



GUTHRIE  
THEATER

McGuire Proscenium Stage / March 10 – April 14, 2018



# Familiar

by DANAI GURIRA

directed by TAIBI MAGAR

PLAY GUIDE

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind, and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

## Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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Photo: Shá Cage (Tendi), Harvy Blanks (Donald Chinyaramwira) and Quinn Franzen (Chris) (Dan Norman)

## Synopsis

At the Chinyaramwira home in suburban Minneapolis, the family gathers ahead of the rehearsal dinner for older daughter Tendi's wedding. As mother Marvelous cooks up a storm, younger daughter Nyasha pads around in her pajamas, having gotten in late the night before from her home in New York. Father Donald tries to keep a low profile. Soon Marvelous' sister Margaret and the bride herself come by.

Amid the family bustle and conversation, Nyasha reports on her musician-Feng shui career as well as her recent trip to Zimbabwe; Tendi gives her sister a lot of unsolicited and unwelcome advice; Margaret recommends

her new direct sales product; and Marvelous tries to get everyone to eat.

Tendi announces she's got a surprise for everyone, which is soon revealed to be Marvelous' older sister Anne, who has just flown in from Zimbabwe and arrives from the airport with Tendi's white fiancé Chris. Marvelous and Donald left Zim behind many years ago and haven't looked back, and Marvelous is less than excited to have her sister arrive, fearing she'll hijack the wedding. In fact, Tendi and Chris invited Anne to Minnesota so that she can conduct the traditional Shona wedding ceremony called roora, which translates as bride price, in order to honor the family's

African roots. Marvelous will have no part of it, finding the practice incompatible with their life in the U.S.

But Tendi and Chris move ahead with the ceremony, which requires Chris to call in his younger brother Brad to be part of it. Roora brings to the surface a number of topics the family has kept buried for years, which puts in jeopardy not only the wedding but a number of characters' very sense of identity.

# Characters and Setting

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## CHARACTERS

**Dr. Marvelous Chinyamurindi**, a biochemist  
**Donald Chinyaramwira**, a lawyer, Marvelous' husband  
**Nyasha**, their younger daughter  
**Tendikayi**, their older daughter  
**Prof. Margaret Munyewa**, Marvelous' younger sister  
**Anne Mwarimba**, Marvelous' older sister  
**Chris**, Tendi's fiancé  
**Brad**, Chris' brother

## SETTING

The Chinyaramwira home in an upper-middle-class suburb of Minneapolis, 2011.

Photo:Shá Cage (Tendi) and Quinn Franzen (Chris)  
(Dan Norman)



# Responses to *Familiar*

It is Gurira's great gift to be able to regale us with torrents of humor in easily recognizable family squabbles — set in the snow-white American Midwest of all places — and at the same time anchor her play firmly in the political reality of her characters' ancestral home. Near the end, she then tops it off with a big family-secret reveal. On the face of it, that heart-stopping surprise might seem to border on melodrama. But actually, brilliantly, it brings home and personalizes an ongoing identity and liberation struggle that for each of her characters is precisely her point.

**John Stoltenberg, "‘Familiar’ at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company," DC Metro Theater Arts, February 10, 2018**

Although it is just as accomplished [as Gurira's *Eclipsed*], "Familiar" is a play written in a significantly lighter key, even as it probes with subtlety and smarts the subject of immigration and assimilation — a topic of major currency these days. ...

Ms. Gurira weaves issues of cultural identity and displacement, generational frictions and other meaty matters into dialogue that flows utterly naturally. Her engaging characters are drawn with sympathy and ... "Familiar" stays firmly on course even as the complications pile up.

**Charles Isherwood, "‘Familiar,’ a Comic Clash of Assimilation on the Path to a Wedding," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2016**

Gurira's "Familiar" is funny and warmhearted while remaining true to the serious turf she claimed in

her earlier plays "Eclipsed," "The Convert" and "In the Continuum." Gurira is interested in African stories, and "Familiar" sticks close to her roots as the Iowa-born daughter of Zimbabweans. Some of the dialogue on race and cultural friction was so on point that during Friday night's opening, the hippest pockets of the audience snapped their fingers in approval.

**Nelson Pressley, "Zimbabwe meets Minnesota in Danai Gurira's funny 'Familiar'," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2018**

A crowd-pleasing, sweet-hearted sitcom with a provocative edge, Danai Gurira's *Familiar* delivers a very different take on the immigrant experience — and a very timely one. In a climate in which our nation's new arrivals are reduced to faceless statistics and political pawns, it's vital to be reminded that these are real people who can never be so easily pigeonholed. And Gurira's is a refreshingly original premise: two well-heeled Zimbabwean parents have raised a couple of privileged American daughters in the heart of Minnesota. Now, as the eldest is about to marry an uber-Christian white man, an aunt arrives from Zimbabwe to deliver a traditional wedding ritual — and something of her own agenda — and the family is tipped into a chaos that moves from comedy to crisis. ...

[F]or bringing a unique voice and genuine humor to an issue that touches us all, it breaks the mold.

**Kate Winfield, "Review: Danai Gurira's 'Familiar' at Woolly Mammoth," *Metro Weekly*, February 15, 2018**

I'm sure that Gurira, an accomplished actress herself (she's best known for her work on AMC's "The Walking Dead"), knew that her story risked falling into cliché unless she did what she so brilliantly does here: stay within the reality of the characters and their voices. Working in a naturalistic comedic tradition that black female playwrights such as Lorraine Hansberry and Alice Childress helped shape, Gurira has a nearly unerring ear for how to make popular theatre without compromising authenticity. ... Like any first-class playwright, Gurira has an innate talent for externalizing her many selves, allowing them to speak without crowding one another or becoming trite.

In "Familiar," she shows us an immigrant experience that we know relatively little about — what it's like to be African in the American heartland — and she avoids exoticizing any of the women, who find both discord and love in one another, as the old world settles, in unsettling ways, into the new.

**Hilton Als, "Betrothed," *The New Yorker*, March 14, 2016**



# Danai Gurira is a Storyteller

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by Carla Steen  
Production Dramaturg

Danai Gurira was born in Grinnell, Iowa, the youngest of four children of librarian Josephine and chemistry professor Roger. At age 5, she moved with her family to her parents' native Zimbabwe, where she spent her formative years. She returned to the United States to attend Macalester College in St. Paul, from which she graduated with a B.A. in psychology. During a semester abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, in her junior year, she participated in a program called Arts and Social Change, where she met artists who used their talent and voices to advocate for social change. The program was a turning point for her, and she decided to become a storyteller herself. After graduating from Macalester, she spent three years at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, where she received an M.F.A. in acting.

Gurira has pursued dual paths in acting and playwriting. In fact, her first play, *In the Continuum*, written with Nikkole Salter, started out as a graduate school project. She and Salter performed the two-woman play in a number of places around New York, including the United Nations. The play is about two young women, an African American teenager and a Zimbabwean news reader, who each discover they have contracted HIV from their partners. A longer, revised version premiered Off-Broadway at Primary Stages in 2005 before a tour that took them to Harare, Zimbabwe, as well as several stops in the U.S.

In 2009, her play *Eclipsed* premiered at Woolly Mammoth Theater Company in Washington, D.C. Set during the Liberian civil war, it tells the story of four women who are taken captive to be "wives" of a Liberian rebel commander and a fifth woman working for peace while searching for her lost daughter. The play made its Broadway debut in February 2016, with Academy Award-winner Lupita Nyong'o featured in the cast. *Eclipsed* was the first Broadway production with an all-black female cast, a black female director and a black female playwright.

In 2012 Gurira's *The Convert* premiered in a co-production by McCarter Theatre Center, Goodman Theatre and Center Theatre Group. In the play, set during the early days of colonization in Rhodesia, a

young girl takes refuge with the Catholic Church to escape an arranged marriage; *The Convert* is intended to be one of a trilogy of plays in which Gurira explores the history of Zimbabwe.

*Familiar* was commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre and premiered there in January 2015 then received a production at Playwrights Horizons in February 2016. In addition to the production at the Guthrie and Seattle Rep, *Familiar* was produced at Woolly Mammoth earlier this year.

As an actor, Gurira is perhaps best known as Michonne on AMC's "The Walking Dead," a role she has played since 2012. She is currently making a splash as Okoye in Marvel's *Black Panther* and will reprise that role in the upcoming *Avengers: Infinity War* as well. On film she has also appeared in *The Visitor*, *Mother of George*, *My Soul to Keep*, *3 Backyards* and *All Eyez on Me*, among others, while television appearances include "Treme," "Law & Order," "Life on Mars," "Lie to Me" and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent." On stage she has performed in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at Lincoln Center Theater and *Measure for Measure* at The Public Theater.

Among her many honors, Gurira has won an Obie Award, Outer Critics John Gassner Award, Global Tolerance Award (from the Friends of the United Nations), Helen Hayes Award for Best Lead Actress, NAACP Best New Playwright Award, Whiting Award for Writers, Stavis Award and Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award.

Gurira co-founded and is executive director of Almasi Collaborative Arts in Harare, Zimbabwe, and has taught playwriting and acting in Liberia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. She speaks four languages: English, Shona, French and basic Xhosa.

# In Her Own Words

I didn't know my name was Danai until I was five years old. Born in Grinnell, Iowa, to Zimbabwean academic parents, I was given a nickname, Dede, that stuck before I was cognizant enough to have a choice in the matter. I remember the day my mom decided to tell me I had another name, one folks in our tiny college town struggled to pronounce. ...

As a typical little girl with cool cred to uphold, I wasn't too into this other name. It sounded weird the way my mom pronounced it, her African cadences freely flowing. ... What was I to do with this new knowledge she imposed on me? I chose to do nothing. I retained Dede; it sounded close enough to a Western name and made me feel like I fit in, to some extent at least. Though I had a pretty joyous childhood in Iowa, we were one of only two black families in town, and Mom and Dad already talked differently from everyone else. A strong African name? Too much.

We moved to Zimbabwe less than a year later, and though Danai was on the register, certificates, trophies, Dede prevailed still. ... But as I went into my adolescent years, a consciousness built up in me, perhaps because I started reading Toni Morrison, Alex Haley, James Baldwin, speeches by Martin Luther King Jr., *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. ... I started to connect the dots around why I was rejecting my people's cultural markers and the dominating effects of Eurocentric culture. I questioned why I didn't speak my parents'

native language and began to test how much Shona I knew, embracing the sounds, the tonalities, of this original tongue of my foremothers. ...

I realized my heritage was to be celebrated, not denied. I didn't want to fit in to what I perceived as a more Western, more acceptable mainstream. I wanted to bring light to those who should be seen more, heard more: people of marginalized cultures. I began to ask people to call me Danai. That choice has affected every choice I've made since — the stories I tell, the characters I play, the activism I embark upon. ...

The irony that American greatness helped bring me to this initial awakening doesn't go unnoticed by me. It's what makes me what I am — Zimerican, I call it. Both Zimbabwe and America resonate in me in equally significant parts and can't be extricated from each other.

**Danai Gurira, "'Black Panther' Star Danai Gurira on Embracing her Zimbabwean Name: 'I Realized I didn't Want to Fit In,'" *Glamour*, February 13, 2018**

There's nothing more thrilling than discovering your gifts. And when that happens, why walk away from it? In my senior year in an all-girls high school in Zimbabwe, a very dear friend of mine was directing us in a play, a Zimbabwean version of *For Colored Girls*. I got that big monologue at the end with the babies getting dropped out the window. I was reading it alone in my living room and started to play

with it and find it and to go there and, all of sudden, there was that thing where you lose that sense of time and space. You're in your zone, something comes out of you, and you have no idea where it came from. You understand that there is something inside you that is deeply connected to creating a story.

• • •

If I had grown up in Grinnell, Iowa, I would be completely from Grinnell Iowa [laughs]. But my formative years were spent in Zimbabwe, so it's by divine design that I did come back. Those formative years in forming my world perspective, my understanding of Zimbabwean people, forming my understanding of my own heritage, the post-colonial experience, the neocolonial experience, how we navigate the world as people of African descent and also living here and understanding it from that perspective, definitely enriched who I am. And I'm constantly thinking about and negotiating how to bridge the distance between the African and the American and how to connect them. That's my sort of thing, which is why I try to bring African stories to the American stage but in ways that are accessible. I want that connection to be felt.

I want the complexity of the African to be experienced the way the complexities of the Americans are experienced. Which story is generally told? Generally, not the African story. I want to bring it! And I wouldn't have had that desire

if I hadn't grown up around the African.

Danai Gurira, quoted in "Danai Gurira: Actress and Playwright with Africa on Her Mind," *Ebony*, March 3, 2012

Theater, it's the very visceral experience of live storytelling. The idea of theatricality, it's a very real thing — things that can live on a stage that can't live on a screen. It's magic in the theater if you know how to latch on to it. I really think theater is where you can sharpen your teeth as a craftsman. It's the original form. It's not for the light of heart. You have to retain integrity and continue to deliver a high-quality product. That's really where you separate the sheep from the goats.

• • •

Every time I go [back to Zimbabwe], I learn something and something gets tweaked. I'm an academic at heart. I was brought up by a scientist and a librarian. I research. Going home is very informative. I definitely research until I find something that compels me. Then I fictionalize it. ...

I write from what fascinates me and what I feel is important to my humanity. I was fascinated about the history of my people and how rarely it's told and explored. Who we are today is how we are affected by what happened back then. The collision of ideologies, colonial norms, traditional practices, informs the African identity. It's never been excavated in a way that satisfied me. It was my own exploration and my own identity and that of my people.

Danai Gurira, quoted in "The 'Zamerican' Danai Gurira Examines *The Convert*," @ This Stage Magazine published by LA Stage Alliance, April 18, 2012



Photo: Cast of *Familiar* (Dan Norman)

I think there's so much underrepresentation and misrepresentation of: the African experience. For several centuries it's been a very hybrid experience, a mixture and a negotiation of different cultural influences and colonial impositions and several other cultures that converged on the continent that are still there today, that make it a very complex cultural hybrid.

• • •

That's why I started to write: I thought I should write because I was tired of the single-dimensional stories or depictions. I started to write because these are not the people I know of or grew up around. I started to write because I thought it was fascinating how Chekhov put his people on the map through a love of them, but also through recognizing how flawed and complex they were. ... There were so many things that were lacking in the expression of the African story and voice that I felt it was something close to a crime. And I was tired of seeing the depictions that were so single-dimensional and were really catering to, bizarrely, always a Western protagonist being at the core of a story that's supposedly about Africans. You know, the

lovely exotic backdrop. It's poisonous to the African because it tells us that our stories don't have the right to be told, but it's also poisonous to the Westerner, because it tells them that their stories are the stories that must be told before anybody else's. And so, in both regards it's very dangerous. It's perpetuating an identity of inferiority and it's perpetuating an identity of superiority. And both of those things are very dangerous. So I love that I'm able to do plays in the West that are very much from the African subjective and complex voice, and that a Western audience sits and absorbs that story and it goes with people into their consciousness. I think that is necessary and it's normal to do, actually, in the West. I reject the idea that in order for a story to be marketable or feasible, it needs to come from the Western protagonist's perspective. And I write against that completely by writing African protagonists and putting them on the stage across the United States.

Danai Gurira, interviewed by Walter Bilderback in "Interview with Danai Gurira," *Wilma Theater*, October 11, 2013

# House of Stone: A Brief History of Zimbabwe

by Carla Steen  
Production Dramaturg

*Familiar* is set in Minnesota, but the heart of the play is firmly located in Zimbabwe, a country roughly the size of Montana in southeastern Africa. Many years ago Marvelous and Donald left their native country and built a life in the United States, where they raised their daughters. By almost any measure, they have attained a level of success that anyone could envy. But Zimbabwe continues to tug at them, notably in daughter Nyasha's exploration of her roots and through the visit of Marvelous' oldest sister, Anne, who lives in Zim, as they call it.

Today Zimbabwe still wrestles with the effects of European colonialism. The first Europeans established contact with the Shona-dominated states in the area in the early 1500s. Before then, beginning in the 13th century, Great Zimbabwe ("house of stone") flourished in what is now the heart of the modern-day country, capitalizing on gold in the area to build a city-state with a population of 18,000 people. Gold drew the Portuguese to the area, speculating that they had found the legendary King Solomon's Mines. The Changamire dynasty drove out the Portuguese and kept them at bay, but the British incursion in the 19th century was another story.

Cape Colony in South Africa became a British possession in 1806, an event that would disrupt the lives of millions of Africans for the next two centuries. In reaction to the arrival of the British, descendants of Dutch and German settlers in South Africa called Boers moved north, a migration that added to a chain of displacement and upheaval that began with a series of violent wars called the mfecane between the Nguni peoples. A couple Nguni peoples then moved north and settled southwest of the Shona people in contemporary Zimbabwe; today the two major ethnic groups are the Shona and the Ndebele, a name the Nguni gave themselves. It was with the Ndebele people that the London Missionary Society made contact and established a mission mid-century. When Cecil Rhodes formed the British South Africa Company and led the Pioneer Column north from South Africa, he succeeded in large part through dubious promises made with the Ndebele leader. The first chimurenga ("struggle") was in the 1890s when the Ndebele and Shona unsuccessfully revolted against the British. When Rhodes' hope to find gold was dashed, he and his company turned their attention to land acquisition.

Photo: Cast of *Familiar* (Dan Norman)



Bit by bit, the land of Zimbabwe, soon called Rhodesia, came under the control of white British settlers, and by 1923, Rhodesia was a self-governing colony of the British Crown. Africans had to register with colonial officials and carry passes at all times. Forced into a fraction of the least-arable land, Africans couldn't vote, but a number of resistance organizations were formed in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly working toward reforms rather than revolution. By the late 1950s, real opposition began to take root. Joseph Nkomo and later Robert Mugabe emerged as leaders of political parties advocating for independence. When Britain refused to give Rhodesia independence as long as the white government refused to include Africans, Rhodesia declared itself independent in late 1965, and its leader Ian Smith vowed that "never in a thousand years" would Africans have power in the country. The second chimurenga began on April 28, 1966, when ZANLA, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, began guerrilla attacks against settlers. Fighting, negotiations, even compromise governments marked the next 13 years, until finally in late 1979 Britain, Rhodesian leadership, Nkomo and Mugabe hammered

out a ceasefire, a plan for independence and a new constitution. Rhodesia became the independent Republic of Zimbabwe on April 18, 1980.

This is the Zimbabwe that Donald and Marvelous left behind, but it's not the Zimbabwe that Anne lives in. Years of prosperity under the new government headed by Mugabe eventually gave way to brutality, a collapsed economy, stolen elections and political turmoil. Anne arrives in the United States with a very different relationship to their homeland than that of her sisters and brother-in-law, and that difference is played out in the varying reactions to the Shona bride-price ceremony, roora.

Anne's visit and roora bring to the surface issues the family thought they'd left behind long ago. *Familiar* illustrates that though Donald and Marvelous carry scars from old wounds, they can heal and move forward, and so too can Zimbabwe. Ties between family and country are much like the ties within family and country – steadfast and strong when there is love, laughter, truth and forgiveness.

## 1979: A Pivotal Year

In *Familiar*, we learn that the events of 1979 played an important part in the history of the Chinyaramwira family; very much relatedly, it was an important year for the history of Zimbabwe. Below are some events from that year that help to paint a picture of life in Zimbabwe just before independence. For these purposes, Rhodesian government refers to the white-led or controlled government that declared independence from Great Britain; Patriotic Front (PF) refers to the combined liberation forces made up of the Mugabe-led ZANU and Nkomo-led ZAPU political organizations.

### JANUARY

- 27:** 19 people (11 guerrillas, seven black civilians and a white man) are killed in a 24-hour period in conflict between guerrilla and government forces.
- 30:** Nearly 85% of white Rhodesians vote to accept "a constitutional plan that provides for a black-led government with extensive safeguards for whites." The new government would be chosen April 20.

The Patriotic Front vows to keep fighting.

### FEBRUARY

- 2:** Eight statutes outlawing racial discrimination go into effect, in theory ending segregation in schools, hospitals and neighborhoods and outlawing barring blacks from hotels, restaurants and movie theaters.
- 12:** 59 people are killed aboard an Air Rhodesia plane that the government says was hit by two missiles launched by PF forces.
- 17:** Rhodesian forces attack a guerrilla camp in Zambia in retaliation for the airline crash. A week later a similar attack in Zambia leaves hundreds dead or wounded.
- 28:** The Rhodesia parliament is dissolved in advance of April elections.

## MARCH

- 17:** U.S. and Britain appeal for new negotiations ahead of the April elections, fearing more bloodshed given escalating military action.
- 18:** Bishop Muzorewa and Rev Sithole (both part of the transitional government, not the Patriotic Front) reject the U.S.-British request that the April elections be supervised by the U.N.

## APRIL

- 5:** Officials set elections for April 17-21.
- 13:** Rhodesian forces attack guerrilla bases in Zambia and Botswana, with reports of at least 10 people killed. The goal was to capture or kill ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo.
- 24:** Bishop Muzorewa's party is declared the winner of the elections with 67% of the vote and 51 seats in parliament (28 seats were reserved for whites). Muzorewa will become prime minister. Rev Sithole (who hoped to be prime minister) denounces the election as fraudulent.
- 30:** The U.N. Security Council approves the resolution to condemn the Rhodesia elections as illegal and to continue U.N. sanctions against the country.

## MAY

- 7:** Rhodesia's new parliament convenes, boycotted by Rev. Sithole's party (12 seats).
- 26:** The Organization of African Unity does not recognize the new Rhodesian government.
- 29:** Bishop Muzorewa is sworn in as prime minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, the country's new official name as of June 1.

## JUNE

- 2:** Police in Salisbury investigate a plot by Sithole supporters to assassinate Muzorewa.

## JULY

- 6:** PF in Zambia say they'll suspend their border attacks into Zimbabwe Rhodesia during Queen Elizabeth's visit to Zambia for the Commonwealth conference later in the month. Attacks will be suspended July 25 to August 10, though attacks within Zimbabwe Rhodesia will continue.
- 9:** Muzorewa begins visits to the U.S. and Britain to lobby for recognition of his government and the lifting of sanctions. He's unsuccessful on both counts with both countries.
- 31:** Rev. Sithole ends his boycott of the Muzorewa parliament.

## AUGUST

- 5:** During the Commonwealth meeting in Zambia, 39 delegations approve a proposal to end the war in Zimbabwe Rhodesia by calling for a cease-fire, a new constitution and new elections that the British government would supervise. It would be up to Britain to persuade Muzorewa, while Tanzania and Zambia would persuade Nkomo and Mugabe to agree to the talks.
- 10:** Tanzania's president says that the Patriotic Front has accepted the Commonwealth's proposal.
- 15:** Muzorewa's government accepts the invitation to attend a peace conference in London. Mugabe will accept only if the PF army is recognized as the people's army in an independent Zimbabwe.
- 26:** Muzorewa announces Rhodesia will be dropped from the country's name ahead of the September talks in London.
- 28:** Figures released say more than a thousand civilians have been killed between April and July this year, about one-sixth of the 7,000 people killed since the war began in 1972. 99 people were killed during the last week and 49 people were killed in a 24-hour period over the weekend. The

increased in violence may be due to the scheduled conference as each sides tries to increase leverage in negotiations.

## SEPTEMBER

- 10:** The parley in London begins at Lancaster House. Muzorewa, Smith, Mugabe, Nkomo and the British participate.
- 14:** Muzorewa accepts British proposals for the constitution, but Smith balks, splitting the Rhodesian delegation. Nkomo and Mugabe both oppose the British proposal. The primary sticking point is the role of the white minority.
- 24:** The Patriotic Front agree “under protest” to guarantee the white minority 20 percent of seats in the new parliament.
- 27:** Zimbabwe Rhodesian troops attack Patriotic Front guerrillas in Mozambique in the first attack since the London talks began.

## OCTOBER

- 5:** The Rhodesian government accepts the British proposals.
- 16:** The PF clarifies that their major objection to the British proposals is the insistence that whites be compensated for farmland confiscated by a new government.
- 17:** Nkomo says that the PF is ready to resolve the land issue as diplomatic sources suggest that international support has created a fund that could compensate whites if their land is confiscated. The next day the PF accepts the British proposals.
- 26:** The PF criticizes the British plan for transition, saying it won't guarantee free and fair elections, and calls for a bigger role for itself in the transition.
- 27:** Muzorewa conditionally accepts the British plan.

## NOVEMBER

- 4:** More than 1,000 people have died since the start of peace talks in London.
- 16:** An agreement on the transition is reached: a Briton will serve as interim governor and all forces will “be required to comply with the directives of the governor.” The Patriotic Front accepts the language as acknowledgment that PF forces will be seen as equals to the government forces.

## DECEMBER

- 5:** A tentative agreement for a cease-fire is reached, achieving the final goal of the 13-week-long negotiation.
- 7:** Christopher Soames is named governor of Zimbabwe Rhodesia. Muzorewa's government will step down when Soames begins his post. Five days later, Rhodesia reverts to colonial rule (and its old name) with the arrival of Lord Soames in Salisbury.
- 17:** The Patriotic Front agrees to the British cease-fire plan. A 12,000-member Commonwealth force will leave for Rhodesia to monitor the cease-fire.
- 21:** A formal treaty is signed in London, ending a seven-year war in which more than 20,000 people were killed. All troop movement into and out of Rhodesia and all hostilities will cease.
- 26:** ZANLA general Josiah Tongogara is killed in a car crash in Mozambique. He was expected to be a presidential candidate; almost immediately observers assume foul play on Mugabe's part.
- 28:** Soames announces elections for the new Zimbabwe will be held February 14 (whites, for 20 seats) and February 27-29 (blacks, for 80 seats). Also announced by the military are 32 more deaths in the war. The cease fire is to take effect at midnight.

- Compiled from headlines and articles in  
*The New York Times*, January 1 - December 31, 1979

# Roora: The Bride Price

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**The Roora ceremony is at the heart of the conflict that drives *Familiar*. It is a long-standing tradition in Shona society (and is sometimes also called lobola). Roora is a nuptial arrangement in which a potential groom and his family offer the bride and her family livestock, cash or other goods in recognition of the loss the bride's family experiences when the bride leaves her home to join her husband's family. The tradition was rooted in the exchange of cattle, a measure of wealth for many years in Zimbabwe, but has in recent years been an exchange of money. Roora is not necessarily a one-time payment like a dowry, however. The Shona have a saying that "a son-in-law is like a fig tree, you keep harvesting," because the roora is a lifelong relationship between the bride and groom's family.**

In the Shona culture, there are twelve different ethnic groups which explains the slight differences in the way the lobola is conducted in each group. To the Shona group, the lobola (also called Roora) was symbolic of an honorable marriage. The chief in the olden days gave the couple a letter of acknowledgement. This predated the giving of a modern-day marriage certificate. The price or value of the lobola depended on the status of the bride, as well as the groom who wanted to impress his in-laws. If the bride was a virgin, had high education, or came from a royal family, more bride price was expected.

Cows were valued and given as bride price because they were used to plough the land, they produced [milk], and provided meat. Women were not allowed to tend or milk cows. Culturally there was division of labour between men and women, where women did the household chores and men worked in the fields and tended and milked the cows.

Bride-price payments, or Roora as it is called by the Shona, is taken as a sign of the man's love and affection for the woman he is about to marry. The Roora takes place when the man has done all necessities, which include proposing to the woman, formal introductions, and ensuring the girl was not pregnant or previously married.

I also noted that, in Zimbabwe, the Roora took place in nine stages, with each stage having its own traditions and amounts to pay. ... [T]hese stages included: introductions, groceries, negotiations for payments and making the payments, and giving gifts to the bride's parents, ending with the man providing a live goat for the Lobola entertainment.

It is also recognized that the process of Roora can differ from place to place among the twelve Shona ethnic groups.

Jonas Darko-Yeboah, *Bride Price: Lobola Narrative and Interpretation*, Victoria, B.C.: FriesenPress, 2017

The concept of lobola is translated into English as bride wealth or bride price. This translation seems to suggest the purchase of wives. You should note that such a practice is not purchase because an economic purchase ends after the final transaction without any residual obligation whilst bride wealth transfer generates a never ending current of obligations and counter obligations. Lobola is negotiated by the heads of the two families or their representatives in the presence of a messenger. Traditionally, cattle were transferred from the groom's family to that of the bride upon marriage, but now bride wealth is usually paid in cash.

Manase Kudzai Chiweshe, "Wives at the Market Place: Commercialisation of Lobola and Commodification of Women's bodies in Zimbabwe," *The Oriental Anthropologist*, 2016

In Shona society, the payment of this bridewealth, the main part of which is called roora, is the basis of marriage and family obligations. ...

Traditionally, the Shona considered roora as a noble custom that functioned as a safeguard against marital dissolution because it generally needs to be repaid upon divorce. The payment of roora gave a man custody of the children resulting from the union. ... Normally, a woman's father would not allow her to take up residence with her partner until these bridewealth payments had started. A system based on bridewealth

payment implies that the family groups have a vested interest in the marriage, and that their influence over the married couple is considerable. ...

An engagement becomes formal, and public, when the suitor approaches the girl's family to announce his intention to marry by asking a mediator (munyai) to take a head of cattle to the parents of the woman. If the family of the prospective bride consents to the union, they will start negotiating the bridewealth payments.

The negotiation and payment of bridewealth is the central part of Shona marriage procedures. Bridewealth payments, made by the prospective groom to the bride's father, are negotiated by the heads of the two families or by their representatives. Shona bridewealth payments consist of two parts, called rutsambo and roora. The payment of rutsambo gives the husband sexual rights in the woman. ...

The second part of the bridewealth payments, roora, gives the man rights over the children born to the woman. Roora is perceived as gift to the girl's parents to thank them for raising her well. Roora used to be paid in cattle, but it is increasingly paid in cash. ... The discussion of the girl's boyfriend with her paternal aunt is an important event in the marriage procedures because it is the girl's aunt who exercises control over her marriage. The strong authority of the aunt over her niece's marriage stems from the fact that the roora received from the aunt's marriage is used to pay the roora for her brother's marriage. Since it is the aunt's marriage that made her brother's family possible, she is in a position of special authority of the children of his marriage. It is customary for a girl who is interested in marrying her boyfriend to introduce the young man to her aunt.

Dominique Meekers, "The Noble Custom of Roora: the Marriage Practices of Shona of Zimbabwe," *Ethnology*, Winter 1993

## Shona for beginners

Anne, Margaret, Marvelous and Donald are native speakers of Shona, one of the official languages of Zimbabwe. Danai Gurira has peppered a number of words and phrases through their lines in the script so cleverly that their meaning is conveyed through context. But here's a brief Shona-English dictionary of some of the common terms.

<b>baba</b>	father	<b>makorokoto</b>	congratulations
<b>chii</b>	what is it	<b>mombe yeumai</b>	cow for the mother
<b>chimurenga</b>	struggle	<b>mukwasha</b>	son-in-law
<b>dzababa</b>	for the father	<b>mwana</b>	child
<b>ehe</b>	yes	<b>mwanawangu</b>	my child
<b>futi</b>	also, too	<b>ndapota</b>	please
<b>garai</b>	sit down	<b>Ndiripo</b>	I am well
<b>kana</b>	no	<b>nyarara</b>	be quiet
<b>kani</b>	please!	<b>saka</b>	so
<b>imi</b>	you (plural)	<b>shuwa</b>	sure
<b>iwe</b>	you (singular)	<b>zvakanaka</b>	that is good
<b>mai</b>	mother	<i>related to roora:</i>	
<b>mainini</b>	maternal aunt younger than mother	<b>makatizisana</b>	you have left us
<b>makadii</b>	how are you?	<b>munyai</b>	go-between
		<b>roora</b>	bride price
		<b>rooraka</b>	bride price ceremony
		<b>rusambo</b>	dowry
		<b>vhuro muromo</b>	open the mouth

# People, Places and Things Mentioned in the Script

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## PEOPLE

### Gideon Gono

(b.1959) As the governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe from 2003 to 2013, he was in a key financial position while the country's economy tanked, continuing to print the local currency in higher and higher denominations as inflation soared astronomically. One of Mugabe's closest and most trusted advisors, he was reportedly with Mugabe when he resigned late last year. Around the same time, November 2017, news broke that Grace Mugabe, Robert's much younger second wife, reportedly had a five-year affair with Gono. She and Gono were also partners in a number of business interests.

### Mashona

another name for a member of the Shona people, especially one from Zimbabwe (and part of Mozambique)

### Wangari Maathai

(1940-2011) a Kenyan environmental activist, academic, politician and Nobel Peace Prize winner. In 1976, she introduced the idea of community-based tree planting, an idea that eventually evolved to become the grassroots organization Green Belt Movement (GBM). GBM focuses on reducing poverty and conserving the environment through planting trees and has planted more than 40 million trees on community lands.

### Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

(b. 1938) the first democratically elected female president in modern Africa, having served as the president of Liberia until this past January. In November 2005, Johnson Sirleaf was elected president with almost 60% of the vote. She was reelected to a second six-year term in 2011, and has received the U.S. Presidential Medal of Honor and the Nobel Peace Prize among other honors.

## PLACES

### Gabon

a west-central African country on the Atlantic coast just south of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. French is the official language, most Gabonese work in

subsistence agriculture and forestry and mining are still controlled mostly by European companies. It has been independent of France since 1960.

### Gambia

a west African country that is the smallest on the continent, essentially a sliver of land carved out of and surrounded by Senegal. The country is formed around the Gambia River, which empties to the Atlantic. English is the official language, the economy is driven by the export of groundnuts, but other crops are grown. It has been independent of the UK since 1965.

### Great Zimbabwe

a national monument in central Zimbabwe, about 150 miles south of Harare, that protects the ruins of an ancient Bantu city called Zimbabwe. The city is thought to have had a population of around 18,000 people between the 13th and 15th centuries, and was an important trading center during the Middle Ages until the 16th century, when it was fairly quickly abandoned, perhaps because the surrounding area could no longer provide enough food for the metropolis. Three complexes make up the monument: Hill Complex, Great Enclosure and the Valley Ruins.

### Mbare

a southern suburb of Harare, the capital of and largest city in Zimbabwe. Mbare has a bus station and a huge bustling market where one can purchase sculpture, crafts, fresh produce, clothing and curios.

### Rusape

a town in Manicaland province in eastern Zimbabwe, about 85 miles southeast of Harare, a little more than halfway to Mutare on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border. Its name means "never dries out," a nod to its location near the Rusape River. Its population in 1992 was about 14,000; today it's closer to 30,000.

### sadza

a food staple in Zimbabwe, it's a porridge made from white maize meal (aka Mealie Meal)

### totem

spirit animal that is sacred to a family or clan. People with the same totem share a common ancestor and cannot marry as a safeguard against incest.

## Victoria Falls

a waterfall in northwest Zimbabwe on the Zambezi River along the Zambia-Zimbabwe border; it's 5,600 feet wide and drops about 350 feet (about twice as big as Niagara Falls on both counts). Water drops into a narrow chasm, and the spray shoots up 100 feet above the falls, giving it a smoky appearance, which inspired its traditional name Mosi-oa-Tunya ("smoke that thunders.") It got its current name when British explorer David Livingstone - the first European to see the falls, in 1855 - named it for Queen Victoria.

## ZANLA

Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, the military arm of ZANU, the Zimbabwe African National Union, established in 1963. ZANU and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) were the two main African nationalist organizations that fought against colonial rule.

## THINGS

### ancestors in Shona culture

In traditional Shona religion, ancestors' spirits are an important part of people's lives. Ancestors from both sides of the family are called vadzimu. When a person dies, his or her spirit wanders until it is given permission to come back to protect its children. If vadzimu feel neglected, they may punish their descendants with ill-health or death; families perform certain ceremonies in honor of vadzimu to keep ancestors happy and themselves protected.

### Feng-shui

literally translates as "wind and water" and is the Taoist art and science of living in harmony with the environment. A feng-shui master might consult about the balance of light and dark, location of doors and windows, orientation of furniture, or for new construction, the orientation of a house to its landscape so that the flow of energy ("chi") is maximized.

### mbira

thumb piano consisting of metal strips that vibrate and a resonator.

### Olivine Peridot

Peridot is the gem-quality version of the mineral olivine (a magnesium-iron silicate found most commonly in igneous rocks). Olivine varies from olive-green, grey-green or brown depending on how much iron is present. Most peridot (80 to 95%) comes from the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona.

## salmon croquettes

salmon, egg, breadcrumbs or flour and any variety of seasonings (onion greens, parsley, dill, bell pepper, salt, mayo, etc.) mixed together and formed into patties and fried until golden brown

## Shona

One of three official languages in Zimbabwe until 2012 (there are now 16 official languages). Shona is a member of the Bantu language family and is spoken by 11 million people, mostly in Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia as well as in Zimbabwe, where 80% of the population speaks Shona.

Photo: Austene Van (Prof. Margaret Munyewa) and Wandachristine (Anne Mwarimba). Photo by Dan Norman



# For Further Reading and Understanding

## BY DANAI GURIRA

*In the Continuum* by Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter, acting edition published by Samuel French  
*Two young women, an African American teenager and a Zimbabwean news reader, each discover they have contracted HIV from their partners*

*Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira, acting edition published by Samuel French  
*Four captive "wives" of a Liberian rebel commander try to stay alive while a fifth woman searches for her lost daughter*

*The Convert* by Danai Gurira, published by Oberon Modern  
Plays in association with the Gate Theatre's production  
*During the early days of colonization in Rhodesia, a young girl takes refuge with the Catholic Church to escape an arranged marriage*

*Familiar* by Danai Gurira, published by Smith and Kraus' Productions in Print in association with Playwrights Horizons' production  
*A Zimbabwe-American family confronts deeply buried secrets on the occasion of their oldest daughter's wedding*

## SET IN ZIMBABWE

*We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo, published by Reagan Arthur Books, 2013  
*10-year-old Darling leaves Mugabe's Zimbabwe to live with her aunt in Michigan*

*Bones* by Chenjerai Hove, published by Baobab Books, 1988  
*Marita's only son joined Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, adding to an already hard life. Her courage and independence is remembered by those who knew her*

*The Hairdresser of Harare: A Novel* by Tendai Huchu, published by African Books Collective, 2010  
*Vimbai is first wary of then befriended by a new male hairdresser at the salon where she works*

## ABOUT ZIMBABWE

*Mothers of the Revolution: The War Experiences of Thirty Zimbabwean Women* edited by Irene Staunton, published by Indiana University Press, 1991

*Culture and Customs of Zimbabwe* by Oyekan Owomoyela, published by Greenwood Press, 2002

*Shona Customs: Essays by African Writers*, edited by Clive and Peggy Kileff, published by Mambo Press, 1970

*The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* by David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, published by Monthly Review Press, 1981

*Zimbabwe: Gem of Africa*, a tourism DVD

*A Whisper to a Roar*, Virgil Films & Entertainment LLC, 2013  
*a documentary about the struggles for democracy in Zimbabwe, Egypt, Malaysia, Ukraine and Venezuela*

*Lost Kingdoms of Africa*, hosted by Dr. Gus Casely-Hayford, IWE Media Production for BBC, 2009  
*includes a visit to Great Zimbabwe*

## MUSIC OF THE MBIRA

*The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe* by Paul F. Berliner, published by 1978

*Tales of the Mbira: Fusions (ancient and modern)*, Sheer Sound, 2005

*Rise Up by Mapfumo* by Thomas Mapfumo and The Black Unlimited, sung primarily in Shona, Real World Records, 2006

