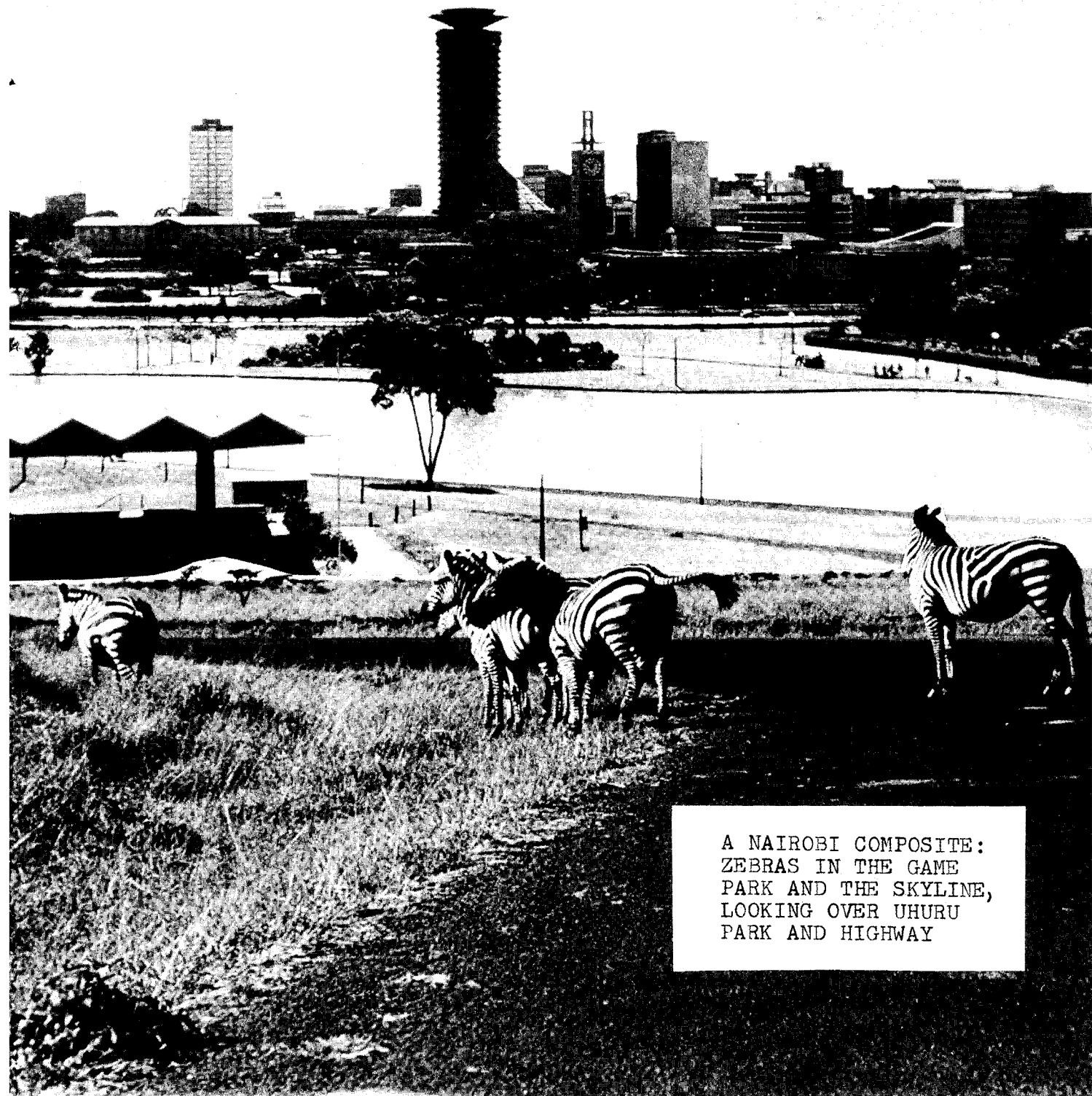


INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS
IJS - 37 KENYA NOTEBOOK: SOME FIRST
IMPRESSIONS



A NAIROBI COMPOSITE:
ZEBRAS IN THE GAME
PARK AND THE SKYLINE,
LOOKING OVER UHURU
PARK AND HIGHWAY

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

WITHOUT WRITER'S CONSENT

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS - 37 KENYA NOTEBOOK:
SOME FIRST IMPRESSIONS

P. O. Box 14246
Nairobi, Kenya
18th April 1973

Mr. Richard Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10017
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

This newsletter is my first report from Kenya. It is rather different from the usual IJS newsletter but perhaps more in keeping with the Institute "news" letter tradition, which has grown up since the 1920's. I depart from my regular practice of writing analytical essays because I have not been given an opportunity to collect enough institutional data to analyze. I am still awaiting research clearance from the Office of the President of Kenya. So I have decided to report a few of the adventures of the Spitzbergs three since arrival. Then I shall briefly indulge my analytical instincts by suggesting some questions which these experiences raise about education. My mode of report will be that of a modified diary: I shall tell a few stories.

I should preface these vignettes with a word of caution. Any white American writing about a black African country -- and often writing critically as I shall be -- must guard against being prejudiced and/or paternalistic in his approach to the problems of the country. This caution is even more important when the writer is a native of the American South such as myself. But also the white American with liberal instincts must be careful not to look at African problems through roseate glasses and avoid calling them as he sees them. I shall probably suffer from both faults; but at least I am aware of the pitfalls and you are on notice of them as well.

So, to begin, as they say, at the beginning.

I. THE ARRIVAL

We flew into Nairobi from Geneva on an overnight flight. Morning began showing its bright face over Khartoum, just in time for us to see the joining of the White and Blue Niles. The rest of the flight took us over arid and mountainous country, with the climax giving a spectacular view of the Great Rift Valley. My impression of Kenya from 30,000 feet was quite different from what I had expected: the aridity of the landscape looked more like California high desert than the climate of an equatorial country.

After landing at Nairobi at an airport once modern but now in need of a facelift, we worked our way through interminable customs, passport and health queues. Everyone was very nice but very slow.

We followed a number of Asians (as used in East Africa, a description of people from the Indian Sub-Continent). It was interesting to see how closely the African officials questioned each Asian. The grilling was reminiscent of the patronizing and demeaning enquiries which have become a fact of life for both Asians and Africans when they enter the United Kingdom. But we went through with no difficulty.

After emerging from customs with our luggage, we were besieged by a half-dozen porters, each picking up one bag. Another half-dozen had to be rejected. Immediately a taxi driver came up and asked if we needed a taxi. I said we would need one as soon as we changed some money into Kenyan currency. He said fine, he would wait. Bobbi (my wife) then went to the bank queues which were very long and served by only two tellers. I was deputised to take care of Edward, our then two-and-one-half year old, tired, wet, but still fantastically energetic son. About forty-five minutes later we finally bundled ourselves and our luggage into the taxi.

The ride into Nairobi from the Airport was our first exposure to Kenyan countryside: large flat expanses covered often with high grass and some brush, interrupted occasionally by a rolling hill; ending at the base of mountains in the far distance. We kept expecting to see lions and elephants and gazelles; especially since we passed an entrance to the Nairobi Game Park. One of our friends from Britain had told us that when he was in Kenya in the early 60's, he saw wild animals on the ride into Nairobi from the old airport. Edward kept asking when we would see the giraffes. Instead of giraffes we quickly saw clusters of apartment houses which could have been transplanted from any barrio in Southern California.

Within ten minutes we were in central Nairobi, travelling along Uhuru (Swahili for Independence) Highway, bordered on one side by Uhuru Park, a pleasant recreational area, and on the other by a chain of hotels and the central business district. My initial impression of downtown Nairobi was that of a very young town grown into a plastic city overnight; still a pleasant place but threatened by big developers.

When we finally came to our hotel on the outskirts of the central area and turned into the entry drive, I felt as though we had just turned out of the 1970's into the 1920's or '30's. The Fairview Hotel with its stone buildings and manicured gardens looked like a colonial dream. The

dream was rudely interrupted by a bill from our taxi driver for 100 KS (@\$14.50) for the cab ride. I later learned that 40 KS (@\$6.00) was the statutory rate for a trip from the airport. But at least we were on solid Kenyan ground and near a comfortable bed; all that one wants after an overnight flight.

2. THE AIR FREIGHT STORY

The week prior to our departure for Kenya we had left London for Geneva. When we turned up with our luggage we were told that it would cost \$500 overweight to ship it with us on the plane. We quickly sought an alternative. We were told we could airfreight the excess baggage at a special rate of one-third the overweight cost. We took our luggage to the air freight office and the freight officer assured us that it would be in Nairobi by the time we were. Our airline to Geneva used British European Airways as its agent, and BEA does not fly to Nairobi. We naively thought that BEA would send our luggage to BOAC for shipment to Kenya, for this required only the transfer of the luggage from one London terminal to another.

When we arrived in Nairobi there was no sign or record of our air freight consignment. I called the airport repeatedly, ninety per cent of the time not even getting through to the switchboard. When I did make telephone contact I never talked to the same person twice. I then made a number of trips to the airport, because I had been told by former Fellows that often there is a discrepancy between the records in the office and the luggage actually in the warehouse. So I went on an "eye-balling" expedition. To get permission to violate the sanctity of the import bonded warehouse, I had to climb the bureaucratic ladder. First I talked to the African clerk. Then I was sent to the Asian baggage manager. Finally I made it up to the African airport manager. I was given fifteen minutes to search the warehouse. I could have been given ten hours and still would not have found it -- it was not there. After my complaints the airport authorities sent a telex to London to search for the luggage.

A week later (two weeks after dispatch) we still did not have our belongings. Phone calls were to no avail. Finally, Bobbi was so irate that she convinced me (we are a liberated family) to go to the local British Airlines manager to complain. We stalked into his office just as he was closing up shop on Saturday and finishing his last cup of tea; luckily we had met a mutual friend in the lobby of his buildings, so he did not bodily evict us. In fact he was quite cordial. And he sent off another telex.

The next day our mutual friend was at the airport and searched the import warehouse. He found our air freight, which had arrived that day. On Monday I called the airport to confirm the arrival of the consignment

and was told there was no record of it. Tuesday found me once again at the airport searching the books myself. Our consignment number had been changed, although it was listed under our name for anyone to see. Once this was sorted out, I rescued our goods from the warehouse; again with a half-dozen porters to assist.

The moral of this story is that many of the snafus which one must confront in Africa often have European origins. BEA had been the source of the delay: they sent our goods to Geneva for transshipment to Nairobi, an indirect route which made them more money but guaranteed us more delay. However, our luggage arrived. Just in time: we were to move into our new flat that day.

3. THE HOUSE HASSLE

Looking for housing in Nairobi was a real shock. We had been told by former Fellows that one could find huge, furnished houses to let for \$200/month. Times have changed. We could not find a mud and wattle hut to rent for that amount. It seems that whenever we visit a country the economy hears we are coming, and immediately the rate of inflation moves up to above 10% during the year prior to our arrival but always a year or two after our informants have left. And then the economy adds a couple of bonus percentile points to the rate just when we arrive. We ended up paying a rent equivalent to that which we paid in central London.

One incident in the process of renting the house deserves report. The real estate agent was an old Kenya settler with classic colonial attitudes about the Africans. Her prejudices did not know colonial bounds. When we were negotiating the final details the day before we were to move into the flat, the landlord said that he intended to raise the rent \$30/month. I was indignant. The real estate agent, being a proper colonial businesswoman, was indignant as well. She assured me this is not the way business is done in Kenya, and promised to talk to the landlord and have the rent reduced to the original amount. "But", she said in her most confidential voice, "you must understand that the landlord is a 'Jewish' gentlemen". So I, in my most confidential voice, replied: "But so am I".

4. MY NEW FOUND PREJUDICE

Anyone coming to live in an East African community will immediately know the region's prime prejudice: against Asians. These Indians who came to Kenya in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries are the commercial class of East Africa and have prospered. The feeling against them among the Africans is quite strong: politicians in Kenya use language quite similar to that of General Amin next door in talking about their Kenyanization program, which is now mainly an Asian expropriation program. Although I should in fairness say that the Kenyans, unlike the Ugandans, distinguish between Asian citizens and Asian non-citizens; only the latter come in for regular abuse.

My own impression of the Asians is that they are very capable people who make a real contribution to the Kenyan economy and society. However, they get as much of their wealth as possible out of the country, and they treat their African customers and employees with little respect. I have noticed a number of times while waiting to pay for some item that an Asian shopkeeper will take an African's money and then literally slam the change down in front of him with a very impatient and condescending glance. The African employees are never given responsible positions -- I have never seen an African man or woman at a cash register in an Asian store.

I find the African/Asian enmity quite disappointing, because the Asian community has made a great contribution to the economic development of the country. But there is one part of the Asian stereotype which is embedded in the conventional Kenyan prejudice and which I have come to share: the reckless Asian driver. The driving record of all races in East Africa must be bad; that is if the high insurance rates are any indicator. But I have never seen driving like that of the Asians. If I see a Mercedes coming, I automatically shift into a very defensive driving position; and if I see a Mercedes with an Asian driver (which is the case about 50% of the time), then I am tempted to pull off the road.

I have met Asians coming down the wrong side of the road, and this practice is not due to lack of familiarity with driving on the left side of the road. The speed of Asian drivers makes Nairobi streets look like a full scale East African Safari Rally every day, especially at rush hours.

Bobbi and I have established a hierarchy of bad drivers in Kenya. At the top of the list are the Asians (especially the Sikhs, always recognizable by their turbans). Next come European women, who seem to express by their driving the aggression bred by their luxurious but boring life in Nairobi. Third are the inexperienced Africans, who are less aggressive behind the wheel but who still like to set new track records between roundabouts. And finally, European males. I should indicate that I am, in Kenyan terms, a European male; with apologies to Europe. Europeans are the whites in Africa. Now in case someone thinks this listing reflects not fact but well established racial and sexual prejudice, let me say that the list is the result of many narrow escapes and is agreed to by my liberated wife. So I have come to share a prejudice; but a prejudice based strongly in fact. Perhaps the Asians would get along better with the Africans if they did not view driving as a hunting sport.

5. A SHIPPING SAGA

Although one might conclude from the air freight story that any consignment which could cost as much as \$500 would include all of a family's possessions, let it be said that it only reflects inflated transport costs, not the volume of goods included. Since we Spitzbergs are turtles -- we have to carry all of our goods on our figurative backs -- we had a large

consignment of belongings shipped from England to Kenya. As is par for that course, our goods were tied up by strikes at Liverpool for almost a month. Then the boat was delayed in transit. Three months after dispatch from our flat in London, we still did not have our shipment. Now this lack of shipped belongings was especially distressing to us because it was mainly books; and without a TV in Kenya we needed our printed opiate.

Soon after arriving in Kenya I had contacted the local shipping agent to give him our address and phone number. But no word. Early in March I called and was told that our goods had arrived at the port in Mombasa. By a quirk of fate our upstairs neighbor turned out to be one of the directors of the local shipping agent; by another quirk he was out of town for all of our travail. But he warned us that if we left our consignment to be shipped by East African Railways it could take weeks, even months, to get it from Mombasa to Nairobi. He instructed his import officer to have it shipped by road. That particular instruction never was implemented. A week later we still had not heard about our goods. I rang again and was told that they were already consigned to the railways and that there was nothing the agent could do about them until they emerged from the morass of the railways.

A few days later I rang once more and learned that the boat had just docked the day before. (No explanation was given for the contradiction between this and the former story.) No word for another week. I rang again, and the import clerk informed me that the consignment was in Nairobi. I went down to take care of the customs paperwork, and the import officer told me to report to the bonded warehouse the next day to clear the shipment through customs. The next day Bobbi and I turned up but there were no trucks and boxes. Another phone call to the import clerk. He said that East African Railways had sent the wrong notice. I then stalked down to the shipping agent's office; he was at a loss to explain what had happened. He rang the railways and talked to the appropriate official: both parties spoke in English to each other but each had to spell a number of words to make himself understood. I was assured that the goods would be at the warehouse the next morning. The next day we drove apprehensively to the warehouse; the shipment was there! After a sequence of aggravations the mere reporting of which cannot begin to communicate.

6. MASTERS AND SERVANTS

An aspect of European life in Kenya with which I am still uncomfortable is having domestic help. I should not really restrict this part of life to the Europeans, because Asians and middle class Africans also have domestics, all of whom are called correctly but unfortunately "servants". Because of the high cost of the usual aids such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners, it is cheaper to hire help around the house.

Although this next justification sounds more like a rationalization than a rationale, it is true that if one can afford to hire domestic help,

he is making a significant contribution to the urban economy of Kenya because of the high unemployment rates in the cities. Each year Nairobi grows by about 6%. Most of this growth comes from rural-urban internal migration. Out of these rural migrants, in the first year after urban migration about 24% of these people are unemployed. Even after three years in Nairobi, over 10% are still without work. Many of these migrants seek domestic employment as a second choice occupation. Those who continue to be unemployed often are limited only to seeking jobs as domestics.

Since we have a young son, we wanted an ayah (Swahili for nursery nurse) to help take care of him and also to help us around the house. Employees at the hotel besieged us on behalf of friends and relatives who wanted to work for us. Not only did we get ayah candidates but also a number of men who wanted to be cook-house cleaners, which is a male role in Kenya. When we moved into our flat, we had a number of people just walk in off the street to ask for jobs.

Each candidate had a collection of letters of recommendation from supposed past employers. I say "supposed" past employers, because at one point we had a cook candidate who had letters from American diplomats. Being relatively thorough people, we checked out these recommendations. When Bobbi contacted the American Embassy, she found the referees had left the country long before the dates on the letters. There seems to be a thriving market in letters of reference for domestics.

We were able to recruit an ayah for Edward who has been superb. Rebecca Wambui is a Kikuyu -- the dominant tribe in the Nairobi area and the politically dominant tribe in Kenya. She had been an ayah before and had also managed a house. Her father, Wallis Kuria, had been a leader in a nearby rural area where he and she still live. He had been a prosperous farmer until the early 50's, when the British arrested him and appropriated all of his land, because he was suspected of being a Mau Mau leader. Rebecca claims that he had nothing to do with Mau Mau. And this period affected her in another way as well: her school was closed after she finished the 5th year because of suspected Mau Mau activity in the area; so she never completed primary school.

Although Rebecca has had only limited schooling, her English is much better than that of all of the other potential ayahs we interviewed. She had worked for a number of European families and had taught herself English. Also she speaks fluent Swahili, a language which Kikuyu children learn at school, not at home. She is obviously a bright woman.

Rebecca manages our house for us. She is exceedingly industrious. I make this point because of a continuing legacy from the old Settlers' prejudice -- the shiftless Africans. The stereotype -- just like that of the American South -- hangs on. From my experience here, the Africans are every bit as industrious and energetic as any Britisher motivated by the Protestant ethic; it is just that Africans operate in a different and

apparently slower time frame than the Europeans. Anyone who has ever been out into the Kenyan villages and seen African women carrying water and firewood for miles would be hard put to justify the stereotype. The only people who fit it are some of the African white collar workers and managers who seem to think that, after having "made it", work becomes a spectator sport. But this seems to be a class stereotype often as applicable in Western societies as in African ones. In Rebecca Wambui's case, we have found that she is capable, industrious, and quite efficient. Indeed, there never seems to be enough work for her.

The society itself does little to help domestics, who are, as a group, relatively well educated and often see their domestic job as a stepping stone to a more lofty position. Rebecca, though atypically of limited education, is quite ambitious. But there are no clear channels for her to improve her skills. There are adult education programs in Kenya but none directed to the needs of the urban employed poor. Her next ambition in life is to graduate from domestic employment to work as a cleaner for a company in central Nairobi; the attraction of this particular job is that it would allow her the security of living in one place and the opportunity for her to have her children living with her where they could go to school. But for someone with Rebecca's intelligence and her independence this seems to be a remarkably limited horizon.

Rebecca has two children. Her husband died when they were very young. The children now live with her mother in Kikuyu, a rural settlement not far from Nairobi. Rebecca lives in a room in a "servants' quarter" near our house. She visits her children every week-end. When the children have vacations from school, they come to live here. This family arrangement is altogether typical for the domestics in Nairobi.

Having domestic help has had a subtly corrupting influence on us. On the two nights Rebecca is away (which is one more than any other ayah we know about), we feel as though it is an imposition to dry dishes. And we never wash the clothes but put them aside for Rebecca. We do most of the cooking; but this is changing, because we are teaching Rebecca to cook. We are giving her cooking lessons, not to get out of cooking -- we are both enthusiastic chefs -- but to give Rebecca an additional marketable skill. Cooks get about one-third more than just houseboys or ayahs. We are now paying Rebecca as much as males who do cooking: this is unheard of in Nairobi.

I am still quite uncomfortable having someone around "waiting" on me. Bobbi has adjusted better. But we still clear the table and do most of the cooking. Another strange feeling for us is having someone outside of the immediate threesome around all of the time. Yet we enjoy Rebecca as a person and have learned more from her about Kenya than from any other single person.

One of Rebecca's other happy qualities is that she is quite politically aware. She is familiar with all of the issues of the day and has strong

opinions about them. She can tell us all of the dirt about high ranking politicians. So we have our own resident Kenyan Jack Anderson (for the non-American reader, a famous American muckraking journalist), as well as an ayah.

But even without Rebecca's help, I would have learned about one aspect of Kenyan politics in some detail -- the politics of the government bureaucracy in Kenya. To this tale of woe we next turn.

7. THE SORROWFUL TALE OF AFFILIATION AND CLEARANCE

Before I arrived in Kenya I was told that one of the petty annoyances of the place for someone like me was that I would have to get research clearance. It seems that originally the requirement for research clearance was designed to keep the country informed about the results of research by requiring that Western Scholars sign a promise to inform the Office of the President about the results of their work. More recently there seems to be some indication that the purpose of clearance has been to cut down on the number of nosey scholars through the erection of various procedural barriers. My experience so far has been that the process has been quite annoying; and I would certainly give it credit for being more than petty.

Before I arrived in Kenya I wrote to the Director of the Institute for Development Studies and also the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Nairobi, whose names had been given to me by American foundation officials. I said that I would like to establish some sort of affiliation with the University, because I thought it would be helpful in my research and would expose me to colleagues who could criticize my naive impressions of what I saw. I offered to teach on a voluntary basis or do whatever else might be useful to the University in return for affiliation. I never received replies to these letters. I should emphasize that when I initiated my contacts with the University, I had no knowledge of any necessary connection between clearance and University affiliation; nor, might I add, did any of my American contacts or, it turns out, did any of the officials at the University.

Shortly after arriving in Nairobi I contacted the Director of the University Institute of Development Studies. I also spoke to an American member of that Institute. The latter person advised me that the politics of the University were such that the Institute had had its privileges of offering unlimited affiliation restricted and that there might be some difficulty for me. After innumerable attempts at contacting the Director and leaving messages, I finally was able to make an appointment to see him. When I went into his office he shuffled his papers and said that he had seen my correspondence and papers but had misplaced them that morning. He went on to ask me questions about my plans in Kenya which indicated that if he had seen my correspondence and papers, he had never read them. When I pressed him on the affiliation point, he said that the executive committee of the Institute had not met and that it would have to meet to

consider my application. He said he would call a meeting in the next few days. He never said anything about the external pressures on the Institute. He only reminded me that I would need research clearance. He then suggested that I contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education and said he would be in touch. I still have not heard from the Director of the Institute of Development Studies. Telephone calls to him through his secretary were never returned. Luckily I had already contacted the Dean of the Faculty of Education.

The Dean of the Faculty of Education gave me an appointment immediately. His first comments to me were that he had lost my correspondence and papers. He had seen them when they first arrived but he had not seen them since. He was completely candid. He then said there would be no problem in affiliating with the University. But first I would need research clearance.

So I filled out the appropriate forms and hand-delivered them to the Office of the President. The official in charge of clearance accepted my application and told me there was nothing else I need do; that he would contact the Dean and proceed from there. He said he would confirm my association with the University.

Three weeks passed and still no further news. I rang up the Dean of the Faculty of Education on a weekly basis to see if he had heard anything. The answer was always negative. Finally, the Dean rang the Office of the President to enquire about a separate matter and mentioned my case to another official. This bureaucrat told the Dean to have me come by and see him. I went to see him; he had to have his clerk go to the reserve file to find my application, which had been completely filed away. Noted on the file was a handwritten comment: awaiting letter from Dean of Faculty of Education confirming University affiliation and letter from New York. The only problem was that the former official had asked neither me nor anyone else for either. I then asked the second bureaucrat exactly what the letter from the University should say. He said it should confirm my official affiliation with the University. I then pointed out to him that it was usual for the Office of the President to give clearance before University affiliation was awarded; that in fact the University made clearance a condition of affiliation. He said that the practice of the Office of the President had changed. I asked him to ring the Dean and tell him that; he said he was too busy. My response was that I felt like I was in the middle of a circle around which the egg was chasing the chicken. He did not smile.

I then went back to the Dean and told him my continuing tale of woe. He said he would ring the Vice Chancellor of the University. Another week passed and no word from anyone. I rang the Dean a number of times but no response. Finally I wrote a letter indicating that if I could not get University affiliation and clearance within a week I would have to start arranging to leave Kenya. I rang the Dean again in a couple of days, and he said he had received a memo from the Vice Chancellor approving my affiliation with the University. He also said he had written a letter to the Office of the President and suggested that I hand-deliver it to expedite consideration; I did.

At this writing three more weeks have passed and still no word from the Office of the President. I have written yet another letter, this time to the Office of the President to plead my case; but still no action.

I should clearly indicate that none of this should be ascribed to a conspiracy against me or any substantive problem in my particular case. I have, since this series of problems has begun, heard of numerous similar situations. It is clear that the bureaucracy in the Office of the President is either unwilling or unable to deal quickly and efficiently with the rising volume of applications which the requirement of research clearance has prompted. What might have been an effective mode of information collection in the past has become a major obstacle to foreign scholars in Kenya. I doubt that this effect is intended by the political authorities, because Kenya is a relatively free country where scholarship seems to flourish. The impediment does not seem to be one of political vetting but rather of bureaucratic inefficiency and indecision. Especially the latter: no one wants to take the rap for letting me do my research in Kenya.

One footnote on the effect of University affiliation. It seems to be strictly a formal procedure devised to cope with the clearance requirements. It carries with it only the opportunity to use the library. Never have I dealt with a group of academics less willing to spend time talking about substantive intellectual problems. No one seems to want to talk about Kenya's intellectual, educational, and developmental problems in either a formal or informal way. Nor does there seem to be any interest in accepting assistance volunteered by outsiders. It seems that such voluntary work -- teaching or research assistance -- is viewed as a threat to a local's teaching job, shaky academic qualification, or professional performance; even though the offerings of the various faculties are limited indeed.

This wariness to proffered assistance by foreign nationals temporarily resident in Nairobi is not unique to the University. For most voluntary efforts, work permits are necessary. Even when there is an accepted need for the services of a foreign national, the authorities do not know how to make effective use of them. For example, Bobbi, who is a systems analyst, has had great difficulty in finding any sort of work -- voluntary or paid -- even though there is a great shortage of such people in Kenya. When she finally did get a job with the Ministry of Finance and Planning -- paid, by the way -- the work required of her was so elementary that it easily could have been done by a Kenyan secondary school graduate trained in programming at one of the local schools. And there was very little of even this simple work; Bobbi spent much of her time reading novels at her superior's suggestion. When Bobbi pointed the situation out to her boss and asked if she could make the job more interesting by involving herself in the overall project (a demographic study financed by A.I.D. and run by the University of North Carolina), she was told to sit in her corner and do her coding. At the risk of some exaggeration, this is like telling a neurosurgeon to stand on the queue and jab hypodermic needles into a thousand arms. I should add that there was a great deal of systems work to be done on the project and no one else to do it. After being told to sit in her corner, Bobbi did a boredom calculation and decided that it would be more boring to sit in the office and read novels than to sit at home and read them; so she quit. To date she has not found anyone who will use her services on a voluntary basis.

Bobbi's story is not unique. We have met a number of wives and even hired consultants whose services are going to waste, because no attempt is made to use them. Each year thousands, even millions, of aid dollars are spent in importing expatriate "experts", when many of the expert jobs could be done by resident foreign nationals or their spouses on a voluntary or inexpensive payment basis; but there is no government policy on this matter and no information clearing house to match expatriates to Kenyan needs. What one has is a Kenyan government and society which is asking for expert aid from outside but ignoring it in its midst.

This digression about voluntary service and its difficulties in Kenya brings me back to the clearance and affiliation problem. Clearance is an impediment to one sort of voluntary service: the voluntary generation of research information which might be of use to Kenya. The pro forma character of university affiliation means that another sort of voluntary service -- teaching -- is lost.

With luck I shall be able to report later that I have received research clearance and that University affiliation developed into an exciting and interesting personal experience. But even if both situations continue on their disappointing course, I will have gained some insight into the dynamics of Kenyan society in the process of coping: but I regret to say that the insight will be more akin to the insight into pain which a tooth-ache gives than to that which one would hope contact with a new society would offer.

8. SOME TENTATIVE IMPRESSIONS AND QUESTIONS

This tale of a tenderfoot and his family in Kenya can serve two purposes: first it gives you information about my perspective on Kenya; second, it allows me to formulate some questions to ask of the educational system, which is what I am supposed to be doing if and when I am given the opportunity.

One impression I have from my dealings with the local representatives of airlines and shipping agencies and the Office of the President is that there is a great reluctance on the part of minor bureaucrats to make decisions and take positions either in their dealings with me or with others. These officials are always looking to higher authority for decisions. Now this characteristic is not unique to Kenya; it is a problem in all bureaucracies everywhere. But this approach is ubiquitous and extreme here. And it affects the social and economic life of the community. I am often impressed when I am forced to deal with a public service in Kenya by the length of the queues of Africans waiting to have their problems considered, which may in large part result from the inability of minor bureaucrats to make even simple and minor decisions. This problem is complemented and exacerbated by a tendency at the top to centralize decision-making and to chastise the lowly bureaucrat who steps out of line.

On the basis of the limited information at hand, one cannot draw a causal chain connecting this unwillingness or inability to take decisions

among the white collar workers to the educational system. However, one characteristic of the educational system reported by every writer on the subject is the rote learning orientation of both primary and secondary schools and the preoccupation of the whole system with examinations graded by a higher authority. I would argue on first impression that there may be a relationship between this rote learning and examination preoccupation and the unwillingness and inability of minor bureaucrats to make decisions. These white collar workers have never been asked to take responsibility in the course of their life in educational institutions. Further support is given to this impression by my experience with Africans who have had only minimal exposure to the educational system. For example, Rebecca, our ayah, who left school after five years, takes charge of all problems she must deal with -- including an intractable two-and-one-half year old -- and never hesitates to make a decision. I admit a limited sample for this impression, but nevertheless it at least suggests a question to ask of the educational system: is there any relationship between the culture of the classroom and the seeming lack of autonomy among those who are more educated in the society?

I have a second impression which is based mainly upon my dealings with the shipping agents and air freight representatives: the lack of mastery of English is the source of many social and economic problems in the country. A lot of time and money are wasted just because the language of commerce is English and those who are involved in it are not comfortable in the use of the language. Although Swahili plays a role in the social life among the various tribal groups, it has little impact on the economy of the country. English is the commercial language. But the mastery of English among most of the Kenyan white collar workers is so limited that one often finds situations such as the one I described where Africans have to spell words over the telephone to each other before they can proceed to the substance of the conversation. If English is to continue as the language of commerce, then this impression raises grave questions about the caliber of the teaching of English in the Kenyan educational system. One must ask how, given the constraints of money and personnel under which the educational system operates, one can quickly improve the use of English at least in the commercial transactions of the country.

A third impression pertinent to the educational system is the relatively high educational attainment of the street merchants, newspaper hawkers, and other self-employed, small traders who make up the lucky percentage of the new urban migrants. The articulateness and clever sales strategies of the street traders testify to the human waste which the underemployment of these people entails. Many of them could perform more effectively in the formal economy than those already in it; but because of restrictions of paper certification, tribal connection, and longer urban experience, these people are put at the end of the list for jobs for which they are in fact well qualified.

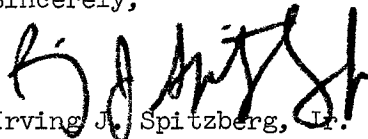
The un- and underemployment of a large number of capable and educated Kenyan citizens raises questions about the relevance of the education provided, the mode of examination, and the relationship between the educational system and a society which is 90% rural and agricultural and is likely to remain that way for the foreseeable future. Indeed from the social products of the educational system I have met and seen, I would be tempted to embark on a Maoist reform of the whole educational system. But this tentative conclusion is pure speculation meant only to call into question the educational system as it is, not to recommend a particular action.

A final impression of the society with educational implications is the difficult and even oppressed role of women. Women domestics receive a third less than men; and domestic employment is a prime area of work for women. When one travels out into the countryside, he can see the traditional role of women, which is that of doing much hard physical labor -- especially carrying water and firewood -- as well as taking care of the home and children. This role has become more trying since World War II, because of the increase in the rate of urban migration by men, who have left the women to assume all of the agricultural duties in addition to their traditional obligations, which, incidentally, already include many agricultural responsibilities. Some women also go to the cities to escape the demands of the rural economy but find there even less employment than men and great discrimination in wages.

There is the occasional woman leader -- e.g., Margaret Kenyatta, a daughter of the President, as luck would have it, is Mayor of Nairobi -- but most of the women have a subservient role in the society. The educational system encourages this subservience by providing fewer secondary places for women than for men and also fewer adult educational opportunities. One must ask what role the educational system can play in the emancipation of women in Kenyan society.

This brief exercise in extracting questions of educational interest from my personal experiences is suggestive not exhaustive. I would not claim that any of these questions is the most pressing facing Kenyan education and society. I would only suggest that until I am allowed to look more closely at the Kenyan educational system in operation, these questions deserve serious consideration based upon the evidence of my personal experiences with the society. Whether or not I shall be in a position to pursue these questions and others is quite out of my hands at the moment. In the meantime, it has been an educational experience for me to learn enough to ask them.

Sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

Received in New York on May 2, 1973



ABOVE: THE FAIRVIEW HOTEL

BELOW: REBECCA, OUR AYAH, WITH EDWARD
AND HER OWN CHILDREN

