

Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe

Terence Ranger, October 2003

Introduction

When I retired from my Oxford Chair in 1997 I went to the University of Zimbabwe for four years as a Visiting Professor. In the first year I was asked to second mark final examination papers in African Historiography and in the modern history of Zimbabwe. It was a chastening and illuminating experience. In the historiography paper every student denounced 'nationalist historiography' – history in the service of nationalism – and instanced me as its prime practitioner. Fortunately, they all said, the sun of political economy had risen and made the past scientifically clear. In the modern Zimbabwe history paper, however, students without exception wrote intensely nationalistic answers with barely a trace of political economy.

In the next three years I was myself generously allocated by the History Department the task of teaching African historiography and the modern history of Zimbabwe. I tried to complicate things in both courses. In the historiography course I tried to explain that political economy in its turn had come under very heavy criticism and the students and I struggled with post-modernity and post-coloniality. I also tried to explain the difference between writing 'nationalist historiography' and the 'history of nationalism'. In my own case, I maintained, my first two books about Zimbabwe – *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* and *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* – had been 'nationalist historiography' in the sense that they attempted to trace the roots of nationalism. They were historicist in so far as they presented narratives leading to its triumphant emergence. But my more recent books, particularly those on Matabeleland, had been histories of nationalism as well as histories of religion and landscape and violence. Nationalism as a movement, or set of movements, and as an ideology, remains central to contemporary Zimbabwe and still requires a great deal of rigorous historical questioning.¹

¹ *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7. A Study in African Resistance*, HEB, London, 1967; *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia, 1898-1930*, HEB, London, 1970; *Voices From the Rocks. Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*. James Currey, Oxford, 1999; with Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, *Violence and Memory. One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, James Currey, Oxford, 2000. In August 2003 University of Zimbabwe Publications issued Terence Ranger, ed., *Nationalism, Democracy and Human Rights*, a set of essays exploring the

When it came to teaching the modern history of Zimbabwe, therefore, I tried to complicate things by asking a series of questions which opened up the apparently closed issues in the ZANU/PF narrative of the past. I tried to show that Rhodesian colonialism had been more various – and often more internally contradictory – than the nationalist narrative allowed.² I drew upon the work of Brian Raftopolous to explore the tensions between nationalism and trade unionism. I sought to re-open many of the 'contradictions' within liberation history – the so-called Nhari rising, the assassination of Herbert Chitepo, etc. I argued that Robert Mugabe's dominance of ZANU/PF, complete though it has seemed since 1980, could not be dated back earlier than 1977. I spent a good deal of lecture time on the events in Matabeleland in the 1980s – on which I had been researching and writing. More generally I explored the many and varied sources of the authoritarianism of the nationalist state in post-independence Zimbabwe. In seminar presentations I raised questions about topics outside conventional political history – on landscape and religion and urban culture.

Meanwhile, as I was exploring with the students the history of nationalism and proposing other topics of study, I was enormously impressed with the vitality of historians, economic historians and archaeologists at the University of Zimbabwe. A generation of scholars had arisen which did not envy their fellows who had gone into business or politics. They wanted nothing more than to be successful researchers and publishers, respected by their peers and by Africanists internationally. These young Zimbabwean scholars were able to go beyond the agendas of nationalism. The archaeologist, Innocent Pikarayi, for example, in his splendid *The Zimbabwe Culture. Origins and Decline in Southern Zambezi States*,³ declared that there was now no need to combat colonial myths about Great Zimbabwe or to write of African 'empires' where none had existed. The time had come to ask new questions about environment and landscape and symbol.⁴ A new school of Zimbabwean urban historians was emerging.⁵ One of them, Ennie Chipembere, took the complexities and contradictions of white Rhodesian

authoritarian turn of nationalism in Zimbabwe and very much 'history of nationalism' rather than 'nationalist historiography'.

² Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe. Pre-colonial and Colonial Legacies*, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 2001, explores the complex colonial inheritance.

³ Altamira, Oxford, 2001.

⁴ A collection representative of the new Zimbabwean archaeology is G.Pwiti, ed., *Caves, Monuments and Texts*, Uppsala, 1997.

⁵ Two urban history workshops have recently taken place at the University of Zimbabwe. At each some ten young Zimbabweans presented papers.

politics seriously for the first time since 1980.⁶ Gerald Mazarire, given the responsibility to develop oral history after the death of Professor David Beach, argued that the political focus on empires, states and chieftancies had distorted interpretation of oral tradition and suggested instead an approach based on historical geography.⁷ Sabelo Ndlovu began to apply Gramscian theories of hegemony to the Ndebele State; Enocent Msindo took up issues of ethnicity and particularly of Kalanga identity.⁸

Senior scholars, like Professor Alois Mlambo and Professor Brian Raftopolous, gave an intellectual lead through their own research and writings, particularly through their explorations of urban and labour history and of political economy. The University of Zimbabwe has some twenty scholarly manuscripts, including an important collection on Zimbabwean political economy, ready for publication. When I made my second retirement in June 2001 a research seminar was organised as a farewell gift at which some thirty scholarly papers were presented by historians, archaeologists, students of religion, members of the departments of literature and languages.

So when I came to reflect on my return to the University of Zimbabwe thirty five years after I had first taught there it seemed to me that if one of my hopes in the early 1960s had been dashed, the other had been exceeded. The emancipatory potential of Zimbabwean nationalism, in which I had so confidently believed, had not been fulfilled. But I could not have foreseen in 1963, when I was removed from Rhodesia and from the University College, a future in which there would be over ten thousand African students at the University of Zimbabwe, all with high A level entry qualifications, and in which research and scholarship would be so thriving. As I thought that I might perhaps venture upon an academic autobiography it seemed to me that I would not locate the golden age of African historiography in the past, as other pioneers have done. For me it seemed that the golden age was here and now, at the University of Zimbabwe in the opening years of the twenty-first century.

⁶ Ennie Chipembere, 'Colonial Policy and Africans in Urban Areas – with special focus on housing, Salisbury, 1939-1964', M.Phil.thesis in Economic History, July 2002. Ms Chipembere is developing this draft into a doctoral thesis.

⁷ Gerald Mazarire, 'Changing Landscape and Oral Memory in South-Central Zimbabwe: Towards a Historical Geography of Chishanga, c.1850-1990', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29,3., September 2003. See also for a constructive criticism of 'political' oral historiography, I.Pikarayi, 'David Beach, Shona History and the Archaeology of Zimbabwe', *Zambezia*, xxvi,ii, 1999.

⁸ Sabelo Ndlovu, 'The Dynamics of Democracy and Human Rights among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe, 1818-1934', doctoral thesis presented to the University of Zimbabwe, September 2003. Enocent Msindo is registered for a doctorate at the University of Cambridge.

When I came to deliver my valedictory lecture at the University of Zimbabwe on 31 May 2001 under the title 'History Matters', I proclaimed the potential of this emerging Zimbabwean scholarship. I also located two circumstances under which historical scholarship was crucially important. The first – which I had myself encountered in Rhodesia in the 1950s and 60s and in Matabeleland in the 80s and 90s – was when people had been denied a history. But you could have too much history as well as too little. You could have too much history if a single, narrow historical narrative gained a monopoly and was endlessly repeated. In Rhodesia in the 1950s and in Matabeleland in the 1990s it had been necessary to remedy a deficiency. Now it had become necessary to complicate oversimplifications; to offer a plural history. Academic history was in difficulty in South Africa, I said, because it did not seem important enough. In Zimbabwe, by contrast, history seemed enormously important. The question was – which history for what Zimbabwe.⁹

The Emergence of Patriotic History

It is only just over two years since I gave my Zimbabwean valedictory lecture but things have changed a great deal in that brief time. I have come to realise that it was foolish for me to separate the growth of nationalist authoritarianism from the growth of historical scholarship at the University of Zimbabwe and to deplore one and celebrate the other as though they could be disconnected. The University of Zimbabwe today is very different even from the University of Zimbabwe two years ago. It has been torn apart by student and faculty strikes; by police repression; by the collapse of funding. Many of the young historians I celebrated in my valedictory lecture are no longer at the University of Zimbabwe and some of them not in Zimbabwe at all. They remain determined to research and write but they will no longer do so as a collectivity. The History Department cannot this year offer an MA course. Some of the senior academics, whose example has been so important, have left or are leaving for universities elsewhere. Much of this is the result of Zimbabwe's dire economic crisis and affects academics in all subjects. But there is a particular challenge for academic historians.

⁹ My Zimbabwean colleague, Josephine Nhongo Simbanegavi, author of *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle*, Weaver, Harare, 2000, and now researching on 'transnational women' and 'nationalist men', is currently spending her sabbatical at the University of Lesotho. She arrived there to find that the government of Lesotho had suspended all grants to Humanities students on the grounds that their subjects were useless. Dr Nhongo had begun to campaign with the slogan 'History Matters'. The Britain Zimbabwe Research Days on June 12 and 13 2004 at St Antony's College, Oxford, are to be on the topic 'Which History for What Zimbabwe?'

There has arisen a new variety of historiography which I did not mention in my valedictory lecture. This goes under the name of 'patriotic history'. It is different from and more narrow than the old nationalist historiography, which celebrated aspiration and modernisation as well as resistance. It resents the 'disloyal' questions raised by historians of nationalism. It regards as irrelevant any history which is not political. And it is explicitly antagonistic to academic historiography. 'The mistake the ruling party made', says Sikhumbizo Ndiweni, ZAN/PF Information and Publicity Secretary for Bulawayo, 'was to allow colleges and universities to be turned into anti-Government mentality factories'.¹⁰ Out in the ZANU/PF countryside university history has become deeply suspect.¹¹

I first became aware of the full force of 'Patriotic history' when I returned to Zimbabwe for the six weeks running up to the presidential election of February 2002. In a personal report on that election I wrote that:

I want to begin discussing the elections by talking about history. You will say that this is because I am a historian. But I don't think anyone could fail to notice how central to ZANU/PF's campaign was a particular version of history. I spent four days watching Zimbabwe television which presented nothing but one 'historical' programme after another'; the government press – the *Herald* and the *Chronicle* – ran innumerable historical articles ... Television and newspapers insisted on an increasingly simple and monolithic history ... Television constantly repeated documentaries about the guerrilla war and about colonial brutalities ... The *Herald* and the *Sunday Mail* regularly carried articles on slavery, the partition, colonial exploitation and the liberation struggle. I recognised the outlines of many of my own books but boiled down in the service of ZANU/PF.¹²

¹⁰ *Chronicle*, 26 April 2001.

¹¹ One of my history students at the University of Zimbabwe went to teach at a secondary school in Matabeleland. He found there was no history taught there and was tasked instead with teaching Business Studies. Then, however, the Minister of Education decreed that history must be taught in every school. But my student found this far from an advantage. His headmaster told him that in order not to attract the hostile attention of the war veterans he must stick very closely to the official line 'Whatever you do don't tell them any of the things you were taught at the university'. He told me later that his pupils regarded history lessons as mere propaganda but they loved business studies where 'you can say anything'..

¹² Terence Ranger, 'The Zimbabwe Elections: A personal experience', *Transformation*, July 2002.p.60.

This condensed resistance history could be communicated at various levels, from the relatively sophisticated to the crudely racist. The essential message was spelt out by Godfrey Chikowore in an article in the *Herald* of 16 February 2002 entitled 'Defending our Heritage. Armed Struggle should serve as Guiding Spirit'. Each presidential candidate, said Chikowore, 'should produce manifestos which spell out clearly that they are going to uphold Zimbabwean values and heritage and restore a sense of patriotism among Zimbabweans':

Zimbabwe is the product of a bitter and protracted armed struggle. That armed struggle should serve as the guiding spirit through the presidential elections and even beyond. The right to choose a president of one's own choice should not be considered as a mere exercise of a democratic right. It is the advancement of a historical mission of liberating Zimbabwe from the clutches of neo-colonialism. Any other wild illusion about it constitutes a classic example of self-betrayal and self-condemnation to the ranks of perpetual servitude. The stampede for democracy should not undermine the gains of the liberation war.

Meanwhile in August 2001 the Zimbabwe government had instituted youth militia camps which were intended to establish the basis of a compulsory National Service scheme. There were many statements that the main function of these camps was to teach 'patriotic history'. Not only had universities and colleges become 'anti-Government mentality factories', but parents and teachers generally had failed to pass on the inspiration of the liberation struggle. Now, therefore, the revolutionary spirit would skip a generation. As the *Herald* reported on 28 January 2002: 'The Government will soon make youth training compulsory for all school leavers to instil unbiased history of Zimbabwe.' The youth were recruited as warriors into the 'third chimurenga' – the first chimurenga having been the 1896-7 uprisings and the second having been the guerrilla war of the 1970s. They became a militia available to discipline their own parents; to attack MDC supporters; and to intimidate teachers and other educated civil servants in the rural areas.

Teaching in the youth camps was crudely rudimentary. As a recent report on youth militia training by the Solidarity Peace Trust explains:

there is overwhelming evidence that the youth militia camps are aimed at forcing on all school leavers a ZANU/PF view

of Zimbabwean history and the present. All training materials in the camps have, from inception, consisted exclusively of ZANU/PF campaign materials and political speeches. This material is crudely racist and vilifies the major opposition party in the country ... The propaganda in the training camps appears to be crude in the extreme. One defected youth reported how war veterans told trainees that if anyone voted for the MDC, then the whites would take over the country again. They were also told that the whites used to kill black people in the 1970s by pouring boiling beer onto them, and this would happen again if the MDC won the election. A youth militia history manual called 'Inside the Third Chimurenga' gives an idea of the type of 'patriotism' that is instilled in the camps. The manual is historically simplistic and racist and glorifies recent ZANU-PF National Heroes along with the land resettlement programme. It consists entirely of speeches made by President Robert Mugabe since 2000, among them his addresses to ZANU-PF party congresses, his speech after the 2000 election result, and funeral orations for deceased ZANU-PF heroes ... The MDC is said to be driven by 'the repulsive ideology of return to white settler rule' ... According to youths trained in the camps ... this was the sole source of written information on Zimbabwean history used in the training process.¹³

While at this crude level the MDC was simply being demonised in the run-up to the elections – as it has been since – Chikowore was using more sophisticated arguments in his *Herald* article. While Mugabe drew deeply upon the revolutionary past, the MDC, he said, had abolished history, proclaiming its irrelevance in an 'age of globalisation'. They merely promised prosperity and were prepared to 'reverse' Zimbabwe's history in order to achieve it, even if this meant 'turning Zimbabwe into a British and American overseas territory'. 'The Zimbabwean public has to

¹³ Solidarity Peace Trust, 'National Youth Service Training. "Shaping Youths in a Truly Zimbabwean manner". An overview of youth militia training and activities in Zimbabwe', 5 September 2003. The Solidarity Peace Trust was established in 2003 and consists of church leaders in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Its report on the militias is endorsed by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, the Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference, the Ecumenical Support Services and other organisations. The report does not focus on 'patriotic history', Its main purpose is to show that 'the reality is a paramilitary training programme for Zimbabwe's youth with the clear aim of inculcating blatantly anti-democratic, racist and xenophobic attitudes. The youth militias so created are used as instruments of the ruling party to maintain their hold on power by whatever means necessary, including torture, rape, murder and arson.' But 'patriotic history' is important to the church leaders because they believe that youth can only behave in this way once they have been 'thoroughly brain-washed'.

be assured', wrote Chikowore, 'that this group has no history that could logically confirm its credibility for the Presidential crown.'¹⁴

The election, therefore, was history versus 'the end of history'. Tsvangarai was regularly mocked, not only for having failed to take part in the guerrilla war but also for having failed to understand history, which amounted to more or less the same thing. 'The depth of his knowledge of our history is so shallow that it is frightening', wrote Olley Maruma.¹⁵

This unprecedented historiographical barrage in the weeks before the presidential elections produced some cries of protest. The most eloquent and deeply felt came from Innocent Chifamba Sithole, writing in the *Financial Gazette* for February 14 to 20 2001. Sithole protested against 'narrowly defined definitions of Zimbabwean nationalism':

Big brother has wrenched open the archives [wrote Sithole about the nightly televised scenes of war-time atrocity] and history cringes into the vulnerable system of mere signs and symbols of ink on paper, of recorded image and sound on films. The nation is daily bombarded with grim images of grotesquely mutilated and decomposing black bodies from the liberation war, falling like boulders from the cliff of the television screen. [It is] an attempt to edit the nation's collective memory in order to rewrite the history of the struggle for independence ... By virtue of being the government of the day ZANU/PF has access to and control over the recorded signs and symbols that denote and connote our history as a nation ... Central to ZANU/PF's election campaign is the political commodification of the legacy of the liberation war. Amid the choking fumes of aggressive political campaigns, history lets out a piercing wail as Big Brother relentlessly attempts to weave past, present and future into his person.¹⁶

The Authors of Patriotic History: Veterans, Robert Mugabe and Tafataona Mahoso

The history instructors in the youth militia camps are war veterans and it has been suggested that 'patriotic history', with its focus on violent

¹⁴ *Herald*, 16 February 2001.

¹⁵ *Herald*, 12 February 2001. Maruma was attacking Tsvangarai for saying that ZANU/PF wanted to turn Zimbabweans into peasants. '70 per cent of the black people are already peasants'. They were made so by the colonial regime. ZANU/PF aimed to make them 'independent agricultural producers'.

¹⁶ Many of the films being shown on ZTV had been made by the Rhodesian army for a 'shock and awe' campaign in the 1970s.

resistance, is the result of the re-emergence of the ex-guerrillas at the centre of Zimbabwean politics. Thus Norma Kriger writes, in her new book on war veterans, that the recent prominence of the ex-guerrillas is a return to the politics of immediate post-independence. The rhetoric of patriotic history displays 'the same dynamic that I have shown characterised the relationship between veterans and the ruling party in the context of working out the legacies of the [1980] peace settlement: often simultaneous conflict and collaboration as party and veterans manipulate one another, using violence and intimidation and a war discourse, to advance their respective agendas ... Contemporary politics in Zimbabwe recalls the early post-independence years.' Kriger finds that 'ZANU/PF and the war veterans have shown remarkably consistency in their power-seeking agendas, their appeals to the revolutionary liberation war, their use of violence and intimidation'.¹⁷

On the other hand Luise White, in her new book on 'texts and politics in Zimbabwe' notes that the 'patriotic history' of the early twenty-first century is different from the ZANU/PF rhetoric of the early 1980s.¹⁸ It is wider in some ways since the mobilised war veterans now include ex-ZIPRA guerrillas and even ex-dissidents, who in the 1980s were being hunted down by the Fifth Brigade. Joshua Nkomo, who fled for his life in the 1980s, is regularly celebrated on ZTV today as 'Father Zimbabwe'. It is narrower in other ways since hardly anything is now said about ZANU/PF's modernising, reconstructing and welfare agenda which was such a feature of the party's rhetoric in the 1980s. 'Patriotism' does not seem to include Socialism, for instance. But White also notes another major shift:

Zimbabwe has been given a new history in which it was a British colony until 1980; moreover the British still meddled, still broke promises and still tried to control the country. This rhetoric was constant in ZANU(PF), perfected by the often-used slogan 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony AGAIN'. This new colonial history sits awkwardly beside the history of settlers, dominion status, and the Rhodesia Front's renegade independence.¹⁹

¹⁷ Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe. Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987*, CUP, Cambridge, 2003, pp.191, 208.

¹⁸ A major difference, of course, is that the policy of Reconciliation in the early 1980s meant that the violence and brutality of the Rhodesian army was played down then while it is being played up now. In many ways the atmosphere of state media discourse in Zimbabwe today suggests that Zimbabwe is in the immediate aftermath of a liberation struggle rather than twenty three years away from it.

¹⁹ Luise White, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo*, Indiana UP, Bloomington, and Weaver, Harare, 2003, p.97.

White is right about the importance of this 'new colonial history' – during the presidential campaign it often seemed that Robert Mugabe was campaigning against the man he called 'Tony B-Liar' rather than against Tsvangarai. In speech after speech Mugabe barely mentioned Tsvangarai but hammered home the simple message that Zimbabwe was Zimbabwe, not Britain.

These changes – the inclusion of ZAPU and ZIPRA, the focus on Britain as colonial power – needed imagining and making. It is the ex-guerrillas who have been teaching 'patriotic history' to youth militias – and occasionally to headmasters and teachers brought into the camps for crash courses. So we need to examine how the war veterans have processed this new history. Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor have begun to do this by exploring the way in which ex ZIPRA guerrillas have remade their own very distinctive history, as it was defiantly expressed in the 1980s, so as to fit with the combined 'patriotic history' of today.²⁰ If there are gains to ZAPU pride now that Joshua Nkomo is safely installed in the national heroic pantheon,²¹ there are also losses to ZIPRA's own self-image of a uniquely disciplined and rational army. Their revolutionary history has now been combined with and made part of the once despised history of ZANLA indiscipline and adventurism. This redefinition has also set them against the majority of their own Sindebele people.²²

²⁰ Alexander and McGregor, 'Veterans. Violence and Nationalism in Zimbabwe', International Conference on Violence and Memory. Emory, September 2003.

²¹ The death and burial in Heroes Acre of Joshua Nkomo's widow, Mafuyana, has given a recent opportunity for the new patriotic rhetoric. The *Chronicle* of 21 July 2003 recorded that: 'The whole country (as one family) converged at the national shrine to pay their respects to their dear Mother of the Nation'. Like every other Zimbabwean she was 'a carrier of a unique culture, specific to the Zimbabwean society'; the 'consolatory speeches' at Heroes' Acre emphasised that 'naturally our destiny is different' from any other nation's. Mafuyana, though, had differed from all other Zimbabweans by bringing her role as an 'African mother' to a national height. Throughout the 1980s she had striven to bring about unity between ZAPU and ZANU/PF. Through her influence 'both parties acknowledged that Zimbabwe was a sovereign country which belonged primarily to our indigenous Zimbabweans. This experience reflected the deeply engraved morality of an accomplished motherhood by African standards in Mama Mafuyana which compelled her to reflect diplomatically beyond the family circles, in constructive national terms as well'. She represented 'the sacredness and mightiness of the Zimbabwean culture, which Zimbabweans first, with others to follow, have the right and privilege to develop.' Zimbabwean universities needed to teach students about her so as to develop 'well conceptualised educative materials on outstanding national personalities ... [to be] systematically developed in the curriculum in a bid to reinforce the question of national identity'.

²² In March 2002 I met in Bulawayo the ex-ZIPRA directors of the Mafela Trust, a body concerned to preserve and record ZIPRA's history. Their main concern was to make videos of ZIPRA's revolutionary role so that these could be shown on ZTV along with the videos of ZANLA forces.

There needs to be similar work on ZANLA veterans. But if the veterans are teaching history in the militia camps, their text book is a collection of Robert Mugabe's speeches, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*. I want here to explore Mugabe as historian.

What is fascinating is that in the last two or three years Mugabe has been celebrated primarily in this role. An outstanding example is the novelist, Alexander Kanengoni's, essay in the *Daily News* of 12 April 2003, 'One-hundred days with Robert Mugabe'. Kanengoni is an ex ZANLA guerrilla whose outstanding novels of the liberation war certainly have not celebrated Mugabe. His last novel did not mention Mugabe at all but ended with a ghostly pungwe at which the dead heroes, Chitepo and Takawira, mourned the beytatal of the revolution. Yet Kanengoni has emerged as an out-spoken advocate of the Third Chimurenga. In his 'One-hundred days' Kanengoni described how he had 'lived with Mugabe for over three months, eating from the same pot, perched on the top of the same hut to thatch it, slept in the same room at a remote base called Saguranca in central Mozambique in 1975, and the man left such a deep impression on my mind – nothing will erase it.'

Kanengoni describes how Mugabe arrived at 'the secluded Frelimo base' to find it in turmoil. The Frelimo base commander, Kanyawu, had received an instruction 'from above' to send all the ZANLA guerrillas 'back to Rhodesia because our colleagues in Zambia had killed Herbert Chitepo.' Mugabe asserted his authority and told the commander that 'we would rather die than give the Rhodesians the immeasurable pleasure of killing us'. Then he 'quickly organised political lessons for us that he personally conducted'.

And what were these political lessons at a time of acute crisis? Kanengoni tells us that they were about land and violence:

Mugabe took us through the lessons: the history of Zimbabwe ... and all through that rather academic process, there was not a single book, a single piece of paper, a single pen. What I found quite fascinating about him was how he had his facts at the tips of his fingers ... When I look at him now – 23 years later – the man has not changed because what he told us then, he is telling an entire nation now.²³

²³ In 1977 Robert Mugabe at last became the elected leader of ZANU. During that year the party periodical *Zimbabwe News* articulated his views. The July 1977 issue was devoted to 'ZANU and History'. Mugabe's own contribution argued that 'the spirit of ZANU' had been present throughout the

The greatest admirer of Mugabe as a historian – and his interpreter to the world – is Professor Tafataona Mahoso, now chairman of the Media Commission and a weekly columnist in the *Sunday Mail*.²⁴ In his column of 16 March 2003 Mahoso argued that the Mugabe demonised in the Western press was not the 79 year old President as an individual but the embodiment of pan-African spirit:

Mugabe is now every African who is opposed to the British and North American plunder and exploitation ... So, old Mugabe here is not the person of Robert Mugabe. Rather it is that powerful, elemental African memory going back to the first Nehanda and even to the ancient Egyptians and Ethiopians who are now reclaiming Africa in history as the cradle of humankind ... The Zimbabwe opposition and their British, European and North American sponsors have exposed themselves as forces opposed to Mugabe as Pan-African memory, Mugabe as the reclamer of African space, Mugabe as the African power of remembering the African legacy and African heritage which slavery, apartheid and imperialism thought they had dismembered for good ... It is not accidental that both the opposition to Mugabe and its sponsors sought to denigrate African liberation history as out-moded and undemocratic traditions.

The west stresses mechanical, even computerised, recall in the place of what Mary Daly calls 'deep ancestral memory'. In the place of original elemental memory which reconnects the once disconnected and liberates them, the west now prefers speed and efficiency which are often mistaken for information and knowledge. What the west takes for memory is mechanical recall, superficial regurgitation of formulaic catechisms which are taken out of context because they must be both uni-polar (centralised) and globalised – rule of law, transparency, free enterprise and human rights.

history of Zimbabwe, wherever and whenever there had been patriotic resistance to foreign intrusion. In that sense what Mugabe was writing then in Mozambique 'he is telling an entire nation now'.

²⁴ Mahoso also took part in the weekly 'National Ethos' programme on ZTV, described by unsympathetic commentators as 'a televised version of Mahoso's Sunday Mail articles', designed to 'propagate a primitive and exclusivist nationalism that clearly fails to seize the popular imagination'. In October 2002 ZTV's own monthly survey revealed that this was the least watched of all its programmes. *Independent*, 25 October 2002.

By contrast to this mechanical, artificial 'memory', Mugabe represents 'deep ancestral memory'. And this allows him to penetrate below the apparent surfaces of world affairs. Younger Zimbabweans do not associate Britain with colonial exploitation because Ian Smith was in revolt against the British crown and a British governor presided over Zimbabwean independence. Mugabe understands the underlying British responsibility for the loss of Zimbabwean land. Younger Zimbabweans accept Colin Powell's appointment as US Secretary of State as a sign of American pluralism and democracy. Mugabe knows that there have always been house-slaves complicit with the slave owners. So when Mugabe attacked Britain and the US at the Johannesburg earth summit on 25 February 2003,²⁵ Mahoso proclaimed in the *Sunday Mail* that the speech was an expression of deep ancestral memory and more important than any speech by Martin Luther King:

The earth cannot be saved without authentic life rituals. Such life rituals were impossible in the presence of two evil spirits whom most youngsters could neither identify nor recognise. The most aggressive demon was that of apartheid founder Cecil John Rhodes. It appeared in the most aggressive, photogenic, restless and boyish body of British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In place of Rhodes's vision of capturing and controlling Africa 'from Cape to Cairo' it now brought the new slogan of 'the conscience of the world' with Africa having been reduced to a mere 'scar' on that conscience.

The second demon, Mahoso continued, was that of 'the US founding slave-master, Thomas Jefferson'; of his half-caste bastards and Uncle Tom house slaves. Colin Powell was 'the evil spirit medium of Washington and Jefferson'. It took an elder, in touch with the ancestral spirits, to recognise these re-incarnated demons since only the elders 'possess the wisdom and memory deep and long enough to recognise the slave master in Colin Powell and the pirate invader in Tony Blair.'²⁶

Within Zimbabwe, 'patriotic history' has seemed indefensibly narrow, dividing the nation up into revolutionaries and sell-outs, in the spirit of Didymus Mutasa's remark that he wished that only the seven

²⁵ For a Zimbabwean report of his speech see the *Chronicle*, 26 February 2003.

²⁶ *Sunday Mail*, 8 September 2002. In practice it was not only the young who failed to perceive the connection between Tony Blair and Cecil Rhodes. As the local historian of Matabeleland, Pathisa Nyathi, remarked in the *Sunday Mirror* on 18 November 2002, 'my cousin out at Sankonyana does not even know there is a country somewhere known as Britain. The last white man he saw was a Rhodesian soldier fighting for freedom fighters.' Nyathi's cousin, in short, knows about Rhodes and Rhodesia rather than about Blair and Britain. Mugabe's speeches have been designed to remedy this ignorance.

million revolutionary Zimbabweans could remain, or of Robert Mugabe's demand at the 2003 Heroes' Days ceremony that the opposition must 'repent' and declare its commitment to the continuing revolution before any unity talks could begin.²⁷ Mahoso, however, portrays Zimbabwean patriotic history as an all-embracing pan-africanist ideology. He also takes care to do what Mugabe does not often bother with – namely to attack the propositions of what he calls 'bogus universalism'.²⁸ In reality, argues Mahoso, it is a-historicised globalised morality which is divisive and narrow.

In a series of *Sunday Mail* articles Mahoso has warned against 'the threat of false universalism'. In an article under that title on 26 May 2002 Mahoso took on the two major cultural institutions of Zimbabwean civil society, the Zimbabwe International Arts Festival and the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. What was missing from the Arts celebration was 'African culture as strategic unhu/ubuntu, African ethics.' The Best 100 African Books awards in Cape Town, that 'anti-African city', would become 'African culture without its soul'. Both events were manifestations of 'the problem of false universalism which in the context of imperialism, means the false liberalism of the white man which is used strategically, by arch-racists, as a Trojan horse against revolutionary ubuntu'. The inspiration of the 100 Best Books project was the historian, Ali Mazrui, whom Mahoso described as 'head of a US institution which generates deadly ideas, from an ubuntu point of view, concerning global culture.'²⁹ Analysing a typically paradoxical Mazrui lecture from a ZIBF publication, Mahoso finds it guilty of 'deletion' of the factors of imperialism and racism; of 'reductionism'; of 'false analogy'; and above all of 'false universalism' which adopts 'the white liberal view of the world as the only model of civilisation' and this dooms most of the world to poverty and impotence.

Having thus taken on the man often introduced at the Book Fair as 'Africa's leading historian', Mahoso went on in succeeding articles to demolish others pillars of Zimbabwean civil society. In one he attacked Zimbabwean churches for accepting neo-liberal and a-historical

²⁷ A powerful expression of this view is Caesar Zvayi, 'Opposition MDC must embrace national values', *Herald*, 2 October 2003. Zvayi cites Mugabe to ask the MDC: 'Are you a willing traitor and second executioner of these heroes, willing posthumous betrayer of their cause?'

²⁸ Mugabe did briefly address these in a passage of his Johannesburg speech. 'We get globally villagised under false economic pretences. We are cheated to believe that we shall all be equals in that village'. See also his speech to the Non Aligned Summit at the end of February 2003. *Chronicle*, 26 February 2003.

²⁹ Mahoso names Mazrui's institution as the Institute of Global Cultural Studies.

definitions of human rights³⁰ which had become, in his view, the ideology of the latest form of right-wing Christianity. In another he repudiated 'liberal' protests of press censorship and repression in Zimbabwe. These were based, he wrote, on narcissism:

The narcissist replaces the real world of history and society with what he/she thinks ... in contrast to the African who says 'I relate, therefore I am.' [There is] a compulsive desire to lie in order to protect the unipolar view of the world. History is treated either as useless or dangerous because it uncovers uncomfortable relationships of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and genocide. Yet we must always look at that history.³¹

Mahoso found on the part of the Zimbabwean opposition and its foreign sponsors 'a compulsive need to lie and to escape from history'.³² In this way he claims Mugabe and ZANU/PF as custodians of history and depicts the MDC as representing a-historical globalisation.

ZANU/PF's Ministerial Historians: Chigwedere and Mudenge

I remember being chided by Victoria Chitepo in 1980 for having helped to produce so many Zimbabwean historians when Zimbabwe needed men and women of a more practical bent. I jokingly replied that there were so many historians in the cabinet and in charge of public institutions that the new Zimbabwe was an experiment in rule by historiography. It is not a joke which seems so funny now, and some of those early historians are dead or gone. Some still remain, however, and two in particular have contributed to the current Zimbabwean debate about history. One is the Minister of Education, Aeneas Chigwedere. The other is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stan Mudenge.

Chigwedere is the author of several books on Zimbabwe's pre-colonial history, including the 1998 *The Roots of the Bantu*. As he says, in dedicating the book to me, he took History Honours in the early days

³⁰ 'Right-wingers seek to hijack churches', *Sunday Mail*, 15 December 2002. Mahoso complained that 'no African church or religious movement is described in our media as part of "civil society" ... unless it has adopted the views of its Western sponsors.'

³¹ *Sunday Mail*, 4 May 2003.

³² Mahoso includes bodies like the Zimbabwe Democracy Trust and the Zimbabwe Crisis Network among those who seek 'to escape from history' and describes their human rights protests to international bodies as a-historical appeals to bogus universalism.

of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.³³ *Roots of the Bantu* is an exercise in what Mahoso calls 'unhu/ubantu'. It begins with a dedication by Chigwedere:

If it be the will of the common ancestors of the Black African Community both at home base (Africa) and overseas, that ordained that I be their instrument for unravelling their history and culture in the interest of their progeny, I thank them for the energy, will-power and inspiration they infused into me.³⁴

Chigwedere's contribution to the current debate, however, has been rather different. In July 2001 he published *British Betrayal of the Africans. Land, Cattle and Human Rights. Case for Zimbabwe*.³⁵ Chigwedere effectively uses the 1919 Privy Council decision that the Crown owned all the land in Rhodesia by 'act of conquest' to demonstrate that Britain had always had primary responsibility for the alienation of African land. As one reviewer remarked, the book also reveals the trickery and violence of that 'devil', Cecil Rhodes:

Lobengula even wrote to Lord Knutsford, the Colonial Secretary. but it seems that his lordship was also in cahoots with Cecil Rhodes. As the story develops, it is amazing just how almost everyone involved in the story is in cahoots with the devil.³⁶

The oddity has been that Chigwedere's book has barely been noticed in Zimbabwe and is not to be found in bookshops. The *Herald* did not review it until 28 June 2003, though then it declared it a 'marvellous book' presenting readers with 'the true history of Zimbabwe highlighting the real facts as done by the British imperialists.' The reviewer explains:

It becomes obvious that to direct the fire against the local commercial white farmers is to direct the fire against the wrong enemy. The settler was only an agent. The proprietor and culprit was and still remains the British and their

³³ I reproduce the terms of the dedication here in the interests of showing the relation between the new patriotic history and earlier nationalist historiography. Chigwedere says that I inspired him to research through my 'own untiring work on behalf of both Zimbabwe and black Africa.'

³⁴ Mutapa Publishing House, Marondera, 1998.

³⁵ Mutapa Publishing House, Marondera, 2001.

³⁶ Ken Mufuka, 'Zanu PF's paranoia against whites explained', *The Standard*, 8 September 2002.

government ... This book is an asset for all Zimbabweans and to the future generations. ³⁷

The reviewer tells readers that the 'volume can be obtained from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. And it is in his role of Minister of Education that Chigwedere has done most to advance patriotic history and to combat 'bogus universalism'. Before Chigwedere became Minister of Education Unesco and Danida had collaborated with the Ministry to produce a series of textbooks on *Education for Human Rights and Democracy in Zimbabwe*. Several Zimbabwean teachers from Education Colleges were employed to write History text books for Forms 1 and 2 and for O level. Hundreds of thousands of these beautifully produced books were printed in 2000. They represented universalist history at its best, containing a great deal of comparative material on Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia; on slavery in Ancient Egypt and the Americas; on colonial repression and nationalist aspirations for liberty; on the slow emergence of international conventions on human rights.

Despite all the money and time spent on these texts. however, they remain in the warehouses, while patriotic history texts are being distributed to the schools. It is easy to see that Mahoso would detect 'bogus universalism' in these human rights text books. They stress the value of Commonwealth monitoring of Zimbabwean elections. They describe the rejection of the draft constitution in the February 2000 referendum as a 'triumph for democracy'. They also contain passages critical of traditional Zimbabwean society. The Forms 1 and 2 text says that 'the slave trade may not have affected the Zimbabwe community in ancient times but slavery did. At Great Zimbabwe chiefs were expected to bring enough people to build a portion of the wall. Although this was called persuasive force, in real terms it was slavery'. The section on minority rights describes the Kalanga, Shangaan, Tonga and Venda peoples of Zimbabwe as 'vulnerable, marginalised and discriminated'. There is a passage on sexual abuse of children in Zimbabwe, though the O level text remarks that 'abusing women is not a monopoly of Zimbabwe alone'.³⁸ These texts are not being distributed; Human Rights are not to be taught in Zimbabwean schools; but Chigwedere has instructed that history is to be taught everywhere.

Mudenge, who has a doctorate from SOAS, is a more sophisticated historian. While he was Zimbabwe's representative at the United Nations he wrote and published an excellent history of the Munhumutapa state

³⁷ Clemence Tshaya, 'Book Reveals imbalances created by British imperialism', *Herald*, 28 June 2003.

³⁸ I owe my sight of these texts to Mary Ndlovu.

between 1400 and 1902, which was very well received by professional historians and has become the standard work.³⁹ As Minister of Foreign Affairs, of course, Mudenge has been regularly involved in contemporary historical debate. Recently, however, he has drawn upon his historical data to paradoxical effect. Addressing senior army, air force and police officers in Harare, Mudenge told them that it did not matter that Zimbabwe had been suspended from the Commonwealth:

A nation must not only recall its glorious past but must also know its sad and humiliating history and draw lessons from it ... Zimbabwe was once a Portuguese colony before the British came, yet the majority of Zimbabweans are not aware of this part of the country's history ... Zimbabwe became a Portuguese colony in the 17th century after Munhumutapa Mavura Mhande, the then ruler of the country, signed a treaty of vassalage to the Portuguese crown.

What the *Herald* called a 'revelation' was likely, it said, 'to trigger debate on whether Zimbabwe should consider joining the community of Lusophone countries, a grouping of former Portuguese colonies, as a way of widening its areas of diplomatic participation'.⁴⁰

Patriotic History and the Pre-colonial Past

Mudenge was not only speaking as foreign affairs minister, longing to widen diplomatic participation. He also gave a message of warning to the MDC:

Both the sovereignty of the state and the institution of Mutapaship suffered a mortal blow from which they never really recovered. Depending on foreign influence to come to power has a costly price tag, often too dear for the nation, and sometimes even for the puppet.

And though patriotic history is so focussed on Rhodes and the British and the first Chimurenga of 1896 it does appeal also to an earlier Zimbabwean past. Perhaps the best example of this is the televised ceremony presided over by Robert Mugabe at which two halves of a long separate Zimbabwe bird were re-united, one half having been returned to Zimbabwe by the German government.

³⁹ S.I.G.Mudenge, *A Political History of Munhumutapa, c.1400-1902*, Zimbabwe Publishing House. Harare, 1988.

⁴⁰ *Herald*, 21 October 2003.

The 'multi-million dollar ceremony' aroused much criticism even in Zimbabwe. 'It was quite noble for the German government to return the Zimbabwe bird carving', wrote Fidelis Mashavakure to the *Standard* on 6 June 2003. 'Surely the bird is of some historical significance to present day Zimbabweans and generations to come'. Yet the government had 'over-dramatised' the event:

It was astonishing to see women religiously kneeling down in honour of a stone carving. It was even more astonishing to see the President lead the gathering in sloganeering over the carving. Does the carving belong to Zanu PF or Zimbabwe. The millions of dollars used for this event could have bought food for starving people .. State television and radio could have been used for covering reports on the concerns of the impoverished population.

But it was criticism in the South African press which outraged the Zimbabwean government. The *Sunday Times* in South Africa satirised the ceremony, saying that Mugabe had a 'bird in his head'. Outraged, the Zimbabwe Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, himself responsible for co-ordinating the patriotic history campaign on Zimbabwe's media, sent an official protest to the South African government. The re-uniting of the bird had been 'a historic moment in the reconstruction of the country's heritage' and for the ceremony to be 'ridiculed and insulted by a newspaper is mind-boggling'.⁴¹ Mahoso seized on the occasion:

The white racist columnist, Hogarth, wrote a column called 'Our Bob's got birds on the brain', which was a savage attack on the entire African process of 'remembering', that is the process of remobilising African memory by reconnecting symbols, communities, movements and people as the South's answer to Northern driven globalisation, reviving their memory of a world without apartheid.

The West feared this process, hence the destruction of Iraqi antiquities and 'spitting' on the Zimbabwe bird.⁴²

Joost Fontein's recent Edinburgh doctoral thesis, 'The Silence of Great Zimbabwe', offers a fascinating analysis of the current historiographical struggle over the monument. He argues that the African peoples

⁴¹ *The Sunday Mail*, 25 May 2003.

⁴² *Sunday Mail*, 1 June 2003.

who live around Great Zimbabwe are just as much excluded from it today as they were by Rhodesian curators. Today the monument is interpreted by elite nationalists and by academic archaeologists who jointly ignore the sacredness of Great Zimbabwe to the locals. Fontein describes how local spirit mediums, in alliance with ex-combatants, have constructed their own 'African memory'. Theirs, too, is a kind of patriotic history, and certainly a product of 'deep ancestral memory'. But they been given no role in the elaboration of the patriotic history of the ZANU/PF regime.⁴³

The ceremony of the re-uniting of the Zimbabwe bird, though it took place after Fontein completed his thesis, fits perfectly into his argument. The present academic curator of Great Zimbabwe, Dr Edward Matenga, is author of *The Soapstone Birds of Great Zimbabwe. Symbols of a Nation*. It was Matenga who publicised the existence of the lower half of a Zimbabwe bird in the Museum fur Volkerkunde in Berlin and who proclaimed: 'Zimbabwe has a plan to recover the specimen in Berlin and allow it to return home to roost!' Matenga's book has a foreword by Stan Mudenge, who hails it as a contribution to 'authentic national history'. The recent ceremony was a fulfilment of Matenga's agenda as well as of Mugabe's and Mudenge's.⁴⁴

There are other signs of tension between a local, radical, war-veterans' agenda and the agenda of state patriotic history. In early 2002, for example, war veterans in Matabeleland launched a campaign for the removal of Rhodes's grave from the Matopos. The veterans' leader, Andrew Ndlovu declared that 'we cannot find peace when we are keeping a white demon in our midst. It is the very core of our problems. His grave should be returned to the British'.⁴⁵ Ndlovu's demand seemed the logical conclusion of Mugabe's ancestral vision of Rhodes as a demonic spirit continuing to possess Tony Blair! And indeed this sort of patriotic demand is continuing to be made in the state press. On 29 October 2003, for example, Caesar Zvayi renewed the call for Rhodes to be removed:

The Matopo Hills, which today are a tourist attraction ... were a very sacred shrine in the pre-colonial halcyon days and believed to be the earthly residence of God and his high priests and priestesses ... This was the sacred Njelele, Matonjeni,

⁴³ Joost Fontein, 'The Silence of Great Zimbabwe: Contested Landscapes and the Power of Heritage', doctoral thesis, Edinburgh, October 2003.

⁴⁴ Edward Matenga, *The Soapstone Birds of Great Zimbabwe. Symbols of a Nation*, African Publishing Group., Harare, 1998.

⁴⁵ 'ZANU PF crusade threatens monuments', *Standard*, 28 April 2002. I quote and discuss this demand in 'Mugabe versus Rhodes: The Uses of Colonialism in Zimbabwe', international conference on Rhodes, His Networks and Their Legacies', St Antony's, Oxford, 1 December 2002.

Mabweadziva, Mwarindidzimu, which today has been desecrated as the burial place of a white bandit, who was rabidly racist ... Can the powers that be please do something about this sacrilege and mollify the spirits of the land.⁴⁶

Yet here arises one of the paradoxes of patriotic history. Mahoso is hostile both to the colonial legacy and to bogus universalism. But the one international agency he admires is UNESCO, remembering its attempts to create a new international information order and how these led to attacks on UNESCO by Britain and the United States. As Fontein shows, Zimbabwean archaeologists and oral historians have taken a leading role in the development of UNESCO's new doctrine of 'cultural landscape' as a key criteria for the declaration of World Heritage sites. And on 3 July 2003 the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO endorsed the Zimbabwe government's application and carried through the inscription of the Matopos Hills as a World Heritage site.⁴⁷ As the non-government Sunday paper, the *Standard*, tactlessly but triumphantly reported on 6 July: 'Matobo Hills, where Cecil John Rhodes is buried, have won UNESCO's World Heritage listing'. And indeed the listing does indeed mean that Rhodes's grave is safe.

Robert Mugabe's address on 29 October to the 14th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium of the International Council on Monument and Sites, meeting for the first time in Africa at the Victoria Falls, presented an altogether more sophisticated version of patriotic history and its relation to world heritage:

Zimbabwe was committed to preserving its heritage ... Zimbabweans had, through the agrarian reform programme, found joy because their greatest heritage – land – had been returned to them. 'Now that land has returned to the people, they were able once more, to enjoy the physical and spiritual communion that was once theirs. For it must be borne in mind that the non-physical or intangible heritage is an equally strong expression of a people, manifesting itself through oral traditions, language, social practices and traditional craftsmanship'. The objectives of ICOMOS were synonymous with Zimbabwe's philosophy. Cde Mugabe said Zimbabwe valued Heritage so much that even the graves of the country's

⁴⁶ 'Colonial Monuments a Shame to Pan-Africanism', *Herald*, 29 October 2003.

⁴⁷ The issue of cultural landscapes and world heritage with reference to the Matopos is discussed in Terence Ranger, *Voices From the Rocks*. Fontein's thesis contains a final chapter based on research at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

**colonialists such as Cecil John Rhodes were being preserved.
'We accept history as a reality'.⁴⁸**

Patriotic History and Academic History

Zimbabwean patriotic history, then, is a complex phenomenon. It ranges from the brutal over-simplifications of the militia camps, through presidential campaign speeches, through the work of ministerial historians, to the sophistications of Mahoso, and to addresses to world conservationists. It is equally variously propagated - in courses taught by war veterans in the camps, in collections of Mugabe's speeches, in Chigwedere's syllabi and textbooks in the schools, on state television and radio, and in the writings of Mahoso and others in the state-controlled press. As we have seen, it is proclaimed as a remedy to the failures of parents and teachers and especially of universities to instil the revolutionary spirit. As we have also seen, in moments like the Zimbabwe bird ceremony or the declaration of the Matopos as a World Heritage site patriotic history and academic archaeology fit together very well.

The academic custodianship of National Museums and Monuments seems assured. But what are the intentions of the various makers of patriotic history towards the lukewarm universities? Here there is certainly pressure from below. There is a good deal of evidence that there is a project to take patriotic history all the way up from the militia camps to the universities. Headmasters and College lecturers, if not yet university professors, have been instructed in patriotic history by war veterans. The radical veteran, Joseph Chinotimba, told headmasters in Mavingo that 'to be in harmony with the government you must go for the training. You can only be patriotic if you undergo this course.'⁴⁹ War veterans have taken over entry procedures at Teacher Training Colleges so as to ensure that only their candidates are accepted. Courses in journalism are to be restricted to entrants who have completed militia training. It has also been announced that only those who have completed national service will be accepted into polytechnics and universities or as entrants into the civil service. And in November 2002 it was declared that

⁴⁸ 'Land greatest heritage', *Herald*, 30 October 2003. With the proclamation of the Matopos as a World Heritage site something of the same combination of interests which Fontein has documented for Great Zimbabwe is emerging. Not only Rhodes's but Mzilikazi's grave is sited in the Heritage area. On 7 August 2003 Jackson Ndlovu, Librarian and Oral Historian at the National Museum in Bulawayo, delivered the annual Lozikeyi Lecture in the Bulawayo National Gallery. Entitled 'Breaking the Taboo: Mzilikazi's Grave and National Heritage' it was an eloquent demand that the grave become a public focus for Ndebele nationality sentiment, for Zimbabwean national sentiment and for world history.

⁴⁹ 'National Service for Teachers', *Standard*, 12 August 2002.

all tertiary level students would be obliged to take a compulsory course in patriotism, to be called for some reason National Strategic Studies:

The course will cover topics such as the history of the liberation struggle, nationalism, the importance of the land reform programme and other related matters.⁵⁰

In March 2003 there was an attempt to launch such a course at the Bulawayo Polytechnic. Students at the Poly declared a boycott of all courses and asked for support from all other tertiary institutions so as 'to save tomorrow's generation from brainwashing'.⁵¹

And yet one wonders whether the Zimbabwe government will really try to carry these policies through. At the moment there are not nearly enough – let alone enough qualified – National Service graduates to fill all tertiary places. If they are to have any effect, courses in National Strategic Studies will have to be taught by competent lecturers. It seems more likely that the government will try to co-opt university history lecturers and to establish a relationship with them like that between Mugabe and the Museum staff at Great Zimbabwe. There are some signs of this. At Heroes weekend this year the *Chronicle* deplored the ignorance amongst youth about Zimbabwe's liberation:

Sadly, a major stumbling block in this regard has been the dearth of books that give a true account of our history, especially the history of the liberation war. We have relied too much on books written by hostile and clearly biased white supremacists who have often wrongly depicted the liberation struggle as a war between barbaric black Africans and white Rhodesian emissaries of civilization. As long as all story-tellers remain bigoted and narrow-minded whites, there will never be a black hero.

The editorial ends with a mingled entreaty and invitation:

What are the level-headed historians in Zimbabwe doing about this? Surely they cannot sit and watch while racists distort the history of our people for cheap political gain. Remember, truth hates delay.⁵²

⁵⁰ 'Government to introduce patriotism courses', *Independent*, 29 November 2002.

⁵¹ 'Students reject National Service Lectures', *Daily News*, 1 March 2003.

⁵² 'Lest We Forget', *Chronicle*, 10 August 2003.

As though in response to this entreaty it was announced on October 16 2003 that 'a partnership agreement aimed at gathering and documenting the country's history' had been signed by the National Archives of Zimbabwe, the Department of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe and the University of Zimbabwe's history department. The project is entitled 'Oral History: From the First to the Second Chimurenga'; it is a 'response to a challenge thrown to the three institutions by President Mugabe to record for posterity the facts of the national struggle.' The Secretary for Home Affairs, Melusi Matshiya, said that the results 'would be made available to future generations through the Liberation War Museum to be constructed at the National Heroes Acre'. The chairman of the UZ History Department, Dr Ken Manungo, said: 'We hope we will have maximum co-operation from the Government as there is nothing more important than being available to tell what happened.' Manungo said he was 'grateful to the Government because they are going to fund this project'; History students at UZ 'will carry out the necessary interviews and research'.⁵³

Depending on how it is carried out and presented this could be a perfectly valid research project.⁵⁴ But it is obviously has a very different emphasis from the series of projects carried out at UZ in the 1990s under the rubric of 'Democracy and Human Rights', directed by Professor Ngwabi Bhebe and funded by SAREC. It is still more different from the 'post-nationalist' historiography which was beginning to emerge at the university in the early twenty-first century.

Patriotic History, Nationalist Historiography and the History of the Nation

If the editorial in the *Chronicle* offered a role to 'level-headed' black historians, it strikingly ignored the contributions already made by Zimbabwean nationalist historians and historians of the nation. It is certainly not true, for example, that there is nothing to read about the liberation struggle except books by white historians, leaving aside for the moment whether these have all been 'bigoted, narrow-minded and racist'. The best book on the war is in fact the work of Zimbabwe's most distinguished and productive historian, Professor Ngwabi Bhebe.⁵⁵

⁵³ 'Project seeks to document Zimbabwe's history', *Herald*, 16 October 2003.

⁵⁴ For a recent fascinating collection of interviews with ex-combatants which offers a complex, non-heroic view of the liberation war see Chiedza Musengezi and Irene McCartney, eds., *Women of Resilience*, Zimbabwe Women Writers, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2000.

⁵⁵ Ngwabi Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe*, Mambo, Gweru, 1999. Another remarkable treatment by a Zimbabwean historian, drawing

Bhebe is indeed the outstanding example of a scholar who has written both nationalist history and the history of the nation.⁵⁶ It cannot be said that Professor Bhebe has been cast aside in Zimbabwe's era of patriotic history. He is, after all, Vice Chancellor of the state university of the Midlands. Still, it is significant that the *Chronicle* chose to ignore his work. Professor Bhebe's nationalist historiography and still more his history of the nation is too level-headed and inclusive to be what the paper is looking for.

Plainly I ought to confront the *Chronicle's* attack on 'bigoted and narrow-minded' white authors of the books which Zimbabwean students read about the first and second chimurenga. I was in Bulawayo when I first saw the editorial and my first impulse was to write a letter to them asking 'Do you mean me?' But then I thought they probably did! And yet patriotic history's relationship with my work is more complicated than merely saying it is 'white' or, heaven forfend, 'British'. The *Chronicle* itself, for instance, carried a whole page article in 2002 showing that 'historians' confirmed the government's case on land alienation. It drew heavily on my *Voices From the Rocks* and from the collaborative *Violence and Memory* to show that 'even' a white historian had documented evictions from the land. Of course it did not make any use of the last parts of these books which deal with the Matabeleland repression in the 1980s and with the failure of the Zimbabwean government to re-distribute the huge areas of land which fell into its hands in southern Matabeleland in the mid 1980s.⁵⁷

Yet sometimes even the last part of my writings gets in. In June 2003 the *Herald* carried much to my surprise a whole page entitled

on the ZANU/PF archives and focussing on issues of gender is Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegave, *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle*, Weaver, Harare, 2000.

⁵⁶ My best student in the African Historiography course at UZ wrote an analysis of all Professor Bhebe's books. There were three ways to be a nationalist historian, she said. One was to react defensively against colonial slanders. If white missionaries said Africans had no religion one had to show that there had in fact existed a profound indigenous religious system. This, she thought, had been the objective of Professor Bhebe's first book, *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe, 1895-1923*, Longman, 1979. Another was to provide the nationalist movement with founding heroes. This, she thought, was the purpose of his second book, *Benjamin Burombo. African Politics in Zimbabwe*, College Press, Harare, 1989. A third was to write a balanced history of the national struggle and this she thought Bhebe had achieved in his *ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*. I do not know where she would situate his latest academic project, a biography of the late Vice President, Simon Muzenda.

⁵⁷ I tried to enter these considerations into the historical debate about land in a letter to the *Daily News* on 12 April 2000. 'In Matobo district the great majority of former white-owned farms and ranches have been in the hands of government for nearly 15 years. Therefore, if there has not been a just redistribution of land in this part of Matabeleland South, this has not been because of white farmers or British vested interests. It has been, alas, because the people in power have used the land for their own profit rather than for the relief of ordinary people and their cattle herds ... The people of Matobo are still waiting.'

'Ranger re-examines colonial myths'. It turned out that this had been lifted from the Heinemann African Writers website and was something I had written at their request as background for readers of novels by Zimbabweans. The first two-thirds of my 'social history' documented the force and fraud of Rhodes, the seizure of the land, the rise of nationalism, etc. So far so good. But the *Herald* made the mistake of printing the final third, thus presenting its surprised readers with 'the horrors of independence'; with the Fifth Brigade 'savaging the civilian population'; with the rise of a vigorous civil society and a critical church; with 'the megalomania of an aging and unpopular president'. My piece ended:

The confrontation between the old revolutionary rhetoric (and history) and the new realities of a complex plural society threw Zimbabwean intellectuals and artists into turmoil. Their whole approach to Zimbabwe's national identity and to its history had to be thought through all over again.⁵⁸

Rethinking Zimbabwean History

Patriotic history is more complex than it at first appears and even on occasion – as with Mugabe's speech to ICOMOS – flexible. Nevertheless because of its narrow focus it has a certain force and simplicity. Critical responses to it have been much more scattered.

Some critics have focussed on Mugabe's appeal to pre-colonial glories. Many stress the gulf between this appeal and the sterile unprofitability of national monuments. Patriotic history elevates Great Zimbabwe but also, they say, empties it and devalues it. The hostility to whites aroused by patriotic history lessons in the militia camps – which has led to attacks on roadside curio sellers because they cater for and attract whites - has depressed the tourist trade:

'Great Zimbabwe is now just a heap of stones with no benefit for us', cursed the empty-handed Jerina, as she arrived at home, her arms folded behind her back. A few kilometres away from her hunger-stricken homestead, a disappointed fisherman folded his nets ... When things were normal this was the time for him to cast his nets at the shores of Lake Mutirikwa in anticipation of a major catch that would meet an ever increasing demand for fresh fish. 'Will Great Zimbabwe ever rise and be great for us?' the fisherman muttered to himself ...

⁵⁸ *The Herald*, 17 June 2002.

It was not only Jerina and the fisherman who went home empty-handed ... In fact it is now the order of the day for drought wracked villagers in Chief Mugabe's area in Masvingo who were earning a living through selling their various wares to tourists who thronged the Great Zimbabwe monuments on a daily basis to explore the mysteries buried at the world acclaimed heritage site. The villagers ... now sing the blues as the monuments have lost their lustre ... Tawanda Magara, a stone carver, said GZ now had a different meaning to him altogether. 'In the past when we saw the GZ monuments we realised that we would always make money since visitors would always come to discover the mystique associated with them. Now we see them just as any other heap of stones. They don't make any difference to our lives.'⁵⁹

Others have criticised the disproportionate focus the Mugabe regime has placed on 'heritage' in the midst of economic crisis. 'Patriotism' and 'Heritage', they say, is 'the last refuge of the scoundrels' who are ruining the nation. In May 2002 a Zimbabwean in the diaspora, Dr T.Mangwende, cited Dr Johnson's definition in his response to criticisms made by Mugabwe of 'young professionals who have forgotten that it was Zanu PF that liberated the country'. Mangwende admitted that he was himself a beneficiary of the 'splendid efforts in education during the early 1980s' but declared himself grateful that these were now 'helping me see through your ruinous policies'. Mangwende claimed that all Zimbabweans were 'number one when it comes to patriotism' but that ZANU/PF itself was dealing in 'rubbished patriotism ... used to justify the training of wholesale murderers':

It is a sheer waste of time and resources to set up colleges to supposedly teach 'patriotism' to the youth when the teacher needs intensive lessons in 'patriotism' ... The President knows more than anyone else that the country is in a mess and there is no point in touring the ruins to assess damage ... Still on the subject of 'patriotism', some young Zimbabweans referred to the other half of the recently returned bird as 'just a piece of stone'. Yes, it is patriotic to refer to this 'half' as just a piece of stone given the situation that Zimbabweans find themselves in. If a country is ravaged to the point that it cannot provide

⁵⁹ Walter Marwizi, 'Great Zimbabwe now just a pile of Stones', *Standard*, 21 June 2002. For similar reports on the Matopos – 'stakeholders in the Matopo National Park said removal of Rhodes's body to pave the way for the resettlement of land less people would render the Park worthless' – see 'Tourist arrivals at Matopo cut by half', *Financial Gazette*, June 6-12 2002.

basics to its citizens, cultural symbols are the first to lose their value and meaning.

The true symbols of the new Zimbabwe were queues and Mugabe ought to visit them. 'I wish the President well in his tour of man-made ruins'.⁶⁰

It is not only the pre-colonial emphases of patriotic history which are criticised. Its account of the 'second chimurenga', the guerrilla war of the 1960s and 1970s, is also repudiated:

Every day in the state-controlled media one hears of distortions of the history of this country ... We are frequently nauseated by endless propaganda about how freedom fighters were always winning battles against Rhodesia forces and how lots of helicopters and planes were downed during such engagements. A lot of young men and women sacrificed their lives for this country but that is no reason to lie than an outright military victory was achieved on the battlefield in 1979 [when] not even a single settlement, including those at the borders had fallen to the liberation forces [and] white farmers were able to continue farming even in the remotest hot-spots ... War is a serious affair with a high price to pay ... Real heroes do not lie and trivialise the pain of war.⁶¹

The narrowness of patriotic history and its division of Zimbabweans into revolutionaries and 'sell-outs' has been attacked by many critics, not least, as we have seen, by the church leaders in their condemnation of the youth militia. Its narrowness in other ways has also been effectively condemned. In August 2003 Erikana Hauruvi wrote to the press to bemoan 'the high levels of environmental degradation which are occurring everywhere'. These demanded practical solutions, but 'Zimbabwe has adopted a strange paradigm in solving its environmental crisis':

I have noted with great amazement the fact that whenever people sense danger they are reminded of some historical achievement. People are forced to remember the harshness of the historical colonial past whenever some crisis emerges. [Yet] a degraded environment will never recover despite the high level of praise it receives. Such an environment can never offer subsistence to man despite the level of high political

⁶⁰ D.T.Mangwende, 'Patriotism does not equate to training murderers', *Daily News*, 31 May 2003.

⁶¹ Letter from Zichanaka Munyika, *Independent*, 14 February 2003.

achievement which may have occurred in the area two to three decades ago. The indoctrinative sentiments being echoed by the State propaganda machinery seems to be telling the country that no matter how degraded your environment is, political history will save us.

The message seems to say 'never worry about the prevailing drought, political history will intervene. Stop worrying about the polluted water, polluted air, extinction of species, declining soil fertility, siltation of rivers ... since all this is set to be solved by political history'.

Haurovi found that all 'state channels of disseminating information' were 'singing the same chorus in unison, elevating political history as an indisputable saviour'. But 'let us protect our environment first and then enjoy talking about our political history. Political history is nothing when we are living in misery and uncertainty.'⁶²

But these varying criticisms do not amount to an alternative historical narrative capable of displacing patriotic history. Their authors share Zichanaka Munyika's hope in a future 'when Zanu PF's stranglehold on Zimbabwe will end and the history of this country will be debated freely by all shades of opinion for the benefit of our children'.⁶³

There are signs, admittedly, of more systematic historiographical dissent. One of these centres around the events of Matabeleland in the 1980s, part of the past which patriotic history excludes. As Mugabe himself declared in December 2002: 'Whatever remains were historical differences. These remain as history of our country and we can't bring ugly history into the present affairs and rewrite that ugly history. No.' Instead ZANU/PF has sought to turn December 22, the day of the Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU in 1987, into a national anniversary.⁶⁴ In response the Zimbabwe Liberators Peace Platform, the organisation of critical ex-combatants, has announced that Unity Day should be kept as a day of national mourning. Max Mnkandla, information secretary of the ZLPP, called on Zimbabweans 'not to be fooled into celebrating an accord which legitimated the slaughter of their kith and kin'. Instead of expensive celebrations 'an upright government' would spend money on

⁶² *Standard*, 3 August 2002. A similar view was expressed in a long comment in the *Daily News* of 29 October 2002. 'Zimbabweans generally derive knowledge and guidance from history. They don't live in history. though'.

⁶³ *Independent*, 14 February 2003.

⁶⁴ Memory Mhizha, 'Unity Day special to all', *Herald*, 17 December 2002.

exhumations and reburials.' History itself needed to be exhumed. On December 22, said Mnkandla, 'we shall be in our black robes, remembering those who perished and lie in mass graves'.⁶⁵

And if Matabeleland in the 1980s is one of the large omissions of patriotic history so, too, is the history of the towns and of the trade unions. Patriotic history sees townspeople as 'those without totems' and the state press from time to time carries bewildered articles about why urban populations are so unpatriotic. The role of trade unionism is largely excluded from the new narrative of nationalism. The most articulate protest against these exclusions has come from the veteran journalist, Bill Saidi. Saidi quotes from a ZAPU central committee report in 1984: 'In the period leading up to the first national organisation of resistance to colonial rule, the workers of Zimbabwe led the way to unity in their struggle to form the first trade unions'. According to ZAPU, 'this development of a working class was an important foundation for the resurgence of the people's resistance ... The workers have fought many battles and taught the people many useful lessons. One of these lessons was the value of unity'. Yet, says Saidi, after the 1987 Unity Agreement the workers dropped out of political discourse. How, he asks, 'did the workers lose out? ... Today the most important people to Zanu PF are not the workers but the so-called war veterans.'⁶⁶

The MDC emerged from the trade union movement and obtains most of its support from the towns. One might have expected it to have developed a counter-narrative against patriotic history which re-instated the workers and made urban history once again central to Zimbabwe's modern experience. One might have expected it also to try to overcome what Brian Raftopolous has diagnosed as the main weakness of the trade unions in the 1950s and early 1960s, namely their failure to articulate rural grievances and aspirations. Then this weakness allowed political nationalism to dominate and eventually to absorb radical trade unionism. Today the divergence between an urban MDC and a rural ZANU/PF yawns dangerously wide. But the MDC has made very little of trade union or worker history, perhaps because it believes that it already enjoys

⁶⁵ 'A time of national mourning', *Standard*, 24 December 2002. The *Daily News* on 20 February 2003 carried a two page spread on Matabeleland rural memories of the 5 Brigade killings in the 1980s. The 80 year old Moffat Tshabangu declared: 'The events of those years will forever remain etched in our minds. It is a story I will tell my grandchildren and great grandchildren so that they can fully understand the history of this country. All the things they read about in the country's history books are pure, refined nonsense meant to placate the egos of Zanu PF chefs'. Another villager, Kennias Ngwenya, hoped that history was still alive. 'As for those who participated in the murders, may God make the memories of our dead linger for ever in their minds'.

⁶⁶ 'Bill Saidi on Wednesday', *Daily News*, 10 July 2002.

the support of the towns and of labour. Nor has it made much of a show of articulating rural grievances and aspirations. It does not possess a coherent land policy. It has been all too easy for ZANU/PF to depict the MDC as globalised and a-historical.

In any case ZANU/PF controls all television and radio; now, with the closure of the *Daily News*, it commands virtually all the press; and it is able to determine what kind of history is taught in schools. It is virtually impossible for critics to develop a counter-narrative in any systematic way. The spokesmen of Zimbabwean civil society, however, increasingly feel the need for this. The Crisis Coalition and the NGOs have appealed to international norms of human rights: precisely those, in fact, that Mahoso has criticised as bogus universalism. It is not a policy which has worked, as the recent refusal of the United Nations Human Rights Commission to discuss a motion censuring Zimbabwe reveals all too clearly. In the week of this refusal a spokesman for the Crisis Coalition told a gathering in London that it was essential to develop a new narrative which rooted human rights in Zimbabwe's own history.⁶⁷

Conclusion

It must have become clear that history is at the centre of politics in Zimbabwe far more than in any other southern African country. But how can academic historians make an impact in the debate? Let me return at the end of this review to the University of Zimbabwe and to its aspirant pluralist and post-nationalist historians. These have refused to go on radio or television. But if their voices have not been heard as advocates of patriotic history, they have not been heard in any other way either. Zimbabwe is a country in which books have much less effect than radio, tv or the press.⁶⁸ But even if academic books and articles made an impact the University of Zimbabwe is effectively gagged. Printing costs have risen so rapidly that the UZ publications department cannot afford to publish any of the admirable monographs and collections it has accepted without massive subsidy. Among other things this means that a very

⁶⁷ There have been some attempts to do this in the independent press. On 17 April 2003 the *Daily News* carried a feature entitled 'Yet another gigantic Zanu PF failure'. The failure was ZANU/PF's betrayal of the democratic aspirations of nationalism. 'When we embarked on the liberation struggle in the 1950s, the main aim was to create an environment where the black majority could have equal opportunities ... The core of those objectives was for the SRANC to acquire power to improve the lives of the people. What occurred thereafter is history whose culmination was the birth of the nation of Zimbabwe'. Yet the people's lives have not improved and they have been given no opportunity to shape their own future.

⁶⁸ The Czech ambassador, coming from a country whose authoritarian regime took books very seriously, used regularly to ask me about *Violence and Memory*, with its account of the 5 Brigade, 'Have there been any repercussions?' There have been none.

large edited collection on Zimbabwe's political economy remains unpublished. Even my own edited collection, *Nationalism, Democracy and Human Rights* – which might be said to provide some of the building blocs for a counter narrative – has only seen the light of day after two successive subsidies. And even then only 100 copies have been produced! The university's journal, *Zambezia*, has not been published for several months. All the external agencies which used to subsidise research and publication have withdrawn. The university is mute.

When I retired from the University of Zimbabwe in 2001 I agreed with two of the university historians that we would jointly write a single-volume history of Zimbabwe. No such book exists and even in today's economic conditions it would sell. We have not written it yet and it is obviously both a very difficult and a very significant time in which to attempt it. But I hope that either we, or somebody else, will soon make that attempt. It might provide an alternative to patriotic history.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ I hope that the Britain Zimbabwe Society Research Days on June 12 and 13 2004, on the topic of 'What History for Which Zimbabwe' will lead to a publication.