

## **WHAT HISTORY FOR WHICH ZIMBABWE?**

### **A report on the Britain Zimbabwe Society Research Days, June 12th and 13th 2004**

Britain Zimbabwe Society (BZS)

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Some seventy people attended the two days and participated in the lively debate. After the event Terence Ranger met with Gerald Mazarire and Ennie Chipembere and they agreed that they would try to edit a book, to be published in the name of the Society. This should be ready for the printer by the end of October. Their joint introduction will set the selected chapters in their full context. For the time being this report on the days will suffice.

#### **Introduction**

The Research Days began with an introduction by Terence Ranger. He drew on his November 2003 paper - posted on the Society's website - 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe'. (This is appearing in the June 2004 issue of the Journal of Southern African Studies). To this he added a recent lecture delivered in Uppsala, 'The Uses and Abuses of History in Zimbabwe', which covered developments between November and May. What emerged from both papers was a determined effort by the Zimbabwean state to ensure that its version of the past, which it calls either 'patriotic history' or 'Mugabeism', is imposed at every level. It is hammered home by television, radio and the state press. It is taught in the militia camps from Mugabe's Inside the Third Chimurenga; in schools with textbooks written by the Minister of Education; in colleges and polytechnics in the form of a compulsory 'Strategic and National Studies' course.

Patriotic history is a much narrowed down version of nationalist history. It focuses on the three 'revolutions' - 1896, the guerrilla war and the 'third chimurenga' of land redistribution. It divides the nation into 'patriots' and 'sell-outs'. (An examination question in the Strategic and National Studies course asked which Zimbabwean political party is an agent of imperialism and how it should be regarded). Mugabe's proclamation in the 1970s that Zimbabwe would carry out a socialist and modernist revolution alongside the progressive nations of the world has been abandoned. White socialists and support groups are seen as having betrayed Zimbabwe and Africa. Today 'authenticity' is the watchword and Zimbabwe seeks support only among the 'indigenous peoples' of the world. With its doctrine of 'permanent revolution', patriotic history glorifies violence and omits other forms of popular action, marginalising in particular the cities and the trade unions.

Its relationship to Zimbabwean intellectuals is complicated. On the one hand, universities are attacked as 'alien' institutions teaching a history influenced by non-Zimbabwean ideas. On the other hand, regime intellectuals - Jonathan Moyo, Stanislaus Mudenge, Aeneas Chigwedere - are crucial to the formulation and propagation of patriotic history. The problem for those academic historians who desire a more complex and plural history is how to make an entry into public debate. Spokesmen of the Crisis Coalition call for an 'alternative narrative'. But what should this be? And how can it be expressed?

Ranger said that the Research Days sought to answer these questions. We needed to confront how far our previous historical writing has been complicit with patriotic history. We needed to ask how best to draw on what we already knew so as to re-assert a more plural history. We need to explore the gaps in the present historiography - what we needed to know, but did not - in order to understand the present Zimbabwe crisis. We needed to determine what new questions that crisis posed.

Because patriotic history challenged other interpretations in so many fields the Research Days would cover much ground. Jonathan Moyo has launched a project to recover oral history and Robert Mugabe is increasingly making use of Great Zimbabwe as a ceremonial centre so the Research Days would begin with statements of alternative oral narratives and of plural 'history-scapes' around Great Zimbabwe.

Patriotic history was unequivocally patriarchal so there would be papers on women in Zimbabwean history: its key figures were warriors so there would be discussion of children and how they related to war. Patriotic history expresses itself in tv and radio jingles specially

written by Jonathan Moyo so we would discuss music and history. As Zimbabwe's best writers went into exile we would explore fiction and history. Robert Mugabe has appealed to the Vapostori, who are seen dancing at Heroes Acre in their white robes, so we would explore the historical consciousness of the prophets. Patriotic history emphasises the role of spirit-mediums in the first and second chimurengas so we would look at their role since independence. Land is the key theme of patriotic history so we would explore what we know and what we don't know about the history of land and look at the neglected history of land in white Rhodesian politics. Cities and trade unions are marginalised in patriotic history so we would look at the contemporary problems of cities and ask what historians can contribute to their resolution. And at the end Brian Raftopoulos, the very model of the committed intellectual, has the task of drawing all this together.

### **Oral History: towards pluralism**

On May 15 2004 Jonathan Moyo launched the 'Capturing a Fading National Memory' project in Tsholotsho district. In the same month chiefs from all over the country assembled, for the first time, at Great Zimbabwe. President Mugabe witnessed the handing over of the base of a Zimbabwe bird, repatriated from Germany, to Chief Fortune Charumbira. The president of the chiefs' council, Jonathan Mangwende, proclaimed: 'President Mugabe I want to thank you very much ... this bird was not the only thing that was stolen but many other things and we want that heritage back'. Mugabe himself 'said he would personally ensure that a university named after the Great Zimbabwe Monument was established to offer subjects such as history, culture and archaeology ... most institutions had been influenced by Western culture and it was important to have a university promoting local culture'. (Chronicle, 7 May 2004). At Independence Day, on April 18, Sabelo Sibanda proclaimed in the Sunday Mail that 'historically Great Zimbabwe is the last of the Great African civilisations to fall and, unlike the likes of Egypt, Zimbabwe remains truly African ... What better place for us to pick up the pieces again than in Zimbabwe, where we still have traceable history of our ancestors in a land still truly black? Being the last to fall it is most fitting that it be the first to arise out of the mud and in turn pull the rest of the continent, and its people globally, upward'. Great Zimbabwe 'is not a ruin as the colonisers had us believe'; it is 'a sacred spirit place' and 'to connect from it spiritually and move on up is a most significant spiritual starting point for all Africans'. (Sunday Mail, 18 April 2004).

So what could we say about 'national memory' and what about the silenced histories of Great Zimbabwe? Gerald Mazarire, who teaches pre-colonial history at the University of Zimbabwe, emphasised that our models of the Zimbabwean past had always been 'reconstructions made from the present'. There had always been regime intellectuals and marginalised dissidents. Under Smith the regime insisted on the exotic origins of Great Zimbabwe and found 'experts' to agree with them. Archaeologists who disagreed were dismissed. After 1980 there was an excessively celebratory history of pre-colonial glories which ignored the hesitations of more sober historians. But there was an underlying change. Before independence many Zimbabwean historians had worked on pre-colonial history, like Bhebe, Bhila, Mudenge etc. After 1980 their earlier research was published but the focus of new historical research moved on to the twentieth century. With the exception of the persistent David Beach, the field was more or less left clear for amateur historians, like Chigwedere or for non-historians who were prepared to make themselves available as 'organic intellectuals' for the regime.

Yet in Mazarire's view, for twenty years the state itself rested content with only cursory references to the glories of the past. Its focus was on its contemporary agenda - the 'pacification' of Matabeleland, the drive towards the one-party state, development. During the period of ESAP history was declared more or less useless. The enthusiastic amateurs, like the sober historians, were left very much on the margins.

Yet today there is a new focus on the pre-colonial. Patriotic history has become central to the 'third chimurenga'; its stress on authenticity puts an emphasis on a 'traceable history of our ancestors in a land still truly black'. The old enthusiasts, together with many new ones, have been co-opted as 'organic intellectuals'. Chigwedere and Mudenge appear almost daily as ingenious historians as well as ministers - most recently arguing for ancient historical links between Zimbabwe and Iran. Mudenge depicted Moslem traders and teachers, driven out by Portuguese imperialism, as Iranians. Chigwedere found similarities between Iranian

Zimbabwean totems. On television geographers, sociologists and literary critics, prominent among them Claude Mararike, convener of the Nhaka Yedu (Our Heritage) programme on ZTV, proclaim an African philosophy of land and draw on African proverbial wisdom. They argue for the rejection of western interpretative theories. They defend localism instead of globalism.

Mazarire finds himself engaged in a double debate. On the one hand he is seeking to develop a new agenda for oral history after the premature death of David Beach, who dominated the field for so long. On the other hand he has to defend his authority to speak on pre-colonial history against the regime organic intellectuals who dominate the media.

In both debates Mazarire depends on dissidence and dissonance. David Beach certainly produced a complicated and plural history - too complicated in fact for many readers to follow. But in one sense Beach's historical assumptions fitted with those of the Mugabe regime. Beach focussed on a political history and on the chiefly lineages which are now once again playing so visible a part in Zimbabwe rural society.

Mazarire is seeking ways to get behind and beyond dynastic traditions. He seeks to write the history - and tap the memory - of landscapes through which dynasties move. He seeks to use myths and legends - which Beach largely discarded in a search for verifiable event history - as data for profound and varied and shifting religious ideas. He seeks to draw on landscapes and beliefs to explore the interactions of gender in pre-colonial history. The end result will be a very complex and layered 'national memory'. It will not be national in the sense of asserting a single polity or single culture, But it will be national in the sense of involving everyone - men and women, commoners and chiefs, landscapes and those who conceptualise them - in the making and remembering of the past.

Mazarire ended by emphasising the critical importance of access to the public. Local publication and dissemination was essential. He was not aiming to communicate only with other academic specialists in oral history but to enable local audiences to hear the multiple voices of the past.

[Note: in writing this summary I have drawn not only on Mazarire's written and spoken presentation but also on his responses to the excellent questions raised. I think that this has represented all the discussion except perhaps for the point raised by Enocent Msindo. Msindo asked why we needed to engage at all with the regime's organic intellectuals. We should simply take the view that politicised history was false history and an abuse of the past. To enter into debate with discredited non-scholars bestowed on them a spurious legitimacy. To this Mazarire replied that even bad history mattered and the argument with it had to be sustained.]

### **Great Zimbabwe**

Joost Fontein has recently completed a doctorate for Edinburgh University on 'The Silences of Great Zimbabwe'. In his presentation he emphasised that the struggle to control the interpretation of the monument had been between governments on the one hand and professional archaeologists on the other, sometimes in contestation and sometimes in collaboration with each other. In Zimbabwe today there is a common agreement about the importance of Great Zimbabwe as a national monument on the part of both the Mugabe government and of the archaeologist-curator of Great Zimbabwe, Edward Matenga. (Matenga's book - *The Soapstone Birds of Great Zimbabwe*, APG, Harare, 1998 - had drawn attention to the presence of the base of one bird in Germany and to the plans to repatriate it). The people neglected in the whole debate had been and still were the groups who lived around the monument.

These three clans - the Nemwana, the Charumbira and the Mugabe - had arrived in the area long after Great Zimbabwe was erected and inhabited. For this reason they were ignored by archaeologists, who were obsessed with origins, and their perceptions of the monument were not represented in the site museum. Nevertheless the creation of the fenced and guarded monument had affected them more anybody else. The clans had once buried their dead among the walling, or had gone there for rain rituals. Above all they had their own 'histories' in which Great Zimbabwe was crucial. Their totems and praise names arose out of

wars among them in the nineteenth century but the myths in which they were expressed were newer variants of archetypal oral themes. The clans contested with each other in a rhetoric of primality involving legends of girls emerging from fountains, possession by spirits, connections with the fabled Rozwi. These themes were combined together by local antiquarians and especially by a historically creative female spirit medium who laid claim to Great Zimbabwe as the necessary site for rituals of regeneration. She was 'the great, great, great aunt of Zimbabwe'.

Working with the local peoples one learnt that oral traditions are cultural resources which can be worked and re-worked. Fontein had no doubt that this had always been so. If we are to take the representation of multiple histories seriously there must be pro-active engagement with the peoples around Zimbabwe and a re-voicing of their experience at the site. The case of Great Zimbabwe is a classic instance of the tension between a constructed national history and the equally constructed but equally significant histories emerging from local landscapes.

JoAnn McGregor initiated discussion by referring to her own research in north-western Zimbabwe where local people showed a renewed desire to have their history recognised. 'You can do culture and tradition when you can't do anything else'. There were very many local history-scapes needing to be articulated.

An archaeologist in the audience took issue with what she took to be Fontein's over-critical account of the discipline. Properly conceived, archaeology could pre-eminently throw light on local landscapes and local histories. Fontein replied that he would like to see this done through local excavation and surveying but that he found the obsession with origins very boring. He thought that there were indeed signs that some archaeologists were taking up new questions but the rise of patriotic history had made it very difficult for them to represent Great Zimbabwe as anything other than a symbol of a single united national history. Enocent Msindo remarked that the monument was depicted on the ZanuPF party card and that he did not believe it could be de-politicised.

As for spirit mediums it could not be assumed that the emphasis on traditional 'authenticity' in patriotic history meant that they could be co-opted by the regime in the way that chiefs were being. There had been tension in the past between mediums and the Mugabe regime. It was at Great Zimbabwe, after all, that a medium of Nehanda had been arrested, tried and sentenced to death in 1982 for refusing to admit that Mugabe had a right to declare an end to the war for land. Fontein intended to return to the area to explore further the response of the local mediums to 'the third chimurenga'. This too was likely to be made up of innumerable local histories.

### **Women and Children: Away from Masculinism and Militarism**

Horace Campbell, once an ardent supporter of the Zimbabwean revolution, has recently published a book with the title *Reclaiming Zimbabwe. The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation* (David Philip, Claremont, 2003). Campbell writes:

The Zimbabwean leadership sought to project itself as the bearer of traditions of liberation and anti-imperialism. However this same leadership embodied the worst forms of leaderism and masculinist violence, with a strident dose of 'traditionalism' clothed in homophobic rhetoric to buttress a general culture of oppression and intolerance.

There is a well developed body of literature by democrats, human rights activists and feminist scholars who, for a long time, sought to bring to international attention the culture of oppression in Zimbabwe, especially in relation to the subjugation of women. This body of literature ... has interrogated the exhaustion of the mystique of armed struggle and how this mystique was associated with gender violence in Africa. (p.269)

Patriotic history is yet more 'masculinist and militarist' than the old nationalist history. The Research Days were not offered any overall synthesising paper revealing the ways in which an attention to gender, to women and to children could correct this masculinist distortion. Instead there were three case studies, one nineteenth century, one mid twentieth century and the third literary.

### **Women in the Ndebele State**

There was no discussion of the oral history of western Zimbabwe, though a paper tabled by Sabelo Ndlovu argued for a new approach towards it. Sabelo called for more theory in Zimbabwean precolonial history and in particular he made use of Gramscian ideas of hegemony in order to analyse the working ideologies of the Ndebele state. An analysis on these lines would prevent Lobengula from being claimed by patriotic history merely as victor in the 1893 Pu Pu battle against the Wilson patrol or depicted as a victim of Cecil Rhodes. It would also rescue Ndebele history from an excessive masculinity and militarism since an analysis of hegemony would necessarily have to involve an examination of the gender ideologies, symbols and rituals of the Ndebele state.

Though written without having seen Sabelo's paper, Marieke Clarke's presentation began to do just this. It emerged, of course, from her biography of Losekeyi, Lobengula's senior queen. Marieke had presented material on Losekeyi at a previous Research Day. Since then, however, she had read Jennifer Weir's thesis on Zulu royal women. This had suggested many more ideas about Ndebele queens as women of power, as owners of cattle and as empowerers of resistance.

What now emerged particularly clearly was the importance of the religious roles of the Ndebele queens. The annual Ncwala ceremony was led by senior royal women - by Lobengula's sister or by Losekeyi. Losekeyi herself came from a lineage of inyangas; she was a full-moon woman, communicating with the ancestors and making war medicines. (Most Ndebele attacks were made at full moon). She lived out a ceremonial celibacy. Her childlessness was part of the marriage contract with Lobengula.

Throughout Lobengula's kingdom were amakanda outposts each with its resident queen. These were significant defensive positions. The queens were attached to ibutho militia units. Losekeyi was herself attached to a key mbutho located very close to the king.

Lobengula's queens survived his death. [ TOR comments that Cecil Rhodes thought them so influential that he arranged for payments and pensions to be made to them during the peace negotiations in 1896 and 1897; some queens lived in the Bulawayo Location, maintaining accommodation for members of the royal family who wanted to visit the area of Lobengula's now-destroyed kraal] During his life Lobengula had sought to limit Losekeyi's influence but after his death she emerged as a potent symbol of Ndebele identity and resistance. She gave out weapons in 1896. When she herself died she was mourned for seven months. Her grave was visited for ceremonies and counsel. Zipra guerrillas laid bullets on it during the liberation war. There was still plenty of militarism in Marieke's account but she had certainly managed to temper the masculinity.

Gender and Nationalism 1945-1965: Writing alternative histories of Zimbabwean Nationalism  
Tim Scarnecchia's case study jumped fifty or so years but dealt with another time of key confrontation with the colonial state. It was a period which saw the emergence of a succession of open mass nationalist parties - the revived African National Congress; the National Democratic Party; the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union and the Zimbabwe African National Union. Patriotic history, like nationalist history before it, has debated where this sequence of parties fits into the revolutionary narrative. Were all these parties part of a single nationalist tradition? Or did the emergence of ZANU revive the historic tradition of 'confrontation'? Whichever answer patriotic history gives - and the reclamation of Joshua Nkomo as Father Zimbabwe means that ZAPU at least has to be admitted into the pantheon - it produces a single and unproblematic nationalism. And this nationalism, of course, is overwhelmingly masculine. As is well known, there are only two women buried at Heroes Acre and they are both wives of the national leaders, praised for domestic loyalty and endurance. Scarnecchia summed up the myths of patriotic history: 'that nationalism only began with the formation of the current ruling party, and that only a male-dominated leadership was responsible for the creation of the African nation-state'.

Meanwhile, as Scarnecchia writes in his paper, both the categories of 'gender' and the categories of 'nationalism' have been deconstructed over the past ten years, 'moving the historiography away from narrative treatments of either an essentialized African woman or an essentialized notion of nationalist unity'. Historians of women's experiences during the

liberation war 'see Zimbabwean nationalism as an ideology unwilling or unable to go beyond a rhetorical promise towards women's demands'.

In his presentation Scarnecchia aimed further to deconstruct nationalism. In particular he discussed 'a different kind of nationalism' pre-dating the late 1950s. He stressed that what has been labelled 'nationalism' was a complex and often contradictory bundle of different struggles. The historiography has pre-empted earlier contestations and streamlined them into one apparently coherent sequence. But we ought to speak rather of plural 'nationalisms', some of which were much more concerned with gender issues and with the problems of women than others.

The type of nationalism typified by Charles Mzingeli and his Reformed ICU in the early 1950s involved a kind of masculinity different from later forms. It also depended on an alliance with woman leaders operating outside formal political organisations. Scarnecchia calls this 'reciprocal nationalism'. As he writes: 'The RICU tried to address demands of the local population in a populist relationship that was dependent on results ... Mzingeli always had a more reciprocal relationship than the more educated leadership with the diverse populations in Harare Township and the few successful campaigns his organisation managed were dependent upon the participation of women ... whether as traders, beer brewers, or prostitutes, at one level, or the more respectable groups of teachers, nurses, social workers and religious leaders'.

Mzingeli's claim to lead these 'diverse populations' and especially women, depended upon him demonstrating 'man-hood'. In his day this meant standing up to whites 'like a man'; being disciplined, well dressed, responsible. This was the man-hood represented by the returned African soldiers from World War Two. It was very different from the township youth gang culture of 'hyper masculinity'.

But in the late 1950s younger nationalist leaders like Chikerema and Nyandoro emerged with an authoritarian rather than a reciprocal style. They managed to gain some control over the gangs and to mobilise them for anti-colonial and anti-rival violence. Women played a much less important role in this newer form of nationalism. In particular modern young women displayed an autonomy which outraged shrill male power and which led to the notorious bus-boycott rape; to attacks on mini-skirts; to increasing complaints by women in the African press of their subordination to nationalist patriarchy.

Scarnecchia argues that we need to explore all this more thoroughly. Reciprocal nationalism, he thinks, was in some ways a trade-union model and what happened to trade unions after the rise of the Youth League has some analogies with what happened to women. We do not have to accept that there has been, and can be, only one form of nationalism. In the past there have been divergent forms. Now that patriotic history is again exalting the claims of violent youth it is important to remember the possibilities of reciprocal nationalism.

### **Childhood, History and the Production of Nationhood**

The final case study in this session was Robert Muponde's discussion of two novels - Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil*, 1976 and Ben Chirasha's *Child of War*, 1985. These two novels make a connection with some of Scarnecchia's themes. They are both about alienated youths who became men - and heroes - by means of being recruited into the guerrilla armies. Obviously this is not the only trajectory of Zimbabwean boyhoods, let alone girlhoods. But Muponde's point was that patriotic history has roots and imaginary prefigurings. In its promise to alienated youth that they can become heroes of the third chimurenga, patriotic history echoes not only the nationalism of the Youth League but also the dreams and imaginings of young men who experienced the guerrilla war.

To understand this we need 'a more engaged history of childhood'. The two novels have in common a narrative of suffering on the part of boy children and of abuse at the hands of their elders. This suffering comes at the hands of older African men but it is not presented as an indictment of the patriarchal brutality of Shona rural society. It is seen rather as necessary suffering; a practice for the higher suffering involved in the guerrilla war. These boys achieve an autonomy from their elders by taking up the gun; they become sons of the soil, with

authority over their fathers. It is in a way a rural generational revolution, yet the novels repress the brutality of indigenous custom and institutions. At the same time they glorify violence: the sound of the gun is answered by the cry of the hero's child. Through both sounds the boy has become a man.

Muponde quoted from Ranger's *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War*, which documents the way in which young male mujibas were put back in their place by a relieved rural society after the end of the war. But he suggested that the memory of a time when 'children were history makers' lingered on. Patriotic history is reviving emotions for which Zimbabweans have all been prepared psychologically.

### **Discussion**

Diana Jeater commented on all three case-studies. She noted that women and children in fact have a place in patriotic history - but as victims rather than as agents. Women and children make good victims. Even Nehanda - the spirit medium heroine of 1896 - is depicted as a victim rather than as an agent. In such a perspective Mugabe is cast as father-protector. Hence any history which challenges victimhood challenges patriotic history.

One might ask of Marieke Clarke's presentation 'Which Losekeyi for what Zimbabwe?' Was she a warrior heroine? A black heroine? One might also ask why there were no Losekeyi or Nehanda figures for the second and third chimurengas. Powerful women are destabilising. In a similar way Tim Scarnecchia's paper shows the problems which arise when they are influential African women confronting a commandist African leadership. Here too patriotic history depends on victimhood.

One has to ask again 'What gendered history for which Zimbabwe?' One cannot produce a balanced historiography merely by putting women into nationalism, or into anything else. A gendered approach is essential for a history of agency.

### **History and Song**

Zanla forces in the second chimurenga organised pungwes in which 'freedom songs' were sung. The 5 Brigade in Matabeleland in the 1900s compelled people to attend parody pungwes and to sing the same songs. The 5 Brigade are remembered with derisive bitterness as 'the soldiers who sang'. And today the omnipresent Jonathan Moyo composes patriotic history jingles to be played every half hour on television.

They are often the subject of bitter controversy in what is left of the independent press. They are branded as obscene, involving as they do scantily clad urban female dancers cavorting in the furrows and proclaiming that 'Land is our Future'. One cartoon showed two peasant elders eying these dancers lasciviously and muttering to each other 'Land is our Posteriors!' But the jingles are undeniably catchy. At the Uppsala conference in May 2004 young Zimbabwean women NGO directors admitted that these jingles get into one's brain and that they find themselves singing them in the shower. It was appropriate, therefore, that the last session on the first Research Day should begin with Alex Magaisa's paper on 'Drums, Lyrics and Melodies: Listening to the History of a Nation'.

Magaisa reminded us that song was an important element of oral communication in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. Scholars have argued that 'poetic licence' was allowed to singers; that taunts could be directed at kings during the annual rituals; that praise songs contain warnings and criticisms. But he suggested that poetic licence was almost certainly not unlimited and singers were often repressed and punished in pre-colonial times just as today. Certainly the recent rules demanding a hundred per cent local content in the music broadcast in Zimbabwe did not mean that all Zimbabwean singers, or even the best ones, were featured.

Popular Zimbabwean singers do not set out to write history and only a few make direct comment on politics. But because of this their perspective is invaluable to historians. They question what is often taken for granted - as Oliver Mutukudzi asks 'Who is a Hero?', noting that Heroes Acre is filled with 'politicians all over' and asking where are the writers, the creators, the women? And they avoid the narratives of patriotic history altogether, pursuing other dramas of redemption as in the omnipresent Gospel songs.

### **Novelists and the Zimbabwean Imaginary**

At the Uppsala conference in May 2004 Robert Muponde argued provocatively that Zimbabwean novelists and poets could not easily now criticise or repudiate Robert Mugabe and his patriotic history. The President's speeches borrowed their colour and life from the work of Zimbabwean poets and writers; he drew upon what Muponde called their 'imaginary'. Now, in the last presentation of the first Research Day Ranka Primorac argued that the relationship was no so straightforward. Zimbabwean novelists might be concerned with land and authenticity and indigenous tradition but they treated these questions in complex ways which were not easy for politicians to appropriate.

She compared a sentence of Mugabe's with one of Chenjerai Hove's. In Mugabe's words, defying Blair, 'this country with its forests and insects, even the mosquitoes, belongs to us.' In Hove's novel *Bones* he asks 'if the birds and insects refuse to sing what would the forest do?' Mugabe's assertion is answered before it is even made.

Hove refuses to participate in official history. 'For those in search of history', he writes, 'go to the liars of the land'. All three of his novels avoid the markers of patriotic history. 1980 does not emerge as a clear dividing line; there is a constant interleaving of pre and post independence and strong continuities of event and destiny. Patterns are constantly repeated as part of a family's fate. Primorac sees Hove's novels as 'stories of frozen worlds' with an uneven and repetitive movements of time. Hove seeks for a more emancipatory passage of time but he does not find this in suffering and violence and repeated revolution. Nor does he find it in authentic ancestral tradition. In *Ancestors* the very person who could not traditionally be an ancestor at all - the dumb, childless female suicide - intervenes to lead children safely across space.

In the same way Hove expresses a deep passion for the land but it has to be one's own and legitimate land. And desire for land is meaningless in Hove's work without associated rights to movement - the right to leave the land; the right to return to it; the right to arrive; 'spatial' rights.

What a politician fails to learn from reading Hove, but what a historian could with profit learn, is that narratives are not straightforward and lineal; that there are more rights than those included in the litanies of patriotic history.

### **Religion and History**

The second of the two Research Days began on Sunday morning, appropriately enough with a consideration of the narratives of Zimbabwean religion - which are also neither straightforward nor lineal and which are also about other kinds of rights.

There have been some extraordinary religious reversals since the current Zimbabwean ideological crisis began. The Evangelical Alliance, historically a-political, has emerged as an outspoken advocate of democracy and human rights - the *Chronicle* in Bulawayo ran an extraordinary scare story in which the Evangelicals were alleged to have combined with the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube, in a plot against the state. Financed by gay and satanic groups in the United States, they were planning to post spies disguised as pastors in every parish of the country! Meanwhile a branch of the Johana Masowe Apostles, historically antagonistic to the demands of any state, has emerged as protagonists of the third chimurenga and are to be seen in their white-robed thousands at Heroes Acres ceremonies.

What kind of history explains these reversals? What vision of history do the churches hold? Do they feel threatened by the growing attacks on Christianity as 'inauthentic' or by articles such as the recent one in the *Mirror* proclaiming Bernard Mizeki as the first of the sell-outs? And are the spirit mediums and priests of the rain shrines the beneficiaries of appeals to traditional values?

David Maxwell offered an overview of the historical literature on religion in Zimbabwe. There had been no major study of African Traditional Religion since the publication of David Lan's *Guns and Rain* (James Currey, 1985). Lan's work was historiography as well as

contemporary analysis and it effectively demolished the sort of 'history' which Donald Abraham (and more recently Chigwedere) had constructed on the basis of the oral myths retailed by mediums. Partly because of this, studies of mediums and shrines had been restricted to their twentieth century history - like Ranger's *Voices From the Rocks* (James Currey, 1999) or Maxwell's own *Christians and Chiefs* (Edinburgh UP, 1999). What was needed was a deep historical study of African religion in Zimbabwe reaching back several centuries comparable to the work of Matthew Schoffeleers in Malawi. Maxwell thought it would be possible to attempt this though neither Abraham nor Beach had shown the way.

As editor of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* he was aware that few articles were submitted on African 'traditional' religious history for any part of the continent. This was partly because the response of Africans to missionary culture had become a dominant theme; partly because of the difficulty of the sources. But it was also partly because African Traditional Religion does not easily fit in with narratives of the African state or its invented rites. And this was why it was important to make deep historical studies - the more historically explored and understood it became, the more difficult it would be for the state to appropriate and exploit African religion.

So far as Zimbabwean Christianity was concerned there existed a rich variety of studies on its origins, its experience of guerrilla war, its role in healing etc. These studies amply refuted any simplistic analysis of mission Christianity as an 'alien' and undermining ideology. Two further historiographical developments were necessary, however. One was for a detailed study of 'encounter' between African religion and Christianity in the 'long conversation' mode. A second pressing need was for a synthesis of the social history of Zimbabwean Christianity - a bringing together, for instance, of Ranger's influential but scattered articles on 'conversion' in Manicaland.

Urban religious history was a relatively unexplored but very important field. Even those, like Terri Barnes, who had written about urban women's striving for 'respectability', had not looked at church sources. Yet Christianity had been a very important ingredient in a moral narrative in which men and women sought 'righteous lives'. He hoped that his own book on the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God would throw fresh light on urban social history, gendering and nationalism.

### **Anti-historical Religion**

By contrast to Maxwell's broad sweep Matthew Engelke offered a provocative case study of a religious movement which did not so much offer its own historical narrative as repudiate history and narrative altogether. He focussed on the WeChesanu Apostles, one of the groups which had developed out of the prophetic experiences of Johana Masowe. The late Border Gezi, now buried in Heroes Acre, had been a member of this group; his fellow Apostles thronged the Acre on Heroes Day. But this was not because they shared the narrative of patriotic history. Indeed they distrusted anything which privileged history over spiritual experience.

Thus they called themselves 'the Christians who don't read the Bible'. This was in part a critique of colonialism since the Bible was a key foundation of colonial power. It was a European version, produced by 'men with black hearts'. 'We could not trust the whites with their book'. But even a Bible untainted by colonial translation would be inadequate. 'The Bible is stale; bible reading makes the religious life dull; ours is a religion of talk and the Bible cannot talk. But the prophets can'. These Apostles are reluctant even to write letters; they prefer communication to be 'live and direct'.

So how would they answer the question 'What History for Which Zimbabwe?' The answer is that these Apostles experience great tension between their fear of being frozen within the covers of a book - 'the Holy Spirit does not want to be published' - and their realisation that in contemporary Zimbabwe recognition depends upon being able to lay claims to the past and to places. They are concerned to be visible; they demand 're-countability'. Some of them hope that Engelke will himself write a book thus providing 'historical legitimacy to an anti-history religion'. Others have developed their own rich but highly idiosyncratic oral history. Yet others stick to the view that all history should be rejected because, like the Bible, it causes more trouble than it is worth.

Engelke thought that his case study offered perhaps two main lessons for historians. One was that not only pluralism but idiosyncrasy had to be reflected in their work. The other was that there were some Zimbabweans who would choose neither patriotic history nor any more complex alternative but who would prefer no history at all.

### **Discussion**

The panel was chaired by Marja Spierenburg, whose recent doctoral thesis (*Strangers, Spirits and Land Reforms. Conflicts about Land in Dande, Northern Zimbabwe*, Amsterdam, 2003) revisits the area and the spirit mediums described by David Lan. She agreed with David Maxwell that African religion has been under-researched. There had been too much focus on their role in war and not enough understanding of their role once war was ended. Politics - and history - is about debate and not only about 'resistance'. (Patriotic history might itself be defined as too much about resistance and not enough about debate). The mediums of the Dande, like those around Great Zimbabwe, root their debating propositions in historical assertion. They advance the claims of the ancestors to land and its management as against those of the state. There are indeed many things that historians need to know in order to understand the Dande situation - what have been the relations in the past of mediums to chiefs and people; how have they adapted to the influx of strangers; how can we historicise the realm of witchcraft.

In general discussion some voices were heard to express uneasiness about a history so plural that it took 'uneducated' mediums and Apostles seriously; other voices insisted that an alternative to patriotic history could not just be a narrative of progress and respectability. David Maxwell suggested that everyone read Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition as History*. The myths and legends of spirit mediums and other local rural experts on the past were an extremely important corrective to European-style history. We needed to explore their connection and dissonance with regime ideology. There was some debate about whether the WeChesanu Apostles were Christians but as Engelke pointed out 'Jesus did not need the Bible'. Enocent Msindo suggested that we needed not only one provocative case study but a comparative analysis which set out a range of Christian attitudes to land and to history.

### **Land and History**

This led neatly into the major panel on land. Patriotic history revolves around the sequence of land dispossession, resettlement and reclamation. Here, if anywhere, historians are most likely to have been used, abused or ignored.

Jocelyn Alexander gave an overview of the immense literature on land in Zimbabwe - another case in which the need for a lucid synthesis was urgent. Some of the historians present at the Research Days had in a sense laid the foundations for patriotic history's stress on expropriation and resistance. Robin Palmer's study of land and racial domination and Terry Ranger's books on the first and second chimurenga were foundational works in this way. Alexander, McGregor and Ranger's *Violence and Memory* was a key text for the massive evictions without compensation which had scarred the modern history of Matabeleland. The point was partly that at the core of patriotic history there lies real history - the first part of Mugabe's election speeches might have been drawn from these books.

But there were other points to be made too. One was that the literature enormously complicated any simple notion of 'African land'. It revealed the bewildering variety of ways of laying claim to the land and the huge variety of histories which people make use of to justify entitlements to it. Another was that the literature on state intervention in land use and tenure - Drinkwater, Monro, Tshuma - showed that colonial interference in communal tenure had often been continued rather than repudiated by the Zimbabwean government after 1980. There were as many continuities as disruptions. (And Marja Spierenburg's book on spirit mediums and 'land reform' in the Dande described just such modernising intervention by the new Zimbabwean state). A further point was that recent studies of landscapes and what Fontein calls *historyscapes* revealed the different ways of seeing and understanding the land. The recent announcement that title to all land will be vested in the state is a drastic attempt at simplification and almost certainly of over-simplification.

There had been work on peasant agency and other work which made it clear that the dichotomy of rural and urban, peasant and worker was unreal. The dualism which patriotic history makes between the loyal countryside and the treacherous towns cuts through whole networks of interconnection between the two.

Most of this work had been directed to the African areas. Far less attention has been paid to the history of white commercial farms, though Blair Rutherford's work on agricultural labourers has begun to rectify this. The recent trauma of white farming has already produced many lamentations and will soon generate many theses.

The current crisis has also polarised intellectuals. The collection launched at the Research Days on Saturday night - Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen's Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business. Rethinking Land, State and Nation (Weaver, 2003) - broke new ground by emphasising conflicts among African rural stakeholders. Its criticism of authoritarianism has been attacked by Sam Moyo as typical of the 'sorry state of progressive intellectuals' who in his view sideline imperialism and racism and fail to celebrate a genuine popular achievement. Patriotic history can make selective use of a lot of the historical literature on land but much of it raises worrying and unresolved questions. We need studies of the Zanu PF elites who are driving the land distribution process and are the major beneficiaries of it - we need to study the latest stage in a series of class formations by means of land ownership. We need to throw light on the shadowy presence of race. What have been the range of black-white relationships on the land? We need new and inclusive social and cultural histories of Zimbabwean rural society. Above all else we need understand the state.

### **Land in the Politics of White Rhodesia**

Donal Lowry addressed two of the gaps identified by Jocelyn Alexander - the lack of information on commercial farming and the lack of understanding of the white land-owning class. He explained that he was a political rather than an economic historian but that from this perspective he could make some comparative points about past white and present black perceptions and puncture some of the myths on both sides. Land became crucial to the self-image of whites: they too could claim that land was their prosperity even though most of them lived in towns. Ownership and exploitation of land offered ideological and moral justification for settler rule and its myths of modernity and civilisation.

There is a sense in which white farmers are more esteemed today than ever before - the world is taking them at their own valuation as paragons of efficiency. Yet early white agriculture was deeply precarious. It was only viable because much land had been obtained as 'loot' or because the BSA Company regime allowed debts to pile up on settler land purchases. White market production was small and far exceeded by African peasant output. Nevertheless, the Company provided services and support for white farming. Despite this, white farmers were the chief critics of the Company and of absentee landlords who allowed African small holders to farm the land in exchange for rents. Farmers emerged as the spokesmen of the settler community; they resisted Company taxes, using radical rhetoric and appealing to British heroes like John Hampden; white Rhodesian populism was 'vested in the land'. Farmers were crucial to the self-government movement and the Rhodesia Agricultural Union became a sort of parliament discussing issues far beyond farming. The farmers adopted a discourse of yeoman self-determination and a critique of globalised capital.

The new settler state after 1923 made control of land the central issue in its relations with Britain. Despite fears that it might prejudice its case for 'responsible government', the need for an 'apportionment' of land was introduced at an early stage of its negotiations with Britain. In the end Land Apportionment was smuggled past British critics disguised as a humanitarian measure designed to protect helpless blacks. Yet the settlers over-bid; they never managed to occupy and exploit all the land allocated to them by the Land Apportionment Act. Right up to the 1950s their boasted efficiency remained more rhetorical than real.

White farming only began to prosper when the boom of the Second World War continued after it. These were the years of the 'tobacco heroes' and of the great tea and coffee plantations. For the first time whites began to impose themselves upon the landscape. At the same time the scale of African evictions increased enormously. Meanwhile industry and commerce developed so that even at its peak of efficiency farming did not play the dominant

role in the Rhodesian economy that it did in settler ideology and imagination. When the whites become the subject of social and cultural history there will be plenty of 'literature', in the shape of farm novels, and of 'art', in the shape of landscape water-colours, to manifest the white 'imaginary' of land.

### **A Land Veteran looks back - and forward**

Robin Palmer introduced himself as a 'land veteran but not a war veteran'. His 1977 book has been much used as a text in Zimbabwean narratives of land alienation. It is drawn on in the Utete Report; it was used at the Copenhagen conference in September 2001 to justify many different positions; in the course of all this usage a complex history has been reduced into a simple one. Many people have lost sight of the length, complexity and violence of the process and write and speak as if the Land Apportionment Act, for instance, immediately removed all blacks from the greater part of the land. In practice, of course, it initiated a long struggle. In many ways the 'fast-track' land resettlement is the latest instalment of this - a fact he illustrated by handing out two descriptions of the agony and trauma of eviction, one from an African family forced out of Filabusi in 1948 and the other from a white farmer friend describing the death of his rural community in 2003.

He would not withdraw anything in his 1977 book but thirty years has thrown it into different perspectives. If he were re-writing it now he would be tempted to set it in a context of globalisation and inequality. Its implied agenda for the future would also have to be corrected. In 1977 he took the view that 'peasants can do it' and anticipated that majority rule would more or less immediately result in widespread land occupations and in the support of the new Zimbabwean state for peasant farming. He failed to predict the curious lack of political will or of popular participation which in fact followed 1980. The result is a much delayed reclamation of the land which is only partly about the re-establishment of small-holder farming and which is at least as much about the replacement of one agrarian elite by another.

What is crucial now is to maintain Zimbabwean research capacity. When the dust has died down and donor finance comes in to stabilise the agrarian revolution it is critically important that enough is known for the money to be spent relevantly and wisely. One can see even from reading the Herald that conflicts exist everywhere between different African stake-holders; that there is a fierce struggle for labour; that there is a crisis of environmental degradation. It is not a situation which can be predicted from the classical historical studies of land but one which needs to be researched in detail.

### **Discussion**

Enocent Msindo remarked that all the presentations had focussed on economics and politics. We should go beyond that and look at other questions - at land and ethnicity; land and imagination. 'We could produce quite a nice history indeed'. Gerald Mazarire thought that we had spoken a great deal about the use of history by Zanu PF intellectuals but had not problematised the use of history by MDC intellectuals. We should be more open about that side of the debate. Alex Magaisa remarked that we needed to give law its place in the story; to examine the commercial farmers' use of the courts; and to explore Mugabe's attempts to embed the reclamation of land in the constitution.

Jane Parpart asked whether the exclusive focus on land - and on land as a collective African inheritance - had displaced the idea of citizenship. Should rights not be vested in citizenship? To which Brian Raftopoulos replied that this was indeed the nub of the question and the reason why the Zimbabwe Coalition and other civil society intellectuals were stressing the rights of citizens as well as rights to land.

### **The Historian's role in the making of public policy - the case of the towns.**

The issue of citizenship made a link with the next session. Ennie Chipembere explained that in the past year she had moved from a research degree in economic history to development studies and policy formation. This had taught her that more is needed than academic publication. Historical knowledge is invaluable but it has to be applied. It was evident from the Research Days that all historical production was potentially political. It made no sense for historians to seek to be un-engaged. Indeed she urged that they become engaged directly in contributing to policy research.

Her academic field is urban history and she is writing a doctorate on colonial policies towards African township housing in Salisbury and on the clashes between the Southern Rhodesian government, the Municipalities, the rate-payers, industry and African residents. It is obvious that these clashes are being repeated today, as the Minister deposes the elected executive mayor of Harare and dismisses councillors; as ratepayers protest against city budgets; and as services break down in a welter of recrimination. So she asks herself 'What History for Which Harare?' and in particular 'What Development History for Which Harare?'

Ennie had been struck by the reference in Terence Ranger's November 2003 paper to the 'muteness' of the University of Zimbabwe when confronted by patriotic history. How was she then to speak? How was she to respond, in particular, to the marginalisation of African urban populations in patriotic discourse?

She was aware of the subjectivity of history. In the Economic History Department every student had to read E.H.Carr's What is History and Ennie read out a passage in which Carr compares a historian to a fisherman in the wild seas of truth. The historian has to decide where to cast the line and what bait to use. She would be a fisherwoman, casting her bait in polluted urban waters, and filleting the fish she caught for consumption by urban policy makers.

She took as her example of rigorous policy research the inquiry commissioned by the Combined Harare Residents Association. This was designed to enable them to counter Minister Chombo. It focussed on who controls the city; the roles of the state, the municipality, the rate-payers, NGOs, citizens. These were exactly the same issues thrown up by her own research on urban policy fifty years ago. The CHRA research analysed the Municipal Act and its limitations and made recommendations for constructive amendments to it. An all-party parliamentary portfolio committee received this technical paper and pursued the issue which it raised, among other things criticising the Minister for the ill effects of his constant interference.

Ennie admired this piece of research but noted that like almost all NGO inquiries it was a-historical. The CHRA project sought information from other urban situations - from Kampala and from Munich. But it did not look at parallel situations within the experience of Harare itself or make comparisons between Harare and Bulawayo. If a historian had been involved it would have been possible, for example, to throw light on the contrast between the self-confident sense of citizenship and belonging expressed in Bulawayo and the diffidence and lack of identity in Harare. Ennie challenged Terence Ranger and Jane Parpart and others working on Bulawayo to help come up with the answers to this.

### **History and Water: the perspective of Institutions**

The last presentation of the Research Days was made by Edmore Mupfema, also from the Economic History department at UZ. Mupfema is working for a doctorate on water supplies: the Chair of the session, Beacon Mbiba, remarked that he was very happy for this paper to follow on from Chipembere's since the cities were so thirsty!

Edmore said that the historiography has been dominated by land at the expense of water. Like a pioneer earlier researcher, Frances Cleaver, he wanted to re-instate the primacy of water. If one did so it led one to an institutional approach to history and this in turn led to a completely different periodisation. He noted in passing that academic work everywhere was subject to the dominant ideological paradigms. In the UK he was expected to work within the neo-classical approach though he was far from convinced of its relevance.

An institutional focus allowed him to avoid these ideological dilemmas. And a focus on the institutions established to manage rural and urban areas challenges the notion that 1980 represented a crucial break. The water law remained the same after 1980 and so did the institutions. From this perspective a change from Tribal Trust Lands to Communal Areas meant nothing - water planning and provision remained the same. Irrigation schemes continued. In the commercial farm sector, too, government patronage continued to ensure well watered farms.

Maybe 2000 will constitute more of a break. In the contest of What History for Which Zimbabwe the key question is whether water policy will now be linked to the commercialisation of the African rural areas or the ruralisation of the commercial sector. Maybe the title of Robin Pamler's *Land and Racial Domination* is still appropriate though the race has changed.

David Mandiyanikere commented from the perspective of a researcher on rural local government. He thought that 2000 really did constitute a break. No water development can be undertaken at a moment when the njuzu spirits are as important as irrigation. 'The agonies of the local authorities' are extreme; like Harare everything is decided at the centre but the blame is allocated locally. Zimbabwe no longer has two levels, sub-national and national. Chombo has become Minister for Harare with a Governor under him. Throughout the country Governors are the key players and Councils have their hands tied behind their backs.

Angelous Dube, ex Provincial Administrator of Matabeleland South, made a magisterial intervention. Zanu PF, she said, did not so much break the law as bend it. She gave the example of Chinotimba's 'leave' from the city of Harare. The issue of urban 'mismanagement' was applied selectively: when the idea of Executive Mayors was introduced it was never anticipated that they might represent the opposition; when they did so they were outflanked by the appointment of urban District Administrators and Governors. This had happened even in Bulawayo though that city 'had always known where to draw the line'. As for water she believed that the department of water and sanitation was 'still robust' and that Matabeleland's 'Give a Dam' campaign, in which she had been involved, still continued.

The session ended with a member of the audience commenting that there was nothing intrinsically different about urban history. If Ennie Chipembere's case for historical engagement applied in the towns it applied equally everywhere else.

### **A Conclusion**

Brian Raftopolous said that it had been the most worthwhile two days since the two days he had spent in prison, which had also been spent in discussing history though there it was the history of football! He returned to the organising questions of the Research Days - what discourses alternative to patriotic history exist or could exist? Were we historiographically prepared for the crisis? Where do we go now?

He drew on the discussions to emphasise several points. The first was the argument made by Tim Scarnecchia on the need to distinguish between several 'nationalisms'. If one looked at citizenship there was both national and civic citizenship. Mzingeli was suspicious of the young nationalists because he felt they did not take seriously enough the project of urban citizenship. If one looked at rights it was necessary to re-iterate the point made by Ranka Primorac that rights to ownership and residence only made sense if there were also the rights to come and go. The papers on religion had raised the question of alternative and parallel narratives to that of nationalism. All these possibilities had to be explored. Zanu PF would never undertake this because it was 'so afraid to look into its own past'. Nationalism had been in many ways an urban growth. The idea of urban dwellers as a totemless people was in itself merely a re-iteration of colonial concepts.

Nevertheless, even if one worked on the towns and on labour it was hard to avoid one's work becoming complicit. Even his own work on labour avoids questions that now come back to haunt us - who really did the ZCFTU represent?

His second point was that the existing historiography was very full but that it nevertheless had major gaps. The greatest was that there is no study of the construction of race in Zimbabwe, an extraordinary fact given that Rhodesian rule depended upon it. The absence of such studies has allowed all ambiguities and contradictions to be eroded so that today 'whites' are spoken of as a single category. 'The race issue is on the table'. As Terri Barnes shows in her recent analysis of school history texts whites are presented as monolithic oppressors. The left focuses on class rather than on race. Yet the end of the white commercial farms did not mean the end of race as an issue in Zimbabwe.

Looking to the future the great need was to study the reception of ideas. Did the repetition of the slogans of patriotic history and its teaching in schools and colleges mean that it had already become hegemonic? There were enough jokes in circulation about it to encourage him to think this was not yet so. Nevertheless it is very important to counter it. We need a general history of Zimbabwe which synthesises what we know about religion, land, the towns. We must go beyond political economy to include culture and consciousness. The battle to record the past is now a political struggle. 'If you are a historian you have political accountability'.

Above all, as Jocelyn Alexander insisted, we need to understand the state. It was not adequate merely to describe it as authoritarian. Building a state was a process of creating constituencies. The colonial state co-opted Africans in the past in way which we do not yet fully recognise or understand. The Mugabe state co-opts interests now. It rules by satisfying those interests and not just by propaganda or terror. We need to study this process.

In short there was more than enough to keep historians busy for a long time yet.

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