
It is extremely difficult to rhapsodise about a city built around a jigsaw of lagoons and islands that never sleeps and where everyone has a short fuse because every available space has been taken and where the heavy humidity provides a good reason to curse and swear endlessly. It is hard to adore a city that has been so brutally abused and that like a cornered, maimed, feral cat lashes out with the fury of fangs. But Kaye Whiteman, who first stepped on Lagos in 1964, has succeeded in conveying what he admires most about Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria and perhaps the entire West African region. He received some unsympathetic glances from those who believe, as so many others, that writing a book about Lagos is a lost cause and can only be dreamed of by the insane. Lagos derives its name from the Portuguese word for lake which is *lago*, while the plural is *lagos*. Also, the Portuguese word for lagoon is *laguna*.

Femi Okunnu, a one time federal commissioner of works in the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon, has written a foreword for the book in which he draws attention to the fact that Whiteman does not mention the pioneering work he had done in building the highways and bridges he claims makes Lagos a major city. This seems unnecessary. But Okunnu's view that Lagos both has a 'soul' and 'a state of mind' is one that is echoed throughout the book. Indeed Whiteman's overriding inclination is to conceive of Lagos as a triumph of the imagination rather than

as a veritable 'hell-hole of crazy slums, endless traffic jams, con-men and chaos' (p.xvii), as would be the immediate reaction of an uninformed beholder. In this regard, the opinions of writers, journalists and poets are highly valued by Whiteman, who in various ways explores the realities of the city as transformed by its authors in the manner Dublin is re-imagined by James Joyce, London by Charles Dickens and Paris by Emile Zola. This, undoubtedly, is an arresting manoeuvre.

In spite of the sheer physical and conceptual challenges involved in attempting to capture the soul of Lagos within the limited spine of a book, the town is rich in history, folklore and myth and should ordinarily fire the imagination of a gifted and enterprising literary artist or even a historian. It is believed that

Lagosians originally descended from Ogunfunminire, a hunter who had ventured from the ancient town of Ile Ife. Having first settled at Isheri, he later became the chieftain of Ebute Metta meaning 'three wharves'. The traditional name of Lagos is Eko, believed to be a derivative in Bini language meaning 'meeting place'. The king or *oba* of Eko was called the Eleko.

However, it eventually became more common to call him the Oba of Lagos, as is often the case in Yoruba and Bini languages. Trade with Portuguese and British merchants changed the fortunes of Lagos by drawing actors of different backgrounds, interests and skills. These ingredients boosted the commercial potential of the burgeoning town. From the hinterlands of the savannah country, the Nupes also arrived and, in time,

would make an indelible mark on the historical evolution of Lagos.

The slave trade in the eighteenth century played a very significant role in diversifying the gene pool of Lagos in that, after its abolition, the Saros (Sierra Leonean Creoles) and returned Brazilians (locally called *amaro* and *aguda*) settled to give it its highly distinctive flavour and complexion. The colonial configuration of Lagos was defined by the activities of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Saro and freed slave who by dint of his intelligence became a bishop. Crowther wanted to see the end of the slave trade in Lagos which, under the reign of Oba Kosoko, had become somewhat intractable. Ajayi Crowther, who later became a legendary subject for historians and even playwrights such as Femi Osofisan, appealed to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, to intervene in halting the trade. It is interesting that Crowther is often cast as a nationalist when a crucial part of his activities was as a British collaborationist that resulted in the destruction of Lagos through 'gunboat diplomacy'. Indeed, as he ended his tenure as a bishop, he was increasingly at odds with the authorities of the church who viewed, with hostility, his efforts to introduce African and syncretic elements to the conventional modes of worship. The abolitionist movement was not motivated by purely altruistic reasons as such but rather was a result of the diversification of the British economy from a mercantilist orientation to industrial production.

The Mad and Impossible Poetry of Lagos

Sanya Osha

Lagos: A Cultural and Historical Companion

by Kaye Whiteman

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Thus, instead of requiring slaves, Britain now needed cotton for its cotton mills and palm oil for its industrial plants.

On Boxing Day in 1851, Oba Kosoko was deposed in a bitterly fought battle and Akitoye was installed in his place. In the following year, the Consulate of Lagos was proclaimed. Kosoko fled to Epe, where he employed the ports of Lekki and Palma for trade in palm oil and slaves. With the Lagos Consulate firmly established, the colonial penetration was well on its way as missionaries entered the scene beginning with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) which acquired some land in 1859, where it eventually built a church in 1880. The Wesleyans also built a chapel. The CMS Grammar School was established in 1859, the Methodist Boys High School in 1879, St. Gregory's College, a Catholic institution, in 1886 and Baptist Academy in 1891. Many Saros sought the benefits of education in these various institutions which they believed would propel them to the upper echelons of the colonial administration. Some prominent Lagosian families of Saro origin include: Coker, Williams, Johnson, Cole and Macaulay.

However, alongside the Christian presence, there was also a marked increase of Muslims involved in the socio-cultural existence of Lagos brought on by the twin factors of war and trade. Prominent Muslim figures included Saliu Shitta of the famous Shitta-Bey family, who first arrived at Lagos in 1844, Muhammed Savage, Amodu Carew and Abdallah Cole. This compelling mix of Muslims and Christians peacefully cohabiting had always been a unique feature of Lagos and contributed to its particular brand of vernacular cosmopolitanism. Currently, 'the French and other Europeans, the Lebanese/Syrians, the Cypriots, other Arabs, the Indians and Pakistanis, the Chinese and even Japanese, Iranians and Turks' (p.31) continue to deepen the city's cosmopolitan feel which had begun many generations earlier.

Whiteman mentions that 'no one would have planned to build an enormous city on the basis of such an unusual configuration of lagoon and island' (p.35). This is indeed true. Being a major commercial centre in West Africa, Lagos has always drawn huge numbers of people pursuing different business interests, fortunes and dreams. But the way in which these various goals have been pursued have been particularly brutal on the landscape of Lagos. With concerted industrial development beginning in the 1950s, suburbs such as Apapa and Surulere emerged. So did the seedier settlements of Mushin, Ajegunle, Somolu, Bariga, Idi-Oro and Agege. Indeed, there has been 'considerable urban overspill in all directions northwards, westwards and eastwards, which are parts of what might be called the Lagos conurbation' (p.53). This tremendous overspill has created immense problems regarding transportation. To ease some of these problems, the nineteen mile Third

Mainland Bridge, one of the longest bridges in the world, was constructed by the ubiquitous Julius Berger Construction Company.

Before the modernist intrusion of the Third Mainland Bridge, Lagos was dotted with other sights of architectural accomplishment. The Brazilians, unlike the *Saris*, did not immediately make their mark on education and instead became skilled artisans and craftsmen. For instance, a gifted mason, Juan Baptist da Costa headed the collective that constructed the Shitta-Bey Mosque in Martins Street which opened in 1894. The Brazilian connection in Lagos has always been particularly strong. There are prominent similarities, for instance, in the architecture of Brazilian cities like Salvador de Bahia and Recife and some of those to be found in old central Lagos. In 1910, J. Laotan published *The Torchbearers*, documenting the achievements of the Brazilian community in Lagos. Antonio Olinto, who had worked as a cultural attaché to the Brazilian Embassy in the 1960s, published a novel, *The Water House* (1969). Olinto's work bears more than a passing resemblance to the saga of Joao Esan da Rocha who had been captured as a slave and taken to Brazil. He regained his freedom and returned to Lagos with his wife and child in the 1870s and was granted land on Kakawa Street, where he built the non-fictional Water House. The da Rocha family subsequently made their mark in the fields of medicine and business. Other notable Brazilian families include: Fernandez, Pereira, Medeiros, Gomez, da Costa, da Silva, da Rocha, Pedro, Augusto. These various families have been part of the cultural life of the city. The Carreta festival that originated from the Brazilian connection is practiced to this day. Frechon, an *amaro* meal eaten on Good Friday and prepared from a recipe of fish, rice, black beans and coconut milk, is another legacy of the Portuguese/Brazilian link.

It is claimed that crops such as cashew, cocoa and cassava became cultivated in West Africa as a whole as a result of the Brazilian connection. The migration of the cocoa bean into what eventually became Nigeria is quite interesting. Historians believe that cocoa was first smuggled into the area from the secretive Spanish plantations located in Fernando Po. Also, a Niger Delta merchant, Squiss Ibanango, is believed to have first planted the crop in Opobo. These historical details cement the city's links to other sites of innovation and culture and add to its highly intriguing pedigree.

Apart from the Brazilian architectural influence, there are other notable contributions as well. John Godwin, a long time Lagos-based British architect pioneered the method of blending tropical architecture with modernism thereby coming up with a distinctive style that has in turn had an impact on the likes of architect/artist Demas Nwoko. Godwin has also been in the forefront of drawing attention to the achievements and legacies of Brazilian architecture in various parts of Lagos.

The inhabitants of Lagos have not always been kind to its natural endowments and its architectural history. The pressures of unrestrained commercialisation have disfigured many of the more inclusive features of the city. As Whiteman writes, 'one of the worst effects the "Bergerization" of Lagos was on the Marina itself. It was, alas, a frustration of the dream of modernization because it destroyed the urban togetherness of central Lagos that had always focused on the Marina. However hard the efforts at re-beautification, the early special ambience of the Marina can never really be recovered' (p.80). Indeed this is quite a pity. If great wealth could be made in Lagos, it could also be a virulent site of mass dispossession as evidenced in the rise of 'area boyism'. Area boys are more or less street thugs who roam about the city extorting pedestrians and motorists alike with a not uncertain hint of menace and violence. From the 1980s onwards, they became a permanent feature of the city as they were able to create a subculture and their nefarious activities transformed both the business and cultural life of the city, in most cases for the worst. An entrenched form of social Darwinism sort of became the norm in Lagos and when the federal capital shifted to Abuja, a noticeable institutional vacuum was created. The Lagos island on which the aforementioned Marina is located 'is now a bizarre and dysfunctional mix of the wilderness of skyscrapers, street markets, old shops and residences, all under pressure from the ubiquitous and extortion-demanding "area boys"' (p.81).

Within the graphic sights and instances of urban decay are often to be found 'trappings of consumerism and modernity' (p.86) in the shape of fast-food franchises which come and go as trends of fashion. In order for global franchises to make an impact, local considerations are usually quite significant and Whiteman observes that 'the resistance of Nigeria to certain brands [...] is a refreshing mark of individualism' (p.86). The distinctiveness of the city is further underscored by the fact that it is also a magnet for flamboyant socialites who always make their presence felt at lavish weddings, elaborate burial ceremonies and dazzling birthday parties. Whiteman suggests that creative writers haven't really succeeded in capturing aspects of the city that have not gotten much to do with squalor, crime and decay, but that was not for want of trying. Indeed, he attempts a rather usual and commendable move in exploring the various authors who have attempted with varying degrees of success to pay homage to the more worthy facets of Lagos. A central part of Whiteman's efforts is geared towards re-discovering the humanity of the city and, in so doing, the inventiveness and uniqueness of its culture provide the best possible avenues.

Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri, Helon Habila, Seffi Atta, Chris Abani have all addressed different realities of Lagos. But none of them has

captured the broadest spectrum of its existence and realities. Lagos seems to surpass the imagination of the best Nigerian writers. Achebe never really felt comfortable with living in Lagos. During the colonial era, he felt isolated in the mostly white neighbourhood of Ikoyi, which was dull and uninviting when compared to colourful hot spots such as Abilene, which was filled with life, sounds, conviviality and vigour. During the postcolonial era, he complained that Lagos was the most uncreative place a writer could be because of the superabundance of the very qualities that had marked out Obalende in the colonial era. The cities depicted in Okri's novels are a composite of towns from probably mid-western Nigeria and parts of Lagos and critics have noted they strive after a universalism in which most of the signs of Lagos are lost. In his first book, *Waiting for an Angel*, Helon Habila depicts parts of Lagos that often overwhelm the senses. Observers have noted that the book is fragmentary, episodic in structure, and have sought to know the reason behind its apparent disjointedness. Habila on his part has revealed that the sheer existential conditions surrounding the writing of the book is responsible for its random structure. Lagos is a place of incessant power outages, irregular water supply, chaotic transport systems and a host of other difficulties; so he had had to adopt a guerrilla approach to writing his work rather than tackle it with a settled, measured mindset. Perhaps this disjunctive narrative is especially resonant because it is true to the random nature of the city.

Chris Abani gained considerable notoriety in Nigerian literary circles by passing himself off as a former inmate of the nefarious Kirikiri Prisons in Lagos. He had claimed that on account of his novel, *The Masters of Board*, which is about a Neo-Nazi invasion of the country, he was detained in the infamous prison for predicting a military coup. Many well informed followers of the Nigerian literary scene have strongly debunked Abani's unproven claims and this has consequently tarnished his credibility as a literary artist. Uncharacteristically, Whiteman does not dwell upon these distressing developments and he takes Abani's word for it. More credible authors who have focused extensively on Lagos are Maik Nwosu in *Invisible Chapters* and Seffi Atta in *Everything Good Would Come*. Nwosu's novel is about the destruction of Maroko, a squalid informal settlement that used to be on the 'elite slum' of Victoria Island. Atta, on her part, tries to capture the ambience of old Ikoyi, the former colonial upscale neighbourhood which was where she had lived out her formative years. Bernadine Evaristo's poetic novel, *Lara*, explores the continuities between a Nigerian-British and the Brazilian community in Lagos. The theme of biculturalism or even multiculturalism is increasingly preoccupying a number of Nigerian – as well as African – authors.

Arguably, this bicultural shift in focus vitiates some of the vitality of Lagos as a site for self-making. Obviously, this cannot be said of the 1950s novels of Cyprian Ekwensi, notably *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana*, both of which, while conveying the ruthless truths of metropolitan life, never fail to unveil what makes the city ineluctably attractive. However, it should be mentioned that, apart from Ekwensi with his early novels, most of the other novelists have written their works while living as far away as possible from Lagos. Seffi Atta lives in the United States, Evaristo is based in London and Abani now lives in the United States. The point is, how many truly creative endeavours can be accomplished in Lagos given its current fiery and chaotic pace? Arguably, the city has been transformed into a ramshackle treadmill that gobbles up everything and everyone on it. Of course, it isn't solely responsible for its Manichean character; it was created by the get-up-and-go imagination of generations of its inhabitants as well as by circumstances of nature, both of which have granted it an almost fully independent impetus of its own.

In the past, Lagos had been the birth place of different kinds of music since the nineteenth century, notably *sakara*, 'a form of praise song and dance music performed exclusively and patronized primarily by Yoruba Muslims [...] by Bello Tapa, probably a Nupe immigrant' (p.115). On the other hand, *asiko*, which 'incorporated an adaptation of Brazilian samba styles brought in by the Agudas who came back to Lagos from Brazil' (p.116), was the Christian equivalent of *sakara*. Eventually, in terms of sheer appeal and longevity, the music forms of juju and highlife are probably the most important. However, the acceptance of juju as a form of popular music was not immediate as its practitioners were regarded as 'low-class ragamuffins' (p.118). The form began as creative protest against the inherent segregationism and repression of colonial rule. It appealed to a wide section of colonial subjects who worked dead end jobs within the colonial machine by mixing gospel, Yoruba traditional song craft and popular idioms of the day to create a distinctive brew of gyrating rhythms. While highlife reached the apogee of its popularity in the 1950s, juju continued to be dominant by virtue of its association with Yoruba ethno-nationalism and the unquestioned mastery of the form by musicians such as Sunny Ade and Ebenezer Obey.

Whiteman mentions the role appropriate and adequate venues play in relation to the evolution of popular music. Just as fast-food franchises, venues come and go at a bewildering rate, yet Lagos's famous *owambe* parties, in which entire public roads are closed, continue to be held each and every weekend. These carnivalesque parties have made and broken many a musician.

Another creative hub of global dimensions is Nollywood, of which Lagos remains its major site of

production. Whiteman notices parallels between the industry and Onitsha market literature in striving for the unapologetic authenticity of local colour. As with so many observers, he accepts that Nollywood

has become a huge business. From having a few years ago the third largest global film industry (in terms of output) after Hollywood and Bollywood, Nigeria now appears to possess on its doorstep a world industry leader. According to a 2009 report by UNESCO, Nigeria, with 872 productions (in video format) has outstripped the US (with 485) in numbers of films made, hard on the heels of India with 1,081 feature length films (p. 131).

Apart from being the venue for pioneering cultural activities, Lagos is also replete with great historical stories that deserve attention, such as the aforementioned gunboat diplomacy incident of 1851 and the memorable visit of the Prince of Wales in 1925, the booing of Northerners who objected to the motion for national independence in 1953, independence day celebrations in October 1960, the treason court case of Obafemi Awolowo and his co-defendants in 1963, the succession of military coups de'tat of 1966, the Biafran capitulation after the civil war in 1970, the All-African Games of 1973, the assassination of the Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed, in 1976, the unsolved murder of journalist Dele Giwa in 1986, the botched Gideon Orkar coup of 1990 that almost deposed the slippery General Ibrahim Babangida, and the seismic bomb explosions that occurred at Ikeja Barracks in 2002, which had people jumping in fear and ignorance into canals and lagoons. These major incidents, which all had multi-regional repercussions, have contributed significantly in lodging the city deep within the national psyche as a place where nothing is impossible.

Lagos also played host to the Black and African Festival Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977. A new national arts theatre was built for the occasion by the Bulgarian company, Technoexportsory, which had been selected through a non-transparent bidding process. The festival has been described as unduly profligate, misguided and muddled due mainly to incompetent handling by military authorities and civilian bureaucrats. Shortly after the festival, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, who had also publicly criticised the mismanagement of the military handlers, had his Lagos compound razed to the ground by soldiers. The venue of the festival, which was the national theatre, has since become a depressing eyesore, as Whiteman complains: 'A visit to the National Arts Theatre today is a sobering exercise. Compared with what it was and what it might be, it presents a pathetic sight. Only a few of the auditoria are now in use, and the whole complex has suffered from the Nigerian sin of lack of maintenance' (p.172).

Lagos has produced an almost endless list of illustrious personalities in an equally daunting variety of fields not necessarily beginning with Oba Kosoko, the king who dared to oppose the British and became a victim of their gunboat diplomacy. Kosoko is credited with immense courage and intelligence by Giambattista Scala, the Sardinian consul whose accounts of the major figures of the era are unusually vivid. His description of Kosoko bears citing:

It has pleased nature to shape in him the true model of an African king. He is tall, of Herculean stature, and endowed with uncommon muscular strength, a quality which is greatly prized in these countries, and which excites the admiration of his subjects, and makes him the more respected and revered by all who come into his presence... he can, when he pleases, express his inmost feelings or else remain silent and impassive according to the circumstances. His eyes are black and lively, his gaze is acute, and when he looks into the face of the person he is speaking to, he bores into his heart and easily discovers his secrets (p.172).

Kosoko's continued involvement with the slave trade was the reason for his deposition and he fled to Epe in December 1851 with his supporters and some Portuguese/Brazilian slave dealers. Together they continued the trade in slaves and palm oil using the ports of Palma and Lekki. Dosunmu, who succeeded Kosoko, maintains a less distinguished place in history for having the misfortune of signing the Treaty of Cession with the British in 1861.

Another very distinguished figure in the history of Lagos is Efunroye Tinubu, a woman of varied and considerable gifts. She is believed to have been born in 1805 and was an Egba native who as a girl was sold as a slave to a chief. Early in life, her considerable ambition and intelligence had marked her out and she was able to negotiate her way out of slavery. She eventually married three times and her second husband became the Oba of Lagos. Her third husband, Yesufu Bada, was a supporter of Kosoko and fled with him into exile. Tinubu herself was forced into exile at Abeokuta by Consul Campbell over allegations connecting her with slave trading. But she was also able to become a major merchant of palm oil trade and during the 1860s she was recalled to Lagos where she was appointed Iyalode (First Lady). However, towards the end of her life, Abeokuta became her abode and the site of most her business activities even though she retained her connections with Lagos. She died in 1887 after a long and productive life. Scala's description of her is just as vivid as the one he offers of Kosoko:

...tall, slender and well-proportioned; her bearing was proud, but not lacking in grace and subtlety; she had the art of

expressing by various movements of her body and by all her postures an indescribable voluptuousness which few could resist. The lines of her face were not at all delicate or regular; her nose was rather thick with very wide nostrils, her lips were full, her mouth large and her eyebrows very thin; nevertheless these features, combined with two large, black, brilliant eyes which had the fascination of a serpent, and two rows of very white teeth formed a wonderfully harmonious example of African beauty which was immediately pleasing and which continued to hold the beholder's gaze for a long time. It is not therefore surprising that this extraordinary woman endowed with so many natural gifts and with an uncommon intelligence, soon came to lord it over these rough men and to find numerous supporters and admirers throughout the tribes (p.180).

Today, the central square on Lagos island is named after her and many Lagosians have adopted her name even though she had no children of her own.

Another personage of considerable stature in Lagos history is Oshodi Landuji Tapa. Originally a Nupe indigene by birth, he was also a slave who rose through the royal court by virtue of his military and administrative prowess. He became the military commander of Kosoko's army and led the opposition to the British which failed. He then fled with Kosoko into exile. He returned in 1862 to the area known as Epetedo, near the Oba's official residence and was installed as the Oloja of Erika, in which position he continued to exert his influence over the affairs of Lagos. Other important personalities of the nineteenth century include Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Mohammed Shitta-Bey, John Augustus Otunba Payne, who had changed his name from the Ijebu name of Adepeyin – an index of how the colonial encounter not only radically transformed broader consciousness but also the contours and subjectivities of personal identity.

The twentieth century also produced several influential personalities whose impact can be felt either on the landscape of the city or its collective unconscious. Among them are Herbert Heelas Macaulay, grandson of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who was a formidable opponent of colonialism, and Isma'il Babatunde Jose, the doyen of modern Nigerian journalism. Whiteman, among others, also names Fela Anikulapo-Kuti as a major figure of twentieth century and devotes an entire chapter to him. Unfortunately, much of what he has to say about Kuti is already common knowledge. His discussion centres on the musician's formative years and the existential and cultural admixture that led to making him the type of artist he eventually turned out to be. Newer information has started to emerge about not only Kuti's infamous lifestyle but also the mechanics of music itself. For

instance, the role played by his equally creative drummer, Tony Allen, is now beginning to become more widely acknowledged. Ginger Baker, of rock combos Cream and Blind Faith, claims that Allen was the real organiser behind the band as well as being the band leader. Baker himself was the only white man in Kuti's political party, the Kalakuta Party, during the 1970s. Kuti had the unexplained habit of never playing his hits once he had recorded them, to the consternation and frustration of recording companies. He and his entourage, sometimes numbering up to eighty individuals, were banned in virtually every major hotel in Europe. Kuti also composed all the arrangements to his music which he painstakingly taught each member of his band. In other words, creative freedom began and ended with him. At the end of his life, he forsook politics for spiritual concerns which were every bit as idiosyncratic as his art, and his recording output reduced drastically as it became increasingly apparent that he was in ill-health. However, in many ways, Kuti was a 'Lagos boy' as Whiteman posits since he lived most of his life there and was also buried in the city.

By the time Whiteman pieced together the historical and cultural mosaic that makes Lagos so inimitable,

it doesn't seem like the glaringly inhabitable hell-hole it is often made out to be after all. Instead, the tantalising cauldron of its myth, history and culture has obviously powerfully redeeming properties. But the challenges of living within the city should not be forgotten under the almost euphoric cloud of its legend. For instance, the United Nations estimates the population of Lagos to be currently between fifteen and eighteen million with local estimates putting the figures much higher. It is expected that by 2025 the figures may reach twenty-five million, thus making the city one of the largest on earth. It is daunting to think what such a large population would obtain from planners in terms of social services, transportation networks, maintenance and urban management. Although, Whiteman does not mention this, increasingly, it can be expected that informal self-regulatory mechanisms would be instituted and become dominant, as indeed they already are in most parts of the city. It is likely that, if the inhabitants of Lagos look after it, it would be perhaps more willing to look after its own. As Whiteman correctly observes, Lagos is constantly being undermined by 'relentless functional philistinism and the lack of apparent lack of awareness of how crude and ugly a city can be' (p.246).

Whiteman makes an important point that Lagos, just as Calcutta, may be regarded as a mega-city but it isn't a world city in the way Amsterdam and Zurich are. P.J. Taylor writes that 'world cities are the loci not just of services in the central place sense, but of knowledge complexes' (cited in pp. 251-252) that involve a wide variety of stocks of knowledge as required by the post-Fordist age. Lagos has not met these requirements and does not seem to be able to in the immediate future.

Whiteman writes about Lagos like a metropolis that ought to be visited at least once in a lifetime even though its obviously chaotic energies appear to renounce sustainable modes of living. But experiencing its transformative and earth-shaking impact is attractive for many reasons. Whiteman eloquently puts forth this point of view without the merest hint of condescension. However, perhaps it is necessary to adopt a less than complimentary stance to the city Whiteman had done so much to admire.

There is something enervating about Lagos's insatiable appetites for everything: people, capital, commodities and culture. Whiteman tries quite hard to make Lagos a city of culture and creativity. Indeed, it may be a place where a wide range of cultural products and activities may be enjoyed but it is

hardly a place in which to make them at any sustainable rate. There is simply too much going on. At all times. It is difficult to imagine where the city's super-abundant energies would eventually lead. The city and its inhabitants lurch constantly in all directions, in quest of diminishing returns and resources in relation to its spiralling population, hungering after a piece of land, a little bit of space to breathe, struggling for virtually everything. The city has not been able to grow leisurely while it coolly observed the tumultuous tantrums of the Atlantic ocean. Instead multitudes from everywhere invade each and every one of its pores, choking every artery. Simultaneously as elixir, redoubtable carcass and resurrected phantom, Lagos has defiantly returned to claim retribution. In this almost triumphal rejuvenated state, it now extracts every ounce of energy, every drop of sweat and blood from millions and millions of the living, many of whom can be called the living dead, who are charred daily by the inexhaustible fire raging in the city's innards. Lagos too writhes between the living and the dead as its infrastructure changes constantly, shedding off its memories like cast off skin. When signs of its eroded memories re-appear like listless bubbles on a filthy lagoon, they also possess the look of proud and colourful rags.