Planes, Security and Automobiles

Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return.
Leonardo Da Vinci

While I love Leonardo Da Vinci (A LGBTQ+ icon) and I am a proud owner of a Vitruvian Man t-shirt (Thanks Mom), I completely disagree with his sentiments regarding flying. Flying to me is a means to an end and I'm the lucky sort that doesn't get nervous flying. Being in a cramped seat, stuffed next to strangers is not my favourite thing and I certainly don't specifically long to fly again (to travel again is an entirely different matter). Especially when stuck in a centre seat. Generally, I pre-book my seats to ensure an aisle seat. Perhaps, it's due to my paranoia from numerous research binges regarding serial killers and an excess of *Criminal Minds,* but I prefer an easy exit if I cannot get an easily defensible position (restaurants are always a great experience). However, *apparently* booking ahead is not enough for KLM as I ended up in a centre seat. Luckily, I was seated beside Elspeth (another participant), so one less complete stranger and someone to compete against when relentlessly playing *Angry Birds*.

After a long 8 hours, we finally landed at Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA)… queue an uptick in panic about customs. Starting from when the forms were handed out on the airport the sudden lightbulb about my lack of knowledge of where we were going was panic inducing. Salvation was found in the comfort of WIFI where I proceeded to figure the address of where we were staying. So with lyrics of *Six the Musical* ringing through my head – a great musical told from the perspectives of the six wives of Henry VIII competing about who had the worst of it but I digress – I joined the line up to get through customs fighting with approximately a dozen (3) tour groups. Once I was up, I calmly walked forward and handed my passport and papers to the officer hopefully not revealing my previous panic. My first indication of the technologically advanced nature of Africa was the use of fingerprint scanners in customs. No other airport I have visited (which is a shocking number now that I have thought about it) has used fingerprint scanning. Being a techie myself, this prompted a lot of questions:

What are they using our fingerprints for?
Where is this data being stored?
How is this data secured and who can access it?
Why are fingerprints a necessity here but no where else I have visited?
Why is customs more intense here (similar to Cuba in intensity) than in Europe?
Why do people have the perception of Africa being technologically illiterate when fingerprint technology is used at airports?

None of which I have the answer to currently, but I am very curious and determined to find out.

Another indication of the surprising tech scene in Tanzania is how easy it is to obtain a SIM card. After some much needed sleep and food, we headed out to a nearby village Tengeru to withdraw some Tanzanian Shillings (current exchange rate is $1 CDN: 1,713.96 Tanzanian Shillings) and achieve our mission of obtaining a SIM card. However, rather than the epic hunt for the elusive necessity I was imagining, we simply walked over to a nearby booth on the side

of the road. This is admittedly a simplification for dramatic effect as finding the SIM card may have been easy, but the process of obtaining one was bureaucratic in its steps. Namely that you needed show them your passport and have your picture taken, steps that I had not thought would be necessary. In other countries such as the UK you can buy SIM cards at kiosks in the airport or at the grocery store, so why is it necessary in Tanzania to produce your passport? Is it indicative of the reported tendency for restrictive tech policies in Africa or is it for some other unknown reason? After a brief google search, it is well known that you need a passport to buy a SIM card in Tanzania but no mention of why.

In addition to the SIM card conundrum and the fingerprints, WIFI at Vijiji Center has been surprisingly good. I am able to do some basic internet browsing and in downtimes and specific locations even download videos. Of course, when everyone and their grandma is on the WIFI it can be hard to even connect, but it is markedly better than the WIFI I was expecting to receive. In an interesting contrast, the roads – while paved in places – could use some improvement and power and WIFI is not available everywhere. Is it only tourists that receive the blessing of decent WIFI? Is WIFI worth the trouble when data can often times perform better? If the answers to the former questions are yes, why is it that infrastructure is pushed to be back in favour of providing for tourists? Is this a remnant of Tanzania's colonized past or is technology the new colonizer?