

## Terence Ranger, African Studies and South African historiography

*Peter Limb\**

### **Introduction: A broad, deep and enduring legacy in African Studies<sup>1</sup>**

The breadth of themes that Terence Ranger has helped pioneer is as impressive as the influence of his scholarship is trans-national. The scope of his interventions ranges from urban to rural history, from political and social history and biography to religion, spirituality and culture to the environment, human rights, and wars.

Ranger's scholarship, especially on African nationalism, is not uncontested but research on the above themes has flourished since his pioneering work. Some may appear to have been "left behind" by recent intellectual pathways, but his vision was also to keep up with or pre-empt many cultural turns. Those fields such as political history, which he soon mastered and which some now see as old-fashioned, have suffered neglect too soon to allow their full reconsideration.<sup>2</sup> Advances in the history of culture, gender and the environment have been vital in improving historical perception, but focus on merely one or the other should not blind us to gaping holes remaining in intellectual and regional history; indeed, their very interconnectedness can help extend the frontiers of knowledge. In this regard, Ranger's injunction for Zimbabwean history, that "nationalism as a movement, or set of movements, and as an ideology ... still requires a great deal of rigorous historical questioning", remains as relevant today for South Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Across these categories, African agency was the subject Ranger first made his own<sup>4</sup> and it soon became a sine qua non for all historians of Africa. His work in Dar es Salaam is well known.<sup>5</sup> He was part of a growing small army of scholars moving in this

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\* Peter Limb is associate professor (adjunct) in History and Africana bibliographer, Michigan State University. His recent books include *The ANC's Early Years* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2010) and, with N Etherington and P Midgley, *Grappling with the Beast: Indigenous Southern African Responses to Colonialism* (Brill, Leiden, 2010)

1 My thanks go to Terence Ranger, William Beinart, Christopher Saunders, Enocent Msindo, Rodney Davenport, Patrick Harries, Jeff Peires, Robert Edgar, Jane Carruthers, Julian Cobbing, Alois Mlambo, Timothy Stapleton, Norman Etherington, Peter Alegi, Heather Hughes, Jan-Bart Gewald, Deryck Schreuder, Donald Denoon, David Robinson, Sean Redding, Jeremy Martens, Lindsay Braun, and participants of the conference on "Making History: Terence Ranger and African Studies", University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 13–15 October 2010, where this paper was first presented

2 Such that themes may be "artificially truncated" before a necessary second stage can complete "assessment and absorption of their results": G Burgess, "Introduction", in G Burgess and M Festenstein (eds), *English Radicalism, 1550–1850* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007), pp 1–16, 3

3 T Ranger, "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies* (hereafter JSAS), 30, 2, 2004, pp 215–34, 216

4 See J Lonsdale, "Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative in African History", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 1, 2000, pp 5–16

5 Here one tangential South African connection was his debate with Donald Denoon and Adam Kuper: T Ranger, "The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam: An Answer", *African Affairs*, 70,

direction, and historians such as Jan Vansina, John Omer-Cooper, and Shula Marks were also making major contributions, so we should not exaggerate the significance of any one person, but he was one of the most influential. Yet was this the case not just north but also south of the Limpopo, where in the 1960s interest in African history was slight, and where the power of Afrikaner nationalism was mirrored in the influence of an Afrikaner historiography that surely formed a bed barren for the sprouting of seeds of a new Africanism? Rodney Davenport, in his 1977 South African Historical Society presidential address, “The Tiger in the Grass”, remarked on the dearth of black historians.<sup>6</sup> The debacle of apartheid and its impact on higher education was uppermost in his mind but he may also have been thinking of “pluralist Africanist” historians such as Leonard Thompson and Ranger, who had made the same plea in the preface to his first book.<sup>7</sup>

In assessing a scholar’s influence, we may employ biographies, Festschriften, and lectures,<sup>8</sup> or turn to citation analysis, in each case running risks of incompleteness or hagiography. In honour of Ranger, we have special issues of *Journal of Southern African Studies* (JSAS) of 1997 and *Journal of African Cultural Studies* of 2000. His oeuvre is so vast, his influence so wide, and in some circles so contested, that this article, based on correspondence and interviews, and textual and citation analysis, can scarcely claim comprehensiveness, but does clarify hitherto neglected South African connections.

The mark of truly influential historians is not just their impact on chosen fields but a wider “span”, to use a term thus deployed by Keith Hancock, who represents to some extent an older guard of imperial historiography, but did start to move towards a more Africa-sensitive history – if ambiguously in his work on Smuts – and embrace political and environmental history;<sup>9</sup> as did Ranger, though Hancock’s detours into South African historiography were curiously “colour” blind to the very field Ranger vigorously drove forward, African agency.<sup>10</sup>

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278, 1971, pp 50–61, when he pondered a link between the “young South African exiles recently working at Makerere” (p 55, note 3) and their critique of the Dar “School” If Ranger’s Irish Studies background, compounded by his expulsion, “disposed him to anti-colonial, nationalist values”, “then Adam Kuper’s and my South African backgrounds disposed us against nationalism in any form” (D Denoon, email to author, 6 October 2010)

6 T R H Davenport, “The Tiger in the Grass”, *South African Historical Journal* (hereafter SAHJ), 9, 1977, pp 3–12, after a metaphor of philosopher of history, R G Collingwood Davenport asks (p 11): “Where are the black historians? Recovering, I suspect, from the white man’s version as set out in certain textbooks” See also, J Carruthers, “The Changing Shape and Scope of Southern African Historical Studies”, SAHJ, 62, 2010, pp 384–93, p 385

7 T Ranger (ed ), *Emerging Themes of African History* (East Africa Publishing House, Nairobi, 1968)

8 For instance, D Bates, J Wallis and J Winters (eds), *The Creighton Century, 1907–2007* (Institute of Historical Research, London, 2009)

9 S Dubow and S Marks, “Patriotism of Place and Race: Hancock on South Africa”, in D A Low (ed ), *Keith Hancock: The Legacies of an Historian* (University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne, 2001), pp 149–179

10 African historians have found inspiration in Ranger’s work Just two are Godfrey Muriuki, responding to a weakened, yet continuing, Western-centrism, and Bahru Zewde, who cites Ranger fully 23 times: G Muriuki, “Western Uniqueness? Some Counterarguments from an African Perspective”, in J Rüsen (ed ), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (Berghahn

One mark of Ranger's "span" is his ability to deftly slot into "other country" historiographies. We see this in his response to the Rhodesian latter-day "mfecane" of the early sixties that scattered progressive scholars northeast. After his brusque expulsion from Rhodesia, where he had transitioned from his Oxonian focus on early modern Irish<sup>11</sup> to African history, he soon mastered other methods and themes such as oral history, religion, and dance,<sup>12</sup> to apply them in Tanzania. Adaptability is also apparent in his astute comparison of two "Great Spaces Washed with Sun", the Matopos and Uluru, and their spiritual and environmental contexts.<sup>13</sup> When I interviewed him in 1992, he made another interesting comparison: whereas South African literature in general dwarfs that of Zimbabwe, in some aspects the latter can be "more detailed and more focused".<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, Pan-African and trans-national expertise helped him transmit South African connections to Zimbabwean studies. Already by 1962, he planned to write on political movements, an agenda that would include ties between early African nationalisms. In *The African Voice* (1970) he devotes an entire chapter to "The South African Influence", including independent churches,<sup>15</sup> J.T. Jabavu's interest in "Rhodesian Fingos", and South African Native National Congress (later, ANC) efforts to represent Zimbabweans.<sup>16</sup> We do not yet have his memoir, but one autobiographical fragment reveals an even earlier interest in British race relations. Probably, he also heard something of momentous events in South Africa. Yet there was more than enough racism in Rhodesia – described by Ranger as "rampant prejudice and total urban segregation" – to keep him fully occupied.<sup>17</sup>

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Books, New York, 2002), pp 142–147, p 144; B Zewde, *Society, State, and Identity in African History* (Forum for Social Studies, Addis Ababa, 2008)

- 11 T Ranger, "Concluding Remarks", in A Kirk-Greene (ed ), *The Emergence of African History at British Universities: An Autobiographical Approach* (World View, Oxford, 1995), pp 165–179, p 166
- 12 T Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890–1970: The Beni Ngoma* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975)
- 13 T Ranger, "'Great Spaces Washed with Sun': The Matopos and Uluru Compared", in K Darian-Smith, L Gunner and S Nuttall (eds), *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (Routledge, London, 1996), pp 157–72
- 14 T Ranger [interview with P Limb], "The State of African Studies in Britain and Zimbabwe", *African Studies Association of Australasia & the Pacific Review*, 14, 2, 1992, pp 2–6
- 15 He had broached the Ethiopianist connection in "Traditional Authorities and the Rise of Modern Politics in Southern Rhodesia", in *Conference on the History of the Central African Peoples* (Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Lusaka, 1963) In a 1962 letter to Maurice Nyagumbo, he flagged that he would write several papers, including on political movements, for that conference See University of Oxford, Rhodes House Library, Ranger Papers, Box 1, file 184r, T Ranger to M Nyagumbo, 16 October 1962; see also in Aluka, <http://aluka.org> (accessed 1 February 2011)
- 16 T Ranger, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* (Heinemann, London, 1970) South Africa also was present in Ranger's chapter in a collection he edited, *Aspects of Central African History* (Heinemann, London, 1968) From its founding, and as stated in the 1919 SANNC Constitution, the ANC saw its scope as Pan-African
- 17 Ranger, "Concluding Remarks", pp 166, 169–70 In Dar he lectured on comparative Indian and Irish history

A “trans-national effect” is also apparent in Ranger’s chapter in the Festschrift for Trevor Huddleston. That great advocate for freedom in South Africa, whose book *Naught for Your Comfort* was one of only two books on Africa that Ranger had read when he first arrived in Cape Town on the Union Castle line in 1957,<sup>18</sup> was a connecting thread to South Africa. A decade later, it was a comfort to Ranger that Huddleston had earlier made the same transition to life in independent Tanzania.<sup>19</sup>

The more I burrowed into his oeuvre, the more connections I found, not surprising given the countries’ proximity. A 1985 talk reminded listeners that colonial Matabeleland recruited many officials from Natal.<sup>20</sup> His chapter on Makoni churches of the 1930s glides elegantly between religion and politics to reveal ties with the Western Province ANC.<sup>21</sup> This ability to work across cultures, countries, and continents would be a hallmark of Ranger’s career.

When I first asked historians about this topic, some were surprised. Ranger is, after all, not a recognised historian of the country. Some were sceptical of any influence, a view perhaps strengthened by a lingering South African exceptionalism criticised more than once by Ranger. Yet the inclusion of three papers on South Africa in the two Ranger Festschriften is a clue to an austral reach. Nothing better characterises the closeness of studies of the two countries – and I return below to the new Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa that underlines this – than Ranger’s interview on his latest book, *Bulawayo Burning*. He muses that, “given another forty years of energy and access to materials ... greatly daring, I would like to work on South African history”, and identifies areas where he thinks the latter lags behind Zimbabwean studies, such as landscape history.<sup>22</sup>

My other hypothesis was that Ranger influenced African History as taught in South Africa. This teaching was weak at first, but went through changes; from the 1990s, some historians, such as Julian Cobbing, switched to teach wider and more contemporary African history, by which time there was a more general urge to re-connect with the rest of Africa. Closer examination of Ranger’s corpus tests these two ideas.

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18 Although, as Donald Denoon wryly observes about African History in 1957: “what was there to read? What was exciting in the 1960s was the relatively clean sheet”: email to the author, 6 October 2010

19 T Ranger, “From Command to Service: Trevor Huddleston in Masasi 1960–8”, in D Honoré (ed ) *Trevor Huddleston: Essays on His Life and Work* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1988), pp 35–52, p 35 Out of their contact came access to church archives and research on change in the Anglican Church in Tanzania

20 T Ranger, *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe* (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1985), p 7

21 T Ranger, ““Taking on the Missionary’s Task’: African Spirituality and the Mission Churches of Manicaland in the 1930s”, in D Maxwell (ed ), *Christianity and the African Imagination: Essays in Honour of Adrian Hastings* (Leiden, Brill, 2002), pp 93–126, p 101

22 [D Johnson], “Interview, Terence Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning*”, <http://www.weaverpresszimbabwe.com> Lindsay Braun, scholar of South African landscape and land tenure history, agrees with Ranger’s view that South African historians have too often read landscapes as part of a “frontier” narrative of white advance and dispossession. Ranger’s call for South African equivalents of histories of the Matopos and the Zambezi prompts Braun to add that South African historiography also needs its own versions of *Islands and Beaches* (Greg Denning) and *Road to Botany Bay* (Paul Carter): L Braun, email to author, 20 September 2010

## South African connections

We have several brief biographical and autobiographical works to help piece together Ranger's contacts and engagements with Africa. John McCracken draws on their long friendship to sketch some of the story, but besides mention of a brief piece on the predicament on white South African activists and a series of conferences, one of which produced a mimeo pack on South Africa, we learn little of South African interests.<sup>23</sup> More revealing is Ranger's T.B. Davie lecture to a South African audience to whom he revealed his experiences there. His first landfall on the continent was Cape Town, en route to take up a lectureship (though not yet in African History) in Salisbury. His address dwelt on academic freedom, a vital issue in South Africa at the time.<sup>24</sup>

Ranger has kindly shared his remembrances. In 1957, he proceeded by train from Cape Town to Johannesburg and thence to Salisbury. Not knowing any South African historians, he stayed for a few days with Ron Ballinger of Wits, an eighteenth-century historian from St Antony's. Becoming an African historian, he deliberately did not go to South Africa ...

It had nothing to do then with an academic boycott or loyalty to the Federation. But I very much wanted Rhodesia not to become part of South Africa. So between 1957 and 1963, when I was evicted from Southern Rhodesia, I did not go to South Africa though some South Africans – in particular Frene Ginwala – came to me. When I was appointed Professor in Dar es Salaam in 1963 I could not travel either to Rhodesia or South Africa. I don't think I went to South Africa during my UCLA years, 1969–74, though I succeeded Leonard Thompson and knew Bob Edgar.<sup>25</sup>

Ranger's visits came later. After the 1981 Davie Lecture visit, came the first long visit in 1982/3 to give lectures on Makoni peasants at UCT under sponsorship of the student union. Ironically, given subsequent antagonisms, Ian Phimister facilitated this visit.

The first version of *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War*<sup>26</sup> was delivered there. I loved Cape Town, and spent much time walking on the mountain or taking the train along the coast. In those far off days, I was on good terms with both Ian and Charles van Onselen, who had after all begun as Rhodesianists. By this time, I had read a good deal of South African history and anthropology and reviewed quite a bit of it. When I wrote my long "Religious Movements and Politics" paper for the US ASA, I gave Jean Comaroff and Bundy and Beinart as examples of how to do it ...

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23 J McCracken, "Terry Ranger: A Personal Appreciation", *JSAS*, 23, 2, 1997, pp 175–85, p 180

24 T. Ranger, *Towards a Radical Practice of Academic Freedom: The Experience of East and Central Africa* (UCT, Cape Town, 1981); C. Saunders, email to the author, 5 September 2010. Ranger had been invited by a young African History lecturer, Patrick Harries; P. Harries, email to the author, 17 May 2010.

25 T. Ranger, email to the author, 12 September 2010. He "taught Northern Rhodesian and Nyasa students. And after the 1959 emergency, when I first visited Nyasaland, I always went north rather than south".

26 T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (James Currey, London, 1985).

Subsequent visits saw Ranger deliver addresses to conferences on the environment organised by Ruth Edgecombe and landscape organised by Liz Gunner. Yet UCT, with Patrick Harries the main exception, appeared “so Cape oriented”; its historians “so sceptical about African religion”. Clearly, despite these occasional encounters, South Africa was always a sidelight to his focus on Zimbabwe and beyond. Even if, as in the interview on *Bulawayo Burning*, he mused he would not mind working on South Africa, he quickly concedes that “in fact I have never worked in a South African archive”.<sup>27</sup>

We cannot say Ranger has always felt the need to draw a great deal on South African scholarship, long influenced by isolation and an inward-looking nature. There are relatively few citations of South African scholars in his works. Yet, as Ranger observes at the end of a recent interview with Douglas Johnson, if he had 40 years to spend on research, he would “be tempted to work on South African religion and landscape”. This interest is discernible in his recent Introduction for a book on evangelical Christianity and democracy, where he mentions the South Africa literature.<sup>28</sup> And from the start of his Africanist career, there have been some South African connections in his work. His 1960 Fabian pamphlet refers to how the Rhodesian Carter Commission looked to South African segregation policy and misuse of “tradition”, and cites Jan Smuts’ 1929 Oxford lectures.<sup>29</sup> In his chapter in the *Unesco General History of Africa, Volume VII*, Ranger lingered for a while on several instances of resistance and religion in South Africa, from Makana to Ntsikana, and on the work of Shula Marks.<sup>30</sup>

Unsurprisingly given its impact, many historians who responded to my communications mentioned *The Invention of Tradition* as an important influence. The first part of Ranger’s chapter in that book talks of white artisans on the Rand, and goes on to discuss, inter alia, black domestic workers in Johannesburg and cricket cultures among black “elites” in Kimberley, drawing on historians of South Africa such as Elaine Katz, Charles van Onselen and Brian Willan. In 1993, he revised his earlier approach away from a too sharp contrast between “custom” and “invented tradition”, now preferring “imagination” as a more appropriate frame for ethnicity in a civic sense, retaining “invention” in the case of the state but giving ethnicity a more nuanced twist. In arriving at such a rethink he was influenced not only by John Lonsdale on Kenya, but also John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton’s re-imagining of pre-colonial Zulu ethnicities.<sup>31</sup>

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27 T Ranger, email to the author, 12 September 2010

28 T Ranger, “Introduction: Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa”, in T Ranger (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa* (OUP, Oxford, 2008), pp 3–36, p 5, footnotes 1 and 2; pp 8, 19 His comments here on South Africa are brief and he chooses to focus in his Afterword only on four other country studies

29 T Ranger, *Crisis in Southern Rhodesia* (Fabian Bureau, London, 1960), p 16

30 T Ranger, “African Initiatives and Resistance in the Face of Partition and Conquest” in A Boahen (ed.), *General History of Africa*, volume 7 (Unesco, Berkeley, 1985), pp 45–62, pp 47, 52–3, 55

31 T Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa”, in E Hobsbawm and T Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), pp 211–62; and T Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa”, in T Ranger and O Vaughan (eds), *Legitimacy and State in 20th Century Africa* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1993), pp 62–111

From time to time, Ranger would return, almost in passing, to South African studies, often in connection to Zimbabwe. When Ranger wrote a short Introduction to Maurice Nyagumbo's *With the People* (1980), he did not bother to mention Nyagumbo's South African days, which comprise six of nineteen chapters. Here we cannot argue for any deep influence, but he was aware of connections.

Questions of politics or involvement of historians in contemporary burning issues is another angle from which to approach influence. McCracken reminds us that in 1966 Ranger drew a comparison between Ireland and Africa in the Kampala journal *Transition*, about Irish fighter Roger Casement and "the problematic position of European activists involved in South African politics", seeing Casement as "strikingly similar to the white martyr figures of the Southern African freedom struggle".<sup>32</sup>

Other ways to gauge scholarly influence are through reviews and citations.<sup>33</sup> Over the years, journal editors asked Ranger to review a good number of major works by South Africans.<sup>34</sup> Many cover his expertise, such as resistance, peasants, religion, and environment, or connect to wider African history. Undoubtedly, his great stature and prodigious output influenced these decisions of commission, but they also reflect his increasing engagement with the wider region. A series of penetrating review articles, notably "Growing from the Roots",<sup>35</sup> critiqued a diverse group of South African writers, including Colin Bundy on peasants, if more at a theoretical than empirical level, but always keen to push the scholarship forward. His timely review of Pan-African journals such as *African Journal of Political Economy* and *Eastern Africa Social Science Review* drew attention to their growing interest in South Africa.<sup>36</sup>

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- 32 McCracken, "Personal Appreciation", citing Ranger, "Roger Casement and Africa", *Transition*, 26, 3, 1966, pp 24–26. In 1961 he still hoped to publish his PhD on Ireland of the seventeenth century, and in his earliest works we see traces of later keen interest in the complexity of ideas and politics, and the role of the individual in history. See T. Ranger, "Strafford in Ireland: A Revaluation", *Past and Present*, 19, 1961, pp 26–45.
- 33 Citation analysis does not work well for African imprints but gives a rough indication of who, at least in the North, is reading what. The Social Science Citation and Arts and Humanities Indexes provide imprecise estimates (they do not index all journals). As of 1 September 2010, they cite Ranger's "Connections: I" (1968) 46 times; and "Nationalist Historiography" (2004) 31 times. Google Scholar counts 5 525 citations for Ranger and "Invention of Tradition"; *Peasant Consciousness* scores 283; and *Dance and Society*, 188.
- 34 For example, his reviews of J. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*, in *History Today*, 30, 1980, p 55; Guy's *The Heretic*, in *History Workshop Journal*, 19, 1985, pp 175–180; and Guy's *The View across the River*, in *African Affairs*, 101, 404, 2002, pp 453–454; J. Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa*, in *Bulletin of SOAS*, 47, 2, 1984, p 410; G. Mbeki, *The Peasants' Revolt*, in *Third World Quarterly*, 9, 2, 1987, pp 719–724; S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid*, in *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 13, 3, 1990, pp 441–442; W. Beinart and P. Coates, *Environment and History*, in *JSAS*, 22, 1, 1996, p 178; B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, in *Africa*, 75, 4, 2005, pp 631–632; I. Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, in *Africa*, 75, 2, 2005, pp 252–254; C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, *JSAS*, 25, 2, 1999, pp 313–315; C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, *JSAS*, 23, 2, 1997, pp 383–384.
- 35 T. Ranger, "Growing from the Roots: Reflections on Peasant Research in Central and Southern Africa", *JSAS*, 5, 1, 1978, pp 99–133.
- 36 T. Ranger, "Africa Looks at Southern Africa: A Review of Journals", *JSAS*, 14, 3, 1988, pp 477–482.

## Impact

Ranger's influence in South African historiography has gone through three phases: an initial period as a harbinger of change and African agency; a middle period when his focus on religion and rural studies gave his work less traction in dominant urban studies; and a third, ongoing, phase when the great depth of his oeuvre won new readers.

Norman Etherington sees Ranger's influence on South African History in four major areas. Firstly, by encouraging research into religious aspects of resistance and nationalism, particularly influencing Shula Marks' *Reluctant Rebellion*, "and through her, her mob of 1970s postgrads". Secondly, in editing and promoting *JSAS* from its inception. Thirdly, by "encouraging reappraisals of ethnicity and national identities"; and fourthly, in "encouraging studies of mission Christianity and mainstream churches"; the latter he rates "as at least equal to the Comaroffs".<sup>37</sup>

Chris Saunders, in *The Making of the South African Past*, observes that when *The Oxford History of South Africa* was still coming out, Ranger presciently predicted the imminent rise of "radical pessimists" highly critical of African nationalist governments and their hagiographers. At the momentous 1968 conference in Lusaka, South African historians were able to meet the new breed of Africanist historians such as Ranger.<sup>38</sup>

Textbooks tend to formalise and distil debate. Rodney Davenport cites Ranger along with jousting partner Cobbing on revolt and religion and, *pace* Cobbing, takes a moment to criticise Ranger's high estimation of a revolutionary role of spirit cults. Reminiscing today, he cannot recall any specific link<sup>39</sup> but those "doing" the wider region cannot totally ignore Ranger. Donald Denoon does not write about Ranger in his lively textbook but recommends his books, as does Neil Parsons in *A New History of Southern Africa*. John Omer-Cooper gives a guernsey only to *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*.<sup>40</sup>

As Ranger reiterates,<sup>41</sup> the test of the "coming of age" of African History would be in its presence in wider historiography, as in journals such as *Past and Present* to which he contributed so much and helped open its pages to Africanists. His wider recognition rests especially on the widely cited work with Hobsbawm on inventions of tradition. Yet not even a Ranger can write on every topic. Hence, we should seek his influence in those sub-fields where he has been prominent, notably African nationalism, peasants and rural areas, religion, biography, and environmental history.

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37 N Etherington, email to the author, 31 August 2010

38 C Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1988), pp 152, 159, 153

39 T R H Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1987), pp 116, 389, 611; email to the author, 6 September 2010

40 D Denoon, *Southern Africa since 1800* (Longman, London, 1972), p 234; N Parsons *A New History of Southern Africa* (Macmillan, London, 1982); J Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa* (James Currey, Oxford, 1987)

41 In *Themes on African History* in 1968, and again to me in 1992: Ranger, "The State of African Studies"

Advances by Ranger in deconstructing complex identities of African nationalism in Zimbabwe and Tanzania are a lodestar for some Africanist, and a growing number of South Africanist scholars. Ineke van Kessel, in her study of the grassroots UDF in rural Sekhukhuneland, makes good use of Ranger, pondering along with him why there is not more religion in the historiography of national liberation.<sup>42</sup> Raymond Suttner, as insider and now outsider, in his nuanced and gendered study of the ANC underground, makes bold to assert that appreciation of the array of “traditional” and other identities unpacked in Zimbabwean historiography by Ranger has yet to find a counterpart in either ANC thinking or studies of South Africa national liberation movements.<sup>43</sup> Gail Gerhart in her study of Black Power sees in South Africa “much corroboration” for Ranger’s “thesis that modern African nationalism has been shaped by forces of ‘historical memory’”.<sup>44</sup> Others to draw on Ranger include Gary Kynoch on the culture of dance and liberation, and Nigel Penn in his sensitive history of resistance across the Northern Cape.<sup>45</sup>

There are silences and critiques. Ranger’s initial writings on resistance were published too early to benefit seminal early works on African nationalism in South Africa by Mary Benson (1963) and Peter Walshe (1970). Naturally enough, given their mutual focus on the late nineteenth century, *Revolt* is cited by André Odendaal (1984), if not by Brian Willan (1984) or Alan Cobley (1990) on later periods.<sup>46</sup>

In Ranger’s classic but oft-contested two-part analysis of primary resistance he drew on a wide range of African struggles, including J.T. Jabavu and 1890s Ndebele resistance and Nelson Mandela’s need to relate tales of resistance wars.<sup>47</sup> Today many would take issue with direct connections between nationalisms of different periods and its unintended dangers in politics. The “dangers of nationalism” help to fairly account for some of the fiercest criticism of Ranger.<sup>48</sup> It can be unfair to blame scholars for the ravages of politicians, yet some point to “Connexions” supposedly glorifying Hutu resistance to Tutsi conquest.<sup>49</sup> John Janzen deploys Ranger’s analysis of peasant

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42 I van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2000), pp 293–294, 340

43 R Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa* (Jacana, Johannesburg, 2008), p 3

44 G Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), pp 149–150 note 32

45 G Kynoch, *We Are Fighting the World: A History of the Marashea Gangs in South Africa* (Ohio University Press, Athens: OH, 2005); N Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape’s Northern Frontier in the 18th century* (Double Storey, Cape Town, 2005)

46 M Benson, *The African Patriots* (Faber, London, 1963); P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The ANC 1912–52* (Hurst, London, 1970); A Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1984), p 339 note 137; B Willan, *Sol Plaatje* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982); A Cobley, *Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950* (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990)

47 T Ranger, “Connexions between Primary Resistance and Modern Mass Nationalism”, *Journal of African History*, 9, 3, 1968, pp 437–453, pp 444, 445

48 See as one example, Rhodes House Library, Ranger Papers, Box 1, 553: Ranger to Robert Mugabe, 18 November 1979, recalling an event in the 1960s when a veteran of the 1896 war presented Mugabe and Nkomo with a spirit axe

49 Email, 5 October 2010 “Connexions: I” mentions the Nyabingi movement; “Connexions II” reviews its origins “as a movement of opposition to Tutsi control”, before concluding that “these movements require to be taken seriously and with sympathy as consistent expressions of

consciousness and healing to help explain resistance to genocide in Rwanda.<sup>50</sup> Yet decades of advance warning of the misdemeanours of African nationalists in power contributed to a cooling of ardour in some circles in South Africa for Ranger's oeuvre.

Julian Cobbing and David Beach mounted major critiques of Ranger's interpretation of the 1896–7 Ndebele and Shona revolts, arguing these had an essentially secular rather than cult leadership. Cobbing added the Matopos cult came from the south, from Vendaland.<sup>51</sup> His attitude to Ranger today is "complicated".<sup>52</sup> He acknowledges Ranger's vast contribution to Zimbabwean history (in one interview even suggesting impishly, or ironically, that Ranger may well have "invented" Zimbabwean history).<sup>53</sup> Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that Ranger's treatment of the risings laid a "respectable foundation myth" for a later "patriotic history" that he would come to criticise.<sup>54</sup>

Phimister sees Ranger's *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* as debatable, incorrectly seeing middle and rich peasants virtually disappearing in the 1950s and 1960s, and he challenges Ranger's assumption they were not inside ZANU.<sup>55</sup> The pervasive materialist and neo-Marxist analysis of the 1970s is evident in Phimister's work and among others such as Stanley Trapido and Charles van Onselen. This linked in turn to developing left critiques of ZANU, for despite Ranger's critical work on Matabeleland, his "big picture" analysis of post-1980 ZANU politics, and acquaintances with its leaders, may have sharpened their criticism. At Oxford, a breach had developed from the late 1970s between Left Africanists in Queen Elizabeth House and Ranger's predecessor as professor of Race Relations, Kenneth Kirkwood. Differences became personalised.<sup>56</sup> Understanding these debates requires a detour through urban and rural studies.

The three Longman volumes emanating from Shula Marks, reveal a certain, perhaps unintentional, "blunting" of Ranger's influence, except where peasants or nationalism are involved. In the first (1980) only Neville Hagan, who conceives Ranger's interest in African nationalism in a rather narrow way, engages with him. Two years later,

aspirations which ... have to be met in one way or another by the rulers" (p 641) Perhaps some ambiguity of what Ranger termed "the task of the nationalist movements" to "maintain mass enthusiasm for their own solutions" led some to question the potential misuse of such formulations, but evidence of his direct "glorifying" of nationalism is thin

- 50 J Janzen, "Historical Consciousness and 'Prise de consciences' in Genocidal Rwanda", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 1, 2000, pp 153–68
- 51 J Cobbing, "The Absent Priesthood: Another Look at the Rhodesian Risings of 1896–1897", *Journal of African History*, 18, 1, 1977, pp 61–84
- 52 Emails to the author, from T R H Davenport, 6 September 2010; and J Cobbing, 6 September 2010
- 53 Elicited from an interview in 1995, cited in T Lyons, *Guns and Guerrilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 2004), p 98 note 13
- 54 S Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Mapping Cultural and Colonial Encounters, 1880s–1930s", in B Raftopoulos and A Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2009), pp 39–74, 53
- 55 I Phimister, "The Combined and Contradictory Inheritance of the Struggle against Colonialism", *Transformation*, 5, 1987, pp 51–59, p 51
- 56 I owe these insights to an unnamed informant. If they appear somewhat one-sided, it was not for want of trying to elicit comments from those with alternative viewpoints

the urban-focused contributors to the second volume ignore Ranger; only Tim Keegan, on sharecropping, cites Ranger on peasantry. The third, in 1987, gives no more than an obligatory bow to *The Invention of Tradition*. The urban History Workshop volumes similarly make little reference to Ranger, the apparent lack of resonance probably due to different agendas, approaches, or ideologies. Had he spent too long in the bundu to catch the attention of urban historians? Yet, his time in Salisbury and Dar, his *African Voice* and later volumes on the Samkanges and his new history of Bulawayo that draws on South African urban historians such as Belinda Bozzoli on Alexandra, show him as much at home among urban elites and workers as peasants and prophets. In any case, these social formations have close interconnections in Africa.<sup>57</sup> After a spell in the Lesotho archives, Ranger in 1978 wrote for the *South African Labour Bulletin* on ethnic and class consciousness of miners, some from Basutoland, during a 1914 strike, observing that reports of “faction fights” could disguise emergent class consciousness.<sup>58</sup>

Ignoring Ranger was not always the case with South African-based urban historians. In chapter seven of *Chibaro*, on ideologies and organisation, Van Onselen listens attentively to *The African Voice* and cites other writings by Ranger, whilst on rinderpest he refers to *Revolt*; but no direct Rangerian influence is evident in his South African urban histories.<sup>59</sup> If today their relations are not what they once were, Phimister made good use of Ranger in his socio-economic history of Zimbabwe; no other writer, except himself, is cited as much as Ranger.<sup>60</sup>

Some other critics are less visible. Being at the top of the academic tree, with all that that involves in accepting and rejecting manuscripts (and even paradigms), invariably brings in its wake enemies. Some Africanists are critical of Ranger’s formulations.<sup>61</sup> One correspondent refracted anonymous views or rumours heard via the drumbeat of well-beaten scholarly trails that hinted at resentment or perceptions of self-centredness.<sup>62</sup>

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57 N Hagan, “Posthumous Vindication of Zachariah Gqishela”, in S Marks and A Atmore (eds), *Economy and Society* (Longman, London, 1980), pp 275–92, pp 275, 288; S Marks and R Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (Longman, London, 1982); S Marks and S Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Longman, London, 1987); T Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning* (James Currey, Oxford, 2010), pp 12–13. In an interview in October 2010, Ranger sees this as his return, rather than a turn, to urban history: <http://afripod.org> (accessed 1 March 2011)

58 T Ranger, “Faction-Fighting, Race Consciousness and Worker Consciousness: A Note on the Jagersfontein Riots of 1914”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 5, 1978, pp 66–74, p 57

59 C van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976); Van Onselen, “Reactions to Rinderpest”, *Journal of African History*, 13, 1972, pp 473–488; Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1982)

60 I Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890–1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle* (London: Longman, 1987) has 25 references to Ranger. With all my diplomacy, I could draw neither Phimister nor Van Onselen to comment on Ranger’s legacy

61 See J Vansina’s frankly vitriolic review of T Ranger and I Kimambo (eds), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Heinemann, London, 1972), in *International Journal of African Historical Studies (IJAH)*, 6, 1 1973, pp 178–180, criticising chiefly the book’s organisation and approach to ritual

62 Email to the author from an anonymous scholar of Southern Africa, 4 October 2010

When we turn to Rhodes, we see more connections. South Africa and Zimbabwe share Cecil Rhodes' grim legacy. Leonard Thompson, opting to write on earlier periods in the *Oxford History of South Africa*, refers in passing to Rhodes and the end of primary resistance, but despite their proximal residence in North America, they show no evidence of influencing each other. More recently, Paul Maylam discusses Ranger on Rhodes at more length.<sup>63</sup> Ranger's "Last Word on Rhodes" (1964) mapped out a research agenda to get "closer to a view of Rhodes which sets him firmly in the full context of South African history".<sup>64</sup> Many more words, often from original angles, followed. Once he occupied the Oxford chair of Rhodes Professor of Race Relations, he could not ignore the link. His 1987 inaugural lecture unravelled the ambiguity of Rhodes' legacies and noted South African aspects: Rhodes as "tutelary deity" of the chair; quoting liberally from a chapter on "Mr Rhodes and the Poisoned Goods" in Beinart and Bundy's *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* of the same year; and South African allusions in works of the Oxonian-Rhodesian Arthur Cripps.<sup>65</sup>

Moving in another direction, connections between Ranger and Namibian historiography are unsurprising given the mentoring milieu but not always straightforward. Jan-Bart Gewald, first mentored at Rhodes by Cobbing, feels Ranger's work influenced him, "but in the way that I had been taught; I did not accept at face value the claims of Bley, Drechsler ... of the national unity of 'anti-colonial' resistance". Wolfgang Werner, a doctoral student of Phimister, structured his Herero history around the concept of "self-peasantisation" developed by Ranger, and is "heavily indebted" to *Peasant Consciousness*. German strength in Namibian historiography has limited Ranger's influence,<sup>66</sup> but his voice is also discernible in works by Zedekia Ngavirue, Neville Alexander, Tony Emmett and Keith Gottschalk. Ngavirue acknowledges Ranger's early insights into African nationalism.<sup>67</sup>

Ranger's engagement with environmental history has been considerable. Jane Carruthers remarks that he "guided students and led numerous colleagues to contribute to a specific area of study". She recalls his interventions at the 1992 conference of the

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- 63 M Wilson and L Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1969–71); P Maylam, *The Cult of Rhodes: Remembering an Imperialist in Africa* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2005)
- 64 T Ranger, "The Last Word on Rhodes?", *Past and Present*, 28, 1964, pp 116–27, p 127
- 65 T Ranger, *Rhodes, Oxford, and the Study of Race Relations* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987), p 16
- 66 J-B Gewald, email to the author 3 September 2010; J-B Gewald, *Herero Heroes* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999), pp viii, 7; W Werner, *No One Will Become Rich: Economy and Society in the Herero Reserves in Namibia, 1915–46* (Schlettwein, Basel, 1998), pp 57, 79
- 67 Z Ngavirue, *Political Parties and Interest Groups in South West Africa (Namibia)* (Schlettwein, Basel, 1997); T Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915–66* (Schlettwein, Basel, 1999), pp 28, 246, 249; K Gottschalk, "Colonialism, Commonage and Proletarianisation: A Re-analysis of the Bondelzwarts Rebellion", in A Spiegel (ed.), *Africa Seminar Collected Papers 5* (Centre for African Studies, Cape Town, 1988), pp 92–107, p 94; N Alexander, "The Enigma of the Khowesin, 1885–1905", in C Saunders (ed.), *Perspectives on Namibia, Past and Present* (Centre for African Studies, Cape Town, 1983), pp 45–68, pp 66–8 Ranger's excursion in Namibian historiography is "Trends in African Historiography and the Tasks Facing Scholars of Namibia", in B Wood (ed.), *Namibia 1884–1984: Readings on Namibia's History* (Namibia Support Committee, London, 1988), pp 41–45

Economic History Society of South Africa where he also led discussions “in very productive directions”. He urged scholars to go beyond then prevailing economic frameworks and take indigenous knowledge seriously. Carruthers, who draws on Ranger in *The Kruger National Park* (1995), had long conversations with him in Oxford. Whilst not an “environmental historian” in the traditional sense, he has been very influential, having a “lasting effect” in putting landscape and local knowledge “onto our agenda”.<sup>68</sup>

Some environmental historians have questioned his application of concepts.<sup>69</sup> Others have applied them; one recent deployment follows his interpretation of landscape painters of Matabeleland.<sup>70</sup> Annie Coombes observes that by combining environmental with cultural approaches in his analysis of indigenous land rights, Ranger warns against essentialising history, though she perceptively adds that just such a strategy has been quite successful for Fourth World indigenous peoples.<sup>71</sup> William Beinart and Joann McGregor have engaged substantially with Ranger’s rural studies. In turn, Beinart’s work may have stimulated Ranger to look more closely at the environment.<sup>72</sup>

In broader rural studies, such as Tim Keegan’s *Rural Transformations in Industrialising South Africa* (1986) Ranger is cited, but we find serious interaction with Ranger’s thought in works on the interaction of power and nature, such as those on struggles in the rural areas by Beinart and Bundy.<sup>73</sup> Ranger would return the compliment, with Beinart and Bundy virtually the only South African works cited in *Peasant Consciousness*. This and related work, in part inspired by Ranger, is some of the best work on rural South Africa and agrarian change.

Regional or sub-continental history offers more proof of a Rangerian influence. Deryck Schreuder’s history of the scramble mentions *Revolt* and Ranger’s “penetrating critique” of peasant research.<sup>74</sup> Today he still sees Ranger “as one of the towering scholars in pioneering African History as a major academic subject for study, and also in showing us how it might actually be written”. Schreuder was “intrigued and much influenced” in his thinking on the dynamics of African societies by Ranger’s work on

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- 68 J Carruthers, “Environmental History in Southern Africa: An Overview”, in S Dovers, R Edgecombe and B Guest (eds), *South Africa’s Environmental History: Cases and Comparisons* (Ohio University Press, Athens: OH, 2003), pp 3–18, p 12; J Carruthers, “Environmental History: Complex Connections around the Constancy of Change”, *Historia*, 54, 2, 2009, pp 98–112, p 109; J Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995); and emails to the author, 6 and 10 September 2010
- 69 Nancy Jacobs, assessing Ranger’s chapter, in her review of W Beinart and J McGregor (eds), *Social History and African Environments* (OUP, Oxford, 2003), *SAHJ*, 50, 2004, pp 269–271
- 70 M Draper, M Spierenburg and H Wels, “Images of Africa: Agency and Nature Conservation in South Africa”, in M de Bruijn, R van Dijk and J-B Gewald (eds), *Strength beyond Structure: Social and Historical Trajectories of Agency in Africa* (Brill, Leiden, 2007), pp 214–39, p 218
- 71 A Coombes, *History after Apartheid* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2003), pp 156–157
- 72 Beinart and McGregor, “Introduction”, in *Social History and African Environments*, p 8; W Beinart, emails to the author 27, 29, 30 September 2010
- 73 W Beinart and C Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 26, 30, 35
- 74 D Schreuder, *The Scramble for Southern Africa, 1877–95* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980)

African peasantry and village culture; his “joy in African cultures, and his affinity to the African landscape, was always palpable”.<sup>75</sup>

Given Ranger’s involvement with African communities, it comes as no surprise that cultural historians should acknowledge their debt to him. Veit Erlmann on *ingoma* dance in South Africa mentions how Ranger’s *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890–1970: The Beni Ngoma* on East African dance shows the dynamism of popular culture.<sup>76</sup> A new generation of cultural historians are hungry for such offerings. Jennifer Wenzel on anti-colonial prophecy acknowledges inspiration.<sup>77</sup> Ian Steadman quotes Ranger on the need to take seriously “the informal, the festive, the apparently escapist”.<sup>78</sup> John Noyes notes Ranger’s writings on post-colonialism.<sup>79</sup>

The rising star of South African leisure history, Peter Alegi, was “definitely influenced” by Ranger. The latter’s book on Beni dance societies was “typical Ranger, many years ahead of the ‘cultural’ turn in African and Southern African social history”. Theoretically, Alegi was “inspired by Ranger’s acute analysis of social change through a serious examination of escapist fun on the copper mines”. Ranger contributed some of the “‘big’ ideas that shaped the way in which I thought of ‘nation’, ‘tradition’, and ‘culture’”. His essay on African boxing in Bulawayo ‘showed how African sport could reveal much about power relations between coloniser and colonised, and how ... boxing was intertwined with local cultural influences and male identities’.<sup>80</sup>

The above influences are clearly not hagiographical and point to a definite historiographical presence. Moreover, Ranger has a small if intriguing presence in South Africa’s own history journals. His article on rural labour and the law appeared in 1993 in the journal of the South African Historical Society – an editorial then observed it “should occasionally also serve as an outlet for important and innovative work done on other parts of Africa” – one of very few articles on Zimbabwe before changing its name to *Southern*

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75 D Schreuder, email to the author 30 September 2010 Schreuder “nearly had the good fortune of studying under Ranger” in Salisbury, but his desire to study African history of Zambia with Ranger, Richard Brown and Eric Stokes disappeared when “the gyrations of African colonial politics saw the university under increasing siege and with many of its academic stars then leaving”

76 V Erlmann, *African Stars* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991), p 97

77 J Wenzel, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009)

78 I Steadman, “Towards Popular Theatre in South Africa”, in L Gunner (ed), *Politics and Performance* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1994), p 27, citing Ranger, *Dance and Society*

79 J Noyes, “The Place of the Human”, in S Nuttall and C-A Michael (eds), *Senses of Culture: South African Cultural Studies* (OUP, Cape Town, 2000), pp 49–60, p 51

80 P Alegi, email to the author, 6 September 2010; T Ranger, “Pugilism and Pathology: African Boxing and the Black Urban Experience in Southern Rhodesia”, in W J Baker and J A Mangan (eds), *Sport in Africa* (Africana, New York, 1987), pp 196–213; E Akyeampong (“Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Precolonial Ga Society”, *IJAHS*, 35, 1, 2002, 39–60) built on Ranger’s work and “these two essays are the only serious scholarly treatments of African boxing history – shocking oversight given the significance of boxing to African men (and their success); but again an indication of Ranger’s originality and eclecticism”

African Historical Society<sup>81</sup> and in 2006 opening its journal to the region,<sup>82</sup> no doubt prompted in part by Ranger's earlier entrance. The *South African Historical Journal* cites Ranger 20 times from 2001 to 2010. Most are references in review articles,<sup>83</sup> in one, Tapiwa Zimudzi discusses debates between John Saul and Ranger over the revolutionary credentials of Robert Mugabe.<sup>84</sup> Others make similar passing mention in reviews<sup>85</sup> and in articles drawing lightly on Ranger's diverse corpus.<sup>86</sup>

*Historia* similarly has eighteen recent Ranger citations, its Zimbabwean connections bolstered by Alois Mlambo, editor for the last three years, but with an earlier presence. It published several articles by Zimbabweans in the 2000s. Gerald Mazarire engaged substantially with Ranger's corpus and his critics in one.<sup>87</sup> In another, Clapperton Mavhunga commented on Ranger's study of the Matopos.<sup>88</sup> Literary critic Anthony Chennells commented on Ranger's critics.<sup>89</sup> Jane Carruthers noted Ranger on imaginative landscapes.<sup>90</sup> Some Afrikaner historians joined in from time to time. Kobus du Pisani discussed Ranger's review of Beinart and Coates' comparison of South African and US environments. Johann Tempelhoff commented that "The extent to which the historian can shed more light on the field [of environmental history], is exemplified in Terence Ranger's contribution on women and environment in African religion".<sup>91</sup> In a substantial engagement, Tim Stapleton, whose works straddle both countries, in 1993

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- 81 "Editorial", *SAHJ*, 28, 1993, p 1; T Ranger, "Tales of the 'Wild West': Gold-Diggers and Rustlers in South-West Zimbabwe, 1898–1940 An Essay in the Use of Criminal Court Records for Social History", *SAHJ*, 28, 1993, pp 40–62
- 82 "Editorial", *SAHJ*, 58, 2006, p 1
- 83 See for example T Zimudzi, "Restoring the Heterogeneity of the Colonial African Intelligentsia", *SAHJ*, 44, 2001, pp 197–206
- 84 T Zimudzi, "Power Syndrome: Robert Mugabe and the Land Reform" *SAHJ*, 47, 2002, pp 213–218, pp 214–215
- 85 P Maylam, *The Cult of Rhodes*, reviewed by C Kros, *SAHJ*, 57, 2007, pp 271–273
- 86 Such as, "Towards a Usable African Past", in C Fyfe (ed), *African Studies since 1945* (Longman, London, 1976), pp 17–30, cited by C Lee, "'Causes' versus 'Conditions': Imperial Sovereignty, Postcolonial Violence and the Recent Re-emergence of Arentian Political Thought in African Studies", *SAHJ*, 60, 2008, pp 124–46; M Musemwa, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Evolution of the City of Bulawayo and Makokoba Township under Conditions of Water Scarcity, 1894–1953", *SAHJ*, 55, 2006, pp 186–209
- 87 G Mazarire, "Oral Traditions as Heritage: The Historiography of Oral Historical Research on the Shona Communities of Zimbabwe, Some Methodological Concerns", *Historia*, 47, 2, 2002, pp 421–445 As Beach noted (*IJAHS*, 13, 1, 1980, pp 103–8, p 104), Ranger drew on some themes of Zulu history to illustrate *Revolt*
- 88 C Mavhunga, "'If They Are as Thirsty as All That, Let Them Come Down to the Pool': Unearthing 'Wildlife' History and Reconstructing 'Heritage' in Gonarezhou National Park, from the late 19th Century to the 1930s", *Historia*, 47, 2, 2002, pp 531–558
- 89 A Chennells, "'Where to Touch Them?': Representing the Ndebele in Rhodesian Fiction", *Historia*, 52, 1, 2007, pp 69–97
- 90 J Carruthers, review of J Tempelhoff (ed), *African Water Histories*, in *Historia*, 51, 1, 2006, 273–275
- 91 K du Pisani, "Storie van die Natuur: Omgewingsgeskiedenis as Groeiende Navorsingsveld", *Historia*, 49, 2004, pp 3–21, p 18, on Ranger's review of W Beinart and P Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa*, in *JSAS*, 22, 1, 1996; J Tempelhoff, "Towards New Avenues of Research in African Environmental History", review of W Beinart and J McGregor (eds), *Social History and African Environments*, in *Historia*, 49, 2004, pp 226–228, p 226

gave a critical defence of Ranger's "resistance thesis" rooted in Xhosa history: "the pan-Xhosa national movement formed during the 1846 war was the climax of their primary resistance and part of a continuum of protest ... unbroken to the present day".<sup>92</sup>

Those South African historians with eyes fixed on religious themes<sup>93</sup> or on northerly climes,<sup>94</sup> often have space for Ranger. Ian Phimister's *Wangki Kolia* refers, in passing, to Ranger's pioneering work on the Watch Tower movement in *The African Voice*. However, the religions connection better shows Ranger's scholarly weight. We see generous attribution to Ranger in Leon de Kock's *Civilising Barbarians*,<sup>95</sup> the shared context being not just missions, holy places and religious movements but also invention of tradition and primary resistance.<sup>96</sup> The opening up of South African historiography assisted such influences. Yet, when we turn to South African religious studies per se, there is sometimes a curious lacuna. For example, only one Ranger citation appears in *Christianity in South Africa*, on peasants and conversion.<sup>97</sup> *Missions and Christianity in South African History* fares better with four references and a quote on the cultural history of missions.<sup>98</sup> These mere bibliographic examples do point to an intellectual history of rigorous engagement with religious studies that is confirmed by first-hand accounts.

Ranger was Robert Edgar's doctoral supervisor at University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) from 1970-4, providing a "profound" and "beneficial" influence. Ranger's seminar on the History of African Religion spurred Edgar's later interest in the Israelites. Ranger, he recalls, really helped to open up South African history to the rest of Africa. When Edgar went to South Africa in 1973-4, he did so to study *African*, not narrow South African history. He was surprised to find few others doing the same and to see so many South African historians not engaged with the rest of Africa; these then were two reasons why Ranger would be less influential in South Africa.<sup>99</sup>

Viewed from the rural areas, Ranger is now part of the canon for a new generation of historians who study South Africa, at least from North America and Europe. Sean Redding cites Ranger on peasants, landscape, religion and resistance. His "deep

92 T Stapleton, "'They Are Depriving Us of Our Chieftainship': The Decline and Fall of the Traditional Xhosa Aristocracy", *Historia*, 38, 2, 1993, pp 86-99; emails to the author, 4-5 October 2010

93 R Edgar and H Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century South African Prophet* (Ohio University Press, Athens; OH, 2000)

94 For example, P Delius, *The Land Belong to Us* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1984)

95 L de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1996) Isobel Hofmeyr's intellectual history of African translations of *Pilgrim's Progress* *The Portable Bunyan* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004), draws somewhat on Ranger

96 T Ranger, "Taking Hold of the Land: Pilgrimages and Holy Places in Twentieth Century Zimbabwe", *Past and Present*, 117, 1987, pp 158-94

97 R Elphick, and T R H Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1997), p 408 note 123 (referring to the "The Local and the Global")

98 J du Bruyn and N Southey, "The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries in South African Historiography", in H C Bredekamp and R Ross (eds), *Missions and Christianity in South African History* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1995), pp 27-47, p 40

99 R Edgar, email to the author, 4 October 2010; telephone interview with R Edgar, 5 October 2010

understandings of both African culture(s) and colonial culture” gave her “profound insights” and, after all, Zimbabwe “is not so far removed from the South African historical experience”.<sup>100</sup> Jacob Tropp’s history of the Transkei forests cites *The Invention of Tradition* and its revision, *Voices from the Rocks*, and “Women and the Environment”. Barbara Oomen, in her study of northern Transvaal chiefs, gains inspiration from Ranger’s shift from the invention to the imagining of tradition.<sup>101</sup>

Such citations are seen by Stapleton as part of a “broad influence ... usually there to establish a comparative context”, perhaps induced by apartheid’s intellectual isolation. It is harder to prove Ranger’s impact on specific aspects of South African than on Tanzanian historiography. Arnold Temu, of the “Dar School”, told Stapleton in the mid-nineties that “post-modernism was delaying the emergence of a nationalist school of South African history along the lines of Ranger and 1960s Tanzania”.<sup>102</sup> This may or may not be a desirable thing, but strong resistance to nationalist schools of any sort, whether by structuralists or postmodernists, also blunted Ranger’s influence in South Africa.

It is uncertain whether Zimbabwean liberation (and Ranger’s related works) resonated in South African counter-historiography of the 1980s, such as *New Nation* and *Sached*; agitprop alternative histories often lack bibliographies to check. But public historian Leslie Witz reminds us the Africanisation of history remains incomplete: “[R]emember the Peires-Ranger debate about how African historians would change the face of South African History? Well, it didn’t”.<sup>103</sup> In that 1991 discussion, carried in *Southern African Review of Books*, Ranger thought there “would soon be many” black historians in South Africa. The exchange began with his comments on the *Radical History Review* special issue on the Rand History Workshop.<sup>104</sup> Retrospectively, to Jeff it was a debate (Terry “reacted quite strongly to a somewhat polemical piece I wrote”, meant as “a bit of a provocation”); to Terry a spat (Jeff “seemed to repent of his historical work”). Yet it was lively for readers, and suggestive of the need for more frequent interactions between Zimbabwean and South African historians. Still, they inhabited different domains and it was time for historians to set more socially relevant agendas.<sup>105</sup>

Ranger’s occasional interventions in South African historiography, Peires observes, may not always say things of momentous *empirical* significance, but show “the

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100 S Redding, email to the author, 5 October 2010; Ranger, “Holy Places”

101 S Redding, “Peasants and the Creation of an African Middle Class in Umtata, 1880–1950”, *IJAHS*, 26, 3, 1993, pp 513–39; S Redding, “Government Witchcraft: Taxation, the Supernatural, and the Mpondo Revolt in the Transkei, South Africa, 1955–63”, *African Affairs*, 95, 1996, pp 555–579; S Redding, “A Blood-Stained Tax: Poll Tax and the Bambatha Rebellion in South Africa”, *African Studies Review*, 43, 2, 2000, pp 29–54; J Tropp, *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei* (Ohio University Press, Athens: OH, 2006); B Oomen, *Chiefs in South Africa* (James Currey, Oxford, 2005), pp 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 194

102 T Stapleton, email to the author, 4 October 2010

103 Leslie Witz, responding to the question “Has history become more Africanised since 1994?” posed by C Saunders and C Kros in “Conversations with Historians”, *SAHI*, 51, 2004, pp 1–23, p 10

104 T Ranger, “Audiences and Alliances” [on *Radical History Review*, 46, 7 1990], *Southern African Review of Books*, 4, 3, 19 May/June 1991; J Peires, “A Usable Past” [response to Ranger] 4/5, 20/1, July/October 1991, pp 38–39; Peires, response to Bonner, 5, 1, 23 January/February 1993

105 Peires, “A Usable Past”, p 39

extent to which he keeps up to date with everything African, including relatively obscure South African publications”.<sup>106</sup> Both men have had their stint in African nationalist politics. Ranger retreated to Dar; Peires, after a time in parliament, now to the Cory. Both pointed to dangers of nationalism; the former to how it could corrupt history writing, the latter how “a new wave of black academic comprador is not necessarily going to bridge” the gap between academic history and popular historical consciousness.

Peires compares Ranger’s overall influence on South African historiography to a man outside trying to shine a light into a closed shop. Everybody certainly respected him, more especially because he read other people’s work with care and interest, whereas most of us were only interested in the work of others inasmuch as it impinged on our own. He qualifies this impact:

... not being a South African historian, his influence was tangential rather than decisive. We taught his articles, especially the one on primary resistance, but the gap between Ranger and us was characteristic of the great divide between South African history and African history proper. Terry was one of the few who made a genuine attempt to bridge it, but with limited success.<sup>107</sup>

Two other areas of interest here are language and censorship. Ranger would be quick to agree he is no great African linguist; after all, Oxford did not offer chiShona classes in the 1950s. He once confided to me, in connection with a claim he had “coined” the term *Chimurenga*, that his meagre Shona skills precluded him from that privilege. Yet in the wider arc of oral history he has contributed, as in his assessment of Wulf Sachs’s psychohistory of a Zimbabwean migrant worker in Johannesburg.<sup>108</sup>

Apartheid censorship extended to some African history books.<sup>109</sup> Ranger’s works, censored in Rhodesia,<sup>110</sup> do not seem to have found their way to Jacobsen’s list of books banned in South Africa. Those banned included not just the works of Lenin, Harold Robbins, and one *Jerry Ranger*, whose *Sex Fantasies* was banned in 1977, but also *African Nationalism* by Ndabaningi Sithole (banned from 1965 to June 1993), along with works by Ali Mazrui and Basil Moore and James Cone on black theology, apparently and oddly deemed more dangerous than *Peasant Consciousness*.<sup>111</sup>

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106 J Peires, email to the author, 22 September 2010

107 J Peires, email to the author 20 September 2010

108 T Ranger, “Personal Reminiscences and the Experience of the People in East Central Africa”, *Oral History*, 6, 1, 1978, pp 45–78, p 46.

109 Garson, “Censorship”, p 6 I have not yet analysed sufficient South African syllabi to evaluate their citing of Ranger’s works, but University of Pretoria Archives has syllabi of F A van Jaarsveld, whose 1984 course on history as a science covered South African history and is replete with his own illustrations, including a flag with “Rhodesia” crossed out by “Zimbabwe” alongside an inscribed hammer and sickle. My thanks are to Bronwyn Strydom for this fascinating historiographical artefact

110 A De Baets, *Censorship of Historical Thought: A World Guide, 1945–2000* (Greenwood, Westport, 2002), p 621 Ranger’s *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* was, at one time, set reading for Rhodesian special forces

111 Jacobsen’s index of objectionable literature: [www.beaconforfreedom.org/about\\_database/south%20africa.html](http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/about_database/south%20africa.html) (accessed 1 February 2011)

Mentoring students and editing are other forms of scholarly influence. Shula Marks, as thesis advisor, provided the main early influence on William Beinart but concern to connect to comparative studies was reinforced by later contacts with Ranger, whose analysis of rural politics, ethnicity, chieftaincy and consciousness influenced *Hidden Struggles*.<sup>112</sup> Ranger was Beinart's external advisor in 1979, read or commented on *Hidden Struggles*, and co-edited a *JSAS* special issue. Beinart assumed the chair of *JSAS* in 1992, and the chair of Race Relations at Oxford in 1997, both from Ranger.<sup>113</sup> William Worger, apparently thinking only of Dar es Salaam, UCLA and Manchester, but writing as recently as 1999, felt Ranger had few successful doctoral students. In fact, he had 40 in Oxford between 1987 and 1997, some of whom, such as Elizabeth Elbourne, went on to make major contributions in South African history.<sup>114</sup>

*JSAS* has always been a focus of Ranger's care. Upon retirement, the journal compiled a special issue to celebrate his contribution. He served on the Board from 1974 to 1992, maintaining a remarkable and continuing level of contribution. He joined two South African scholars, Beinart and Rob Turrell, to edit a special issue on violence. On the Board, he gave intellectual direction and regional balance, "bridging the Limpopo during the isolation of South Africa" and "nurturing areas in which the journal was less well-represented such as anthropology, cultural history, the history of religion, and debates being generated in African studies outside of the region".<sup>115</sup> In this bridging of isolation, we see his influence on South Africans, both in Britain and in South Africa.

Another fruitful area of collaboration was supervision. Ranger externally examined some of Marks' South African students. Jeff Guy was one, whom Ranger came to know well, whilst Guy was a fellow at University of Manchester and when Ranger was an external examiner at National University of Lesotho where Guy was lecturing.<sup>116</sup> Guy

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- 112 There were others: the Oxford group on agrarian issues, the Johannesburg History Workshop, his cohort (Delius, Peires) and a slightly earlier generation (Bundy, Guy, Bonner) I Niehaus, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics* (Pluto Press, London, 2001) cites Ranger on witchcraft and identities
- 113 Beinart, emails to the author, 27, 29, 30 September 2010 Ranger had written on the Beni, but Beinart's interest in youth culture was sparked more by Philip Mayer, Van Onselen and others on youth gangs
- 114 W Worger, "Southern and Central Africa", in R Winks (ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, V* (OUP, Oxford, 1999), pp 513-540, p 531 note 83; Ranger, email to the author, 12 September 2010; Ranger, "Concluding Remarks", p 178; E Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* (McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2002), p ix Elbourne's "'Race', Warfare, and Religion in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 1, 2000, pp 17-42, was "inspired by Terence Ranger's concern with ... invention of tradition, the centrality of narrative to human self-understanding, and the complicated intersection between 'religion' and 'politics'" Ranger had his historiographical revenge, for *The Oxford History Index* cites him more often than any other Southern African historian (and once more than Thompson) *The Cambridge History of Africa: I* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), p 7 also cites his works
- 115 W Beinart, in *JSAS*, 23, 2, 1997, special issue for "Terry Ranger", p 173
- 116 Ranger, email to the author, 12 September 2010; J Guy, "Class, Imperialism and Literary Criticism: William Ngidi, John Colenso and Matthew Arnold", *JSAS*, 23, 2, 1997, pp 219-41, p 220; and Ranger's reviews of Guy

muses that a walk with Ranger on that most majestic and historic of mountains, Thaba Bosiu, where they chanced to meet a group of South African pilgrims, might just have engendered in Ranger “something non-material which played its part in the creation of subsequent work”. Guy proceeds to outline a case study of John Colenso and William Ngidi. At the outset, he quotes Ranger’s comment, writing of the Masasi, how historians need to understand not just opposites, but also intermediary social and cultural forces. Guy’s article shows Ranger’s influence on one of the finest South African historians.<sup>117</sup>

### **The teaching of African (and Zimbabwean) History south of the Limpopo**

Chris Saunders recalls that, besides the Davie lecture, Ranger came through Cape Town quite often, on more than one occasion with Judith Todd, and addressed UCT history students, including his own class on Liberation and Zimbabwe History. On any specific South African influence, he is unsure. There may have been dissonances with Cobbing and Phimister as regards Zimbabwean studies inside South Africa. Yet Saunders, who taught African History in the 1970s with Robin Hallett (1926–2003)<sup>118</sup> at UCT, feels “the idea of African agency came above all from Ranger”. Whilst Ranger succeeded Leonard Thompson at UCLA, Saunders does not view the two as close, though they may have interacted at conferences in Salisbury in 1960 and Lusaka in 1968.<sup>119</sup> Then, South Africa history departments were “composed almost entirely of research specialists in South African history”, keeping its academic history “still in a ‘colonial’ stage”.<sup>120</sup>

It was much the same across the country. Heather Hughes recalls attending the first undergraduate course in African History at Wits in 1973, offered by Philip Bonner, who had studied under Marks (who in turn interacted with Ranger). At the University of Natal, African History had been taught in Comparative African Government and Administration courses well before it was taught in the History Department.<sup>121</sup> In the Afrikaner universities, there was little African History as such, though F.A. van Jaarsveld began to introduce a rather odd hybrid form in the 1980s (see footnote 107).

Patrick Harries provides a detailed, inside account of Ranger’s growing influence as African History began to be taught. Eric Axelson had introduced the first course in African History in a South African university in 1964 at UCT, though not in tune with the winds of change. Robin Hallett replaced Axelson and gave the second course. It was not

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117 Guy, “Class, Imperialism”, p 220, citing Ranger, “Missionary Adaptation of African Religious Institutions: The Masasi Case”, in Ranger and Kimambo, *Historical Study of African Religion*, pp 221–251, p 221

118 Hallett taught in Nigeria, Niger, Tanzania and Oxford before moving to UCT in 1972, returning to the UK in 1978: G Shaw and P Sanders, “Robin Hallett: Teacher at the Forefront of African Historical Studies”, *Guardian*, 8 March 2003 He felt marginalised at Oxford (D Killick, obituary H-Africa, 27 March 2003) and lacked recognition there for introducing African History (C Saunders, obituary, *St. Antony’s College Record*, 2003, p 154) If identifying as an Africanist he felt “I still remain an outsider”; R Hallett, *New Winds of Change: Africa in the 1970s* (Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, Cape Town, 1978), p ii

119 C Saunders, emails to the author, 15, 16 May 2010 Recent visits have included some on Aluka business

120 N Garson, “Censorship and the Historian”, *SAHJ*, 5, 1973, pp 3–9, pp 6–7

121 H Hughes, email to the author, 3 September 2010

until the early 1980s that African History ceased to be a special sub-section of the department and an integral part of the History degree.<sup>122</sup> Hallett, who had lived in, and written on West and East Africa, brought “a breath of fresh air and new ideas”, and an “anti-establishment” ethos at a time when the cultural boycott was biting; and when Africa was “much closer to many Londoners” than to “the inhabitants of Newlands or Parktown”,<sup>123</sup> Hallett had a profound impact on Harries, who rates him the most important influence on his thinking, just ahead of Ranger and David Birmingham, with van Onselen “close behind”. Hallett “produced a stream of African Historians” including Tim Keegan, Rob Turrell, Sue Newton-King, and Dave Killick. When Harries entered Hallett’s classes in 1973, African History had become the largest section of the department. And “Ranger was at the centre of Hallett’s teaching. At the centre of this teaching was African agency”, which was “quite revolutionary” in South Africa. Overall, Ranger was “crucial – the dominant intellectual influence – in the development of African History at UCT”.<sup>124</sup>

When Harries began to teach African History at UCT in 1975, intermittently at first, and then regularly from 1980, “Ranger was at the centre” of his teaching. Harries sees Ranger’s work as “behind much” of what he has written, “from moving the study of migrant labour away from economic determinism to African initiative, to the turn to oral tradition”. This is evident in Harries’ *Butterflies and Barbarians*, as well as in the broad “intellectual scaffolding on which we have built our knowledge of Africa”.<sup>125</sup>

Zimbabwean historians based in South Africa see Ranger’s influence differently. Economic historian Alois Mlambo did not come to South Africa to teach until the 2000s. He feels Ranger would not have had a significant impact in the dark days of apartheid with little attention paid to history of Africa. The only clear evidence he detects is the work of Zimbabweans now working in the country, exposed to Ranger’s ideas whilst at the University of Zimbabwe.<sup>126</sup> Cambridge-educated and Rhodes-based Zimbabwean historian Enocent Msindo sees an influence, especially in changing scholarship on identities. South African scholarship borrowed from *The Invention of Tradition*, with scholars such as Harries “typically Rangerian”. His influence was “first and foremost” on

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122 P Harries, email to the author, 17 May 2010; P Harries and C Saunders, “Eric Axelson and the History of Portugal in Africa”, *SAHJ*, 39, 1998, pp 167–76, p 172

123 Hallett, *New Winds of Change*, p 1

124 P Harries, email to the author, 17 May 2010 Hallett’s debt to Ranger is best seen in his *Africa since 1875* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1974), where he has a long quote from *Revolt* (p 508), and in the Bibliography, where he cites *Emerging Themes* (“a particularly stimulating introduction to the present state of African historical studies”, p 777), a “splendidly detailed” chapter in *Colonialism in Africa. Revolt, Themes in Christian History and African Voice*, and a chapter in *Aspects of Central African History* as “the best introduction to the development of African political activity in Southern Rhodesia” (p 799)

125 P Harries, email to the author 17 May 2010 Ranger “inspired much of what is best” in Harries’ *Butterflies* (p xiii); Hallett, *New Winds of Change*, p 3, described UCT in 1978 as “exceptionally well provided for” and “fairly comprehensive” among South African universities in African Studies In the proceedings of a conference organised by Ranger in Manchester on History and Anthropology in 1980, Harries published on the history of ethnicity, which may have influenced Ranger’s ideas in *Invention of Tradition*

126 A Mlambo, email to the author, 14 July 2010

African History but he “was able to influence South African scholarship towards the end of apartheid”. In urban history, the movement may have been the other way round.<sup>127</sup>

Another younger generation historian, Jeremy Martens, gives an interesting perspective of the historian of Natal. Not only has he long enjoyed Ranger on Zimbabwe but also *The Invention of Tradition* was “most influential”, “especially as it is so relevant for anyone looking at indirect rule in Natal”. He came to Ranger after reading Carolyn Hamilton’s account of Shepstone “crowning” Cetshwayo in 1873.<sup>128</sup> Hamilton and Ben Carton also connect with *The Invention of Tradition*, if chiefly to seek to transcend its approach.<sup>129</sup> Marks, in *Reluctant Rebellion* engages with Ranger on connections of primary resistance, careful to note he was well aware of its ambiguity and tension. Her conclusion invokes Ranger’s observation in *Revolt* that even unsuccessful resisters often achieve their aims. He read the manuscript of Marks’ *Not Either an Experimental Doll*, which she revisits in the 2000 Festschrift, citing his article on healing and colonial society, and cites “Making Northern Rhodesia Imperial” in her *Ambiguities of Dependence*.<sup>130</sup> Paul la Hausse, with his deft sense for social biography, turns to the Samkanges and “Holy Places”, and sees a prehistory to *The Invention of Tradition*.<sup>131</sup>

One can go on, sweeping across South Africa, but Ranger is still often there. In his book on the Southern Tswana, Kevin Shillington makes use of Ranger on Rhodes, resistance, and peasants. Lize Kriel, in her study of the Hananwa, draws on his Wahehe research.<sup>132</sup> Alan Kirkaldy’s sensitive treatment of the Vhavenda acknowledges Ranger’s detailed comments on a paper given at Oxford,<sup>133</sup> reminding us that a scholar’s influence can be indirect. Editors of the new *Cambridge History of South Africa* air Ranger’s critique around the Comaroffs and pre-colonial narrative.<sup>134</sup> Of course, one could cite just as many other books that do not mention Ranger, and we have already drawn attention to

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- 127 E Msindo, email to the author, 17 May 2010 Msindo, whom Ranger taught for two years, now writes “from a different angle”, but feels Ranger’s tremendous personal and wider influence: email, 21 May 2010
- 128 Email correspondence with J Martens, 17 September 2010
- 129 C Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Power of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge: Mass, 1998), pp 25–26, p 73; B Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2000)
- 130 S Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906–8 Disturbances in Natal* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1970), pp xviii, xix, 338; S Marks, *Not Either an Experimental Doll* (Women’s Press, London, 1987); S Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1986)
- 131 P La Hausse, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c. 1881–1948) and Lymon Maling (1889–c.1936)* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2000), p 27
- 132 L Kriel, *The “Malaboch” Books: Kgaluši in the “Civilization of the Written Word”* (Steiner, Weisbaden, 2009), pp 100–101
- 133 K Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana, 1870–1900* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985); A Kirkaldy, *Capturing the Soul: The Vhavenda and the Missionaries* (Protea, Pretoria, 2005)
- 134 C Hamilton, B Mbenga and R Ross (eds), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, I: From Early Times to 1885* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009), pp 7–8; see also P Landau, in the same work, p 397 note 12; Lonsdale, “Agency in Tight Corners”, p 8

his critics, most of whom maintain their criticism. Nevertheless, there is an undeniable, ineluctable Ranger “presence” in South(ern) African historiography.

## Conclusion

Some historians might conclude, with Etherington that, apart from the broad influences outlined above, Ranger “remains very much a Zimbabwean historian”.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, he is much more: historian of Africa, of agency, nationalism, religions and cultures. Over the years, he has, as Harries puts it in terms of a 1980 conference, “brought generations and disciplines together in a wonderful way”.<sup>136</sup> Or, to paraphrase McCracken, to South African historians as to other African historians, Ranger introduced “ideas developed by historians elsewhere while simultaneously bringing African history to the attention” of white historians.<sup>137</sup> This influence rose steadily from the late 1960s, was kept at bay in the late 1970s and early ’80s when it came – perhaps inevitably and necessarily so – under attack from writers concerned at what they perceived as Ranger’s sailing rather too close to the wind of rampant African nationalist triumphalism, but then increased again with the cultural turn – and is likely to keep doing so.

Ranger’s South African interventions are not without contradiction. Yet even if we wonder at the grasp of the totality of South African studies by a self-confessed outsider, his readings, as Peires notes, are impressive. He can point deftly to undeveloped areas of South African historiography. In a recent commentary, he offers his views on South African religious, literary and art studies. He points to persisting South African exceptionalism, though those he chides are less broadly influential than those he commends.<sup>138</sup>

The rather conservative philosopher of history R.G. Collingwood once suggested, in connection with History education, that we should not ask whether one should become a historian but rather, “How Good an Historian Shall I Be?”<sup>139</sup> Such a thought may have crossed Ranger’s mind as he transitioned from European to African Studies. In retrospect, there is no doubt he is one of the top historians of Africa with wide influence. This span just reaches the behemoth south of the Limpopo, now home to a growing Zimbabwean diaspora of one to three million people,<sup>140</sup> on the broader fate of which Ranger, with his customary curiosity and ethical commitment, has been active.<sup>141</sup>

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135 Email to the author, 31 August 2010

136 P Harries, email to the author, 17 May 2010

137 McCracken, “Terry Ranger: A Personal Appreciation”, p 176

138 In J Draper (ed), *Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2003); this is Ranger’s own recent estimation: email to the author 12 September 2010

139 *The Philosophy of History* (OUP, Oxford, 1930), p 3, cited in M Hughes-Warrington, “How Good an Historian Shall I Be?: R.G. Collingwood, the Historical Imagination and Education (Imprint, Exeter, 2003), p 155

140 See the articles in *JSAS*, 36, 2, 2010; J McGregor and R Primorac (eds), *Zimbabwe’s New Diaspora* (Berghahn Books, New York, 2010), chapters 1–3

141 T Ranger, “Narratives and Counternarratives of Zimbabwean Asylum”, *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 3, 2005, pp 405–21 For his concern about an earlier generation of refugees, see Rhodes House Library, Ranger Papers, Box 1, 676, Ranger, “Notes”, Francistown, 24 July 1977

Just as historians must always be alert to the dangers of nationalism and how their own histories might be exploited, so it is salutary to recall Ranger's 1995 words: "I have myself moved from being a nationalist historian through being a historian of rural society and environment and religion back to being a historian of nationalism".<sup>142</sup> This intellectual circuit may have more to do with historical trends than individual predilection for, far from fading away, nationalism remains a potent force today, requiring historians to take it seriously. Historians also need a mutually beneficial dialogue with those adhering to different paradigms so that, as Shula Marks puts it in her contribution to a Ranger Festschrift, the personal (and the author) can become the political. Ranger is one who can assist such intellectual reconciliation with, as Jeff Guy perceives, "his insistence that intellectual differences lead to intellectual development".<sup>143</sup> We might still well point to Ranger's greater concern with superstructure than foundation, and with culture than class. However, in this focus he is clearly not alone today and his originality, erudition, and adaptability have made him a central figure in the making of African Studies, and a gingering contributor to South African historiography where, given changing paradigms, his influence may well be increasing.

### **Abstract**

Terence Ranger's influence on African historiography and across several sub-genres of the discipline is immense, if not uncontested. The scope of his significant work ranges from urban and rural history, political history (including legitimacy, patriotism/nationalism, resistance and accommodation) and social and political biography to religions and spirituality, culture, tradition, environment and landscapes, human rights, and violence. Across these categories, he helped make African agency a *sine qua non* for historians. His influence is most pronounced on Zimbabwean and wider African historiography, but what of his influence south of the Limpopo? How did the study and teaching of African History within South Africa draw on Ranger's oeuvre; how was his influence felt on South African historians? I draw on contemporary writings of South African historians from the late 1960s to the 2000s and on recent assessments of Ranger's legacy by a select group of these historians (and Zimbabwean historians in South Africa) to estimate the influence on South African historiography of this giant of African History. Also from South African historians came the most sustained critique of the history of nationalism broadly associated with Ranger. I also narrate and analyse some of Ranger's limited but penetrating interventions on South Africa.

**Keywords:** Terence Ranger; historiography; South Africa; Zimbabwe; African History; historians; nationalism; culture; agency; African Studies; teaching of History.

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142 T Ranger, "Concluding Remarks", p 177

143 S Marks, "Changing History, Changing Histories: Separations and Connections in the Lives of South African Women", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 1, 2000, pp 94–106; Guy, "Class", p 220

## **Opsomming**

### **Terrence Ranger, Afrika studies en die Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie**

Terence Ranger se invloed op Afrika historiografie en oor verskeie subgenres van die dissipline is ontsaglik, indien nie onbetwisbaar. Sy beduidende werk sluit in stedelik en landelike geskiedenis, staatkundige geskiedenis (insluitende regmatigheid, patriotisme/nasionalisme, weerstand en aanpassing) sowel as sosiale en politiese biografie tot godsdiens en geestelikheid, kultuur, tradisies, omgewing en landskap, menseregte, en geweld. Hierdie kategorieë het gehelp dat hy Afrikaanse agentuur 'n sine qua non vir geskiedkundiges gemaak het. Sy invloed is mees bekend in Zimbabwiese en wyer Afrika historiografie, maar wat van sy invloed suid van die Limpopo? Hoe het die studie en onderrig van Afrika geskiedenis in Suid-Afrika op Ranger se oevre instelling gemaak; hoe het hy Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedkundiges beïnvloed? Ek gebruik kontempêre werke van Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedkundiges van die laat 1960s tot die 2000s sowel as onlangse evaluering van Ranger se erfenis deur 'n selektiewe groep van hierdie geskiedkundiges (en Zimbabwiese geskiedkundiges in Suid-Afrika) om die invloed van Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie op dié reus van Afrika geskiedenis te skat. Die mees volhoubare kritiek het van die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedkundiges gekom oor die geskiedenis van nasionalisme wat geassosieer is met Ranger. Ek verhaal en analiseer van Ranger se beperkte maar deurdringende intervensies op Suid-Afrika.

**Slutelwoorde:** Terence Ranger; historiografie; Suid-Afrika; Zimbabwe; Afrika Geskiedenis; geskiedkundiges; nasionalisme; kultuur; agentskap; Afrika Studies; Geskiedenis onderrig.