

Ten years ago, I wrote *Jacaranda Journals* about a mid-1990's Zimbabwe that no longer exists. Recently, a childhood friend of mine took a trip home to Harare. On her return to her new home in South Africa, she called me to tell me that she was homesick. I was confused. "Didn't you just go home?" I asked her. She was quiet, "I did go home but the country we grew up in is no longer there."

*Jacaranda Journals* depicts the lives of the multicultural, urban, mainly middle-class, residents of Harare's northern suburbs. I wrote it at a time when I was still very young, idealistic and even, nationalistic. It was very much an attempt to lay out and address the problems that plagued the newly-independent Zimbabwe of the 80s and 90s: racism, gender oppression, economic inequalities, political corruption and so on.

Like the "New South Africa", Zimbabwe accomplished a political transition from white minority rule to a democratic government representing the black majority but that did not translate into the demise of racism or social justice for the poor. Fundamental issues like land redistribution were not adequately addressed. All of these problems are elucidated in *Jacaranda Journals* yet there is something missing... There are those who believe that writers are prophetic but I must confess that I did not foresee Zimbabwe becoming the embarrassing Banana Republic that it is today. President Mugabe's ZANU PF has steered Zimbabwe into a hole so deep, it is hard to imagine how the country will ever recover.

When my mother suggested that I write a sequel to *Jacaranda Journals* set in 2006/2007 Harare, a decade later, I was stumped. How would I do that? Like three to four million other Zimbabweans, roughly a third of the country's entire population, I form part of the Zimbabwean diaspora that no longer lives in Zimbabwe for political and/or economic reasons. We "MaDiasporans" look on in quasi disbelief at the events unfolding, keeping abreast of the news as best we can but out of touch with the daily realities.

Where would Boomshaka of the story *Indigenous Transactions* be right now? He was a street kid who made money by selling marijuana and looking after cars. His homelessness was probably the result of the IMF Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) which hit Zimbabwe hard in the early nineties. But now, in an economy with an inflation rate close to 2000%, how would he make ends meet? I wonder if he is literally starving to death on the streets of Harare in 2007. People like the wealthy Mrs. Goldberg of *The Shade Diary* would most likely have immigrated to England, Australia or the U.S. In fact, the Jewish population, countrywide, is rumoured to be less than 400 now, just like the larger white population has decreased to tiny numbers. The majority of those who can have emigrated.

But it's not just the whites though, everyone is trying to go to South Africa, Botswana or overseas, because the only way people are surviving is on the money sent back to them - desperately-needed remittances in hard currency - by relatives working in stronger, more stable economies. They

exchange this money on the illegal black/parallel market to try and beat the inflation and some say up to 80% of the population are surviving on remittances. Most likely, Tinaye's middle-class family in *Evergreen Periodicals*, is just scraping by. While Mum is waiting in endless petrol queues and answering cell phone calls (when the network is working) to tell her where she can find bread or mealie meal, Baba is probably working overseas. He may be part of the infamous "brain drain" which is supplying much-needed skills to other countries while Zimbabwe suffers. But how would Mum and the family survive without the money he sends back when local salaries paid in "Zimkwacha" buy less and less each day and prices change daily because of hyperinflation?

Shura Samuriwo of *Perennial Log*, an English Professor at the University of Zimbabwe, has probably returned to New York City where he had spent some time in the past. Unless he forged an alliance with his detested relatives who were part of the ZANU PF corrupt elite. In that case he could be making big money through the various schemes they employ to systematically loot the country. While the rich are getting richer, people like Concilia, Mrs. Goldberg's domestic worker, of *The Bipinnate Review*, are certainly getting poorer. Is she one of those muttering, "Nyika yafa" (the country is dead)? Would Concilia even still have her job? If she has a new job and she has to take public transport, how would she get there? The transport costs alone would come to more than her monthly salary? She absolutely cannot afford to buy basic foodstuffs, much less "luxury items" like toothpaste. Perhaps one of her children has received some of the land that was seized from a white commercial farmer, one of those who offended ZANU PF, not by owning land, but by contributing money to the opposition. But that is doubtful as most of the people who have been "resettled" have not received the necessary support in terms of fertilizers, implements etc. to grow crops for the country. Hence the former "bread basket of southern Africa" must now import food and has become an "economic basket case". Of course, a number of the best farms have been given to political bigwigs, land transferred from wealthy whites to the wealthy blacks, which has resulted in startling statistics - there are figures that say half the population, six million people, are starving, life expectancy for a female in 2007 is 34 years, and for a man, 37!

I am looking forward to a day when the land is returned to the people, not the political elite. I am looking forward to a day when democratic freedoms are practiced and respected. I hope that in another ten years, I can write a sequel to *Jacaranda Journals* in which we will all be living in happier, peaceful times.

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2007