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DEBATE

Five funerals, no weddings, a couple of birthdays: Terry Ranger, his contemporaries, and the end of Zimbabwean nationalism – 24 October 2013–3 January 2015

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Lionel Cliffe – 11 August 1936 to 24 October 2013; Wilfred Mhanda aka Dzinashé ‘Dzino’ Machingura – May 26 1950 to May 28 2014; Nathan Shamuyarira – 29 September 1928 to 4 June 2014; Paul Brickhill – 8 July 1958 to 3 October 2014; Terence Ranger – 29 November 1929 to 3 January 2015: they have to be considered together in what could be called a ‘collective epitaphic’ in a journal such as this, emphasising socio-political history and agency within the context of political economy’s constraints and cracks. This is especially so given that all of these important and interesting men were so actively engaged in Zimbabwe’s – and Africa’s – nationalist conjuncture. Their passing may indicate the death of not only what Ranger called ‘liberal nationalism’ in his autobiography, *Writing revolt* (2013), his last and for those interested in Zimbabwean political history and historiography most interesting book, but something more. That would not by any means be nationalism as a whole, but nationalism as a contested mode of politics and ideology, blending liberalism, various socialisms, traditions and new idioms of ‘Africanism’ born of the apostles and disciples of all of these and more from around

the world and the new ruling classes inheriting their states. In the current conjuncture, that once exciting and pregnant political lexicon may be simply monolithic. It could be resting at an impasse, waiting for a new generation and global shift to infuse it with the content that might awaken it from its exhaustion (Zeilig 2008). It is certainly stuck within what Ranger famously – and perhaps with the slightest bit of regret, remembering vaguely the last refuge of scoundrels and his formative role within it – called ‘patriotic history’ (2004). Maybe this political ideology as it appears now should just be called ‘paranoid’: but that was certainly not the feeling as Africa was swept under the waves of those seeking political kingdoms, as Kwame Nkrumah put it, or in the words of another politician the ‘winds of change’, in the 1960s. The coming and going of Ranger and his peers and younger cohorts above mark this era as no other. Ranger must be foremost among them not only because this essay was commissioned with him in mind, but because his presence and his absence pervade – indeed nearly polarise! – the public/academic/activist invention and reception of the rise and falling of Zimbabwean nationalism’s history, politics, and culture.

In the case at hand, it should be remembered that when Terry Ranger arrived in Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia until the prefix was dropped in 1964) as a history lecturer with almost no knowledge of the continent at the ‘multi-racial’ University

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College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the 'self-governing' settler colony was nearing the end of an era of moderate liberalism led by Prime Minister Garfield Todd. That conjuncture saw the rise of a vibrant working class and trade unions (Scarnecchia 2008). With this class formation an African elite was grooming itself for power in the manner of the Kwame Nkrumahs and Julius Nyereres across the continent, and organisations such as the Capricorn Society and the Interracial Association of Southern Rhodesia were established by cold warriors and liberals to conjoin white and black elites (Holderness 1985). They were stymied, however, by the rise of reaction among the settlers who feared the nationalism that led to Kenneth Kaunda and Hastings Banda taking power in then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi), former partners in the Central African Federation, not to mention the hysteria inspired by the Lumumba moment in the Congo. It is not surprising in this context that Ranger, a dedicated non-racialist and liberal far in advance of the most liberal of Rhodesians, would have joined the aspirant rulers in their efforts to gain political equality and power and that he would be pushed into a pool by an angry white as he campaigned for the freedom to swim where one wanted, thereby gaining a good spread of fame and infamy. Given the Cold War and the contingent rise of Marxism within segments of the global intelligentsia, some of whom found themselves in southern Africa with Ranger, a good part of what he called "liberal nationalism" in his career is juxtaposed with his interpretations of historical materialism and its advocates. Along with this, as *Writing revolt* chronicles, the nationalist movement he joined – but left in its early days as he was deported from Rhodesia – soon became riven with interne-cine divides. Some were overlaid with a liberal/Marxist tone that may have been more important for Ranger and his protagonists than the nationalists themselves –

except for a younger generation – but lent their weight to scholarly-activist accounts of Zimbabwe's road to liberation.

As *Writing revolt* makes clear, Ranger took on the historical making of Zimbabwean nationalism as his task. Soon after his 1957 arrival at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN) and his involvement with African nationalists he decided to delve deep into history to find the roots of this politics. The birth of what many have called his most important contribution to African historiography, that being the idea of African agency and resistance to colonialism, came out of a blend of his engagement with his new comrades with that colonialism he was working within and against – and with his friend, UCRN colleague, and fellow nationalist the Marxist English lecturer John Reed, whose letters and diaries become both a support and a foil to Ranger's memories. While Ranger and Reed were attending meetings with the men who would fight to lead Zimbabwe eventually, and starting up the radical magazine *Dissent* (many copies of which are in the long-time UCRN/University of Zimbabwe historian Philip Warhurst's collection at Durban's Killie Campbell archives), they saw the way to a new history of Rhodesia – partly to counter the conservatism of Margery Perham, a famous English historian of a previous generation.

Perham, Ranger says, "determined my choice" of historical research (2013, 37). She had attended a March 1958 congress meeting of nationalists and opined that African nationalism in Rhodesia was "a typically rootless, fly-by-night affair. It did not connect with a deep past or promise a long future." Ranger writes that he himself "had . . . been very wary of unconstrained nationalist emotion. But as nationalist rallies grew in size and fervour, I began to wonder. Where had all this come from? What were the antecedents of African nationalism in Southern Rhodesia" (2013, 37). Thus in 1959 he embarked on the work that would "invent" African history, as Julian Cobbing, one of the critics of

this reverse teleology put it later (Limb 2011, 10; Cobbing 1977) as a history of the African people. Reed told him he could be “a sort of G.D.H. Cole of Central Africa . . . [this] could become a history of the people of the country rather than its rulers”. Indeed it could, Ranger wrote, and as well as meaning “meeting a lot of jolly old Africans and travelling about a bit . . . I think . . . that Nkomo [the leader of the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress] might co-operate within the obvious limits and that he will appreciate that the study would be sympathetic” (Ranger 2013, 38).

It’s possible too that the sheer joy of that moment simply lasted for a long, long time: in this more cynical age it’s hard to imagine a white expatriate saying that he’d like to be black because “everything is still open, everything is still to do” and to be reassured when the student who, yelling along with Stokely Carmichael at his University of Dar es Salaam lecture that he hates whites, turns to him to say “I don’t mean you, Professor Ranger” (Ranger 2013 in Grundy 2013). These were formative years after all: furthermore, professors usually do not have to bear the burden of power their ideological constructions help create.

As Ranger’s critics foreshadowed – mostly after his friends were either in power or had been pushed out on the road to it – this was nationalist history for and with his mates in the newly emerging middle class (as we used to say in the seventies and eighties, the “petty bourgeoisie”), who said they were (and probably thought they were) very close to that imprecise but progressive sounding category of “the people”. (Ranger 1968, 1970; Melber n.d.; White 2011, 325, 329–30 – cited in Melber – asks what we should “do about Ranger’s role in [Zimbabwe’s] history of the 1960s, and his role in the broader historiography of the country”, and where do we “draw the line between Ranger the comrade and Ranger the scholar?”) Thus began the collapse into each other of sovereignty, a

new ruling class, and “people” that comes with nationalism, with the rulers taking charge of the rest in their name: as Kriger (1988; 1992) noted in her critiques of *Peasant consciousness and guerrilla war in Zimbabwe* (Ranger 1985) the ideology that Ranger purported to be the pleasant one of hard-working small commodity producers was more likely that of a wealthier and more political group. Ian Phimister’s “The combined and contradictory inheritance of the struggle against colonialism” (1988) was even more critical.

In *Writing revolt* Ranger (2013, 83) admits that it took him “many more books . . . to appreciate the infinite variety and internal contradictions of African responses” to colonialism. These were hardly *class* contradictions, however. Moreover, according to him the roots of his earlier monolithic view of nationalism were not in the nationalists themselves but in the colonialists’ perspective: in other words Ranger was following the oppressor’s lead. As he scoured the archives in search of modern nationalism’s origins, he found that Rhodesian civil servants

noted anything that seemed like a revival of ‘traditional’ politics; anything which seemed to link with movements elsewhere in central and southern Africa; anything which seemed to promise – or threaten – ‘modern’ forms of protest. Rhodesian administrators were even more disposed than I was to define almost every form of African political agency as ‘political’. Rhodesian missionaries interpreted every African initiated church as a challenge to colonialism. (Ranger 2013, 82)

Thus Ranger realised that one of the dangers

of relying so heavily on the National Archives was that my ‘nationalist’ assumptions went unchallenged and were indeed sustained. In the archives, as in [*Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–97*, Ranger 1967] all these various African responses were presented

as part of a single anti-colonial response. (Ranger 2013, 83)

Yet even then there were many more variations within the *modern* nationalist umbrella than those ‘back to tradition’ ones in *Voices from the rocks* (1999) and others from north-western Zimbabwe in *Violence and memory* (2000, co-written with Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, two of his many brilliant mentees), which included a far too belated recognition of the devastating massacres of the Ndebele in *Gukurahundi* (Phimister 2008; Moore forthcoming for Mugabe foreshadowing these moves in a meeting with Margaret Thatcher just a few weeks after his 1980 victory). Some are recalled suggestively in *Writing revolt* when Ranger presents his hurried, day-by-day, account of the chaotic divisions appearing in the nationalist movement, accompanied by reflections with his muse, John Reed (Ranger 2013, 149 ff). Earlier, Ranger records Reed’s contemplation of Marxism’s message for Rhodesia:

I have been reading a lot of Marxism so as to work out how to act in Africa. Things are happening and must happen – so that I can momentarily forget my profound inability to act... Marxism provides some kind of framework for contemplating Rhodesia and especially as it provides a theory for moral neutralization. The settlers act as on the whole they are bound to act and it is no use appealing to their hearts or argue [*sic*] with them. The thing to do is to choose to fight with the Africans for the overthrow of white tyranny – not to spend an hour and a half each morning being angry. (Reed cited in Ranger 2013, 20–21)

Ranger slams Marxism’s supposed structural lassitude with “neither then nor after did I read much Marxism. I was angry all day,” but it is clear that Reed was able to surmount his philosophy’s constraints and act with as much commitment to the journey without end as his friend. However, when discussing the early splits

in the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), Ranger answers Reed’s worries about the unhappy choices to be made between Joshua Nkomo’s leadership and the possibilities of Ndabaningi Sithole with “you are quite right, of course. History is made in this chaotic way and it is no use applying Marxist or any other analysis to it” (2013, 161). This is followed by Reed’s evocative characterisation of the choice facing them, as they both discuss George Nyandoro’s decision to stick with Nkomo – which, like a crystal ball ignores Sithole: “Nkomo has his faults as a leader but he is clearly the choice of the people and cannot be thrown over to satisfy a clique of the leadership who are anyway as much to blame for what has gone wrong... as he is.” Nyandoro’s analysis and prescription – to crush ZANU (the Zimbabwe African National Union) – was “harsh”, thought Reed, but was not “so disheartening as listening to Mugabe saying that the masses don’t understand and will accept anyone as leader” (Ranger 2013, 161).

As these internecine struggles continued while Ranger was at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and later in California and the UK, Lionel Cliffe’s words (Cliffe’s leading role in the UDSM’s Development Studies programme also left a memorable legacy on the Hill – as the UDSM was called – and later at the University of Zambia) could be interjected into the Ranger–Reed dialogue. Soon after 1980 Cliffe wondered if it was possible to ascertain when and how “the balance of political forces becomes not simply an outgrowth of the broader social forces but becomes determinant” in the structuration of nationalist struggles: in other words if the seemingly interminable scabbling of Zimbabwean politicians could have then (or would now) alter a trajectory that appears not to bend from the lengthy, tragic and/or farcical travails of primitive accumulation and nation/state formation (Cliffe 1981, 9; Moore 2004). For a time many nationalists thought that Marxism could be taken on

board: in the mid 1970s Cliffe – who was close to many ZANU activists while lecturing in Lusaka – spent serendipitous time in Lusaka’s jails with some of them who were accused of assassinating ZANU’s National Chairman, Herbert Chitepo, in the wake of regional attempts at “détente” to keep the struggle and its leadership “moderate”. When he was released and deported he worked with a Zimbabwean committee in London to release them. ZANU member Fay Chung asked Ranger to join it but he declined, judiciously replying that since he had no idea who was behind the assassination he could hardly get involved (while other members who shared the same ignorance got involved because they disapproved of torture being used to extract confessions) (CIIR 1976; Moore forthcoming).

During this vacuum a group of young radicals in which Wilfred Mhanda played a key role attempted to unify the split – and temporarily moribund – movement to steer it in a direction approaching Reed’s philosophical considerations (Mhanda 2011, Moore 2012; 2014a; 2014b). The Zimbabwean People’s Army (ZIPA) – more precisely the *vashandi*, or “people’s” group in it – was sidelined for the duration of the war by Zimbabwe’s current president, Robert Mugabe, as he proved to the ‘west’ that he was the only politician in control of the guerrilla army. Ironically, John Saul, one of Terence Ranger’s sparring partners at the Hill (there is no sign of friendly, Reed-like letters between them!), lecturing in Nathan Shamuyarira’s Political Science department, supported this ginger group publicly, with the encouragement of Mozambique’s Frelimo, which backed it for a time. Saul’s and Cliffe’s articles in North American solidarity journals came out just after the *vashandi* political soldiers were jailed (Saul 1977; Cliffe – anonymously – 1977). Along with Giovanni Arrighi, Saul was quickly ridiculed as an “armchair revolutionary” by Shamuyarira in a new, Mugabe-controlled, edition of *Zimbabwe News* at the end of the year,

wherein all ZANU members were warned that the axe would fall on those who did not submit to the great helmsman’s harmony (Shamuyarira 1977a). Ranger – a friend and fellow intellectual-for-the-nationalist-cause of Shamuyarira in the early days – also dismisses Arrighi through Reed’s 1963–1966 diaries. Ranger introduces Peter Mackay, another friend, foil, and decidedly non-Marxist revolutionary aide at this point (whose memoir [2008], ending in 1971, was introduced by Ranger with appropriately broad hints about Mackay’s employer, Her Majesty [Moore 2007]).

Arrighi was a convinced Marxist revolutionary [who] clashed violently with Peter Mackay, whom he regarded as a mere romantic adventurer. For his part Peter denounced Arrighi, telling him to go back and make his revolution in Sardinia and not import irrelevant Marxist ideas into Africa. (Ranger 2013, 165)¹

Arrighi may well have riposted with a reply worthy of his fellow Italian, Gramsci, that liberal or Owenite ideas were equally or more irrelevant, but there is no record of that. Ranger records Mackay’s “much more effective assistance to ZAPU in the 1960s when he helped build training camps in Zambia and shuttled guerrilla recruits up the road from Botswana in his Land Rover or across Lake Kariba in his motor boat” (Ranger 2013, 165). A decade later, as if to underline the slipperiness of even hotter ideological stances by then, the Princeton PhD’d Shamuyarira told an Indiana University audience that ZIPA was the promise of radical things to come in Zimbabwe’s liberation movement (Shamuyarira [sic] 1977b, 27, 31) – but a few months later, after their incarceration, he lambasted them.

In 1980, with Mugabe in power and the Marxists duly expelled, the paragon of liberal nationalism praised Mugabe, who had participated in the struggle “in the

Castro fashion” (Ranger 1980, 83) and promised to follow an amalgam of Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tse-Tung thought. This raised the question of why one who had challenged Reed’s, Saul’s and Arrighi’s ideology would strive so hard at the moment of rule to defend a leader who had just demonstrated the authoritarian way with which he would deal with challenges to his power – in the name of a fey version of that Marxism. Surely a spat with John Saul over the “petty-bourgeois” label affixed to his friends would not be the reason. Only a year and a half later, Ranger delivered a lecture on academic freedom at the University of Cape Town, recalling the struggles for such on Dar es Salaam’s Hill between those such as Saul who according to him relied on the state to support their ideology – and were disappointed – and his camp that did not, preferring negative freedom (Ranger 1981). This too could scarcely be call enough for such academic praise-singing for Mugabe. When asked about these histories, Ranger would say “life is too short” to hold such grudges. Perhaps a little bit of time out for the far-left was seen as justified when facing godless materialism and/or the prospect of brutal Stalinism.

Perhaps too these are no more than academic-activist debates, worth very little as the Cold War recedes from memory and all in its wake conspire to the long and deep structures producing pragmatism (upset only by some ethnic cleansing and land invasions). Lionel Cliffe’s musings about political and ideological agency may have gone the way of Nyerere’s ujamaa. Nathan Shamuyarira got his place in the Politburo in spite of his wavering to the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe in the early 1970s and uttering scant praise for those Samora Machel² called the infantile leftists later in that decade – and in the eighties Shamuyarira even brought a few of the young Turks who had been in ZIPA into his ministry of information. Terence Ranger saw the perils of ZANU patriotism

towards the end of *Gukurahundi* – perhaps while loaning his Oxford cottage to Jeremy Brickhill, a ZAPU-ANC activist almost blown up in Harare by the South Africans, and taking him on as a doctoral student – and in the midst of Zimbabwe’s illiberal ‘fast-track’ land reform. Wilfred Mhanda’s second political career was seen by RW Johnson (2001) as the incarnation of true liberalism as he renewed his battles against the elderly helmsman – perhaps the sign of a proponent of a real national democratic revolution.

Somewhat on the edge of it all was a white radical Zimbabwean with ZAPU through his liberation-war career, a Communist of the Russian type disliked by new leftists and liberals alike, and a cultural activist *par excellence* in Zimbabwe and the region for all of his post-colonial life. Paul Brickhill’s – Jeremy’s younger brother – understanding of the revolutionary process in his country was expressed elegantly in the middle of 2004: “what ever happened to the *democratic* in this national democratic revolution?” Paul summed up the question for the generation that these five funerals signal. It’s not *that* different from the one posed by Ranger and his more interesting interlocutors in the fifties and sixties, when Paul and Wilfred were finding their literal and political feet. It must be answered as the next political generation inherits what the man with the expensive birthdays (Smith 2015) has left “his” country.

A reading for a conclusion

A few weeks before this collective obituary was written, a chapter appeared on Google that exemplified what has become of the dreams of these dead males (three whites and two blacks). A book with the very trendy title *Strategies of representation in auto/biography: reconstructing and remembering* has a chapter about Wilfred Mhanda’s book – *Memories of a freedom fighter* – called, unsurprisingly, “Reading

Dzino” (Makanda 2014). One imagines the ghosts of Terence Ranger, Nathan Shamuyarira (poor even in death: apparently he died penniless), Lionel Cliffe and Dzino in the Book Café while its manager, a still dishevelled Paul Brickhill, joined them, apologising for the high cost of the British-produced book. As they read this strange example of literary scholarship, they would have been informed that *Memories of a freedom fighter* was similar to the bitter memoirs of “angry Rhodesians who, up to today, do not believe that they were defeated in the battlefield by the blacks”. Its “tone and . . . agenda . . . have apparently been set by someone else.” Mhanda tried to “complement Rhodesian literature and curry favour with reactionary forces that he has joined, which is his prime motivation for writing his book . . . We cannot rule out a third white hand in Dzino’s memories” (Makanda 2014, 78–79). As one of the many Zimbabweans working for George Soros’ Open Society walked by and winked at Dzino, who wrote the book while supported modestly by that organisation, Shamuyarira – author of the impressive *Crisis in Rhodesia* (1965) – wondered what had happened to the state of Zimbabwe’s academe.

Terry Ranger read on (assuredly the fastest reader in the group). He called Cliffe, who had left the tome shaking his head at the decline of empirics and theory evident in those words and was looking for books on land reform, back to the fold. They all listened to this:

The tragedy here, with Dzino’s account, as has become “normative” with self-seeking people, is that writing *against* the liberation struggle has become a lucrative commercial venture. It was of course given a broad theoretical thumbs-up by Terence Ranger who rubbished the Chimurenga in his recent work *Rule by historiography: the struggle over the past in contemporary Zimbabwe* (2005, 217–243). It is also known that he is the link-man regarding the shaping of British opinion and

foreign policy towards Zimbabwe. (Makanda 2014, 83)

By that time the ghosts of history’s nationalist past and its critics – from Masi-pula Sithole to John Reed, Giovanni Arrighi to Ibbo Mandaza and John Saul, the latter two still alive, still writing for the revolution – would have joined the group. As Professor Terence Osborn Ranger declared that his next intervention would be a book on ‘patriotic professors’ the loud guffaws (Mhanda’s loudest) would have raised the roof . . .

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Note on contributor

David Moore is Professor of Development Studies at the University of Johannesburg. He has been trying to understand Zimbabwean political history for more than thirty years. The people remembered in this collective obituary have helped that quest immensely.

Notes

1. For details of the assistance of Arrighi, Conradie and many others to ZAPU, see Wood 2012, 127: it is likely that Ranger would have been surprised.
2. Samora Machel was the president of the newly free Mozambique, who had the task of hosting the Zimbabwean guerrilla fighters and politicians, and dealing with their wrangling.

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