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PROBLEMATISING NATIONALISM IN ZIMBABWE: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Nationalism, as a mobilising ideology, has had a powerful presence in Zimbabwean history, as it has on a global level. This article is an attempt to trace the historiography of nationalism in Zimbabwe from the 1960s to the present. It argues that since the celebrated nationalist inspired texts of the 1960s, there has been an increasing attempt to unpack the ideology and practice of nationalism and nationalist politics, fracturing our view of the latter through a more careful analysis of class, gender, ethnicity and changing rural-urban relations, as well as periodising the presence of nationalism in Zimbabwean history. The result is that we now have a more complex picture of nationalism, reflecting both its continued resonance and its uneven and differential presence. This has opened up the possibility for less ahistorical, essentialist notions of the subject.

INTRODUCTION

In his 1979 review of the social and economic historiography of Zimbabwe,¹ Ian Phimister set out to explore the path-breaking contributions of Marxist interventions in the historical debates between 1970-1979, emphasising also the limitations of the existing liberal and Africanist discourse. The relationships between structure and agency, forms of accumulation and social differentiation under colonialism, and the tensions between the Africanist's emphasis on the more or less unified agencies of nationalist politics and the differential responses to colonial rule stressed by radical historians, formed the central features of Phimister's seminal discussion. In his conclusion, Phimister lamented that there was often a methodological overlap between liberal and Africanist discourses on the one hand, and the new radical historiography. Explaining the cause of such an overlap Phimister observed that such radical historians,

were constrained to clear away the existing historiographical undergrowth and to initiate construction of materialist interpretations

* I am grateful for the useful comments of Dr. Patricia Hayes.

1 I. R. Phimister, 'Zimbabwe: Economic and social historiography since 1970', *African Affairs*, (1979), 78, (cxl).

of Zimbabwe political economy, but in doing so they inevitably risked the appearance and occasionally the substance of capture by the very liberal problematic they were confronting.²

The result of this methodological proximity was 'the failure of Marxist studies of Zimbabwean economy and society to establish themselves securely as a distinct paradigm'.³ This failure of Marxist studies, referred to by Phimister, was related to the problem of understanding the nationalism-race-class triad under colonialism. While the Africanist emphasis on the celebration of African, and more broadly, nationalist agency, paid too little attention to differential struggles, the radical emphasis on class largely subsumed issues of race and nationalism. Because of the failure of both the Africanist and radical historians to confront the relations between these categories in more convincing ways, a common analytical problem in this area in the 1970s, the methodological overlaps were not surprising as each held on to the stronger coat tails of the other's arguments.

The issue, of course, was not only a methodological problem, but was also located in this force field of the political dynamics of the period, 1970-1979. Problematizing nationalism in the context of the on-going liberation struggle not only at a national level, but also in a regional context, had serious political implications for historical analysts. More will be said about such political contextualisation below.

The issues which Phimister raised in 1979 have continued to surface in the historiographical debates on Zimbabwe, since that period. The arguments have taken different forms, but the central problem of relating nationalist hegemony to difference, and discourses of unity to the contradictions born out of the struggles and varying perspectives of subordinate classes, remains. However, there was one problem in the perspective Phimister proposed for a future paradigm of historical research. His emphasis on the centrality of class for future historical work, always contained within it the possibility of economistic and reductionist readings. He has recently emphasized this formulation by stating that unless the processes of race, nationalism, and gender 'are refracted through class they ultimately mislead rather than inform'.⁴ Phimister's own excellent work, like much of the radical history which has relied so heavily on him, myself included, has sometimes displayed such economism. This central focus on class perhaps also stemmed from

2 *Ibid.*, 267-268.

3 *Ibid.*, 267.

4 I. R. Phimister, 'Keynote Address at the Conference on 'The Zimbabwean Economy 1930-1990', 4-7 August 1997, University of Zimbabwe.

an underestimation of the potential for fruitful growth within the liberal, Africanist paradigm. In fact there have been substantial developments in this field centred around the work of Terence Ranger, the doyen of Zimbabwean historiography.

Important work on the 'inventions' and 'social constructions' of nationalist and ethnic discourse has emerged under Ranger's influence. These developments are still characterised by some of the problems Phimister raised, which will be discussed below. However, their central concern with nationalism has provided valuable lessons for new analytical developments.

In order to carry out this review of Zimbabwean historiography, this article will concentrate on two periods. Firstly we will revisit briefly the period covered by Phimister, starting however from 1967-1979, in order to make some additional comments on the developments in this period. However, the major focus of this discussion will be an assessment of historiographical developments between 1980-1997, namely the post-independence period in Zimbabwe. In doing this we hope to review the questions which were raised during the formative periods of historiographical growth, as well as the limitations of such interventions.

THE PERIOD 1967-79

The year 1967 marked the publication of the formative Africanist text on African agency in Zimbabwe, namely Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*.⁵ The book had a formative influence not only academically, but also politically as it helped to feed the nationalist invention of a continuous thread of anti-colonial struggle. The book dealt with African resistance to colonial intervention in 1896-97, which in popular nationalist discourse, became known as Chimurenga I, the sequel being the liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s. This book was completed while Ranger was teaching at the University of Dar-es-Salaam between 1963 and 1970, after being deported from Southern Rhodesia in 1963 for his involvement in nationalist politics during his seven years' stay in the settler colony.⁶ For younger aspiring historians like myself, who were also involved in nationalist politics, the lure of Ranger's unified vision of early anti-colonial struggle was strong. In 1982, a leading Zimbabwean poet paid homage to Ranger, in a poem entitled 'To Terence':

5 T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-97* (Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1967).

6 For some recent biographical details on Ranger see, John McCracken, 'Terence Ranger: A personal appreciation', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (June 1997), (23), (ii).

You were gone when I came,
and yet I have met
the blood you spilled
in the muscle of history.

.....

Your history, Terence,
is an arrival
where others departed.⁷

In 1970, this book was followed by Ranger's *The African Voice*⁸ which Phlminster aptly described as 'a mature expression of the Africanist scholarship which then dominated central African studies'.⁹ This book attempted to track the development of African political and social organisation in Southern Rhodesia up to 1945, a precursor to the study of mass nationalism in the colony.

In addition to Ranger's African work, numerous books by leading African nationalists themselves, which span both time periods under review in this article, appeared which provided both general and autobiographical accounts of nationalist struggle. Ndabaningi Sithole, who was to become the first president of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963, produced his book *African Nationalism*¹⁰ in 1959 in which he combined his personal movement towards Nationalism, with an attempt to theorise what he termed the 'factor of nationalism.'

Eshmael Mlambo's *The Struggle of a Birthright* (1972)¹¹ also attempted to provide the historical background for the emergence of African nationalism. Autobiographies by Bishop Muzorewa (1978), Maurice Nyagumbo (1980) and Joshua Nkomo (1984)¹² provided interesting and valuable insights into the lives of major nationalist leaders, within the broad narrative of nationalist politics. In the case of Nkomo's book, appearing in the middle of the war in Matabeleland in the mid-1980s, the story is also one of the tensions and break-up of nationalist unity. The most interesting of this genre of work were the two books produced by

7 Chenjerai Hove, 'To Terence', in *Up in Arms* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1982), 33.

8 T. O. Ranger, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* (Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1970).

9 Phlminster, 'Zimbabwe: Economic and social historiography since 1970', 253.

10 Ndabaningi Sithole, *African Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1970).

11 Eshmael Mlambo, *The Struggle for a Birthright* (C. Hurst Company, London 1972).

12 Bishop Abel Muzorewa, *Rise Up and Walk* (Sphere Books, London, 1978); Maurice Nyagumbo, *With The People* (Allison and Busby, London, 1980); Joshua Nkomo, *The Story of My Life* (Methuen, London, 1984).

Lawrence Vambe in 1972 and 1976.¹³ Vambe's work provided a fascinating insight into the urban social history of nationalist politics setting in an important precedent for the growth of urban historiography in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s.

Ranger's Africanist sway in the study of early anti-colonial struggles in Southern Rhodesia dominated the field, until the emergence in the 1970s of alternative *analytical perspectives*. Between the work of Giovanni Arrighi,¹⁴ Charles Van Onselen¹⁵, Duncan Clarke¹⁶, Phimister¹⁷, Harris¹⁸ and Davies¹⁹, processes of class formation, class struggle and articulation of modes of production, became a more prominent feature of the analysis of the settler formation. However, these interventions by radical scholars failed to seriously engage the problematic of nationalism for a number of reasons. Firstly, much of the work by these radical scholars was concentrated in the period before the emergence of mass nationalist politics in the mid-1950s, and thus the implications of the analysis of class for an understanding of nationalism were not seriously explored. Secondly, the most important historical texts on class, namely the work of Van Onselen and Phimister had as their central focus, the establishment of the existence of worker consciousness, against the more undifferentiated focus of the Africanist and liberal schools. Thus Van Onselen boldly stated:

By systematically probing the response of African workers within the context of a specific industry, it seems possible to suggest that there was a well developed worker consciousness from the earliest days of the mining industry.²⁰

13 Lawrence Vambe, *An Ill-Fated People* (Heinemann, London, 1972); Also, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (Heinemann, London, 1976).

14 G. Arrighi and J. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (Monthly Review Press, London, 1973).

15 C. Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (Pluto, London, 1976).

16 D. G. Clarke, *Contract Workers and Underdevelopment in Rhodesia* (Mambo Press, Gwelo 1974); *Agricultural and Plantation Workers in Rhodesia* (Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1977); 'Structural trends affecting the conditions of labour for African workers in Rhodesia', *Rhodesian Journal of Economics*, (January 1976), 10, (ii); 'The Under-development of African Trade Unions and Working Class Action in Post-war Rhodesia' (Oxford Workshop, Unpub. mimeo, 1974). Clarke, a prolific researcher, published much more in the 1970s.

17 I. R. Phimister and C. Van Onselen, *Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1978).

18 P. Harris, *Black Industrial Workers in Rhodesia* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1974); 'Industrial workers in Rhodesia, 1946-1972: Working class elite or lumpen proletariat?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (1975), 1.

19 R. Davies, 'Notes on the theory of the informal sector with reference to Zimbabwe', *South African Labour Bulletin*, (1977), III.

20 C. Van Onselen, 'Worker consciousness in Black miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920', in I. R. Phimister and C. Van Onselen, *Studies in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1978), 19.

Moreover, heavily influenced by social historians such as E. P. Thompson and Eugene Genovese, Van Onselen sought this expression of worker discontent 'in the nooks and crannies of the day-to-day work situation', which in his view were the only ways in which workers could express their discontent in the context of the repressive labour conditions on the mine compounds. In this kind of analysis class tended to become a delimited corporate framework, linked to an historical task of proletarianisation.²¹ The reductionist pull of such a trajectory was hardly going to be of much use for an understanding of the complexities of nationalist mobilisation.

The work of historians like Van Onselen and Phimister was developed within the context of the radical South African labour historiography of the 1970s, which in Lewis's words, 'followed hard on the heels of the revival of South African trade unionism in the early 1970s'.²² This growth in labour history also reflected the focus of the South African Left on labour as an alternative focus of anti-apartheid struggle. The decisive effects of Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement on the political scene in South Africa during this period, also raised important theoretical and political questions on race and nationalism, which may have fed a heightened concern with class on the part of large sections of the South African Left. In such a context class could once again have the effect of subsuming issues of race and nationalism. In any case the influence of these developments could be detected in the work of the radical historians focusing on labour in Zimbabwe. Thirdly, even when questions of ethnicity were dealt with by radical historians, the dynamic and construction of ethnic consciousness was located largely in the abode of production.²³ Thus even though the political economy interventions of the radicals raised serious questions, absent in Ranger's work, the work of the radical historians itself raised new problems and limitations.

However, Ranger's work not only faced criticism from the Marxist inspired historiography. His own interpretation of the uprising of 1896/97, which fed so much nationalist nostalgia and mythology, was seriously undermined by the late 1970s. The work of Beach²⁴ and Cobbing²⁵ seriously

21 In a different context, see T. Nairn's critique of E. P. Thomson's use of class, in T. Nairn, *The Enchanted Class: Britain and Its Monarchy* (London, Vintage, 1994).

22 John Lewis, 'South African labour history: A historiographical assessment', *Radical History Review*, (1990), 46, (vii).

23 I. Phimister and Charles Van Onselen, 'The political economy of tribal animosity: A case study of the 1929 Bulawayo Location 'Faction fight'', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (October 1979), 6, (i).

24 D. N. Beach, 'Chimurenga: The Shona risings of 1896-97', *Journal of African History*, (1979), 20, (iii).

25 J. Cobbing, 'The absent priesthood: Another look at the Rhodesia risings of 1896-97', *Journal of African History*, (1977), 18, (i).

challenged Ranger's exaggerated view of the extent of unity and popular resistance in the conflicts of 1896/97. Beach and Cobbing seriously questioned Ranger's view of the organisation of the Risings, undermining Ranger's view of the role of the Mwari Cult in organising these Risings. Where Ranger had sought to demonstrate the unity of the Shona and Ndebele in the Risings as a prelude to later, mass nationalism, both Cobbing and Beach painted a more differential, less romanticised picture. In Cobbing's view the 'problem of scale' was for the most part not solved by the Shona or Ndebele in the supratribal sense pointed to by Ranger.²⁶ Cobbing thus concluded that it was,

above all fallacious to seek in the events of those years a surge of Zimbabwean nationalism or proto-nationalism, which was only to develop this century.²⁷

Thus by 1980 Zimbabwean historiography was faced, on the one hand with a still influential Africanist school, whose often undifferentiated perspective on nationalism had been critically dented; on the other hand the 1970s had seen the emergence of a radical scholarship which, though it had raised serious issues regarding the differentiated struggles under settler-colonial capitalism, had been unable to bring such insights to bear on a convincing problematisation of nationalism.

HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD: 1980-97

In the immediate post-colonial years of the Zimbabwean state, there followed a series of studies attempting to demonstrate the unifying capacity of nationalism, and its ability to express and integrate a variety of subaltern struggles. In 1981, a work by Martin and Johnson,²⁸ represented little more than a hagiography for the ruling party, an unashamed apologetic justifying the coming to power of a section of the liberation movement. However, two much more substantive studies celebrating the growth of nationalism, namely Ranger's *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*,²⁹ and David Lan's *Guns Rain*³⁰ appeared in 1985. Ranger's work, located in the Makoni District in north-eastern Zimbabwe, traced the development of a radical peasant

26 Phimister, 'Zimbabwe: Economic and social historiography since 1970', summarises the critique of Beach and Cobbing succinctly.

27 *Ibid.*

28 D. Martin and P. Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1981).

29 T. O. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1988).

30 D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1988).

consciousness in this area which developed out of the experiences of colonial conquest, land alienation, and centralised, authoritarian state interventions in the agrarian questions from the 1930s. This growth of peasant discontent provided the basis for guerrilla mobilisation and nationalist politics. Moreover, the use of spirit mediums as symbols of the rights of peasants to land, was incorporated into ZANU's mobilisation strategy. The result was that the,

collective action and collective suffering of peasants and guerrillas produced a corporate ideology in Makoni District and elsewhere in the country.³¹

David Lan's work also stressed the close cooperation of guerrillas and spirit mediums in mobilising peasants, with the latter legitimating the authority of the liberation forces against discredited chiefs who collaborated with the settler regime.

A similar insistence on Ranger's 'composite ideology' can be found in the work of Manungo who sees the guerrillas as 'an extension of peasant resistance to colonial rule' with the peasants viewing the liberation forces as 'their children who had come to assist them in removing the burden of colonialism'.³²

In 1992 a major critique of Ranger's and Lan's perspective on nationalism appeared in the work of Kriger's *Peasant Voices*,³³ in which she argued that Ranger's stress on unity ignored the differentiation within the peasantry along the lines of lineage, age, gender and wealth. Thus she argued that Ranger's 'narrowly constructed concept of peasant consciousness' based on 'shared cultural nationalist ideology' ignored various levels of differentiation of peasants, and thus overstated peasant grievances against the state and White settlers in the arena of agricultural production. On nationalism she concluded:

The concept of nationalism, like that of peasants is outward oriented and assumes that peasant differences with each other pale in significance to their differences with alien others. Peasants appear as a class motivated against an alien state, whether characterised as capitalist, imperialist, or colonialist.³⁴

31 Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, 182.

32 K. Manungo, 'The peasantry in Zimbabwe: A vehicle for change', in Preben Kaarsholm (ed.) *Cultural Struggle and Development in Southern Africa* (James Currey, London, 1991), 117-118; see also K. Manungo 'The Role Peasants Played in the Zimbabwe War of Liberation With Special Emphasis on the Chiweshe District' (Ph.D thesis, Ohio University, 1991).

33 Norma J. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), 27.

34 *Ibid.*, 240.

Moreover, central to Kriger's thesis was the view that in order to mobilise a nationalist consciousness in the countryside, guerrillas were forced to utilise coercion rather than persuasion, because of the conflicting agendas of peasant communities. Thus the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe was successful despite the lack of popular rural support.

Other critiques of Ranger also emerged. Alexander,³⁵ one of Ranger's foremost students, argued that Ranger's study was based on an area which was a prime example of successful peasant production, an experience which could not therefore be generalised. She proposed, in a critique that applied also to Lan and Kriger, that studying the national liberation struggle in Zimbabwe differed according to the areas' experience of the war, its geography, the political and religious institutions and the nature and extent of incorporation into the colonial political economy.³⁶ Alexander also criticised Ranger for his failure to seriously address the problem of guerrilla violence and coercion, treating the latter 'more as a necessary condition of war than as an indication of social tensions'.³⁷ Moreover, Alexander's own work on rural struggles demonstrates the uneven relationship between nationalism, 'traditional' authorities and peasant communities, in her comparative study of the liberation war experience in areas in the north-east and south-west of Zimbabwe, respectively.³⁸

While Kriger's work posed serious questions and problems for Ranger's work, her own understanding of nationalism exposed a failure to understand the hegemonic capacity of nationalist struggle. Her central concern with the use of coercion in nationalist struggles, disarmed her from confronting the passionate commitments of nationalist affiliations. Thus a few major problems can be located in Kriger's work. Firstly, referring to Alexander's earlier point about the need to understand different area responses to the liberation struggle, Kriger like Ranger, sought to generalise a particular district experience to the guerrilla war as a whole. Moreover, the area studied namely Mtoko district, had a particular potential for coercive strategies because of the rival nationalist movements operating in the area. As Alexander points out:

Kriger neglected the role of Methodism in creating support for Bishop Muzorewa's UANC Towards the end of the war, a strong UANC and

35 Jocelyn Alexander, 'Things fall apart, The center can hold: Processes of post-war political change in Zimbabwe's rural areas', in Laurids S. Lauridsen, (ed.) *Bringing Institutions Back In — The Role of Institutions in Civil Society, State and Economy* (IDS Roskilde University, 1993 [a]), 35.

36 *Ibid.*, 134.

37 *Ibid.*, 135.

38 Jocelyn Alexander, 'The State, Agrarian Policy and Rural Politics in Zimbabwe: Case Studies of Insiza and Chimanimani Districts, 1940-1990' (D. Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1993 [b]).

auxiliary presence would have contributed to the level of violence and to the ZANLA guerrillas' pre-occupation with identifying sell outs.³⁹

In fact the last two to three years of the war witnessed a more general indiscipline among guerrillas, as the liberation movement, sensing a political settlement, concentrated less on patient politicisation and more on increasing guerrilla numbers in a more strictly militarist strategy.⁴⁰ Secondly, in her major emphasis on nationalist coercion Kriger fails to reveal adequately 'the complexities of peasant guerrilla interactions and the extent of boundary crossing between compliance and resistance and between coercion and voluntary participation'.⁴¹ Thus as Robins has pointed out, peasant criticism of guerrilla violence did not automatically imply lack of support for the nationalist struggle.⁴²

The work thus far discussed has concentrated on the rural experiences of nationalism and anti-colonial struggle. However, in the study of nationalism in the urban areas, and the relations between nationalism and labour, a similar uneven and differentiated picture of nationalist struggles has begun to emerge. Phimister's recent work has continued to stress the differential and uneven process of the anti-colonial struggle. His comprehensive *Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe 1890-1984*,⁴³ expanded on his original explanations of capital accumulation and class struggle during this period, while his long-standing interest in the study of capital and labour in the mining sector has resulted in a detailed study of Zimbabwe's largest coal mine.⁴⁴

In studies of urban social history, which began to emerge slowly in the 1970s,⁴⁵ and then expanded rapidly in the 1980s, a more complex process of the differentiated and layered experiences of various urban classes has been presented, thus further problematising the understanding of nationalist consciousness. Such studies have sought to understand class, ethnicity, gender and nationalism in the urban areas as part of a

39 Alexander, 'Things fall apart, The center can hold', 135.

40 The Work of D. Moore on the struggles within the liberation movement over political and militarist issues in the mid-1970s is a valuable contribution to an understanding of the various trends within nationalist politics. See D. Moore, 'The Contradictory Construction of Hegemony in Zimbabwe: Politics, Ideology and Class in the Formation of a New African State' (D. Phil thesis, York University, 1990).

41 S. Robins, 'Heroes, heretics and historians of the Zimbabwe revolution: A review article of Norma Kriger's *Peasant Voices*', *Zambezia*, (1996), XXIII, (1), 86.

42 *Ibid.*, 87.

43 I. R. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe 1890-1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle* (Longman, London, 1988).

44 I. R. Phimister, *Wangwi Kolia: Coal, Capital and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe 1894-1954* (Baobab Books, Harare, 1996).

45 S. Thornton, 'African History of Bulawayo' (Unpub. Mimeo, 1978).

more general and related agrarian history of the country. The dichotomies between urban and rural struggles have thus been eroded. As a result we have a better understanding of the different types of consciousness which emerged amongst workers, the range of factors affecting labour organisation and labour mobilisation, and the changing relationship between the labour movement and nationalist politics. A brief overview of some of the works in this area will exemplify these trends.

Yoshikuni's⁴⁶ work on colonial Salisbury demonstrates the relationship between the changing origins of major urban migrant workers, and the growth of a territorial consciousness. As a result while migrants from Nyasaland (Malawi), Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) dominated urban life in colonial Salisbury until the late 1940s and early 1950s, because of the continuing peasant option for indigenous workers, the relationship between urban and a broader rural territorial politics was tenuous. As land alienation policies intensified in the 1940s and 1950s, and increasing numbers of indigenous workers entered the colonial cities, the ground was prepared for a broader nationalist mobilisation.

Building on the work of Yoshikuni, my own work⁴⁷ has attempted to focus on the political and ideological relations between nationalism within the context of both urban and agrarian history in the period after 1945. The thrust of this work suggests the following propositions:

- 1) From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s there were demographic changes in the urban areas which resulted in indigenous Africans becoming the dominant numerical factor in the cities. These changes were a result of more destructive changes on the land (that is The Land Husbandry Act, 1954), which increased the movement of local Africans into the urban sector.
- 2) These changes were also accompanied by the increased growth of an African middle class intelligentsia, who began to articulate a nationalist ideology which encompassed the problems in both the rural and urban areas.
- 3) This nationalist movement increasingly subordinated more strictly urban based movements like the Reformed Industrial and Commercial

46 T. Yoshikuni, 'Black Migrants in a Black City: A Social History of Harare 1890-1925' (D. Phil. thesis, University of Zimbabwe 1989); Also T. Yoshikuni, 'Notes on the influence of town-country relations on African urban history: Experiences of Salisbury and Bulawayo before 1957', in T. Yoshikuni and B. Raftopoulos (eds.), *Essays in Zimbabwean Urban History* (Forthcoming, 1999).

47 B. Raftopoulos, 'Nationalism and labour in Salisbury 1953-1965', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (1995), 21, (1). See also 'Labour Internationalism and Problems of Autonomy and Democratisation in the Trade Union Movement in Southern Rhodesia: 1951-1975', Paper presented at the Conference on 'The Historical Dimensions of Human Rights and Democracy in Southern Africa' (University of Zimbabwe, September 1996).

Workers Union led by Charles Mzingeli, and which dominated African politics in Salisbury from 1945 to the early 1950s. Nationalist politics also increasingly marginalised the emerging Southern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress which came into existence from the mid-1950s. The critical voice of labour was thus increasingly subsumed in the nationalist movement, especially once the anti-colonial struggle was caught in the grip of serious divisions and exile politics. More fundamentally, as the focus of the liberation struggle moved to the rural areas the role of the labour movement was further minimised. Within this period the role of the International Labour Federations (ICFTU) created further problems for the trade union movement, pulling it into the sphere of Cold War politics.

The relationship between gender and nationalism in the urban areas has been confronted in the work of Barnes⁴⁸ and Scarnecchia.⁴⁹ Barnes's work demonstrates the complex gender struggles within the African urban community in the context of changing colonial policy with regard to women. Summarising her argument Barnes writes:

African women often challenged the forces of patriarchy: they travelled, absconded, used the colonial courts, earned their own money, and talked back to their elders. However, it would be a mistake to paint African women in the colonial years as unflinchingly heroic combatants in a fight against patriarchal oppression. African women in colonial Zimbabwe generally did not seek to destroy the ties which bound them to the perspectives, hopes and visions of their fathers, husbands and sons . . . they contributed to the shaping of urban society not so much by confronting patriarchy head on, but rather by persisting in developing and performing tasks that enabled them to further the causes nearest to their hearts: the survival and hoped for prosperity of the coming generations.⁵⁰

Thus Barnes attempts to show that women not only fought against the patriarchal authority of their husbands and fathers, but also fought with their men against colonial authority. She demonstrates this in her analysis of the importance of issues raised by women in the demands of strikers in the 1940s. She writes:

There is a great deal of evidence . . . that worker understanding of how the prevailing economic system affected their females contributed to their willingness to strike. Lists of workers' demands show that they

48 T. A. Barnes, 'We Women Worked So Hard': Gender, Labour, and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-1956" (D. Phil. thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 1993).

49 T. L. Scarnecchia, 'The Politics of Gender and Class in the Creation of African Communities, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1937-1957' (Ph. D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1993).

50 Barnes, 'We Women Worked So Hard', 446-447.

were increasingly concerned about issues of family viability and social reproduction. When the consideration of the role of women is added to the equation it becomes clear African workers in Rhodesia in the 1940s were not just making economic demands. They wanted the state and their employers . . . to shoulder a greater part of the burden of their reproduction and that of their families.⁵¹

Scarnecchia's work also deals with the internal gender and class divisions of African urban society, focusing in particular on the struggles over residential space and the importance of such space in defining class and status within the African community. These divisions are expressed by Scarnecchia as follows:

The climate within the Harare township in the late 1940s and early 1950s reflected a growing tension between married and single workers, and further among married people, between those who aspired to middle class status, migrants, and those who remained tied to rural ways of living.⁵²

These tensions, according to Scarnecchia, often reflected competing perceptions of 'respectability' and 'morality', concerning how Africans, and particularly African women, should live in the city. Conflicts over the position of women in the city could sometimes become an ugly part of urban struggles against the colonial state, as in the case of the women, living in the newly built women's hostel, who were raped during the 1956 Bus Boycott in Salisbury organised by emerging nationalist politicians. The work of the latter historians on gender has been particularly important in highlighting the deeply gendered nature of nationalist politics. This central feature of nationalism became apparent once again in the post-colonial period, when the independent government attempted to include in its problematic discourse on the nation, selective patriarchal definitions of 'respectable women', and homophobic attacks on 'unacceptable' sexual preferences. These trends in the discourse were exemplified by the round-up of so-called prostitutes in the early 1980s and President Mugabe's attack on gays and lesbians in 1995.⁵³ Notwithstanding the varied urban struggles described above, the work of West has carefully charted the growth of an hegemonic middle class between 1890 and 1965 as part of the growth of urban society, which increasingly defined and articulated the nationalist agenda.⁵⁴

51 *Ibid.*

52 T. Scarnecchia, 'The Mapping of Respectability and the Transformation of African Residential Space' (Unpub. Mimeo, 1995).

53 Marc Epprecht, 'Unstructural Behaviour and the Queer "Threat" to Zimbabwe' (Unpub. Mimeo, 1996).

54 Michael West, 'African Middle Class Formation in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1965' (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1990).

Thus as in our discussion of nationalism in the rural areas, the complexity of nationalism and the urban experience has become more apparent. In the face of these diverse and uneven experiences of nationalism that have become apparent in the recent historiography of Zimbabwe, Ranger has pointed to an increasing contingency in the relationship between nationalist politics and popular mobilisation. He has observed that the connection between peasants and nationalism is far from given and in fact 'depends upon very particular, and by no means enduring, convergences of peasants and nationalist interests'.⁵⁵

Ranger's views on the contingency of nationalist mobilisation have also been influenced by the most traumatic event of post-colonial Zimbabwe, namely the crisis in Matabeleland in the mid-1980s. It is a crisis to which some commentators believe the triumphalist nationalist historiography of an earlier period contributed through 'a failure on the part of historians to recognise the continuity in a culture of violence and authoritarianism, that emerged during the guerrilla war'.⁵⁶ Certainly the brutality of the Zimbabwean state towards a minority ethnic group, left little doubt that the terms of belonging to the nation were being defined in brutal militarist fashion.

Moreover central to the crisis in Matabeleland was the central thrust of ZANU (PF) to eliminate its major political opposition in the southern part of Zimbabwe, namely the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). The ZANU government's policy of *Gukurahundi* (a colloquial Shona expression meaning, 'the storm that destroys everything') was, in the words of Sithole and Makumbe, 'an undisguised, intolerant, commandist, and deliberately violent policy towards the opposition. By this policy the opposition was rendered impotent'.⁵⁷ Evidence in a recent report on the violence experienced in Matabeleland reveals the wrath of an authoritarian nationalism. Reports of beatings, rape, torture and a generally forced compliance with a particularist version of national allegiance, characterised the Zimbabwean state's use of its 5th Brigade in Matabeleland. As an example of forced mobilisation of people in Matabeleland by the state the report recorded an incident in the Matobo area:

5 Brigade rounded everyone in the area to a local school. There were about 200 men, women and children. Everyone was beaten and kicked from sunrise to 10 a.m. Then some were made to dig two graves while

55 T. O. Ranger, 'Towards A Research Project, with IDS, 1997 to 2000' (Oxford, 1997).

56 Robins, 'Heroes, heretics and historians of the Zimbabwe revolution', 76.

57 Masipula S. Sithole and John Makumbe 'Elections in Harare: The ZANU PF hegemony and its incipient decline', *African Journal of Political Science*, (1997), 2, (1).

others were made to fight each other. Six men were chosen at random and placed in groups of three. They were then shot dead. Everyone else was told to sing songs praising Mugabe and condemning Nkomo. While some sang and danced, others were beaten.⁵⁸

Such state violence on a minority ethnic group called out for analysis and explanation. Richard Werbner's book on a Kalanga family in Matabeleland, sought to explain this debacle through the concept of 'quasi-nationalism', an ideological practice located primarily in 'the struggle for power and moral authority in the nation state'. Werbner concluded that:

The catastrophe of quasi-nationalism is that it can capture the might of the nation state and bring authorised violence down ruthlessly against the people who seem to stand in the way of the nation being united and pure as one body.⁵⁹

Ranger's response was an attempt to historicise the development of ethnicity in order to show how such an invention had emerged as a result of the combination of colonial state practice, missionary interventions in the definition of African language dialectics, and migrant labour practices.⁶⁰ Expanding on this work later, Ranger has revisited the idea of an invented ethnicity which he perceived as paying inadequate attention to a 'fully historical treatment of African participation and initiative in innovating custom'.⁶¹ Preferring Benedict Anderson's concept of *Imaginal Communities*,⁶² Ranger's new emphasis on 'Imagination' was an attempt to provide for a more active agency for different African voices, in which 'multiple imaginations' developed by different groups, over a long period of time, contest over the meaning of such imaginings. This process of discursively constituting ethnicity and nationalism has been part of the most recent, innovative work that has emerged on nationalism.⁶³ Thus Ranger's emphasis on the historical mutations of ethnic identity, based not only on colonial and missionary categorisations, but on the changing

58 Evidence to the report 'Breaking The Silence' (The Legal Resources Foundation and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1997).

59 Richard Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of An African Family* (Baobab Books, Harare, 1991), 159.

60 T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe* (Mambo Books, Gweru, 1985).

61 T. O. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition revisited: The case of colonial Africa', in T. Ranger and O. Vaughan (eds.) *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa* (MacMillan, London, 1993).

62 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, London, 1983).

63 See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983); also Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader* (OUP, Oxford, 1996); Golap Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping The Nation* (Verso, London, 1996).

interventions of African agents, such as chiefs and nationalists, has attempted to de-essentialise both ethnic and national identities.

This movement away from essentialist characterisations has been a response to official state nationalism, stressing the democratic possibilities of both ethnic and national identities. In his most recent book Ranger has continued to explore the changes in nationalist practice stressing earlier traditions of pluralism and tolerance, in the early Southern Rhodesia African Nationalist Congress of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Commenting on the writings of one of its leading lights, Stanlake Samkange, Ranger noted that the latter 'deplored the nationalist attempt to take over other associational activities, such as the trade union movement, and the cycle of violence which this precipitated'.⁶⁴

In summing up this section, we observe that if one looks at the work of Ranger and the various attempts, in response to him, to develop a more variegated analysis of nationalism in Zimbabwe, there appears to be a certain convergence of perspectives. Ranger has moved away from earlier celebratory positions on nationalism to a more nuanced concern with divergence and diversity within nationalist politics. A two-volume collection edited by Ranger and Bhebe provides a useful overview of the unevenness and diversity of the liberation struggle. This collection thus registers the on-going process of unpackaging the categories of nationalist struggle while continuing to assert the resonances of nationalism.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Ranger has pointed to a dilemma which continues to confront all the work on nationalism in Zimbabwean historiography. This is the fact that nationalism continues to provide an essential part of the framework in which political ideas and participation are imagined in Zimbabwe, notwithstanding the tensions and differences in the way that different groups have experienced nationalist mobilisation. In Ranger's words:

... despite the many injunctions within African historiography not only to go beyond nationalist history but also to abandon nationalism as a topic, it makes no sense to do this in Zimbabwe ... the sequence of nationalist thought and organisation from the Bantu Congress of the 1940s and early 1950s through the revived mass nationalist parties of the late 1950s and early 1960s and into the guerrilla war are crucial for contemporary debate about democracy in Zimbabwe. Understanding rural nationalism is crucial for understanding Zimbabwe's rural areas.

64 T. O. Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe 1920-64* (Baobab, Harare, 1995).

65 N. Bhebe and T. O. Ranger (eds.) *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War Volume One* (University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 1995); and N. Bhebe and T. O. Ranger (eds.), *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War Volume Two* (University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 1995).

The range of political options in Zimbabwe seems confined to emancipating pluralist nationalism on the one hand and collective, majoritarian nationalism on the other.⁶⁶

This position is similar to that of one of Zimbabwe's leading historians, N. Bhebe, who in his work has emphasised the formative and unifying role of nationalism.⁶⁷

In the light of the above discussion, we can therefore observe that, despite the growth of the historiography on nationalism in Zimbabwe, there are continuing problems of understanding the relationships between nationalist ideas articulated by nationalist elites, and the contradictory and complex ways in which subaltern classes assimilate and utilise such ideas in contending ways. Moreover, the effects of this analytical problem can be observed in the weakness displayed in the analysis of the relationship between the ruling party and its support base in the post-colonial period. On the one hand, many analysts take note of the continued populist appeal of nationalism, without critically explaining this hegemonic project, beyond broad references to the persisting legacies of the liberation struggle, and the welfarist policies of the post-colonial state. On the other hand, having summarily dispensed with such explanations, analysis of post-colonial politics becomes focused on the factional struggles of state and party elites.

A good example of this tendency is the work of Ibbo Mandaza, one of Zimbabwe's leading political analysts. In 1986, in the first critical review of the post-colonial regime, Mandaza assumed the 'strength and dominance' of African nationalism, which because of its national-popular appeal was able to 'disguise the class structure of African societies, to hide the reality of the class struggle'.⁶⁸ However, the ways in which the national-popular elements were incorporated into subaltern ideologies was given little attention. Henceforth, Mandaza's analysis has focused on the role of elites in defining and resolving 'the National Question'. In an example of his many statements on this issue he observes that,

the African nationalist leadership must have the courage to call a spade and spade, oblivious of the ideological white mail which, in seeking to disparage nationalism and the related concerns of the

66 T. O. Ranger 'Living Africa: Making and Writing History in Zimbabwe' (Valedictory Lecture, 19 June 1997, Oxford).

67 N. Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe 1947-1958* (College Press, Harare, 1989); See also N. Bhebe 'The nationalist struggle 1957-62', in C. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890-1990* (College Press, Harare, 1989). For the most part this volume is a celebratory nationalist text.

68 I. Mandaza, (ed), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-1986* (CODESRIA, Senegal, 1986), 8.

National Question, distracts the new state from the urgent tasks of building a nation and developing a national economy.⁶⁹

A similar emphasis on the role of elites and nationalism can be found in the work of Sithole, Sachikonye and Moyo,⁷⁰ where questions of the nation state and democratisation are usually dealt with in terms of intra-elite struggles. In such analyses the state is usually viewed through a dominative and instrumentalist model,⁷¹ in which questions of legitimisation strategies are largely confined to what Bayart has termed 'the reciprocal assimilation of elites'.⁷² As important as the analysis of elite politics remains, we cannot understand the strengths and ambivalences of nationalism if our focus remains at this level.

CONCLUSION

To conclude we can make the following observations. Since Phimister's review of Zimbabwean historiography in 1979, there has been a vast expansion of work on nationalism in Zimbabwe. We now know much more about nationalism in relation to: the different experiences of the peasantry; the labour movement; gender; class; ethnicity; and religion. The study of all these areas has provided a more divergent perspective on the experiences of nationalist ideology and practices. Phimister's hope that radical historians would develop a distinct paradigm, as distinct from the liberal and Africanist agendas, proved too confining a perspective. While class remains an essential modality of analysis, its tendency to subsume issues of nationalism to an almost teleological trajectory of class formation in Southern African historiography, was always going to be problematic. The complexities of understanding nationalism will demand a much more expansive, less reductive view of the still fruitful category, class.

In fact what has occurred in Zimbabwean historiography has been a convergence of interests around the diversity of the nationalist experience.

69 I. Mandaza, 'The National Question and Affirmative Action in Africa: Some Reflections on South Africa', Keynote Address presented at the Affirmative Action Workshop, Natal, 11 October 1993.

70 M. Sithole, 'Zimbabwe's eroding authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, (January 1997), 8, (1); L. M. Sachikonye 'The nation-state project and conflict in Zimbabwe', in A. O. Olukushi and Liisa Laako (eds.), *Challenge to the Nation State in Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1996); J. N. Moyo, 'Civil society in Zimbabwe', *Zambezia*, (1993), XX, (1).

71 For a discussion of Gramsci's relevance in avoiding such instrumentalist models in the analysis of the post-colonial state see, S. Hall, 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity', in D. Morley and K. H. Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (Routledge, London, 1996).

72 J. F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (Longman, London, 1993).

This development has occurred within the context of the fracturing of the nationalist alliance in independent Zimbabwe, and the increasing strains and tensions in the legitimacy of the post-colonial state. These cracks in the nationalist alliance have become particularly apparent in the 1990s as the destructive effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe have become an increasing reality. Various classes and organisational lobbies have been forced to confront the state over a variety of grievances. Thus the labour movement called a General Strike in December, 1997, while consumers in the township areas engaged in food riots in January 1998. At a different level the indigenisation lobby, representing an aspirant Black bourgeoisie, has since 1990 pressed the state for increased government interventions to facilitate Black involvement in the economy, while the War Veterans Association threatened the very existence of the ZANU (PF) government with its demands for compensation. In addition to these varying demands the state, in response to its decreasing legitimacy, had been forced to deal with the long neglected demands of land reform. The emergence of these different agendas represents the difficulty of nationalist politics in containing the constituencies that have in the past made up the national alliance, under a unifying vision.

Moreover, in the midst of the embattled state of the ruling party, there has been a greater willingness not only to confront the Zimbabwean state, but to begin to confront and re-examine the nationalist past. For example, during evidence given to the commission to examine the abuse of War Veteran Funds in 1996, ex-combatants spoke not only of their present distress, but of their past suffering in the liberation movement. Examples of the commandist and coercive aspects of the struggles, already registered in the historiography discussed earlier, were once again brought to the fore. Among the most harrowing evidence presented was that of the women ex-combatants. The Minister of State for Gender Issues, Oppah Rusesha reported:

Being a women it was very difficult to survive on your own at that age (17). We had thugs . . . We had these rapists taking advantage of us being young women.⁷³

In addition the Secretary of ZANU, Edgar Tekere, warned that the President was surrounded by 'imposters' who have engaged in the 'falsification of the liberation war history'.⁷⁴ Enraged ex-combatants further challenged the legitimacy of the ruling elite, by staging a demonstration

⁷³ *The Herald*, 26/8/97.

⁷⁴ *The Financial Gazette*, 28/8/97.

at the central symbol of the liberation struggle, namely the National Heroes Acre, during the annual celebrations in August 1997. Thus the contemporary problems of the Zimbabwean state have placed new questions about the past on the agenda. Our historical perspectives and agendas always relate to our contemporary political concerns. Therefore, unpacking the authoritarian notions of unity peddled by nationalist politicians has become as essential for understanding the history of nationalism, as it has for current debates on democratisation in Zimbabwe.