

Harare to Costa Rica, and everything in between

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Harare International Airport

I was given a jolt at the check-in around 1500hrs when some dude said "nah mate we cannot let you through you gotta have a visa." A flurry of emails between the WPFDD organisers, and I'm back by the Internet cafe and the guy comes to me and says, "We have found a way to get around the visa thing. Since you are travelling through Germany you won't be leaving the airport so, abracadabra, you can travel!" I be like, "Dude, that's what I was telling you all the time!"

I am sitting at the Harare International departure lounge watching some TV and I'm like what the fuck, shouldn't we be watching DSTV! But then I soon realize it would be deemed treasonous showing such content at a "strategic national treasure!" Somewhere in the distance I can hear "last night a dj saved my life" blasting from the radio and I be like wow, that gotta be some coincidence. I move to another end where I order a pint of lager and I sit in front of a screen showing BBC news.

Arrived in Zambia shortly after 1900hrs but departure was delayed due to some technical fault in the checking system, the pilot explained. Finally left at 2040 PM for Dubai. Bloody long, 5,793km to be exact.

1 May 2013

Arrived Dubai 0723 Tuesday. Checked my phone, it was showing Zim time to be 0528am. Enjoyed some Family Guy though, three episodes I had never watched before. Lovely stuff. Incredible cartography being shown on the screen mapping our flight route: I can see we are passing through that notorious stretch that has become the favourite playground for pirates: the Gulf of Aden, saw Addis Ababa and virtually the whole of the Emirates, it feels so damn close yo! Though I m seeing it on the navigation screen, it feels you are indeed seeing it from up in the air, literally!

Was supposed to leave Dubai for Frankfurt at 0820 but flight lifted at 0913, busy airport, explained the pilot. Even this early in the AM, I wondered.

Just arrived in Frankfurt. The Lusaka journey was damn long and had to rush to connect for the Frankfurt flight. Plane circled for about 20 minutes before landing waiting for the all clear. Was a bit shaken that could well have missed it as the immigration folks sought to clear the visa entry and had to go through the sheaf of printouts. Good idea that Linda suggested we have all these printed out! It was the same story again on entry in Frankfurt; this time cops not immigration wondering why I was travelling through all these stops! They had to check with a chap who must have been the "chef" if indeed I did not require a visa to enter German space. The cop guy actually asked me, "are you not afraid to return to Zimbabwe," a trick question suggesting perhaps that I was one those

folks eager to leave the country under false fears of persecution. I'm writing this entry some forty-five minutes after landing and two young fresh-looking cops, very much unlike our impoverished own, approach. One asks me in feigned politeness I might add, "sir, do you speak English" then proceeds to ask what's the dealie-yo, but then I have them papers at the ready and voila, they are on their way wishing me a good day! Ahhh, lovely. Still, it's gonna be a long wait for the connecting flight as it is scheduled for 2050. I thought I could while away the hours at some Internet hotspot but ten bucks to surf at 2 euros for 12 minutes! I changed ten bucks and got 4 Euro 51cents and I always thought these developed country airports oughta have free wi-fi! Damn, these airports are just too big, you can very easily get lost. All along I was waiting at the wrong end. Just asked some woman and she took me right across the airport! Took a ride in some train and you just have to imagine what would happen if you are lost and running late. The pricing of the Internet is crazy. Just been logged on to free 30 minute Wi-Fi on the other side of the airport and the website hosting the hotspot says you can pay 4.50 euros for 24 hours! I be wondering then why the fuck did I change 10 bucks for less than 20 minutes?

Just saw a cleaning woman and could have sworn I know her from Bulawayo's backwaters! Ain't seen any blacks since I landed here this one makes an exception and you do get the feeling that everywhere you go you see a black person you feel you know them! Again, just saw another young black chick selling eats whose variety gave me a running stomach already. A half liter coke sells 2 euro 95, but I ain't surprised, this is an airport where nothing comes cheap! Was given a jolt when I boarded for Frankfurt it felt kinda weird seeing all the white faces, perhaps confirming rather cruelly that I am indeed from Zimbabwe where whites in Bulawayo's CBD have gone the way of the pangolin: extinct! But I quickly recover, realising that I shouldn't be jolted this ain't Africa! Kwaaaa

It sure is true that when you travel across time zones you lose sense of time. It is 2014 Frankfurt just checked in for Costa Rica but it's clear as day as one nutty prof would say. For a moment I thought the Ipad lost its senses but turns out it's been updating itself across all time zones! Costa Rica here goes nothing. Praise be to the gods. Allahu Akbar! But not just losing sense of time, I can feel my body has taken a battering since I haven't had proper sleep, what with me being the guy who loves his fair share of forty winks! I have a feeling I will pay dearly when jet lag decides to make a grand entrance!

2 May 2013

Arrived San Domingo 0240am. Frankfurt time 0840. Body battered. Condor airlines much different from Emirates which in comparison looks many light years ahead by service and amenities. And then I remember the announcer on the Emirates flight "Welcome to our award winning airline!" go figure. I could follow the flight route from right in front of my seat on the small TV. I could watch, and listen to in-flight entertainment at my leisure. Not so with Condor where a movie was being shown on a screen a hundred metres away and with no sound, how's that for in-flight entertainment! It is in the Condor airline that I'm reading a sign that says "Fasten your seat belts while seated" and I'm like there are gotta be people here who fasten their seat belts while standing! Meanwhile, we wait for the flight to continue as we have been told the pilot taking over has decided

to keep us, apparently there was an option for us to board another Condor flight. The flight to San Jose is expected to be two hours thirty minutes. I-pad is showing Frankfurt time at 0859am!

We are up in the air crossing the Caribbean Sea and I can't help but laugh that we are passing over Kingston, Jamaica! I am watching the screen tracking the flight's path and it feels so close like I'm seeing them Rastas puff their spliff! We are now an hour 30 minutes from San Jose. It means we are getting there shortly before 4am. I can also see not very far from where we are now there is Montego Bay, Caracas, Tegucigalpa and soon, Panama. Interesting stuff. San Jose itself is neighbor to Managua, is not very far from Acapulco, and I'm recalling "Acapulco Heat" back in the day when Zimbabwe TV was real Telly.

Finally arrived this morning. Pleasant joint the Double Tree. Switched on the telly and was met by Hispanic programming and was like what the F. Guess I'm used to my DSTV.

Met IREX folks, Dru, and Mark Whitehouse. Attended morning sessions, nice to see all these people gathered here concerned about the safety of journalists across the world. Afternoon session was great. Got to listen to various panelists talk about journalism work made difficult by governments acting on impunity.

As part of the World Press Freedom Day celebrations, we were invited for dinner with the president. Didn't know Costa Rica has a female president. Quite an eye opener. I get to see great Costa Rica cultural dances and this stuff one only sees in the movies, seeing it live is mind blowing. The president gave an address, first welcoming the people in English, then she says, "I will now switch to my local language" and I just stood there clueless about what she was going on about! I just had to notice that there were no heavily armed burly men on the ready to protect the president! She looked ordinary and comfortable. It was a standing dinner, waiters and waitresses emerged passing on all kinds of funny stuff they called food. I declined. Then came wine, whiskey, rum. I decline. Then came chicken kebab. I took it. I asked for a Coke, and the Nicaraguan guy I was with was like, "you don't want this," referring to the whiskey and wine - you see he was taking it all - and I said no thanks, a Coke will do me just fine. The Coke came an hour later! Great day.

3 May 2013

Sat and watched interesting presentation from the female Ethiopian journalist imprisoned for her work. She was chosen as this year's UNESCO's WPF winner. Great narratives about her work and how she got to be arrested. Cruel stuff, could be Zimbabwe without changing the script. Very inspiring stuff. Even from behind bars she was able to articulate her cause in a speech read on her behalf by an American colleague. Afternoon was great too with presentations on Internet security for scribes. And then later that evening, Goggle hosted delegates for dinner with a past Unesco director general being honored. Great evening. Google guy says this the best company he can ever have: beer and food and lots of people, or something like that.

4 May 2013

Attended one final session. Turns out some delegates had already started leaving as the sessions were poorly attended. Great though to sit through and hear some more.

5 May 2013

Leaving for home. The odyssey begins once again. From San Jose to infinity via Madrid.

At the airport I meet a young Italian dude and we have a chitchat. Tells me is he from Palermo, then he asks me where I'm from. I tell him I'm from Zimbabwe and he be like, we got Zimbabweans in Parlemo! Indeed our people can be found in any place under the sun. I ask what kind of jobs they do and he says they came finding work as domestic help. In fact he says Zimbos can be found across Italy! I ask about the language barrier and if Zimbabweans have mastered Italian, the young man laughs and says they get by. Are they there legally I ask and what about cops? Some are 'clandestinos' but the cops have no problems with the 'clandestinos' - the illegals - if they are not pickpockets! I instantly recall the life and times of Zimbos in the Diaspora and how miserable lives back in the fatherland have forced them to live even more miserable lives across the world, forced into pickpocketing and not giving a hoot about where they dip their fingers: even in the pockets of struggling fellow Zimbabweans. I imagined I could easily have met a Zimbo in San Jose!

6 May 2013

Arrived on a sunny morning in Madrid at around 11am. We walk through the gate where cops are making routine checks from people just off the plane. While all passengers are waved through after flashing their passports ala Zim cops, one cop asks to see mine. He sees its Malawian and says something in Spanish to another cop. He asks for my itinerary asking where I'm going. I tell him, and he says, sorry, I am asking because I have never seen a Malawian passport before! Then he says something about getting it photocopied, and asks me to wait in his office, "don't worry sir, this will only take five minutes," he says. Five minutes it takes and he says, "sorry sir for delaying you," and I'm on my way like I was Sinatra. But something keeps creeping at the back of my mind as I feel something is wrong with this picture. I walk to the Emirates check-in where I meet a Ugandan blogger who was also at the WPF and she asks me, "Were you stopped at the gate?" I reply in the affirmative and she says, "They also stopped, me. Racial profiling bastards!" That is what was bugging me seeing everyone else being waved through, but I wanted to cut the guy some slack! We are cosmopolitans I always say and keep my head up. Meanwhile, I wait for the Emirates check-in to open.

I am up in the air with no clue what time it is and we are flying over the Mediterranean. Beautiful sight to behold from the satellite tracking the flight path. It's day over the sea, but 2015PM in Dubai. 3hrs 44mins before we get there.

Flying over Cairo 18:41 Dubai time.

And then it suddenly became dark. Crossing time zones into the Middle East? Watched the documentary "Searching for Sugar" on the emirates flight from Madrid to Dubai and loved it. Remembered it from a review in M&G. Flying over Bahrain with 1hr 14min to Dubai. Arrival time 12:05am.

7 May 2013

Dubai International Airport. 01:00. Long wait ahead as connecting flight is at 09:25! No Wi-Fi here? I'm like what the fuck. Just have to stick it out. Cursed too soon. Wi-Fi galore! I am used to it automatically connecting but turns out I had to do a manual. BA has Wi-Fi but turns out they are mean - you gotta be traveling with them to get a password! Meanwhile, I use the airport's. This is the final stretch, and godamnit I need me some sleep. Body is buttered (sic) (to steal Zimpapers journo's writing)! It feels like an appropriate time to make that kindergarten thingie "when I grow up..." For me it's "when I get home I will sleep like a baby."

Dubai International Airport. Going home. 09:25am. Pilot introduces himself. My name is blah blah blah from Zimbabwe. We also have blah blah blah in the cabin crew from Zimbabwe. Two Zimbos flying Emirates planes? Indeed our people litter the universe. With the chaos at Air Zim you understand why these people find themselves here.

2hrs 34 min to Harare and we are flying over Somalia. We are up in the clouds and I can see the ground far below. Ethereal stuff. In my mind's eye I can see a group of gunmen roaming the streets.

Arrived in sunny Kenneth Kaunda International Airport at 14:15. And then you see that indeed you are back on familiar territory looking at the size of this "international" airport. I don't see any "international flights" it looks so tiny I feel am at our very own Joshua Mqabuko Airport in Bulawayo. It's just something you cannot fail to notice, coming as it is from the giant Dubai International where getting lost can come naturally. Perhaps here we prefer our things small, excluding of course the egos of politicians and their bellies! Kwaaa. Then female voices announce to passengers: "Please have your boarding passes ready on disembarkation." I'm like wow, I have just learnt a new word!

16:25. We land at Harare International Airport. Odyssey ends.