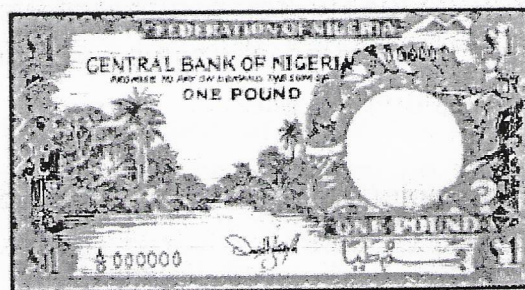


Amali Mucheke: Year 7

Colonial Nigeria - Freedom For All

It was the 1st of October, 1960. My newly-made *buba* and *iro* were almost swept off by the heavy gush of wind that blew heavily, even though the bright sun scorched everyone that set foot on the famous Tafawa Balewa Square.

The air heavily smelt of refreshments made by men and women from different areas of the country. One corner scented with the smell of hot, spicy and sweetly-marinated *suya*, culturally made by the Hausas. Snaky lines could be seen with people queuing up for some of that natural, meaty deliciousness. Containers filled with soft, pillowy snacks known as *puff puff* filled another corner of the stadium. There was a strong, savory, deep-fried aroma that enclosed the surrounding environment. *Jollof* rice saturated the air with a distinct aromatic smell, allowing you to sense the traditional bottom-pot, its indulgent smoky-burnt flavour. You can't have a celebration without 'party *jollof*'. I had to prevent myself from heading to the refreshments, remembering that I didn't have even a pound to spare, as I was just a 'common person', unpaid and treated as a slave. I could see the many varieties of footprints on the ground, made by all the men, children and women who had made their mark on this 'sacred' ground.



A young boy stood on the sidelines, wailing and crying out. "I've l-l-lost my mother! *Jowo ran mi lowo!* Help me!" At his age, he'd already been taught how to speak his native language, Yoruba. An old woman wearing a bright green

gele walked up to the child, and, understanding Yoruba fluently, said, "*Wá nibi, ọmọ kunrin. Kini o ti şeleş?* Where is your mother?" Quickly dashing on, she carried the boy on her back, who placed his hands tightly around her pale, malnourished neck. Taking on, she went off with him, bouncing along as if nothing had gone wrong.

As I trudged along the stairs, scrambling to find a free space where I could have a personal view of the celebrations, I gazed upon the beauty of the Nigerian attire on each and every person's body, whether young or old, a child or a grandparent. You could identify the many different tribes fixed on the chairs that anyone from the past could have sat on. The proud Yorubas: men wearing their fine white *agbadas* with a *fila* on their heads, women wearing ankara-made *buba and iro* with smartly tied *geles* around their head. The successful Igbos, known to have the same fashion sense as the Edos: women carrying babies around their backs with a tied wrapper, a short beaded wrapper around the maiden's waist, usually themed with orange and red. The traditionally strong Hausas: men dressing up, wearing their popular *kaftans*, or just sticking to plain *jalabiya*, matching them with colourful embroidered caps known as *hula*.

These three main tribes came together as one, celebrating their forthcoming independence. Their three main leaders: Nnamdi Azikiwe for the Igbos, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa for the Hausas and Theophilus Owolabi Shobowale Benson for the Yorubas, all uniting as one Nigerian community, representing themselves and their people.

But as I looked around, applauding everyone I could notice around me, an excruciating bang pierced my thoughts. I shivered. I froze. And I stared into space, not able to do or think about anything, even though I could sense that doing so would kill me. People at all angles of the stadium rushed up and out of the stadium. Loud. Terrifying. Strange. So many words to describe one situation. But all I needed to see is how the lucidity on the faces of all who were gathered in the stadium changed in the blink of an eye.

As soon as I thought that nothing worse could possibly occur, the whole world crashed upon me. Tumultuous shots were fired into the air, and everything was one thing. Chaos. Confusion. Havoc. No-one knew what they were doing, where they were going, or how they were still alive and breathing. While I followed everyone out of the stadium, I watched with one eye to see if I could find the culprits of this formidable disruption. Then I saw them. It was the British. We began as a business 'plan' of theirs so that other foreigners such as the Germans and the French couldn't gain control over us. Nigeria wasn't 'up to their standards' so we could become an independent nation. They didn't want us independent. They wanted us to benefit them. Their lives. For us to remain like a colony. And for them to be able to tell the world that they were able to rule a country for more than 60 years too many. But no. I wasn't going to let my people, the people of my country, suffer like this and be treated like nonexistent human beings. I was not. Not without a fight.

"Everyone! Do not run! These colonists are depriving us of our freedom! We MUST terminate this act of foolishness!"

I had all the amount of doubt in my heart and blood, flowing through to my brain, but I was wrong. When everyone turned around and looked at me, they clapped. Soon their clapping turned into pounding. Uproarious pounding. For me. But as soon as the applauding began, it had stopped almost immediately.

Then the attacks began.

From every corner of the exterior part of Tafawa Balewa, men in official army uniform set up their heavy machine guns, every lad for himself. The cold blood flowing through their body could evidently be seen in their eyes; hard as stone and cruel as cruel could possibly be. Nigerians picked up any object they could use to fight with, from shoes to machetes. A gale of dust picked up in the air, blanketed everything in near reach with choking ash.

Women ran around to find refuge and shelter for themselves as well as their children, scampering around, lost as a single puffed cloud in the sky. I could

hear the babies, sobbing loudly. 'Waaah, waaah!' Their special sounds like a song, chirping in one's ear.

Suddenly, everywhere went quiet.

A deafening horn was blown into the air, sounding louder than every other noise being made. 'Hoooooooooooooooooooo! Hoooooooooooooooooooo!' The resounding hooting of the horn bounced along the corners of walls in all angles, creating invisible ripples through the air. As I turned around, along with everyone else, a custom-made green and white 1960 Volkswagen Beetle pulled up, with the soon-to-be expected president looking distressed, confused on what had happened to his country and their well-being.

"SILENCE! EVERYONE, PUT YOUR WEAPONS DOWN! NOW!"

"A good commander-in-chief," I thought to myself as I put down my heavy, stolen Franchi LF-57. We were all standing at attention, ready to listen to Sir Tafawa Balewa.

"Now, everyone listen. I came here today to build my strength and ties with the British, and finalise what the Nigerian Government had began: helping the people gain their independence. When I walk in the midst of each and every person, I feel the hatred that you have for each other in your hearts. And I feel so dejected that the aims and battles my people and I have put forward to help the country have turned out like this. But if this is how your want your country to be- wartorn and deadly- then so be it. But in my heart, I hope that this is not how it ends. That the brave men and women who came out today are the same ones who will go back today, with a touch of joy, excitement and appreciation in their hearts. Make the right choice, Nigeria."

When he finished speaking, he left. And so had the British. They had gotten on their expensive helicopters and had flown away. To their land far far away.

A band of musically talented men and women began to play music. Music that people rejoiced to. The loud vibrations the talking drum made, allowing people to dance to its rhythm. The clatter the shekere made as it was shaken in different beats. These infused sounds played by different tribes, the dynamics of the many played instruments changing, from a loud bang to a soft thud, a thunderous blow to a reedy whistle. An expression of inner emotion, a symbol of everlasting memories. This is how it brought everyone together. From different regions and different tribes of the country, everyone celebrated.

When we were all gathered around in the stadium, we became one. One nation, proudly holding up our newly-designed flag, nobly designed by Taiwo Akinkunmi. Our coat of arms, every part with a meaning: the black shield representing Nigeria's fertile soil, the two horses on each side representing dignity. The eagle representing strength, the green and white bands on the top of the shield represent the rich soil. The yellow flowers at the base are *Costus spectabilis*, Nigeria's national flower, the base is Nigeria's national motto: "Unity and Faith."

One individual, independent confederation. United forever. Keeping our traditions alive. Till the end comes.

Now, I walk back around the stadium, even with my clammy palms and sweaty head held high, I am extremely ready to taste some party jollof I have been awaiting.....