SIMILIH M. CORDOR

A Farewell to the Old Order

Born in 1946 in northern Liberia, Similih M. Cordor writes fiction and studies African mass communications, literature, and politics. He is also a journalist, political activist, and university professor. Cordor's writings have been published in anthologies and periodicals in Liberia, South Africa, England, Denmark, and the United States.

In "A Farewell to the Old Order," published in Short Story International *in 1988, Cordor tells us the story of a man who encounters intercultural problems at work even though he never leaves his country.*

Before you read "A Farewell to the Old Order," write about a time when a situation in your life demanded that you give up someone or something important from your past or lose someone or something important in your present situation. Describe the choice you faced, why you faced it, and what you thought the rewards would be if you gave up the someone or something from your past. What choice did you finally make, and why? What have you learned from having made the choice?

The choice was hard to make. It was between my new job in a powerful government ministry and my two unlettered wives, the mothers of my five children: three by Kau and two by Yei. The two ropes were tightly tied on my waist and it was rather difficult to decide on which one to pull down.

I had gone to the university, studied various disciplines including economics, public administration, and personnel management, and got a couple of college degrees. And right after my graduate studies, I got this government job, but my two non-literate women became a problem almost immediately. The whole affair emerged rather casually and then developed into an open crisis between me and our chief minister.

The frequent visits to my office by my wives were the first thing that unveiled

the distaste my colleagues had for my marital status. Each time my wives came to the office, people would ask;

"Whom these country women always coming to here?"

To me of course.

When it became known that I was married to two unlettered women, my co-workers, including some of my senior staff members, began to ask again:

"With all his university education, James Dahn is living with country women?"

What is wrong with a country man living with country women in a country way?

I began to feel a little uneasy about the situation but I tried to tolerate it. Then one Tuesday morning, one of my senior planning officers walked into my office as soon as my two wives had entered. It seems that he had been running behind them from the hallway.

"Chief, these girls are quite charming," he said and stared at the women.

They bent their heads down to avoid his eyes.

"Is that what brought you here this morning?"

"Well, you're our Chief, and we come in here anytime."

"But you don't usually run into my office like that."

"Anyway, who are these beautiful girls to you, Chief?" the young man asked and looked at the women again.

They tried to avoid his eyes but he kept them firmly on the two girls, who were dressed in modern African style. Both wore *lappas* and *bubas* made of Fante cloth.

Who are these women to you?

I hesitated to answer the question.

"But, Chief, tell me who are these fine girls to you; don't blame me if I tried to push my hand around one of them."

The girls laughed.

"They are my women," I said finally, almost blurting.

I waited for another statement because I knew my planning officer would say something else.

"Women . . . or *wives,* Minister Dahn?" he asked.

I tried to avoid frowning.

"Yes, my man, they're my wives . . . Don't you know?"

When did I ever introduce any of my wives to my staff members?

The gentleman let out a queer laugh that greatly irritated me.

"The two of them, Chief? You mean you *alone* have these two fine girls? And you want to keep both?"

I ignored the series of questions from my planning officer. He looked at the girls for the last time and walked out of my office quietly, perhaps slightly embarrassed about the brief encounter.

I looked at my wives who sat innocently. They didn't appear to be upset, at least not as much as I had been.

After this incident, my uneasiness about the frequent visits to my office by my wives increased. Then several other junior and senior officials began to joke and

tease me. Their jokes made me feel rather uncomfortable and indignant about the whole affair. But I couldn't think of dropping my wives at the moment, neither was I contemplating quitting my ministerial job. My appointment as Assistant Minister for Personnel and Planning in the Ministry of Presidential Affairs was too great a milestone in my career to let it go like that. In our country, top administrative positions in national government hardly went to people like me. And this had come to me not particularly for my academic brilliance and professional training, but because of a social connection I had established with an elitist family in Monrovia. Now the same elite was on me about some aspects of my social life.

After some time, I called Kau, my senior wife, and talked to her about their visits to my office. I felt that this was necessary because the problem kept rising steadily.

"Kau, I think you people will have to keep at home now," I said to her.

"But we don't walk about in the city," she said, quite surprised by my statement. "Aye, my people who saw us in the street? Who want to put us in trouble with you, Dahn?"

"No, Kau," I said quickly, "I mean coming to my office."

"What about coming to your office?"

"I told you the last time that our work was rather delicate and receiving visitors was inconvenient on many occasions . . . You have seen me working with all kinds of papers and people in my office before . . ."

Kau sighed and looked at me with some sort of amazement. She probably did not expect this from me. When this ministerial job was given to me, my wives were quite enthusiastic about it. In fact all my people were crazy about the idea that someone from our area suddenly had been pushed into the political limelight.

"But people go to other offices quite frequently," Kau said to me.

"Yes, that's true, Kau, but you people will have to stay home now, and not be running to my office as before."

"Is your office different from other people's?"

"Yes, it is quite different, Kau; you know it is the Presidential Ministry, right in the building with the President of the country . . ."

When last did I discuss the various types of government ministries and their functions with Kau?

"Dahn, you must be up to something now; I don't understand. Maybe you want to be taking your *kwii* women or school girls to your office now. Anyway, it is your office. We will stay home and be eating our *pusawa* and you and your *kwii* women can have your office . . ."

"Don't talk like that, Kau," I said; "you people should be able to understand."

"Dahn, do what you want to do."

"Tell Yei about it."

"Don't worry about Yei. If I don't go to your office or didn't send her there, she won't be seen there at all."

Kau sent her big son to call Yei. When she came, Kau wasted no time in telling her the news about visiting my office. Yei frowned immediately and joined Kau in suspecting me of being up to something. We talked about it briefly and then they resorted to quiet resignation.

I could see the discontent in their faces about stopping them from visiting my office, where they usually went together. Kau and Yei apparently enjoyed their visits to the Ministry of Presidential Affairs in the Presidential Palace. The colossal building was the most modern and beautiful in the whole country. Our government was still paying on the 108 million dollar loan that went into the construction of the statuesque edifice.

My wives enjoyed stepping into the beautiful hallways of the Palace; they loved to ride the elevators to my sixteenth floor office. Walking into the air-conditioned office became so great a pleasure that they were there every week. Sometimes they brought me food, sometimes they brought their friends and relatives to see the beauty and magnificence of their husband's office. But other times they came simply to greet me and see me punching the adding machine and hitting the electric typewriter behind my desk. Now they missed all of these things.

The curtailing of visits to my office by Kau and Yei and their relatives and friends did not solve my problem at all. Some of my office mates, especially those higher than me including our chief minister, Edward J. Barclay, continued to joke and tease me occasionally, sometimes quite strongly. I tried to tolerate the jokes and make them rather amusing, but I couldn't continue this for long. I began to think about what to do under the circumstances.

I took a report to Minister Barclay's office one afternoon. He had not sent for it but I knew he needed it for the forthcoming staff meeting on recruitment of planning officers for our ministry.

"Thank you for the report, Minister Dahn," Mr. Barclay said when I gave him the booklet. "You brought it just in time. You're a brilliant young man and you usually do smart and neat job."

A contented smile crossed my face.

"Dahn, how is the Personnel and Planning Office?"

"It's all right, Mr. Barclay," I said. "We're trying."

"That's fine, Dahn; you are quite brilliant as I just said, and that is why when my uncle and his wife recommended you to me, I didn't hesitate to forward your name to the President of the Republic for the ministerial appointment you now hold. You know I bypassed all formalities to push your appointment through."

I grinned appreciatively. Minister Barclay was not a man who easily expressed commendation to workers, and whenever he did, one felt flattered and highly delighted.

Then a brief silence fell on us. I stared into Mr. Barclay's face. It seemed that he was thinking about something and I suspected that he was about to plunge into my domestic life. Minister Barclay had joined the teasing group and gone deeper into it. He usually confronted me with the issue on certain occasions, often informally, but sometimes embarrassingly.

"I saw you people at the party the other day," he said, smiling.

My guess proved correct. I knew the subject would come up. And, as usual, it emerged casually and as a byproduct of our conversation.

I said nothing to the minister about my going to a party with anyone.

"How are your people, Minister Dahn?" he asked.

"Which people?" I asked, of course knowing exactly to whom he was referring.

"You don't know whom I'm talking about? I mean your native women, especially your headwife I saw with you at the party over the weekend . . . I know you didn't expect me at that party, not so?"

I didn't answer but it was true that I did not think Minister Barclay would attend such a party. It was rather a small social affair, the type that he hardly attended.

"Well, they are all right, Minister Barclay," I said finally.

"Dahn, aren't you tired of those poor country women yet?"

I looked into his face again. I had wanted to ask him: "Minister Barclay, aren't you tired of your wife now?"

"When will you get a civilized wife, I mean an educated woman to take to parties and other kinds of social and political functions?"

I hesitated to respond to his question, and he didn't press me for an immediate answer.

"Minister Barclay, what about attending important occasions without a lady?" I asked.

"Just so you can keep your country women?"

"No, Mr. Barclay."

"Well, that's even worse, Dahn. Just imagine a government official like you—a whole Assistant Minister, not just a clerk or a head of a bureau—without a wife, I mean a decent *kwii* wife, attending important functions like one of those irresponsible single boys around town. That would not look good at all."

There was an air of joviality in our talks but Mr. Barclay firmly held his officialdom behind his words. Each time I appeared a little resentful he threw his official weight behind his words, forcing me to retreat to give way to him.

I continued in my job amidst the pressure on me to marry a literate woman. After a year, a vacancy occurred: the Deputy Minister for Personnel and Planning was dismissed for what was termed as "administrative reasons." I became immediately excited. My rise to power and eminence in government service on the national level was about to take another thrust. I was sure of succeeding my immediate boss for the mere fact that I was next in line of succession and I thought I had all the necessary qualifications and experience. I began to calculate the increase in salary and fringe benefits, the traveling allowance, and the little tips received during recruitment of workers in our ministry, which my former boss used to enjoy.

What happened next?

My excitement died down as suddenly as it had arisen when Minister Barclay hinted that he would not consider any person for such a position whose social life did not reflect modern living. The minister did not define the term "modern living," neither did he mention me by name. But everybody knew what the term signified as far as Minister Barclay was concerned. And it was also apparent that the first person his mind had run to was me—James K. Dahn.

Minister Barclay instructed me to take over the duties of the former deputy minister until further ordered. I did all the work of my ex-chief without extra compensation and without much difficulty until I received a pamphlet on budgetary appropriations for the new fiscal year. I took it to Minister Barclay.

"What's that, Minister Dahn?" he asked.

"The budgetary appropriations and the new superannuation scheme for our ministry," I said.

"What am I supposed to do with it, Dahn?"

"Well, Chief, I need some clarification on it."

"My goodness!" the minister sighed. "I think we need a Deputy Minister for Personnel and Planning," he said, and sat up in his chair.

He looked at me after his statement, perhaps to see if I was offended by it.

"Let's see what it is all about, Dahn."

I put the document before the minister on his desk.

He skimmed through it.

"Sit down, Mr. Dahn," he said after skimming. "We have to examine the statistical calculations carefully . . . This seems to be a complicated document.

You don't have to tell me that; I know it.

I drew a chair to the desk and sat. For a good thirty minutes we went over the huge amounts and the various notations in the document. Minister Barclay seemed exhausted. He took his head away from the pamphlet, got a cigarette from his coat pocket and lit it.

Then he stared at me for a few seconds.

"My man, how are things at your home?" he asked, and leaned back in his chair.

What the hell had he to do with my home?

Well, Minister Barclay often asked about the homes of his employees including his subministers. It was a habit of his, and most of us were no longer reluctant to tell him all about our homes. Usually there was no malice in his intrusion into the affairs of other people.

"My home is all right, Minister," I said.

"All your people all right, Dahn?"

"Yes sir, thanks to the Lord."

He lit another cigarette and began smoking.

"My man, when will you get into real modern living?" he asked, smiling rather generously.

"I'm a modern man and I am sure I live a modern life," I said and began preparations because the battle over my social life was about to be resumed.

"Even when it comes to marriage?"

I didn't want to answer him on this topic but I later decided to.

"Well, I have been married for some time now."

"You mean to those native women? Don't tell me that."

"But what can I say again?"

"Say something better than that, Dahn."

"What else do you want me to say, Minister Barclay?"

"A whole Assistant Minister like you?"

"Mr. Barclay . . ."

"I say, tell me something better than that, Dahn."

I adjusted my body in the chair and gathered momentum. The battle was now in full swing. I had fought it several times and I was prepared to continue it.

"Is that all you can say, Dahn?"

"What do you want me to say again, Minister Barclay? After all, that is the way I want things to be with me. I don't have anything more to say on this topic, Minister . . ."

I sounded defiant. I suddenly seemed to have courage to speak out on my domestic affairs.

"Don't you think all these things count when it comes to higher government positions?"

Even that of the Deputy Minister for Personnel and Planning in our ministry?

"Well, I am speaking only in your own interest . . . You have to do something about your domestic life. With all these educated girls around town looking for husbands with tears in their eyes, you telling me that you are married to a pile of country women? You better do something or you won't have me to blame . . ."

"Minister Barclay, some people are married according to the traditional African way and are working in government offices."

"But they know what offices to work in," the minister said, "and what positions to hold, too."

"Well, look, Minister Barclay . . ."

"Dahn, not in this ministry, right in the Presidential Palace."

"But Minister . . ."

"Dahn, this is not the office for such people."

"So there is none in our ministry?"

"You mean besides you?"

"Well, yes."

"At least not in any ministerial position. Maybe some of our drivers, mechanics, janitors, and people like that, but not you and me."

I seemed to be losing the battle but I struggled on.

"We are all Africans, Minister Barclay," I said.

"And so what?" he replied rather quickly.

"Well . . ."

"Look, Dahn, we surely are all Africans, but this is a modern age. We have to bid a farewell to old Africa. In fact, we expect people like you with higher Western education to lead the way, but you seem to be looking towards traditional African life with glorification. You see, Dahn, you have been to the university and have college degrees, an opportunity which we did not get in our day."

Who's to be blamed for that?

The minister looked into my face again. He said a few more things and lit another cigarette. Then he picked up the document from his desk. We went over the rest of the pages after the battle over my social life.

"Minister Dahn, go and look over the figures again," Mr. Barclay noted. "You need to study this document carefully. You see, when it comes to professional training and academic qualifications, you've got them, but try to do something about yourself, Dahn. You see, you boys from the interior ought to get some political appointments now, because we want to bring some country people into the government. But you all have to do away with some of those primitive things from the hinterland. We're in the modern world now . . . I hope you will see about yourself as soon as possible."

Who are the country people?

Three months later the vacancy for the deputy minister in our ministry was filled by another person outside the ministry. I was disappointed but not surprised that the position was not given to me. But another promotion came up and that passed by me the way June passes by July every year.

However, I continued in my same portfolio and kept on hoping to rise to higher positions in the government bureaucracy. Then something came up again. Minister Barclay received a few fellowships for senior staff training in the United States of America. He sent for me.

"Minister Dahn, we have something again," Mr. Barclay said, when I came to his office that morning.

"Again?" I said.

"Well, yes, something again," he said, laughing.

"What is it this time?"

"We have some fellowships from the American Cultural and Educational Foundation in Monrovia for senior staff members to improve themselves. Of course, you've got your B.A., M.A., and M.Sc., but you might want to take one of these to America to go and enjoy those colored girls in the States . . ."

"That will be fine, sir," I said, after thinking about the fellowships for a while. "I won't mind taking one if you people agree to offer me one."

The Minister laughed.

"*If we agree?* Well, Dahn, you know your trouble. You don't want to leave those poor *country things* and live a modern life."

"Well, Minister, I thought I promised to do something about the matter very soon."

"Well, you have to . . . I hope you will put an end to the problem soon. You see, everything that comes your way is always missing you."

"I know, Mr. Barclay."

"If another promotion comes again, where will you be?"

Where have I been all this time?

"You see, we have to know the kind of persons we are giving higher government positions to," he said to me.

Minister Barclay sounded as if government positions were a legacy of a particular group of people—perhaps the elitist sector of our population.

"Well, if our advice continues to fall on deaf ears, don't be surprised if something unfavorable happens to your job here."

"You mean my present job?" I asked rather quickly.

Minister Barclay laughed and said, "Of course, yes."

Was he thinking about replacing me now because of my social life?

"Since you're interested in the fellowships, I will see if we can give you one. Anyway, they are not for this year. They won't be available until about three to five months from now. I hope things will be all right with you by then."

"I think so, Minister Barclay."

"That's fine, Dahn; I hope everything comes through."

"Thank you, sir," I said to Minister Barclay, and left his office.

When I walked out of Mr. Barclay's office, I wondered why he and his senior staff members could not understand my position. It was not too strange a life to live but they kept bugging me about my unlettered wives, whom I had acquired some years ago. I got Kau during my high school days and Yei when I was doing my undergraduate studies at the state university in Monrovia. For Kau, I went upcountry to collect her; my mother had completed all negotiations for her and all I had to do was to pay the bride price and bring her with me to the city. As for Yei, I didn't even have to travel; I only sent the bride price and she was sent to me like one of those big parcels that come to us in the city from our people in the rural areas. Nothing was unusual about such an act.

Each time the pressure on me to marry according to Western custom mounted, I took refuge at my brother's home in Sinkor. So when Minister Barclay told me about the fellowships and what would happen to my present position if I didn't do something about my social life, I went to Brother Dolo.

"Hello, Brother Dolo," I greeted him when I entered his house that evening.

He responded and offered me a seat in the sitting room.

I sat down and looked around.

"How are things this way, Brother?" I asked.

"Well, things are so-so," Dolo said, smiling. "We look up to you big, big people in the country."

We laughed.

"What's the news in the big office—the Presidential Palace, Brother Dahn?"

"Brother Dolo, we are there-O."

"Ah, you people stay there-O," he said laughing.

Brother Dolo sent for a few bottles of club beer and we began drinking. His wives came and greeted me. The children came and did the same thing.

"So everything is all right with you at work?" Dolo asked, as we sat drinking the beer.

"Well, yes, except this one marriage business."

My brother laughed and stared at me. He refilled my glass and then picked up his. I sent for more beer for us.

"The same thing still around," Dolo said.

"Yes, Brother Dolo, the same *kwii* marriage business. All the talk is about my marriage business as if I am the only person in such shoes."

"Dahn, the way I see it, it looks like your ministers will never get tired about this one marriage business."

"Well, my marriage business and my job are like two ropes hanging on my waist, and I have to try to pull one down."

"I think so myself, Brother Dahn. You have to make up your mind and pull down one of the ropes and let the other one go. In any case, we have talked about this before."

"That's true, Brother Dolo," I said. "Everyday, we're just talking about the same thing . . . In fact something new has come on top of it."

"What is that, Dahn?"

"Foreign travel and training for senior staff members."

"That's fine, and I hope you won't miss this time. We are proud of you, Dahn; it is a great thing to see you in that Presidential Palace. All our people look up to you as our part, the *big shot* in the government. All the chiefs from our home come to Monrovia to see you. We all pray that you will remain in such a big position all the time. So you must do something about this one marriage business. You have to do what your ministers want you to do, Dahn."

I lay back in my chair as my mind wandered. Dolo wasn't compromising any longer as he used to do before. He had joined my senior ministers in calling for a farewell to the old order. The pressure on me had taken on a new front. Now everybody wanted me to marry according to Western custom: one man, one wife in public and several women in secret; church ceremonies, wearing of rings; cutting of cakes, and having an elaborate wedding reception that usually takes the newly married couple a year round to pay for.

"You're right, Brother Dolo," I finally concurred, rather painfully. "My senior ministers keep bugging me all the time. In fact, I am fed up with the whole mess now."

I wanted to tell my brother that I was now thinking of resigning my ministerial post and that would automatically put an end to the pressure. I would be out of their way for good. But where in the world could I find such employment with comparable rank and remuneration? Many persons from the rural areas with a similar amount of Western education and even more usually ended up becoming only teachers, clerks, and general office workers. But here I was in an administrative position with the hope of rising to higher posts in the near future. I knew many people were envious of me and would take my portfolio at any moment.

"Well, Brother Dolo, we have talked about Kau and Yei and the children, over and over," I said. "But I don't seem to have any clear cut solution to the problem . . ."

"Except to send them back to their people, as we have discussed sometime ago."

"But Brother Dolo, my wives have born five children for me."

"And so what?" Dolo said quickly. "Other men have had more than ten children and as many as a dozen wives, but they left them all and got married to civilized women."

What a wickedness!

"Your friend Bill Paasewe and Kato separated. Whoever thought they would? Brother Dolo asked.

Nobody, not even myself. I could not believe that Paasewe could abandon Kato, after fifteen years together and with nine children, for a little schoolgirl. But he did.

"Explain to your wives, Brother Dahn; they should understand the situation."

"Well, up to now, they have not understood it."

"Everything is up to you, Dahn. You see, you people have put your hand in this civilized business, so you must try to live up to it in every way."

"But all these so-called civilized people in higher positions or offices are doing all kinds of things. You and I know that these cabinet ministers, legislators, jurists, and people like that have several women—both civilized and natives—in various parts of the town or country. They are running to them regularly and paying huge bills for them."

"So you prefer to have them under one roof?" Brother Dolo said.

We laughed.

"I know that, Brother Dahn, but despite that, they have their *kwii* women at home, of course as a show-off business."

"So you want me to marry according to Western custom and have a big party?"

"Yes, so we can get boozed up that day."

We laughed again.

"Anyway, Brother Dolo, I have to do something about these girls," I told my brother.

"Well, it is all up to you, Brother Dahn. Me, I got my five women and have no trouble with any one. I can keep as many as my pocket can afford."

But your case is different; you are not a government minister or official like me.

Brother Dolo and I discussed the issue at length, but I still felt undecided. I told him that I would need some time to make a choice between my job and my wives—the two ropes that were tied tightly on my waist.

Kau and I sat face to face again. The same marriage business was our topic for discussion. It was about a few months before the fellowships at my ministry would be granted.

"Kau, the marriage business is catching hell again," I said to her at the beginning of our discussion that night.

She looked into my face and sighed deeply. There was much sadness in her face. I was terribly upset about the whole thing. And it seemed that Kau noticed that I was very desperate that night. This was the first time Kau and I had talked so seriously and so lengthily on the matter.

"Well, I have told you what I had to say on this marriage business," Kau said.

"Kau, I have been thinking of what to do with you and Yei, especially you, who have served me so long and so well."

"Dahn, do as your Brother Dolo has always told you: send us back to our people . . . we will go."

"How can I do that?"

"It's all right; our people will never refuse us."

"I know that, but we have been together for so long now and we have children . . ."

"And so what, Dahn?"

"Kau, you people helped me to become what I am today . . . This very house we live in now, my small taxi transport business and other things, the two of you helped to get them all."

"Yes, and this is our pay now we are getting . . . Well, so God say."

I saw tears rolling down her cheeks. From this point on, she sobbed intermittently throughout our discussion that night and that deepened my grief.

"You and Yei did all kinds of things for us to live in this hard city when I was going to college right here in Monrovia. I was not working for money except the little jobs I used to cut here and there. You people made market and got money, and when I went to America for school, for two years you people took care of the house and the children."

"Well, you either drop us or leave your government job."

Leave my government portfolio?

"That's hard to decide, Kau," I said. "You people can't go like that, and I can't leave my job like that, either."

Kau almost laughed.

"You have to choose between us and the government office so you can live your *kwii* life . . . It is now that you are so civilized to see us around you."

She burst into tears again.

"I'm not the one causing all this trouble, Kau," I said to her. "You should understand my situation."

"I think we will never understand this one. We can't go to school tonight and finish book tomorrow."

I wish they could, especially Kau.

I waited for a moment as she wiped her face and hauled down her *buba* and tied her *lappa* around her waist. Then I began thinking about the series of proposals I had made up a week ago to present to Kau. I took my time to present them to her one by one.

"Kau, suppose I get a place in town for you to stay? Won't that be all right for you?" I said, and listened carefully to her reply to my first proposal.

"Suppose *you do what?*" she asked quickly and stared at me.

I hesitated to answer her. She appeared a little skeptical of the first plan. I explained the deal to her and then added:

"You have seen this many times in Monrovia, right?"

She did not answer; she only sighed deeply.

"What about Yei?" Kau asked.

Yes, poor, young but innocent Yei.

"I can take care of her problem easily. Yei's uncle is in town and he knows the trouble I am going through at my office. He will understand the situation."

"Well, do anything that will get us out of your way."

"You can have the house we were building near my uncle's place in Sinkor," I announced my next plan.

"Who is coming to take that unfinished house?"

Kau seemed to be doubtful of my deals.

"Finishing the house is no problem," I said. "I can arrange that quite easily with my position in government. And I will be supporting you, doing everything for you . . ."

"And you will be doing what?" Kau cut me off.

Her eyes were up into mine again. She showed more skepticism about my next deal.

"You will be supporting me until when?" she asked.

"Should there be any time limit to supporting you?"

"Yes, because it will depend on the *kwii* wife you're going to get. You know these civilized women are troublesome. They don't like to share men with other women but they like to take people good, good men from them. I know that some of them finished putting all these ideas into your head."

"No, no, Kau, no woman is cooking my head. Anyway, the woman I will marry will have to share me with you and Yei; after all, my children's mothers have to live, too."

"Oh, my children!" Kau cried out loudly.

"Don't cry about the children business," I comforted her.

As Kau cried, I tried to figure out which of the two ropes on my waist I should pull down in the final analysis. On the right were Kau, Yei, and their children; at the end of the left were my ministerial rank and my possible rise to eminence on the national political scene.

"You know these *kwii* women don't like to take good care of other people's children . . . they make servants out of them . . . I want my children to be with me wherever I will go."

"Don't worry about the children, Kau," I repeated my assurance. "I will take good care of them. You can come to the house sometimes to see them."

"Who wants to come to your *kwii* house for your civilized woman to be abusing for nothing?"

"Well, you may see me at my office, then . . ."

"What? The same office you finished driving us away? No, my man, you don't mean that."

"What about my brother Dolo's house?"

"That your brother who has been behind you ever since to throw us away?"

Well, where should we meet then?

"Anyway, those kids will be properly cared for, Kau. Don't have any fear about them."

"We shall see what will happen in the future."

"So I will finish the house and you can go in immediately. I will send Yei to her uncle whom I have already explained everything to, and I am glad he is in sympathy with me in this marriage trouble."

"Anything you do will be all right with me . . . I will stay at the house; if you don't come to see me, it is okay with me. If you don't let my children come to see me, it is fine with me . . . God will help me."

"Who says I will forget about you? I will forever be grateful to you people for all what you and Yei did for me. I promise you sincerely on all these things. In fact I will give you some money, about three to four hundred dollars, to start a big market or you can have a shop at the house . . . I will put a shop room on it. Won't that be fine, Kau?"

Kau only nodded her answer. I had expected her to smile after I had talked about giving her some money, but she didn't. Instead, she continued sobbing.

"Well, everything is all right, now, Kau," I said.

"What makes everything all right? Because we are going and leaving behind everything we have suffered for?"

"Don't talk like that, Kau. Don't you want to consider all what I have been telling you the whole night?" I said and looked at my watch; it was after midnight, indicating that we had now talked for more than five hours.

I looked at Kau and reflected on the number of years we had been together; I thought of the pressure on me from my minister to marry a literate woman. Then I sighed deeply. We had reached the end of the affair; of course, I was determined to finalize everything about this marriage business. I had presented all my deals in a grand style, amidst Kau's skepticism and hesitation in accepting them. But I had comforted and assured her sincerely that I would not forget her and Yei.

After a moment of brief but awesome silence, Kau raised her eyes up into mine.

"Oh, Dahn, so this is the end of us now, after all the years with you?" she said and burst into tears.

Well, what to do?

Kau wept bitterly as one of the two ropes on my waist came down solemnly.

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. On what cultural assumptions and values do Kau and Yei operate? From what background has each woman come, and how do her assumptions grow out of that background?

2. Although Dahn, the narrator, never leaves Liberia, in what ways does he cross cultures nevertheless? What are the cultural assumptions and values under which Mr. Barclay and his department operate? In what ways are Barclay's demands of Dahn justified? In what ways are they not justified?
3. What is really at stake in this story, both for Dahn and for Barclay, and why? What does the "old order" have to recommend it; what does the new way offer?
4. What elements do you respond to, effective or detracting, in Cordor's writing style? Explain your response.

DAVID HALBERSTAM

How Datsun Discovered America

Born in 1934, David Halberstam graduated from Harvard University in 1955 and has been involved with writing ever since. He has worked as a reporter for the New York Times *(1956–1960) and as a staff writer and foreign correspondent for the newspaper in the Congo (now Zaire) from 1961 to 1962. He also spent a year each in Vietnam (1962–1963), Warsaw, Poland (1965), and Paris, France (1966). In 1964, Halberstam won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the Vietnam War. His two best-selling books,* The Best and the Brightest *(1972) and* The Powers That Be *(1979), have been widely praised and criticized as examples of new journalism.*

"How Datsun Discovered America," published in Esquire *in October 1986, also exemplifies this new journalism approach to reporting. Fellow new journalist Tom Wolfe describes this kind of nonfiction writing as one in which techniques ordinarily confined to the novel or short story are used "to create in one form both the kind of objective reality of journalism and the subjective reality that people have always gone to the novel for." New journalism often has a colorful style, extensive description, personal commentary from the writer, juxtaposed facts creating a desired dramatic effect, and a narrative that brings us inside the minds of the characters.*

Halberstam is a thorough writer. In preparing his subject, he says, "I talk to everybody. I don't just see the generals—what I call four-star interviews where everything is all set up for you. I start with the privates so that when I get to the top, I know what I'm talking about."

Before you read "How Datsun Discovered America," write about a situation at work involving a well-liked and even competent co-worker who was nevertheless eventually let go. Describe the situation of the person at work, why the person was removed, and what factors you think caused his or her removal. If you haven't encountered a situation like this, write instead about