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Introduction:

*Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography*

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Violent conflict, though by no means unique to southern Africa, has been central in its modern history. It is very difficult to write about the region in the nineteenth century without constant reference to wars, conquest and violence. While colonial ascendancy halted local warfare for much of the period between the First World War and 1960, the violence of state control, police brutality and coerced labour have remained persistent themes in the literature. Recent conflicts have put violence high on the political and academic agenda. The traumatic displacement of settler and colonial governments in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique over two decades necessitated armed struggle which militarised the region. In turn white South African fears gave rise to destabilisation strategies which have contributed to horrific civil conflicts in Mozambique and Angola. Whereas guerrilla struggle was the weapon of liberation movements up to the late 1970s, it subsequently became that of counter-revolution.

Armed struggle has not made so direct an impact within South Africa; the military wing of the African National Congress was weaker and the South African government stronger. But the rise of Inkatha and vigilantes, as well as the emergence of an insurrectionary ‘comrades’ movement in the 1980s, further extended the deployment of violence in regional politics. As in the second half of the nineteenth century, the availability of weapons — locally manufactured and pouring into the subcontinent from outside — has intensified and exacerbated conflict. Photographs and television footage have made visual images of violence an indelible element of contemporary politics.

* A first version of this paper, entitled ‘Violence and Masculinity in South African Historiography’, was written for a conference ‘Towards a Gendered History of Men in Africa’, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, April 1990. I would like to thank Luise White, the organiser, for her encouragement and insights; and Kate Crehan, Shula Marks, Dunbar Moodie and Troth Wells for comments. In this version I have also tried to incorporate some of the ideas developed in papers delivered to the Journal of Southern African Studies/Oxford African Studies conference on Political Violence.
Intellectuals have responded rapidly to these developments — a testament to the fertility of academic production on the region. Nor have they, by and large, dodged the difficult questions. It is not only the wars of liberation, the rise of Renamo and South Africa’s militarisation which have been explored. The intensity of civil conflict and the nexus of violence within or between African communities have also become important questions for explanation. Academics explicitly pursued these issues as part of the ideological work necessary to counter the colonial notion of the intrinsic violence of ‘tribes’. An increasing volume of literature displays direct concern not only with the causes of conflict, but with violence itself.¹

The *Journal of Southern African Studies* conference and special edition were conceived to develop further debate and new perspectives on violence in the region.² We have aimed, first, to situate current events in the context of long-established historical patterns of violence. Neither editors nor contributors find simple and direct connections between past and present forms of violence but we have tried to raise questions about the legacies of the past. Second, we have tried to maintain a regional perspective and to contain events north and south of the Limpopo within the same field of analysis (but see Ranger’s ‘Afterword’). Third, contributors have attempted to deploy a range of explanations for political and collective violence. Violence is not presented simply as an instrument of coercion or of resistance. Contributors explore also cultures of violence; gender, male socialisation and threats to masculinity; violence as spectacle; and the fraught logic of vengeance. Our aims were not entirely achieved. Regional coverage, for example, proved to be less extensive than we had hoped. Moreover, the bulk of the papers were addressed to the experience of violence within black communities, rather than the role of the state and its agents or white violence; this balance is reflected in the special issue.

A central problem in focusing on violence, as Manganyi and du Toit note, is the multiplicity of meanings which the term evokes.³ It is often used with a qualificatory adjective: ‘instrumental’ or ‘expressive’; ‘legitimate’ or ‘illegitimate’, ‘revolutionary’ or ‘oppressive’, ‘criminal’ or ‘recreational’, ‘personal’, ‘domestic’, ‘collective’ or ‘structural’. By and large the papers and this introduction deal with violence as a collective act in the public sphere and not with criminality, domestic violence or personal violence by men against women. And while most of the papers remain sensitive to ‘psychological’ violence and ‘structural’ violence — violence in the metaphorical sense as a denial of human rights or life chances — the focus is on explanations of physical violence. There can be interconnections between all these forms and meanings of violence, which are noted in some of the papers, but they are not our major concern. Moreover, while most of the papers

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² The conference was organised in conjunction with the University of Oxford Standing Committee on African Studies and held at St Antony’s college, Oxford in June 1991.

discuss violence between groups of men, none dwell on biological explanations for violence.

Even within this more restricted meaning, however, violence appears not as a single phenomenon but as an expression of a wide range of conflicts, crises or catharses. Much public violence is part of an assertion of political power — either an attempt to monopolise coercion and control, or to break that monopoly. But war, police brutality, riot, insurrection, sabotage, ‘faction fight’, ethnic violence, gang fight, public beating or ‘necklacing’, which all come within our purview, may be extensions of rather different political contests. Any analysis of violence is therefore beset by explanatory tensions. On the one hand, it is helpful to disaggregate types of violence, to concentrate on contextual analysis, and to explore different lines of causation. On the other hand, there is a certain irreducibility about acts of physical violence and it is perhaps inadequate to see violence purely as an epiphenomenon of different forms of conflict or politics. Legal systems and widely held social perceptions to some extent recognise a common phenomenon, though there may be intense disagreement as to what is legitimate or illegitimate violence.

Colonial and Anti-Colonial Explanations of Violence

Colonial or white settler thinking had an extraordinary capacity to invert causation for a whole range of social phenomenon, including violence. The conquered, more particularly African societies, were presented as intrinsically violent and barbarous; the conquerors, who had of course usually been the original invaders — and introduced more destructive weaponry — were conjured as essentially peaceful. Admittedly, matters were complicated in South Africa by the presence of the Afrikaners. Some British (and African) observers viewed them also as having powerful in-built leanings to brutality. The perceived founts of violence in the region were never entirely racial. But to simplify: those who wished to monopolise coercion, and arrogate the responsibility for warfare and civil order to themselves, tended to project themselves as peaceful and others as violent. Military and ‘legitimate’ force was sharply distinguished from ‘informal’ or ‘barbarous’ violence; the idea of the ‘tribe’ was an important element in colonial thinking about violence which was imbued in both the British and settler audience with considerable success and remains a deep legacy of colonialism.

These perceptions were illustrated with new material — or gained and shed ‘evidence’ — as racial ideas changed. For example, more scientific racial thinking of the early twentieth century used the idea of intrinsic African violence as way of explaining the origins of new social threats that African society was seen to pose in an industrial era. Commentators from Cecil Rhodes in 1894 to the Native Economic Commission in 1932 argued that the rapid growth of African population was due largely to the imposition of colonial peace. The tendency for tribes to engage in continual warfare — so this argument ran — had been a means of population control:
War keeps population in bounds; it aids polygyny; it gives the men an outlet for their energies, deemed worthy of their status; and wherever scarcity of land begins to be felt, it maintains the conditions necessary for the continuance of the social system. War is therefore endemic among primitive peoples; it is a necessary condition for the permanence of their economic system.4

African population increase and urbanisation, the threat of social and political ‘swamping’, thus seemed to prove the historical tendency of Africans towards violence.5 Similarly, polygyny was incorrectly attributed to a large number of male deaths in constant ‘tribal’ warfare — rather than the fact that men married later than women and some found it difficult to obtain bridewealth.

Such ideas, partly formulated in popular anthropological works, remained remarkably persistent so that they became fused into white employers’ understanding of African workers.6 For example, the report of the 1975 Mine Riots Commission argued that ‘grouping or banding together’ while a ‘phenomenon that occurs among all races’ was particularly marked in the case of the ‘Bantu’.

This faction-forming has its origin in fear or a feeling of insecurity which leads to violence. This fear is passed from generation to generation and is ingrained in most Bantu tribes. Despite the influence of the White men, civilisation, religion and Western standards, the tendency to become violent, where tribal differences are involved is practically spontaneous. The ethnologist and Bantu expert, Dr. van Warmelo, stated inter alia, the southern Bantu tribes ... are particularly inclined to become violent and that they even regard fighting as a form of recreation.7

Such associations remain an important part of white thinking both within the region and outside.

Another important legacy of this element in colonial discourse — even if it was not universally expressed or accepted — was that it tended to structure the anti-colonial debate. In the South African context opposition groups in general and the African National Congress in particular have worked hard to invert explanations of

5 There is an interesting mirror image of this point in the thinking of rural African men about population increase. When I have asked old men in the Transkei why they think population has increased so fast, a number have responded that births were 'traditionally' more widely spaced. The major reason given for this was that women could not be expected to carry more than one child at a time in case of danger or the need to flee during war. Therefore, one child had to be able to run before the next was born. The imposition of colonial peace reduced the imperative for spacing. This perception is a little more subtle than the colonial idea that large numbers of people were killed in warfare in pre-colonial times. It is also an explanation which focuses on women's behaviour, and not the mortality rate of men who did not bear children. But it is not necessarily any more cogent as an explanation of population increase.
the origins of violence in the subcontinent. Armed struggle has been justified by demonstrating sustained imperial and settler violence in conquest and dispossession as well as the essentially coercive nature of the South African state, which did not permit peaceful opposition. Whereas colonial and settler thinking tended to fuse the ideas of ‘tribe’, African resistance and violence, anti-colonial thought tended to see imperialism or settler rule as intrinsically violent.

To understand the logic of anti-colonial ideas, it is useful to return to writers such as Fanon. His work may not have been the critical locus of anti-colonial thought; it is the pattern of explanation which he so eloquently expresses, often replicated in the 1960s and influential to the present, that is important. Fanon argued that metropolitan and colonial states were essentially different:

In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and ‘bewilders’ separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the police and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm ... It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force.

The colonial state was ‘the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native’ and could only be called into question ‘by absolute violence’. Those interested in decolonisation were therefore ‘ready for violence at all times’.

Fanon was both explaining why he thinks decolonisation tends to be violent and justifying the use of violence as a political instrument. He was also developing his critique of the ‘so-called dependency complex of colonised people’. But he goes further than this. The totalitarianism of colonial rule, he suggests, leads colonisers to dehumanise ‘natives’. Not only does the settler ‘paint ... the native as a sort of quintessence of evil’, but speaks of Africans in animal terms. If Africans can laugh at this characterisation, then they are also trapped and shaped by it so that ‘the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess’. This will not only affect relationships with the coloniser but within colonised communities. Colonial

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8 Frantz Fanon, ‘Concerning Violence’ in The Wretched of the Earth (Penguin edition, 1967), p. 29, first published in French in 1961. Fanon, a young psychiatrist born in the Caribbean and educated in France, became a leading protagonist of the Algerian revolution and clearly had a particular experience of the struggle for decolonisation; it is his work as ‘manifesto’ for ‘emergent countries’ which is of concern here. For biographical material, see P. Geismar, Fanon (New York, 1971); D. Caute, Fanon (London, 1970). H.A. Bulhan, Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression (New York, 1985) also has an interesting analysis of Fanon’s ideas on violence and subsequent debates and developments.

9 F. Fanon, Black Skin White Masks (London, 1968), first published in 1952, contained a stinging attack on O. Mannoni, Prospero and Caliban (Ann Arbor, 1990), first published in 1950 which suggested this ‘need for dependence’ so that ‘colonisation was expected — even desired — by the future subject people’.

10 Frantz Fanon, ‘Concerning Violence’, pp. 32ff.

11 There is another irony here, in that African praise poems, not least those dealing with the prowess of kings and chiefs, dwelt upon animal metaphors and saw humans as deriving strength from these animal characteristics.
violence ‘has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms’.

The colonised man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up, and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing waves of crime in North Africa.12

In southern Africa, this would be the period of the ‘faction fight’. The very ease with which settlers resort to violence, Fanon argued, tends to make Africans defend their personalities with quicker aggression from each other, ‘suicidal behaviour which proves to the settler … that these men are not reasonable human beings’.13 Colonialism, Fanon suggests, brutalises the colonised at a personal level and this is the root of internal violence within African society.

Fanon saw political violence in the cause of liberation as an escape from this state of tension: ‘at the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force’ (p. 45). While colonialism divides and perpetuates tribalism, violence or armed struggle is ‘all-inclusive and national’, ‘unifies the people’ and gives them responsibility (p. 74). Let us bypass the issue of the effects of violence in cementing national unity. While armed struggle was certainly a necessary element in decolonisation, subsequent deployment of political violence has perhaps proved a fragmenting rather than uniting force. But Fanon was writing at a time of passionate involvement in a war of liberation and he was determined to delink some forms of violence from ‘criminal’ or ‘illegitimate’ or ‘instinctive’ action.14 Rather, it is the logic of Fanonesque-type ideas (he was by no means the only influence) as developed in southern African historiography that I want to pursue.

Historical work has been a significant intellectual site for the decolonising of minds in southern Africa. An obvious but important first step has been to project African military responses to colonial incursions as natural and justified in the face of aggressive colonialism. Two of the key books dealing with the history of the Zulu kingdom — pictured in colonial minds as the most violent of African states — included as major themes the enormous reluctance with which the Zulu took to arms in resisting colonial power both in 1878 and 1906.15 (And unlike Fanon, certainly did not see the colonised as brutalised.) The stark imbalance in fatalities during the Bambatha rebellion — 24 colonial deaths; 4,000 African — are testament to the main direction of violence.

The Ndebele, nineteenth-century conquerors of some of the Zimbabwean highveld, were also viewed through colonial (and some African) eyes as a ‘warlike tribe’ akin to the Zulu. But Cobbing emphasises rather the rapidity with which the

12 Ibid., p. 40.
13 Ibid., 42.
14 Bulhan, Frantz Fanon, p. 151.
Ndebele kingdom in Zimbabwe established a civil order. He has more recently attempted to overturn notions of the Zulu kingdom as primary agents of the warfare in the early nineteenth century and challenged ideas about the extent of African violence at this time. In his paper sent to the conference, ‘Rethinking the Roots of Violence in southern Africa, c.1790-1840’, Cobbing reiterates his powerful critique of school texts, popular histories and overviews which see the rise of the Zulu kingdom as an event that can be explained with reference to the dynamics of African society. ‘It was the imperial-colonial quest for labour and land’ and the Delagoa Bay slave trade which were the font of violent appropriation in the region, and produced effects much like the slave trade in West Africa. Inkatha impis now, bedecked in a neo-traditionalist garb and reconstructing a powerful pre-colonial past, are just as mistakenly prey, Cobbing suggests, to a cult of warlike domination as colonial commentators.

Historians are also demonstrating systematically the pervasiveness of violence and terror as an intrinsic part of colonisation, both Boer and British. Ross has questioned the idea that Khoisan people died very largely from the unseen hand of smallpox. He also argues against the notion that Cape slavery might have been relatively benign (because of the absence of large plantations). Newton-King finds evidence of ‘numerous examples of savage beatings’ on the early nineteenth-century Cape frontier, and of the systematic use of violence to assert authority by settlers. ‘The result ... was a pervasive tension, a “static electricity of violence” in nearly every household on the frontier’. Work on the nineteenth-century Transvaal has re-examined the persistence of slave-like forms and the capture of children; Abel Erasmus is now firmly established as the archetypal Boer tax collector — a ‘fiend in human form’ for whom appropriation by violence was always an option.

If British warfare was more formal and more successful, it has not been represented as less brutal. This element in conquest is vividly demonstrated, for example, in two recent books on the Eastern Cape: A Proper Degree of Terror and The Dead will Arise. Calculated use of terror and exemplary violence was an intrinsic element of British conquest from its earliest phases; the mutilation of
Hintsa, the Xhosa paramount chief, after his capture and death was just one example. (Bambatha’s head was also cut off in 1906.) Peires discusses the proclivity of British governors and soldiers to resort to coercive strategies for political ends. British concepts of civil and military authority were by no means clearly separated; the personnel involved in these activities were often the same. Nineteenth and early twentieth century British literature about hunting in Africa has exposed the extraordinary predatoriness of British hunters towards African game, but also the tendency to confuse sport and war in the ‘chase for wild beasts of the human kind’.

One interesting feature of this work is that it allows no simple separation between violence as an instrument of public policy — that is state-sanctioned aggression by armies responsible to civil authority which could notionally be called off — and brutality. Colonial wars could be particularly brutal, partly because of the imbalance of technology and partly because of dehumanisation of the victims. Moreover, colonial states in their earlier phases seldom had complete control or monopoly over the violence of their agents. Hunters, traders, settlers or levies sometimes mobilised themselves beyond the frontier, attempting to establish authority in the absence of officials through violence. It was seldom easy for states to catch up and assert a monopoly of coercion. Some early Transvaal Boer settlements, and Mozambican prazos, were examples of localised political systems involving powerful patriarchies appropriating through hunting, tax, trade, capture and forms of unfree labour; they effectively became, for a time, the local state.

Coercive labour controls on farms and mines, discussed in a variety of historical analyses, were addressed at the conference in papers by Isaacman, Van Onselen and James. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Portuguese colonial governments attempted to increase colonial cotton cultivation to fuel the metropolitan textile industry. Despite the use of chibalo (conscripted) workers in Mozambique, production remained low until the Salazar regime ‘initiated a vigorous campaign to capture the peasantry and restructure the labour process’ in 1938. Isaacman documents a growing barrage of regulations specifying planting.

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weeding and harvesting times, as well as minimum plot sizes. The state permitted direct application of violence as a means of discipline: ‘for more than two decades intimidation, coercion and terror were synonymous with cotton’.

Repeated exemplary violence in some senses reflected the weakness of colonial control. Because so many men could escape as wage labourers, not least in South Africa, they were less affected by the regime than women, who also suffered deeply from the constraints it placed on food production. Isaacman’s study reveals the way in which ‘structural violence’ and coercion could be intertwined in colonial labour systems where free markets were seen as incapable of producing adequate commodities.

Van Onselen, exploring the relationship between violence and paternalism on farms in the south-western Transvaal to 1950, lays particular emphasis on the content of a paternalistic ethos. The language of paternalism survived in a context where cash wages were limited, mechanisation rare and tenants had few political rights but some scope for mobility. It took on extra meaning because white farmers depended not least on ‘the ability of the black patriarch to “bring out” his family’s labour’. In this world, white and black children played together before whites reached school age; naming practices suggested quasi-kin relationships; prayer meetings could include tenants; and age was often a mark of status.

But ‘when all else failed, highveld landlords … did not hesitate to resort to violence to ensure that their wishes prevailed over those of the tenants’. Van Onselen concurs with Keegan that ‘whipping of recalcitrant workers by their masters was widespread and often caused conflict between landlords and heads of tenant households’.25 The ‘willingness of white landlords to resort to the use of the sjambok’, he suggests, was not necessarily at odds with a paternalist ethos; it could reinforce it by a patriarchal form of punishment which entailed ‘humbling of the “child”’ rather than a public act sanctioned and enforced by the state. Paternalism in this context was severely eroded by the rise of state assisted maize production and the death of tenancy during and after the Second World War. On both farms and mines, the demise of established patterns of authority, which might include coercive or violent elements, opened the way for reactive violence.26

Deliberate use of exemplary violence where state authority had been established, bureaucratic terrorism and persistent violence beyond the call of duty by the police, often noted in South African academic and opposition literature, are explored further in the conference papers. Seekings comments from his own findings, and those of others working on township politics in the 1980s, that government-linked forces were the most consistent initiators and agents of collective violence. The security forces themselves were estimated to have accounted directly for 60 per cent of


26 Whether the term paternalism can be applied with equal effect to slave systems, Mozambican officials, South African gold mines and Transvaal farms — as various papers to the conference did — is open to question. Nevertheless, it is a useful way to describe aspects of labour relationships which on the one hand were not violent, and on the other, were not part of capitalist labour markets.
political fatalities in the first ten months of the 1984/5 insurrection and they were often the first and last involved in incidents.27

A great deal of testimony from activists, such as that reported by Orkin, points to the apparently random nature of shooting, beating, arrest and police excess.28 The police, Seekings concludes, contributed to the township violence in numerous ways and ‘police action — both overt and covert — was clearly violent in itself’. Extensive evidence which has emerged over the last couple of years about direct state or police involvement in training political hit squads and Inkatha impis — not to mention Renamo in Mozambique — affirms that violence has been used in a calculated manner; and that elements in the security services felt too constrained by police rules.29

The idea of ‘structural violence’ has provided a further framework for critiques of the apartheid system and justification for armed resistance.30 It might include forced removals, compound conditions, pass law arrests and harassment, denial of access to justice, food and health care — or, at its broadest, social and racial discrimination which limits life chances. The implication is that structural violence, ‘highly repressive police and security apparatus on the one hand and a life of material deprivation and poverty on the other hand’, invites counter-violence — a point made forcefully by Hayes in his paper on township youth in Natal.31

As suggested above, opposition movements’ understanding of the effects of state violence has informed their own political practice and strategies. Barrell argues that after the ANC was banned in 1960, its theorists felt not only that armed struggle was justified, but that political remobilisation could best be secured through armed struggle: ‘the general uprising must be sparked off by organised and well prepared guerrilla operations during the course of which the masses of people will be drawn in and armed’.32 Revolution was very likely, if only it could be triggered because the people were ready for violence. Che Guevara rather than Fanon was the source of ANC and Communist Party inspiration, but the ideas were similar in that neither laid great stress on the political role of the party.33 Only by the late 1970s,

29 In this context, it is fascinating to note that the term ‘Third Force’, used by the ANC now to describe hidden violent agents of the state in South Africa, is used in Jean-Paul Sartre’s Preface to The Wretched of the Earth, p. 11, to refer to neo-colonial groups and ‘tin-pot bourgeoisies’.
30 See Manganyi and du Toit, Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa, for discussions of this idea, especially S. Marks and N. Anderson, ‘The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence’ and Degenaar, ‘The Concept of Violence’.
33 Caute, Fanon.
Barrell suggests, when the potential for internal political organisation was patent, did ANC change its priorities in order to mitigate its military weakness.

Orkin’s paper illustrates the experience of ANC cadres who took the leap into armed struggle. All were agreed with the general position of the movement: ‘if the system is unjust, it is your duty to take up arms’. But armed struggle and violence had different meanings and potentialities for different protagonists. For Esmail Ebrahim it came as a conclusion to long involvement in the Congress movement. His commitment was so intense that he resumed his involvement even after he had spent fifteen years on Robben Island for membership of Umkhonto we Sizwe. He drew also on Islamic ideas both to justify and set limits on his actions. For him, armed struggle was ‘a painful necessity’ which required careful tactical use and he found the Poqo actions of the early 1960s counterproductive and distasteful.

For others, however, the transition to armed and violent politics involved less ideological work. Their experience in the townships included frequent encounters with violent and vengeful police and officials. The events of 1976 — and the ‘retaliatory temper’ of the generation which left the country after them — presented the liberation movements with recruits who found it less problematic to absorb violent actions into their political repertoire. Nevertheless, as Orkin points out, there was a unity in their ideas, very widely accepted, about the centrality of non-racial democracy and full citizenship as ideals for which it was worth fighting and making sacrifices. They were ‘not so poor as not to have expectations; educated sufficiently for these to be keenly disappointed by inequality in general and discrimination in particular’. The question may be, Orkin suggests, why did so many people do so much less?

Explanations of Violence Within or Between African Communities

Explaining and understanding African political violence as a response to conquest, dispossession, and the authoritarian nature of colonial rule or apartheid has not been particularly problematic for radical historians and social scientists. More difficult has been the related issue which Fanon raises: that of violence within or between African communities. The first step in analysing ‘internal’ violence has been to treat each incident or episode as discrete and potentially having a different line of causation. Any notion of intrinsic tendencies towards violence are thus dispensed with.

Second, such violence has been seen as a result of divisions caused by the nature of colonial or settler rule. For example, civil war in Zululand in the 1880s can be seen to result directly from the post-conquest colonial political settlement; or rural ‘faction fights’ could be explained essentially through land shortage induced by

34 Orkin, ‘Rationales for Guerrilla Behaviour’.
35 Barrell, ‘Political-Military Relationship’.
colonial dispossession and the state’s dependence on local collaborators.\textsuperscript{37} It has long been central to the critique of segregation and apartheid that Bantustans were an attempt to subvert national movements and struggles at the point of production. The Bantustans would act as a pressure valve on the periphery: conflict could be externalised from the cities to zones where it was easier to contain and disperse.\textsuperscript{38} Africans would then ‘struggle against each other for the political goods of the Bantustans, instead of for those of the whole country’ — though these conflicts expressed tensions within the political system as a whole.

Van Onselen and Phimister have researched ethnic ‘faction fights’ in the urban context of Bulawayo from a similar perspective.\textsuperscript{39} Migrant workers were being pushed out of the rural areas, squeezed in their access to the South African labour market and had to compete intensely in Bulawayo for employment in unsavoury conditions. Faction fighting ‘was very largely an expression of competition within the working class about limited job opportunities’; these were ‘eruptions which occur in colonial urban ghettos when there is restructuring of a labour market in which employment, to differing degrees, is “ethnically” defined’. The Bulawayo violence of 1929 was shaped ‘at every point’ by the colonial nature of Southern Rhodesia and the differential process of proletarianisation. ‘The fighting can be interpreted’, they argue, ‘in Fanonesque terms as internalised or displaced aggression’.

Transposed to the mining industry, which employed large numbers of rurally based migrant workers, this line of analysis sees compound fights as a result of coercive controls, divide and rule strategies, coupled with ethnic housing policy. Though Moodie’s paper in this issue on mine ‘faction fights’ goes beyond these contextual factors, he insists on their centrality to his analysis. He notes that major fights were not very commonplace and were usually linked to perceived unfairness in the control of jobs or positions in the compounds. These issues became particularly exposed and sensitive when there were major shifts in the pattern of recruitment and numbers from a particular rural area rose very quickly. The steady growth in the overall number of mineworkers up to the 1940s, and subsequent stability, tends to disguise important shifts in workers’ origins.\textsuperscript{40}

Sapire, examining the background to recent violence on the Rand between hostel dwellers, squatters and township residents, also deploys and develops such

\textsuperscript{37} Guy, Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom; Beinart, ‘Conflict in Qumbu’ in Beinart and Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa.


explanations. Squatters on the Rand are amongst the poorest of urban population, often too poor to afford even the backroom rents in the townships from which many of them came. Competition for scarce resources in squatter villages could be intense, and found focus in the patterns of patronage and local leadership that emerged in these informal settlements. Here again, Sapire found flash points often resulted from rapid population movements between informal settlements and new challenges for space and resources. The juxtaposition of hostels, townships and informal settlements, coupled with politicisation of conflict in the late 1980s made the squatter zones particularly volatile. Perceived ethnic allegiance exacerbated and gave focus to patterns of violence rooted in competition for resources.

Third, a variant on this explanation sees the state intervening directly to take advantage of colonially produced fractures in African communities by empowering or arming one branch — brutalising by adoption rather than neglect. This has become a particular feature of recent politics in South Africa as Haysom’s disturbing report on the rise of right wing vigilantes, *Mabangalala*, reveals.41 Political turmoil and economic recession in the mid-1980s, combined with the collapse of state attempts to develop collaborative African urban leadership helps to explain the social base of vigilante organisations and the state’s readiness to adopt them. Josette Cole illustrates such processes in *Crossroads*, Cape Town but they have been even more strikingly evident in the Natal/Kwazulu townships.42 Much of the critical material on the rise of Inkatha sees its violence as reflecting the coercive powers of the state or, alternatively, resulting from the empowerment of black intermediaries and warlords, given freedom to operate by the state.43

Fourth, violence has frequently been seen as a reflection of impoverishment and social ills, especially those produced in the process of industrialisation. ‘Faction fights’ could in this context be ‘alongside desertion and strike action ... an important index of working class frustration and despair’.44 In explaining violence by Africans against Indians in Inanda, Heather Hughes argued for a close analysis of patterns of social deprivation, a point which is echoed by Sapire in this issue.45 In certain contexts, poverty and social disintegration could explain an increasing degree of conflict between men over women as well. Bonner argues that gang fights on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s ‘were not simply a reflex response to some primordial sexual or territorial instinct of men’, but ‘reflected a much broader shift

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41 Nicholas Haysom, *Mabangalala The Rise of Right-wing Vigilantes in South Africa* (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1986); Craig Charney, ‘Vigilantes, Clientelism and the South African State’, *Transformation*, 16 (1991) is a forceful statement of this position, which includes an international perspective.


in the status of women’ who were simultaneously more independent and more vulnerable in town.\textsuperscript{46} Poverty has also been invoked to explain male aggression towards women. As the \textit{Weekly Mail} newspaper once put it in a headline: poverty produced violence by ‘brutalised men who brutalise their women’.

Fifth, violence has been seen as a result of differential policing of white and black areas. Incipient conflict would rapidly be controlled when it threatened city centres, points of production or white suburbs. But either because of a lack of concern, or under-resourcing, or the state’s or mining companies’ intention to defuse class conflict by allowing internal conflict, African locations and compounds were left with little effective policing. Consequently violent elements were left to fight it out.\textsuperscript{47} ‘So long as “tribal conflict” did not jeopardise production and was confined to mine compounds … sustained state interest and action was conspicuously lacking’.\textsuperscript{48}

And lastly, the politicisation of violence has entered a new phase. Systematic liberatory political violence was limited in South Africa by the inability of trained guerrillas to achieve a strong foothold in the country. However, the growth of the liberation movement within the country in the 1980s intensified the political struggle within local township politics. The state decentralised power in the townships as well as the homelands; Inkatha and other groups attempted to fill the political space allowed to them. Sitas and Campbell, dealing with Natal, and Sapire, with the Transvaal analyse how politicised conflict emerged in the townships to exacerbate existing social fractures. Tensions between migrant workers in hostels and urban comrades, between generations, became more clearly congruent with ideological differences.

\textbf{Some Further Explanatory Paths: Literary Representations of African Violence}

Taken together, these points have offered explanatory devices and methodologies through which academics could begin to deal sensitively and accurately with violence within and between African communities. Contributors to the conference generally concurred with these contextual approaches as part of their analysis. Any attempt to plot the incidence of violence within a conquered or colonised population would certainly entail examination of the critical pressure points created in social transformation. In twentieth-century South Africa, it might be hazarded that there was a shift from rural fights over land, to compound violence at the height of mining expansion and subsequently to location and township gang fights in the post-Second World War era; in the 1970s and 1980s cleavages in the townships have become more deeply politicised and violence far more directly political in character.


\textsuperscript{47} This was discussed in a paper by Stan Trapido, ‘African Urbanisation and Social Control in South Africa’, unpublished, 1970.

\textsuperscript{48} Van Onselen and Phimister, ‘Political Economy of Tribal Animosity’, p. 3.
Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to see any clear consensus about all the points in the historical analysis of political violence which I have tried to outline, even amongst those who share this broad approach. There is by no means unanimity, for example, about Cobbing’s interpretation of the early nineteenth century. While it is generally accepted that slave raiding may have been underestimated in the region, he seems to minimise Zulu responsibility for their rise to power and to ignore the extensive oral traditions about the violence and terror involved. In looking at particular patterns of explanation in the secondary literature, I have also underplayed the complexity of arguments and explanation. In this section I hope to draw out some further explanatory ideas from these and other sources: the historical legacies; masculinity; and the cultural expression of violence. These will be discussed first, in relation to ‘faction fights’ and related violence in the earlier decades of this century, and second, in relation to contemporary violence.

The points developed below extend rather than contradict a contextual analysis of violence. But contextual analyses do not seem sufficient in themselves to explain the forms of violence within African communities in first half of this century. While they quite rightly assert the need to locate violence in its colonial historical context, they tend to include the ahistorical assumption that African violence was born in the colonial era. Fanon probably overestimated the influence of colonisation on the psyche of the colonised; much recent literature on the colonial world emphasises the limits to colonial hegemony. African society was not totally dismantled and reassembled by white rule, even in South Africa. Remnant chiefdoms survived, even if with very limited land and power; cultural practices probably more so. While it is wrong to see pre-colonial African society as intrinsically violent, it is no less misleading to see it as without violence. Force as an instrument of African public policy did not simply melt away when the Cape Mounted Riflemen loomed on the horizon. For a significant period after conquest, the processes of chiefly politics persisted in some form, and so did the expectation that men would be able to participate in the application of force for political ends. A set of questions needs to be asked about continuities in the expression, containment and resolution of violence after conquest.

An interesting place to start — before grappling with the academic literature — is novels and autobiographies written by black men. Evocations of pre-colonial society, of country districts, and of urban slums in some of these books include descriptions of violence incidents. As Njabulo Ndebele has pointed out in his article on ‘the rediscovery of the ordinary’ in South African literature, depictions of violence have been attractive to South African writers.49 (But certainly not only to them.) The powerful strain of social realism which informs much black South African fiction and the prevalence of the political autobiography as a vehicle of literary expression has encouraged a desire to tell it like it really was — and life was often hard.

Depictions of violence can, however, be a literary device, a means to construct plot around the spectacular. Violence provides excitement in novels and even in autobiographies and can also be a way of representing conflict and oppression — a useful metaphor for writers of fiction which saves them from lengthy sociological explanation. Though fictional works have sometimes been intended as social and political commentary, they should not be understood simply as representations of social reality. Nevertheless, they have been one source through which historians have been able to approach African experiences and consciousness. And they were discovered at the same time as 'new narrative' techniques were being more assiduously explored by historians of South Africa; there is also, perhaps, an element of literary spectacular in some academic work.

Violence is not the main theme in all the books discussed, but many of them deal with the issue unselfconsciously as an 'ordinary' part of African life. 'There is no country in the world where wars do not take place', Mofolo noted in his novel Chaka. ‘At one time or another tribes quarrel and prepare to fight: sometimes they fight for years, but in the end peace returns again and the country prospers once more’. Oral traditions — for a complex of reasons — often dwelt on conquest, flight, military events and masculine prowess. Some early written literature drew on oral history, but reworked its themes. Take Sol Plaatje’s Mhudi — one of the first modern African novels — which deals with the conflict between a Tswana chiefdom and the invading Ndebele. Here violence is portrayed as an instrument of public policy in African societies as elsewhere, both in the maintenance of civil order and in the pursuit of foreign affairs. But Plaatje sees violence as going beyond these bounds. He dwells on the brutality of the Ndebele invaders: ‘the Matabele were not fighting men only; they were actually spearing fleeing women and children’; ‘Ra-Thaga saw one of them killing a woman and as she fell back, the man grasped her little baby and dashed its skull against the trunk of a tree’. Plaatje also suggests that violence and bravery could be a more specific intention of the socialising processes of some societies: ‘the members of a constantly warring nation like the Matebele had been drilled from childhood to face the most devastating situation without the tremor of an eyelid’. Nor were the Rolong (Tswana) heroes of his book immune from such feelings.

To speak the truth, Ra-Thaga and the other young bloods were glad. Old men liked to recount their wondrous deeds of valour in the wars they had fought, and young men were always pining for an opportunity to test their own strength in a really good fight.

50 It should be noted, however, that some of the novels which are discussed below, and especially A.C. Jordan’s Wrath of the Ancestors, take enormous trouble to explain the reasons for and context of conflict.
53 Plaatje, Mhudi, Lovedale ed., p. 36. (Heinemann ed. p. 51)
Two novels written somewhat later take up these themes in the early colonial period. In *The Wrath of the Ancestors*, A.C. Jordan, dealing with Tsolo district, bases his story on the kinds of conflicts that were not uncommon in the early twentieth-century Transkei. He depicts a chief on the side of modernisation trying to "uplift" his people in what could be an intensely political context where "villagers set dogs on the teachers" and "swore at them, threatened them with spears or hurled dangerous clubs at them and chased them out of the place". Jordan dwells on conflict rather than violence. He sets up a major fight but does not allow his protagonists to go through with it; they are constrained partly by concern about magisterial intervention. Nevertheless, the power of Jordan's book derives from the intensity of rural conflict which he presents as a fundamental aspect of life.

In *The Hill of Fools*, Peteni wrote more recently about a very similar context in the Ciskei. He goes further in suggesting that violence was an enduring feature of African life, embedded in the structure of society: "it's the tradition of the two villages to fight. You dare not break with tradition".

The green field which was to be the scene of fierce fighting belonged to one of the Hlubi villagers. It had once been an arable land ... The Hlubis and the Thembus seemed to regard the field as the official battle field ... It was a perfect, natural stadium, suitable for combatants and spectators alike ... Somehow, the cows were never in the way when there was a fight. Was it a coincidence that they were always grazing away from the arena whenever human beings were butchering one another?

Although there are different emphases in the approach of these authors to violence, all were members of the educated African Christian elite. All tended to illustrate the destructiveness of such conflict within African society and suggested that means should be found to resolve it; progress (and sometimes nature) is contrasted with violence. 'What merit is there in an evil tradition?', Peteni lets one

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54 A.C. Jordan, *The Wrath of the Ancestors* (Lovedale, 1980); R.L. Peteni, *Hill of Fools* (London, 1976). Jordan's novel, unlike Plaatje's and Peteni's, was first written in Xhosa. It was published in English twelve years after his death in 1968 in Madison, Wisconsin where he had become Professor of African languages. Peteni wrote the foreword to this English translation of *Wrath of the Ancestors*; I suspect that Peteni's novel was considerably influenced by Jordan, and both seem to have drawn on Plaatje.

55 Beinart, 'Conflict in Qumbu' and 'Amafelandawonye (The Diehards)' in Beinart and Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*. I had not read Jordan's book before *Hidden Struggles* was written, but there are some intriguing similarities. Jordan is clearly drawing on events in Qumbu and Tsolo in the early twentieth century, though he does not represent them exactly. There are also references to conflicts in a number of districts in the 1920s which gave rise to the *Amafelandawonye* movement. Jordan names one of the factions in his book the Felandawonye. However, they are here depicted as the supporters of a modernising chief, whereas the movement in the 1920s tended to be opposed by the wealthier modernising progressives. He may have been using the term in its earlier meaning to denote the close supporters and advisors of a chief.

57 Peteni, *Hill of Fools*, p. 149.
of his characters say at the end of the book.59 (Plaatje presented Tswana society as relatively peaceful and bucolic; the Ndebele were the major agents of violence and destruction.) To some extent these authors may have been viewing African societies and ‘factions’ through the eyes of the dominant ideologies into which they were educated — or writing ‘proto-nationalist’ work which sought to advocate wider loyalties.

But their reworking of oral sources and insights into rural African politics suggests a more complex conclusion; it would be a mistake to see the African elite as unquestioning recipients of dominant ideas. Plaatje and Jordan, powerful protagonists of African nationalism from different generations, were celebrating the traditions of African society as well as offering ‘rebuke’.60 Peteni was not known for his radical political views and was perhaps less concerned to explain violence. But he too has an interesting understanding of the legacy of the past in shaping African society. Although the traditionalists in these novels are sometimes defeated, the portrayal of them is certainly no harsher than that in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart. And unlike, Achebe, none of these authors permit their traditionalists to commit suicide.61

Lanham and Mopeli Paulus’ Blanket Boy’s Moon also touches on violence in mid-twentieth century rural settings.62 They try to capture the social realities of industrialising South Africa by following one migrant’s adventures through a varied range of ‘typical’ contexts, including Johannesburg, Durban and Maputo. But Lesotho is the heart of the novel and here violence in rural politics is depicted not only in open battles, but as including secrecy, witchcraft and ‘unfair’ weapons. Lanham and Mopeli Paulus also pursue the idea that alcohol and group mentality could suppress the individual conscience:

Now Phafha, seizing the opportune moment, and relying on the blood-lust of the impi for support, struck Koto the first vile blow. Good men of warm heart were there amongst that impi, but their judgement was clouded by the fumes of liquor, and their humanity oppressed by superstitious fears.63

A final example might be the short autobiography recently published by Alfred Qabula, who was brought up in rural Pondoland but has worked since the 1960s on the Rand and in Durban. After joining Dunlop in 1974, he became a trade unionist,

59 Peteni, Hill of Fools, p. 149.
62 Peter Lanham and A.S. Mopeli Paulus, Blanket Boy’s Moon (London, 1953), republished Cape Town, 1984. The book sold well when first published and provides something of a contrast to Alan Paton’s depiction in Cry the Beloved Country of the rural areas as declining havens of peace; for Paton the city was the den of iniquity.
COSATU cultural officer and *imbongi* (praise poet). He recalls the ‘ordinariness’ of conflict in his youth in Pondoland in the 1950s:

Despite hardships my childhood and youth were full of adventures and challenges at school, in the veld, everywhere, where we used to get up to fights for no reason at all. What the problem of the cause of any fight was, nobody could tell. There was a time when we fought the boys from Gabheni. It was a long feud, an almost traditional war of the boys. Sometimes we would quarrel over the use of a river, each group wanting only its flock to drink from the river. Sometime were would demand that they do not swim before us since they would spoil the water for us … But such fights could become very serious.64

The same forms of expression recur in oral memories. His work as COSATU *imbongi* has partly been about bending older forms to new ends — forging a trade union culture which is sensitive to African experiences. He retains a sense of romance about rural boyhood, but does not moralise about rural society: ‘People think of the countryside as a place of cows and peace. Yes, both exist and existed but you had to be a daredevil or you would be beaten up to nobody’s business’.65

**Male Associations, Gangs and Fighting**

This literary material, while it should not necessarily be accepted as accurate social reporting, suggests some of the continuities in expressions of violence in the colonial period, and also the particular role of men as agents of violence. In discussing academic literature, I think it is important to hold this last point in mind: while women can be involved in violence, men are very much more likely to be. The conceptual distinction between conflict and violence, suggested above, is of relevance here. While much (though not all) public violence stems from conflict, by no means all conflict results in violence. Violence requires particular forms of agency, and the actions and predispositions of those agents were not simply created by broader lines of conflict. Men — sometimes men of particular age or class — have been the primary agents of violence in most societies.

This is not to argue that men in general or any particular group of men are ‘violent’ nor that this is the major feature of male behaviour. But in exploring the incidence of violence in the first half of this century in South Africa, we need to ask how masculinity and male socialisation were reconstructed in this period of change. What controls were developed over the expression of masculinity in violence? How could societies where men were generally expected to be militarily capable adapt themselves to the new colonial constraints? Even where there was no direct continuity in the socialisation of men, we need to ask what traditions, myths, social memories were available to reconstruct male identity and how these

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65 Ibid., p. 30.
were invoked in the new contexts of the farm, the compound and the urban location.

Clegg’s study of faction fighting in Msinga district, Zululand, 1882-1944, suggests ways of combining contextual and cultural explanations. He is certainly keen to distance himself from the view that twentieth-century fights within ‘the same tribe’ can find direct precedents in ‘the pre-Shakan era of inter-clan warfare’. His explanatory path draws on Guy’s study of the collapse of centralised authority in Zululand that produced the shattering civil war of the 1880s. Clegg is able to trace the emergence of new associations in Zululand proper after colonisation which allowed both the containment and expression of masculine aggression and violence: ‘play-fighting’ groups based on local territorial units.

In Zululand, ‘playing’ between districts in the form of the umgangela was a means by which districts could cope with the tensions unleashed by the fragmentation of traditional power and the tendency towards balkanisation of the territory, generated by the increasing absence of the unifying effect of the age regiment system.

These groups assembled after weddings which provided an arena for structured hostilities. He explains the ideology of vengeance which developed in Msinga, and the far more open and destructive violence which took place there, by pointing to the absence of the umgangela in this district. Vengeance, as the novelists suggest, took on its own dynamic and these communities had no mechanism for resolving it.

Clegg does not really explain the well-springs of this male violence which had to be contained, except by general reference to the breakdown of regiments and land shortage. He probably underestimates the degree of internal conflict in the era of the regimental system. But, like some of the novelists, he does suggest the theatre and spectacle of violent confrontation in rural societies where dance, orality and fighting could be deeply intertwined. This kind of contained fighting — usually restricted to specified arenas — could be construed as a direct code of communication in preliterate societies where groups re-enacted their conflicts, hierarchies and oppositions in one another’s presence. This kind of fighting could include the idea of sport (a word that has gone through many changes of meaning) but was more than sport. The Msinga material is also useful in emphasising that there was not just one kind of public rural violence, or ‘faction fight’. Fights could be more or less linked to chiefly politics, more or less ‘violent’; some could be socially sanctioned by local authority, others not. They could take distinct forms in different districts.

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67 Guy, Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom.
68 Clegg, ‘Ukubuyisa Isidumbu, p. 189.
The Mayers' analysis of rural youth associations in the Transkei raises further issues about changing forms of fighting between youths and men of different localities. Stick-fighting traditionalist youth associations based on locality remained a major feature of rural life in the Transkei and Ciskei at least till the 1960s and played a central role in the socialisation of youths up to marriage. In the traditionalist groups, fights tended to be contained — they were effectively the major rural sport. But they did sometimes become more intense and could spill over into 'faction fights'.

In the 1930s a new form of uniformed male association, the indlavini, developed in the north-eastern Transkei and southern Natal which bridged the world of rural location, school and compound. Although its members generally had some education, it developed gang-like tendencies and was particularly noted for its violence. Indlavini frequented and disrupted major rural social occasions such as weddings, dominating them if necessary by launching fights. Members of these associations saw their violence as recreational and subject to tight rules, though they did not always hold to such constraints in practice. A complex set of shifting rivalries developed amongst indlavini groups, and between them and traditionalist associations, which sometimes led to sequences of fights. 'The reason is', a former indlavini leader recalled in the 1960s, 'that no side wants to admit defeat and come to plead for peace. Such an act would be looked upon as cowardice and would bring discredit and shame upon them'. The name indlavini probably derives from a Zulu word for male bravado; more committed members of the indlavini enjoyed the power of male solidarity and the fear which they were capable of instilling into others. Their weekly meetings and activities were concerned with the reinforcement of solidarity, and its use — together with violence if necessary — to control space and establish autonomy and authority in rural districts.

In areas of Natal like Weenen, where many of the farms were largely occupied by African tenants till the inter-war years, igoso (crooked) leaders, previously leaders of dance associations, became 'generals' elected by youths as war leaders. Bradford suggests that they exercised 'more authority over young men than did black or white officialdom'. (In Pondoland, youth and male associations both before and after the rise of the indlavini remained both dance and fighting groups.) More generally on the Natal farms, groupings known as the amagxagxa — the term which in Xhosa denotes 'poor white' or a clanless person — proliferated and were


much the same as the *indlavini* in their patterns of behaviour.\(^73\) The demonstration of prowess through competitive dancing and fighting was incorporated into new forms of rural male association.

In a number of contexts where most men were expected to be militarily capable, ‘sport’ involved learning and practising fighting skills; sometimes these were developed into gladiatorial public spectacles. But it is surely important that male leisure took the form of fighting even if half the art was to learn how to stop. When rural fighting became less contained in the inter-war years, and male associations less subject to control, it is perhaps legitimate to argue that it became less clearly socially sanctioned and therefore more clearly ‘violent’. There may not have been more fighting — and there were probably fewer deaths — than in pre- and early colonial times. But the literature suggests that the locus and incidence of violence became more unpredictable and more intense as the controls on the youth associations broke down. In some areas, it became difficult to define tightly the shift to responsible manhood and to curb the expression of masculinity through violence.

In addition to weddings, beer drinks are often cited as microcosms for these conflicts. A number of descriptions of violent incidents — and not only those by colonial commentators — associate violence with liquor. But in rural communities, the nature of the gathering, with its hierarchies, complex seating arrangements, oratory and oppositions — there to be affirmed and contested — as much as the effects of alcohol, could lead men to challenge one another.\(^74\) Beer drinks celebrated community and sociability, but also brought out the conflicts and hostilities within local communities.

Recent approaches to the central issue of African proletarianisation have also attempted to capture the cultural experiences of black workers and migrants in town. The making of the working class has been studied partly from the vantage point of the rural peripheries. Africanist perspectives, oral history techniques and participants’ perceptions have become more central to the project. In addition to advancing earlier work on labour processes and trade union organisation, new themes are being stressed: the social fragmentation of the urban population; the significance of ethnicity; rural-urban links; and gender. One striking sub theme of the work is that on male associations, gangs and criminality in town.\(^75\) As yet it is


\(^{74}\) P. McAllister, ‘Xhosa Beer Drinks and their Oratory’, PhD, Rhodes University, 1986.

unclear how important these were in the history of the South African urban life. But in a system which relentlessly criminalised workers and the poor, and in the absence of sustained trade union organisation, they seem to have been central vehicles of ‘self-organisation’. In order to understand the history of collective violence in the cities it seems essential to come to terms with these associations, which took a number of different forms.

First, up to the 1930s and perhaps beyond, many new male associations in town were still deeply influenced by rural idioms. La Hausse’s studies of the amalaita in Durban in the first few decades of this century demonstrate how the legacies of Zulu military ideas and of rural fighting groups were reworked by associations of migrant workers. La Hausse argues, ‘Ngoma dance and amalaita gangs’, la Hausse argues, ‘provide the most striking examples of the way in which popular culture in Durban was infused with military symbols and rituals drawn from a pre-colonial past’. Yet these associations were also vehicles for an emerging culture of the urban streets and ‘dangerous classes’.

Amalaita groups were also prevalent in the Transvaal. Delius quotes Mphahlele on the youth fighting groups from Sekhukhuneland in Pretoria in the 1930s and 1940s.

They had on shorts, tennis caps, tennis shoes and handkerchiefs dangled from their pockets. They crouched, shook their fists in the air so that the ... bangles round their wrists clanged. They moved with long strides like a black army ... they sprang and shouted.78

Most of these young men were domestic servants. Although they ‘clubbed together’ for other purposes, it could be a ‘bruising comradeship’. The emphasis was on violence as display and sport. Regular staged battles took place at an arena every weekend: ‘We dressed well, we blew whistles, we could be seen by each and everyone. We were not hiding away in order to ambush people’. Groups tended to coalesce around rural identities rather than urban blocks, townships or suburbs, though they were by no means immune from change.


76 La Hausse, ‘Cows of Nongoloza’.
78 Delius, ‘Sebatakgomo’, quoting E. Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue.
Moodie’s description of the way in which fights developed amongst the mine work force demonstrates how vast single-sex compounds exposed the raw nerves of male social sensitivity. But it echoes features of rural conflict: challenge and counter-challenge; the rapid mobilisation of male cohorts reaching for weapons at hand; the striking out of lights. As in the rural areas, compound fights could escalate from competitive spectacle, or single incidents of protest, to become more explosive and sustained. And migrant workers from some areas, such as Pondoland, stand out as instigators of violence — a pattern which is difficult to explain purely on the basis of differential rates of incorporation into the workforce.

Specific patterns of rural masculinity might have influenced behaviour on the mines. Moodie returns to the Mayers’ suggestion that the absence of circumcision or a sharp differentiation between boyhood and responsible manhood, predisposed Mpondo men to violent confrontations; Xhosa men by contrast, from a circumcising background, were socialised more systematically into resolving conflict by other means. Migrants from Pondoland and elsewhere also commented on the way in which their lack of circumcision led to taunting on the mines. Lack of circumcision may be significant, but it is surely only one element in the shaping of masculinity. Men from Xhosa and Sotho backgrounds were involved in fights in these years. And in other contexts, circumcision has been cited as a factor leading to violence: ‘the qualities that a boy has to develop to undergo the ordeal courageously are the same which might later lead him to violence’. But debate does point to the importance of male socialisation, as well as the context of the mine, in analysing ‘faction fights’.

Guy and Thabane’s discussion of their interview with a man they call Rantoa, a member of the notorious Sotho-speaking Ma-rashea ‘Russians’ on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s, reinforces observations about the link between violence and male solidarity but notes also the ‘atmosphere of intense enjoyment in Rantoa’s description of the fights in which he participated’:

We were stronger than those people, there was not another reason (for fighting). It was just the enjoyment of fighting and it was as if people were not satisfied during their time of herding. It was nice that thing of fighting each other like that, even though it was dangerous as it caused so many deaths.

Rantoa’s unselfconsciousness about his motives for fighting might seem something of a headache for those who have long tried to counteract colonial mythologies. Guy and Thabane distance themselves from, or at least add to, this line of thinking: ‘there can be no doubt that the exhilaration of physical combat gave relief in general conditions of severe social deprivation’. But they do also follow Rantoa’s path of explanation in noting the ‘excitement of violence, the camaraderie of the fighting party, the fear they struck into others as they moved out of the alleyways of Newclare in their distinctive dress which everyone knew

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81 Ibid.
concealed their weapons, the thrill of planning the battle and outwitting the opposition.

The Rand compound and prison gangs were a second form of male association. They seem to have been more firmly located in an urban political economy which first sucked in people from the countryside and then spewed them out to survive on the cold margins of early capitalism. Van Onselen argues that Jan Note, the Ninevite leader, was effectively made by the institutions of prison and compound where he spent much of his adult life. There was certainly reference to Zulu ideas of hierarchy and regimental structure in his gang. But such elements in his cultural repertoire seem to have been more supplementary than central. The systematic brutality of the gang, its secrecy, criminality and homosexuality seem to reflect more closely the specific institutions in which it was born.

The Mpondo Isitshozi was probably less centralised and perhaps more closely connected with compounds and migrant labour associations than prisons; they contributed to the reputation of men from Pondoland as instigators of compound fights. Isitshozi members even referred to displays of strength and robberies on pay day as ‘weddings’. But their particular pursuit of criminal activities and the organisation of homosexuality suggest they were closely modelled on the Ninevites, perhaps a successor organisation.

Third, the growth of specifically urban gangs and youth sub-culture, often referred to by the general term tsotsi, calls for a shifting explanatory framework. Here there is far less evidence of rural influences; gangs were organised by neighbourhood and streets rather than ethnic loyalties. Dikobe’s novel on a Johannesburg slum yard in the inter-war years, distinctive in the South African context as one of the first written from ‘inside’ working class life, includes an evocative description of the ‘Black Cat’ gang. Its leader was ‘a miscegenation of Coloured and African’: ‘He could speak neither Sesuthu, which was his father’s language, nor Afrikaans, his mother’s language, well. He could not finish a sentence in a single language.’ Dikobe rejoices in the vitality of African urban life and the Marabi culture; the novel is a powerful justification of inner-city black urban communities in a society which was trying to demolish them. For Dikobe, gangs and male violence were part of this specifically urban African cultural world.

84 Breckenridge, ‘Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting’.
86 Dikobe captures the partially Afrikanerised argot of ‘tsotsis’. For Cape gangs, which may have had a longer history and have influenced patterns on the Rand, see D. Pinnock, ‘Stone’s Boys and the Making of a Cape Flats Mafia’ in Bozzi (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict. Dikobe also suggests that violence can be a simple and direct mode of expression, where other codes of communication are restricted. It is a point explored also in Richard Rive, Buckingham Palace District Six (Cape Town, 1986) through his character Amaai, a strong man who talks little and has his say through one explosive expression of violence.
87 See also, E. Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue.
The boundaries between the types of association discussed — and there were others — were not watertight, and specific associations could include a range of behaviour. But urban gangs were associated in the minds of rural men and migrant workers with a more instrumental violence geared to more explicit aims of theft and even killing; they were seen to have less self-discipline in relation to weapons — using knives and guns — and to be more secretive. Godfrey Moloi’s memories contrast sharply with those of rurally based men; they may be romantically exaggerated, but they recreate the desires of young urban men of his kind in a revealing way.88 He was frequently involved in violence, but on a more individualistic basis. It was around the dance hall rather than the water hole that physical prowess, weaponry (a gun) and showing off to women became features in the construction of Moloi’s formidable antagonisms.

‘Territoriality’ may not have been based on rural identity, but was not absent from the dynamics of urban gangs in highly proletarianised South African communities — as it has been in many other cities. While urban gang violence may have been less public and more instrumental, it is difficult to argue that the element of display was absent. Many migrant and urban associations were involved in political protests and violence, from the amalaita in the Durban Beerhall riots of 1929 to gangs allied with the ANC on the Rand in the early 1950s.89 But the rhythms of gang activity and assertion were not fundamentally shaped by political organisation.

In dealing with the post-Second World War urban world it is increasingly necessary to place the fragmented experience of proletarianisation at the centre of the analysis. But migrant culture bridging rural and urban worlds did not suddenly disappear. Each new generation of immigrants to town recreated associations expressing their particular experience and material position. Movements such as Inkatha, while using new weaponry, engaging in new politics and empowered by wings of the South African state, have locked into the associational forms and male solidarities which, while not traditional, reconstruct an aggression that is widely reflected in groups which bridge town and countryside. In their case, also, the invocation of the memory of military prowess might help to cement male solidarities in service of new ‘warlords’.

Those from the Transkei, living in shack settlements south of Durban, who fought against Inkatha impi in late 1985, had no major military memory. They were not empowered by the state and had less advantageous a position in the urban labour market and in the peri-urban locations. But pictures of those involved strongly suggest that the solidarities of the rural male association were brought into play at the moment of conflict. (‘The Mpondos are different … they are good fighters, they take all the shit jobs’.)90

88 G. Moloi, My Life. Volume one (Johannesburg, 1987)
89 La Hausse, ‘Message of the Warriors’ and Bonner, ‘Family, Crime’.
90 Ari Sitas, ‘Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal’s Black Working Class’, unpublished paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Societies of Southern Africa seminar, 1987. (The Zulu informant whom Sitas quotes also had more insulting things to say.)
The analytical issues raised by the emergence of new male associations, gangs and related violence seems to me to encapsulate more general difficulties in explaining collective violence. Here collective violence is clearly related to social dislocation and the breakdown of family authority consequent on rapid urbanisation as many earlier sociological works stressed. But forms of violence express cultural continuities, and changing collective solidarities. Where alternative social expression of masculinity are less immediately available, violence can become a powerful means of self-definition for younger men in particular. Violence can in this context be used to carve out social space. As Fanon suggested, it could provide meaning to its protagonists. It could also provide an organising force, even to its victims, though more usually violence is deeply destructive of its victims.

Young men have been wild cards in a number of African countries, as elsewhere, and it seems essential to discover how they become available for, or incorporated in, violent enterprises by looking historically at patterns of socialisation, associational life and the breakdown of controls. Feminist analyses which relate gender relationships in industrial society to diverse forms of pre-industrial patriarchy offer instructive parallels. It is important also to understand why youths and men even in urban contexts and highly politicised situations, draw selectively on deep cultural markers which justify and shape the form of their violence. The likelihood of this social outcome seems to be considerably increased where one form of socialisation in pre-industrial society is undermined, but not replaced by the institutions of industrial society. (Though those institutions themselves can be turned to violent intent.) To historical explanations of violence based on poverty, repression and under-policing, must be added a curiosity about male sub-cultures.

A similar route could be suggested for discussing Afrikaner communities. Aside from the difference in pre-industrial contexts, just two features of the Afrikaner experience of industrialisation help to focus attention on the particularity of African experiences. First, Afrikaner urbanisation was more rapid and more complete. The links between country and town over a few generations were less evident and men tended to live more as part of nuclear families in town (as well as having favoured access to employment). Second, Afrikaner men, unlike the great majority of black men, were absorbed in state institutions — made full subjects of the state — in a far more thoroughgoing way through universal education, the army, the police, the bureaucracy, the railways, mining industry and other institutions. White South African society, like the American West, was probably a far more corporate, rather

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91 Amongst comparative works that have been drawn on by South African historians, F. Thrasher, *The Gang* (Chicago, 1929) was an influential American sociological analysis which emphasised these points. This type of analysis, together with material on the erosion of the family, had some influence on inter-war concerns in South Africa about juvenile delinquency, crime and urban disorder. A. Cohen, *Delinquent Youths* (Glencoe, 1955) emphasised the working class base of gang activity. N.Z. Davies, ‘The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France’, *Past and Present*, 50 (1971) and other early modern social history has helped to focus on the cultural and ritual expression of violence.

than ‘frontier’, world far earlier than often supposed.\textsuperscript{93} These corporate institutions sometimes became the vehicle for coercive controls and Afrikaners within them, agents of, or conduits for, violence. Studies of institutional sub-cultures might provide insights into the reconstruction of Afrikaner masculinity and violence.

**Contemporary Violence: Politics and ‘Cultures of Violence’**

It is often said that contemporary South Africa is a ‘violent’ society and evidence is adduced not only about political violence, but a wide range of social phenomena from high rates of family violence to high rates of murder, judicial hanging and road accidents.\textsuperscript{94} It is tempting to see connections between these different forms of violence — as part of a national ‘culture of violence’ — but, as noted in the introduction, difficult to specify how they interact. Neither more general social violence, nor the legacy of the past in themselves explain the upsurge of recent political violence and the cultures which have grown up around it.

The discourse of total strategy and the notion of the country being at ‘war’ have clearly been important justificatory ideas for excessive force by white southern Africans who have not found it difficult to explain why they go so far to defend their position.\textsuperscript{95} Until very recently at least, old established but reworked racial ideas and the bogey of communism continued to serve their function. Keeping white society whole and pure, and thus guarding ‘civilisation’ in the subcontinent were recurrent themes. In a spoken presentation to the conference, Alex Boraine discussed how ideas of ‘law and order’ were fused with upholding the apartheid state order. The security forces (but not them alone) increasingly came to hold a conspiracy theory of politics which negated the idea of legitimate opposition. Over a considerable period of time, they were allowed great freedom and given secure protection against prosecution for excess. The police in particular, Boraine argued, thus developed a ‘cop-culture’ where internal professional constraints were increasingly eroded. When P.W. Botha incorporated the security apparatus more centrally in decision making, and the state itself began to fragment in the 1980s, police felt they had authority to broaden their roles. Direct acts of violence as well as collusion with KwaZulu police, Inkatha, vigilante groups and hostel dwellers became prominent. In this context, the scope for cruelty and atrocity escalates so that they can become ‘terrifyingly normal’.\textsuperscript{96}

The ideas of masculinity channelled and developed in South Africa’s military institutions have recently been examined by Jacklyn Cock. She notes the encouragement of ‘a form of ultra-masculinity which requires aggressiveness, competitiveness and the censure of emotional expression’.\textsuperscript{97} Femininity is defined

\textsuperscript{93} D. Worster, *Rivers of Empire* (New York, 1985).

\textsuperscript{94} Most explicitly in Marks and Anderson, ‘The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence’ in Chabani and du Toit, *Political Violence*.

\textsuperscript{95} For Zimbabwe, see Ranger’s concluding article and Julie Frederikse, *None But Ourselves Masses vs. Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg, 1982).

\textsuperscript{96} Cock, *Women and War in South Africa*, p. 55, quoting Hannah Arendt.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p. 58.
as the antithesis of these attributes and men who were deemed to fall behind were derided as ‘sissies’ or ‘girls’. They could also suffer prolonged victimisation. In some senses, training facilitated dehumanisation of recruits as well as opponents; in this way, the bounds of acceptable action and capacity for cruelty could be stretched. The South African Defence Force has not been unique in providing a conduit for aggressive masculinity; to what degree it was able to channel and control it is unclear. The evolution of these male cultures in the SADF are of particular interest in that it is not least a citizen force; and perhaps reflects broader patterns of socialisation rooted in the physical and linguistic bravado of colonial maleness.

On the other side of the South African struggle, Sitas explores cultures of resistance amongst black youth in Durban, deploying material which expresses their own vision of what has happened during the insurrectionary years. While state violence and repression, together with widespread unemployment and poverty, created the context for the extraordinarily rapid spread of the comrades, their activities were not simply a reflection of these objective conditions. ‘They are a movement involving voluntary (and sometimes coerced) participation, cultural dynamics and a new volatile social identity shaped through mobilisation and conflict’. Both Sitas and Zonke Majodina, in her paper to the conference, noted that ‘adolescent energy is quickly mobilised through dramatic action’. Comrades conceive of themselves as soldiers of a liberation movement and the ‘militarisation of their subculture is endemic’. They see their struggle as a process of counter violence, but nevertheless one which involves fighting back and asserting solidarity. While many more youths have been killed than have killed, their incorporation of a politicised violence as part of their identity is a striking feature of the last decade.

Seekings similarly argues that urban youth culture has increasingly legitimised a defensive violence. Violence was conceived as against the ‘system’, but ‘much collective violence on the part of the “community” was not directed against targets which were unambiguously part of the system, but rather on the margins of the community’. Precisely because the community was fragmented, dissent became chronic; at some moments a sub-culture of violence, incorporating elements of criminality, has surfaced. The necklacing of Maki Skhosana in Duduza, 1985 was an outburst of community anger, led by a youth who already had convictions for assault. Sitas also sees the violence of comrades as seldom co-ordinated and controlled by ANC discipline. The necklace, with its symbolic references to industrial waste, barricades, fire and sacrifice was a creation of the cultural bricoleurs of the locations, not the exiled political movements. It was a modern weapon of punishment and social purification, but reminiscent of older purificatory

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99 Seekings, ‘Identity, Authority’. 
movements against those perceived to betray the community. ‘The word “pollution” is often on the lips of the violent’.100

Youths in Natal also incorporated older ideas about aggression and defence, including doctoring and witchcraft. But it is in Mozambique that we find the starkest example of the interplay between new cultures of violence and historical legacies. Wilson’s article in this issue illustrates in compelling detail how Renamo has systematically used terror and violence to instil fear and command authority in the areas which it conquered. It is not only the atrocities which must be listed, but the way that collectively, they became a ‘cult’ of violence, with ritualistic devices ‘to instil a paralysing and incapacitating fear in the wider population’, which is ‘one of the most important parts of ... what Renamo actually is’. The perpetrators see themselves as a ‘brotherhood socially discrete from the victims’ and their aim has been to set themselves beyond the realm of social beings — and beyond control and resistance. Asserting masculinity through rape as well as mutilation seems to be a recurring facet of their activities.

In this sense Renamo differs from government forces in the civil war fighting a more strictly military battle. And a primary means of countering Renamo has been attempts to break the stranglehold of their cult of violence by cults of counter violence of which Naprama, a peasant movement, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses have been most significant. A major element in their pattern of resistance has been to recreate a sense of community and belonging, and a sense of inviolability (through ‘vaccination’ against bullets), even if this involved the sacrifice of individuals to Renamo. They have also attempted to invert that element of Renamo’s practice which empowered men through taking possession of women.

Renamo, initially a creature of the Zimbabwean and South African armies, has achieved its heights of terror through the development of its own internal cultures of violence. There are hints of similar tendencies amongst those whom the security services have nurtured in South Africa, but mercifully they remain on the peripheries. Campbell’s paper on the recent violence in Natal, however, extends the analysis of masculinity in a contemporary context and suggests some of the recent social forces which might produce African cultures of violence in South Africa. Her interviews revealed a deep sense of loss and insecurity amongst older men who were unable to provide for their families and unable to fulfil the patriarchal role which they felt they should. Whereas in earlier years, older men could at least assert themselves in the community and public contexts, in the late 1980s they felt themselves confronted and superseded by youth in the public as well as the private sphere.

Their anger was expressed as violence within the family. But in certain cases these ‘serious intergenerational conflicts ascendant since the mid-1980s’ intersected with political involvements and notably Inkatha loyalties on the part of older men.101 Some explained their responses in terms of the damage which they felt had

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100 Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘The Rites of Violence’ in Society and Culture in Early Modern France (London, 1975); the same observation could be applied even more forcefully to whites.
101 Quote from Hayes, ‘Another Side of Violence’.
been done to their masculinity. It is interesting that the term coined by Radio Zulu, to describe senseless violence and killing, *udlame*, has the same root as the word for masculine bravado or foolhardy courage.\textsuperscript{102} Campbell does not explain why violence became so readily adopted as a strategy by Inkatha members — nor how Zulu-speaking men might draw on and reconstruct their heritage — but she does argue powerfully for a gendered analysis of violence.

To a surprising degree, youths also articulated a patriarchal view of society, and viewed politics and fighting as their realm.\textsuperscript{103} Bonnin, however, cautions against analyses which simply see ‘men as warriors’ and ‘women as victims’.\textsuperscript{104} It is true that men have been overwhelming responsible for recent violence in Natal and the number of arrests of women has been very small. The majority of those killed — about 90 per cent between 1988 and 1990 — have been men, most of them young. Nevertheless women were killed, more especially when houses and public transport were attacked. Women can be held responsible for the actions of men and youths in their families; and women were attacked precisely because homes were a central battle target. On occasion they were involved, both on the side of Inkatha and the ANC, in cheering and encouraging men in fights. Though they were seldom agents of violence, they have sometimes been involved in it and supportive of it without challenging male roles.

**Conclusion**

Violence, as part of a range of social processes, has perhaps played a ‘creative’ role in state formation, national liberation, the recent insurrection in South Africa and even in creating solidarity amongst rural communities and the urban poor. But whatever the rights and wrongs of violence in the past, it is important that routes be found out of a reactive momentum which is set deep in the historical experiences both of black and white. Violence is a difficult processes to stop, once set in train. Political violence may in part be a reflection of a weak states in the region; it can also severely undermine the capacity of states to perform other functions at a time of dire economic and social need. Violence is certainly constraining and inhibiting political settlements and the installation of democratic processes. As a political and personal expression, it has achieved a degree of social sanction in significant segments of southern African society.

But this is not necessarily an unbreakable cycle. In the case of Zimbabwe, the legacy of the war has in part been overcome and means of healing discovered. Both Ranger, in his introductory talk, and Zonke Majodina, discussing the effects of violence on children, laid great stress on the need for social healing.\textsuperscript{105} But it is not

\textsuperscript{102} The word *indlavini*, used in Pondoland for the assertive male association begun in the 1930s, probably derives from the same source. Beinart, ‘The Origins of the Indlavini’.  
\textsuperscript{103} See also Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*.  
\textsuperscript{104} Debby Bonnin, ‘‘We are not Interested in Old Women, We Want to Kill the Husbands and Sons’’; Women and the War in Natal’, paper presented to the conference.  
\textsuperscript{105} See Ranger’s Afterword and Gill Straker et al., *Faces in the Revolution. The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992).
only healing that is required; restoration of legitimate authority is also important. Perhaps because power and authority in South Africa have been so bound up with a repressive state, South African analysts may not have asked sufficiently hard questions about what might be required from a new state.

Oppositional violence has been justified because of the repressive nature of the state and the lack of democratic politics. In this logic, exclusive control over violence might be seen as the province of the state once a democratic system has been achieved. The citizen will contract out of violence in return for a civil society which in theory can be influenced by other means — and which protects its subjects against violence. Ideally, both the agents of the state, and its opponents might forsake violence.

It can only be hoped that such an outcome is possible, and that South Africa has experienced both its counter-revolution and its terror before a new order has been established. But, even in the absence of systematic disorganising violence, post-colonial contexts have not generally resulted in rapidly achieved social stability. Relatively egalitarian democracies are extraordinarily difficult systems to establish. Political control by universal consent and without coercion has proved an elusive goal; sporadic violence has tended to persist, fragmenting rather than cementing national identities. Structural violence, broadly defined, is also likely to persist in the region, especially in view of the current world economic order.

In this context, even a relatively democratic, representative state might need to conquer disorder with force. It will no doubt have to work hard to promote a tighter definition of legitimate violence — shifting away from anti-colonial discourse that legitimised violence in popular struggles. A delicate balance, one that requires constant public debate, is required to achieve order without systematic repression.

Containing violence, however, implies constraint by citizens as well as states. If it is recognised, as argued here, that cultural, psychological and gendered explanations of violence need to be taken into account, then political solutions may not in themselves resolve all the impulses towards violence. Alternative forms of focussing national identity, of socialising men are potentially significant as it is men who need most urgently to constrain their violence.

Caute, Fanon, p. 87 notes Fanon's awareness of the psychologically traumatic aspects of violence and vengeance.