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ZIMBABWE

25 YEARS LATER



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This version of **Zimbabwe 25 years later** is a lightly edited version of the stories published on my website during the days of March-April 2018, when I travelled around the country. The major difference is the additional photographs used in this version, compared to one photograph per story principle originally used.

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When we came to Zimbabwe in the 90s, we fell in love with the Baobab tree. Even when it is not gigantic in size, which is often the case, it radiates command and control of its surroundings. We would go on trips, which would take much longer than necessary, because we had to take photographs of all the Baobabs we met. Every Baobab is, after all, special. No two Baobab trees are similar. On this trip, we also stopped every so often, when from a distance we had identified a Baobab, which was truly exceptionally different!



22 APRIL 2018

HIS EXCELLENCY!

[ABSTRACT. OIL ON CANVAS]

AN INTRODUCTION



On my last weekend in Harare, after a fabulous three weeks of visiting people and places we came to know and appreciate a quarter of a century ago, when we lived with our two children in the capital, I decided to do visit the National Gallery in downtown Harare. This was also a place we enjoyed visiting back then, partly because of the Zimbabwean art exhibited (stone carvings in particular), and then because of the beautiful and peaceful Harare Gardens right next to the museum. When the patience of Lasse and Thea finished, we could walk and play in the garden.

Friends had told me that the Gallery right now ran an exhibition with photographs from the events taking place in November 2017, under the title *LOST & FOUND - Resilience, Uncertainty, Expectations, Excitement and*

Hope. It was worth a visit. I remember how anxious I had been during the dramatic days, when ousted Vice President Mnangagwa returned and the military removed Robert Mugabe as the President. Just like in 1989, when people tore down the Wall dividing the city of Berlin into two parts, a symbol of the cold war, I felt a strong urge to jump on an airplane and join the crowds in the streets of Harare, celebrating the end of 37 years of despotism and injustice. Unfortunately, this did not happen. However, now at least I had a chance to see some of the photographs that have already become iconic and will in the future undoubtedly be reproduced again and again.

The National Gallery in Harare is a pleasant building, with large rooms full of natural light, well suited to exhibitions of both photographs and paintings. Like elsewhere, the wear and tear of time has taken its toll. You note right away that it would help with a repainting of the white walls. Still, the photos from people and soldiers in the streets of Harare in November would provide the viewer with a convincing story irrespective of the color of the walls. They stand out as forceful testimonies of anger and defiance, as well as an almost physical sense of anger released, and the beginning of a new dawn.

Photo by Believe Nyakudjara.



Only time will tell how things after November 2017 became a real turning point, or just a bump in the road, similar to what we experienced with the Arab Spring in 2011 [read more about the expectations in the last article]. Walking past the photographs in the exhibition hall, it struck me that the faces I looked at in the photos were faces of the ‘type’ of Zimbabweans I had met and become friends with in the 90s. Self-conscious and proud Zimbabweans;

well-educated and open-minded Zimbabweans; hard-working and committed Zimbabweans; and of course Zimbabweans ready to sing and dance and enjoy life, when this was appropriate and necessary.



The anger towards President Mugabe has always been strongest in the urban areas, where the opposition party MDC and the now deceased opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai had their strongholds. The photos naturally only tell the story about the festivities in the capital, but from what we heard on our journey, there were celebrations all over the country.



Walking to the first floor of the National Gallery, I was confronted with a large painting titled “His Excellency”. Here he was, the more than 90 years old former president, painted in strong reddish and brownish colors, with a rooster [the symbol of the ruling ZANU-PF party] sitting on the bald head of His Excellency. He looked different in this abstract painting of oils on canvas than on the photos from recent years. He is definitely old, overwhelmed by forces from within his party, bewildered, unsure of where he really is and what will happen to him, at the end. You hear his voice:

“Where am I? What is happening? Why do you not want me anymore?”

Right away, I had a feeling that I wanted to own this painting. I liked the way the young artist *Benjamin Furawo* [he was born in 1983 and grew up in the high-density city of Chitungwiza on the outskirts of Harare] had composed his painting, and the forceful use of strong colors. He has positioned himself as one among the most promising artists of his generation, now also selling to an international audience. I would never consider having a large photograph of Robert Mugabe hanging in a prominent spot on the wall of my living room. Would a painting work?

I thought so and decided to buy the painting. Since it was made specifically for this exhibition, to ‘celebrate’ the events unfolding in Zimbabwe in November 2017, it was officially supposed to hang in the National Gallery until end of April. However, I asked the staff to find out if an exception could be made, since I was worried what would happen if it had to be sent to me later. Various directors of the National Gallery were contacted, and at the end of the day, we got hold of a person able to make a decision. Permission was given! His Excellency could retire to an apartment in Copenhagen.

16 MARCH 2018

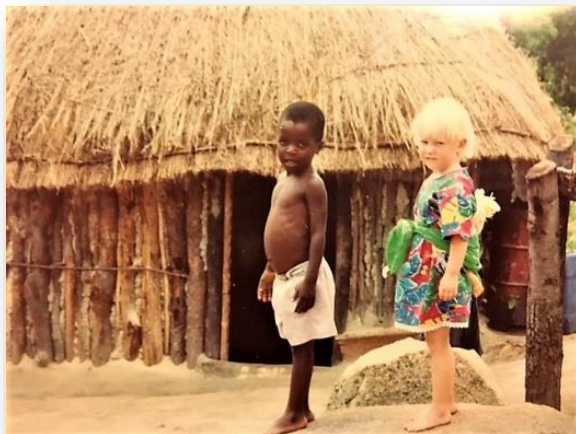
TRAVELLING DOWN MEMORY LANE



Today, together with my wife Anne, I embark upon a tour down memory lane in our beloved Zimbabwe. We plan to visit people and places all around the country. We will start in the capital Harare, where we lived in the area called Strathaven, not far from the city centre. Then we will drive to Nyanga, and continue along the major highways to Chimanimani, Buhera, Masvingo, Gwanda, Bulawayo, Nkayi, Binga, Gokwe and Nembudzia - weather permitting, in particular the rainy part of the weather, which can make some of the roads difficult to navigate. Contrary to the days of the 90s, we will not be driving a big 4-wheel drive.

All of those places are villages and towns where we visited regularly 25 years ago. They are the names of the places, where *Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke* [MS] had development workers posted. Today, there is no longer a MS program or a MS office in Zimbabwe. MS merged with the global *ActionAid* organization in 2010. In that process, MS offices were merged with ActionAid offices all around the world, and in Zimbabwe as well. So in that sense MS no longer has any 'partners' in the country.

Of course, we will also spend time with the families that helped us in and around the house back then. In the photo at the start of this story, you see Anne [who no longer smokes by the way] and Thea [who is now 27 years old] in the rural home of our gardener and his wife, together with Luca [today also 27], the best playmate of Thea. Unfortunately they had to give up the house they built themselves years ago, because of 'problems' with the title deed, so today their home is on the outskirts of Harare. Clara today also lives in her own house on the outskirts of Harare.



Luca and Thea outside the rural home of Luca in the north of Zimbabwe, with Thea carrying 'her' baby on the back.

18 MARCH 2018

THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED US IN THE 90s



Nando's Restaurant in the Avondale Shopping Centre, not far from where we used to live, was the first stop down memory lane: to meet with the two families who helped us in the house (Clara) and in the garden (Batsirai). Back then, in the early 90s, it meant that five people lived in the two staff rooms behind the house - Batsirai (born 1950) and his wife Maria (born 1950) plus the two boys, Wilson (born 1980) and Luca (born 1989). So the parents are Bjørn's age, Wilson was 12 when we arrived in 1992, and Luca was almost a year older than Thea at two. Clara was on her own, her husband died years back, and her daughter Rebecca stayed with family down in Gutu.

Today we needed a much larger table for our lunch. Maria and Batsirai were there, together with Wilson, who is now 38 years old, and his wife Susan. They were married in 2006, and today they have three charming children: Melissa (born 2007), Masimba (born 2011), and Maria (born 2015). Clara (who has just turned 70) had taken her granddaughter Shalom (born 2009) along. Therefore, we were a total of 11 people around the table.

However, we could have been 15 around the table. Luca could not be with us. He married last year and now has a son called Douglas. They have moved away from Harare and settled outside Mount Darwin, where he has taken over the farm originally owned by Maria's parents. On Clara's side, her daughter Rebecca could not be excused from her duties for the family she is serving.



What we talked about? What families who meet anywhere in the world talk about: How is Anne's mother doing? How is Bjørn's daughter in New York doing? How is Anne's brother Per and Bjørn's sister Sølvi doing? We were surprised that they could remember the names of literally all the people who visited us over the three years, family as well as friends.

And NO, we did not venture into a debate about how Zimbabwe is doing after the dramatic changes in November 2017, resulting in the fall of President Mugabe and the rise to power of President Mnangagwa. Still, from the adults we could feel a sense of relief, a bit of optimism, and a hope that the future could finally be better than they thought a few months ago.

19 MARCH 2018

THE LIFE OF CLARA



We did not recruit Clara to help us keeping the house clean and taking care of our two children, Thea and Lasse. She was in the house when we came to Harare and I took over the job as Coordinator for Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke after Vagn, his wife Dorte and their three children. We arrived in June 1992 (on the same day that Denmark won the European Soccer Championship), with Thea being two and a half years old, and Lasse inside Anne - he was born on 15 November 1992 at the private Avenues Clinic in Harare.

Since the first day he was brought to the house from the hospital, Clara took care of Lasse whenever she got the chance, looking after him when Anne was not around, playing with him on the floor when we got tired. You could argue that Lasse had two 'mothers'. Whenever I have met Clara over the years, her first question has always been about Lasse. *"How is Lasse doing? Is Lasse still studying? Has Lasse been married?"* Of course, she would also ask about Thea, but Thea was old enough to manage her own life, playing in the garden with Luca, and in the kindergarten, she attended.

We had brought a number and photos from the old days, as well as some of Thea and Lasse from today. Clara looked at them and had a hard time

reconciling her memory of Lasse as he grew up during his first years, and the bearded engineering student of 25, standing next to his girlfriend in the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen.



Above: Clara with Lasse in 1994. Below: Lasse in the arms of his big sister Karin visiting in 1993. Last: Lasse studying the daily newspaper 'The Herald'



Listening to Clara, it is evident that the years with the three Danish families she worked for in the 80s and 90s were good years. She was not paid an extravagant salary or much more than other household staffers were paid in Harare at the time. Her room in the shed behind the house was definitely not luxurious in any way. We often discussed among ourselves if it was good enough or big enough. Probably good enough, but certainly not large enough!

However, Clara felt appreciated for the work she did, she was treated with respect, and she once told me that she felt that we trusted her. Which is true. Her English was not particularly good, and she would normally speak to the children in Shona, but once she had understood what we wanted, we knew it would be done. We always felt safe with her taking care of the children.



Clara has now retired. She really did not want to, but she finally had to accept that no family is ready to employ a maid at the age of 70. Her last family told her that this was her situation!

Having served in the house of other families her entire life, she is now taking care of her daughter Rebecca and granddaughter Shalom. She has settled in an area - what some would call a slum area and others maybe a 'high density area' or even a 'growth point' - around 20 kilometers from the city center of Harare. Before she retired, she was smart enough to join a cooperative. Clara may not be well educated, but she is not at all ignorant. This membership provided her with a piece of land to build a house on, and over the last ten years or so, she has slowly been able to pay for bricks, some window frames, doors and labor to get the structure built.

This is the house you see Clara and Anne posing in front of. Right now, she has one room she is using as a living room - and preparing the food when the

weather does not permit it to be done outdoors. Another room is used for bedroom for the three of them - but it still needs to have a proper window frame put in. A third room she rents out - which brings in some necessary cash. The two rooms for toilet and kitchen are still not ready - she needs additional funds to finalize this part. Like other families in this area, and in other similar urban areas, she uses every inch of land not covered by buildings for agriculture, in this case mainly maize.

One day she might just build on this part of her plot. Clara may be old and she may be poor, but she is in her own low-key way very proud of what she has achieved. Living with a family like ours, she knows very well that there is a world of difference between our lives, Lasse's and Thea's lives, and her own life and that of Rebecca and Shalom.

You will never hear her complain. You will never hear her get angry. This is something I still fail to understand. Why not?

20 MARCH 2018

WHAT IS LEFT OF THE HALF-WAY HOUSE



Today we left the capital Harare, moving 275 kilometers towards the Eastern Highlands, where majestic mountains form the border towards Mozambique. In the early 90s, we visited this beautiful part of the country several times, on vacation with family and friends visiting, and for project visits to partners and development workers, as well as training seminars and annual meetings.

Midway on the four hour tour, we would always stop at the 'Halfway House' in Headlands, to stretch our legs, buy soft drinks, tea and coffee, and rest in the shadow of the enormous tree, which fills almost the entire courtyard. Today, the tree is as impressive as ever, seemingly untouched by years of economic crisis, a situation largely created through the mismanagement led by politicians more interested in taking care of their own bank accounts, rather than making an honest effort to provide jobs and security for the people.

Almost everything else at this place tells this sad story. The shop used to be full of local produce, vegetables as well as cheese and meat; today all you can buy is a few varieties of water and soft drinks, a few types of biscuits, and

'Bounty' chocolate. The huge selection of trees and flowers for the garden has disappeared. The thatched roofing shows signs of wearing down, and in the corners of the once beautiful colonial type buildings, you see stones falling to the ground. Surprisingly, in the midst of the decay, the small restaurant serving coffee, toasted sandwiches and chips continues to operate, with the two women making up the staff going at it as if nothing has changed - they made us cups of great coffee and served us with a smile.

There was one other couple in the courtyard, and it turned out to be a Danish couple, believe it or not. Like Anne said to me: *"Fortunately we did not say anything that could not be quoted!"* We thought we could easily boast of a history with Zimbabwe much longer than they could. No! The woman told us that they had come to live in Zimbabwe in 1980 and had lived there ever since. They worked for 'Humana. People to People', the name for what in Denmark used to be known as the Tvind Organisation.

HPP has its international headquarter in Shamva outside Harare. Which reminds me that when one day the history of Danish activity and influence in Zimbabwe is written, it will be difficult not to award a significant position for HPP, whether we like it or not.



21 MARCH 2018

THE WEAVERS IN NYANGA



"I hhhhh, Mr. Bijoorn!" the tiny lady exclaimed, and standing on her toes, she threw her arms around me and gave me a hug worthy of a bear. The two other women sitting in front of the newly painted building followed, and amid laughter and clapping of hands, one of the women asked me: "Mr. Bijoorn, do you know how Hanne is doing?" A natural question, considering that Hanne [a development worker posted by Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke] had been part of their lives on a daily basis 25 years ago. I had just been the boss from Harare, passing through Nyanga once in a while for a project visit or an occasion of special importance.

Such an occasion had taken place in February 1995, when the 10 year anniversary of the founding of the ZUWA Weaving Cooperative in Nyanga had been celebrated, in the building where I am now meeting with *Rose* (on the left - 62 years old), *Cecilia* (in the middle - 57 years old) and *Sheila* (on the right - 58 years old). Rose was the one who gave me a hug to start with, and she was the one who gave me an update on the state of affairs of the weaving cooperative today, 23 years after we first met.

"We were 20 members back in 1995. Since then some have died, and some have left for different reasons. All of us meet here at the building that we own

every Monday. As you can see, we rent many of the rooms in the buildings to other companies and the Council, and this gives a steady monthly income. The rest of the week, we come in groups every other day. As you can see, we are not doing any weaving, because there are no customers. Therefore, we come to look after our building, and on the days we are home, we take care of our garden and produce onions, tomatoes and maize to eat and to sell. Life is difficult in Zimbabwe."

I remember the women working the large Danish wooden looms, producing high quality carpets, using wool from local sheep, in beautiful whitish and brownish colors, and simple but elegant patterns. Some of the carpets would be sold to tourists visiting Nyanga; some would be bought by the many Danes we introduced to this craft; and there was also some export.

Today, there are few tourists coming to Zimbabwe in general, and local people cannot afford to buy the products. Those Zimbabweans, who can actually afford it, will probably not consider buying this particular type of product. They would rather buy something imported.



At the anniversary in 1993, we had managed to bring Minister Didymus Mutasa from the ruling ZANU-PF party along as the guest of honour. This area was part of his constituency, so that gave him a reason for attending – getting a minister to attend was always difficult, but something we would still make an effort to happen, because it indicated [we hoped] a genuine interest by local politicians. They were, after all, more important than we [the donors] were, although we would sometimes forget and think the situation was in fact the contrary: *We* were most important!

I have no memory of what he said in his speech on the occasion, nor do I remember what I said. However, I am sure that both of us highlighted the strength and determination of the 20 women making up the cooperative, and I believe we would have emphasized the idea of the 'cooperative' as a way of bringing both solidarity, jobs and improved livelihoods to the people.



*Above: The Danish looms are still standing in the large weaving hall, and if business picked up, they could easily be used again.
Below: Some of the young women when the cooperative was formed in 1983.*



It is important to remember that the cooperative idea was very much part of the ideology of the new 'socialist' nation that had achieved independence on 17 April 1980. The cooperative idea was also very much part of the history

of Danish development. In this sense, Zimbabwe and Denmark of the 80s was a good match. Why not? The cooperative movement had served Denmark well in its process of developing into a modern and prosperous society.

How does this all of this compare with the reality 23 years later? Well, only one third of the cooperative members are left. When the seven women of ZUWA die or retire, there will most likely not be anything left of the cooperative! Were we wrong, ignorant or misinformed, when back in the 90s, we decided to help this group of women? Should we have been able to predict the actions and decisions of selfish politicians, who ran the economy of Zimbabwe into the ground and made it almost impossible for an organisation like ZUWA to survive?

I do not know, but I am certainly thinking about all of these legitimate and necessary questions. I hope that I will have some sensible answers in the book I am planning to publish in the summer of 2019.

Leaving the three women, Rose looked at me, as if she could see the thoughts running through my head:

"Tell Hanne that we are still here. Without the project and the building that we own, we would not have been able to send our children to school. Together, the three of us have 13 children, and they all got an education. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe has not been able to offer all of them a job."

22 MARCH 2018

THE SAD STORY ABOUT HOTEL CHIMANIMANI



There are facts and figures that can be used to document the dramatic deterioration in the social and economic indicators for Zimbabwe, thanks to decades of failed policies, inadequate governance, and an unchecked level of corruption. This is not my personal opinion. This is in fact what newspapers write about every day right now. To some extent, it is also what President Mnangagwa is admitting, although it is not entirely clear who he thinks should be blamed. It would probably not be too far from the truth if we assume that he does not see himself as one of the key culprits. He will more likely blame it on the international community, and of course the people who in recent years have surrounded Robert Mugabe and forced him to stray away from the original ideas of the ‘revolution’.

Among the statistics being mentioned, the 80 percent [if not 90] unemployment is probably the one that all citizens as well as commentators can understand. In the rural areas it might not be easy to see that there is this level of unemployment, because there will always be something to do in the fields, although the level of effectiveness is also low. Even in the city it is not

so easy to ‘feel’ that the level is that high, because it looks like everyone is doing some job or other. Indeed, they are. The ‘informal’ sector is huge, with more ‘jobs’ being done than your imagination can enumerate.

However, the signs are clear as soon as you enter the town of Chimanimani, some 250 kilometers south of Nyanga, not far from the border to Mozambique. You sense the restlessness of people moving around on the dusty streets without having anything meaningful to do; many of them being young men. You notice the stores around the main square being run down, with very little activity going on. In the old days, Chimanimani depended on a flourishing timber business as well as farmers growing tobacco and tea. The land invasions that started around 2000 changed all of this, making the production of tobacco and tea come to a full collapse.

Nature has not changed since we stayed one night at the hotel back in 1994. The view towards the mountains is as majestic as ever. When the sun rises in the early morning, while the birds perform at their best, there is a yellowish-orange-like reddish color on top of the mountain ridge. Flowers that we know in small sizes in our part of the world have gigantic proportions here. Lizards constantly changing color run across the floors and walls. It is almost hynotic.



The rest is sad to talk about. Carpets on the floors are falling apart. Ceilings are full of holes. Lamps in the hallways only work partly. The bar cannot serve a gin and tonic, because it has been impossible to get hold of tonic. Bread is not available in the restaurant, so the helpful young male servant runs out to get some. Like they had to do with paper napkins for dinner. Apart from the two of us, there are only three other guests eating and sleeping at the hotel. It is a wonder that the hotel is open at all, and that it can pay a salary to the staff. I ask if more people are the next days and weeks.

"Yes, we have a group of 25 people from World Vision coming in for a seminar later today. They will only be here for the day, and they will have lunch. They will not stay in the hotel overnight."

Looking into the conference room, you see the old and worn out pieces of soft cardboard that will serve as the table. A few hours later the room looks much better, with white tablecloth covering the uneven boards, and the mint sweets in small bowls, exactly like 25 years ago.



Walking down through the garden, the variety of plants and the number of colorful birds still astound and surprise. From a distance, the pool area with the thatched party building looks nice and inviting, but as you come closer, you find out that the green water in the blue-painted pool is definitely unhealthy. There is probably not enough water in the borehole belonging to the hotel to deliver to the pool. With few guests coming, there is no reason to fill it anyway.



The same situation is clearly visible inside the hotel. The ‘Santa Maria Bar’ is still there, and the sign telling you about the dress code being ‘smart casual’ is also there. It is furthermore clear that children under 18 years of age cannot enter. So far so good! The waiter or barman approaches us and asks if there is anything, he can serve us. We tell him that we would like a gin and tonic and sit on the veranda, looking towards the mountains. Gin he has, but tonic water is not available in the entire town of Chimanimani.



President Mnangagwa has given promises about ‘change’ ever since he took over in November 2017. More investments will come to Zimbabwe! More tourists will visit Zimbabwe! More jobs will be created! Livelihoods will be improved! Trust me. Hopefully his government will be able to turn the situation around before the country reaches the point of bankruptcy, and before Hotel Chimanimani will no longer be able to avoid the inevitable.



22 MARCH 2018

COMMUNITY BASED HEALTH CARE IN BIRCHENOUGH BRIDGE



When you move from the mountain areas of the East, in what is called *Manicaland Province*, and turn towards the West, into the *Masvingo Province*, you have to cross the Save River. At the end of the day, all the water in the Save River runs into Mozambique, and eventually it ends in the Indian Ocean.

Compared to the amounts of water running through the Zambezi River or the famous Victoria Falls, the Save River is nothing to brag about. Nevertheless, it is the environmental lifeline for hundreds of thousands of people, and although the water flow has diminished, the breadth of the river is still impressive. The monumental Birchenough Bridge is the only way you can get from Manicaland to Masvingo. Historically, it is one of the finest pieces of engineering and architecture in Zimbabwe. It used to be open for traffic in both directions. Today, only one car at a time is allowed to pass.

Right on the other side of the bridge, you meet the township of Birchenough Bridge, a sprawling conglomerate of people selling whatever is required by the locals, and lines of taxis and mini-buses taking people back and forth over

the river, as well as further into either Manicaland or Masvingo provinces. It was something like this 25 years ago. Today it is more of the same.

This used to be one of the places where Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke/Danish Volunteer Service (MS) posted development workers. Remember, in the 90s, the HIV/AIDS pandemic was one of the key health challenges. MS posted nurses to help with the development of Home Based Care Programmes, because admitting all of those infected to the hospital was not an option. Therefore, Marianne was here, and Ellen was here. Would anyone remember? I turned right towards the hospital, after having crossed the bridge, hoping that maybe there would be a nurse old enough to remember.

Right at the gate I met a nurse who seemed to be old enough to remember. Yes, she had been there in the 90s, and yes, she remembered. But it would be more appropriate for me to talk to the Matron, the administrative head of all the nurses at the hospital. She kindly took me to Mr. Sithole, who happened to be in his office, and he was willing to talk to me.

"Yes, I remember Marianne, and I also remember Ellen. I was a junior nurse back then, and I remember playing the guitar with Ellen's daughter, Anita. Back then, we really needed the Danish nurses, and they did a great job. Today there are no expatriate nurses working here. We can manage ourselves today. By the way, today I live in the house that Ellen lived in back then."

He was happy to talk to me, and he mentioned that Ellen had passed through 10-15 years ago on her way to Mozambique, he believed. We exchanged e-mails, and I promised to inform both Marianne and Ellen about my visit.



23 MARCH 2018

THE MAGIC OF GREAT ZIMBABWE



Like in our own country, Denmark, history is important, and history can and will be used and misused. Not least used and misused by politicians to serve their own agendas. Just think of the Danish debate about our role in the slave trade from around 1670 to 1802, when close to 100.000 slaves from Africa were transported on Danish ships across the Atlantic, creating huge fortunes that helped build our capacity to develop as a nation. Or the war with Germany we lost in 1864, thanks to serious miscalculations by Danish politicians. Not to mention the way we handled the German occupation during WWII, which has been used [some would argue ‘misused’] by former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

It can therefore not come as a surprise that also in Zimbabwe, history is important for the self-understanding of the nation. Most often, we hear about the colonial period that ended with the liberation struggle in the 60s and 70s and resulted in the declaration of independence, under the name Zimbabwe rather than Rhodesia, on 17 April 1980. Less known outside Zimbabwe might be the pre-colonial period, with the historical monuments of *Great Zimbabwe* outside the city of Masvingo as the most visible expression.

Great Zimbabwe is the largest of the stonewalled settlements, which are found throughout modern Zimbabwe, north-eastern Botswana and central Mozambique, almost all the way down to the Indian Ocean coast. It is one of the world's most extensive dry stonewall complexes (i.e. built without binding mortar) and is comparable with the architecturally similar 'ancient wonders' of the Egyptian pyramids and the Inca sites of Peru.

The settlement flourished between 1200 and 1500. It is believed to have been the capital of an extensive 'Shona State'. At its height, approximately 11.000 to 30.000 people lived at Great Zimbabwe, making it the largest 'urban' settlement in sub-Saharan Africa during its time. Well, there is much more to tell, but there is still also much, which needs to be understood better.



Standing at the *top* of the monument, after a tiring and hot walk in the burning sun, you look down at what is called the 'Enclosure'. This is an area where many of the important daily activities took place, inside the monumental wall built without using mortar between the stones. On the photo *below*, you see what is left of the original wall lying in front of the wall that has been rebuilt in modern time.





We visited the monument of Great Zimbabwe on a day when hundreds of students from schools all over the country also visited. This was nice! They were happy to see *us*, and we enjoyed talking to *them*, both students and teachers. At some point Bjørn started on a longer lecture about Danish history.



We have visited Great Zimbabwe before, but today we were lucky to be there with hundreds of students of all ages and from schools all over Zimbabwe. They walked around with their teachers, listening attentively to the stories of the past being told by enthusiastic guides and teachers.

It is actually not an easy journey to walk to the top of the majestic stone mountain, where the elite of the settlement lived. The children were visibly tired – and so were we. I remember climbing the mountain [or is it just a hill?] when I was 25 years younger, and I remember that it was much easier than what I felt in lungs and legs now. From the top, you can look down on the so-called 'Great Enclosure' (seen on the photo), where religious ceremonies and initiation of young girls took place, according to historians. Again we cannot be entirely sure. Much still needs to be researched.

By the way, the bird in the flag of Zimbabwe was found here at Great Zimbabwe, carved out of soapstone. The cone- and phallus-like stone construction in the logo of the ruling ZANU PF party is part of the Great Enclosure [see the photo on the previous page]. This became the party logo in 1987, when the two liberation forces of ZANU [led by Robert Mugabe] and ZAPU [led by Joshua Nkomo] merged. This sounds like it was something that both parties wanted, but this was not the case. The merger was actually the result of ZAPU being defeated as an independent political force.

Indeed, history is an everyday part of every nation, although most Danes and Zimbabweans probably do not think about it most of the time. It only happens on those special days - when we were invaded, or liberated, or attacked another nation. It was therefore great to see students jump happily from stone to stone in this landscape of stones and learn about the importance of the civilization of Great Zimbabwe.



24 MARCH 2018

THE PORTRAIT OF THE PRESIDENT



We have reached Gwanda in Matabeleland South province, after a 325 kilometer journey from Masvingo and Great Zimbabwe, through wide valleys covered in lush green after the rains, and mountains covered by green Msasa trees and dotted with magnificent stones, some of them standing on top of each other, looking like they are about to fall. We know this will not happen. They have been standing like that for tens of thousands of years, so why should it happen now. Why would the farmers build their homes right beneath the stone formations if they knew there was a chance the stones would fall and destroy it all. Of course not.

Gwanda looks like other larger towns in Zimbabwe – like Nyanga, Chipenge, Gweru, Kadoma, Mbalabala. The main road running into town is also the main street, with petrol stations, hotels, shopping malls, street vendors, bottle stores and much more situated along the street. For some few hundred meters, side roads extend to the left and right for a few hundred meters as well, allowing for a spider web like network of private homes behind solid walls or see through metal fences. In the pre-independence days, these were homes for

white people. Today there are only few white families left in Gwanda. The houses now belong to black Zimbabweans.

One of the houses has been changed into the *Apex Lodge*, owned by a Zimbabwean couple. They wife and husband used to work in the banking sector, but they are now doing their best to make it in the hospitality sector. From what we experienced staying there for two nights, they have done well. We had a nice room with all the necessary facilities, we enjoyed the food, were treated nicely by the competent staff, and not least, we were able to spend most of our time in the garden, enjoying the trees and colorful plants, very similar to what we were used to in Harare in the 90s.

Of course, there was also a reception, and here we saw the obligatory photo of President Mnangagwa. In fact, this photo is the primary reason for and focus of this story! To tell the truth, it is difficult to comprehend that after having become accustomed to the portrait of Robert Mugabe, who for 37 years has looked down at his people as well as visitors to the country whenever they walked into a government office, a school, a bank, a shop, a hotel or a lodge, or any other building for that matter, Mugabe is no longer there! It is mind boggling. Now we have to get used to President Mnangagwa.

However, this is not the only thing, which boggles your mind. I will not lie and say that we have done a statistical survey of scientific quality, but we have asked a few people of reputable character how the change of portraits came about. This is what we know. It happened soon after the inauguration of Mnangagwa as President in November 2017, approximately one week after, give and take a few days. Photos of the President were distributed to institutions all over the country. Not only to this lodge in a large town like Gwanda, but to the most remote of rural schools according to evidence we have collected.

Why is this important or even remotely significant? Because it shows that contrary to the general belief among many, the authorities of this country are in fact perfectly capable of implementing a large-scale logistical operation, speedily and precisely. If this skill is put to good use in other areas, there is still hope for Zimbabwe.

25 MARCH 2018

A ZIMBABWEAN WITH VISIONS AND IDEALS



The main reason for our visit to Gwanda was that this is the place of residence for one of the Zimbabweans, who has been most important to us for our understanding of developments in this country. This is Paul Themba Nyathi, who was the first Chair of the Policy Advisory Board established by Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke (MS) in the first part of the 90s, as part of the ‘MS in the South’ strategy.

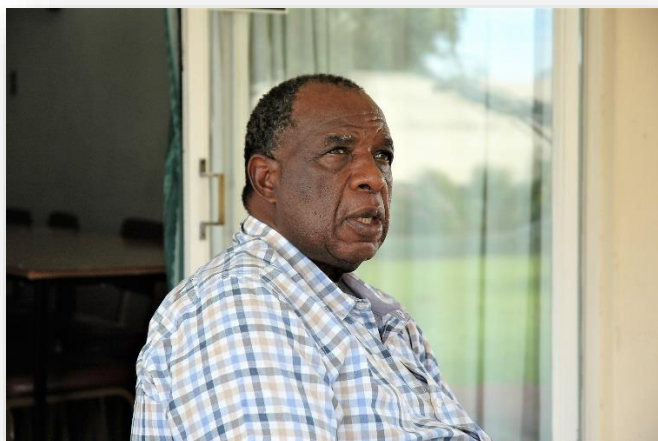
With the 75-year anniversary of MS coming up in January 2019, I decided to go to Zimbabwe and talk to him about his thinking about the role of MS during the first decades of independent Zimbabwe. His thoughts about this will be available for public consumption in January 2019.

However, Paul is an interesting and impressive personality in his own right, and this is the first time we have the opportunity to meet him in his own locality. On a daily basis, he works in Bulawayo, but Gwanda is where his ‘homestead’ is located. In the past, we would always meet in Harare, or in Copenhagen, when he visited us in the 90s. We have not been together for at least 15 years, but still it feels like only yesterday, when we sat together and shared visions for Zimbabwe, as well as for the world at large.

It is great to be able to do this again! Paul is definitely worth listening to. Despite being only three years older than I am [he was born in 1946], his life has without comparison been more dramatic and challenging than my own.

Paul is educated as a teacher, but he early joined the liberation struggle as part of Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU forces. In 1976, this cost him three years in detention. After independence in April 1980, he continued to be politically active, but increasingly became pessimistic about the ability of the ruling ZANU PF party and devoted his life to grassroots work for ex-combatants and offering advice to civil society organizations – MS being one of them.

Towards the end of the 90s, Paul again became active in politics, and although you will not get himself to admit as much, my own understanding from what others have told me is that he played an important role in the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change, led by the newly deceased Morgan Tsvangirai. He was elected to Parliament for the Gwanda North constituency, and he became a hardworking and respected parliamentarian.



Today Paul is no longer active in party politics. At some point, he left MDC and Morgan Tsvangirai and decided to return to his grassroots. My sense is that this was a deliberate choice by a person, who is unwilling to compromise with the ideals that have driven him his whole life, since he was a young man. He is now the Director of *Masakhaneni Projects Trust* in Bulawayo, which is dedicated to supporting and empowering the weakest, the poorest and the most marginalized communities and women in particular.

26 MARCH 2018

VISITING CECIL RHODES' GRAVE IN MATOPOS HILLS



I know of few people, if any at all, who have been able to choose as magnificent a place to be buried as *Cecil Rhodes* - businessman, politician, believer in British imperialism and white supremacist. Together with his British South African Company, Rhodes 'founded' the southern African territory of *Rhodesia* in 1895. Driving through the Matopos Hills National Park, I am once again struck by the serenity of the unbelievable natural constructions of stones, sitting on top of each other, seemingly ready to tumble down if touched by human hand, but they are still there, more than two billion years after having been formed. *Mzilikazi*, founder of the *Ndebele* nation, gave the area its name, meaning 'Bald Heads'.

Whenever I see photos of Rhodes taken around the time of his death in 1902, at the age of 48 years, my first thought is that I am surprised that he is not much older. He certainly looks much older, although probably not after the standards of his day. My second thought is that while I detest his ideas about the supremacy of white people and his description of black people as largely living "in a state of barbarism", it is difficult not to 'admire' what he was able to achieve in a relatively short span of time.

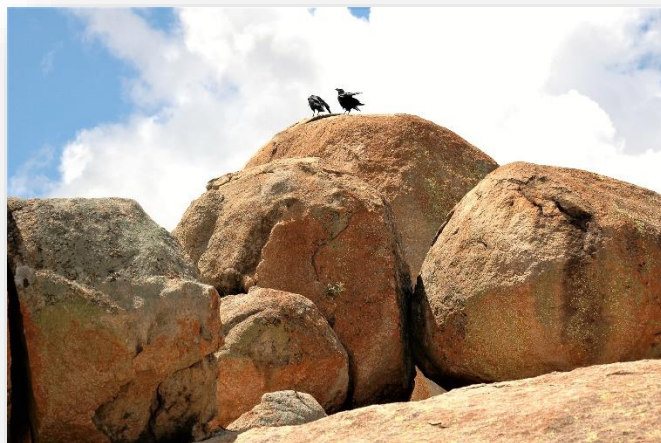
Rhodes came to South Africa in 1870, when he was 17 years old. He entered the diamond trade in 1871, when he was 18. Over the next two decades, his company, De Beers, formed in 1888, gained near-complete domination of the world diamond market. Rhodes entered the Cape Parliament in 1880, and he became Prime Minister in 1890, at the age of 37. He ‘founded’ Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia) in 1895, at the age of 42.

The site of his grave is a national monument. There are those who feel that his remains should be moved away from Matopos, because this is an area that the local Ndebele people call *Malindidzimu* – “the place of benevolent spirits”. Entering the gate and paying the entry fee, I ask the official what she thinks about that idea:

“Well, he was part of our history, like it or not. This will not change if he is moved to a different place.”

The official is right of course. Still, standing at the gravesite, trying to absorb the unique beauty of the landscape stretching as far as my eyes can see, I really feel that it is wrong for a person with his mindset to rest here. I am reminded of what he stated in his ‘Confession of Faith’ in 1877:

“We know the size of the world, we know the total extent. Africa is still lying ready for us, it is our duty to take it. It is our duty to seize every opportunity of acquiring more territory, and we should keep this one idea steadily before our eyes that more territory simply means more of the Anglo-Saxon race, more of the best, the most human, most honorable race the world possesses.”



28 MARCH 2018

MUSEUM IN BINGA TELLS THE STORY OF THE TONGA PEOPLE



Lambiwe Munkuli is a 27 years old Tonga, and when I ask her about her obvious pregnancy, she tells me that she is set to deliver her second child, a boy this time, on 27 April, only a month from now. When I tell her that she was only two years old, when I visited Binga for the first time, she starts laughing and reaches for my hand, as is the custom here.

“Welcome to the BaTonga Museum in Binga. You are most welcome. When you have paid the entry fee, I will take you on a tour of the exhibits in the museum.”

Back in the early 90s, I would travel by car to far-away Binga on the shore of Lake Kariba, at the end closest to fashionable and tourist-infected Victoria Falls. Getting there from Harare was a ten-hour tour de force over more than 500 kilometers on potholed dust roads, when taking the most direct route. This was not an option for us this time, because we did not drive a 4-wheeler. Consequently, we had to take the long route, meaning from Bulawayo to Binga and back, a total of 850 kilometers. The first 275 kilometers from Bulawayo were as we remember them, perfect! The last 150 kilometers after the Dete turnoff was definitely worse than 25 years ago.

Some would call Binga a slightly wild-west-like town. There is not a single two-story building. Houses are spread over a large and very sandy area, hidden among trees and bushes, which makes it difficult to make it that this is really a real town. Temperatures are usually high, and most Danes would say the same about the humidity, caused by the wind rolling in from the nearby Lake Kariba.



Above: Lambiwe in front of the nicely carved doors of the museum. She takes care of visitors [if they pay the entrance fee], who would like a presentation of the history and culture of the Tonga people. On this occasion, she had brought her first-born daughter. Below: A map shows where the Tonga people used to live along the shores of the Zambezi Valley – and where they live today, after the dam at Kariba was built, the valley was flooded and the Tonga people relocated.





To be perfectly honest: If I had a choice, Binga is not the place I would personally choose for my family to live for many years. Nevertheless, we had several Danish families living here, posted by Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke as development workers, to support and build capacity in areas of health, environment, productions of craft articles, maintenance of schools, and culture. Of course, they would complain now and then, but in general, they actually liked living in Binga.

This story is about culture, because Binga is the territory of the small group of Tonga people, although the third largest after Shonas and Ndebeles. Once upon a time, they lived along both sides of the Zambezi River in present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the 1950s, government officials without consultation decided to flood the Tonga's lands to build a dam at Kariba to produce hydroelectric power.

Obviously this meant 'progress' for Zimbabwe, because electricity would now be available in much larger amounts than before. For the Tonga people, it meant a virtual collapse of the way of life they had become accustomed to through hundreds of years. Of course, they were never asked their opinion! They just had to follow orders. Tonga people were rounded up in the river valley, and relocated to the higher dry country, which has always been marred by low and erratic rainfall and poor soils.

There are probably about 250.00 Tonga people living in Zimbabwe today – of a total population of around 13 million. [It could also be 14 or 15 million, depending on what source you decide to use.] While issues of livelihoods are important, MS agreed with the local authorities that it would be important for future generations to know the history. How did they use to live, when they depended on fishing in the Zambezi River and cultivating small plots of land?

Both emotionally and as a development professional, I have always felt that the MS-support to the Binga Museum was a meaningful exercise. We invested in studies conducted by museum professionals; we discussed the most sustainable structure of management necessary; we were aware that this museum should be part of the national structure of museums; we looked into how this could be a living part of what students learned as they grew up. In short: how could this be set up in such a manner that it was seen as a relevant activity by the Tonga people, and that it was genuinely owned by the Tongas.

I will tell more about my thoughts about this in the book I am working on for publication in 2019.

Right now, I must admit that pregnant Lambiwe, the guide at the museum, made my day. I was actually wondering if the museum still existed. It does! Nothing fancy; not with hundreds of visitors paying an entrance fee every day; not with lots of staff working to update exhibitions; but with Zimbabweans from other parts of the country – Libiwe told about school classes visiting all the way from Harare - as well as locals coming to visit.

From the guest book, I noted that in recent years there had also been visitors from the UK, Germany, and South Africa. From Denmark, the Hansen family had signed the guestbook!

29 MARCH 2018

WILL THE BINGA CRAFT CENTRE SURVIVE THE CRISIS?



Driving up the bumpy tar road leading to the town of Binga, situated close to the shores of Lake Kariba, the first big sign built in stone tells us to take the dust road to the right if we want to visit the Binga Craft Centre. Which is exactly what we want to do. Not to visit as such today, but to see if we can make an appointment with a staff member to come back the next day to talk about the situation of the Centre.

We walk around the beautiful thatched-roofed buildings. Well, it would be more honest to say ‘the once upon a time’ beautiful buildings! The truth is that the thatched roof of one of the buildings is full of holes, with water on the floors from the recent rains. Nothing in this building indicates that there is any life left in this project. The state of affairs of the other building is better. Through the windows, we can see rows of files sitting on the shelves, but no telephone, no computers, and no staff. In another room, we can see the beautiful baskets woven by Tonga women lined up on a table. A flicker of hope maybe?

That night I did not sleep well at all, and the hot and humid air close to the lake did not cause it. The Binga Craft Centre was one of the projects closest

to my heart when I lived in Zimbabwe. Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke invested a lot of energy, money and posting of development workers during my own time as Director, as did my successors in the following years.

Was it now all over for the Binga Craft Centre? Was the weaving of baskets no longer a source of income for thousands of Tonga women? Had this ended as a 'white elephant'?



Leaving Binga the following day, I was a lot wiser, and slightly more optimistic. Not because the Binga Craft Centre is doing well, far from it. No, the optimism was caused by the Manager of the Centre, *Mr. Matabbeki Mudenda*, who took me through the history from the start in the 90s until today – he started working for the Centre in 1997 and became the Manager in 2005. He came across as one of those extraordinary people, whose dedication and commitment to the idea of empowering thousands of women weaving baskets in this poor and remote part of Zimbabwe simply is unbelievable.

I will provide more details of this project in the book I hope to publish in 2019. Let me give you the highlights now! At its peak around 1997, the Binga Craft Centre had organized 3.000 women – meaning that it directly affected at least 15.000 people, when husbands and children are included. The economic crisis in Zimbabwe after 2000, culminating around 2008, with a rate of inflation surpassing anything seen in economic history, made it almost impossible to run a business selling baskets, despite the unique patterns and high quality. Ten years later, there are no more than around 1.000 women weaving baskets, the quality is not what it used to be, and the middlemen have come back, forcing women to sell at low prices.

Of course, politics has played a role as well. In good times, political forces have exploited the Centre. In bad times, it has not received the support it

deserves. Undoubtedly, MS has also made mistakes – and I intend to be honest about those in my book. What amazes me is that Mudenda has stayed around, without really receiving anything you could call a ‘salary’. When a basket has been sold, 70 percent of the price is paid to the weaver, and 30 percent is kept for administration, including salaries. For at least ten years, Mudenda has received no regular salary!



The Manager for the Binga Craft Centre, Mr. Mudenda, proudly presents some of the baskets and containers produced by the women today. The quality has not improved in recent years, but it is still reasonably high, and the patterns are unique for the Tonga people.



Before leaving Binga, Mudenda tells me that he would like to write a book about the history of the Binga Craft Centre. I am slightly taken aback when I

hear it. A book? However, I quickly realize that it is also a fascinating and appropriate idea, so I offer my support and suggests that we work together on this. The thousands of Tonga women, who have produced such beautiful products over the years, deserve to be recognized.

Of course, the Centre also deserves to survive. Mr. Mudenda tells me that he has just sent off an application to a donor, not asking for millions, just a small amount to allow activities to continue. The Manager may not get paid, but he still reports to work every day – despite the telephone line not working and electricity having been cut off, because the bills could not be paid. What is the right word for this?

30 MARCH 2018

QUALITY COFFEE FROM EASTERN HIGHLANDS – AGAIN?



Not all stories are equally important when you revisit after 25 years, but some of the ‘small’ stories can provide a perspective on the development the country has been through during the period since 1990. I was reminded of this, when we walked into the *Indaba Book Café* in Bulawayo, and my wife spontaneously asked me if I remembered the coffee we used to drink in Harare. I finally did, with her help! We got fantastic coffee (roasted beans) from a farm close to Chipinge in Eastern Highlands, and we would then grind the beans ourselves.

The Indaba Café offered excellent coffee, in all the varieties that are common to all cafés all over the world. Running through the *Daily News* newspaper while drinking my cappuccino, I accidentally come across a small article at the bottom of a page with the following headline: “*Coffee production in dire state*”. The article offers a dramatic perspective of a small corner of the Zimbabwean economy, and it deserves to be shared with you. Here is a short summary.

The controversial agrarian reforms by President Mugabe started around 2000, and the most dramatic aspect of the reforms was the forced removal of white

farmers from their properties. Officially presented as an exercise meant to redress past historical imbalances and injustices, it was effectively also a political card used to undermine the new political opposition coming from Morgan Tsvangirai's new party, the Movement for Democratic Change.

By the way, I fully agree on the historical injustice argument. Unfortunately, the Brits did not allow this to be addressed immediately after Independence, as enshrined in the Lancaster House Agreement from 1980, and I have always believed that this was a mistake of historical proportions.

Around 3.000 large-scale commercial white farms were taken over, to the benefit of around 300.000 indigenous black farmers – as well as a large number of well-off members of the ruling party, many of these without any significant agricultural skills. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a fall in agricultural production, which contributed to the deep economic crisis, which Zimbabwe has still not been able to recover from.

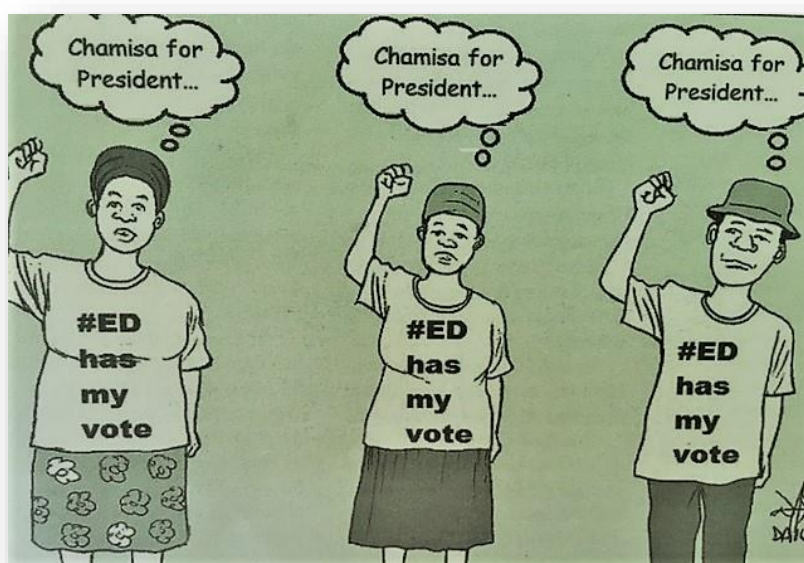
Now, for the coffee sector, the following statistics are important: In 2004, there were 145 coffee farmers, farming an area of 7.600 hectares. Today there are only 2 commercial coffee farmers, producing on 300 hectares. In addition, today there are 400 smallholder farmers on 77 hectares, down from over 2.000 smallholders on 400 hectares in 2004.

This translates into the following production numbers: Coffee production peaked in 1989 at 14.664 tons, and it hits its lowest in 2010 with only 208 tons produced.

I am no coffee expert, although I wrote an educational book about the trade and consumption of coffee 30 years ago. Therefore, I do know that certain technical skills are necessary, if a farmer wants to produce high quality coffee that can compete on the world market. Remembering the quality coffee we got from Eastern Highlands, there is no doubt in my mind that Zimbabwe could again produce fantastic coffee for the benefit of coffee lovers around the world – and for the benefit of the farming families involved, white and/or black.

31 MARCH 2018

COMPETING FOR THE MINDS, HEARTS AND STOMACHS OF ZIMBABWEANS



We have driven more than 3.000 kilometers through the beautiful mountains, valleys and plateaus of Zimbabwe. We have stayed at hotels, lodges and guesthouses in cities and towns. We have stopped at roadside bottle stores, ordinary as well as fancy restaurants and petrol stations using both state bonds, US dollar notes and credit card machines. We have talked to old friends as well as strangers that just happened to be there, when we stopped.

Our conclusion is clear: *The absence of fear has disappeared!* Well, just like any truth based on the journalist talking to the taxi driver on his way from the airport to the hotel in the city must beware of the limitations of this ‘truth’, so must we. We have not been able to move far away from the major highways into the most poverty-stricken parts of the rural hinterland; nor have we necessarily been in areas where the presence of the ruling party cadres of hard-core members still roam, and where food distribution, as per tradition, is being used as a political tool. However, we have had numerous discussions

with people who did not know us, and they have all without exception engaged freely, willingly and with a smile in political discussions.

“Sir, you seem to be a little younger than me, so would I be correct in assuming that you will vote for President Mnangagwa, while your younger colleague is likely to vote for opposition candidate Chamisa?” I asked the attendant at the petrol state at the Dete crossroad, where we turn right to get to Binga, after he had filled up the car.

“Yes, I will probably vote for Mnangagwe, although I am not sure he will be able to make much of a difference. Things are not good. I hope the young people will vote for the younger candidate, Chamisa, because the country needs a younger man,” he replied and smiled, while waving away the flies coming from the nearby butchery.

The election must take place before the middle of August, but the President has still not announced the date. For now, the focus is on the registration of voters, and the parties are coming out with their election manifestos, one promising more than the other does. The opposition MDC candidate, the one who has taken over after Morgan Tsvangirai, has so far beaten the rest of the crowd with his promise to build a bullet train line between Harare and Bulawayo! There are more than 100 political parties registered, but most of them are nothing more than a piece of paper with airy and incoherent ideas.

At the end of the day, it will come down to a battle between ED (Mnangagwa) and Chamisa. My sense is that in the battle for minds and hearts, the sitting President, Mnangagwa, will draw the longest straw. As the cartoonist from the Daily News on March 29 has presented it, many could be voting for the President although they would like to give the vote to Chamisa. Maybe he is still too young. Maybe Mnangagwa should be given a chance to show that he can pull the country out of the shadows of Mugabe. For some, the deliveries of food aid will be seen as a result of intervention from the President, and he will be rewarded with a vote.

Irrespective of who comes out on top, the election will hopefully be part of a new beginning for Zimbabwe. Peaceful, free and fair elections is what the country needs and the people we talked to are hoping for.

1 APRIL 2018

MEETING JULIANA AND TITUS – MENTORS AND FRIENDS

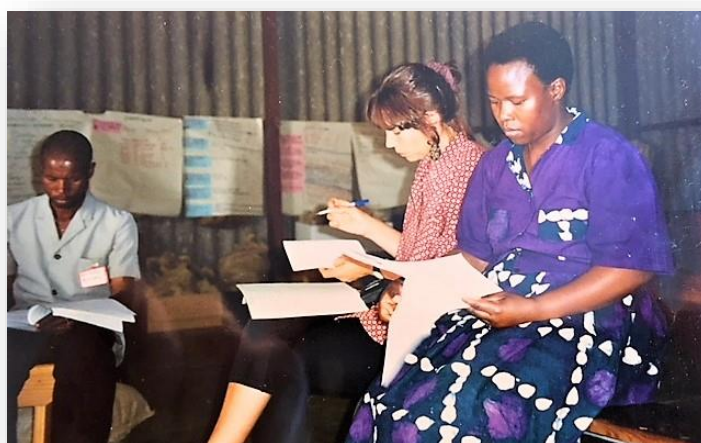


I have met separately with Juliana and Titus on a few occasions since we left Zimbabwe in the summer of 1995. We have kept in touch regularly over the years, but we have never met as a group since then. Now we finally do, almost 23 years later, and not in Harare, but on the farm Juliana and her husband own 140 kilometers south of Harare, towards the town of Chivhu. Turning off before you reach Chivhu, you first drive 10 kilometers on a well maintained strip road, and then the last five kilometers on a rugged dust road with holes large enough to offer local animals a place to take a bath in the rainy season.

Juliana and Titus were the most important people in my years as Director of the Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke programme in Zimbabwe. They were my advisors; they were my mentors; they became my close friends. Without them, I would have made numerous mistakes, and without them, the Danish development workers would have been lost. Of course, all of us coming from Denmark had knowledge and ideas to offer the partners and communities we came to work for and with. However, we really had very little clue about the

social and cultural fabric of all the places we worked – places like Nyanga, Chipinge, Birchenough Bridge, Buhera, Masvingo, Zaka, Mberengwa, Bulawayo, Binga, Nkayi, Nembudzia and Harare.

I remember *Juliana* as the born facilitator, feeling comfortable in any rural setting, helping groups of women define their aspirations and the road to travel to make them a reality, always enthusiastic and supportive, never lecturing or dictating. In addition, you would always find Juliana with an open face and a smile that signaled her respect for the voices of the local people.



Above: Juliana back in 1993, participating in a workshop with partners. Below: The full staff of MS-Zimbabwe around 1994, with Titus sitting number two from the left and Juliana number three from the right.



Of course, *Titus* had some of the same competences, because both of them had to operate in rural settings, meeting with both modern and traditional representatives of the communities. In addition, he was an artist, writing

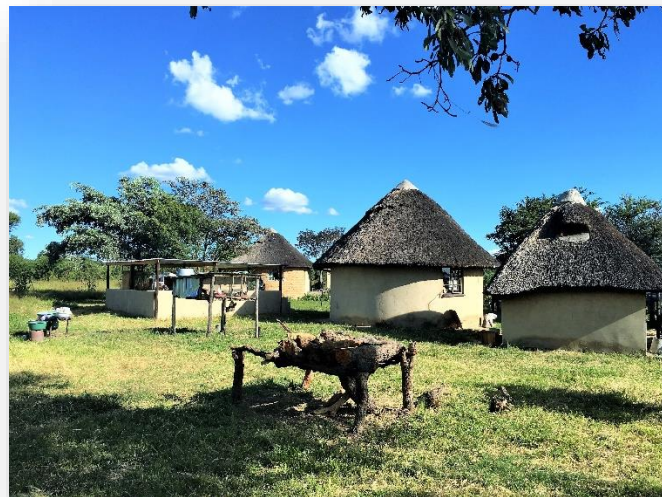
poetry in his free time, and working with Community Theater as a way of allowing marginalized communities to express their ideas.



Time has changed very little. *Juliana* is still resting within herself, moving around quietly to make all of us comfortable, smiling as always. The setting is different than before – together with her husband, she is now managing a farm of 4.000 square meters, with cattle and sheep, a variety of crops and plenty of vegetables, all of it on an organic basis. Quite impressive! If you have experienced the driving from the main road to the farm, you would be even more impressed!

Titus is still a city boy, now working with communication for UNICEF, after having worked in South Africa, Botswana, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Liberia among others. He still writes poetry, and he is still very active in the promotion of Community Theater in Zimbabwe. Also very impressive!





What did we talk about, when Juliana served us the food – nicely roasted goat and beef, deliciously cooked chicken, sadza (the staple food in Zimbabwe, made from maize or mealie-meal with water added, cooked slowly over open fire), and a variety of vegetables. It goes without saying that all of the food had been produced on the farm.

Well, we mostly talked about what people meeting decades later talk about – how our children and grandchildren are doing, what we will do when we finally retire, and all the hopes and aspirations we continue to have on behalf of humanity.

I am truly grateful to have had Juliana and Titus in my office during my years in Zimbabwe, and I am equally grateful that they continue to be my friends.

4 APRIL 2018

THE NEPHEW OF MR. MUZAMBA FROM NEMBUDZIA



The plan was to visit the village of *Nembudzia* in Gokwe North District in the Midlands Province, 285 kilometers west of Harare, by way of Kadoma. However, good friends had told us that while the tarred road from Kadoma to Gokwe was perfectly possible to navigate for our small KIA, once we got to Sanyati and beyond, we would most likely get stuck in one of the larger than life potholes. If we were unlucky and the rains started pouring down, we could be in bad trouble.

Sadly, we therefore had to try to imagine what Nembudzia would look like today. What did the *Nyamuroro Kubatana Secondary School* look like? Was the *Production Unit* at the school still alive and kicking? What about the ambitious *Gokwe Community Centre*? All of these were projects and activities Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke had helped to get off the ground and trained people to manage decades earlier.

Of course, equally important and exciting for me personally: Would we still find the energetic, creative and visionary Principal of the school, *Mr. Mudzamba*, running around in a sky of dust, throwing his arms in the air and

shouting orders left, right and centre? Had Mr. Mudzamba not existed – or had another person like him not been around – I seriously doubt that Nembudzia would have been such an exciting centre of development. People *do* matter, and people *can* make a difference!

Fortunately, a former development worker had put me in touch with *Herbert Mudzamba*, the nephew of Mr. Mudzamba. We met in Harare a few days later, and as soon as we came face to face, I could see the similarities with Mr. Mudzamba in his eyes, in his energy, in his visions. Although Herbert grew up in Gokwe, some distance from Nembudzia, and had gone to school first in Bulawayo and later in South Africa, ending up as an agricultural engineer, he had returned to the rural area where his uncle had spent many of his years as the respected Principal of the secondary school. The uncle had died in 2009, without being given due respect for his accomplishments by the government.

Once we had talked about his uncle, Herbert gave me a ‘lecture’ in how he wanted to use his knowledge to benefit his people in rural Zimbabwe (not only in the Gokwe area, although this is where he has started), and also how this vision had been difficult to implement in the past political and economic environment of Zimbabwe. However, with the changes presently taking place, he was optimistic. His vision was practical, possible and pertinent.

Through his *Agri-Climate Trust*, and through its ‘OneAcre Seed Trials Project’, Herbert seeks to sustainably deploy *climate smart agriculture (CSA)* in its various forms in Gokwe North District, by building strategic alliances at the farm gate. Climate change is the greatest threat to food and nutrition security across the globe, and the approach works through governmental, community, non-governmental and private organisations to increase food and nutrition security, while also reducing poverty.

The *OneAcre* flagship model “climate-smart village” brings together various actors in agriculture under one roof in the farming community, with the aim of helping our farmers to go ahead of climate change. This project looks at ways of sustainably boosting productivity, profitability and resilience among our rural farmers, while at the same time countering the triggers of climate change, such as greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation). The OneAcre project currently works through engaging farmers in on-farm demonstrations on replicated one-acre trials.

This is indeed fascinating, and you can only hope that Herbert will get the support from the system necessary to implement his vision on a large scale. You can read more on this website: www.oneacre.co.zw.

6 APRIL 2018

WOULD ZIMBABWE BE DIFFERENT IF MUGABE HAD NOT MARRIED HIS SECRETARY GRACE MARUFU?



The following is written with inspiration from the illustration by cartoonist Zapiro and with a glimpse of the eye. I am not a historian, and I have no other examples from history to back up my hypothesis. Nevertheless, I will suggest the following:

Zimbabwe would not have experienced such a dramatic race towards the bottom as that which has characterized the country over the past 25-30 years, if Mugabe's first wife had not died, and he had not married Grace.

When we arrived in Zimbabwe in the summer of 1992, Zimbabweans spoke highly of *Amai* (*Mother*), the popular name used for the late First Lady, *Sarah Francesca "Sally" Mugabe* (born 1931), who was married to Mugabe in February 1961. She died in January 1992.

Early after their marriage, she gave birth to a son named *Nhamodzenyika*, a Shona term meaning "suffering country". Some years later, while imprisoned,

Mugabe learned that his son had died at the age of three. He requested a leave of absence to visit his wife in Ghana, but this request was denied.

Already in April 1995, stories in the press revealed that Mugabe had secretly had an affair with his secretary, *Grace Marufu*. This should supposedly have taken place since 1987, and Mugabe then decided to hold a wedding in August 1996, inviting 12,000 people. The ceremony was controversial among the Catholic community because of the adulterous nature of the relationship.

By the time we left Zimbabwe in 1995, Grace was still behaving reasonably well (normal), and this of course had nothing to do with our presence in the country! She had not yet shown Zimbabweans (and the rest of the world) her real appetite for power and wealth. This would become clearer and clearer after 2000, when the opposition had grown stronger, and when Mugabe unleashed the veterans in the invasions of white-owned farms.

Year by year, Grace would strengthen her influence in the ruling party and openly display her taste for opulence and extravagance, at a time when her people were suffering. She turned out to be a perfect example of an '*invasive species*', indiscriminately taking over farms, companies, positions, situations and whatever else came within her reach. It may not be clear if this was all happening with the consent of her husband. However, it was definitely happening with the support of others in the ruling party, who saw her power and privileges as a convenient shortcut to their own power and privilege.

The Grace Dynasty ended in November 2017, when the military orchestrated the 'personality change' (different from 'regime change') many had spent years trying to find a way of making a reality. With Mugabe out, Grace was no longer in a position to continue her rampageous behavior.

In other circumstances, she might have had to pay a higher price. Thanks to her husband, she was spared the humiliation others have had to suffer. However, as the cartoonist Zapiro illustrates, after gold miners a few days ago invaded her citrus farm in Mazowe, she now tastes the medicine she herself has developed to perfection.

It is hard to believe that Sally Mugabe would have behaved like Grace Mugabe. Could she have reigned in her husband? Could she have protected her people against some of the worst excesses? Could she have 'civilized' the forces from the liberation struggle? Maybe she would have left her husband and returned to Ghana, her country of birth, which by comparison has done much better in rooting the country in some of the basic democratic values. We shall never know! Now at least we can be happy that Zimbabweans will no longer have to put up with the whims and excesses of Grace Mugabe.

7 APRIL 2018

MEMORIES FROM THE 'HOME' ON 122 UNION AVENUE



Going down memory lane can be risky business. You never know what you find at the end of the rainbow. Anything from unbelievable surprises to tragic disappointments are possible. Of course, you would like to believe that most of what you had responsibility for a quarter of a century ago could stand the judgment of time. In reality, this is rarely the case. Some of what you initiated could be doomed from the beginning, simply because the ideas were not as sustainable or well thought out as they should have been. Other ideas were both good, necessary and well prepared, and still they did not survive the politics and economics of the decades following. When it worked, the success might not even be attributed to you, and rightly so. When it failed, it could very well be due to your lack of foresight, but it could also be for reasons beyond your control.

We had talked about this before we left for Zimbabwe. How it came out in the end will remain my secret for some time, until I have had the time to digest the many impressions and written about them in the book I have previously mentioned that I am working on. However, I want to share one very special

experience I had, when I visited what used to be the *MS* (Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke) *Zimbabwe Country Office* on 122 Union Avenue, close to the Holiday Inn and the city center of Harare. Today, the building is the office of *DW Windscreens*. We rented the place, and MS vacated it when it merged with ActionAid in 2010. The charming home for country office staff and development workers has disappeared.

Parking out front, in what was then a nice area of grass and trees, a young man in his 30s starts talking to me before I have opened the door, suggesting that he should wash my car. While the car certainly needs a thorough washing, I tell him that I am not planning for this today, but I would like him to watch it, while I go to the office of DW Windscreens.

“Why do you want to do that?” he asks me. I explain the reason for my visit, and that starts him talking energetically for the next many minutes, while he moves his hands holding his bottle of water, a dirty piece of cloth, and a brush with just a few brushes left around in the air.

“Oh, yes, I know that this used to be the office of the Danes, and next door were the Germans. In fact, just last week a German man and a woman asked me about it, they were also back after many years. I am glad you are back, because Zimbabwe is now ‘open for business’. This is what our President says, and I hope he is right. We need business and jobs. It is sad what happened during the years of Mugabe. I am 35 years old, with a wife and children, and I try to make a living from washing cars,”

I enter the office of DW Windscreens and ask the receptionist if I can walk to the back of the building and see what has happened since I resided in the big office facing the street. No problem, I can enter. I vividly remember the view I had from my office, of the indescribably beautiful Jacaranda trees lining Union Avenue, branches heavy with purple flowers when they bloomed in October-November, and the street covered by a thick purple carpet of flowers when they finished. ‘My’ office was now a storeroom, filled to capacity with windscreens and tires, so I had a sense of where this would end, when I entered the back of the building.

For others to understand why this sounds strangely emotional, I need to offer some background. Some would rightly argue that 122 Union Avenue was, after all, just another building! No, it was certainly not ‘just’ another building. This was a ‘home’, with heart and atmosphere, created by the people who spent years working together to manage the Zimbabwe program, and the many development workers who had 122 Union Avenue as their first ‘home’ when they arrived in Harare, and later used it as a resting place when they came to town from their rural homes.



To start with, this was not a particularly fancy place. The building towards the road, with a fence built in stone in front of the small garden, had the necessary offices for a director, two program officers, an administrator, and admin staff to take care of the necessary bureaucracy. This included temporary employment permits, import of cars, housing agreements, purchase of necessities for the houses around the country, logbooks for every car we owned, and much more that I have happily forgotten about. Behind the house there was a swimming pool (not built by MS, but we were delighted to enjoy the swimming, the children in particular), and two small buildings with small rooms for development workers (or other Danes) visiting. There was also a small kitchen, allowing us to cook meals.

When we entered the phase of *MS in the South* in the early 90s, including the partners and selected Zimbabweans with standing more closely in deciding on the direction of our work, we decided to invest in a creative expansion of the office into a *Partnership Centre*. A Danish architect helped us, and we ended up with a nicely covered patio in Danish design, and a two-story library and conference room behind the swimming pool. Standing next to the pool with a bit of thick greenish water at the bottom, it was difficult to imagine that almost 25 years ago, this was a vibrant meeting place for Zimbabweans and Danes, enthusiastically discussing, and often disagreeing, on how to meet the challenges facing the country, and what the role of the Danes should be.

“Not good?” my friend the car washer asked when I returned after this disappointing and depressing sightseeing. *“Just like Zimbabwe, eh?”* he continued, padding my back in consolation when he noticed my frustration. *“Remember, it is just a building. It is much better that most of the houses my friends live in. You know, you have given me one dollar to look after your car. This means that I am now a rich man compared to my friends, who have nothing. Cheer up!”*

True, there are many ways of getting a perspective on things. Still, driving back to Borrowdale north of the city, I felt genuinely sad, and I was wondering if the state of 122 Union Avenue year 2018 compared to year 1995 was actually a pretty accurate picture of what has happened to Zimbabwe during those years.

8 APRIL 2018

PRISCILLA AND HOPE, TWO POWERFUL WOMEN



Among the many privileges I have had during my years in the development business is the privilege to work with and learn from a large number of gifted, charismatic and powerful women. You have already met Juliana Kadzinga [see page 51], who was one of my programme officers in the MS Zimbabwe office. You will now meet another two Zimbabwean women, who have played important roles in the development of Zimbabwe in particular and Africa more generally.

The top photo shows *Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga*. If you Google her, you will learn that she is a politician and Member of Parliament. She was first with Morgan Tsvangirai, when the Movement for Democratic Change started and participated in the 2000 elections. In the government of national unity, formed after the 2008 elections, she was appointed Minister of Regional Integration and International Cooperation. Later she left the original MDC and joined one of the splinter MDCs.

When I first met Priscilla in 1992, she was not a politician. She was a young journalist and feminist, eager to make a difference for women at a time when the HIV/AIDS pandemic was cutting deep wounds in the social fabric of Zimbabwe and Africa. Together with other strong-willed and visionary

women, she founded the *Women's Aids Support Network (WASN)*, with a mission to support women's rights in what was effectively a struggle for life and death. Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke was the only donor to start with.

When I ask her if she will run in the upcoming elections scheduled to take place before the end of August, she is not entirely sure. She has started studies in law at the university; she needs to take care of her son and family; maybe her experience can be used in other ways. There is no doubt in my mind that Priscilla will continue to play a role. She will also continue to be a role model.



The photo above shows *Hope Chigudu*, who is a Ugandan by birth, but who has lived in Zimbabwe since the 80's after marrying a Zimbabwean. Educated as a sociologist with a focus on women's studies, she worked first for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and then joined the civil society community. Over the years, she has been a board member of numerous global institutions, and she continues to share her advice with NGOs around the world.

I first met Hope in 1992 in her capacity as a co-founder of the *Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network [ZWRCN]*. Back then, women did not have spaces where they could go and simply be. Women's studies were not common, and the Centre became a school for learning. Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke was fortunate to be able to support the organization, posting developing workers and offering a bit of money.

We do not meet often these days. There will be years between our meetings. However, the friendships with Priscilla and Hope will last forever.

9 APRIL 2018

WHERE IS ZIMBABWE GOING 38 YEARS LATER?



I have reached the end of my journey. Driving 3.500 kilometers through beautiful Zimbabwe, meeting scores of people and revisiting places I have missed, has been a fascinating experience.

Rather than presenting a summary, I would like to focus on what in a sense made this journey possible in the peaceful manner it unfolded. This is the events leading to the downfall of President Robert Mugabe in November 2017, as illustrated by this photo by Zimbabwean photographer *Ralph Chikambi*. His photo is right now part of an exhibition at the National Gallery called *LOST & FOUND Resilience, Uncertainty, Expectations, Excitement and Hope*. A really nice exhibition that offers those of us who were not in Harare in the defining days last year a vivid sense of what took place.

The mere fact that this exhibition is open for the public is an indication that Zimbabwe is now much more 'open' than it has been for decades. Not only 'open for business', which is the mantra repeated daily by President Mnangagwa and his ministers, and rightly so. Zimbabwe needs business to create jobs for the 80-90 percent of the adult population presently having to

survive on informal jobs, supplemented by remittances from abroad if they are lucky, and of course growing their own food on all available pieces of land. However, Zimbabwe also needs '*openness*' for the mind, allowing people to share their concerns, ideas and preferences in the open.

This is exactly what we experienced as we moved along the roads connecting the major cities of the country - now paying two dollars at the modern toll stations, receiving a printed receipt every time. We stopped at hotels, lodges, restaurants, bottle stores, petrol stations, roadside women selling tomatoes and bananas, roadside men selling telephone cards, children selling sugar cane, etc. All of the people we met were as always extremely friendly. Contrary to what I have felt in the past, they were also ready to engage in a political discussion when challenged by our questions to do so.

I doubt that the actions of the new President has created many jobs since he took over. Politics is often the art of wishful thinking and optimistic messages, unconnected with reality. Politicians will also try to convince people that their words will, in a magic-like manner, be translated into reality overnight. People actually know better! Many told us that they did not expect miracles in the short term. It was more important that the politicians would finally, after decades of cheating and deception, be honest and hardworking – not to benefit themselves, but to serve the interests of the people.



In a sense, people would like to see an end to the *era of entitlement*, where entering politics is also a free license to the coffers of government and state-managed companies. This is not only a feature of politics in Zimbabwe, but in many other African countries, as well as countries in all other parts of the world, including my own (although at a lower level I hasten to add to avoid getting into a fight with Danish politicians). Hardworking and honest Zimbabweans would like to see their politicians being equally hardworking

and honest. Even the smallest and seemingly indifferent form of entitlement (like getting free tickets to a concert because you are a politician) is a mockery of the hard work ordinary citizens have to deliver just to survive. This is particularly the case because politicians make enough money to pay for such tickets. Strangely, Zimbabweans think just as Danes do in this regard!



It should come as no surprise that President Mnangagwa travelled to China the first time he travelled outside Africa. China has been a major donor and supporter of the Mugabe regime for decades. This will not change under Mnangagwa. It is therefore important that other donors can balance the influence of the Chinese, to ensure that the values of open and democratic dialogue, free and fair elections, etc. will get the necessary support. Traditionally, the Nordic countries have been trusted (and critical) friends of Zimbabwe since Independence in 1980. Sweden is still around, and so is the European Union. Norway has left. Denmark also left a few years ago.

In fact, *Denmark* left for the first time years ago, and then decided to come back again, although not with an Embassy headed by an Ambassador. Under the direction of the present Danish government, and with a Minister of Foreign Affairs who seemingly has no personal engagement in or knowledge of any of the countries, Denmark historically has given priority, there is of course no realistic chance for yet another revival and return. For both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Development, priorities around security (terrorism) and migration seem to be more important.

This is sad indeed. With Mugabe gone, now would have been the time to engage, once again, and to use the historical ties between our two countries, both at the institutional and personal levels. Therefore, those of us who lost our hearts to this country and its people must continue to offer whatever support and encouragement we can. This we owe to the people of Zimbabwe.