

LETTERS

Dear Editor:

A recent article (Lillian Trager and LaRay Denzer, "American Students and Researchers in Nigeria: Relationships with Host Institutions, Academics and Communities," *ASA News* 26(2):7-9 (1993)) discussed the authors' perceptions of "exchange students, students assessing the possibilities of postgraduate research, independent students, post-graduate students carrying out research projects, post-doctoral scholars, and visiting professors." From 1989 to 1992, while resident in Ibadan, Nigeria, I fell into one of those categories. As such, I would like to comment on some of those opinions, from a student's-eye view.

The authors identified "money, time, and respect" as the core issues of research in Nigeria. They presented these as the "three central aspects to the maintenance of good relationships," and thus "crucial to success as a researcher in Nigeria." They made it clear that they considered money to be the most important of these, and so devoted the most ink to it. Time they placed as "the second aspect" and respect as "the third aspect." Insofar as they predicated research success on relationships with people, we are in agreement. But with their premise that relationships be based on "money, time, and respect," I must, respectfully, disagree.

As a young scholar, and therefore presumably as a member of what the authors define as "a new generation of students," it seems to me that research is about learning, that this learning is shaped by personal relationships, and that personal relationships cannot be reduced to money. Knowledge cannot be purchased, and neither can friendship, trust, or honesty. These were not mentioned by the authors, but they are the basis of any successful field research, and mutual respect is the most important. While its forms of expression vary with cultural and social contexts, mutual respect is fundamental to developing human relationships of trust, honesty, caring, friendship and commitment. It is through the development of such relationships that one learns. It is through learning that one does research.

In the process of learning, it is also natural to make mistakes. In emphasizing certain individual errors, the authors omitted the possibility of learning from mistakes. By the same token, they omitted to mention that the majority of their colleagues are basically good people who try to do what they need to do as best they can. Many of these colleagues, in Nigeria and elsewhere, gave freely of their wisdom and advice (and yes, their time), to enable me to avoid the most painful errors in Nigeria. As a result, I think of these people with gratitude, and must say that I saw no shortage of decency, kindness, generosity and hu-

manity among them, regardless of their nationality. To omit respect for such colleagues is to do them a grave disservice.

While devoting so many lines to money, it seems a curious omission that the authors did not mention the well-known monetary troubles of today's "new generation of students." It may not be out of place to mention that these troubles are not fables. Research costs money, yes, although maybe not in the ways the authors seemed to imply. In addition to household and living expenses, there are affiliation fees, access and processing fees of various types. There are the paraphernalia and logistical expenses as well, such as transport, supplies, photocopying, recording, photographing, developing, transcribing, typing, and so forth. There are medical expenses and medevac insurance. There are also financial obligations overseas, and student loans that come due.

Research certainly takes time and patience. The authors were right to remind us that desiring or needing assistance from a colleague may be viewed as an unnecessary demand on that colleague's time. They omitted to mention that research primarily requires the time of the researcher. Time and patience are needed to adjust to new surroundings, to adapt to new expectations, to make new friends, to learn. Because these experiences do not occur in a vacuum, portions of the lives, the time, and the patience of others are always involved. If the research is successful, then these are reciprocal, and take place in the context of developing personal relationships.

Unless the research topic is the academic community, most of these investments of self, time, patience, funds, adjustments, trust and caring may be expected to happen off campus. In the absence of any particular personal interest or friendship, colleagues on campus may not have a clear idea of what or how well a researcher is doing. If that is the case, then colleagues will not have sufficient information with which to judge what their fellow scholars do or do not do. In the final analysis, it is our respective publications that will show most clearly what and how well we have done.

Carolyn Keyes, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Lillian Trager writes in response.

I would like to thank Carolyn Keyes for her response to the commentary written by myself and LaRay Denzer; student perspectives on these issues are crucial. I think there is little fundamental difference between her views and ours. As we stated at the outset of our comments: "The maintenance of personal relationships with a wide variety of people is crucial to success as a researcher in Nigeria;

furthermore, this is what can make research in Nigeria so rewarding an experience..." If we seemed to devote more attention to money, it is because it was with regard to money that we saw a number of problems arise, particularly now that the Nigeria Naira is worth so little. We certainly had no intention of suggesting that personal relationships can be reduced to money.

While it is true that many researchers spend the majority of their time away from the university campuses, many others do live on campus and spend considerable amounts of time there. And since affiliation with a university or research institution is necessary, all must have some contact with Nigerian university colleagues, some of whom are feeling overburdened by increasing demands on their time

and expertise in a context where it is increasingly difficult for them to carry out their own research. There is no doubt that most continue to be generous in helping visiting scholars. But it can also be useful to reduce some of the demands on them; our suggestions were made with this in mind.

Finally, we all make mistakes while carrying out research. And, hopefully, most of us also learn from our mistakes. But it is useful to try to avoid certain types of mistakes, and to learn from the experience of others. By focusing our comments on certain issues, we hoped to provide some suggestions that would assist others planning research in Nigeria.

Lillian Trager, University of Wisconsin-Parkside

ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN ETHIOPIA

The following letter was shared with ASA News by Ed Alpers, ASA Vice-President.

The Hon. George Moose
Assistant Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

The Hon. Mark Baas
US Ambassador
United States Embassy
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Gentlemen:

We are a group of American academics whose association with Addis Ababa University spans four decades. We have watched with pride as a dedicated group of our Ethiopian colleagues led the university through peril and challenge to create one of Africa's finest institutions of higher education. During the Haile Sellasie period and even during Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime, the university continued its research and teaching functions largely unhampered by government. The institution now has suffered a severe crisis brought on by the decision of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia arbitrarily to impose extralegal and non-academic criteria as determinants of faculty competence.

As you know, on Friday, April 9, approximately forty members of AAU's academic staff ranging in rank from lecturer to professor, were summarily dismissed from their positions. Among those fired are some of the university's most distinguished academics, the director of its two leading research institutes in the social sciences and humanities, and its president, Dr. Alemeyehu Tefera, an excellent

scholar and able administrator, whose detention is especially worrying.

The terminations, and the capricious manner in which they were carried out, gravely threaten the university's reputation of academic integrity. They have created an atmosphere of intense anxiety and uncertainty among the remaining faculty and their fellows abroad. The TGE's actions perplex and dismay those friends of the university and Ethiopia who, listening to the words of President Meles Zenawi, believed that there finally was in Addis Ababa a government that stood for freedom of speech and due process of law.

The United States Government and its plenipotentiary in Ethiopia are influential with the TGE. We urge you to use the full influence to persuade the government that it has made a critical mistake in unreasonably dismissing university staff and that it ought to take corrective steps, starting with full reinstatement of the dismissed faculty. Thereafter, if the TGE believes that it has grounds for legal action against university staff, then it ought formally to charge them under the law and adjudicate them in compliance with due process.

We would be grateful to learn what action you have taken or will take in this matter.

John Cohen, Harvard University
Stanley Fisher, Boston University
John Hinant, Michigan State University
Edmond Keller, UCLA
Wolf Leslau, UCLA
Donald Crummey, University of Illinois
John Harbeson, City University of New York
Grover Hadson, Michigan State University
Donald Levine, University of Chicago
Harold G. Marcus, Michigan State University
James Paul, Rutgers University