

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GJ-16:
The University of Nairobi

February 15, 1972
P.O. Box 4080,
Dar es Salaam,
Tanzania.

Mr. R.H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
535 Fifth Avenue,
New York 10017.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

It is hard to believe that less than a decade ago in Kenya the African high school graduate was a rarity. He was revered by the community and accorded many of the privileges usually set apart for a chief. With the advent of Independence, and with the subsequent emphasis placed on the pursuit of literacy and education, slowly the high school graduate is becoming common. The praise formerly reserved for the high school degree holder is now shifting to the university graduate.

At last year's conferment and awarding of degrees at the University, President Kenyatta, who also serves as Chancellor, presented close to seven hundred degrees and diplomas: Bachelor of Arts (221), Bachelor of Philosophy (14), Bachelor of Commerce (106), Bachelor of Veterinary Science (45), Bachelor of Science, Home Economics (3), Bachelor of Science (188), Master of Arts (3), Master of Science (5), Doctor of Philosophy (10).

In 1956, its first year of operation, the College decided after being deluged with applications, to make the entrance requirements more stringent. At that time, the College was prepared to handle no more than two hundred and fifty students.

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI



THE COUNCIL AND SENATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

requests the pleasure of the company of

MR. & MRS GEORGE JONES

at a congregation for the award of Certificates, Diplomas and conferment of Degrees by

THE CHANCELLOR

HIS EXCELLENCY THE HON. MZEE JOMO KENYATTA C.G.H., M.P.,

Hon. LL. D. (Nairobi) (East Africa) (Manchester) and (Haile Selassie I)

President of the Republic of Kenya

at 3.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 26th October, 1971

R.S.V.P.
Registrar
University of Nairobi
P.O. Box 30197
NAIROBI

Admission by this card

*Academic Dress
Guests are requested to
be seated by 2.30 p.m.*



The
Chancellor
Mzee Jomo
Kenyatta

(Photo Courtesy of Daily Nation)



Graduation Ceremonies

Lft: The Mayor of Nairobi,
Miss Margaret Kenyatta

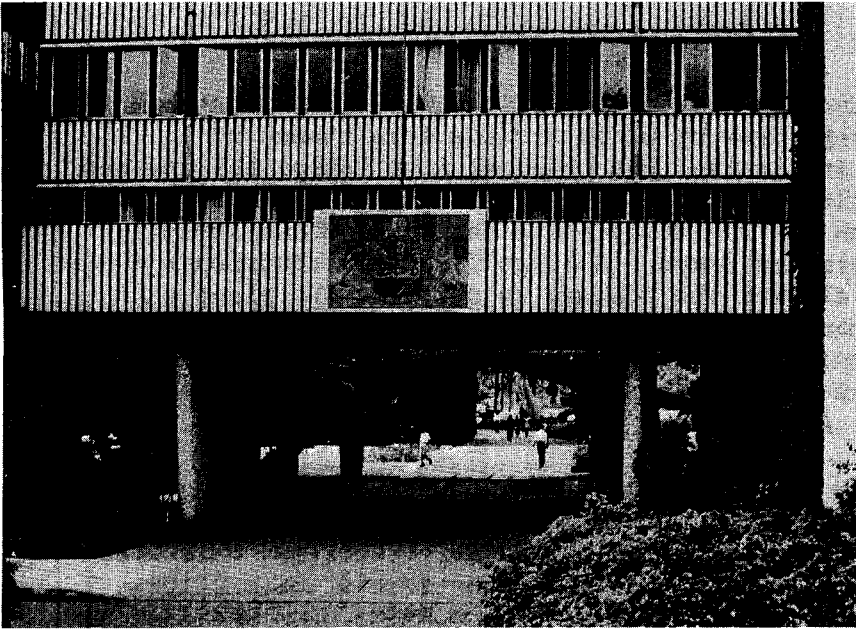
The actual beginning of the University was in 1947 when the colonial government of Kenya drew up plans for the development of a Technical and Commercial Institute. The original idea behind the college was to develop those skills which were lacking in Kenya, but in 1949 the government decided to open its registration to the entire East African Community: Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. A large financial contribution from the Asian community allowed the College to complete its plans on schedule. The Asian community had originally set out to build their own college structure as a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi, but after conferring with the Kenyan Government decided to pool resources in favor of the Royal Technical College of East Africa.

The title of the university has been a point of many discussions. The original name, Royal Technical College of East Africa, was changed in 1961 by the East African High Commission to The Royal College, Nairobi. It constituted, when referring to East Africa, the second university college—the first being Makerere in Uganda. In 1964 the name was changed again to the University College, Nairobi. The present name, University of Nairobi, was conferred in 1970 with the dissolution of the University of East Africa.

During the early years of the University much of the college life was patterned on that of the English tradition. One practice in particular which I found amusing involved daily dress. The regulation read as follows: "It has been decided that full-time students shall be required to wear a students gown, which will be of the oxford half-gown/type in a special shade of crimson. Gowns will be supplied on repayment under college arrangements."

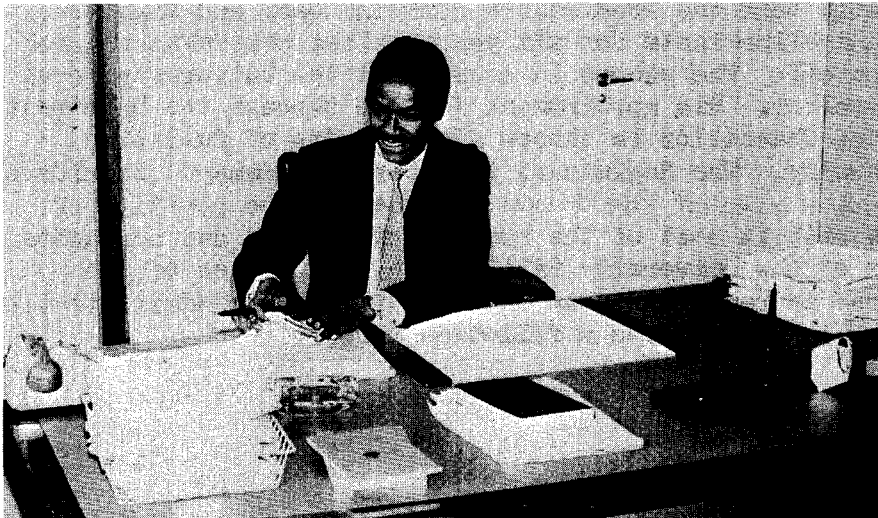
In spite of a comparatively brief history, the University has managed to build traditional values of academia while at the same time pursuing those goals which are necessary for nation building. The Vice-Chancellor at last year's graduation ceremonies reminded the student body that the University existed to serve and reflect the aspirations of the community. "Once the University gets so high on the hill that it doesn't hear or heed the cries from the people it is no longer a meaningful institution," he said.

The Vice Chancellor is a direct appointee of the President of the Republic. As Chancellor, the President is recognized as the titular head of the University. All degrees, diplomas, certificates and other awards from the University bear the President's official seal and signature. The term of the Vice Chancellor lasts for six years unless otherwise changed by the Chancellor or Council. The second in command at the University level is the Deputy Vice Chancellor. His appointment is made through the University Council. The Deputy Vice Chancellor is chosen from a cadre of full-time professors of the University. The Registrar, the third in command, shoulders most of the administrative duties of the University. Whereas the position of Vice Chancellor carries with it most of the responsibilities — and headaches — the operational aspects of the University fall within the purview of the Registrar. The Registrar is responsible to the Council for the administration of funds, although the University hires a full-time bursar.



The University
of
Nairobi

The Vice-Chancellor
Dr. J.N. Karanja



The Registrar
Mr. S.W. Karanja

As paid employees of the University, the Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, and the Registrar are directly accountable to the University Governing Council. Constitutionally the Council has the following duties: "Control and administration of the University, to administer property and funds, to receive gifts, donations, grants or other moneys and to distribute these funds according to needs. To provide for the welfare of the students of the University, to make, after consultation with the Senate, regulations governing the conduct and discipline of the students of the University." The Chairman, vice-chairman and honorary treasurer of the Council are appointed by the Chancellor. Other members of the Council include: Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, the Principals of each of the constituent colleges, ten representatives of the Government appointed by the President, four members appointed from the Senate (described below), Gandhi Memorial Academy Society, Convocation (recent graduates), Staff Association, and representation from the Student Body.

The "academics" are taken care of by the Senate of the University. The content as well as the standards for all courses must meet with the approval of the Senate before the courses can be officially recognized. The Senate is also responsible for setting the guidelines for admission to the different courses. The Senate also decides on the level of proficiency necessary for the passing of any course and subsequently decides which students should be awarded a diploma or degree.

Degrees and diplomas or certificates of the University are awarded in the following areas:

- Faculty of Agriculture (5 departments);
- Faculty of Architecture, Design and Development (5 departments);
- Faculty of Arts (8 departments);
- Faculty of Commerce (2 departments);
- Faculty of Education (5 departments);
- Faculty of Engineering (4 departments);
- Faculty of Law (3 departments);
- Faculty of Medicine (10 departments);
- Faculty of Science (8 departments);
- Faculty of Veterinary Science (6 departments).

Contiguous to the Urban center of Nairobi, the main campus is less than one mile from the innermost downtown area. This proximity brings the activities of the big city within walking distance of the majority of the student population. The remainder of the students is divided between two other campus sites: Kabete Campus, eight miles from the main campus; and, Kenyatta National Hospital, three miles from the main campus.

The location of the University not only has certain administrative limitations, such as direction of growth, but the city also provides a daily refuge for students. For many of the students, of whom the majority are rural dwellers, the pleasures of the city become too overwhelming. The effect is usually a marked drop in academic achievement. A few months

ago, my guess would have been that the most difficult adjustment for new students would be in the daily campus living situation. I felt there would have been many constraints on the young people coming from different tribes and from remote areas of East Africa to be forced into a communal eat, work and play situation. I lost sight of the fact that the majority of the population of the University have spent at least six years in a boarding school and therefore have had prior experience in group living.

For those students not drawn to the night life in Nairobi, the campus offers a well balanced extra-curricular program. Special interest groups, academic, hobby, theater and religious, are readily available. Athletic events such as cricket, football (European), volley ball, basketball, and track are played intramurally and interscholastically. Over the past five years a strong rivalry has developed among the universities in Kampala, Tanzania and Kenya. On a yearly basis, each country plays host to an olympic type weekend where all the major sports are represented. This athletic fete has maintained a high priority on the social calendar of the students - and many faculty.

Somewhat curious as to how others associated with the University felt about the school, I set about asking random questions. The listing of people included: administrators, faculty, students, general public and members of Parliament. The expressions given to me could be applied to almost any growing University in any part of the world. Staff shortage, housing limitations and the need for more financing in certain areas topped the list for the administrators. Many of the faculty expressed a dissatisfaction with the salary structure. They feel the expatriate salaries were way out of line with the local terms. Many of the over-seas lecturers with teaching load identical to that of a locally hired employee might earn twice as much. Students were mainly interested in gaining a more effective role in the administrative operation of the University. They felt their present position on the different committees was a token one. The most forceful political group, the Members of Parliament, who are responsible for the greatest portion of the University budget, emphasized the need for more University - public contact.. They asserted that a developing country such as Kenya cannot afford the luxury of an Ivory Tower. There were too many critical issues to be tackled now rather than solely focusing on the long term goals. Some of the challenges which were put forth by these law makers as immediate problems included: design of low-cost housing which will be aesthetically pleasing to the wananchi; production of furniture which is comfortable and low-priced; mounting crime rate; the growing migration and squatter problems; and finally, farming techniques which will ensure a greater crop yield. Much to the surprise and pleasure of the group, the students have accepted the challenge and are diligently experimenting with new techniques and designs.

Throughout most of the interviewing I asked varied but general questions. I did however, manage to go into more detail with two recent graduates of the University. I would like to share these interviews in this letter.

Mona, 23, is Tanzanian. She is a graduate of the class of 1971 in

Commerce. As with many of her African classmates, college for Mona was an unexpected dream come true. She felt her being able to go to secondary school was the end of her school career. For this she was most grateful. Most of the Africans prior to independence completed their education at standard eight.

Mona's parents had no formal education, and most of their skills were acquired through on-the-job training. Her one sister attends a nursing school. Contact with college graduates for Mona was very rare. Most of the people whom she knew who had had a college education were either European or Asian. "My educational future was to end at form VI," Mona said. "One day," she recalled, "I remember vaguely filling out forms which were supposedly applications for the University; but not believing such a program possible for me, I went through the process most perfunctorily." Much to Mona's surprise, six months later, May 1968, she was notified that she had been accepted by the University College, Nairobi. Notification at that time meant seeing your name listed in the local newspaper followed eventually by a formal letter from the University. When asked if she became excited with the news, Mona said certainly, but probably not for the reason most obvious. She was excited not only because she was going to college per se, but also because she was going to be independent for the first time in her life. As a devout Muslim, Mona's social life had been somewhat limited by the dictates of her religion. Such activities as dating, attending mixed parties unaccompanied by an older sibling or parent, were frowned upon by her parents and especially her grandmother. Mona's role in life had been preordained by her family. She was to finish high school, get a job, and marry a family-chosen fiance. Her acceptance by the University presented an enigma to the family - planned program. Mona, however, after many hours of discussion and pleading, gained their approval to attend college and by September was on her way to the University College, Nairobi.

Much of the impact of loneliness during the first months of College for Mona was cushioned by four of her friends who also had been accepted by the University. They were allowed to room together their freshman year. Mona and other new students who were Muslim found it initially difficult to fit into their new community. Many of the fads, beliefs and social practices of the "in students" ran contrary to their strict religious codes. "For the first year, none of the new girls would date," Mona said. "Most of our social activity took place in groups. The second and third years were a little different. Many of the girls began to date occasionally but with much discretion."

Mona also talked of another difficult adjustment for many of the Muslim students during her three years: acquiring a taste for the University food. "The food, although well prepared most of the time," she asserted, "was dominated by a Wazungu (European) menu. In the beginning we very seldom had our Ugali, Matoke or Pilau." One of the practices they all enjoyed was the four o'clock tea. After a long day at the University the afternoon break with a cup of hot tea and some biscuits was a welcome relief.

When asked what suggestions she would recommend to the University in her new position as an alumna, Mona responded with these suggestions. First, she would like to see the University moved from its present site and made more centralized in a rural setting. She feels the noisy and heavy traffic which engulfs the main campus detracted from her idea of a university atmosphere. Secondly, there should be a modification of the syllabus, subject matter must be patterned to fit the needs of East Africa. "Foreign models which we used did offer a certain amount of appropriateness structurally," Mona said, "but the content just wasn't relevant to the needs of our developing nations." Mona's final suggestion would be to bring about more contact between the University and the "real work world." She would like to see many more people who are actually in the field used as visiting lecturers and consultants. "These people really know what the score is," she asserted.

The second interviewee, Fatma, 22, comes from Zanzibar. Most of her education beyond primary school took place in Mombasa, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Until recent times, the island of Zanzibar had no secondary schools. Unlike Mona, Fatma comes from a large family. She is the third child in a family of ten. Her older brother attended college in England. Fatma explained that in the past most aspiring students went abroad for a higher education or advanced training. The majority of those students going abroad studied in England: many ventured to the United States and Russia. Most of the male students had a free choice of what subjects to pursue in these different colleges, but the expectation for the female population was either to go into nursing or into teaching.

Fatma's grandfather, who graduated from the University of Beirut, as well as many relatives who were studying medicine in England, strongly urged her to continue her education beyond the secondary school level. Her relatives did not pressure her to follow any particular professional career. Her mother, on the other hand, who had completed her education at a teachers institution on the island of Zanzibar insisted that Fatma prepare herself for a teaching position. Fatma, however, with the aid of a few members of the family and some close friends of the family, finally convinced her mother that she should pursue a career which complemented her interest in mathematics. Fatma therefore broke out of the usual female pattern and applied for a degree in Commerce at the University College, Nairobi.

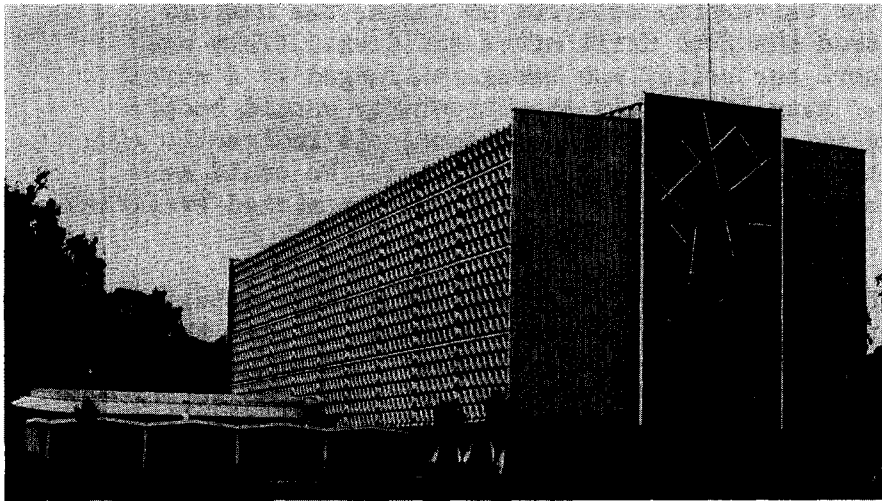
Fatma recalled that she came down with a very acute case of pre-college anxiety several months before the notification of acceptance was expected. The competition for a seat in the Commerce Department was extremely strong. Each year a high number of Asians, hoping to continue the long family pattern of merchant entrepreneurship, applied for a seat in the Commerce Department. She felt their years of practical experience would give them a marked advantage. "If I had been rejected," she reported, "it would certainly have meant resorting to my second and third choices, nursing and teaching, which I chose in order to console my mother. When the notification finally arrived and I was on the list for Commerce I could barely control my happiness. The preparation to go to college," Fatma continued, "was most anticlimactic in comparison to the waiting period."

Fatma like many of her classmates found herself ill-prepared to cope with this new away-from-home adventure. One of her biggest hurdles was the need to make decisions about everyday living problems. "At first, I felt very insecure and frightened" she confessed. "Here-to-fore, most of the decisions affecting my life were made by my mother and other senior members of the family." It appeared to Fatma that most activities which seemed to be a normal part of the University social life were in conflict with her Muslim beliefs. Her desire to take part in the full range University life, the dances, parties, the whole spectrum of boy-girl relationships, simply clashed with the Muslim ethics. Fortunately for Fatma, many other Muslim students were experiencing similar conflicts and as a result, a decision was made to form a Muslim Organization so that they might meet periodically and attempt to seek solutions to some of their mutual problems. Fatma related that it was not too long before the group realized that many of the problems appeared out of proportion because of their own lack of tolerance. Islam had been the sole ideology in their lives and now many of its doctrines were being challenged by other social practices. After this realization, she stated, many of the issues became clearer and consequently, easier to deal with. "As an example," she said, "I no longer felt ill at ease or as awkward when I was asked out by one of the boys. I no longer felt they were deliberately negating my religious beliefs, but were simply acting naturally."

The organization was especially helpful during the Muslim period of fasting, Ramadhan. Ramadhan is a period of reaffirmation of faith by the Muslims through a denial of certain activities such as eating. Whereas the big meal of the day at the University occurred at lunch, the Muslims during Ramadhan are not allowed any food until after sun down. "This was a case," asserted Fatma, "where our belief was being challenged by a normal operation of the University. Many of us felt the University should comply with our needs. On the long run, however, she continued, "it indirectly gave more meaning to the objective of Ramadhan and the fasting. We could no longer gorge ourselves at the evening meal to make up for the missed breakfast and lunch."

The organization finally expanded to a total of thirty members and as they solved many of their personal problems they began to broaden their interest to such topics as the religious beliefs and practices of other groups. Speakers representing these various religions were invited to meetings to lecture and discuss. Throughout a variety of discussions, Fatma reported that the group, at least the male contingent of the group, would never consider discussing the role of the Muslim female in the changing society. This was certainly not a topic one would feel free to talk about at home. Fatma said that it was soon obvious that the females of the group would have to meet alone and discuss this issue.

The most memorable occasions during her three years at the University were firstly, the student "riots" of 1969 when the students rebelled against an administrative decision concerning a University program. Fatma said that after a brief confrontation, the students were given exactly half an hour to clear the campus, bag and baggage. The second most memorable event for her was her being cited as the outstanding accounting student in her second and

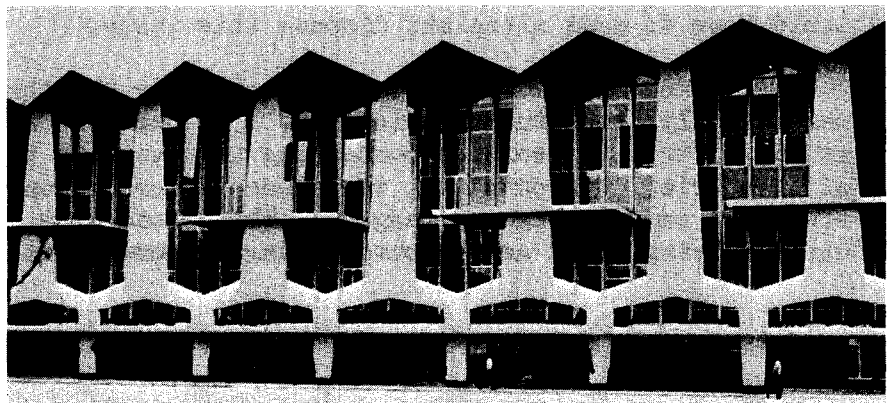


Above Lft: Mona

Above: Fatma

Left: Science Hall

Right: The Library



third years of college. The award consisted of a total of a thousand shillings which she used to help to pay for a needed operation for one of her younger sisters.

Fatma's major criticism of the University centers around the examination system. She feels it could stand a complete overhauling. "As it exists now," she said, "if one flunks one examination with a fairly low mark he is required to repeat the year not only in the subject he fails, but in all the subjects in which he had been enrolled for that year. All the good work which a student may have produced during the year is threatened by one examination." Fatma, however, did say that in some cases an appeal could be filed to sit just for the examination which was failed. Examination time is a very traumatic period for many students. One indication is that the number of students who report to the University dispensary almost doubles.

Fatma further suggested, as did Mona, that there be more emphasis placed on practical experience. Her recommendation is that students should spend at least six months in the field after the second academic year. This exposure, she feels, would not only allow many students to see what the "real" world is like, but would also give students a better concept of their chosen career and their suitability.

Asked if she missed the University, Fatma thought for a moment and then replied with a qualified yes. She reports she undoubtedly misses the "carefree" life of the student and the intellectual stimulation which the University environment provided, but on the other hand, the needs of her country are so great that her talents and skills have been put to immediate use. She feels it is exciting to see things change around her as a result of her contribution. "It's no longer theoretical," she explained. "If I make an error, someone suffers for it. It made me very uneasy in the beginning, but with a little experience I have learned to accept the responsibility."

Fatma did finally confess that she would indeed like to return to the University to undertake advanced work in her field, but right now, as she puts it, "there is just so much to be done and so many kilometers to go before I lala / (sleep)."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "George Jones". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Received in New York on March 2, 1972.