

# Mzungu! Mzungu!

Mzungu (plural Wazungu) is a Swahili word which literally translated means "someone who roams around aimlessly". The term was first used in the African Great Lakes region to describe European explorers in the 18th century, apparently as a result of their tendency to get lost in their wanderings in Africa. The term is more generally used now to mean White Man in the more remote parts of Tanzania. There is no malice involved, in fact usually a beaming smile and a wave or a handshake. There are even T-shirts at the airport if you want to proclaim your Mzungu status.



(1) The Wazungu in this case were myself and 8 Italians and it became a regular greeting as we drove along dried up river beds to reach remote communities. Maurizio Franzoso and his brother Federico who both work for Sun Chemical in Italy, had invited me to join their group visiting the Consolata Mission in the Morogoro region of Tanzania to assist at some of the nurseries in the area under the Missions responsibility. I offered to teach English for the 3 weeks we were there at the Kasanga Primary school which had been donated to the government by the mission a few years previously.

After an eventful journey from Heathrow to Frankfurt to Turin to Istanbul to Dar es Salaam we arrived to find Turkish Airlines had managed to lose our entire luggage including the teaching material I had prepared. We arrived at 2.30 am and by the time we had filled out our lost luggage forms along with 40 others our driver had been waiting a long time. So long in fact, that he fell asleep on the journey back and drove off the motorway at 50 mph down an embankment and wedged us in a ditch. After being dug out for a fee by the locals, a few running repairs to various cuts and bumps and the obligatory bribe to the traffic police we continued with a lot less glass in the windows than we started with.

Before straight line borders were imposed, this part of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya was Masai territory and still is to some extent. They were a regular feature in their purple robes with their cattle and goats on our daily jaunts into the bush. It seemed their integration into modern life was complete when I saw them in Masai traditional dress in



the Forex queue in the bank on their mobile phones. (2) The Masai cattle market was a sight to behold and we managed to get a goat and a bull for a very reasonable price. (3)



We had enough material to entertain the nursery children and teach some English until our luggage arrived in dribs and drabs over the next week. Maurizio, who has many years' experience of Africa thought it would be best if he came with me to teach at the school. It was a good job he did. This had become a very popular school with the oldest pupils now reaching year 7 i.e. 12 to 13 years old. The 7 classrooms now house 700 children! (4) The whole school was brought out to meet the 'English teachers' and we introduced ourselves. The first lesson was



with year 5 and there were 85 children. The teacher stayed with us for a while but when he realized that we meant business he exited stage left. We did our best but I think the first lesson was more Mr. Bean than Mr. Chips. (5)



We hastily revised our plans for the following days and year 6 received our very latest teaching methods. Then it was the older children in year 7 and we felt we were getting into the swing. Both classes had over 60 children and when things started to get out of hand teaching them a song got things back on track. We began to get the feeling that we had been pushed in at the shallow end and that the tough stuff was to come - years 4 down to 1. We were right. Teachers started to hastily pack up as we arrived and offer sympathetic smiles as they left. Emergency songs were proving insufficient; dancing was added to our armoury. Song and dance were proving to be our weapons of mass distraction. It was all building up to year 1 - the new children mostly 5 and 6 years old. The day arrived, we never even saw the teacher but we did see a retreating cloud of dust that appeared to be hysterically laughing. 130 children on average - it was a rapidly changing figure. Ability ranged from those that didn't own a pencil or book to those that could copy off the board and fill in missing words by themselves. It was more crowd control than teaching but it was the most enthusiastic rendition of Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes we had achieved so far.



A South Korean charity had recently built and staffed a kitchen building (1 young lady). (6) They also contributed 1000 Tsh (40p) per month for each child to get a bowl of rice and a warm drink each day between 10 and 10.30. It often didn't stretch and it was heartbreaking to see the children at the end of the queue asking other children for some food. We were told that for many children this may be the only meal of the day.

Maurizio's group like to take on and complete a project in the 12 months following their visits. They commit up to €5000 which

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## Mzungu! Mzungu! *continued*

they will raise over the next year through fundraising events in Italy. The nursery school at Kasanga houses 120 under 5's and desperately needs another building which can be used as a dining room and classroom. (7) We had some rudimentary plans drawn and costed at €10,000. The mission agreed to fund the other 50%. The Sun Chemical UK Publications Division had generously donated £250 to a project of my choice and I was very happy to be able to add to this and give the project enough of a kitty to get it off the ground. (8)



The time spent with this school was very rewarding and I know we learnt more than the children did. Hopefully they will remember some of it even if it is only the songs. The only way these children's prospects have any chance of improving is through education and improved health care. I hope we played a very small part in this development. There have been 2 Christian and 2 Muslim presidents of the country since formation in 1964. The classes were a completely integrated mix of Muslim, Christian and traditional religion boys and girls who studied, played, shared and sometimes fought without any sense of difference or segregation. (9) This seemed to be the case throughout the Morogoro and coastal region of Tanzania which was predominantly Muslim. If only all countries could follow this example. I hope it can continue.

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