of power holders and 'went into the woods' where they engaged in political resistance as well as banditry to sustain themselves. Interestingly, the chapter by Aregawi Berhe in our volume shows how the *shifta* tradition helped to inform and structure a more modern form of resistance to colonial rule, that of the 'Patriot' movement fighting the Fascist Italian conquest and occupation from 1935 to 1941. However, other studies questioned the applicability of the social banditry concept to African history. Maughan Brown[40] disputed the appropriateness of the concept to Mau Mau in Kenya, as did Colin Darch for Renamo in Mozambique,[41] whilst even Isaacman himself showed that the 'social' bandits he studied *did* prey on some of the peasants or migrants in Mozambique – in contravention of Hobsbawm's model suggesting that they refrain from predatory behaviour against the people of 'their own' territory. By arguing that these early Mozambican bandits never attacked their natal communities or rural people that explicitly supported them, Isaacman could uphold their 'social' status. Nevertheless, one could argue that the fact that these bandits lacked Hobsbawm's class consciousness and did not perceive themselves as the defender of *all* peasants – differentiating as they did between rural people on the grounds of social proximity and political support[42] – engenders evidential difficulties and reduces the practical applicability of the social banditry concept, in this as well as most other cases.

More fundamentally, Austin observed in the volume edited by Crummey that the distinction between social bandits and common criminals requires one common political system that claims hegemony over both rich and poor. Conceptually, social banditry in Western history constituted a challenge to existing forms of control over territory and property but not of the validity of these concepts as such. This, however, is the root problem in the applicability of social banditry in African historical contexts. First, the relatively open frontiers of pre-colonial polities encouraged deviants not to challenge the common central authority but, rather, segment and constitute their own political system with their own underlying values. Second, before and since the imposition of colonial rule, the forces of the modern state and market began, to varying degrees, to pervade African societies, thus allowing for the coexistence of

[32] Crummey, 'Introduction'.

[33] Ibid.

[34] See E. Wolf's influential book *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), 106-9, and his *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969).

[35] Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 13.

[36] Isaacman *et al*, '"Cotton is the Mother of Poverty"', 604

[37] A. Isaacman, 'Social Banditry in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Mozambique, 1894-1907: An Expression of Early Peasant Protest', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1 (1977), 29-30.

[38] E.J. Keller, 'A Twentieth Century Model: The Mau Mau Transformation from Social Banditry to Social Rebellion', *Kenya Historical Review*, 3 (1973), 2, 189-205.

[39] See note 4 above. Based on conference papers of earlier in the decade.

[40] D.A. Maughan Brown, 'Social Banditry: Hobsbawm's Model and "Mau Mau"', *African Studies*, 39 (1980), 1, 77-97.

[41] C. Darch, 'Are There Warlords in Provincial Mozambique?: Questions of the Social Base of MNR Banditry', *Review of African Political Economy* (1989), 45/46, 34-49.

[42] Isaacman, 'Social Banditry', 25.

competitive socio-political values. The interpenetration of two formerly distinct societies (in our case the European colonial and the African ones) therefore produced 'primary' forms of resistance with no repertoire of common values shared between the opposing sides. The Robin Hood narrative is therefore largely lacking in African mythology, with the vocabulary of deviance more often developed in the language of magic and witchcraft.[43]

The same fundamental objection could therefore, at least in certain cases of African resistance, be levelled against the use of the concept of *protest*. This notion differs from the concept of resistance in that protest entails a higher degree of vocalization. While resistance may be mute or take place through stealth, protest assumes a more explicit form of articulation of grievances, marked among others by such (modern) cultural forms as strikes, campaigns of defiance, riots and disorder.[44] According to Crummey, however, as in the case of social banditry, such protest presumes some common social and political order that links the protesters to those they appeal to for redress.[45]

In this volume, therefore, we continue to use the concept of resistance, employing it in a broad sense to signify intentions and concrete actions taken to oppose others and refuse to accept their ideas, actions or positions for a variety of reasons, the most common being the perception of the position, claims or actions taken by others as unjust, illegitimate or intolerable attempts at domination. The concrete acts of resistance involved may or may not be acts of physical violence and extend also to other spheres of human behaviour. Resistance, however, must be defined not so much by various forms of concrete acts, as by the *intent* of those performing these acts, aimed usually at the defence of pre-existing and cherished socio-political arrangements, upholding other civilizational ideals, or just defending existing power structures, elite or otherwise. This also helps to distinguish (violent) resistance from the concept of violence as such, which is employed in a more instrumental or technical way here, though not without attributing meaning to it (see below). Finally, as shown in the literature, large-scale manifestations of collective resistance have been described with the aid of different notions, such as revolution, revolt, insurrection, insurgence or insurgency, and rebellion. In this volume, the concept of revolution is eschewed,[46] since it usually signifies very radical,

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[43] R.A. Austin, 'Social Bandits and Other Heroic Criminals: Western Models of Resistance and Their Relevance for Africa', in Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest*, 89-94.

[44] See, for example, R.I. Rotberg & A.A. Mazrui (eds), *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York, 1970).

[45] Crummey, 'Introduction'.

[46] The adjective 'revolutionary' will be used, however, when referring to the rhetorical or ideological dimensions of revolutionary transformations.

fundamental transformations of societies and political systems quite exceptional in African history. The other terms will be used more or less synonymously, although the term 'resistance' perhaps carries more of the connotation of intent referred to above.

Resistance to what?

Even if one agrees that resistance has been a marked feature of human behaviour in African history, this begs the question already alluded to in the previous section of what or whom the target of such resistance was. In trying to answer this question, one leaves the area of even minimal consensus. Did Africans resist the imposition of colonial rule or specific configurations of capitalist economic relations associated with colonialism?[47] Were political forms of resistance directed at the imposition of colonial rule or, as implied in the chapter by Stephen Ellis in this volume, were they as much directed at *African* elites profiting from the onset of capitalist relations of production? Were manifestations of resistance during decolonization aimed at ending colonial suzerainty or also the product of intra-elite rivalry, as argued in the chapter on the *Sawaba* revolt (Niger) in this book?

What is clear is that communities have resisted various forms of rule or domination throughout African history – a phenomenon, as emphasized by Crummey, not just limited to colonial rule but extending far back into pre-colonial times and covering most of the post-colonial and contemporary period. The chapter by Mirjam de Bruijn & Han van Dijk in this volume graphically underlines the manifestation of resistance as a near-permanent characteristic of political life in pre-colonial West Africa, or at least of certain areas or polities in that region. Closely bound up with specific political economies and fragile ecological contexts, the lack of political stability and absence of monopolies of violence represented, perhaps, the fundamental hallmarks of the history of this region, as well as of many others. Analytically, resistance would then be a derivative notion, depending (though not in any mechanistic sense) on other concepts and features such as political instability, competitive value systems, economic exploitation and social (im)mobility. This would, in effect, render the resistance concept less useful for an analysis of African historical development. Perhaps then an alternative term like 'contestation' should be used.

It could be argued that the, at times, limited value of the resistance concept could be implied from several more recent resistance studies that appeared

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[47] Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance', 3, and Ranger, 'The People in African Resistance'.

during the 1990s. Two important features of these studies, some of them marked by great detail and subtle analysis, are, first, the emphasis laid on the nature and degree of internal differentiation in communities involved in rebellions and, second, the role of coercion in the mobilization of people for the rebellious cause. The combined effect of these two nuances was to show how complex and multifaceted cases of resistance could be in their structure, development and, especially, their meanings and objectives. Thus, in the introduction to his brilliant study of the 1888 rebellion on the Swahili coast, Jonathon Glassman argued that, in general, peasant consciousness and resistance during the colonial period tended to grow out of an awareness of conflicts *integral* to the agrarian communities in which peasants lived. 'Tradition', in this context, was the cultural language or idiom in which peasants expressed conflicting views of their world and innovated new ones.[48] This also constituted an important nuance of James Scott's view of the 'moral economy of the peasant' as something universal and unchanging.[49] In order to describe the awareness of his own Swahili rebels, Glassman used the term 'contradictory rebellious consciousness', to which we will return below in the section on rebellious imagination.

Norma Kriger, working on the war of independence in Zimbabwe, similarly argued that the peasant concept as such has an external bias that implicitly assumes that differences internal to the peasantry pale into insignificance when compared to members of other classes or occupation and status groups. Hence, it vitiates against examining gender, lineage, and generational and other differences that are of considerable importance in explaining the evolution of rebellion and relevant peasant responses.[50]

Moreover, Kriger showed that coercion played some role in the mobilization of peasants for the second *chimurenga* (1972-1980), thus adding a vital nuance to our view of the struggle for Zimbabwe. Her field data suggested that guerrilla coercion may have been important in winning popular compliance, a point also notable in the thirty-year Eritrean struggle for independence. If true, this could not only profoundly affect our view of historical cases of resistance and rebellion but also bring the older resistance studies more in line with analyses of more recent wars and violent conflicts, in which coercion has tended to assume an important place. Other questions, which we will consider below, are whether the ideological motivation so prevalent in, especially, anti-colonial resistance

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[48] Glassman, *Feasts and Riot.*
[49] J. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, 1976).
[50] Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War*, 240. Ranger ('Resistance in Africa', 42) had already noted that historiography ought to focus more on the different peasant experiences in resistance cases.

cases should not, therefore, be interpreted in a different light and whether the ideological dimension is not an understudied aspect as far as more recent revolts and conflicts are concerned.

With regard to Zimbabwe, Kriger showed that coercion may adversely affect popular support due to the fact that cultural nationalist appeals cannot compensate for the material sacrifices of the peasantry. The lack of peasant support that Kriger noted in the districts she studied may not have been an obstacle to guerrilla success, yet peasant attitudes undoubtedly affected the outcome. Caught between the guerrillas and the Rhodesian state, peasants pursued their own agendas, seeing the guerrillas as potential allies or susceptible to manipulation for their own objectives. Peasant resentment of the white minority government did not mitigate negative views about coercion by the guerrillas. Hence, the coercive nature of mobilization also had repercussions for post-war relations between peasants and the new government party, ZANU-PF.[51] This was confirmed by the important study by Alexander, McGregor & Ranger,[52] who provided an important testimony on the internal divisions during the war of independence and the pain inflicted by state violence thereafter. Another volume, edited by Bhebe & Ranger,[53] nuanced in this respect the role played by spirit mediums in peasant mobilization, well known since the study by David Lan.[54]

Clapham[55] similarly concluded that a context of insurgency may or may not be marked by a relation of common interests between insurgents and the surrounding population. His edited volume marked, perhaps, the transformation of the 'freedom fighter' into the more straightforward 'guerrilla'. Concentrating solely on cases of resistance against the governments of post-colonial states, this book could not be seen to have the political commitment to the resisters themselves, as exemplified by the Isaacmans and maybe the early Ranger. Rather, it drove home the point that resistance is a phenomenon not limited to pre-colonial and colonial Africa. If rebellions against post-colonial states used to be explained away as a hangover of colonial rule, through the heavy if vague

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[51] Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War*, Chapter 1.
[52] J. Alexander, J. McGregor & T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford, 2000).
[53] See the introduction to N. Bhebe & T. Ranger (eds), *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (Oxford, 1996), 12.
[54] D. Lan, *Guns & Rain: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (London, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1985).
[55] C. Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas* (Oxford, 1998). This volume was the result of a two-day conference on this subject at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, January 1997.

ideological concept of neo-colonialism,[56] now it was argued that, very generally, violent revolt derives from blocked political aspirations and in some cases 'reactive desperation'.[57]

Hence, in his typology of guerrilla insurgencies, Clapham listed 'separatist insurgencies', 'reform insurgencies' and 'warlord insurgencies', besides the now familiar 'liberation insurgencies'. He argued that revolts against independent African states initially grew out of failures in the decolonization settlement, subjecting peoples to governing groups widely considered as alien and illegitimate. Eritrea and southern Sudan were given as examples. Alternatively, revolts were, or are, triggered by unrepresentative, autocratic regimes, a category that actually merges with cases considered as failures in decolonization. Listing Chad and the Senegalese Casamance as examples,[58] we could tentatively add two cases presented in this volume, namely that of Renamo's war in Mozambique, which was in part driven by regional discontent, and that of *Sawaba*'s revolt in Niger, where the degree of regime illegitimacy was, however, overestimated. More straightforward desperation, according to Clapham, drove rebellions in Uganda under Amin and Obote, in Somalia under Siyad Barre (discussed by Jon Abbink in this volume), in Liberia and in Sierra Leone.

Generally, these types of insurgencies were long denied any legitimacy, by the OAU and internationally, but their growing acceptance as expressions of popular alienation in the post-Cold War era with its ideals of 'good governance' and multipartyism was reflected in this new scholarly attention. (The warlord type of insurgency is discussed below). Clapham observed, in this regard, that insurgencies occur in all types of rural African settings and economies. While the structure of society does not, therefore, seem to have much bearing on the incidence of rebellion, it has nevertheless some influence on the type of insurgency, with differences between these types more due to their receptivity in society than to their own ideology or organizational models. Hence, Clapham likened the technique of guerrilla struggle to pre-colonial modes of warfare and considered it the normal way of doing battle in societies without powerful states. He observed, in this respect, that a disposition to resort to insurgency may be linked to the structures and values of a society: where state structures are weak and the use of violence in pursuit of certain objectives was a normal feature of pre-colonial society, the incidence of violent resistance merely

represents the continuation of such practice in the post-colonial era.[59] This underlines what was mentioned above about political instability (in the sense of imbalance or lack of permanence of the main features of a polity and its power configurations or continued violent opposition to these structures) as the salient feature of pre-colonial life in the nineteenth-century West African Fulbe polities. These pre-colonial socio-cultural characteristics also inform much of the context of twentieth-century Somali history, as shown in the chapter by Jon Abbink in this volume, and of the Patriots' resistance to the Fascist occupation of Ethiopia analysed by Aregawi Berhe (Chapter 4).

It would, however, be going too far to conclude that resistance as a concept has lost its analytical value due to the fact that so much of the political life in Africa's past and present is characterized by instability and physical violence. As shown in recent literature, many revolts in the past decade were affected if not driven by a sociological factor that has gained increasing importance, i.e. generational tension. Hence, at least some of these insurgencies were marked by more or less explicated political or ideological *intentions*, thus distinguishing them as cases of resistance as defined above, from the phenomenon of violence as such. With most Sub-Saharan countries marked by high birth rates and young populations but deteriorating economies, youths have been finding it ever harder to gain access to educational facilities, employment and social advancement and political representation. Competition for jobs, schooling and privilege, especially in the urban domains, has thus begun to mark, to a greater or lesser extent, relations between different generations and has, concomitantly, become a factor in post-colonial political systems and in several violent revolts emerging as a result of blocked mobility or political communication *within* those systems. Interestingly, this factor appears to have been present for much of the post-colonial period, if not always with the same urgency. Thus, it played some role in *Sawaba*'s revolt in Niger during the 1960s, as analysed by Van Walraven in this volume. Kriger, too, showed that in the war for Zimbabwe during the 1980s youths were empowered by the *chimurenga* and sought to challenge the authority of the elders. Moreover, aspirations to gain a modern education have, perhaps, appeared as the outstanding driving force in the political mobilization of youth. As shown in this volume's chapters on Niger and Mozambique, promises of foreign scholarships sometimes constituted an effective means of recruitment of potential rebels, as the dream of overseas studies drove or lured youngsters to participate in revolts against their governments.

An important recent study of resistance in which the anger of youth was attributed a crucial role is Paul Richards's analysis of the RUF rebellion in

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[56] Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance', 5.

[57] C. Clapham, 'Introduction: Analysing African Insurgencies', in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, 5.

[58] Ibid. 3.

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[59] Ibid.

Sierra Leone.[60] Arguing that the decline in patrimonial distribution during the 1980s tested the loyalty of the younger generation while the capacity of the state to control its formal territory diminished sharply, Richards stressed that this conflict was manifestly not an ethnic one. Rather, it was driven by a younger generation, in particular by young school drop-outs and, more generally, victims of educational collapse. Other studies have similarly underlined the importance of youths, and especially of school drop-outs, in recent resistance movements. For instance, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, Joseph Kony, was a school drop-out himself,[61] while marginalized youths decided in droves, and without consulting their parents, to join the Mai-Mai militias fighting in the east of Congo-Kinshasa.[62]

Participants in the fierce fighting that wrecked Congo-Brazzaville in 1993-94 and again in 1997 were mostly young men (aged 15 to 35), in the first wave of violence from the capital itself and in the second wave from several other towns in the country, most of those involved being school drop-outs. Since educational advancement in Congo had always been affected by political considerations, the economic decline and rising graduate unemployment of the 1980s and 1990s threw idle youngsters, who had at least some experience of political mobilization, onto Congo's streets. Even if the social frustrations of these youths did not directly cause the civil war (which was very much the immediate result of rivalry between more comfortably positioned and older politicians), their thwarted expectations of social and economic advancement proved a rich recruiting ground for those wishing to create a personal army. This, of course, does not constitute the central objective to be attributed to the Congolese conflict, at least not at the level of the leaders who began the revolt against President Lissouba. Yet the social frustrations of Congolese youths deeply affected the course and nature of the insurrection. In a study of this violent period, Bazenguissa showed how the militiamen went on a looting spree to recompense themselves and their families, targeting any urban property, including that of people of their own ethnic group, as well as that of the very politicians who had hired them in the first place. With fine houses regarded as the receptacle of the power exercised by a politician, the looting became a genuine trial for a political class of elders that was collectively held responsible for the misfortune of the young. However, while the pillaging indicated some political awareness on the part of the militiamen in the sense that it symbolized

an emergent social distance between them and the political leaders, this ideological aspect should not be overrated as it was to some extent a mere justification to satisfy some immediate material desire.[63]

It is therefore hard, or has become harder when compared to past cases, to attribute more or less explicit ideological objectives to some of Africa's more recent strife. Hence, concepts like resistance and guerrillas, let alone freedom fighters have increasingly given way to notions such as 'new wars', 'warlords' and, quite simply, 'conflicts' (see also Jon Abbink's chapter in this volume). Whatever political objectives are ascribed to recent conflicts, these cannot be explained by reference to African nationalism – the ideological dimension of the original resistance studies. The armed clashes between the rival wings of Zimbabwe's guerrillas during the early 1980s had already raised uneasy questions about the nature of ethnicity and factional conflict in the nationalist movement of a country that had been at the centre of debate in the resistance literature.[64] Later and much more violent (or at least more atrocious) conflicts such as those in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mozambique clearly showed that not all acts of resistance to official authority constitute forces of progress or emancipation. Consequently, as discussed further in the section below on violence, recent scholarship has produced more anthropologically oriented studies that tend to view wars as very complex social phenomena, rather than as struggles in straightforward support of modern political ideologies.[65]

The rise of the African warlord has had important implications for our imagination of, and the attribution of meaning to, recent violent revolt. Warlord insurgency can be described as aiming to weaken or overthrow the official state leadership, with the formal control of the state a desirable objective though not necessarily essential. Rebels such as Jonas Savimbi and Charles Taylor could simply take over substantial parts of the formal state territory and introduce quasi-governmental structures to run them without actually overthrowing the internationally recognized government.[66] However, an analysis of the behaviour of warlords does not in itself constitute the meaning – in terms of objectives and

[60] P. Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford & Portsmouth, NH, 1996).

[61] R. Doom & K. Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message: A New Koinè?: The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda', *African Affairs*, 98 (1999), 21.

[62] F. van Acker & K. Vlassenroot, 'Les "Maï-Maï" et les Fonctions de la Violence Milicienne dans l'Est du Congo', *Politique Africaine*, 84 (December 2001), *passim*.

[63] R. Bazenguissa-Ganga, 'The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville', *African Affairs*, 98 (1999), *passim*.

[64] K.P. Yap, 'Uprooting the Weeds: Power, Ethnicity and Violence in the Matabeleland Conflict, 1980-1987', PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam (2000).

[65] In this field, anthropological studies on Asia and Latin America preceded those on Africa. For an excellent study on southern Sudan, see S.E. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas Coping with Money, War and the State* (Berkeley, 1996). See also Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance'.

[66] Clapham, 'Introduction: Analysing African Insurgencies', 7-8. The shadow state concept coined by William Reno (*Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge, 1995) makes the control of formal state structures superfluous.

intentions – of their concrete military activities, which as such represent a rebellion against the formal state authority. The study by William Reno of warlord politics and African states[67] did not really define warlords and their objectives but, rather, described their actual behaviour. Against a background of collapsing state patronage politics, Reno ascribed the warlords' actions to the pursuit of power and wealth, for purely private interests completely dissociated from the state project.

Several points of interest come into play here. First, is there any similarity between this warlord action and the role of 'big men' in pre-colonial political cultures? Second, how are evidential problems resolved in reconstructing the intentions behind the actions of these modern rebels? Instead of simply reading political intent in actual conduct, one should carefully research the motives of the specific warlords in question –as far as conditions and data allow – since even in this category of political actors there are differences between individual cases. For example, recent literature suggests that there were certainly differences between the motives of the RUF leadership in Sierra Leone and, say, those driving Charles Taylor's revolt against the Liberian government of Samuel Doe.[68]

Furthermore, if the rebellious intention of warlords is reduced to the pursuit of wealth and power for wholly personal benefit, how close does this come to the much criticized view of Paul Collier that wars are mainly motivated by the desire for economic gain[69] or even to the 'new barbarism' thesis exemplified by Robert Kaplan,[70] arguing that resource competition, environmental stress and culture clashes provoke violent anarchic revolts, i.e. '*apolitical* events indistinguishable from banditry and crime'?[71] Finally, are we not too easily overlooking the possibility of ideological motivation – even if broadly defined – on the part of these modern rebels[72] and could this not also be in line with the

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[67] W. Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO & London, 1998).
[68] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, and S. Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York, 1999).
[69] P. Collier, 'Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective', in M. Berdal & M. Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO, 2000) and Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance', 7.
[70] As phrased by Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*. R.D. Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease Are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet', *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994.
[71] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, xiv. Emphasis added.
[72] See for this also R. Buijtenhuijs, 'The Rational Rebel: How Rational, How Rebellious? Some African Examples', *Africa Focus*, 12 (1996), 1-3, 3-25 and idem, 'Peasant Wars in Africa: Gone with the Wind?', in D. Bryceson, C. Kay & J. Mooij (eds), *Disappearing Peasantries?: Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*

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decline of explicit ideologies in the post-Cold War era and with, as some have argued, the 'decidedly cynical context' of current Africanist scholarship?[73]

Here it should be noted that violence can also be constructed as a *political* act aimed at gaining power and ending one's social exclusion.[74] Atrocities and even wholesale material destruction have, in this respect, an underlying, and what can sometimes be called political, intention. The RUF revolt in Sierra Leone is an example, as are the LRA's actions in Uganda. Thus, while Doom & Vlassenroot[75] assessed Kony's programme as 'from the start rather indistinct, a mixture of political entrepreneurship, personal frustration and warlordism' and concluded that he is no longer trying to win the conflict but is content with employing violence as a tool and end in itself, they also noted his anti-establishment message, which was to be realized through destruction and could be considered to some extent as being political in intent. This issue is pursued further in the following sections.

On violence

Even if not all of the more recent rebellions lacked political content, it is clear that they differed considerably – at least as far as style and military execution were concerned – from the project underlying, for example, Frelimo's war against the Portuguese or that of the Patriotic Front against the Rhodesian state. In particular, the nature of the violence involved has undergone changes since the onset of colonial rule, anti-colonial revolts and decolonization.

Violence can be defined as the contested use of damaging physical force against other human beings with possibly fatal consequences.[76] While it should be distinguished from the concept of resistance explained above, it should be realized that violence usually involves an intention on the part of those employing it, i.e. the deliberate humiliation of other human beings, often with

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(London, 2000), 112-22. Other examples of ideologically motivated insurgencies would be the SPLA struggle in southern Sudan or the resistance of the northern Somali National Movement against the Siyad Barre regime in former Somalia in the 1980s and 1990s.
[73] R. Jeffries, 'Ghana's PNDC Regime: A Provisional Assessment', *Africa*, 66, 2 (1996), 291.
[74] Van Acker & Vlassenroot, 'Les "Maï-Maï"', 103.
[75] Doom & Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message', 22, 24 and 35-36.
[76] Cf. J. Abbink, 'Preface: Violation and Violence as Cultural Phenomena', in G. Aijmer & J. Abbink (eds), *Meanings of Violence: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (Oxford & New York, 2000), 1 and idem, 'Restoring the Balance: Violence and Culture among the Suri of Southern Ethiopia', in Aijmer & Abbink, *Meanings of Violence*, 79.

the objective of achieving or maintaining domination over them. In this analytical, and not normative, sense violence is much more meaningful than is frequently assumed, while it is also often rule-bound (though not always) and sometimes constituent of new social relations.[77] Indeed, violence is a form of 'social' behaviour,[78] in the sense of sociologist Marcel Mauss's 'total social fact' – set in a universe of cultural meaning and 'communication', however normatively negative that may be.

This is also true for 'terrorism', a term that may have some relevance to certain cases of resistance described in this volume. Terrorism is defined as the method, or the theory behind the method, whereby an organized group seeks to achieve its aim *mainly* through the systematic use of intimidating violence,[79] usually against arbitrarily chosen individuals. Thus defined, it distinguishes itself from the concept of resistance through the predominance of sheer violence over any other instruments with which one could theoretically attempt to reach one's goal, such as through persuasion, propaganda, and non-coercive mobilization generally. Terrorism excludes violent clashes with the opponent, since it involves the use of violence against a target that is largely constructed as victim. According to Hardman, terrorism even excludes mere intimidation as the terrorist is defined by the actual use of violence, although this is an unhistorical definition. In contrast, Crenshaw entertained, as we do, a broader definition including also the threat of violence.[80]

There is a widespread view, however, that terrorism has a *political* purpose, which means that it must be seen as a form of rational behaviour in the instrumental sense. Terrorism represents purposive behaviour, involving a conscious strategy, to communicate a political message rather than directly defeat the terrorist's opponent. Terrorists generally seek to arouse not only the government deemed to be their enemy but also, and especially, the wider public – the message being that the government's authority does not go unchallenged. This publicity factor is a key aspect of a terrorist strategy and implies that the target of terrorist action lies in the realm of symbolism. Its users expect a reward out of proportion to the resources employed and, sometimes, the risks

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[77] J. Abbink, 'Preface', 2 and A. Blok, 'The Enigma of Senseless Violence', in Aijmer & Abbink, *Meanings of Violence*, Chapter 1.

[78] J Abbink, 'Restoring the Balance', 77

[79] J.B.S. Hardman, 'Terrorism', in E.R.A. Seligman & A. Johnson (eds), *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1950), vol. 13, and M. Crenshaw, 'Terrorism', in N.J. Smelser & P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam, 2001), vol. 23.

[80] Ibid.

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taken. Its use can also be seen in the context of inequality of power relations, which forces the militarily weaker party to be deceptive.[81]

There are several dimensions to revolts such as those staged by Renamo in Mozambique, the RUF in Sierra Leone or the LRA in Uganda that would qualify as 'terrorist' as it is defined here. Many of the more disturbing aspects of these recent forms of resistance are discussed in Gerhard Seibert's analysis of Renamo in this volume. In the early twentieth-century Somali revolt of the *Sayyid* Mohammed 'Abdulle Hassan (see Chapter 13), one could also speak of terrorist tactics against those Somalis opposed to him. However, before some more general remarks are made on this kind of violence, it can be noted from the above discussion that the concept of terrorism is emotionally very powerful, lending itself to subjective interpretations that are usually driven by political or moral purposes.[82] It is obviously a term with strong pejorative connotations. In the hegemonic ideologies of ruling elites, the violence practised by those dubbed as 'terrorists' is denied any legitimacy – to which purpose the term 'terrorism', in its dictionary meaning, is also applied. While terrorism practised by formal governments usually appears or is presented as law enforcement, that of non-governmental, unrecognized groups is condemned as law breaking.[83] Consequently, this volume avoids the term 'terrorism' and employs the notion of violence instead, although the ideas behind the terrorism concept may inform our understanding of this violence.

The horrors in Mozambique described by Seibert call for an explanation that, unfortunately, denies them unique status. Thus, an interesting comparison is provided by the war in Sierra Leone, in which atrocities were committed that Richards argued to be deliberate and intentional. First, this war had a clear political context and its belligerents had rational political aims. Rebel violence was not an instinctive response to population pressure, as suggested by Kaplan, but the result of a mobilization of youths fighting out of social frustration on behalf of a small group of angry excluded people.[84] While the RUF's head, Foday Sankoh, exercised largely exhortatory leadership, the rebel war effort was, in fact, directed by a war council. Radio communication played a vital role, inspired perhaps by Sankoh's personal background as a radio signals technician and thereby striking an interesting parallel with one of his heroes – fellow radio technician Pol Pot. In addition, and in marked contrast to the centrally organized structure of Renamo discussed by Seibert, the confidence

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[81] Crenshaw, 'Terrorism'.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Hardman, 'Terrorism'.

[84] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 164 and 178. See also T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, 1970).

reposed in RUF commanders, both boys and girls, delegated the execution of daily battle to the lower cadres, thus providing the movement with strategic flexibility. The war, therefore, was not fought by 'madmen or mindless savages', but deliberately planned and executed corresponding to a consciously elaborated strategy.[85]

Secondly (and in line with the concept of terrorism), Richards observed that the violence was *supposed* to unsettle its victims. New recruits, for example, were terrorized in the process of capture, but later treated generously, with the whole process approaching and perverting the initiation ritual of the forest cultures of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Thirdly, the perpetration of atrocities had, according to Richards, specific objectives, at least initially. Rebels began amputating the limbs of nearby villagers to thwart the harvesting of crops and thus the restoration of food production and a return of normal village life to which hungry fresh recruits could escape. Feet were cut off recruits wishing to flee, while planned elections that threatened to sidetrack the rebels were checked by severing the hands of potential voters. The increasing menace of militias hostile to the RUF was met with another spate of mutilations. In this way, acts of violence became the logical way of achieving intended strategic outcomes, even if as a last-ditch expression of sectarian rationalism. Revenge for lynchings of suspected rebels, as well as attempts to fight the magical powers attributed to hostile militias and chiefs, would have provided additional reasons for rebel atrocities.[86]

Doom & Vlassenroot also pointed to the deliberate and rational use of atrocious violence or, instead, to its beneficial effects for the LRA's cause in Uganda. The violence perpetrated by the LRA strengthened the power of the field commanders far beyond their logistic and military capabilities. The unpredictability of the LRA's violence was, in this respect, a key weapon. With a minimum of weaponry and well-trained troops, it was able to traumatize the entire population of northern Uganda. The random nature of its violence reinforced the rebels' self-confidence and the experience of impunity bolstered in-group cohesion.[87]

There are several similarities, as well as differences, between the violence perpetrated in these revolts and in Renamo's war as described by Seibert (Chapter 10, this volume). First, in most cases the recruitment of rebels was violent, with the threat of punishment by the government after escape discouraging their desertion. In the Sierra Leonean, as well as Liberian[88]

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[85] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, xx, xix and 179.
[86] Ibid., *passim*.
[87] Doom & Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message', *passim*.
[88] Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*.

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conflicts, this also involved a manipulation of initiation ritual that was not present or as explicit in Mozambique or Uganda. Yet, in general, one can observe a process of degeneration in the perpetration of violence in the context of African tradition – a process also described by Abbink for the Suri people in southern Ethiopia, although admittedly on a much smaller scale.[89] Seibert also points to 'cultic' aspects of the excessive violence committed by Renamo fighters that were often of an obscure nature or directed at violating sexual taboos. Here, he cites research undertaken by Wilson,[90] who argued, like Richards and Doom & Vlassenroot, that violence perpetrated by rebel forces was purposive. Renamo's atrocities were intended to instil a paralysing fear in the wider population for purposes of control with a minimum of means, which more or less strikes a parallel with the LRA's actions in northern Uganda. The actual number of incidents in Mozambique was not very great or at least out of proportion to its impact on the population. The ritual aspects involved were deliberately made incomprehensible so as to have a maximum effect in terms of fear. By making the violence appear to lack rationality and in the process creating a vision of inhumanity that set Renamo outside the realm of social beings, the rebels instilled a belief that the violence could not be managed – thereby escaping from the bounds of social control and, hence, preventing the people from resisting.[91]

Thus, the violence perpetrated in these revolts is, in the strategic-instrumental sense, not irrational but deliberate and reasoned if atrocious. Its random nature serves to make it unpredictable,[92] which in turn makes it unmanageable and therefore increases people's fear and their propensity to submit, especially if the form of violence is incomprehensible and, hence, alienating.[93] In addition to moral issues, this raises fundamental questions as to whether such violence can, therefore, be truly *understood*. While such questions cannot be answered here, they have not only bothered numerous scholars but also writers, poets and novelists, such as authors who focused on the consequences of the *Shoah* in European history.[94]

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[89] Abbink, 'Restoring the Balance'.
[90] K.B. Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence in Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 3, 527-82.
[91] Ibid. 531-33.
[92] But also see Van Acker & Vlassenroot, 'Les "Maï-Maï"', 104.
[93] The question of whether such violence achieves any long-term aims is, however, doubtful because at some point its exercise becomes an end in itself, a way of life in which no one believes except those who have no choice to get out. Resistance here becomes an empty concept.
[94] See D. Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 2000) and idem, 'Negative Symbiose:

It seems, therefore, difficult to explain the sheer extent and intensity of the violence involved in these revolts. In some respects, it may have been triggered by the (initial) cause or nature of some as a kind of last-ditch and embittered attempt to save local societies from social collapse and political hegemonies deemed illegitimate (the RUF in Sierra Leone and, less convincingly, the LRA in Uganda). In other respects, however, it is the external dimensions to these conflicts that appear to have fuelled the conflicts, even if these did not determine the form of violence involved (Renamo in Mozambique, although external/regional dimensions clearly played a role in Sierra Leone and northern Uganda too).

To some extent the degree of this violence was informed by the desire to *destroy* rather than construct or reform. Richards related this desire to the intellectual anger of excluded educated elites whose bitterness led them to 'save' their society through a war of devastation. Whether informed by the uncompromising *mentalité* of university intellectualism as exemplified by Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* (with which Richards compared the RUF) or spurred on by the despair and embitterment of more rural leaderships and rank and files, a penchant for destruction affects most resistance movements whose (original) aim is radical transformation. Indeed, while rural movements may wish to obliterate society because they feel that they cannot defeat ruling hegemonies or fit into the political system and are encouraged in this by a self-esteem inflated by their own violent powerfulness,[95] even the more sophisticated programme of Maoist thought foresees a role for chaos and ruin as the necessary precursor of revolutionary change.[96] A destructive tendency is, moreover, not simply the preserve of rural rebel movements alone. In a fascinating article, Mkandawire argued that it is urban malaise that lies at the root of the activities of and antipathy exhibited by post-colonial rebel movements towards rural

Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz', in D. Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 186-7. Also D. Diner (ed.), *Zivilisationsbruch: Denken nach Auschwitz* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988); L. de Jong, 'Die Niederlande und Auschwitz', in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1969, 16; S.R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany NY, 1997); and G. Banner, *Holocaust Literature: Schulz, Levi, Spiegelman and the Memory of the Offence* (London, 2000).

[95] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 27 and Doom & Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message', 26 and 35.

[96] F.D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton, 1994). See also Chapter 9 in this volume. At the other and least sophisticated end of the scale, Bazenguissa observed a propensity of Congolese militias to destroy the residences of politicians as a consequence of past politicization of domestic space, although here it fused with a desire to satisfy personal greed. Bazenguissa, 'Spread of Political Violence', 49.

populations.[97] Their extreme violence towards rural folk would stem from their fundamentally opposed aims and agendas.

On a more controversial note, Wilson argued that organized violence appeared to be seen in northern Mozambique as a normal and likely, if somewhat undesirable, tool of economic and political activity, based on cultural conceptions of spiritual and magical male power elaborated under Renamo.[98] While this would to some extent put the horrors narrated by Seibert in context, it seems in contrast to, or at least to differ from, the experiences of the *chimurenga* in Zimbabwe and its underlying Shona and Ndebele cultural notions stipulating the need for endorsement of violence by the ancestors and the necessity of cleansing after committing the violent act.[99] Perhaps the level, if not the nature, of the violence in Renamo's revolt can also be partly explained by the tendency of violence to escalate once it is employed. As Seibert shows, at least in the initial stages of the war, Renamo enjoyed some local support or sympathy before the situation got out of control, just as the movements preceding the LRA in Uganda could reckon on support from the Acholi people before this culminated in a permanent state of terror.[100] In addition, the role played by external powers (on which more below) had an escalatory effect on the levels of violence involved. As mentioned earlier, Jon Abbink has analysed this process of escalation for the Suri people in southern Ethiopia, where traditional violence has had a propensity to escalate under the influence of the state modernization project, ecological pressures but also the importation of modern small arms like the AK 47.[101] Such weapons allow these people a fateful quantum leap in killing techniques, thus making the use of physical force contested in a way that 'traditional' violence with spears, knives or slow three-bullet rifles was not.

One of the most disturbing aspects of violence in war and resistance is the sexual dimension. Women are constructed as objects and objectives of war and violence, something clearly shown in the more shocking details of Seibert's narrative of Renamo. Wilson argued, in this respect, that the ideological superstructure reserving agency for men and constructing women as a threat to that agency was reinforced by the use of sexual violence. The violent capacities of Renamo as an institution were conceived of partly as being based on male

[97] T. Mkandawire, 'The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial "Rebel Movements" in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence against the Peasantry', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40 (2002), 181-215.

[98] Wilson, 'Cults of Violence', 535. Compare also Abbink's argument on pre-colonial Somalia in Chapter 13 of this volume.

[99] Lan, *Guns and Rain*. See also the next section.

[100] Doom & Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message', 15 and 23.

[101] Abbink, 'Restoring the Balance'.

power and, consequently, intimately threatened by the existence of female sexuality.[102] Alternatively, raping women was an act of asserting superiority over *men*, as in the case of the Rhodesian security forces and their auxiliaries who violated African women in part to humiliate the guerrillas of the Patriotic Front.[103]

Nevertheless, rape and the subjection of women to the status of slave wives by Renamo were not really ritualized but instead considered as a 'bonus' for men participating in the revolt.[104] Again, the fighters of the *chimurenga* were at times also involved in exercising what they saw as their rights over women,[105] just as happened later on a wider scale in Sierra Leone, Liberia and during the genocide in Rwanda. As Bhebe & Ranger observed in the struggle for Zimbabwe,[106] women had to contend with the confused sexual morality of war, even if one cannot simply reduce their role to one of objects of exploitation. This, of course, is not an African phenomenon but a universal one, as shown in the fate of thousands of Muslim women during the civil war in Bosnia and in the experiences of the countless German women overpowered by the invading Russian armies in 1944-45.[107] Perhaps this aspect, more than anything else, serves as a vital correction to the heroism so often attributed to resistance, revolution and even violence as such.

One last aspect of violence in African revolts to be noted here is the role of forces external to the societies concerned – be they colonial or white settler governments, the influence of racist ideologies, the totalitarian dispositions of certain European powers or, in the post-colonial era, the involvement of regional actors. In many cases these external forces influenced the nature and form of violence or helped to drive it to much higher levels. The chapter by Robert Ross in this volume shows how the vicissitudes of war and resistance on the South African frontier were affected, among others, by racist attitudes that bolstered white self-righteousness to the point that it was regarded as legitimate not just to subject but also to *exterminate* the African other. These inclinations were even more prevalent in the totalitarian dispositions of German and Italian

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[102] Wilson, 'Cults of Violence', 536-37.
[103] See the introduction to Bhebe & Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, 26. Also see Doom & Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message', 27, on the widespread and public rape of men in northern Uganda by the LRA, as acts of humiliation
[104] Wilson, 'Cults of Violence', 536.
[105] Introduction to Bhebe & Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, 26.
[106] Ibid. 27.
[107] See, for example, for the denial and knowledge of these massive rapes at the highest level of the Soviet leadership, M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London, 1962), 88 and 102 quoting Stalin himself justifying and trivializing the rape and murder of women by soldiers of the Red Army in eastern Prussia and parts of Yugoslavia.

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colonial rule, as shown in Gewald's chapter in this volume on the Herero genocide and its aftermath in Namibia and Berhe's analysis of the brutal Italian repression of Patriot resistance in Ethiopia. These attitudes were part of a much wider European cultural complex, in which one set of mentalities claimed, if necessary, *the right to kill* with regard to those considered of inferior racial or cultural status.[108] Indeed, some would argue that Europe's *Shoah* had specific antecedents if not roots in previous colonial experiences.[109]

That these dispositions cannot be regarded as something of the past is, moreover, shown by Ranger in his discussion of the 'guilt-free semantics of the Rhodesian war', which shielded white Rhodesians from raising uncomfortable questions about their own humanity.[110] Such guilt-free semantics are, in fact, closely bound up with the waging of war itself and can be observed in any conflict to this day. Hence, Ken Flower, the chief of Rhodesian intelligence responsible for the creation of Renamo, admitted with shocking laconism that the force he had helped to field had just developed into a monster out of control.[111]

While Seibert is right to stress that the war in Mozambique had specific internal roots, we should not forget, as Wilson observed, that although the nature of Renamo's violence was informed by local cultural logics, its effectiveness and intensity were to a considerable extent bound up with the intervention of regional white powers.[112] The same thing could be said about some of Africa's more recent revolts. The civil war in Liberia, for example, had profound regional dimensions that served to complicate and prolong the hostilities.[113] The war in neighbouring Sierra Leone experienced the considerable involvement of Charles Taylor and his NPFL rebel movement in

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[108] This point was clearly driven home, in a literary fashion, by Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899; Penguin Books: London, 1989). As to the veracity of the horrors perpetrated by and attitudes of European agents in the Congo and some striking parallels to their literary representation by Conrad, see A. Hochschild's widely acclaimed *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London, 2000). While the facts of these shocking actions and mentalities reverberated in the more enlightened circles of European society for more than a decade, the eruption of World War I had the effect of diminishing historical awareness of this racial/cultural aspect of European humanity. See also next footnote.
[109] H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951).
[110] T. Ranger, 'Afterword: War, Violence and Healing in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 3, 704.
[111] K. Flower, *Serving Secretly: An Intelligence Chief on Record Rhodesia into Zimbabwe 1964 to 1981* (London, 1987), 262.
[112] Wilson, 'Cults of Violence', 581.
[113] K. van Walraven, *The Pretence of Peace-keeping. ECOMOG, West Africa and Liberia (1990-1998)* (The Hague, 1999).

Liberia as well as of Sierra Leonean exiles based there and wishing to fight their way back home. Moreover, Richards emphasized that the earliest atrocities committed during Sierra Leone's civil war, rather than being the work of Sierra Leoneans, had actually been the work of foreign mercenaries.[114] Similarly, Doom & Vlassenroot[115] observed that after 1994 the LRA in Uganda began to receive 'full-scale support from Sudan'. In other words, while it cannot be completely reduced to extraneous factors it seems difficult to conceive of the horrendous violence marking many of Africa's more recent revolts as being completely isolated from external involvement.

Imagining

Resistance and, perhaps to a lesser extent, violence are conceptually dependent on more or less specified intentions. Motivation is, consequently, one of their key components. In order to understand the phenomenon of resistance and violence in African history, one must therefore focus also on what those who organized, led or participated in revolts thought they were doing or intended to achieve. While from the perspective of the older resistance literature this was considered to belong primarily to the realm of ideology, in later publications the attribution of meaning to resistance was researched from other conceptual angles as well, such as discourse, religion and predominantly cultural features (rituals, values).

The concept of ideology became somewhat disqualified, partly because of the obvious inadequacies of the explanation that resistance movements were straightforward nationalist uprisings. These inadequacies stemmed, however, to some extent from classical definitions of ideology as referring to relatively comprehensive political programmes or complex and explicated systems of thought claiming universal validity and marked to varying degrees by systematization and coherence.[116] Yet, viewed more or less along the lines of the concept of discourse, ideology could be seen as encompassing any views, ideas or thoughts purporting to provide meaning to cultural reality, political systems or social existence, at whatever level of abstraction and complexity.[117] Marked by descriptive and prescriptive elements, ideology, as discourse,

represents the construction of meaning as a social process through spoken and written dialogue, leading to systems of meaning through which reality is imagined.[118] Such a process of imagination is a social phenomenon and as such affected by its interaction with the social context, though not determined by it in a mechanistic sense.[119]

An important and subtle approach to the role of ideology in African resistance, with some bearing on certain chapters in our volume, is Glassman's earlier-cited analysis of the Swahili revolt of 1888.[120] As mentioned above, Glassman used the term 'contradictory rebellious consciousness' to explain the tendency of rebels to express their grievances in language marked by or reminiscent of the hegemonic ideologies of ruling groups. Inspired by Gramsci, he did not dismiss this as a form of 'false consciousness' in the Marxist sense (i.e. consciousness appropriate to the material interests of another group), but argued, first, that the perceptual languages in which class positions are articulated tend to differ since beliefs are not created by or within one specific group but are forged in the crucible of social interaction, arising from the rough-and-tumble of everyday struggle. Perceptions of group interests do not precede such struggle but grow out of it.

Second, and again following Gramsci, Glassman stressed that hegemonic ideologies influence popular consciousness not through the imposition of particular ideas but by the way that these ideologies shape the questions to be asked and the issues to be debated. The language of political culture is not an instrument for the defence of underlying interests but a form of discourse within which certain issues are defined and debated. Hence, popular consciousness is not appropriate to the material interests of either subordinate or dominant groups (nor is hegemonic ideology). Affected by hegemonic ideologies, popular consciousness is rarely revolutionary in the fullest sense, yet still contains much that is expressive of perceptions of struggle against those dominating society. Such consciousness is made up of different fragments of thought originating in different times and places, including conflicting daily experiences and hegemonic ideas. The result is a bizarre combination of ideological components crafted in the course of struggle in which individuals find justification for their

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[114] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 181.

[115] 'Kony's Message', 25.

[116] E. Shills, 'The Concept and Function of Ideology', in D.L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (no pl., 1968), vol. 7, 66.

[117] P.H. Partridge, 'Politics, Philosophy, Ideology', *Political Studies* (1961), 227 and C. Clapham, 'The Context of African Political Thought', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1970, 2-3.

[118] D. Macdonell, *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction* (Oxford & New York, 1989); R. Boudon, *The Analysis of Ideology* (Cambridge & Oxford, 1989) and D.J. Manning (ed.), *The Form of Ideology: Investigations into the Sense of Ideological Reasoning With a View to Giving an Account of its Place in Political Life* (London, Boston & Sydney, 1980).

[119] See for example, L.G. Graham, 'Ideology and the Sociological Understanding', in Manning, *The Form of Ideology*, Chapter 1; Boudon, *The Analysis of Ideology* and M. Vovelle, *Ideologies and Mentalities* (Cambridge & Oxford, 1990).

[120] Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*.

different agendas. As an ever-changing patchwork of thought, political awareness arises, in traditional or pre-modern settings such as pre- or early colonial Africa, not only over conflicting views of the ideal society but also over definitions of custom and tradition. In this context, defence of the local community is not an objective goal of struggle but the form of discourse in which the struggle occurs. This discourse, while being shared at many levels of society, is not a uniform mode of thought but an ideological or discursive language.[121]

The resultant forms of contradictory rebellious consciousness can be observed during different periods of Africa's history. Robert Ross's chapter in this volume shows, for example, how Khoi and English settlers along South Africa's Kat River came into violent conflict with each other and, against the background of hardening race relations, held conflicting views on the nature of early colonial society. Measures taken by white settlers not only threatened the material aspects of Khoi life but also dashed hopes of reconstructing Khoi lives in the context of loyalty to the British crown. Hardening British ethnic and racial consciousness determined who the opponents of the British were, and Khoi settlers 'rebelled because they were declared to be rebels': 'even then many of those who were considered to be disloyal to the Cape Colony struggled as hard as they could to preserve their loyalty'. In the process, the concept of resistance blurred with that of loyalty – i.e. allegiance to an older and now contested view of society. Similarly, Ineke van Kessel (Chapter 6 this volume) concludes that the African soldiers recruited for service in the colonial army in the Netherlands East Indies were caught in a colonial paradox since they were encouraged by the Dutch to look down on the Asian indigenes and maintain a status of Europeans while at the same time they were denied the equal treatment that this status implied, due to racial bigotry and meanness. In revisiting the *menalamba* rising, Stephen Ellis (Chapter 3 this volume) shows that this revolt was not only a movement of resistance to colonial rule but also a campaign against an unpopular Malagasy government that had discredited itself through forced labour and enslavement practices, and association with Christianity. The resisters aimed to restore the indigenous monarchy in what they saw as its proper form, purified from alien (religious) influences and the rapacious practices of the indigenous elite.

Perhaps the best example in our volume of revolt being motivated by the desire to resist *foreign* intruders or usurpers is the chapter by Aregawi Berhe (Chapter 4), although even in the case of the Patriots' resistance contradictory indigenous perceptions of what local African society should look like played a role in the background and aftermath of the resistance. Thus, the *shifta* tradition,

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[121] Ibid. 16-20.

which Berhe argues inspired the Patriots to fight the Italians, involved a tradition of rebellion against indigenous authorities that were regarded as having failed to deliver justice or respect local customs. While the essence of resistance to the Italians was to safeguard Ethiopia's independence, religious values and cultural identity, it also led Ethiopians to re-examine the nature and meaning of their own state in the context of the modern world. As Berhe concludes, some of the social and other political aims of Patriot resistance, such as ideas on social justice, equality and openness of the political system, later met with repression and violence from the Ethiopian authorities.

The Patriots' revolt shows, however, that in ideological terms, not all rebellions in African history can be classified fully as contradictory rebellious discourses. The chapter by Mirjam de Bruijn & Han van Dijk in our volume is perhaps the best example of sharp clashes between antagonistic ideologies. Upcoming Fulbe minorities sought to legitimise their political and economic ambitions against existing hegemonies by propagating a stricter, 'uncorrupted' Islam that ostensibly promoted a new egalitarianism but gave justification to the violent subjugation of other peoples (especially non-Muslim groups), the plunder of their wealth and the exploitation of their labour. In the process, the oppressed became oppressors themselves and prompted the counter-resistance of communities that adhered to other religious beliefs, objected to Islam as the dominant ideology or tried to escape from the pressure of Islamic reform and (imposed) economic marginality. Even though individual Muslims also became the victims of Fulbe expansion and the discourse involved in these revolts was, consequently, marked by contradictions and ambiguities, the ideological counter-positions were, at least seemingly, put in sharp and uncompromising relief.

This was also true, though with different ideological reference points, for the Tuareg revolt against French colonial rule in Niger (1916-1920), analysed by Kimba Idrissa (Chapter 8). Idrissa, in revisiting the famous rebellion led by Yakin Kawousan, argues that the ideology of Islam, as represented by the Sanûssiya order, functioned mainly as a mobilizing vehicle that rejected any blind fanaticism of fighters who wanted to engage in a holy war against the infidel. Rather, the alliance with the Sanûssiya was of a tactical nature. Idrissa takes issue with Fuglestad's comparison of the revolt with classical forms of Tuareg pillaging,[122] arguing instead that in Kawousan's case raiding had a political purpose, namely the weakening of the colonial enemy. He explains the revolt as an anti-colonial uprising against the loss of an aristocratic Tuareg hegemony over other cultural communities. This hegemony was based on a

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[122] F. Fuglestad, 'Les Révoltes des Touareg du Niger (1916-17)', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 13 (1973), 49 and 82-120.

political economy involving nomadism, animal husbandry, raiding and slavery and grounded in beliefs of cultural superiority and independence of mind, both of which were obliterated or jeopardized by famine and the destruction by the French of Tuareg economic power through enforced sedentarization and subjection to colonial control. Here, too, few if any intermediate ideological positions would have seemed possible between the principal adversaries involved.

Ironically, with the chapter by Idrissa the arguments of the resistance literature turn full circle as he reintroduces the explanation of rebellions as manifestations of anti-colonial, if not fully (proto-)nationalist, uprisings. The chapter by Klaas van Walraven about a much later period in Nigerien history, the *Sawaba* revolt during the 1960s, shows, however, that it is impossible to generalize about the role of nationalist ideology. Rather than as the exclusive result of Marxist-inspired nationalist militancy, the revolt of the *Sawabists* was fuelled by personal aspirations for higher education, access to jobs and social advancement coupled with some ideological conviction and pragmatic opportunism. Hence, we can concur with the argument by Alexander, McGregor & Ranger,[123] made in another historical-geographical context, that popular motivation for supporting various forms of armed insurgencies proves resistant to generalization.

Moreover, the difficulties scholars have encountered in generalizing ideological motivation have increased considerably with regard to the more recent cases of armed rebellion to which, as noted above, it is much harder to attribute explicit ideological objectives. Richards's study of the RUF revolt in Sierra Leone is exceptional here since he argued that, beyond the horrors of death and mutilation, the rebel leadership held a clear vision of a reformed and accountable state as their ideological objective. This objective was to some extent inspired or affected by the populism of Gadaffi's Green Book ideology, Pan-Africanist militancy and the writings of an American futurologist, yet could not be communicated properly due to poverty, incompetence and sectarian isolation. Internally, the rebel movement was driven, like an 'enclave' culture, by meritocratic and egalitarian ideas about social accountability, which differed strongly from the surrounding local society that it had rejected.[124] Interestingly, Van Acker & Vlassenroot also read an enclave mentality in the aspirations of the Mai-Mai militias who mobilized certain traditions and new conditions of mobility in a new interpretation of customary defence, based on the social significance of the land but with rejection of the local traditional authorities. Yet, while displacing power into the hands of these young combatants, militia

alliances remain(ed) weak and mobilized and divided in a continual process of transformations, on ethnic as well as financial grounds, precluding a common ideological objective such as the building of a new state.[125]

Consequently, the usefulness of the concept of ideology for an understanding of people's imagination of revolt and resistance remains limited. Other scholars, notably anthropologists, have therefore resorted to other conceptual angles. David Lan's study of spirit mediums had already drawn a lot of attention to the role of religious practices in the mobilization of Zimbabwe's peasants for the *chimurenga*.[126] It showed how tradition afforded the war a revolutionary element – a paradoxical situation that had important implications for the struggle and its aftermath, since 'any attempt to establish political legitimacy [would] only succeed if it obtains the endorsement of the ancestors. For the ultimate test of legitimacy of any political system is its ability to provide fertility, to ensure that the crops grow, that the people prosper and are content.'[127] That this is or was true not only for Zimbabwe but also other African countries is shown in the chapter on *Sawaba*'s revolt in Niger, where the ability to muster 'luck' and provide good rains and growth represented key elements in the regime's survival. African conceptions of political legitimacy thus provide their own peculiar dimension to wars of resistance. Bhebe & Ranger,[128] for example, argued that the rain shrines of Zimbabwe provided a view of history that gave a pattern to be followed in the struggle against white rule as a whole. These religious dimensions gave Zimbabweans a specific relation to the land and held that blood could be spilled to claim it, provided that fighters and the land would be ritually cleansed afterwards.[129]

However, religion did or does not always play such a constructive role. While the Holy Spirit movement of Alice Lakwena represented the political manifestation of an Acholi society driven into a corner by Museveni's rise to power in Uganda,[130] her succession by Joseph Kony proved much less beneficial. Kony, like a biblical prophet inspired by his own (quasi-) religious rituals and belief-system, wanted to punish the Acholi people for their 'sins' in the wake of the LRA's failing popularity.[131] Similarly, Stephen Ellis's study of the civil war in Liberia drew attention to the destructive effects of manipulated

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[123] Alexander *et al.*, Violence *and Memory*, 7.
[124] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest, passim*.

[125] Van Acker & Vlassenroot, 'Les "Maï-Maï"', 109 and 115-16.
[126] Lan, *Guns and Rain*.
[127] Ibid. 228.
[128] Bhebe & Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, 8.
[129] Ranger, 'Afterword', 704.
[130] H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits· War in Northern Uganda 1986-97* (Oxford, 1999).
[131] Doom & Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message', 22-25.

religious repertoires.[132] In our volume, Seibert's study of Renamo's war in Mozambique demonstrates that ritual magic can be helpful in mustering some degree of popular support for or acquiescence in an insurgency, however bloody its execution. He shows, moreover, that one of the few effective antidotes to Renamo's expansion was the involvement of an armed peasant movement, the Naparamas, reputedly equipped with rival supernatural powers.

These various religious dimensions show that, to some extent, acts of resistance take place in the realm of the mind. The study by Mbembe, mentioned above, argued in this respect that part of the life and activities of Ruben Um Nyobè, the source of inspiration of the UPC rebellion in colonial Cameroon, revolved around dreams he experienced in the *maquis*. These dreams constituted the rebel's comment on and opposition to colonial violence. This, of course, also has some links to the religious dimension discussed above, since to the Beti people in Cameroon the world of the night and sleep are proximate to death and the invisible world generally. While colonialism therefore not only penetrated the physical world of Africans but also touched the very foundations of their imagination and pursued them in their sleep, the invisible world in turn allowed them to manipulate the 'economy of the day' and the strategic points controlled by the French administration. This rendered dreams relevant to anti-colonial resistance as efforts to control daily, or rather, daytime life, to direct the struggle and to heal the community.[133]

This naturally extends the concept of resistance considerably. One chapter in our volume which contributes to the widening of the resistance notion is the study by Jan-Georg Deutsch on the supposed absence of slave resistance under German colonial rule in East Africa. Deutsch argues convincingly that slave resistance to subjugation mainly took the form of flight. This also puts labour migration during early colonial rule in Tanganyika in a different perspective, since those who, like the Isaacmans, initially made so much of peasant resistance to capitalist encroachment appear to have overlooked the social origins of those marginal groups who, at least in East Africa, embraced colonial subordination and made early colonial capitalism work. Deutsch also criticizes the danger of romanticizing resistance by reading legitimate current concerns about the marginality of certain social strata back into African history or, alternatively, by making the existence of slave resistance dependent on the presence of a genuine Spartacus.

It is exactly this romantic dimension to resistance that is discussed, from a very different ideological angle, in the chapter about *Sawaba*. Inspired by

Colburn,[134] Van Walraven argues that the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist dogmas that helped *Sawaba*'s leader, Djibo Bakary, to legitimise his invasion of Niger in 1964 actually amounted to a form of romantic narrative that blurred his sense of reality. Colburn argues in this respect that Marxism represents, or represented, not so much an explicit and comprehensive ideology stipulating coherent plans for reformed government as a millenarian *mentalité* geared towards effecting a radical break with the past. With little precise guidance as to the concrete challenges of government, Marxism and its discursive off-shoots functioned as a dreamy mind-set inspiring its revolutionaries to behave more or less as mystics propagating the possibilities of a simple, Herculean transformation of the world they lived in. One could add to this that the associated revolutionary perceptions of the nature of chaos, anarchy and violence were necessarily rosy in character, attributing good, necessary, even constructive effects to their occurrence. Added to the alienating effects of exile that many revolutionary agitators experience(d) at some stage in their career, this could contribute towards a state of thorough misunderstanding of political reality. Van Walraven argues this to be true, as a preliminary assessment, for the leader of *Sawaba*, while concluding that war and revolutionary violence are not romantic at all.

Furthermore, this romantic dimension does not only create concrete effects for the nature, patterns and outcomes of rebellions (Marxist-inspired and other), but also has effects at the level of research. Thus, in discussing the concept of social banditry, Austin remarked on the romantic element of the masculine violence involved, arguing that this can only be redressed by looking at the role of women. More generally, he opined that the social bandit represents the heroic version of self-help, defying government from a geographically and socially isolated position, with his moral purity becoming reinforced by the inevitably tragic fate met out to him at the hands of the authorities.[135] Not just social bandits but even the more technical concept of guerrilla in due course acquired such romantic connotations.[136] Even when researchers began to detect collaborators and pragmatic opportunists making their mark on African history, the romantic narrative was upheld and, according to Ranger,[137] given a new boost with the Isaacmans pleading the case of the masses and their popular struggle against colonial capitalism. Inevitably, such romanticism found its way even more easily in literary presentations of the African condition. For example, novelists living in the relative calm and security of Rhodesia's cities entertained

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[132] Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*.

[133] Mbembe, 'Domaines de la Nuit et Autorité Onirique', 119-21.

[134] Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution*.

[135] Austin, 'Social Bandits', 91.

[136] Clapham, 'Introduction: Analysing African Insurgencies', 1.

[137] Ranger, 'The People in African Resistance', 142.

a flawed notion of the *chimurenga* that during the 1970s began to engulf the countryside.[138]

While some of the authors already discussed in this chapter make passing mention of the romantic narrative, there appears to be need for more systematic scholarly attention to this aspect. The attribution of romantic dimensions to resistance, revolt, revolution, and even war and violence generally, is, in fact, an understudied theme. Lan, in discussing the more peaceful role of spirit mediums in mobilizing Zimbabwe's peasantry for the war effort, noted coolly that rural folk were 'organised, mobilised and educated sometimes by gentle means, sometimes not'.[139] More generally, perhaps Western people in particular are in need of a demythologized view of the nature of war and violence. Existing attitudes to these dramatic phenomena appear to have become more and more romanticized or at least detached from their ugly realities, perhaps in part because of the effects of long-standing conditions of peace in the Western world itself, but also as a result of the alienating effect of increasingly complex weapons technology, which has a tendency to blur perceptions of the act of killing[140] while not necessarily impairing the attribution of heroism to those who perform the deadly act. Media discourse on the role of high tech in the Gulf War or in the Western war against the terrorist phenomenon has in this respect been illustrative.

Memory and heritage

A final issue to be considered in the historical and social study of resistance is that of 'memory'. There is an ideological sedimentation of the impact, or the tranformative effects, of revolt and resistance, especially when they have been violent and dramatic, on the people involved. This can be recognized in the

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[138] C. Hove, lecture, African Studies Centre, Leiden, 20 June 2002. Critical perspectives on this in the poetry of C. Hove, *Up in Arms* (Harare, 1982), esp. 20 and 29, and his *Red Hills of Home* (Gweru, 1985), inspired by the events in Matabeleland during the early 1980s, esp. 1-2, 18, 35 and 50-51. Also F. Nyamubaya, *On the Road Again· Poems During and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1981), 10-11 and 13.

[139] Lan, *Guns and Rain*, 226.

[140] Bertrand Russell (*Power A New Social Analysis*, London, 1938, 32, 30-31) in narrating the Italian invasion of Ethiopia called this 'mechanical power', which 'tends to generate a new mentality' since 'the men in control, having been trained on mechanism, would view human material as they had learnt to view their own machines, as something unfeeling governed by laws which the manipulator can operate to his advantage'. See for a discussion S. Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (New York, 2001), 151.

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social, psychological and political domain. In contemporary communities and polities in Africa – even, or perhaps especially, in the non-literate ones – the stylized and selectively framed social memories of revolt and resistance continue to be felt at different levels, either as ideology or as justification for new forms of resistance. As Ranger has suggested,[141] a heritage of 'excessive violence' has implications for the legitimacy of subsequent regimes that issue from it, as well as for the governability of citizens under it. Cultural factors come into play here, as practices of violence – often representing a break with the past in terms of their scope and intensity – have a qualitative effect on ideas of political order and social cohesion. For instance, the violence of the Dervish movement in Somalia in the early twentieth century, while initiating a massive rebellion against foreigners, alienated most Somalis who did not adhere to the violent and uncompromising message of the movement and created new antagonisms between clan groups that were carried well into the post-independence era (see Chapter 13 this volume). In this sense it is not surprising that the movement's leader, Mohammed 'Abdulle Hassan, who was seen by observers as the chief initiator of 'Somali nationalism', is not well remembered by Somalis today.

A critical factor determining how the memory of resistance by earlier generations against colonial rule or other oppressive dominance is institutionalized is how the proponents of resistance dealt with the people or 'the masses' on whose behalf the struggle was usually waged. Here a cultural analysis alongside a politico-historical one is necessary: movements and acts of resistance tend to have resonance when they refer or tune in to the cultural values and symbolism that animate people. As Donham suggested in a brilliant study of resistance responses of the southern Ethiopian Maale people against the violent policies of the Ethiopian revolution, people's cultural commitments are crucial.[142] Here the diversity across Africa is great and challenges scholarly explanation. It is without doubt that the construction of memories of resistance is an ongoing process *with political relevance* in contemporary African history. As the chapters in this volume on Namibia by Melber and Gewald make abundantly clear, the ideological manipulation of history – either the German colonial mass murder of Herero or the invocation of the 'heroism' of the liberation struggle of the 1970s and 1980s – is used in the construction of legitimacy and power of new regimes in no need of a critical discourse on the past. This 'politics of memory' itself is a social fact that should receive close scrutiny from academic scholars. The different representations of the past

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[141] Ranger, 'Afterword', 705.

[142] D.L. Donham, *Marxist Modern. An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford, 1999).

advanced by different actors and observers are partly shaped by their contemporary concerns but this does not imply that they are all plausible. As Cole has suggested, representations of memory narratives exist within culturally defined patterns of meaning that are structured by narrative conventions as well as by the social context of their telling.[143]

There can also be outright disagreement on the 'facts' and often this centres on who has gained power and who lost. Some events glorified by incumbent governments as defining moments in the emergence of the (post-colonial) nation are thus rejected by others as disastrous episodes. One revealing example is the invocation by the Eritrean government at independence in 1991 of the violent bandit and raider Hamid Idris Awate as the national hero who initiated the Eritrean armed liberation struggle. Among the Kunama and some of the Nara people of western Eritrea, who were the main victims of his murderous exploits, he is seen as a notorious butcher of their people.[144] In a nation emerging from a period of struggle or dominated by a certain ethnic, religious or regional group, these issues of memory of whom and for whom are crucial in shaping the internal political dynamics of a country.[145]

In the case of Zimbabwe, for example, the ex-ZIPRA fighters saw themselves, after the 1980 independence, as victims of a war in which tribalism at the national level had replaced nationalism and in which they perpetuated ZIPRA's struggle.[146] But the scope for venting alternative views is often seriously limited. As Alexander, McGregor & Ranger[147] show, the enactment of the 'official memory' of the liberation war sought to silence alternative memories, such as the recognition of ZAPU heroes who only received scant recognition. It will be a matter of the extent to which the political system is allowed to be democratic and pluralist as to whether such memories of the liberation struggle can (continue to) be monopolized in the face of the alternative views being presented. When the state discourse on the memory of violence and struggles of the past suppresses alternative views, it not only tends to exclude certain others and falsify history but may also engender in itself new resistance to its present-day authoritarian policies in other domains. In this

[143] J. Cole, 'The Uses of Defeat: Memory and Political Morality in East Madagascar', in R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony· African Anthropology and the Critique of Power* (London, 1998), 104-25.

[144] D. Lussier, 'Local Prohibitions, Memory, and Political Judgment among the Kunama: An Eritrean Case Study', in K. Fukui, E. Kurimoto & M Shigeta (eds), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective*, vol. 2 (Kyoto, 1997), 444-45.

[145] See also the important study by M.S. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs· History, Memory, and Politics* (Boulder, 1998).

[146] Alexander, McGregor & Ranger, 'Violence and Memory', 8.

[147] Ibid. 255-56.

process, a post-colonial regime's 'amnesia' may be seen, in turn, to generate nostalgia on the part of those constituencies that feel slighted or excluded.

There is, in addition, a vast range of cultural and socio-psychological effects associated with a violent past that are encoded in the social memory. This is not limited to the colonial situation but also to preceding experiences of violence, oppression or humiliation. Some conquered peoples have episodes in their rituals whereby the conquerors – Islamic slave raiders or expanding neighbouring despots – are depicted as malevolent spirits or as dogs (as among the Malian Dogon). In many areas of East Africa, spirit medium cults multiplied after the traditional chiefs were killed or removed by the new authorities. Some examples are southern Sudan after the predatory conquest of Mohammed 'Ali, and southern Ethiopia after the conquests of Emperor Menilik II in the late nineteenth century. The vacuum left after the decline of divine kings and traditional chiefs was filled by an upsurge of crisis cults based on spirit possession, as if to reconstitute a nostalgic past.

A more active recourse to spirit mediums (and ancestors) in actual movements of resistance was seen in the well-known example of the Zimbabwe liberation war, as described, among others, by David Lan. A *cultural resource* in the specific setting of rural Zimbabwe became an essential asset to a political resistance movement and its success. What is interesting is the legitimacy and power it gave to the spirit mediums, perhaps ultimately even over and above the political authority of the guerrilla movement. This explains why, after independence, the new holders of power were criticized for neglecting shrines, for failing to thank the ancestors by offering an apology for the violence, and thus for not leading the way in cleansing the nation.[148] President Mugabe's interventions (for example in installing certain shrine keepers) were considered wholly illegitimate. Such considerations played a role in the 2002 Zimbabwean elections when some people even talked of widespread protests as foreshadowing the third *chimurenga*.

Resistance studies will enter a new phase when the dominant concern with the heritage of colonial rule and the revolts this evoked recede into the past and when the already forty-year-long era of independence can be considered by itself. In some countries, this time-span has been long enough to have produced its own memories of violence and terror. The most gruelling example may well be the Sudanese civil war that has, in effect, been continuing since 1956 and seems insurmountable except by the secession of the South, which is very different both historically and culturally from the North. In some thought-provoking and sensitive work on the Nuer and Dinka peoples, Hutchinson and Jok Madut Jok have demonstrated the deep and often unforeseen socio-cultural

[148] Ibid. 265 and 267.

impact of protracted conflict on local societies.[149] The Nuer example illustrates that violence can be too massive and dramatic to allow people to 'remember the victims' in a culturally proper way. Indeed, they are, as Hutchinson suggests, consigned to a social and spiritual oblivion in order to release a more destructive use of violence against enemy government troops.[150] This will reshape the social memory of resistance and probably even impair its effectiveness.

We can thus conclude, with D. Crummey,[151] that for modern African history the themes of resistance, rebellion and protest are far from exhausted. Empirically, new modalities of political inequality, injustice and protest have emerged in post-colonial states, and new social dynamics of rural-urban relations[152] or generational conflict are evident. Theoretically, the old notion of the 'masses vs elites' has given way to a complex of new contradictions,[153] rural differentiations and old impermanent articulations. The upshot of this is that the significance of resistance as a theme is not reduced, but increased: a newer historiography combined with sociological and anthropological insights is laying the foundations for understanding resistance in post-colonial states as a wider socio-cultural, not only political, phenomenon. In addition, in reconsidering resistance in colonial times, there is the need, as argued by Stephen Ellis in this volume, to analyse issues such as African intra-elite struggles and not just those against colonialism. Those fighting colonial governments at other stages accommodated or collaborated.[154] Moreover, the relation of elites vs non-elites in terms of their differential incorporation in (late) colonial states requires a new look, considering for instance that in the 1945-60 period the relations of cooperation and non-cooperation of Africans and colonial regimes became increasingly complex.[155] These considerations indeed form the background to the present collection of studies.

The chapters

The chapters in this volume are based on papers presented at a seminar for invited scholars held in October 2001 at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. They show a geographical and thematic diversity purposely chosen to reflect the empirical range of resistance in Africa. The book's separate sections reflect our interest in the recurring key issues in a comparative study of resistance in Africa, but in view of the extensive references to the various chapters in this introduction, it is not necessary to describe each one individually here.

In Part I the historical and in some cases pre-colonial dynamics of resistance are discussed. De Bruijn & Van Dijk treat the contestation of Islamic Fulbe expansion in West Africa, Ellis reconsiders the complexities of conquest and resistance in Madagascar, indicating the internal divisions in Malagasy society itself *vis-à-vis* colonial encroachment, while Aregawi discusses the Ethiopian Patriots' resistance to the Fascist Italian conquest and occupation in the 1930s.

The chapters in the second part focus more on the internal dynamics and contradictions of moments and movements of resistance within colonial settings: the rebellion or mutiny of African soldiers in the Dutch colonial army in the Netherlands East Indies by Van Kessel, the various responses of collaboration or resistance in a settlement in South Africa's Eastern Cape by Ross, and the search for the response of slave groups in German colonial East Africa by Deutsch.

The focus of Part III is on the actual symbolism and use of violence in an ideological and practical sense: Van Walraven's study of the remarkably but largely unknown *Sawaba* revolt in Niger in the 1960s, Kimba Idrissa on the early twentieth-century Tuareg revolt against French colonial rule, and Seibert on the Mozambican civil war of the 1970s and 1980s. All three cases illustrate the essential role of indigenous interpretations and reverberations of power, revolt and unsettling violence.

The final section, Part IV, reconsiders some well-known resistance movements and moves back to 'memories' of resistance. Gewald and Melber discuss Namibia: the former considers the colonial period and its dreadful heritage of Herero genocide, while the latter looks at the state-cultivated memory of the country's violent liberation struggle and its highly contested representation today. And lastly, Abbink reinterprets the Somali Dervish revolt of the early twentieth century, assessing its transformative impact on Somali culture and identity and on the political dynamics of Somalia's currently stateless polity.

In some respects, these studies come full circle to the theme of our title, rethinking resistance: both for academic observers and for (the descendants of) the people involved. Here the notion of heritage or legacy is important, not only

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[149] See: S.E. Hutchinson, 'Nuer Dilemmas'; and idem 'Death, Memory and the Politics of Legitimation: Nuer Experiences of the Continuing Second Sudanese Civil War', in Werbner, *Memory and the Postcolony* 58-70 and Jok Madut Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan* (Philadelphia, 2001).

[150] Hutchinson, 'Death, Memory and the Politics of Legitimation'

[151] Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest.*

[152] Cf. Mkandawire, 'The Terrible Toll'.

[153] Cf. Ranger, 'Resistance in Africa', 49.

[154] Cf. Ellis, 'A New Look at Resistance', 13.

[155] Ibid. 10.

in shaping conceptions of colonial-era resistance movements but also for an understanding of the emerging political antagonisms of today.

We trust that this volume of selected case studies will contribute to reinvigorating the study of resistance, revolt and contestation in African history, both past and present. The subject is fascinating in its focus on the agency of African people shaping their own tormented history and also essential for an understanding of the problems and grievances of today in an unequal world of struggle and crisis. We do not necessarily want to substitute it for Marx's old idea of class struggle but, in many respects, movements of resistance are the motive force of African history.

Acknowledgements

PART I:
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES