



Colonial Lagos

LITERATURE AND THE CITY

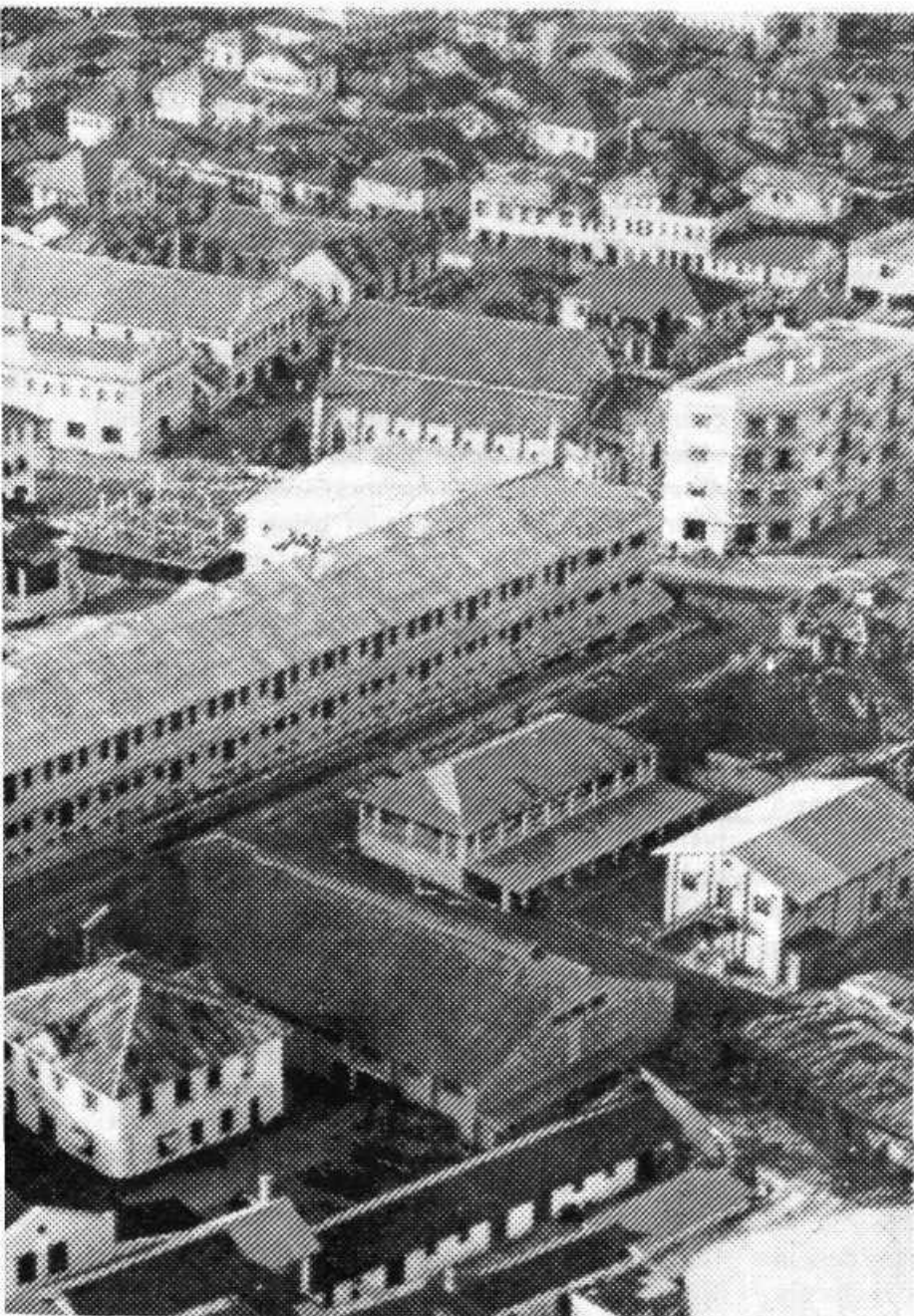
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Our cities today are hell; real hell! Each time I go to Lagos I marvel at the audacity and the courage of people who live there. There is so much chaos, so much degeneration. There is no planning. There is really no time to stand and

stare. So I think, in a way, our cities discourage creativity because when you spend four hours on one spot in a traffic hold-up, it is not likely that you will get

home and write your best poem or your best short story or your best play.

You are simply fagged out and angry.



Our cities have been dehumanized and that is why those who are their inhabitants have been dehumanized. Cities are supposed to be inspiring. Dublin for James Joyce, Abeokuta, Ibadan and Ishara for Wole Soyinka, London for Charles Dickens, etc. Cities have some anonymity about them; that

kind of plural mentality which should really make creativity possible. But that is when these cities are organized: where there are parks and open spaces; when there is enough shelter for everybody; when highways are not blocked by garbage. These are the negative things you see in our cities today. The

governments we've been having have not planned any of our cities as centres of inspiration. But be that as it may, this is not enough reason for us to fold up our hands and say all is lost.

Certainly not. There is some kind of negative inspiration, after all. Although the cities are so bad, we are still writing about them. We criticize and satirise all those who get the funds to improve our cities but put these money in their bank accounts and their stomachs. So creative writers and artists are asking for the authorities to bring some humanness back into our cities.

However, cities are not the only place in Nigeria. In fact, the cities cannot exist without the rural areas. I'm a poet of the rural areas, for example. There is nothing wrong in our writers going to the countryside. In fact, the trend in the developed parts of the world today is towards rural migration. There is also nothing wrong going abroad to write. I have done it before. *Midlife* which won an award was basically written in Iowa City, USA in 1988. I was then a resident artist at the university under the International Writers' Programme. The manuscript I have in press now, *Horse of Memory* which is due out any time from now was written in Yaddo in New York. It really helps a lot when you can step out for a while and recapture some of the inspirations that the home base has provided.

It was once a trend for African-American writers to go to France, especially Paris, to write. Langston Hughes and James Baldwin are typical examples. I have a collection I'm working on which is a kind of travelogue in poetic form. As an artist I have tried to ensure that every part of the world that I have been has become a part of me and also that I am part of that area of the world. I'm not a stranger anywhere: China, Australia, Japan, Canada, US, France, etc.

This world belongs to all of us. **GR**