
Beer, Bricks and Boots

*Lagos and Accra boom
into the independent sixties*

JAMES CURREY

LAGOS IS CHEERFUL CHAOS. Accra is more sombre and better ordered. In Lagos the traffic sweeps on to the island across the Victoria bridge with screeching brakes and drivers yelling "fool you" at one another. In Accra the police, standing on little pedestals in white versions of an English bobby's uniform, stop all the traffic while they lecture drivers; they can arrest people for hooting.

IN LAGOS money-making is free enterprise. "How much to the Federal Palace Hotel?" I asked the taxi driver at the gangling sprawl of the airport.

"Two pound sah."

"Take my luggage out of the boot. That's too much."

"Tirty bob sah." He shows me a scruffy tariff sheet which sadly enough bears him out.

"Well, all right."

"I look well after you. I good friend."

"You tried to overcharge me. That's not friendly."

"Try anything once sah! I good friend." His English is difficult. Having just arrived from French-speaking Africa, I expected to be able to relax my ears and my brain, but the British have not imposed their language with the success of the French.

In Accra money-making is technically government-controlled.

"Have you an entry permit?" I am asked at the better-run airport.

"No. I thought that Commonwealth citizens were all right."

"You must have an entry permit." The official looks as though he would be glad if I went back to Lagos.

"Well, what must I do?"

"Five bob for an Emergency Entry Permit." He stamps my passport. The place for the official receipt number is left blank.

In Nigeria tips are expected for all the hundreds of people who do things you don't want. In Ghana tipping is illegal, though people do not refuse.

IN ACCRA you seem to be able to get whom you want on the telephone—except that the *Drum* office has only

JAMES CURREY, who works in the Cape Town office of an English publishing office, described Leopoldville and Brazzaville in *The New African*, November 1962.

one line. In Lagos it is by no means certain you will get through. In the rickety hot lead atmosphere of *The Daily Express* office I asked John Pepper Clark how to get through to Chinua Achebe at Broadcasting House.

"You tried to get Broadcasting House? But nobody ever gets Broadcasting House." He tipped himself back with laughter and nearly fell out of the window on to the rusty roofs under the rainy season heavy day skies.

IN LAGOS the buildings skyscraper out of the slums. It is the biggest boom town in Africa. Independence House is being built for the Federal Government by Italians. The slums spread noisily over the islands and on to the Apapa mainland. White new concrete booms out above the palm trees along the edge of the lagoon where the rust-red Liverpool freighters bring in more goods to unsettle further the balance of payments. For Nigeria was £72m. in the red in 1960. This is what the economists call "the beer, bricks and boots" stage of economic development when local industries are started which do not demand precise skills. Nigeria is almost self-sufficient in quart bottles of 'Star' beer.

In Ghana they are pulling down the slums. The new Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute stands on the edge of Winneba. As you drive to it through the town, blood-red crosses are splashed passover-like on the walls. The marked houses will be bulldozed. Pictures appear on occasion in the Ghanaian papers of people standing in the road beside their belongings. The papers give their flattened houses as examples of the wonderful new Ghana which is arising. An official of the Congress People's Party is quoted as saying "Alternative accommodation is being considered."

An Australian journalist had just been out to Ajena. A Ga girl had interviewed people in a village to find out what they thought of being flooded out by the dam; as far as they could make out, nobody knew that they would be making their contribution to the electrolysis of bauxite into aluminium.

IN NIGERIA *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Graphic* and the rest of the press viper with vitriol. Nothing escapes notice. There will always be some paper to defend somebody. In the middle of last year, the Coker inquiry provided joy for journalists and readers.

Chief Justice G. B. A. Coker was appointed to conduct a Commission of Enquiry into the financial affairs of the six statutory corporations in the Western Region. The affairs of The Western Region Finance Corporation and the Western Nigeria Development Corporation were under particular scrutiny. The crowds outside the courts were only rivalled by the everlasting crowds outside the Lagos Maternity Home. The crowds in the court-room were told to stop giggling. Among details presented as evidence was an allegation that £6.2m. had been diverted from government funds to a Company controlled by four leaders of the Action Group.

Chief Michael Okorundu, Q.C., provided a democratic side-show with his attacks on the Action Group, the Israelis of the Nigersol finance company, and on Macmillan, who was quoted as having told a public relations man that he favoured the Action Group. *The Daily Express* came out with the joyful and uncomplicated headline: "The Western Region is bankrupt" and

was rapped by Chief Justice Coker. Altogether it was not a fortunate impression to give when Nigeria is looking around for £200m.-worth of investment from abroad to finance its Six Year Plan. The Nigerians are in a more difficult situation democratically than Nkrumah, who can allow uncounted millions to be spent on the Boeings, Viscounts and Ilyushins of Ghana Airways.

The Coker enquiry has given a great opportunity to the conservatives ruling Northern People's Congress to attack their chief rivals, the Action Group of the Western Region, who are African Socialists and maintain an office in Accra. "The boys from the North have come to get us," said a young Nigerian in a Lagos bar. The fight with the North is developing. "Of course," said another young man in an open-air Ibadan nightclub, "younger people don't think these Northern people are going far enough. The British think Nigeria is so democratic, so Westminster. But young people want a bit of a move-on. They want something to happen. The Northerners won't do anything." The band tooted hi-life under a Coca-Cola sign. "Will the Federation break up? Oh no! We're the biggest country in Africa."

IN CONTRAST, in Ghana, press and politics are a bore. The *Ghana Times* and the *Evening Post* are Congress Peoples Party hand-outs. The end of the party Congress at Kumasi finished with the plaudits of the newspapers. The *Ashanti Pioneer* included a large old block of the redeemer, the Osagyefo Nkrumah. The glories of one-party Ghana were humourlessly rubber-stamped by the tabloids.

On the Wednesday after the Congress, a bomb was thrown at Nkrumah at Kulungugu in the north. At the Government Rest House at Kumasi the day afterwards, a number of Nkrumah's press officers came in. The Ghanaian with whom I was travelling knew one of them. They talked about the weather, the roads, their mutual friends. They had come from Kulungugu. But there was no mention of the incident. "To mention that would not be wise," said my companion afterwards.

Accra feeds on rumours as the lizards on the government offices feed on sun. "Oh yes! I know the head of the army very well," a Ghanaian confides in me. "We were at school together. He does not agree with the Osagyefo's ideas. But for the time being he will stick it out. But then who knows?"

AMERICANS are everywhere in Lagos. The corridors of the luxury Federal Palace Hotel are full of the sassy children of American businessmen who are here fixing up deals. The United States has backed up the Six Year Plan with a promise of £89m.-worth of aid. (Britain has promised its big black hope only £10m. to date). A large American A.I.D. mission in Lagos is deciding to what projects the dollars should be given. "We don't know if we are going to be able to use it all," said a member of the mission. Economists point out that this amount of money can cause one-sided development if the less glamorous aspects of the economy, such as agriculture, are neglected.

In Accra the Russian association appears. In certain aspects Nkrumah's one-party state shows an unimaginative adoption of Iron Curtain ideas. The use of the Black Star in the names of the main parade square, and in the national shipping line as well as in the national symbol, immediately has Red Star associations. The title of the full colour magazine which tells of Ghana's industrialisation is called *Ghana Reconstructs*. The war-raddled wreck of China had reason to put out *China Reconstructs*, but since the colonialists, according to the African Nationalist, did not construct anything, it is a bit uncertain what is being reconstructed.

Not that the Americans are neglecting Ghana. The Volta Dam is an American design, and American-backed. Harry Weese's American Embassy in Accra is extraordinary. It is built on the courtyard plan of an Akan chief's house; its bronze and shuttered facades are delicately lifted up by slim legs so that you can see underneath. The effect, ironically, is Chinese; the shallow curving roofs of so many Ghanaian houses also have this Chinese affinity.

Other countries are moving in on Nigeria and Ghana. The six-legged dog of Supercortemagjore breathes its Italian fire over new filling stations and motels. The petrol will be refined at the new port of Tema where the electric power of the Volta will smelt aluminium. Mercedes-Benz lorries growl through the forests.

THE NIGERIANS are self-assured. A clerk in Apapa, the dock area of Lagos, said about Ghana: "They want to be the biggest, most important country in West Africa: because they know they aren't. We are larger. We have greater riches. I respect Ghana. They are a good little country." This attitude is reflected in Nigerian newspapers, which do not make the enormous efforts of the Ghanaian press to provoke national consciousness.

Everybody outside Ghana knows that Nkrumah wears a Kente cloth. It has the prestige of being completely African and expensive. The price-range from £80 to £250 is accounted for by the handwork. A man was sitting in the shadow of the Cultural Museum at Kumasi stitching and stitching many bold red, yellow, and green stitches.

But nobody knows what the Nigerians wear. The cloth was probably made in Manchester or Yokohama, which doesn't give much national kudos. But the men's clothes are pretty; a three-quarter length coat splaying out over trousers in the same cheerful cotton. "Of course there is some pressure to wear these clothes to be different from Englishmen. But I wear them because I like them," said a young publisher. "Though in the office I find trousers and a shirt more practical. You knock papers off the desk with these." These,

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Western Region Yoruba clothes, only cost £3 or £4 a time, and they are changed each day and washed and starched. Another attractive dress was the broad-striped tunic-neck pyjamas worn by Segun Olusula, a producer at Western Region Television headquarters in Ibadan.

Socially, young educated Nigerians are relaxed. Segun Olusula, arriving twenty minutes late for an appointment, yelled out as he swung his Volkswagen round, "African time!" We were just off to see Wole Soyinka, the playwright, rehearsing the 1960 Masques in a new production. Soyinka, Olusula, John Pepper Clark and Christopher Okigbo (the Cambridge University Press representative) are all involved in the Mbari Club at Ibadan, which has one of the most sophisticated lists of plays and poems in Africa.

THERE IS only a small society of educated professional people in both countries. South Africa's uncle- and cousin-ridden society seems large in comparison.

"Uncles" are everywhere in both Nigeria and Ghana. A situation was being sorted out by a Nigerian producer and his assistant in a broadcasting studio. "You know those two young problems we have on our hands?" said the producer. "I told them that chairs don't get broken by just standing up. That chair was thrown across the studio with force. We'll have to deal with them."

"Better find out who their 'uncles' are first," said his assistant.

"Better find out who they are first and shoot them."

In Ghana it is the same. "Oh yes! I was at school with the Osagyefo. He was two classes below me," said a man in the educational world. A little while later he was introducing me to a school principal. "Madame's husband is the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

But who *is* teaching nowadays? The Ministries, the television and wireless studios, are full of ex-school teachers. Nkrumah himself was a teacher. Perhaps this is a somewhat more enlightened élite than one provided by commerce.

In Nigeria especially there is a considerable colonial hangover. Establishment snobbery appears. Some of the attitudes made South Africa seem like a welfare state. I was worried that my going to Ibadan for the week-end was going to keep the driver away from his family. "Don't worry," said the clerk, who was somewhat senior to the driver, "that's his job."

Snobbery, in both Ghana and Nigeria, about being educated overseas, matched English public school snobbery. A Nigerian civil servant told me that he got forty-five days leave a year; this was obviously what his British expatriate predecessors had had in order to recover from the rigours of the climate. "You've had a political revolution," said an Englishman to him, "but you lot just moved in when we bloody old British moved out. Just you wait. In ten years' time you'll be having a social revolution too."

One hopes that Nigeria will take some of its lessons to heart. For though Ghana's authoritarianism is in danger of warping more civilised growth, its air of social and economic reform is Cromwellian. Nigeria is self-confident but lack of organisation will be wasteful. ●

The Two Moralities—V

JORDAN K. NGUBANE

APARTHEID'S HOSTILITY to the non-tribal African and the cultural amalgam assumes a new significance against the background of the growing African emphasis on humanism, and the existence of potential allies throughout the world. Ethnic grouping and emphasis on the tribe could perhaps be an Afrikaner attempt to enable the African to cultivate love for what is distinctly his own in the mistaken belief that he does not already have something better. It could also be a sinister move to re-create a racialistic nationalism which would push *abantu basesilungwini* and their non-racial outlook back to the position of a third force between Afrikaner race consciousness and tribal racialism, when civil war or the threat of it among the Africans would weaken opposition to White domination. Tribal fissions could develop which would incapacitate the African for presenting a decisive challenge to White supremacy. The peoples of this country would be split into three groups: the White racialists, the Black racialists and, between them, a diminishing number of non-racialists. In such a situation it would be so much easier to push the majority of the Whites into one camp.

To guard against all these dangers, the Bloemfontein conference saw to it that the political realism of *abantu basesilungwini* became the dominant influence in the organisations they set up to oppose White domination. Its success in deepening the roots of non-racialism among the Africans can be seen against the fact that after 1912 no political organisation rose to demand the expulsion of the Whites from South Africa. Even the Pan-Africanist nationalists insist that they are interested primarily in the human being as an individual and not in race. They reject race rights or group privileges. They do this in South Africa because the Bloemfontein conference's rejection of racialism was complete and uncompromising. The All-African People's Conference held in Accra in 1958 merely did for the rest of

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