

family was the official custodian (and relator) of all these histories and that of the tribe as a whole. With the missionary's help a hundred or even fifty years ago, these histories could have been preserved. But I am inclined to believe that if these people had then — like the polynesian prince in James Michener's *Hawaii* — pleaded with the missionary that they dictate these histories to him, they would have been laughed away. Impossible! the missionary would say, how can you remember all that? — forgetting the Greek history he had presumably learnt while studying for the ministry.

This disservice — the successful erasure of our past — is one of the reasons why the missionary has not received the gratitude that seems his due; even famous figures like Father Huddleston did not inspire gratitude — only admiration for doing what we expected any honourable and principled man to do. ●

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## Dream Money in Léo

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JAMES CURREY

TO MOST PEOPLE 'Congo-Brazza' still means French Africa while 'Congo-Léo' means ex-Belgian Africa. This shortening of names does not stop with the two capitals; Matadi becomes 'Mat' and, inevitably, Stanleyville becomes 'Stan'. Brazzaville and Léopoldville sit among the trees on opposite sides of *le pool*, a mile-wide part of the Congo river. The ferries pass one another half way at each half-hour amid wedges of the evergrowing green weed. The women's clothes vividly colour the lower decks. Their babies, like little knights, joust one another from their mothers' backs and yell for the inevitable attention of a bulging Frenchwoman. Congo-lease stand white-shirted at the rails. A Belgian golfing party talks on the top of the first class gangway.

BRAZZAVILLE is provincial French; there is a *Chambre du Commerce* and a *Place de l'Hôtel de ville*. Frenchmen pop up and down on their mopeds, buy batons of bread, drink aperitifs. They look very French even with their black skins. From the ferry the town is rapidly swallowed up among the trees.

LEOPOLDVILLE sets out to be a great capital. Large banks, office buildings look out across the trees as the ferry draws into *le beach*. Along the main boulevard, at night, the street lights stretch undulating into the distance with the promise of kilometres of town. But in

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fact the town peters out into leafy suburbs after a few hundred metres. Léo has the clean-limbed look of the towns in *Babar the Baby Elephant*. Except that everything is becoming tatty at the edges. The grass is unkempt. There is a stink of urine. And only one block of offices is being slowly built. For, of course, the mining millions of Katanga have until now been pocketed by Tshombe.

IN BRAZZAVILLE the money is good but the prices are as wildly high as they are throughout French speaking West Africa. "It casts me", yelled an American across a Brazza hotel lounge, "twenty dallars every time my family wants to eat". The Central African Federation franc is still controlled from Paris and the prices in the shops *look* the same as in Metropolitan France. But as the Central African francs are meant to be twice the value of the old French franc the cost of a meal knocks the lining out of a visitor's stomach.

In Léopoldville the money is upsetting. It is dream money. There is lots of it to be seen everywhere. Bank notes flicker in hands. On the Brazza side of the ferry the young *Zazous*, or teddyboys, stand leafing their wads of Congo-Léo notes under the trees. The French bank clerk shrugs his shoulders at the sight of Congo-Léo notes which he has not been allowed to exchange since independence and says, frankly, that the only thing to do is to see what you can get out of the note-leafing boys. Officially the rate of exchange is 3½ Brazza francs for every Léo franc. But the black market rate is closer to one for one. In Léo you can hardly sit down for a glass of *Primus* beer at one of the boulevard cafes before you are asked for your Brazza francs. The cost of living is thus reduced to almost a third for visitors who come via Brazzaville.

Money — raggedy three-foot Léo boys with bare feet peel off crisp notes. Money — a quarter of a million Léo francs for a second-hand Vauxhall which has not been serviced since independence. Money — a game played at the Léo street corners with two blank playing cards and a joker. The Maître du Casino squats on the pavement flickering cards from finger to finger and chanting: "Tunisie — Nigérie — Maroc — Anglais — Français — Belge — Tshombe". He teases the crowd for bets as to which is the joker. A blonde Swedish U.N. man lays a thousand francs and shrugs as the crowd groans at his loss. The chant rebursts: 'Anglais — Français — Belge — Tshombe'.

THE UNITED NATIONS are everywhere. Pale blue berets, pale blue scarves and fawn uniforms make this the prettiest army since the red-coats. White jeeps moan along the boulevards. A Thai clammers into the back of a white Bedford two-tonner as it moves away from a boulevard cafe. An Indian medical orderly Sunday-drives three new colleagues who flew in yesterday from Bombay; he points out the sights of the town: "Now that is where you purchase your films". At the University College of Lovanium a Canadian family swims in the pool while a Nigerian soldier guards the nuclear reactor. There is not much for the soldiers to do in the town except to finger the tourist trinkets and to think what to send back to County Donegal. And, of

course, the night clubs dust-pan in the money. 'The Cage' is billed as a sultry tropical strip-tease; but the totem symbols are very much of Europe, with a bit of flagellation and a cigarette stubbed out on a girl's naked breast.

THE U.N. AND ITS AGENCIES fill the flats and the hotels, although many of the Belgian villas have dust-drawn curtains and weeds on the crazy-paving. Hotels Residence, Stanley, Memling, Pool and Regina are permanently full.

"Have you got a room for tonight?"

The Congolese doorkeeper replies: "I think so, but you must return at four o'clock. Madame will then come and she will tell you".

"Is it probable that there will be a room?"

"*Bien sûr*. It is probable. Where do you work?"

I realise too late that he assumes that I work for the U.N. or an embassy, but without thinking I reply: "In South Africa".

"There is no room." His expression remains unchanged.

"But I am completely against the South African government." I explode out the words.

"Madame will tell you which room you can have at four o'clock." His expression remains unchanged. I know I have got my room.

LOVANUM IS A BOOM UNIVERSITY. Ford and Gulbenkian conscience money lies under the buildings although it only supports Roman Catholic freedom of conscience. Its association with the university of Louvain remains close. Professor Nicaise lectures in Belgium for half the year on the political systems of Africa. A gaunt priest in a floor-sweeping hassock looks into an American spectroscope. "It cost a million Belgian francs," he says. The Americans have built an atomic reactor. They have just beaten the Russians who have been putting one in for the University of Cairo. M. Carlier, a botanist, compares the progressive stunting of the growth of the pots of maize exposed to 5, 10, 15 and 20 thousand roentgens of radioactivity. He points proudly. "Perhaps chlorophyll has totally ceased to exist in that one."

The *Alliance Française* has arranged for the university staff to play their production of *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* at the Théâtre du Zoo. Giraudoux is being watched by Congolese, French and Belgians. The Congolese girls sit magnificent in their swathes of rich Bousac cloths. Apparently the war might not have

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## Africa Diary

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taken place; though in the interval a Belgian said quietly to me: "The wife of the commander of the Force Publique said to me on the eve of independence 'Tomorrow we shall be foreigners here'."

THE COURRIER D'AFRIQUE stands near a star of avenues. Two small Citroen vans are loading the day's edition. Boys with piles of newspapers run along the dusty pavements. The afternoon sun glints in the trees. I ask a journalist: "*Le Courrier d'Afrique* is an evening paper?"

"Oh no! It's a morning paper."

"Well, then isn't it rather late?"

"Yes, perhaps. For some time it did not come out at all. *M. le Directeur* was locked up by the government of the Congo."

M. Gabriel Makoso, *le Directeur*, is nicely tailored and briskly friendly. He smiles at the mention of jail. His assistant, Antoine Matumono, is an Angolan politician. He sits behind a desk full of agency photographs and proofs and says with all the confidence of youth, "I am a member of the Provisional Government of Angola. I am the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ANGOLA has its headquarters in an old Belgian villa near the centre of Léopoldville. Round it the earth is trodden bare like a chicken run. The Provisional Government is in fact the executive of Holden Roberto's *Uniao das Populações de Angola* (U.P.A.). It has been running the guerilla warfare in Northern Angola which has changed the whole position of Portugal in Africa. Guerillas in khaki shorts and with bare feet squat on the ground to cook. Just over the wall from an everyday suburban road they wash, talk and cut one another's hair. A man with a Portuguese bullet hole in his cheek wanders around behind a bulge of bandages. Holden Roberto stops a man with an arm smashed by a grenade. "The Portuguese insist that our struggle has been crushed," says M. Neco, the Press Officer. "But we know that it is otherwise." His French is easy to understand with its heavy Portuguese accent.

Holden Roberto cuts his well-suited way through the morning ablutions. His arguments and movements are equally well tailored, except on the question of the quarrel with his political rivals, the M.P.L.A. He is slim, tall and a little reserved behind his spectacles. He is very conscious of being *le premier ministre*. "Our greatest need is arms," he says, as though he were discussing coffee plantations or dock equipment. But the only considerable offer of arms would have had Russian technicians attached. "The second need is for drugs. Against malaria, tetanus and gangrene." He speaks easy English. The imminent arrival of 100 men of the M.P.L.A. from Algeria will mean that their political rivals will join battle against the Portuguese.

A young Methodist arrives with his father from the post he runs on the frontier to help Angolan refugees; there are many protestants in the U.P.A. In the main office people sit at almost bare tables working with determined silence; it is gloomy and cool. Occasional voices come in from the yard. Then I walk back to the hotel world of aperitifs down the Avenue Charles de Gaulle. ●