

Dear Friends of Georg Deutsch

I was very sorry to hear last night that our friend is gone, but not without leaving some deep imprints on me, and I suppose on many other people who may have run into him. I thought it may be a good way to celebrate his life by recording some of these impressions before time gobbles them up in its forgetfulness.

If I remember right, and I am getting old and forgetful, Georg came to Zanzibar when we were organizing our first Conference on the History & Culture of Zanzibar in 1992. Georg helped us in the chaotic organization of the conference, and it turned out to be very successful. It was a time when Zanzibar was becoming a favourite haunt for researchers, and I decided to shift to Zanzibar to work in the Department of Archives, Museums & Antiquities. I am proud to say that we at DAMA were able to provide a very enticing and comfortable research environment.

It was at this time that I came to know how Georg happened to come to Zanzibar, and why he was so passionate about it. He told me that he had earlier come with his girlfriend, and they loved Zanzibar so much that they decided to get married in Zanzibar. They marched to a government office to have a civil ceremony. The staff were flabbergasted; but they cooperated, and the bond was sealed between them and with Zanzibar.

The bond between us also strengthened, and it led to my own bond with Germany. With the support of Georg I was invited several times to spend time at the ZMO. He introduced me to the late and much lamented Professor Albert Wirz who invited me to teach a term at Humboldt. He in turn introduced me to the Wissenschaftskolleg where I spent a very satisfying and fruitful 10 month-fellowship which culminated in my book on the *Dhow Cultures in the Indian Ocean*. In all this Georg was the catalyst that facilitated all these linkages.

I am only sorry to say that despite all this I never learnt German. My reason, and not an excuse (although 26-letter German words are a good one), is that I am not good with languages – if I was, I would have been fluent in Arabic and Persian which I tried and now regret.

The second chapter of our relationship was after Georg returned to Oxford as a teacher which he passionately wanted to do, and he has devoted the rest of his life teaching there which he always seemed to be enjoying, despite the overload. When I was in the UK he invited me to spend a few days at Oxford where I made some new contacts through Georg with upcoming brilliant scholars like Zahirhasan Bhalloo, now at EHESS, and with a scholar in the manuscript section who acquainted me with an 11<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian Arabic manuscript that actually mentions my native island of Unguja in Zanzibar, and I am thankful to Georg for facilitating all these fruitful contacts.

The last time Georg visited Zanzibar, if my memory does not fail me, was in 2005 when he found an opportunity to observe our perennially troublesome elections. This was soon after my job at the Zanzibar Museums was suddenly terminated just 6 weeks before the elections without any explanation, but Zanzibar politics is the invariable culprit. Georg was among the first to write: 'I cannot say how angry I am about the government doing this to you. ....Would it make sense to write to the Ministry, protesting about the way you have been treated by them?' It did not make sense then, as it does not make now when Reconciliation and Government of National Unity, the two solutions to our political problem, have been thrown

into the dustbin, unfortunately. I had insisted on going back to Zanzibar to cast my vote, and therefore had the opportunity to walk around the Stone Town with Georg the night of the election and discuss the never-ending electoral misfortunes of Zanzibar.

The past five years or so, while Georg was keeping busy with his numerous and demanding students, and I managing the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute, and later the troubled process of getting a new Tanzanian Constitution in which Zanzibar can be comfortable, as well as my reduction in international travel with age, we have not had a chance to meet, apart from a few longish letters last year.

However, early this year, out of the blue, I received an email from Georg saying that he was going to celebrate his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, and was planning to visit Zanzibar for a few days in August or December. I was overjoyed. Unfortunately he informed me in June that he had to cancel his visit 'on medical grounds. Nothing serious, but I need an operation that I cannot postpone.' Unfortunately, it turned out to be much more serious, and we have lost our friend.

We can regret for the life so cut short, but we can also celebrate his life. For me it has been a long series of good fortunes over the past quarter century that opened for me, opportunities as well as hearts of people I got to meet through him, for which I am eternally grateful. One regret that I cannot hide is the fact that he has not been able to complete his book on the biography of Sokomuhogo Street in Zanzibar Town for which he slaved for several months in Zanzibar, and which weighed heavily on his mind as he wrote to me in January 2015. I do know precisely what state his work had reached, and whether it can in any way be rescued.

I did not know how deal with my loss, but I thought that sharing with my friends reduces the sense of loss. I hope I have not erred in this during this festive season. I may have missed some mutual friends whose addresses I could not find. If you would like to forward this to anybody else, you are welcome.

Yours sincerely

Abdul Sheriff