

2008

ZIMBABWE IN PICTURES



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The unscripted movie that is the (new) Zimbabwe

EDITION 13



Chris Kabwato
Project Coordinator

The unscripted movie that is the new Zimbabwe

I had to be there on Monday 15 September. Up and early I struggled into a suit – jeans are my preferred item of clothing – but on this occasion I thought a suit might just be appropriate. I wasn't exactly in a celebratory mood. Deep down I still felt that this was an unjust resolution to a simple problem – the lack of ZANU PF's legitimacy. Mugabe had lost an election, had lost the support of the people. Now he would need to be accommodated – very much the way the National Party had to be accommodated by the African National Congress. It need not have ended this way. But our leaders had said this was the best compromise deal...

Chris Kabwato
Project Coordinator





07.30

At the Bronte Hotel I have a lousy breakfast with the world's smallest beef sausage and some stuff that passes for eggs!

The hotel's resident cat (Harare's Garfield) keeps me company as I nibble my breakfast. I am not sure what the cat thinks about Mugabe but it tells me "meeow-inflation".



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08.45

I had taken up my seat in the former Sheraton Hotel, now misappropriately called Rainbow Towers (a rainbow remains an illusion – was this peace deal a mirage?). As I settled down with my notebook and camera I began to write...



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09.04

The Police Band, representent in black and gold have started playing an upbeat tempo. It's an old song that we sung way back in 1980. Redone by the Harare Mambos the song was one of joyful exuberance at the attainment of our independence. "Mhoroyi mose mose, makadini, nemufaro..."



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09.05

As the band plays I look down at the 9 people or so who are battling to figure out which country or dignitary should sit where. Nine people! Amazing how ZANU PF manages to create employment.



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09.07

The Police band have gone religious – playing “Zvikomoborero” (Blessings). Is this peace deal a blessing? As the band play an unconvincing traditional dance troupe takes the floor and begins its antics.

The place is teeming with the dreaded Central Intelligence operatives. You can smell them a kilometre away with their equally dreadful ill-fitting green suits (do they buy their regalia from one single source?). Up right in front of me across the hall is a ZANU guy in a red suit and flaming orange socks – serious clowns these people have been over the last 20 years. The sole reaction to the dancing group is someone asking “Does Bata still make those white tennis shoes?”

From where I am seated I can see Tommy Mandigora and Supa Mandiwanzira (both ex-ZBC stalwarts) conversing. What is in store for them in the somewhat new Zimbabwe?



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09.45

Then Police Band does the unthinkable. They play a popular song with the MDC crowd – “Tomudana”. The people stand up, dance and wave as they swing from side to side:

“Tomudana ,Morgan, Tomudana”. We call on him, Morgan.

The guy seated next to me, an MDC councillor in the Harare Municipality, remarks, “Mapurisa amusaluta Morgan” (The police have saluted Morgan).

But the police band is becoming incorrigible – they play another number and the crowd sings: “Saina, saina, usarambe kusaina!” (Sign, sign, don’t refuse to sign!)

The councillor points out the notorious war veteran leader, Chinotimba, and remarks, “He has been complaining that the harmonised March elections should not have taken place. Instead we should have started off with the re-run!” Chinos is the butt of many jokes here.

Mrs Tsvangirayi is ushered into the hall and the upper deck of the auditorium erupts, “First Lady!” She is looking regal in her cream outfit. Tendai Biti’s entrance is greeted with equal fervour.

We are becoming a bit restless. I spot ZBC chief reporter and ZANU apologist, Reuben Barwe, and the councillor releases a savage line, “Why doesn’t he ever change that checked jacket of his? With his tummy he looks more like Humpty Dumpty.”



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10.11

Nkosazana Zuma, South African Foreign Affairs Minister, walks over to greet Tendai Biti. There isn't much warmth in the handshake – no hugs, no tears.



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10.37

The Police Band is on fire. And so are the people. As they belt another tune the people spin their own lyrics to it:

"Tsvangirayi tonga zvako, ZANU yakoniwa" (Tsvangirayi govern, ZANU has failed).

SADC leaders stream in but the warmest reception is reserved for the Botswana leader –

"Khama! Khama! Khama!" Joyce Mujuru, seated next to her husband, looks stupefied by this.



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10.49

My favourite band plays "Makanaka Mambo Jesu" (You are good/great, Jesus)
Our leaders have now taken their seats. Boring ceremony follows. I will spare you the details.
Anyway, the signing happens.



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11.30

Then Morgan steps up to the podium. He is already looking presidential (ok, prime ministerial). Applause punctuates his speech:

"I salute the service chiefs,

I would like to salute the people of Zimbabwe". He elaborates that in signing this agreement he has been guided by HOPE. Hope is the key word in his speech. He does not skirt the issue of restorative justice – "there is need for public acknowledgement of injustices of the past". He calls the agreement a product of "painful compromises".

"This agreement sees the return of hope."

As he speaks the chant rings "Taura Save" (a reference to his totem).



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12.00

Mugabe steps forward. His voice retains its strength and authority. In typical style he disses Morgan. He acknowledges all the leaders and calls them "Comrade" and then moves on to say "Professor Mutambara and Mr. Tsvangirayi". Can a leopard change its spots, I wonder. He goes into his usual cacophonous monologue on anti-colonial struggles and the role of the Frontline States. Britain and the US come in again for the usual bashing. It's an old script - and he is not even reading.

"He has lost the plot", I whisper to the councillor.

"Zvinonyadzisa", replies councillor.



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12.26

"We are all Zimbabweans", says Mugabe. Oh that's amazing. Last time I checked I was a M'brandaya – people without totems. But the old warhorse is not done yet "Chinhu chinonzi democracy is a difficult proposition in Africa."



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12.45

King Mswati III steps forward to speak as Head of the SADC Organ for Defence and Security. Not for once does he mention the word "democracy", instead he talks of peace and stability.



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13.00

Jikaya Kikwete, Tanzanian President and African Union Chair says the signatures mark an end to "a dark shadow" in Zimbabwe. He praises both Mugabe and Tsvangirai.



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13.13

As Kikwete speaks Mugabe nods off. He is tired. He wakes up as he is about to slump onto the table. As he shuffles to shake hands with Kikwete you can see that he has problems walking.

Time and then economy have done their bit to force Mugabe to drink this bitter poison. Read Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Autumn of the Patriarch and you will see parallels here.



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13.14

President Thabo Mbeki takes the podium and reads the long preamble to the signed agreements. He concludes by saying that there are just a few details to be concluded in relation to the agreement. I am a bit disappointed. I had hoped the issue of the ministries would have been announced by now. That is key.



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14.20

I am now outside. The MDC crowd is singing as they line up outside entrance of the Rainbow Towers. They wish to acknowledge their own.

The mood is electric. ZANU PF supporters seem to have retreated themselves to their HQ just half a kilometre away. This is not a time to rejoice on their part.

"Saddam waenda,

Kwasara Bob"

(Saddam is gone, next is Bob).

"Kutora minda

Kurima sora

Havanyare!

Taking farms

So you can grow weeds

You have no sense of shame"

George Charamba makes an appearance and the crowd shouts "mbavha! mbavha! thief! thief!". Charamba wears a bemused smile.

One security detail nods as the songs roll on – "Sewage mumba mangu", "Ane mazano Tsvangirayi", "Feya, feya hauhwine" etc. It's a moment to behold.

The crack troopers that accompany the president ride by several times as they escort the SADC leaders and the opposition crowd shouts fearlessly, "Junta! Junta!". This is a different day. I am even taking pictures without any accreditation and I am right there where the leaders are coming and going.



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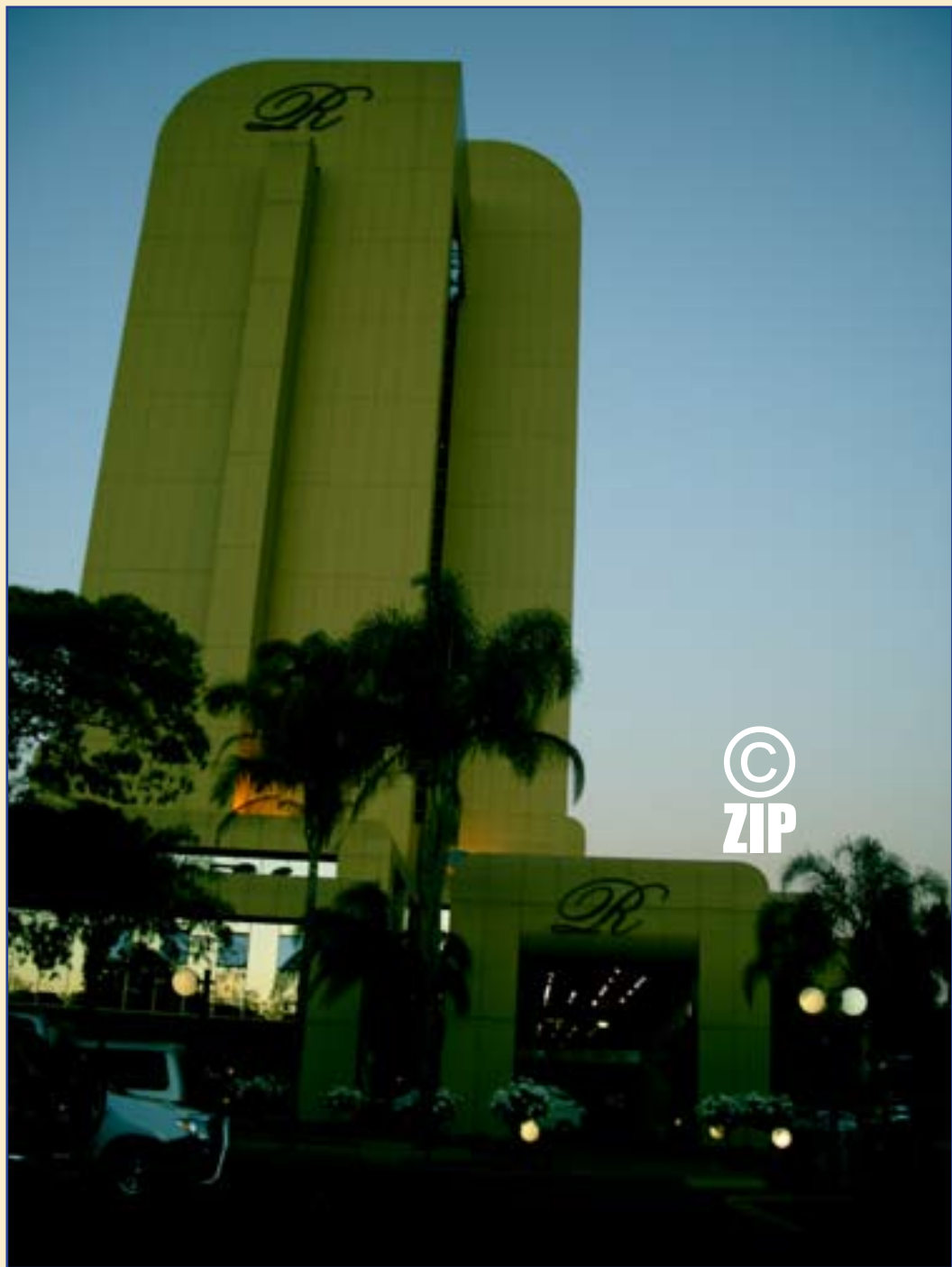
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A Different Poem by Onesimo Silveira

The people of the islands want a different poem
For the people of the islands;
A poem without exiles complaining
In the clam of their existence;
A poem without children nourished
On the black milk of aborted time
A poem without mothers gazing
At the vision of their sons, motherless.
The people of the islands want a different poem
For the people of the islands:
A poem without arms in need of work
Nor mouths in need of bread
A poem without boats ballasted with people
On the road to the South
A poem without words choked by the harrows of silence.
The people of the islands want a different poem
For the people of the islands:
A poem with sap rising in the heart of the BEGINNING

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Netherlands institute for Southern Africa

MEET THE TEAM



Chris Kabwato – Publisher

Chris joined Highway Africa in October 2003 as Director. Highway Africa is a programme of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. Highway Africa is a network of African journalists and exists to promote the use and understanding of ICTS and new media by journalists. Highway Africa convenes the largest annual gathering of African journalists (701 people attended Highway Africa Conference 2007). Chris is also Publisher/Editor-in-Chief of the Highway Africa News Agency. His portfolio includes projects in media, ICTs, gender and the arts.



Levi Kabwato – Journalist

Levi is currently studying for a Post-Graduate Diploma in Media Management at the Sol Plaatje Institute for Leadership at Rhodes University. Before coming to Rhodes, he was the staff writer for Malawi’s Blantyre Newspapers Limited, publishers of The Daily Times, Malawi News and The Sunday Times.



Shalen Gajadhar - Design & Layout

Shalen is a teacher in Communication Design at Rhodes University. He completed his Bachelor of Journalism at Rhodes in 2003. He is responsible for the design and layout of most of Highway Africa’s publications. Shalen also teaches design courses specifically structured for mid-career designers and layout artists. If he is not reading, he also freelances, with projects ranging from book layout to business cards.

