

THE “NOBLE SAVAGE“ AND WHAT IS BEST FOR HIM: AN INSULAR VIEWPOINT?

The following notes result from perusing a thought-provoking text produced in the homeland of a former colonial power and appearing in a publication describing itself as the Magazine for the independent Traveller (Wexas, 1979, 5). It seems that some expeditions are beset by incidental fiascos (some of which start, perhaps, at the stage of attempting to purchase and equip a cross-country vehicle?). For a few varying opinions and experiences, compare Därr and Därr (1976, 23–24), Hamer (1977), Moll and Milburn (1976, 119–123), Morgan-Grenville (1974, 34 & 38) and Robson (1976).

Also mentioned is a trail of incompetence and errors of judgement: primitive peoples and local officials can be mishandled, while the environment is abused and the party is generally insensitive to its impact on the local folk: this is a sad situation indeed and is perhaps less uncommon than one might imagine.

Does the word “expedition” itself tend to give its members, who may be tourists following a well-worn trail, an exaggerated idea of their own importance, resulting in behaviour which might have been avoided, had they thought of themselves as mere travellers? Those two great explorers of the last century, Henry Barth and René Caillié, seem, at least from the titles of their respective English-language books, to have thought of their own enormous achievements as travels. There is in any event a reason for not using the word “expedition” without good cause nowadays, which is simply that one is a good deal less conspicuous as a traveller in certain areas. People who do not appear to be tourists may well attract unwelcome attention from the authorities, who will want to know what they are up to.

Armed with a transistor radio, the illiterate nomad (do we take it that some Islamic pastoralists may be excluded from the list of those who cannot read?) sits in his tent and hears what is going on (or what is said to be going on, since accounts will vary) in the Big Wide World outside his own experience. We learn that we should not continually underestimate him, but should pay more heed to what he is likely to think about such incursions by unofficial ambassadors of the western world who roam about in his territory. We should offer something worthwhile to be countries we visit, we are told, especially if we are tourists: trivial gifts are not enough.

Drugs and medical appliances can be sonated to hospitals, for instance, while other gifts can be left in responsible hands, such as detailed local maps, expedition films or photos, expedition reports, plus useful objects like tents and binoculars. All the above need not apparently add much to the total expedition costs (especially if tourists can be persuaded to pay beforehand for these “gifts”, as part and parcel of their “expedition”).

These philanthropic sentiments appear fine up to a point. The contents of the well-filled European “expedition” vehicle must appear just a bit excessive to the average nomad, who can no longer rob his sedentary neighbours with impunity in many areas, whatever his inclination to do so (cf. Hubac, 1948). Yet in some territories there might be distinct problems in dishing out such gifts as are mentioned above, in addition to resentment occasioned by insensitive European dress, manners and behaviour which take no account of local susceptibilities: on these latter “ambassadorial” failures perhaps a number of volumes could be written (cf. Blashford-Snell & Snailham, 1978, 9; Harrington, 1977, 57–58; Jones, 1978, 205–206). Yet works by Gardi (1971: 1978) seem to indicate that there exist travellers who manage to attract the friendship and respect of the peoples in whose countries they more around.

In the case of medical supplies, it is most necessary to be certain that the recipients know how – and how not – to use them. It is all a question of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing, although I have noticed that drugs which are thought to have come straight from Europe may seemingly possess healing power not attributed to almost identical ones (also European)

from some local dispensary. A man who has been kicked in the face by a camel may well feel happier once he has cajoled an aspirin from some visiting tourist. At least, such has been my precise experience. Any amount of reasoning may leave him unconvinced of the usefulness of taking himself and his damaged face to be inspected, even not far away, by a professional doctor.

Local maps, especially large-scale ones, may be expensive and hard to obtain in Europe, as well as actually forbidden in certain lands: it may be unwise to hand them out too freely. Expedition films or photographs may amuse people, provided they understand what is going on at all times: the police may be interested in pictures of anything remotely resembling military installations. The wisdom of giving away expedition reports, except at the very highest level, appears questionable: some I have seen are extremely parochial, bristling with technical terms and their bibliography may be muddled and unintelligible even to a reader in whose language the report itself is written. Binoculars may well have their uses, though many illiterate nomads – whether simple or advanced pastoralists (Pearson, 1974) – have extremely sharp eyes anyway: however such appliances can be fragile and subject to damage in, for instance, desert environments.

Tents, if expensive and thus a drain on expedition finances, may be strong enough to last some time after being given away: if cheap, they may anyway not last long. Gifting of spare parts for vehicles would surely imply excessive, or even foolhardy, confidence in ones' own motor transport (cf. Moll and Milburn, 1976, 119–123). In terms of useful and inexpensive gifts, probably hard to obtain locally and thus certain to give endless pleasure in remote areas, Blashford-Snell and Snailham (1978, 26) have provided a short list. It is worth checking further, however, to find out just what will be most appreciated in the zone to be visited by the “expedition”. If proposing to offer gifts to high officials, it may be worth recalling that “Entwicklungshilfe” has been suggested as meaning that the Poor of a rich land donate to the Rich of a poor country.

Having disposed of the items suggested as gifts by the text in question, though not, one hopes, leaving the illiterate nomad gazing (bemusedly?) at documents he cannot comprehend or equipment whose intricacies are lost on him, we come to the vexed question of who precisely may be deemed to be “responsible”: the gifts, it has been stated, should be left in responsible hands.

While the problem of deciding just which countryfolk or “primitive” people come into this category must invariably rest with the donors in each case, what degree of responsibility has, in the past, been shown by the emissaries of certain tour-operating organisations in their relations with the locals, while carrying fare-paying tourists on “expeditions”? Perhaps the following examples speak for themselves.

An African official working in a desert outpost once described the wife of a certain driver as being an even bigger liar than her husband: both were employed by a tour-operator, some of whose minions were under suspicion of importing whisky illegally and selling it to Moslems. Another commercial entity, advertising “expeditions” from November 1978 up to April 1980, appears openly to encourage its tourists to search for old arrowheads, notwithstanding the prohibition on their export. As for the bare knees and short skirts seen in Arab countries, the former still seem just as common among male Europeans as the latter among females. Do many “expedition” leaders go around with their eyes and ears tight shut? Or are they just not bothered about offending “primitive” peoples? White guests of the locals in South America are not always seen as supermen (Zander, 1979, R2). And is certain official exploitation of tourist groups by Moslems the result of this short-sighted European behaviour?

Probably an ex-colonial power is unlikely to see itself as other nations see it. Even though the one from which the text in question emanated does not physically hold millions of aliens in slavery (Linklater, 1948, 90), it may be that a good many of its nationals still regard themselves capable of judging what is best for “inferior” or “underdeveloped” peoples, since they themselves may long ago have been promoted to their own level of incompetence (cf. Peter and Hull, 1969, 25).

The true state of near-chaos in the motherland is hidden beneath a few well-tried euphemisms, such as “delays are not unknown at the factory” or “Continental rail services have improved greatly in the last decade”: self-delusion needs to be rampant, i.e., foreign cars are “expensive”, while the low state of the national currency, compared with that of ten years back, is conveniently

forgotten. A case history may be useful here. In summer 1979 I set out, one Saturday morning, to do some shopping. After the long, long wait for the bus, theoretically running every 10–12 minutes, I am deposited close to the southern edge of a large park. Here I manage to leave an unstamped letter on the premises of an organisation whose overseas membership costs considerably more than its national one. To send out its periodical publication, weighing some 120 grams, by surface mail and to a national address, would currently cost 13,5 monetary units: postage to a European address would amount to 19 units, as from 29 October 1979. The difference is only equal to some DM 0.22.

Pondering on this financial anomaly, my next visit ends in dismal failure. A clothes shop in a nearby arcade is firmly shut: a sign on the door announces that it is “open”, though absolutely no other information is offered to a would-be customer. Catching a second bus to a large bookstore, I find a bored assistant who cannot tell me whether a certain book is, or is not, still in print. “Do you have one of those magic books in which to look it up?” is my next question. While she grudgingly complies, I look on a nearby shelf, finding three copies of a popular book, on which this very same shop could give absolutely no information only three months back.

On the ground floor, an agreeable girl explains that a new archaeology book, whose appearance has just been communicated to me by its distinguished author, is probably to be found in the Natural History Department. Hesitantly I mount the stairs, wondering what sort of reception the great man would give to such information, only to find that a polite youth refers me back to the Archaeology Department. At this point I give up.

Trying to purchase a rucksack of well-known type, the attitude of the “salesman” is “take it or leave it” to such a marked degree that I am soon out in the street oncemore: luckily I possess a catalogue showing exactly what I require, dispelling each and every doubt as to my intentions. Next, in a music shop, I choose a long-playing record for a friend: some days later I am to find out that the record contained within the gaudy cover is not that for which I asked, nor indeed that whose title appears on the cover . . .

Crossing the road to wait for yet another bus from the city-centre, I hear a clock playing y boating song of a famous school: from far off, the words come back to me: – “Jolly boating weather and a hay harvest breeze. Swing, swing together, with your body between her knees”. Surely, I cannot help myself reflecting, the “Red Flag” would be more appropriate under present circumstances.

Had Buonaparte lived one and a half centuries later, he might have contended, with stunning accuracy, not only that his mortal enemies were a Nation of Shop-keepers, but also that many seemed to have become extremely indifferent tradesmen into the bargain, with little or no idea how to look after customers nor understanding of “service” as offered in neighbouring lands. Perhaps he would have found it difficult to comprehend such headlines as “Howe slams unions” or “1-day ‘warfare’ ruining Leyland”: he might wonder at the progress of twentieth-century democratic procedure, resulting in some people preferring to enlist the financial aid of the State itself rather than to earn their daily bread.

Whatever the illiterate nomad might make of all this, were it to be well-explained by an impartial observer, could Buonaparte have concluded that tradition dies hard in a land which, for centuries, has “known best” how to run the affairs of subject peoples: and whose apparent determination to learn nothing from other countries remains – typically and also tragically – as resolute as ever?

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DIE FRÜHGESCHICHTLICHE ANLAGE BEI GROSSA/KORSIKA

Während meiner Studien der Menhire und Dolmen Korsikas stieß ich in der Gegend von Grossa, im Südwesten der Insel, auf eine gewaltige frühgeschichtliche Anlage mit einem beherrschenden Turm. Die Stätte liegt an einem zu beiden Seiten stark abfallenden Ausläufer der Punta di Forcone beim Hause Vitata. Die etwa 4 000 m² große Anlage ist umgeben von einer Mauer aus unregelmäßigen, teils mächtigen Natursteinen, die zu einem gutgefügteten, mörtellosen Werk aufgetürmt sind. Im Westen, dort, wo der Hügel stark abfällt, ist die Mauer besonders gewaltig, während sie im Osten nicht sehr hoch ist. Hier ist auch eine leichte Senke im Berg und Macchia begleitet die Mauer.