Vigilantism: further thoughts on comparative study

“For it is the attempt both to generalise and at the same time take on board the intensity of the fieldwork experience, that is at the heart of anthropology. There is a middle ground which is not just a compromise, and which is absolutely central to the subject.” 1

The study of vigilantism is a relatively recent development in social anthropology, and a substantial body of new fieldwork-based material has been amassed since my own (1987) and Suzette Heald's (1982, 1986) first discussions of the subject.2 Prior to these, most accounts were by historians dealing with vigilante movements in North America, and especially those of San Francisco, Montana and the Ku Klux Klan during the second half of the nineteenth century. This material became the subject of an important pioneer survey by Richard Maxwell Brown (1975) who had himself studied early vigilantism among South Carolina settlers (1963). My own book, Vigilant Citizens (1998), was a broader comparative study of such cases along with many others from South America, South East Asia, Africa and Europe. 3

In 2005 I was privileged to be invited to two conferences organized by younger social anthropologists in which an impressive body of new research on the subject was presented. The first, in Sussex, was attended by anthropologists and other interested scholars, and its wide-ranging proceedings on material from several continents have now been published in the recent volume Global Vigilantes (Pratten and Sen, 2007). The second, which has resulted in the present book, was a workshop - organised by the editors - of the German Anthropological Association conference in Halle, and its focus was particularly African. In my contribution to the Sussex volume, and in the spirit of its title, I was keen to clarify my approach to the identification and comparison of vigilantism as a geographically widespread
and historically recurrent phenomenon. I want here to continue my discussion of these questions, and to explore in a preliminary way some of the questions that narrower comparison of local differences within a region appears to raise.

I hope I will not be misunderstood if I say I was particularly pleased to encounter so much work by Africanist anthropologists at both of these events. The 'global' coverage of my own book, and my research on Finland and Estonia (cf. 1991 and 1994) should dispel any notion that I am some kind of 'African chauvinist', and I have also been extremely grateful for collaboration with historians, criminologists and other scholars in much of my work. It is well known, however, that African social anthropology has substantially receded in relative importance since the heady days of Evans-Pritchard, Forde, Fortes, Gluckman, Richards and Schapera half a century or so ago, as they and many of their immediate successors, such as Goody, have been replaced by scholars with markedly different area and other interests. As such, while I have no wish for a return to that earlier hegemony, it is heartening to see that so much valuable work is being done which may help to regenerate a lively academic interest in the region both in social anthropology and beyond.

Beyond this major point, I may also confess to some small pleasure both in the fact that, like Heald, my own first ventures in the study of vigilantes had a firm African research base, and in the possibility that my work may have contributed a little to the current growth of interest in this field.

**A regional approach?**

At the same time, there is arguably some need for caution in this context, for one needs to ask, rather than to take for granted, what a close
anthropological focus on a particular region has to offer. Isaac Schapera, whom I mentioned earlier, was a thoughtful commentator on this issue, and a consideration of some of his early views on comparative study may form a useful starting point for discussion.4

I should say at once that 'Schap', as one affectionately knew him, was a true 'giant', and my slightly qualified reception here of the ideas in question should be read in the light of a more general debt to him. His Tswana studies provide an unrivalled corpus of carefully collected and analysed ethnography on the life and institutions of an African people, and his combination of pragmatism and scholarly dedication quickly led him to several conclusions that seem common sense today but gave his work a marked innovative quality at the time. One of these was that oral and documentary history was clearly relevant for the understanding of the present. Coupled with this, and well before the idea had begun to form a serious element in social anthropological theory, he insisted (1943) upon introducing into his analyses a strong element of what today is fashionably called 'agency'. Malinowski had of course stressed the importance of the actor's individuality and perspective, but Schapera went beyond this to explore the role of political leaders and other actors in important processes of social change. Again, as Gluckman (1975) noted, Schapera always insisted that a people like the Tswana did not live in isolation from the world around them but, for a century and more, had actively engaged with and absorbed the influence of political, economic and other forces emanating from outside their boundaries. Long before historians of Africa were self-consciously shifting from writing the history of Europeans in Africa towards a focus on the history of Africans in their own continent,
Schapera paid carefully balanced attention to both endogenous and exogenous forces for change among the Tswana, including the influence of neighbouring peoples; and he showed that such change had a longer history than many of his fellow anthropologists were likely to assume. I need scarcely stress the significance of such pioneering insights for political anthropology and the study of a phenomenon like vigilantism.

Schapera set out a clear program for comparative research in an American lecture published in 1953. Like many others, he saw such study as a major long-term task of social anthropology, and his stated preference for conducting at least the initial stages of such work within specific regions clearly has a common sense plausibility. His main stress was on the possibility of complete coverage of such an area, but it is also clear that a relatively large number of variables can be kept under control when many of the societies concerned may have a common origin and are subject to investigable similar or different influences. Yet available evidence does not always provide the support to this approach that one might expect. There are of course some relative success stories, though they are by no means all of the same kind. Schapera himself mentions Radcliffe-Brown's comparative analyses of Australian kinship systems, and his own very different work on the different Tswana groups and kingdoms is impressive. Some of the work on related East African age and generation group systems has also been fruitful, to take a case that I have myself been involved in, and there are no doubt many other examples. Nonetheless, some surprising 'holes' appear to remain. Some of the most celebrated and intensive studies of African regions, such as the Mole-Dagbane area of West Africa and that of the Sudanic and related...
Nilotes, have not seemed to produce as much significant understanding (as opposed to careful description) of the variations within them as we might have hoped for, though I make this point a little tentatively since I am not as fully up-to-date on work in these areas as I was some years ago. Again, the careful study, based mainly on oral traditions, of age groups and related associations among the Native Americans of the Great Plains has left us with far more tantalizing questions than good answers.

I raise this point, not as criticism of those who have worked in and on these areas, but simply to suggest that such a regional ethnographic focus does not automatically lead to comparative enlightenment even when the ethnography itself is of the highest quality. This must depend in part both on the kinds of data available and on the approach that a researcher takes, and it relates to problems in the explanation of similarity and difference that Schapera himself, with his emphasis on history and 'agency', and others such as Leach (1954, 1961) and Goody (1984) have variously recognised.

A detailed examination of the complex literature on these problems would be out of place here, and I merely venture some of my own reflections on them stemming from my own research. The similarities and differences between neighbouring and/or related societies have a history which can be partly understood as a history of structural choices, including similar or different solutions to similar problems, made for the members of a society by themselves and others. Moreover, one can argue that, many such problems are extremely widespread, occurring well beyond the confines of a region. For example, it seems clear that attempts in a variety of areas to maintain the integrity and viability of family farms (and other family enterprises) over the
generations regularly encounter comparable tensions between kinship ties and a range of economic and technical constraints (cf. Abrahams, 1991).

This suggests that the successful recognition of such problems and their possible solutions may be more useful in such contexts than a doctrinaire emphasis upon their regional location. Such recognition is admittedly not always easily achieved, and special difficulties may easily arise if one attempts simply to apply concepts and models developed in one regional context to another, as Barnes (1962) and others trenchantly argued with regard to Africa and New Guinea. Yet one should remember that these and other critics have also questioned the applicability of the same models within Africa itself, so that expansion beyond a single larger or smaller research area can in fact offer us a useful opportunity to refine and reformulate our ideas on that area.

**Vigilantism and the quest for order**

In the present case of vigilantism, it is arguable that wherever people live within State structures, similar questions about the (un)satisfactory provision of law and order from that source frequently arise, as I hope that my own broader comparative study brings out. I have suggested that 'taking the law into their own hands' is a common response of citizens to such problems of order, and I have taken this as my focal concern. I am aware that this may seem to some an arbitrary choice and I acknowledge that it is possible to approach the same forms of behaviour from other perspectives such as those of political hegemony or the economic interests of the actors, which are clearly often a part of the vigilante scene. I have, however, preferred to see
these as common, interesting, and sometimes influential adumbrations, rather than the key comparative issue for analysis while at the same time stressing that vigilantism is a highly labile phenomenon whose practitioners, like people everywhere, may have a multiplicity of motives for their actions. I have tried to encompass much of the variability of real situations through the use of an 'ideal type' approach to definition, as I have discussed in some detail elsewhere (1998, 2007). It is possible that there is something of myself in this decision and approach, but I would argue that it also has a strong empirical base. This is certainly the case in Nyamwezi and Sukuma culture and society, where I encountered the Sungusungu groups that formed the subject of my first analyses in this field, and I consider that a quest for order is also a much more widespread and more powerful force in society than 'hard-nosed' economic and political maximisation theories would suggest. One aspect of this point that struck me in the writing of my book was the regular tendency of vigilantes (and others) to seek legitimation of their activities through the assertion of such a quest, even when other 'less noble' motives appeared to be present and perhaps dominant. While this makes it clear that a desire for order carries a risk of vulnerability to political manipulation, it also suggests that one dismisses such desire from one's reckoning at one's intellectual peril. I might add - since it has not always been well-understood - that this forms the general starting point for my own approach to definition and comparison in this field. By exploiting the flexibility of an 'ideal type' analysis, I have tried to bring a wide variety of cases within a common frame by comparing the extent and form of their approximation to what I have seen as the 'type case'.
An Anthropological Approach?

There is a further question to confront, however, and this concerns the nature of social anthropology itself as a discipline. This can be a long and fruitless issue in the abstract, but I hope that its particular relevance here will be clear. For various reasons I am used to describing myself as a 'social anthropologist'. In some respects, this might appear as a 'flag of convenience', which reflects my possession of a first degree and doctorate and my having held academic posts 'in the subject'. Yet there is also some useful content to the label. At its simplest, this content relates to the ultimate fieldwork basis of the discipline, and the respect which this implies for the cultures and social structures of the people whose lives we study, typically at a local level. My comments about Schapera's pioneer work, and my own ideographic and comparative explorations of a wide variety of relations between 'villagers and the State', including vigilantism, testify to my conviction that this local level ought not to be studied simply in isolation. At the same time, however, we arguably drift away from 'an ideal type' of social anthropology - if I can extend that notion to a 'meta-level' - if we concentrate unduly on the external factors working on a local situation. This might perhaps be illustrated by an anecdote. I worked with a research student some twenty-odd years ago who was much influenced by contemporary Marxist ideas, which he tended to apply without what seemed to me sufficient thought to his discussion of the Kenyan villagers he was studying. At one of our many friendly and informal meetings I found myself frustratingly advising him to try to make up his mind whether he was simply studying 'peasants' or, as I put it rather crudely, 'tribesmen'. Leaving aside my infelicitous vocabulary, and the unfairness of the choice I was
offering, my point was of course that he was working with people who had much more than a 'mode of production'. A similar point has of course been made much more elegantly by several writers, including Harri Englund and James Leach (2000), in the face of a more recent explanatory overloading of the theory of globalisation.

Turning this 'spotlight' on myself, I realise that I may to some extent be guilty of the same sin of omission or imbalance in as much as I have tended, as my earlier discussion reveals, to look for unifying features in the field of vigilantism and, in so doing, to focus on relations between 'citizens' and 'the State' while at the same time acknowledging and documenting a range of slippage away from the ideal type I had constructed. Of course, in good anthropological tradition, my discussion of my Nyamwezi/Sukuma material pays considerable attention to the indigenous cultural and social structural background to the development of Sungusungu. However, partly for want of relevant detailed material, and also because of my interest in the spread of vigilante ideas and activities through migration and the influence of the press and other media, it is arguable that my book sometimes paid less attention than it ideally might have done to exploring the significance of local differences in ideas of citizenship and perceptions of the implications of state membership.

One returns here to the hope that the availability of increasing quantities of detailed local ethnographic data, as presented in the present book, might help to generate a more nuanced and differentiated comparative picture of the processes of the emergence of vigilante activity in various locations. I have already stressed that there is nothing automatic about this,
but the mechanism of a focussed conference or workshop which has led to this volume and to Pratten and Sen's *Global Vigilantes* should offer as good a chance as any of the development of mutually well-informed (I hesitate to say co-ordinated) quests for answers to a range of questions which the participants, and others inspired by their work, may go on to pursue.

**An East African example: the Nyamwezi and Sukuma and the Kuria**

I will close with a modest offering in this vein which actually harks back to that earlier era of comparative Africanist work that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Alongside my own and others' Nyamwezi and Sukuma work, Heald's (2006, 2007) and Fleisher's (2000a and b) studies of Sungusungu among the Kuria of Kenya and Tanzania remind us that eastern Africa may also provide the possibility of enlightening comparison in this field. For it seems clear that, despite their involvement in broadly similar State structures, local differences of social organization between the peoples in question may illuminate significant differences in the development of this vigilante movement among them.

As I have discussed at length elsewhere (1987, 1989, 1998 - see also Bukurura, 1995, and Masanja, 1992), so called Busalama or Sungusungu groups originated among northern Nyamwezi and neighbouring Sukuma villagers in the early 1980s as a response to perceived high levels of robbery - especially cattle theft - and, in some areas, witchcraft. They appear to have developed spontaneously as a genuinely grass roots local initiative in a few communities near the borders of three adjoining administrative Districts - Kahama, Nzega and Shinyanga. The movement mushroomed very rapidly
from village to village throughout the region. Local leaders were invited by the members of nearby communities to come and help establish similar groups.

Each village group has its own body of officers. These are led by a chief (ntemi) supported by a second in command (ntwale) who are often diviners and medicinal experts. Below them there were several makamanda (cf. English 'commander') and a few other named officers including a secretary (katibu) whose job is to keep records of proceedings and look after subscriptions. Ordinary members, and especially younger ones, are simply known as 'askari', the Swahili term for soldiers or other armed staff. Although there was initially a women's wing in some communities, the movement was predominantly if not wholly a male one by the early 1990s. Each member has a bow and arrows and a gourd stem whistle to be blown only in emergencies. When a theft has been committed, a hue and cry is raised and the thieves are to be followed by the young men of the village concerned. The whistles would alert neighbouring villages who then forewarn others in the same way to look out for and try to intercept the criminals.

In my first paper on the movement (1987) I noted that this spontaneous development did not appear to be mirrored in some other areas of Tanzania such as that of the Kuria in Tarime District, despite the reported presence there of a great deal of cattle theft. I noted that, despite some official encouragement to adopt Sungusungu forms, Kuria villagers at that time appear to have done no more than sporadically take the law into their own hands when police action against rustlers had proved ineffective. My own response was to suggest that such official encouragement could well have been off-putting and to note that alternative local arrangements might possibly
have been available. I also set out some of the features of Nyamwezi and Sukuma social structure which seemed highly favourable to the development of Sungusungu village vigilantism in that area, and I shall return to these shortly. Meanwhile, Sungusungu groups were in fact eventually established in the 1990s both among the Tanzanian and the Kenyan Kuria and a substantial literature is available about them (cf. Fleisher, Heald loc.cit.). Although this literature does not explicitly pick up my arguments about the favourable local conditions for Sungusungu's emergence among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma, it does provide extremely valuable insight into the contrastingly less favourable environment that indigenous Kuria society appears to have offered for such a development.

During my first Nyamwezi fieldwork, I was much struck especially in the northern part of the area, by what I referred to as 'neighbourhood organization' (cf. Abrahams, 1965, 1967a). My undergraduate studies had emphasised the often critical importance of lineage and other forms of kinship in the constitution of local African communities, and it came as a surprise, despite earlier work by Wilson (1951) and Beattie (1957), to find that Nyamwezi villages could not properly be described as kinship units. As I documented at the time, neighbourhood was one of several main structural and organizational sub-systems of Nyamwezi society, along with chiefship, kinship and affinity, domestic grouping and a variety of voluntary associations including so-called secret societies.8

Villagers collaborated in their capacity as neighbours in a wide range of social and economic activities including agricultural work, housebuilding, specific roles in marriages and funerals, and - mainly in the north - a system
of neighbourhood courts dealing with a variety of offences that included the dereliction of these neighbourly duties, verbal abuse, ritual mistakes, and failures to pay the fines imposed for previous misdemeanours. Importantly too in this context, although villages recognised the independent status of each other’s courts, they also acknowledged a clear responsibility to deal with relevant offences committed by their members in other villages. All this was much the same among the neighbouring and closely related Sukuma people. As I noted in 1987 (cf. also 1989), the presence of such groupings and the sometimes uneasy relations between them and the State in one form or another appears to have been a major persistent feature of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma political scene. It can be viewed as part of a continuously monitored and negotiated equilibrium between public service and authority, emanating from the 'centre', and freedom and authority at local level, and the Nyamwezi and Sukuma polity has in this sense been persistently a 'dual' one. At the same time the chiefdom system itself predicated a universalist idea of citizenship over and above ethnic, kinship and other sectional divisions, and it remained a key feature of the political landscape until its constitutional downgrading after Independence.9

In addition, the associations I have mentioned deserve some consideration here. They included dance societies, cultivation teams, spirit possession and other ritual associations, hunting groups, and threshing teams. Some of these, such as the Swezi spirit possession associations, were part of a much wider network of such groups stemming ultimately from the interlacustrine area to the north and east, but the active groups, though not simply village-based, were typically local and relatively small in scale and not
subject to higher administrative authority. They were not part of the formal chiefship system, though chiefs often felt it politic to become members of some of them, and their relation to kinship was typically one of complementarity rather than conflict, though potential for the latter is sometimes highlighted in their rituals of initiation.

Along with village neighbourhood organization itself, involvement in such groupings has provided a continuous template and source of practical experience for villagers in the area in the organisation of their own affairs. Most of the groups had similar internal structures, largely drawing their original inspiration for these from the chiefdom model, with its chiefs, headmen, secretaries and messengers, as Sungusungu also did when it was started.\textsuperscript{10}

Overall, it has not seemed too surprising that groups like Sungusungu should emerge in response to rising crime in such an area where a sense of public order and responsibility (as opposed to private, sectional or segmentary interests) is well developed, and where much of the groups' basic organisation and structure follows templates provided by previously existing collaborative local groups which 'ordinary' villagers have long experience of running for themselves.

The situation that prevailed among the Kuria seems rather different, and a key issue that emerges from both Heald's and Fleisher's studies is the inhibiting influence exercised by the sectional activities of 'clans' and lineages which provide a basic framework for local organization.\textsuperscript{11}

Heald describes how Sungusungu among the Kenyan Kuria has not sprung 'naturally' there. She notes that the development involved a 'decisive
shift in .... the 'moral economy' of the area', and she tells us it 'did not emerge spontaneously, out of a Durkheimian uprising of the collective conscience, but was a conscious act of design' (2007, p. 184, 189). Its beginnings and its history more generally both among the Kenyan and Tanzanian Kuria have depended on an alliance between its local organizers and the administrative wing of central government. This alliance was necessary to overcome indigenous problems in the local communities and also opposition and harassment from the police and the judiciary. As Heald points out, and I and Bukurura (1993) have documented, there was also 'central government' support for Sungusungu in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma area in the face of comparable hostility. However, this support largely came from influential Party ideologists including Nyerere himself, and the main division involved was between such leaders and the bureaucracy more generally. Beyond this, the situation in the two areas was markedly different. Nyamwezi and Sukuma Sungusungu did emerge more or less spontaneously and enjoyed very high levels of local support. The best that central government and bureaucratic opponents of the movement could try to do was to claim it, rather lamely, as part of 'the Party', and to try to 'hijack' it for a variety of largely urban projects.

Among the Kuria, a serious part of the uphill struggles of the movement was that cattle raiding was an endemic feature of life at the local level, and that raiders often apparently operated in consort with the police and the judiciary themselves. This appears to have been less true of Nyamwezi and Sukuma area, although police inefficiency, partly though not wholly through corruption, was a common source of dissatisfaction there as elsewhere. It is important, however not to see the endemically high rates of cattle-raiding and
other predatory crime, and the problems of dealing with them, among the Kuria as simply a statistical phenomenon. A crucial concomitant was clearly the influential presence in the area of competing clans. As Fleisher (2000a and b) has shown for Tanzanian Kuria, this sometimes worked in surprising ways, but the key factor in the present context was a deeply engrained particularistic tendency to see stealing cows from other clans in a seriously contrasting light to stealing from one's own. Similarly, Heald (2007) also tells how lineage interests constituted a continuing source of sectional division in the Kenyan case that she analyses. Lineages held both long-standing and more recent grudges against each other, and there was suspicion, despite the apparent openness of proceedings, that some members of different lineages represented in the recently established committee of the local iritongo (wider socio-political community) were secretly providing help to accused kinsmen.12 One can readily understand how such endemic attitudes and structures might hinder the indigenous development of a more universalistic ethic of pursuing Kuria-wide ordered relations, and the fact that Central Government representatives were key elements in the eventual establishment of Sungusungu in both Kenya and Tanzania is of course consistent with this. So too is the background information that Heald provides on the local leaders of the Kenyan group whom she describes as 'new men'. She notes that the founding prime mover and four others of the first officers of the group had histories of previous professional or public sector employment, as had some of the rank and file members. This is in sharp contrast to the Nyamwezi and Sukuma situation where the movement began spontaneously in out of the way, and relatively 'traditional' communities, and where - as far as I can judge
such past experience of state and parastatal employment among leaders figured far less prominently.

This is not to say, however, that indigenous structures that cross-cut clan and lineage loyalties were altogether absent from Kuria society. Here I have particularly in mind the recognition of a wider community (iritongo) and the age-group system, which also seems to have played a role, though not a wholly positive one in the new development. At first, elements of traditional age-set organization were exploited in enforcing attendance at meetings and the payment of fines for non-attendance. Later, however, when the age-sets started to use such fines for their own rather than wider community purposes, Heald (2007, p. 191) comments that it was decided by the iritongo committee that their power 'had to be broken', and their formal role in the organization was abolished. Meanwhile, the previously relatively muted power of the iritongo itself was strengthened and developed to form the basis of the new organization as lineage and age-set power were diminished.

**Old debates and modern settings**

I hope this brief exploration of local differences will encourage others to attempt more and, hopefully, better comparative analyses along broadly similar lines. I must confess, having begun my anthropological career roughly fifty years ago and having seen so many theoretical fashions come (and sometimes go), that I find a modicum of pleasant irony in the idea that something not too far away from Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's well-worn distinction between centralised and segmentary structures in *African Political Systems* (1940) (see footnote 11) may still have something useful to tell us
about contemporary changes in modern States. At the same time, however, some of the (almost equally long-standing) riders and criticisms of their model are also important if we wish to progress further.

One may usefully remember here both Southall's (1956) point that there are 'stations' in between these polar types and Leach's (1954) comparable arguments that such systems may be in an unstable equilibrium and that indigenous peoples by no means always believe that they are living in the best of all possible structural worlds. More directly pertinent is Southall's claim that peoples like the Lendu and Okebu were prepared to forego their segmentary freedoms in favour of acceptance of chiefly Alur rule partly because of the escape which impartial judicial authority offered them from constant oppositional friction. Similarly the Tiv are said by Bohannan (1957) to have 'welcomed' the courts of the colonial era despite their deeply entrenched segmentary lineage organization, because they appreciated the possibilities of peaceful settlement of disputes that they offered. Of course, Bohannan also stressed that one must be careful not to miss the distinctive nuances of local attitudes and actions which belied any simplistic idea of a Tiv conversion to western notions of authority and justice.13

I consider that such material can throw further light on the Kuria scene and, perhaps, on the development of vigilante activity more generally. The segmentary tendencies in Kuria society appears to have been resistant to the emergence of community-wide vigilantism, but possible structural bases on which to build such a development were not wholly lacking there. Moreover, change has proved possible when sufficient pressure for it has arisen, even if its future is precarious. At the same time, I am naturally interested to see that
there as in the Tiv, Alur and many other cases, issues of order - which for me, as I have said, lie at the heart of vigilantism - have been the main engine of such change.

I hope that this makes sense to the very able younger anthropologists whose work provides the main substance of this book. It has been a privilege to meet and work with them, as with those in the Pratten and Sen conference, and they leave me with confidence that the study of vigilantism in Africa and elsewhere, along with social anthropology more generally, is in safe hands.


2 Some valuable early work was also carried out by political scientists and sociologists such Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1976) and Gitlitz and Rojas (1983).

3 For further detailed references see Brown (1975) and Abrahams (1998).

4 I refer here to the views he sets out in his 1953 paper. Of course, a scholar's perceptions on such issues are liable to change in the course of a long career, and it is interesting that, with possibly playful hyperbole, he is quite dismissive of 'comparative anthropology' in a 1986 interview with the Comaroffs. "JC: Does that mean a comparative anthropology is impossible? IS: Unless you go to the extent of eliminating everything but the lowest common denominators- and then you miss everything worthwhile, don't you?" (J. and J. Comaroff, I. Schapera 1986, 562)". It will, I hope, be clear from my discussion that my own preference is to seek a viable middle way between undue abstraction on the one hand and ideographic excess on the other.

5 Schapera does not explicitly make this latter point in the paper in question, but he touches on it, not surprisingly, in a number of his other works (1943, 1962).

6 Cf. Abrahams (1987) and Bukurura (1994). As I noted in 1987, it is probably significant that these communities were situated in a cattle-rich zone well away from District Headquarters.

7 Bukurura (1994a). Bukurura (1994b) also documents ways in which the movement became supportive of men's rights over women.

8 The label 'secret society' can be slightly misleading. The societies in question had their ritual secrets which were carefully guarded, but their existence and the identity of their members were generally common knowledge.
While differing from a bureaucratic model in its paternalistic idiom, the universalistic nature of chiefdom citizenship in the area was clearly marked. Its nature is examined in detail in Abrahams (1967, 1981) and in Cory (1953, 1955). A key feature in the present context was the recognition that all subjects of a chief should be equally entitled to justice from his court and were entitled to the use of land for their subsistence needs. The chief, through his ancestors, was also the main source of the chiefdom's (and its citizens) well being, e.g. with regard to necessary rainfall, and it is said that, in a drought, a chief might be beaten in the past until he wept in order to bring rain through his tears. Much of this was well summed up in the customary admonitions to a chief upon his installation where he was told that he had no father or mother; all even these were his children. He should not hesitate to share food with any of his subjects. He should be just in court, neither favouring the rich nor maltreating the poor. The prosperity of the land was in his hands...He should be ever mindful of his subjects and respect them.

Such use of a 'chiefdom model' led some Government officials to fear that Sungusungu was an attempt to regenerate traditional chiefship in the area. This was a serious misunderstanding of the historical background to such groups and the relation of their antecedents to chiefship (Abrahams 1987, 1989).

For convenience, I use 'clan' here following Fleisher's and Heald's usage. Dr Malcolm Ruel, who also knows the area well, informs me that he prefers to use the term 'province' for the Kuria units (ebiaro sing. ekiaro) concerned. He agrees, however, that there are also lineages, while at the same time noting that they do not exhibit the classic patterns of systematic internal segmentation found among the Tallensi or Tiv. My own use of the term segmentary here refers primarily to the sectionalism vis-a-vis each other that the groups in question exhibit.

The term iritongo is not easy to translate as its reference varies contextually. As Ruel (1962) points out, it relates to a variety of aspects of community within the larger Kuria territorial ebiaro subdivisions.

It is perhaps worth noting that early acrimonious attacks on Bohannan (cf.Gluckman, 1965, 209-12) for excessive emphasis on the special nature of the Tiv situation, might readily have been avoided if both sides had clearly recognised and stated that adult Tiv lived in, and had been socialised into, a segmentary society, which became encapsulated in a colonial state that they both resisted and in some ways found attractive.

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