

Clegg News 1997

One of the many innovatory ideas flowing from the University of Dar es Salaam is to send out invitations to meetings after, rather than before, the date of the meeting. This building in to the system of the excuse for not turning up is something I like and I am trying to develop it into a way of life. Which accounts, in part, for why this Christmas letter has not reached you until long after the event.

I am still in Tanzania; my job is in HRD, which has nothing to do with the change of life, but reflects the trend in the aid business to replace all simple descriptions with long meaningless phrases which are then reduced to an acronym. What it all means is that I am employed to help out a bit at the University doing mainly, (another characteristic of this business) things I have no qualification for or previous experience of, like setting up a Microsoft network.

If you spend your time wrestling with the inconsistencies of Microsoft software in a place like Tanzania you cannot avoid being stuck by two things. The first is the marketing genius of anyone who can sell such a third rate product so successfully and the second is that there is perhaps something amiss with a world in which the annual government income in a country of around 25 million people is the same as that earned by Mr Gates in a fortnight. Tanzania, they say, is the world's second poorest country; a fact which reflects less, I suspect, the state of the country's economy than the state of the country's economists, for Dar is nevertheless awash with people driving around in the latest Japanese chromium plated 4 litre 4WD's that cost more than 10 years' their declared annual income. It is a place of private wealth and public squalor, a capitalist's dream capital. The old colonial buildings that gave the city its considerable charm and distinction are rapidly being bulldozed to make way for marble-faced universally undistinguished multi-story icons of unrestrained capitalism. So what, the phrase goes, is new?

I continue to work for the Dutch and so make frequent visits to the Netherlands, both something I enjoy. Everybody knows that the Netherlands is a very flat country full of very tall people who speak perfect English. What few people know about the Netherlands, however, is that it is a country without stones. This has all kinds of interesting economic, ecological and psychological consequences. They are the world's greatest importers of rocks. The rocks needed for keeping out the sea, for example, are all imported from Finland by the huge boatload and a Dutch water engineer I met in Namibia bought a dry stone wall surplus to his landlord's requirements there and shipped it in a container back home instead of his furniture. What, I reflect, are the psychological consequences, for a nation having all that water, of not being able to throw anything into it.

In Dar I spend most of the time working. This is because (a) I like it that way and (b) I am not a sea person. One thing that has recently influenced my life however, is my appointment as chief conductor of the Dar es Salaam Choral Society. This has less to do with my ability as a conductor than the lack of such ability in anyone else. However, we had a good Christmas concert of music from eleven different countries sung in seven different languages, this despite the fact that the Old Lutheran Church (much more distinguished than its better known sister across in Windhoek) ran out of electricity the second night. Two thousand years ago the Word was all that was needed for a bit of light; these days you also have to have a plastic card.



I have frogs like some people have lice. The one just outside my bedroom window shouts 'welcome' all night. Its friend, just outside the opposite window responds. They spend the whole night loudly welcoming each other through my bedroom until the competing 4.30am calls to prayer from all the nearby mosques, after which they are silent. Muslim frogs.

Amphibia are not the only well-represented class in my house. Reptiles of all kinds crawl across my ceilings in pursuit of insects and reprocess them into little white-tipped droppings which litter the floor. I don't quite know how the friendly little gekkos that eat my mosquitoes manage to climb up the wall; it is not suction because they can't manage glass. They can run across the ceiling and crunch beetles upside down but attempts at gravity defying copulation tend have unfortunate consequences.

But it is gogos, or dudus as they are called here, that really occupy the mind. This is because they also occupy the clothes, the bed, the fridge, the plug-holes, the food cupboard and those little dark recesses of the body like that little warm place between the little toe and its neighbour. And in these places they create merry havoc (and unpleasant odours). The termites have eaten an original David Hockney (remember, the one in the Independent early this year), a (new) shirt and a packet of water purification tablets. They have also eaten my residence permit.

I bought lots of cans of anti-dudu stuff all of which state they are more friendly to ozone than they are to dudus and have lots of instructions on them telling you you can safely use them anywhere except the bed, the fridge, plug-holes, the food cupboard, and the little toe, but that they smell nicely of cherry. Then I learnt that ignoring them was a more sensible strategy. And possibly more nutritious; instead of worrying about ants in the meusli, I just add a bit of yoghurt to stabilise them.

The family mammalia; Eileen and Dan struggled towards the end of their respective courses. Eileen, apparently, is an expert in the lithics of the southern Levant and Dan works in Torquay, an early hominid resort on the south coast. Rose has unfortunately not yet settled well at her new school near Bristol and Rob is still searching for possible suitable alternatives. Tom wrestles with his mocks. Tom, Rose and Rob came to Dar for a holiday but a fish stew consumed in a beautiful place in the Kilimanjaro foothills put

paid to any trips for the next two weeks that went more than an hour from home so we just had to content ourselves with white beaches, gently waving coconut palms and bright blue warm sea.



Hale-Bopp came by us tail first on its way back. Comet spotting in Tanzania is not quite as it is elsewhere. It was a perfect night, crystal clear, no cloud and no moon, so I took the binoculars and headed for the top of the hill. There was a nice spot in the pull-off to the campus bank where I could steady the binoculars against the landrover.

Within a very short time, however, there was that universally recognisable sound of the semi-military boot approaching. I kept on watching but wondered how he would direct the conversation towards the bribe. I didn't have long to wait. A hasty greeting, 'What are you doing? Looking at The Comet. Oh yes, he said, appearing knowledgeable. Where did I live? Here. Then came the introduction. 'You cannot park here' 'Yes I know' I lied, 'I just stopped for a moment to get a good look at the comet'. Then the development section: 'You must come down to the police station' (This is one of the standard opening lines in the bribe dialogue and the correct response is to reach for your wallet) 'No, I replied immediately, 'it would be no good, you could not see it from there'.

Straight ace. First game to me but it was still his service. 'Can I see your identity document?' (another standard line) 'Yes certainly', I said, pulling out the international driving licence I always carry now since a similar occasion a while back; failure to produce an identity document on demand is a bribable offence here. British international driving licenses are very difficult to read because the details are hidden in the back cover so I allowed him to struggle a bit before helping him. It worked; the photo, albeit looking like someone in an FBI murder line-up,

was definitely me and I had an unpronounceable name and totally unspellable address. He gave in graciously.

So I gave him a peep at Hale-Bopp through the binoculars. That really hooked him. We chatted for a long while about comets and his relatives and things and both forgot the failed bribe. We parted the best of friends. Hale-Bopp continued on its journey apparently unmoved.



It is Tanzania's bad luck that nobody any longer wants its two finest products, sisal and red tape. Both are the products of a unique combination, the British Empire and Socialism. The sisal is produced by the State-run Tanzania Sisal Authority, the red tape mainly by the state run National Bank of Commerce.

I asked, in the bank, if the money for the photocopiers would go off this week. He said 'No Problem'. Now this is a tricky phrase; it sounds as though it is English and means 'no problem' but it is actually in Kiswahili and loosely translates into "I really have not a clue as I have never done this before and there are bound to be a minimum of ten insoluble difficulties to overcome before it happens"

Hence my visit later in the week to check. No, she said, it hasn't because we need a cheque' She gave me a totally melting smile. Tanzania is the land of melting smiles and they employ the best ones to front organisations like banks to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. 'But when I came here on November 15th to ask you to transfer funds, and asked you if you wanted a cheque you said no, a letter of instruction was better, so I brought you one' (My cool reference to the transaction initiation date three months previously elicited not even a suspicion of surprise). 'We have not got one' 'But I gave it personally to you' 'I will look' Look she did. 45 Minutes later she said 'I cannot find it, you must bring a cheque'. 'But to get cheque is difficult', I calmly explained, 'because it requires two signatures

and if you make me get two signatures I am going to foam at the mouth and tear off my clothes and run amok in the bank when you are paying out salaries tomorrow'.

I went home and returned with the copy of the original letters (there were two) signed by the Dean and the Bursar of 25th Nov. 'But these are not signed.' "THEY ARE COPIES, YOU HAVE THE BLOODY SIGNED ONES" I said casually (or similar). 'I will look again'. She picked up one of those characteristically Tanzanian files that contain brown paper documents that are all torn and fingered and have been stapled and pulled apart an infinity of times and she slowly paged through. There they were (I have accumulated a wealth of experience in the art of distant document spotting.) She closed the file. 'They are not here'

I smiled with a perfectly cultured natural benignity. 'Maybe you should just look again - they could be near the bottom. What is that white piece of paper - fast sotto voce - 'with the university crest from the Dean and the Bursar to you about paying for the TEAMS copier, burke'

'Oh, I have found them.' The melting smile again. I congratulated her on a good afternoon's work and thanked her for saving me the problem of getting the signatures - and running amok etc.

I will send the money off straight away', she smiled meltingly. 'No Problem'



Mlandizi is a little place about 50k on the road out of Dar where the resurfaced road starts and the traffic police have radar gun and it is a really good little earner. The fact that it does not work deters them not at all; it is stuck on 111kph which is sufficiently above the 80kph limit on the open road to command a satisfactory fine. They just wave you down as you as you are just beginning to enjoy the freedom of the pot-holeless tarmac in the straight descending road

and sternly show you the 111 on the display.

'But officer I was doing 135, I know because I was trying to find out how fast my new landrover would go' I didn't say. 'Please go across the road and pay the fine of 10000 shillings'. Now, speeding, in Tanzania, like driving without seatbelts, without carrying a licence, or observing Comet Hale-Bopp without permission, is a bribable offence. Bribable transactions, however, only proceed smoothly when both sides know and follow the lines and gestures. If the intended briber is either dumb or plays dumb, or alters his lines unilaterally, all kinds of interesting things tend to happen.

As I walked across the road I decided this time on the unilaterally altered lines strategy. 'You can either pay the full fine of 10000 shillings or a lesser amount without a receipt', it was succinctly put to me. 'I will pay the fine', I said, 'I was speeding'. There was a long pause. He repeated the opening line, giving me a second opportunity to get mine right. 'I will pay the fine and accept the receipt', I repeated with emphasis, and, realising I was probably onto a winning move, added, 'I am guilty as charged of the crime of speeding'. There ensued a long discussion in Kiswahili (there were four of them playing the game) about how the situation could be rescued. Finally the officer turned to me and announced that although my crime was serious, he had discussed my case extensively with his colleagues and had decided to let me off with a warning.

I got the next line right. Grovelling apologetically I indicated appreciation of his generosity and wished him and his family a good harvest. Walking back to the landrover, I tried to put on my impression of an enigmatic smile at the next person coming across, who had just been caught coming down the hill at 111kph.



You get on a boat to go to Zanzibar and about four and a half hours later and you go

through immigration. Its not a different country of course but there is a lady there with a very large stamp and she wants to place it heavily right in the middle of a new page in your almost full passport because that is marginally more satisfying than doing nothing. You fill in the immigration form and forget to tick the box that tells her what sex you are and she gives you that 'I've been sitting here in this hot little office all day doing nothing but telling stupid Wazungu to tick their sex boxes and I am on the point of running amok with my big stamp' look. You humbly tick your sex box and thank her for filling up all the last page in your passport which otherwise would not have had to be replaced until 2001. She asks you how long and you say two days and she says two days only or else and you go to find a taxi.

Your taxi driver is called Ali because all taxi drivers are called Ali. He takes you to the Stone Town Inn because the guidebook says it has atmosphere. Atmosphere is pretty well all it has got. It has also, however, got light bulbs and air conditioners. I pull back the sheets sharply to see if anything scurries. It doesn't so we say yes. Only then I notice it hasn't got electricity.

The Stone Town area of Zanzibar is worth spending time in. It is a warren of little snickleways full of tiny shops selling almost everything, many for local people and some for the Wazungu. Now and then you come across a church or a mosque or a nice little square where there is a notice or two like the one advertising 'Buddah's Parts' This was a new one on me but there are so many curious religions in this part of the world. Close inspection, however, revealed a Toyota dealer.

The Stone Town is built of a cobb construction several stories high, very typical of Arab countries. The stones are held together with mortar made from lime still made on the island (now only for limewash) in the same way as it has been for millennia from neat piles of coral fired with coconut trunks. The town became rich on

the slave trade - the eastern one controlled by Arab nations - and prospered for several centuries. This was all stopped by the British navy in 1873 after which it began a steady economic decline which has continued ever since.

The Anglican Cathedral was built in the slave auction square. I paid someone called George Michael to show me the place where all the slaves were kept prior to sale and he told me that David Livingstone was a very nice man and that they brought his body here from Ujiji after he had died, except for his heart which was buried under a tree. A few more bits of him can be found in various museums around the place but his major parts were taken from this very spot to Westminster Abbey. They were having a crusade in the church, a team of sweating wazungu Evangelists looking like second-hand washing machine salesmen, still at it turning the poor to God, insulting the air with those awful pseudo-swinging hymns that have so trivialised Anglicanism everywhere in the last quarter of a Century. I thought of those choirs I heard a couple of years back at Odibo in the north of Namibia, that had walked for days out of Angola to St Mary's to sing so perfectly at the Eucharist.

We were getting hungry when we came upon a notice on a closed door advertising the 'Chit Chat Restaurant' It said it would open at six but it was after six and it wasn't. But the lady upstairs must have heard us and she said please wait while she came down. She welcomed us in and it really was a little restaurant, though this was not obvious until they started the generator and we could see tables. The chit chat was provided by Rodney, a Goan, and the food by his mother-in-law. It was outstanding, all kinds of fishy things cooked in coconut milk. Was he open for lunch also (we thought of returning next day)? No he said, they are too busy; it takes all day to hand grind the spices for the next night's food.

At this point a Royal Ulster Constabulary Policewoman put her head round the door and said

she was a wee bit lost. O reflection, I agreed. However, clearly she was not too unhappy about having missed her way in the Shankill Road and ending up in Zanzibar, though she was, she said, feeling a wee bit hot. She had thought, she explained, it might be a wee bit nice to go to Zanzibar before the marching season began again. Typically, charmingly, Irish, she was called Michelle and we invited her to join us in Ali's taxi the next day to go and see a monkey.

The Red Colobus Monkey is one of those animals like the Panda that has an extinction wish. It has decided it can live only in a particular part of Zanzibar and nowhere else. We went to see the few remaining unextinct and while Susan took a photograph of one, its friend peed on her camera. If you are intent on extinction its important to avoid making friends.

The monkey lives in an interesting bit of coastal rainforest which grows on a couple of feet of soil on top of coral, long since left behind by the sea. Curiously, when the sea retreated, the crabs didn't notice and they are still there, burrowing up and down from the coral to the forest floor continuing the search for the lost sea begun aeons before by their ancestors.



The Makonde people on the Tanzania-Mozambique border are famous for their woodcarving. Their work was once famed for its reflection of African life and traditions but it is now famous for its reflections of the curio market. A large group of them work just down the road from me. So I have bought yet another giraffe suckling a young one.

I also bought a Masai and his wife. Masais (like giraffes) come either natural or kiwied. I prefer my Masais natural but all the nice ones were kiwied which presented me with a problem until one Masai seller explained that you could covert a kiwied Masai back into a natural one simply by scrubbing him with petrol. So I chose the couple I liked and they renaturalised them

for me while I waited.

The problem with buying things like giraffes or Masais is that two hundred trainee Masai or giraffe salesboys watch you very carefully and as soon as your interest in giraffes become apparent they pursue you with armfuls offering deals you cant refuse. They persist until you have to be rude but they persist because they are well aware that the giraffe they are offering was cheaper than the one I was interested in and therefore must be better value. A giraffe, after all, is a giraffe is a giraffe.

John, an American with a mangrove obsession, who stayed here for a while, bought the new Kiswahili-English dictionary. Now, for me, this year's word is 'taghairm', winner of the 'Guardian Weekly' most useless word nomination, a word of Scottish origin meaning a state of contemplation induced by sitting behind a waterfall dressed in a bullock hide, (apparently widely used, though, by treasury forecasters). He looked up taghairm in the new dictionary. Disappointingly, it was not in, possibly because a bullock in a rather un-African concept.

I mention this only because one other word not apparently in the dictionary is kuKiwi, to make black, as in 'Tafadhali sikiwi Masai wangu' - please do not cover my Masai from head to foot in boot polish.



Tanzania grows a lot of oranges and similar things. They are unspeakably sour and full of pips but they all ripen at once so at the right time you can buy several for a penny. Marmalade, I thought. So I emailed around the world for assistance and advice (and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who sent me those many recipes.) Unfortunately all the responses gave precise measurements of how much of what I should add to what which was all very informative but I have no measuring jug and no scales. So I spent some time extracting the quantity-free essential principles of marmalade making from

the e-recipes before throwing a whole lot of golf ball sized limes into a thing I recently bought that you could pulp a cat in.

It may be pretty good at cats but it had little effect on Tanzanian limes. So I fished them all out again and hand chopped them. I think I then rather underdid the next step, the primary heating phase, because although I have some rock solid marmalade the chunky bits are not a little chewy. As an experiment, I did half of it in the microwave with an identical lot as a control in a pan on the stove. I was also boiling up an old chicken carcass on the stove and at one point, when adding bits of chewed bone I got the pans mixed up which rather upset the experiment because, after much wrestling with my scientific conscience, I decided against throwing an equal mass of chewed chicken bone into the one in the microwave.

So, out of a huge quantity of fruit I got two and a half little jars of sticky chicken marmalade.

Later that day, I carefully explained to Angela (the lady, here, who irons the parts that ordinary irons never reach), how email works and how a letter sent from my computer goes very quickly up into the air to a satellite and then down again to my daughter's computer on the other side of the world in a second or two. She was very interested in it all and went off thoughtfully. In a little while she returned and took my bible off the shelf and opened it at Daniel 12 verses 3 to 10 where she said that it was predicted that the widespread use of email would rapidly bring about the end of the world. She often tells me lots about the end of the world whenever, for example, I open a can of Castle but this email business seems to have given it all a sense of urgency.



I have had a bush guard and a roof rack made for the landrover. Together they cost 150000 shillings which sounds quite a lot but one shilling is a twelfth of a penny; the reverse of what

I was led to believe in my childhood was an unchanging law of the universe.

As it happens, this is exactly what Peter (my somnolent nightwatchman) is currently paying, by instalments, for his new wife. She is called, aptly, Gloria, and has the ubiquitous melting smile and is just as nicely put together as my roofrack. She is a Chagga, the people who come from the slopes of Kilimanjaro and are known for their inordinate fondness for bananas. As wives go, they have a reputation, I am told, of being durable and functional but a touch over-priced. She is currently partly owned by me as Peter took out a mortgage on her with me repayable over six months. I waived the full structural survey (as it was only a 50% mortgage) and gave Peter a week off work. He usually spends most of his nights praying which serves the dual purpose of gaining Brownie points where it matters and frightening the burglars. I did not, however, hear much in the way of devotions that week.

Angela, the ironer, has gone back home to Malawi, for Christmas with her husband. I took them both with their goods, a whole landrover-full, down to the bus station. Check-in at 3pm for the 6am bus it seems. Their luggage joined all the rest that will be stuffed inside and piled on top. They don't have passports; about 4000 shillings to the border official is apparently the current going rate for getting in and out. Their departure solves a problem created by Peter's marriage; where Peter's sister should sleep. She no longer need spend the nights outside in the cold (hot actually) with the welcome frogs.



I have a house on the campus. It is at the bottom of the campus hill and this is important because of the effect of gravity on water in the pipes. My house contains the last lavatory to lose its flush in times of scarcity. Before this I lived in a one room flat at the top of the hill where the view and the wildlife were splendid (One breakfast time I turned towards the veranda

to find a row of 13 wide-eyed Meerkats sitting up on their haunches mesmerised by the sight of a naked mzungu making toast) but which were on the uppermost end of the pipe.

Have you noticed how, whereas you can learn to sleep through any number of loud sounds (like the 5am call to prayer) there are certain tiny sounds that wake you up suddenly and completely, like the gurgle of your (but not someone else's) baby.

In the flat, I used to wake up in the middle of the night to tiny gurgles. And little drips.

The drips told me that the lavatory tank was filling and that I must therefore get up quickly and wash out my smalls before the lady upstairs gets up and washes hers and uses up all the available water that is, the drip tells me, momentarily flowing up the pipe.

The gurgle told me that those little bugs down the pan are up to their incredible little tricks, converting what I don't want into what they don't want. They do this all the time of course, but what the gurgle told me was that the gases they make can't escape the normal way so instead they back up the pan, filling the bathroom with an exciting mixture of air and methane. It all meant that the sewer was blocked again.

Now, there is a great deal of physics in blocked sewers. And also quite a bit of biology. But first I attended to the chemistry. In Dar everything rusts and so sewer inspection hatches quickly form an airtight seal. This must be broken to allow the release of methane by another route than up my pan. The hatch is opened revealing the rather startled biology. The mass of three inch cockroaches which create seething living sides to the man-hole get a bit over excited and fall in. Curiously, they seem to enjoy it and are accomplished swimmers. With the pressure reduced, so is the risk of pan overflow when the lady upstairs flushes. Not her pan; gravity ensures that it is mine. The problem is that $V(\text{pan-mine}) < V(\text{tank-hers})$ and this tends

to create a bit of a mess on my floor when she flushes. It also drowns my ants.

That takes care of the short-term remedial exercises. Except that I replace the inspection hatch so the night watchman does not join the cockroaches. Unlikely as I notice he is still fast asleep, unperturbed by all the nocturnal plumbing.

Next morning I write a formal memorandum on the state of the research flat sewers and deliver it to the maintenance department. The memorandum looks good; it was the first one created on the new Project Stationery I have just designed. Sufficiently weighty I decide; it has a drop-everything-and-attend-to-this quality about it which pleases.

Returning to my flat later in the morning I am contented to note that the memorandum had been effective. There were several fundis around. These were hole fundis equipped with spades. Hole fundis dig random holes anywhere where they see evidence of a pipeline problem. The holes are dug until one of them finds an underground pipe. They have found such a pipe but unfortunately it is not the sewer but the water main and being plastic, they have cut it. But they have stuck a plaster over the cut so it's only dripping slowly. They continue to make holes. I return to work

I don't know how the story ended. Maybe it hasn't. After a while trying to deal with a problem of this nature you realise that it is more sensible to just live with it and go for a beer. I've moved out of the flat now. Occasionally I revisit the place and I note that the holes are still there. Nobody seems to complain much anymore but a bar has been opened in the flat complex. Lateral thinking.



We have had, in Britain, general election (or general erection as it is picturesquely called in East Africa where l's and r's are inter-

changed and people go to church to play). We all turned, on the morning of May 2nd, to the BBC and heard that Mr Blair had won the election and The Soul-Winners Gospel Ministers from Freetown, Sierra Leone had won the BBC Network Africa jingle competition. We were living, I thought, in stirring times.

As Woody Allen once said, not of elections but of money; it can't buy happiness but it can buy a better sort of misery. But on the day I returned here last week, Blair banned oxtails. Thatcher was a bruiser but she knocked us all around in a fairly mature kind of way and I am left wondering whether there anything worse in the political bran-tub than liberal paternalism. But he has not yet found a way of legislating against the three late December roses that Madame Alfred Carrière produced for my homecoming. There are still such things that we can be thankful for.

A happy retrospective Christmas

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