

## Summary of Dr. Gerald Chikozho Mazarire's Presentation to the BZS: 'Terence Ranger and the Historiography of Zimbabwe: Some Reflections'

Terence Ranger is widely known for his wide array of publications on Zimbabwe and more importantly for the debates he provoked on a number of topics in African studies in general but very little has been said so far about his role as a 'historiographer' which I concentrated my presentation on.

My main argument was the defining feature of Terry Ranger as a historiographer is his 'optimism' for Zimbabwean historiography even despite all the odds stacked against it since the beginning of his career. His supervisor Hugh Trevor Roper did not believe there was African history, he had no prior training in African history when he took his first teaching appointment at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN), and in the practice of history in the then Rhodesia he had to confront a more entrenched and established settler historiography commissioned by the state. Even if towards the end of his career he seemed disenchanted and disillusioned his final attempt at a historiography; the publication of 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe' in 2004, itself remained an optimistic testimony of the endurance, promise and vigilance of academic history in Zimbabwe.

I went on to highlight the contradiction that Ranger's death was received with mixed feelings in Zimbabwe which have provoked debate about his legacy as a historian. I highlighted two outstanding views; the one tabled by pro-establishment newspapers in Zimbabwe that saw him as the 'visible tragedy of white liberalism' where Terry is depicted as a convenient historian who took sides with African nationalism for selfish personal gain, to enhance his career as a radical historian but went against it at the critical moment that it sought a complete reversal of colonialism, in this case the reclamation of the land in Zimbabwe. The second is a view from younger generation Zimbabweans who had little or no contact with Terry and whose training was done elsewhere outside Terry's academic circles who have come to question the relationship between Zimbabwean and British historians of Zimbabwe and lament the failure over the years to equip historical institutions in Zimbabwe enough to sustain a homegrown cohort of PhD graduates in History.

I then documented attempts by Terry to take stock of what was happening in the Zimbabwean historical landscape since 1971 when he published his first historiographical piece that appeared in the *TransAfrican Journal of History*. At that point he feared that methodologies, sources and interpretations imported from South African historical schools would contaminate the history of Zimbabwe given that critical works on Zimbabwe's peoples such as Stanford Glass' *The Matabele* were based on South African sources and written by South African based scholars. Terry also was concerned that Rhodesian 'patriotic history' (the first time he actually used this term) would dominate in as much as the apologia for colonial rule was gaining influence through the work of state commissioned historians like Lewis Gann. Terry pinned his hopes on the 'Stokes School' of History that had developed at the University College but had all migrated to Zambia to the former Rhodes Livingstone Institute and pioneered the first work of professional African historiography *The Zambesian Past* which appeared at almost the same time as his own seminal *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*. Terry correctly predicted the success of the Zimbabwean historians who went into SOAS and completely revolutionised Zimbabwean history in the 1970s composed of Stan Mudenge, Dave

Beach, Ngwabi Bhebe, and Hoyini Bhila. He also was full of admiration for what he termed the 'exile school' of Zimbabwean historians in the Americas such as David Chanaiwa, Stanlake Samkange and Lawrence Vambe. Most of these people could not work in Zimbabwe's rural communities despite the quality of the work they produced and there is a significant gap created by their inability to access African oral information (with the exception of Beach).

He was however wary of some of the theoretical and empirical shortcomings of this growing historical work of the 70s and he was quick to make his feelings known. I cited the case of his critique of the emergent 'peasant historiography' which was epitomised by the publication of Parsons and Palmer's *The Roots of Rural Poverty*. Terry criticised the book's weakness of definition, sources, classification and interpretation, arguing more poignantly that the 'drama of peasant agriculture is more drawn out' than the authors believed. Not only did this lay the basis of his 'long drawn out' study of peasant consciousness and the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe but it set the tone for a backlash from scholars like Beach who believed in classifying local economies into branches of production. But I promised not to deal with Terry's debates at the beginning.

I highlighted that for all his optimism Terry still believed that the independence of Zimbabwe would be a turning point for historians and the historiography of Zimbabwe. I cited his closing remarks to a International historical conference held at the University of Zimbabwe to underscore that very point in 1982. Terry revelled in the fact that the History department had rapidly Africanised and hoped that Zimbabwe's schools would have new history books. He emphasised the urgency of doing all this before capable historians were absorbed in teaching, administration and government. This task he believed, should 'not be left to journalists'. More importantly he emphasised the need to document the triumph of the guerrilla war because 'it is our responsibility to those who endured it'.

Unfortunately, this turning point never turned, yes, capable historians became absorbed into teaching and a good many of them became politicians, books for schools were published but nearly all of them were suffocated with doses of historical materialism from the country's adopted socialist policy. Terry himself ended up doing the writing of the struggle, and in the late 1990s edited two volumes on the war that had extensive historiographical surveys in the introductions.

I then moved on to Terry's return to Zimbabwe as an active teacher at the University of Zimbabwe albeit in his retirement. Terry taught more but amidst political turmoil, student unrest, the beginning of the land occupations in 2000, the rise of a new political party that posed the biggest challenge to ZANU PF hegemony and the rising brain-drain of historians from Zimbabwe. Still Terry gave a valedictory lecture entitled 'History Matters' where he continued to celebrate the 'mind and imagination' of Zimbabwean historians going on to declare that 'the Golden Age of Zimbabwean historiography is here and now' and that a Zimbabwean intellectual culture with its own standards of excellence and its own rewards and prestige is growing up!'. Yes, Terry had come full circle, he was prevailing with his friend Ngwabi over the Human Rights and Democracy Seminar series which came out as two books, he had himself published two books while in Zimbabwe and completed the archival research for another. He was leaving at a point that a new University had been founded with yet another History department. But less than two years after he left the situation had changed in Zimbabwe in more radical ways than he anticipated. As I intimated earlier on, Terry was acutely aware of all these negatives at the time he wrote 'Patriotic History' in 2004 and feared more the triumph of a history invented by ZANU PF than the demise of Zimbabwean professional history which he believed lay in the hands of younger historians now dissipated in the diaspora. Was his

faith and optimism misplaced. This is the challenge that perhaps haunts us to this day; is this school of historians capable of taking up the mantle, has the school of historians based in Zimbabwe like myself kept the momentum, what are its options and how can such platforms as the BZS engage with the future of Zimbabwean historiography in a manner that sees the inequalities and circumstances in which historians in Zimbabwe have to work. To provoke further debate I compared Terry's memoirs *Writing Revolt* with Lewis Gann's autobiography that appeared in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* in 1993. Terry concludes that his criticism of ZANU PF and Mugabe's nationalism is a part of his commitment to fight injustices, whereas Gann is unapologetic about glorifying pax-Britannica and the benevolence of British rule to Zimbabwe. He together with his colleague Peter Duignan predicted, dictatorship, corruption and ethnic strife and argued that although their works were boycotted by many Africanists following Terry Ranger and others' optimism, they have largely been vindicated. Terry 's career should be a source of inspiration for unpacking the question of the vindication of Afro-pessimists and the future of history in Zimbabwe after his demise.