

Looking back and moving on

Writing home

In 2002, writer and poet Chenjerai Hove was forced to leave his country, Zimbabwe, for political reasons. He first went to France and then to Norway. He currently resides in the USA. Here are extracts from a letter he wrote to his mother while living in Norway.

Dear Mother,

Remember the day I arrived in my new town, one of my many stops on this journey that is life. The rains at the airport in Stavanger¹ brought me memories of you working in the fields, not shielding yourself from the warm raindrops. I remembered you then, way back in February, 2005. For, I knew you would have composed an instant poem to celebrate first raindrops, those songs about the fish eagle up in the sky, the harbinger¹ of rain, giving life to people, animals and plants.

Here they still have not stopped cursing² the rain. I always remind them that one who curses the rain is a witch who wishes that life should not be brought to this earth. But no, they still curse at their gentle, thunderless rain. They prefer the sun instead. Or the white snow which paints the street white as if cotton wool had embraced the whole earth. My fear of snow still persists, especially when it hardens and becomes slippery ice.

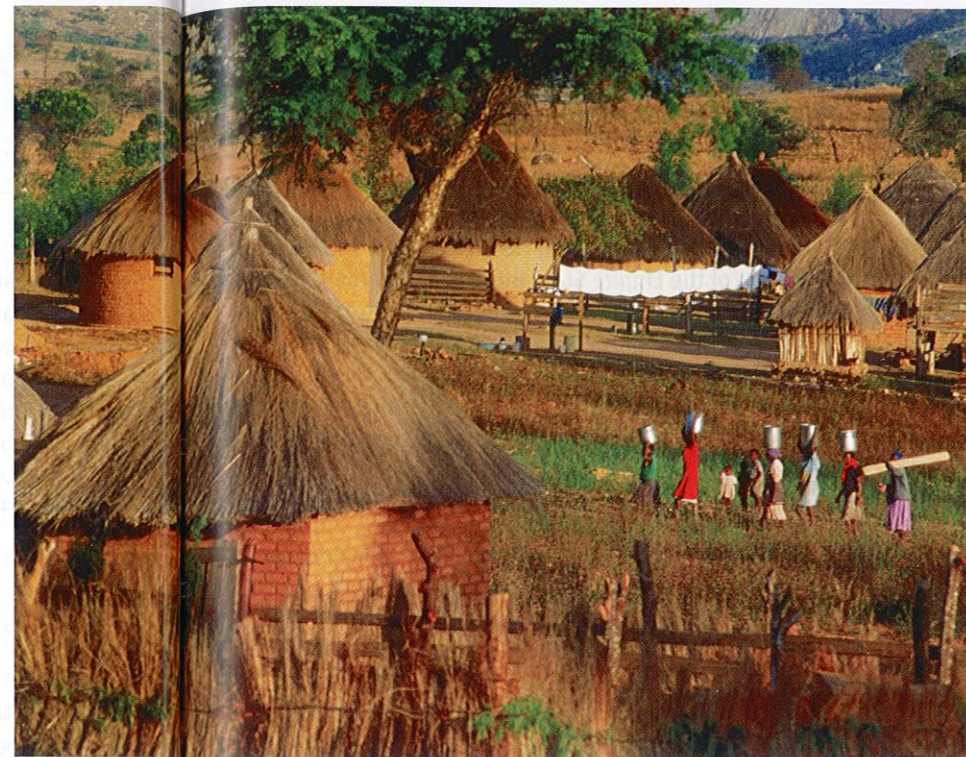
For me, a step on ice is a potential disaster. Ice is more slippery than the muddy clay soils of your maize fields. Norwegians hardly fall on ice. They float on it like Arabs walking on sand, never sinking, never falling. They even run races on the ice and win competitions! Can you imagine? [...]

Normally, Norwegians are deep in silence. Forget about the noise you hear in the streets of Harare, or in the village in Gotami's country down there in Chireya. Here they are silent, and it is the silence which explodes into your ears as soon as you arrive in their lands. No, they are not afraid of strangers. They are too shy to venture into the life space of anyone, including their own people. It takes time for them to remove that veil of silence which sometimes shields them so much from the possibility of laughter and the good humour which enkindles the human spirit in times of sorrow and despair. [...]

Maybe your attacks of malaria will already be haunting you. There is no malaria in this country. The little mosquitoes they have are as harmless as pieces of flying paper. No one bothers much about them. But this is not to say there are no diseases here. They have different kinds of illnesses, some to do with the mind, others to do with eating too much wrong food, and maybe others to do with a life controlled too much by watches and clocks. You should see how they walk in the street. They rush to everywhere as if in a permanent state of emergency. Slowing down might help reduce some of their tensions.

So, mother, you can see how complex life is here, with its ups and downs. As I yearn for the voices of home, I begin to think there are more downs here than ups. The voices of home, the music of our birds and the beauty of our setting sun, they weave patterns in my dreams as live as this never-ending desire to be home one day.

I hope the thunderous rains have come by now. Maybe the maize you planted is already the height of a small child. Every sun which rises gives me fresh



← A village in Zimbabwe

memories of you, and every early sunset reminds me that I am in other lands. Maybe one day we will sit together, switch off the street lights and gaze at the beauty of that lovely African moon which displays the image of a rabbit with large ears. Maybe I will be older, but I will not have given up the idea of being young.

Now I know that there are so many streams to the river of knowledge, and one of them is to live in other lands.

Your Son, Chenjerai,
www.icorn.org/articles

1. **Before reading**, concentrate on the title, the introduction and the photo: imagine how Chenjerai Hove may have felt when he arrived in Norway.

2. **Read** the first line of each paragraph. Identify the different topics.

3. a. Read the text from lines 1 to 34. Pick out the differences between the two countries.

page 43

b. Share your findings.

4. Scan the same passage and underline Hove's comments on those differences. What are his feelings for Norway and Zimbabwe?

page 43

5. Read lines 35 to 55. Share what you have understood. Sum up why Hove's life away from home has "its ups and downs".

6. Discuss the meaning of the last sentence (lines 52 to 55).

pages 43-44

Recap → List positive and negative aspects one may encounter when settling in a new country.

LANGUAGE TOOLS

★ WORDS → p. 82

Habits

- be used to /'ju:stə/ = be accustomed to, be familiar with

→ He is used to living in Norway.

⚠ → He used to live in Zimbabwe. He no longer lives there.

Integration

- adjust to
- fit in = blend in
- be homesick = miss one's country

TRAINING TASK

Press conference

While living in France, Chenjerai Hove gives a press conference and shares his impressions of the country.

a. **In groups:** prepare the journalists' questions and Chenjerai Hove's possible answers.

b. **Whole class:** act out the press conference.



Chenjerai Hove, ↑ 2009

1. the 4th largest city in Norway, about 350 miles west of Oslo

2. *maudire*