

Sample text from "Waiting for the Rains"

Chapter 14 Moving the masses

The long distance bus

Many adventures started with the departure from the market of the inter-town bus. Although the generic term of 'bus' might describe their general features, their evolutionary history made them as adaptable to the African terrain as perfectly as a leopard is adapted for forest camouflage. They were robust single deckers, usually built on a lorry or truck chassis with a suspension, or sometimes lack of it, to match. What the buses lacked in speed they made up for in robustness. They were generally supplied by the Indian TATA company and across these two great continents this universal icon of cross-country travel clocked up thousands of miles.

The heavy diesel engine which was located alongside the driver was only semi-silenced and upon take-off the bus was obscured in a black-blue smoke cloud which belched from a street level exhaust. When accelerated hard the exhaust note had a high-speed crackle about it, something like a hot-rod street machine heard through earmuffs. The buses were inevitably battered with dents and heavily worn paintwork, often with missing windows. In fact, during my whole time in Africa, I cannot remember seeing a new bus. It was as if they rolled off some production line with 10,000 miles already clocked up.

The interiors were austere with tough plastic padded seating showing the effects of a hard life dished out by the travelling public. The space around the massive frame of the engine was often the reserve of passenger baggage; the only place passengers could store what would not fit on the roof. The roof area had a retaining frame to tie baggage to, with a rear ladder to gain access. The interior baggage space often extended the full length of the entrance and exit gangway between the seats from the door to the rear. In rural areas just about anything was taken on board. I am not sure what the actual limitations were, but I was convinced that anything that could not fit through the door or window after the roof was full, must have been discarded. However, any amount of time and ingenuity were taken by both passengers and crew to get the package on board.

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**Boarding through windows is allowed.
Long distance bus travel is often an adventure**

I have been on rural buses with the aisle between the seats filled with scrap metal and bags of maize stacked halfway to the roof. Entry and exit was only possible by actually climbing up the side of the sacks, crouching over their tops and dropping off the other side. But it did mean there was a natural barrier to keep the small pigs and chickens in their place.

Travelling by public transport in developing countries is inevitably an adventure, which can be exhilarating or frustrating, but never boring. The experience really starts before departure and appears to blend seamlessly into the journey itself. It is as if all the confusion and chaos of the waiting time accompanies you on to the vehicle itself. It is a mechanism by which the western traveller can get the closest to local life without the insulation of tour buses and even taxis. It is a confrontation with the heat, jostling, noise, smells, delays and characteristics of the country. A ready-made package of culture, which you the traveller must interact with, adjust to, come to terms with and realise it is not a show. This is real life carried on by ordinary people, every day and in every town and city.

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The market stalls come to the bus window

Long distance buses were notorious for their unpredictable departure times, often hours after the scheduled time. Passengers would start arriving with their *katundu* or baggage prepared for a wait, which they invariably did without complaint. The drink and food sellers from the adjacent market took advantage of this isolated transient group. The peaceful scene of the waiting passengers would explode into confusion as the bus came into sight amidst plumes of diesel smoke and swirling dust. The bus would be surrounded on all sides, not just a crowd by the door, with shouts and gestures between passengers and staff as to how their bags were to be placed. Bus staff on the roof manhandled all the bulkier goods aloft, while the interior filled up with passengers and none-roof cargo. The bus appeared to slip into the background as its outline blurred against the numbers of people and baggage either on the roof or standing around the windows pushing in plastic shopping bags or cardboard boxes.

Even at this stage the market food sellers were still either in the bus or handing their charcoaled maize cobs and packets of nuts in through the windows. It was a lengthy process. On all the bus journeys I took, the interior was so full of people and packages, I found it was just about impossible to move. What little access there was, the food vendors were certain to occupy. Anything I may have wanted to retrieve from my bag on the roof, would only have been possible by climbing out through the window.

The signal to leave was a series of loud horn blasts given some minutes before leaving and on the moment of departure. This was the final sign for the food vendors to depart from the bus. As the over-loaded vehicle gathered speed and headed towards the outskirts of town, the open windows provided a welcome breeze through the cramped interior amidst the multiple smells of goods and people.

From my vantage point on a window seat – always the window, as it was the only place guaranteed to receive fresh air when the bus stopped – I could observe Africa on the move.

Sample text from “Waiting for the Rains”
Chapter 24 Zambia as a ‘frontline’ state

Local politics and their supporters

There were two black liberation movements vying for majority rule in the independence struggle for Rhodesia, both known collectively as the PF or Patriotic Front. Zambia became host to ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union, formed in 1962 and led by Joshua Nkoma. Its army was known as ZIPRA - the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army based in the vicinity around Lusaka. Like most organizations in Africa, it too was tribal based, affiliated to the *Ndebele* group with its spiritual capital in Bulawayo, Rhodesia. Its army had an estimated force of between 9,000-15,000 at any time, some in the training camps in Zambia and others engaged in the guerrilla struggle in the Rhodesian bush.

The Soviets and East Germans supplied most of its armaments and logistical support. But this came via Cuba, at that time a Soviet enclave, and not directly from the Russian military. This would have been seen as dangerously close to direct influence. But there were certainly Russian instructors in the background, training in the use of amongst other armaments, the SAM 7 Strela surface-to-air missiles, which they had supplied.

The other black liberation movement was ZANU, the Zimbabwe African National Union formed in 1963 after a break-up with ZAPU. It was led by Robert Mugabe and based in Mozambique. Its other notable member was Ndabaningi Sithole, who challenged for leadership. The two groups had an uneasy relationship, but were under considerable pressure to cooperate. ZANU had an army too, known as ZANLA, the Zimbabwe

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African National Liberation Army, with a force of around 12,000. It was essentially a Chinese trained outfit, generally regarded as young ruffians, with a Maoist-style campaign, which besides engaging in the liberation struggle, had an agenda to transform the countryside. There were other parties, but none with the clout of these major contenders.

Standing alone against this onslaught, the Rhodesians had their own major white political party, the RF or Rhodesian Front, lead by premier Ian Smith who certainly did not want black liberation movements within its own borders. When UDI was declared in November 1965 his famous statement: "I don't believe in black majority rule in Rhodesia, not in a thousand years", became almost a statute.



**Despite the war, the residents of George Compound, Lusaka
always appeared to have a smile**

Rhodesia could argue it had its own black political party, the lesser-known UANC - the United African National Council. This organization was headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, and was brought into the first Rhodesian elections. The country could now boast that it included a black political party and this was expected to achieve a moral advantage within the international community. Elections were held on 10 April 1979 and the bishop was duly nominated the country's first black president. With the Patriotic Front still fighting a bush war, it was excluded from the elections. But the PF regarded a Rhodesian black political party as a sham and as the war raged on, if anything its tempo was increased.

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The endearing happiness of a Lusaka resident

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Children from the townships. They are the future