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The last time I was in Harare was in 1962. It was Salisbury then and Rhodesia was forever. I was part of a rugby tour and we were feted and overwhelmed with a hospitality that effectively anaesthetized us to the socio-political world around us. Everything was "bakgat, great and lekker". But in that same year Mugabe was already organising the Youth Wing of the National Democratic Party. A biography of his refers to the meetings he arranged -

"The last meeting of the NDP, held in Highfield on 3 December 1962, was proof of the emotion that had been evoked. An hour before it was to start, every path was one huge, coiled, black snake of wriggling bodies heading for the Cyril Jennings Hall. At the Hall, Youth Leaguers ordered attendants to remove their shoes, ties and jackets, as one of the first signs of rejecting European civilization. Water served in traditional water-pots replaced Coca Cola kiosks. By the time the first speaker, a European in bare feet took the platform, the whole square was a sea of some 15 000 to 20 000 cheering and cheerful black faces. The emotional impact of such gatherings went far beyond claiming to rule the country - it was an ordinary man's participation in creating something new, a new nation". The natives certainly were restless whilst we were having a rugby tour, but, as I said, not so you would notice it.

Now, twenty four years later, I have come again to, amongst other things, get the feel of the "new nation". Mugabe is the undisputed leader. This is clear from talking to white and black leaders in the private sector, senior civil servants and academics. His intellectual stature, self-discipline and enormous capacity for work are referred to time and again. Everyone is agreed that the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe cannot be understood without the crucial role Mugabe played. (I remember how Graham McIntosh, PFP MP, returning from a visit a few years ago, was mocked and jeered by Nationalist Party MP's when he said Zimbabwe was "a miracle of reconciliation".) I heard this phrase repeatedly

over four days from white businessmen, who 10 years ago were Ian Smith's staunchest supporters.

One said to me : "I know you whites down there will think I am crazy, I was like that myself, only worse. But majority rule can work."

Another : "During that time the liberal and right wing whites were always at each other and bombarding us with threats and dire predictions. Now they are either gone or irrelevant and we and the government have to sort things out as best we can."

"Sorting things out" is a phrase one comes across quite often. I raised the issues of Marxist-Leninism, One Party State, the conflict in Matabeleland. "Sure, they are issues, but we are sorting them out." What strikes one is not that these "issues" are not seen as problem areas, but the infectious confidence that they can be coped with. Somehow, the ghosts of the past have been demythologized and the future is not experienced as a dead limp weight on the present. There is a major qualification though - the conflict in South Africa. But more of that in a moment.

Visually it is easy to be seduced by Harare and its surrounds. Jacarandas are in full bloom and they go on for as far as one can see. We drove forty miles north of Harare past beautiful and well-kept farmlands surrounded by Mopani and Jacarandas. I suppose the "miracle" of Zimbabwe is not to be found in the absence of problems, but in the fact that the worst whites expected was not even approximated by what they actually experienced.

Nothing now appears quite as obsolete as a high security fence around a farmhouse and yet there was a time when it meant the difference between life and death. Nobody can be found who does not look upon the war as a period of dreadful waste.

Ian Smith's Harare house is right next to the Cuban Embassy and about three blocks away from the embassies for the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Bulgaria and Algeria. After Lancaster House one of his more ultra-conservative Ministers was asked : "So, when are you emigrating?" He replied : "I already have. I moved from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe and I brought the farm along as well." No doubt about it, Zimbabwe is a "new nation".

It is of course impossible to resolve all the contradictions and synthesize the impressions in a four day visit. Especially if one is visiting one city. But of the 80 000 permanent white Zimbabweans, approximately half live in Harare. At least one can gauge how the transition must have been for them by driving through their suburbs, reading the smalls in the newspapers and job advertisements, looking in on discos, sporting grounds and testing house prices and models of cars. They are living very, very comfortably, thank you very much. (One Zimbabwean dollar is worth 60 plus South African cents.) How does an ordinary white South African resolve the following philosophically and emotionally:

The Russians recently sent a Rugby XV to beat the local Zimbabwean XV. After that the Bolshoi Ballet. Only the whites fought tooth and nail to get tickets - blacks could not really care either way.

Currently the Young West Indians are locked in a number of test matches with a Zimbabwean cricket eleven. The Harare sports field crowd could be anywhere in SA on a lazy summer afternoon. The restaurant in Meikles Hotel is so colonial it aches. Waiters in squeaky tackies, red sashes, smiling non-stop for tips.

Across the road a bookshop sells everything on Lenin from his first gurgle to his last gasp as well as the latest on South African liberation literature. (That's the place to meet South Africans - met two there on the first visit). And yet, you will find more Marxist thetoric and debate in $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour at UCT campus than four days in the centre of harare.

Seven o'clock on Friday night : Knight Rider; Sunday : Dallas and Dynasty - the whole nauseating McDonald's cultural imperialism on the box. Radio is different - more blacks can afford it and the thmp and thud of indigenous music tells you where you are.

Harare is a high morale place. One senses it in gestures, conversation and the way traffic moves. There are signs of poverty and people do scramble for jobs - but they are scrambling. Generally the feeling is : "Given a chance, I can make it." It is when they look South that there is a wavering, a check on the exuberance. There is a sense of the vortex-like pull of that conflict for the whole Southern African region. The questions raining on one define you as the resident kill-joy for the moment. One wishes one can bring more hope and optimism, but cold realism tells one that until South Africa is a "new nation" as well, the young ones around it will have to nurture their nationhood with caution and apprehension. I am afraid there is still no easy ride to freedom South of the Border.

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