

Popular Ideas of Freedom in Decolonizing Nigeria

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ABSTRACTS

This essay draws on the Lagos press and other contemporary sources to explore popular understandings of the meanings of freedom in the decade preceding independence in Nigeria. In a period marked both by enormous optimism and considerable anxiety, the Nigerian urban public grappled with the prospect of a new order, what the political activist and commentator Magnus Williams described in 1952 as the “inexhaustible feats of freedom”. Although abstract political ideas were only rarely directly debated, the topic of freedom’s meanings emerged indirectly in a wide range of contexts. In quite straightforward terms, for example, concerns raised about the slow pace of Nigerianisation of public and private sectors or regarding the behaviour of politicians in the new regional and national legislatures clearly articulated elements of competing visions of freedom in an independent Nigeria. Such ideas emerged as well in the perceptions of national sovereignty that surfaced amid the excitement of the 1956 Royal Tour of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip as well the reaction to patronizing external characterisations of Nigerian culture and society. Such responses underscore the importance of prevailing notions of Nigerian modernity expressed in popular culture and rooted both in local tradition and “as up-to-date as Piccadilly Circus”. The brief flap over Moral Rearmament’s effort to shoot a film in Nigeria based on its widely-produced play, “Freedom”, got at an issue that ran through each of the aspects of freedom, the tension between the individual (in Moral Rearmament terms the power of personal commitment and faith) and collective action.

Dieser Aufsatz basiert sich auf die Presse von Lagos und andere zeitgenössische Quellen, um das populäre Verständnis der Bedeutung von Freiheit im Jahrzehnt vor der Unabhängigkeit Nigerias zu untersuchen. In einer Zeit, die sowohl von enormem Optimismus als auch von erheblicher Angst geprägt war, kämpfte die städtische Bevölkerung Nigerias mit der Aussicht auf eine neue Ordnung, die der politische Aktivist und Kommentator Magnus Williams 1952 als „unerschöpfliche Errungenschaften der Freiheit“ bezeichnete. Obwohl abstrakte politische

Ideen nur selten direkt diskutiert wurden, tauchte das Thema der Bedeutung von Freiheit in den unterschiedlichsten Kontexten indirekt auf. In ganz einfachen Worten brachten beispielsweise Bedenken hinsichtlich des langsamen Tempos der Nigerianisierung des öffentlichen und privaten Sektors oder hinsichtlich des Verhaltens von Politikern in den neuen regionalen und nationalen Gesetzgebungen deutlich Elemente konkurrierender Visionen von Freiheit in einem unabhängigen Nigeria zum Ausdruck. Solche Ideen tauchten auch in der Wahrnehmung der nationalen Souveränität auf, die inmitten der Aufregung um die königliche Reise von Königin Elizabeth und Prinz Philip im Jahr 1956 sowie in der Reaktion auf herablassende externe Charakterisierungen der nigerianischen Kultur und Gesellschaft zum Vorschein kam. Solche Reaktionen unterstreichen die Bedeutung der vorherrschenden Vorstellungen der nigerianischen Moderne, die in der Populärkultur zum Ausdruck kommen und sowohl in der lokalen Tradition verwurzelt als auch „so aktuell wie der Piccadilly Circus“ sind. Die kurze Aufregung über die Bemühungen von Moral Rearmament, in Nigeria einen Film auf der Grundlage seines vielproduzierten Theaterstücks „Freedom“ zu drehen, ging auf ein Thema ein, das sich durch alle Aspekte der Freiheit zog, die Spannung zwischen dem Individuum (in Moral Rearmamentvokabular die Kraft des persönlichen Engagements und des Glaubens) und kollektives Handeln.

The historiography of decolonisation in West Africa has little to say about the popular meanings of independence in West Africa. There is a substantial literature on the ideas of the leaders of anti-colonial movements; and scholars, including Elizabeth Schmidt and Judith Byfield, have given serious attention to popular voice and action in anti-colonial movements.¹ Yet, as Jean Allman has pointed out in a trenchant overview of African nationalism and decolonisation, we know relatively little about the aspirations for freedom of the urban publics who experienced the dramatic political events of the 1950s that led to independence.² In her study of popular political ideas in the era of decolonisation in Tanzania, Emma Hunter has shown how highly disparate ideas about nationalism and freedom emerged in the tension between local and national politics and “fundamental questions of political theory were debated not only by colonial or nationalist elites, but by all those who engaged in colonial and postcolonial public spheres”.³ The Lagos daily press offers an opportunity to explore this “intellectual history from below” in relationship to the multiple and layered meanings of “freedom” in the imaginations of Nigerian urban dwellers and in particular among the literate and politicized younger men and women who came of age in the decades leading up to independence.⁴ This essay draws

1 E. Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958*, Portsmouth NH 2005; J. Byfield, *A Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Post-War Nigeria*, Athens OH 2021.

2 J. Allman, *Between the Present and History: African Nationalism and Decolonization*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, Oxford 2013, pp. 224–240. Note the absence of discussion of popular aspirations for independence in Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson’s ambitiously titled, *Rethinking Decolonization: A New Research Agenda for the Twenty-First Century*, in: M. Thomas and A. S. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, Oxford 2018, pp. 1–26.

3 E. Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonization*, Cambridge 2015, p. 7.

4 As Karin Barber and her colleagues have pointed out, there is a far richer body of relevant popular written materials than earlier scholars have imagined, notably in the case of Nigeria, the burgeoning production of

especially on the Lagos-based papers, the *Daily Service* and the *Nigerian Daily Times* (later the *Daily Times*). The British-owned *Daily Times* was a pioneer of modern print journalism in West Africa and had the largest circulation among Nigeria's papers at that time. The *Daily Service* had a substantially smaller circulation, but as the official organ of the Nigerian Youth Movement, very explicitly targeted a more youthful and cosmopolitan readership who were perhaps less concerned than previous generations with achieving political independence than with what that freedom might or should mean.⁵ By the early 1950s in Nigeria, freedom was very much in the air and there was both a palpable optimism about the future and anxiety regarding this nation-in-the-making.⁶ In the popular press, advertisements appeared for "Freedom Beer", an imported product that was introduced as

*just from Germany, but not a Nazi – every blackman is my friend. On me are patches of four colours: BLACK represents the colour of the African peoples. YELLOW, the mineral resources of Africa, GREEN the rich agricultural resources of Africa. RED the blood, the very life of the Black man. My mission here is FREEDOM.*⁷

A few weeks later, an advertisement in the *Daily Service* urged readers likewise to "Drink Freedom Beer". This ad veered sharply away from the political message to focus simply on "the Beer Soaker's Testimony" that this imported product tasted better than any other.⁸ There is no evidence that *Freedom Beer* caught on with consumers in a big way, but these two distinctive pitches suggest that the promoter, Umoh Commercial Syndicate, understood how the "freedom" name would resonate both in terms of the project of Nigerian nationhood and of the individual opportunity to participate in global material and cultural worlds.

1. "The Inexhaustible Feast of Freedom"

The question in the popular media was no longer whether Nigeria would attain self-government, but how quickly and what form that self-government would take. In 1952 constitutional reform had led to the inauguration of elected regional assemblies and on 29 January of that year to the first federal legislature, convened in Lagos. On that date

popular fiction associated with Onitsha market literature. K. Barber, Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa, in: K. Barber (ed.), *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, Bloomington IN 2006, pp. 1–24.

5 W. Adebani, *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning*, Rochester NY 2016, p. 49. The NYM had represented the Lagos working classes broadly, but by the early 1950s had become closely aligned to the Action Group and hostile to Azikiwe. R. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, Princeton NJ 1963, p. 55. On the challenges of making use of the press see Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere*, ch. 1; and Barber, Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa.

6 In reframing this essay I have drawn on the discussions at the panel where an earlier version was presented, "Merry, jolly and gay? Non-official expectations of independence (1950–1975)", 2023 ECAS Conference, Cologne. My thanks to organizers Ngozi Edeagu and Dmitri van den Bersselaar and to Justin Willis for his comments.

7 *Nigerian Daily Times*, 9 February 1952, p. 6.

8 *Daily Service*, 13 March 1952, p. 3.

in the pages of the *Nigerian Daily Times* the NCNC political activist, Magnus A. O. Williams, declared,

*A new age is here. Today is the D-Day for Nigeria. As a people we are now knocking at the gates of our Jerusalem – the Jerusalem of our freedom. We can now see our Canaan with unclouded eyes [...]. The turning point in the history of this great country has arrived at long last. The inexhaustible feast of freedom is almost ready. The wine of self-government is ready to be tasted.*⁹

In *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, a short book published immediately after the Second World War, the future Action Group leader and Premier of the Western Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo, anticipated this rhetoric when he wrote that there was a “popular illusion” about among educated young Nigerians like himself that “self-government [...] is like the ‘Kingdom of God and His Righteousness’ which, once attained, brings unmixed blessing [...]. Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”¹⁰

Yet the question of the meaning of freedom was rarely directly addressed in the popular press, except around the critical question of the future shape of an independent Nigerian state. As Wale Adebaniwi has argued in his recent book, *Nation as Grand Narrative*, during the era of decolonisation and continuing during the first decades of independence, contending narratives of nationhood emerged and evolved in Nigerian newspapers which in turn served to define and explain a shifting political landscape.¹¹ In March 1953, scarcely a year after the inauguration of the new national legislature, Action Group member of the House of Representatives, Anthony Enohoro, electrified that body and the broader public by introducing a motion calling for self-government by 1956.¹² Although opposition from colonial authorities and from the Northern Nigerian political leadership killed the initiative, the ensuing existential debate over Nigeria’s national character overshadowed all other political topics in the years that followed.¹³ Still, amid the often bitter discussions regarding Nigeria’s future (or whether it even had a future), the pages of the local press told other, often fragmented, stories that inscribed aspirations for freedom.

With the move toward representative government, the persistent visible legacies of colonial authority met intensified vocal condemnation. In January of 1952, just days before the opening of the national legislature, the classified advertisements in the *Nigerian Daily Times* could still include – in addition to numerous cinema announcements – an ad from Omo Sawmills in Lagos for a vacancy for a “European Assistant to the Managing Director”. The Sawmills were looking for a “well-educated” man in his late 20s “with

9 Today is D-Day for Nigeria, in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 29 January 1952, p. 5.

10 O. Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, London 1947, p. 30.

11 Adebaniwi, *Nation as Grand Narrative*.

12 Ibid, p. 3, pp. 69–70.

13 E. E. G. Iweriebor, *Nationalism and the Struggle for Freedom, 1880–1960*, in: A. Oyeade (ed.), *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, Trenton NJ 2003, pp. 79–105, esp. pp. 101–103. Notwithstanding the title, in this useful essay “freedom” is simply a synonym for independence.

sound commercial training, including knowledge of accounts and shipping procedure". In contrast to similar positions open to local men, this one promised an "attractive salary" and the "usual leave conditions", as well as a pension scheme and free housing.¹⁴ Advertisements like this one, casually excluding qualified Nigerian candidates for what was presumably hardly more than an entry-level position, drew attention to what was a key goal for the educated class: the expansion of professional employment opportunities in the public and private sectors for Nigerians and the elimination of disparities in salaries and benefits.

Nigerian political leaders and activists had for decades challenged racial discrimination, and as the country moved toward self-government demands for Nigerianisation in government employment became especially strong.¹⁵ Professional jobs in the civil service were definitely on the menu of the feast of freedom. In April 1952 the *Daily Times* published an editorial calling for more rapid Nigerianisation; and in a subsequent opinion column, Magnus Williams, similarly decried slow progress, detailing a "long and painful history" of government half-hearted efforts to recruit more Nigerians into higher level government employment.¹⁶ "It is my candid opinion", Williams wrote that "the Government of Nigeria is not at all serious to Nigerianise the Civil Service". Notwithstanding a series of commitments, the government is still "hastening slowly", planning to form yet another committee to study the subject. He claimed that recently eleven secretary typists had been recruited from Britain and joined the substantial numbers of British women already working there. "What", he asked, "is the Nigerian Government doing to fit our girls for these posts?"¹⁷

The aspirations for economic opportunities that these criticisms of the slow pace of Nigerianisation represent, are just one element, of course, of broader desires that surface in numerous advertisements for consumer goods and also in the efforts, as in the Freedom Beer ads, to tie freedom to economic progress and affluence. In the early 1950s, for example, the National Bank of Nigeria placed a series of large newspaper advertisements that purported to educate the public on economic issues. In an ad devoted to the question of "unemployment" the copy noted that "thousands of boys and girls leave school every year without the least chance of employment". The solution was major investment in agricultural development and industrialisation, citing examples of major employers. The advertisement closed with a patriotic plea, "SUPPORT THE NATIONAL BANK", presumably to permit the bank to invest and create jobs.¹⁸ Commenting on another ad for the National Bank, A. F. Massi, Director of the Nigerian Association of African Importers and Exporters, urged readers to "help the African businessman" and tellingly

14 Nigerian Daily Times, 26 January 1952, p. 10.

15 T. Falola and M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, Cambridge 2008, p. 156.

16 Nigerian Daily Times, 18 April 1952, p. 10.

17 Ibid. See also Daily Service, 4 January 1952, p. 1.

18 Daily Service, 26 February 1952, p. 1. In July 1948, the *Daily Times* featured articles about the Nigerianization commission then underway, with writers stressing the need for more Nigerians in higher positions. See Nigerian Daily Times, 1 July 1948, p. 1.

congratulated A.O. Nwapo on having been appointed the first Minister of Commerce and Industries.¹⁹ Massi observed that “Africans have been subjected in many economic exploitations [sic] by foreigners”, but now that “political powers are being restored to us” the new government leaders will have the responsibility to bring real change.²⁰ A *Daily Service* editorial in 1952 noted that the government, despite a stated commitment to Nigerianisation, had not made sincere efforts to promote the advancement of Nigerians in the Civil Service. Now, however, the Action Group government in the West region had taken concrete steps to stop most recruitment of Britons into the civil service, and had “ushered the dawn of a new era”.²¹ The editorial balanced partisan boosterism with a warning that was echoed in the popular press during this period: “Now it’s up to Nigerians/Africans to prove themselves.”²²

In the months surrounding the introduction of the new provincial and national legislatures, a series of editorials, articles and letters appeared in the press with versions of this header, “What Freedom Do We Want?”²³ As Nigerian politics devolved into a regional political party system, commentators increasingly focused on what self-government should actually look like and the perceived dangers that the new system represented. In a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Daily Service* in February 1952 S.B. Ajayi wrote, “we hear in the streets of Lagos shouts of ‘Freedom. Freedom everybody wants freedom,’” but Ajayi argued that rather than a moment for jubilation this was the time for “sober reflection”.²⁴ The writer was plainly concerned that the emerging entrenchment of the NCNC in the East, the Action Group in the West and the NPC in the North would stifle free speech. “Does the freedom we want in Nigeria”, he asked, “suggest enforcement of the currents of human thoughts to flow in one single groove? [...] [S]incere and honest freedom does not mean blind and unquestioning acceptance of every [...] word of our leaders.” With sentiments that would be repeated in a number of articles, he warned against freedom “polluted with lust of filthy lucre and profit motive”.²⁵

A January 1952 editorial in the *Daily Times* signaled this theme of concern over political bribery and corruption with a denunciation of the “dubious methods” by which “many elections in the East and West have been won”.²⁶ The newspaper called the situation a “disastrous start along the road which is leading to self-government”, arguing that freedom should not involve repudiation of a “centuries-old culture which has brought a high standard of public morality” rather than bankrupt secularism.²⁷ Just a week earlier, Chief Gogo Abbey had similarly invoked traditional culture in an attack on the supposedly socialist schemes of the Eastern Regional Production Development Board. The

19 *Daily Service*, 5 March 1952, p. 3.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *African Challenge*, in: *Daily Service*, 26 February 1952, p. 2.

22 *Ibid.*

23 S. B. Ajayi, Letter to the Editor, in: *Daily Service*, 7 February 1952, p. 3.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 What Sort of Freedom Do We Want? (editorial), in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 19 January 1952, p. 5.

27 *Ibid.*

fundamental source of freedom, in Chief Abbey's view, lay in the communal ownership of land and the "common man's" rights to that land.²⁸ This denunciation of socialism was among the relatively rare instances of discussion of abstract political ideas.²⁹ Much more common were critiques of the failings of politicians, who rather than uniting to achieve independence, were fanning the "embers of disunity" and engaging in acts of venality that held the nation in disrepute.³⁰ The pomp surrounding the openings of the new regional and national legislatures inspired repeated warnings that "the world was watching", the emergence of a free and independent state.³¹ This sense of responsibility was matched, however, in heightened popular sensitivity to suggestions that Nigeria was somehow not yet sufficiently mature for freedom. The continued resistance of long-serving colonial officials to Nigerianisation and their dated views were often noted in the press.³²

The intertwined themes of freedom and sovereignty re-emerged in the year before independence in the mostly hostile response to the comments made by former Nigerian Governor (1943–1948), Arthur Richards, in the House of Lords, regarding the future of Nigerian democracy. The now Baron Milverton was reported as saying that "some kind of dictatorship is probably the best thing for many colonies [plainly including Nigeria] at an early stage" because independence was being granted in areas "where the majority are unable to exercise the privileges of democracy and universal suffrage".³³ In an editorial entitled, "No, No Milverton", the *Daily Service* denounced his comments as the predictable opinions of an unreconstructed imperialist, and in refuting his claims, cited the "shining example" of the seven-year Action Group government of the Western Region as "eloquent testimony to the fact that democracy can and will survive in Africa".³⁴ Articles in the foreign press that emphasized the exotic or which patronized Nigeria's educated and political classes attracted particular wrath – notably a patronizing article in the London *Sunday Times* by Elspeth Huxley, a member of what the *Daily Service* described accurately enough as the "imperial class of ignorant writers". Particularly galling to Nigerians was the fact that Huxley had gathered much of her information from British colonial officials, who facilitated her tour of West Africa, offered her hospitality and apparently fed her information.³⁵

28 Chief Gogo Abbey, *Socialist Commonwealth of Nigeria and the Common Man*, in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 11 January 1952, p. 13.

29 But see A.A. Adepeju, *The Freedoms We Want*, in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 9 February 1952, p. 5.

30 O.U. Chinedum, *Yaba Estate, Lagos, The Stage is Now Set* (letter to the Editor), *Nigerian Daily Times*, 26 January 1952, p. 2.

31 *Nigerian Daily Times*, 30 January 1952, p. 8.

32 Exits Sir Chandos (editorial), in: *Daily Service*, 23 January 1952, p. 2.

33 No, No Milverton (editorial), in: *Daily Service*, 23 April 1959, p. 2. Lord Milverton (Arthur Richards) was the author of the infamous postwar Richards Constitution that was quickly cast aside by his successor.

34 *Daily Service*, 23 April 1959, p. 2.

35 Huxley *Libels a Nation* (editorial), *Daily Service*, 14 February 1952, p. 2; E. B. Ndem (Research Assistant, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh), *Experiment in Nigeria*, in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 26 February 1952, p. 2. Huxley, a prolific author of books and articles supporting the imperial project, later gained considerable fame with her romanticized memoir (later a popular television series) of her childhood in a white settler family in Kenya,

But what exactly was that “democracy”? As Wale Adebaniwi has argued, during the decade leading up to independence the press relentlessly addressed the future political structure of a free Nigeria, but rarely examined the political content of that freedom.³⁶ But in a letter to the editor responding to the editorial on Milverton’s comments, O. Koleoso, a reader from Ibadan, explored exactly that question.³⁷ The writer acknowledged that “up-and-coming nations” must oppose the establishment of dictatorship, but pointed out that Nigerians had uncritically accepted the Westminster model of democracy. With an argument that would become common in Africa after independence, Koleoso stated that

*we must be prepared to shed some of the luxuries of the so-called democratic system of government, such as its fruitless and hypocritical Parliamentary Opposition, and be prepared to accept some form of dictatorship toned down to a conception of democracy that will make for rapid progress and development.*³⁸

In short, in his view, social and economic development were more important elements of freedom than individual rights. Yet across ideological, regional and party divides, most Nigerians felt strongly that “freedom” must involve equal standing with other countries as they moved toward independence. Hence, the concern in the press that the behavior of politicians might tarnish Nigeria’s reputation and anger over publications in the international media, like Huxley’s and others, that were seen to “libel a whole nation”.³⁹

2. The Royal Tour

In the early 1950s many Nigerians had looked forward to a rapid progress toward independence, yet in 1956, the year that Action Group and NCNC leaders had targeted, the timetable still remained uncertain. In that year Britain’s determination that decolonisation in Nigeria would advance in the Commonwealth context was manifest in an ambitious three-week royal tour during which the young Queen Elizabeth and her husband, Prince Philip, traveled across the country, generating enormous press coverage in Nigeria itself, the United Kingdom and beyond.⁴⁰ On 26 January 26 the *Daily Times* reported the release of the first song recorded in honor of the royal visit, a “calypso” number sung by “Lord Ganga”. “1956 January you read Nigerian history”, the song began. The song’s lyrics reminded listeners that “Nigeria is a land of bliss; all Nigerians are filled with pride;

The Flame Trees of Thika, New York 1959. The Daily Service dismissed her as an “inconsequential girl from an obscure English village”. Huxley Libels a Nation (editorial), in: Daily Service, 14 February 1952, p. 2.

36 Adebaniwi, Nation as Grand Narrative.

37 O. Koleoso, Milverton’s Idea (letter to the editor), in: Daily Service, 8 May 1959, p. 3.

38 Ibid.

39 Huxley Libels a Nation (editorial), in: Daily Service, 14 February 1952, p. 2.

40 D. Williams, Nigeria Today, text of an address given to a joint meeting of the Royal African and Royal Empire Societies, March 1, 1956, in: African Affairs 55 (1956) 219, pp. 109–119. In the UK, the visit also received a great deal of attention on television. Williams was then editor of *West Africa*. The Federal Information Service produced a lavishly illustrated pamphlet documenting the tour. Royal Tour of Nigeria: 28th January to 16th February 1956, Lagos 1956.

we ought to be the proudest people on earth”, and “Nigeria will be attracted [sic] to the whole world”.⁴¹ The paper went on to note that the country was entirely caught up in preparations for the tour. Streets and facilities were being cleaned, construction was underway for various venues, and sets of rules of “proper behavior” were widely distributed.⁴² Notwithstanding the expense of preparations and the somewhat heavy-handed rule-making, there was little criticism of the Queen’s visit, even as the date for independence got pushed back.

The visit itself seems to have gone off virtually without a hitch, with the Queen attracting very large and enthusiastic crowds who it seems regarded the royal tour as recognition of Nigeria’s impending independence.⁴³ At the regional capitals there were formal meetings with the leaders of government: the Sardauna of Sokoto, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo.⁴⁴ In an elaborate ceremony in Lagos, replete with imperial and traditional symbols, members of the legislatures of the central government pledged allegiance to the monarch.⁴⁵ The various ministers who spoke all referred “with gratitude the part played by Britain in putting Nigeria on the road to self-government”. The Queen’s reply more ambiguously referenced “this most important stage of Nigeria’s development”.⁴⁶ The *New York Times* article on the tour was headlined, “royal visit is elaborately planned as a prelude to independence”.⁴⁷ If self-government was very much in the air, it was also clear that there was little agreement on what that self-government would involve. Plainly, however, as the lyrics to Lord Ganga’s song suggested, many Nigerians saw the Queen’s visit less as an opportunity to recognize and reaffirm the country’s continued close relationship to Britain and more of a sign of Nigeria’s emergence as a nation on the global scene. In a long letter reprinted in the *Daily Times*, two Nigerian students in Canada characterized the visit as “long overdue” and a sign that Britain was finally acknowledging the importance of West Africa to the future of the Commonwealth and all of Africa. As the letter pointed out, Nigeria population had by then exceeded 32 million and was the largest territory administered by the Colonial Office.⁴⁸

41 Nigerian Daily Times, 26 January 1956, p. 11.

42 Ibid. Also: Chicago Defender, 11 February 1956, p. 8. A number of pathé newsreels of the royal visit are available on YouTube. The visit featured in many magazines and newspaper, and there was even a View Master packet created with 21 three dimensional images of the visit, including “close-ups of royal engagements, “native life and crafts”, and “splendour of Africa”.

43 Williams, *Nigeria Today*, pp. 109–119; New York Times, 1 February 1956, p. 4; Chicago Defender, 11 February 1956, p. 8. See the account in the House of Commons of the Queen’s visit to Lagos and Ibadan from the Labour MP, John McGovern, who was present in Nigeria for the visit. Mr. J. McGovern, UK House of Commons, Debates, 20 Feb. 1956, vol. 549, cc 34–40.

44 Chicago Defender, 11 February 1956, p. 8; Nigeria Expresses Loyalty to Queen, in: New York Times, 1 February 1956, p. 4.

45 Nigeria Expresses Loyalty to Queen, in: New York Times, 1 February 1956, p. 4; Mr. J. McGovern, UK, House of Commons, Debates, 20 Feb. 1956, vol. 549, cc 34–40.

46 Nigeria Expresses Loyalty to Queen, in: New York Times, 1 February 1956, p. 4.

47 Queen to See All Nigeria: Royal Visit is Elaborately Planned as a Prelude to Independence, in: New York Times, 22 January 1956.

48 U. Thekwazu, Two Nigerians Give their Views on the Royal Visit, reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 27 January 1956, p. 5.

Controversy surrounding the royal tour only emerged a month after it concluded, with the release in Nigeria of the 55 minute Federal Information Service film documenting the visit, *Nigeria Greets Her Queen*. After premiering at the Rex on 13 March, with numerous political figures in attendance, it made the rounds of Lagos's many cinemas, with planned showings across Nigeria and also in the other British West African dependencies and most importantly in the UK itself and the United States.⁴⁹ By what the government film-makers chose to portray and omit, the movie conveyed an idea of the significance of the royal visit quite different from that of the masses of residents of southern Nigeria. From the British perspective, the visit – and thus the film – illustrated a Nigeria, rich in diverse and often exotic cultures, deeply influenced by tradition and traditional authority, dependent on British support, and only very gradually moving into the “modern” world.⁵⁰ The immediate reaction to the film among Nigerians was mostly negative. They were disappointed first of all that the documentary was aimed at international audiences. With length limited to about an hour, much of the footage of the tour ended up on the cutting room floor. A number of stops were excluded altogether and many events received passing attention at best. As one commentator noted immediately after the film's release, most Nigerians had no opportunity to see the Queen, and the film represented an opportunity through “the wonders of the screen” to make that possible. At the same time the movie could have portrayed a modern Nigerian nation-in-the-making rather than the collection of disparate colonial regions that critics claimed emerged on screen.⁵¹ Given the apparent success of the Queen's tour, government officials were caught off balance by the “storm” of protest that the film ignited.⁵² Within days *Nigeria Greets Her Queen* became the subject of debate on the floor of the Federal House of Representatives.⁵³ Members “attacked the Government for permitting the showing of the Royal tour film”, describing it as “a disgrace to the country”. One NCNC MP stated that the film was “of no benefit to, and did not promote the interests of, the country”, a view that apparently found strong support across regional and party lines.⁵⁴ From the record of the debate it's clear that “no benefit” meant both as a record of the royal tour for Nigerians themselves or as a documentary meant to showcase Nigeria to Britain and the larger world – especially the United States. Echoing other critics, members of the House noted that the film was too short to encompass the scope of the visit and consequently left out a number of key events. It was also criticized as too focused on imperial power and history rather than the institutions of the emerging independent Nigerian state. One speaker called the film “great propaganda against self-government for Nigeria”. A particular issue for numerous critics was the way that the film seemed to silence the newly installed

49 Nigerian Daily Times, 14 March 1956, p. 3 and 15 March 1956, p. 5.

50 Williams, *Nigeria Today*, pp. 109–19; and various articles appearing in the Nigerian Daily Times.

51 *Nigeria Greets Her Queen is Too Short for Nigeria*, by A Special Correspondent, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 15 March 1956, p. 5.

52 N. Obi, *The Film as it Ought to Be*, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 29 March 1956, p. 5.

53 Members Attack Film of the Royal Tour, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 17 March 1956, p. 2.

54 Ibid.

regional prime ministers. *Nigeria Greets Her Queen* documented the Queen's words and those of a number of imperial officials, but the footage of the prime ministers' welcoming remarks included a BBC-style voice-over describing the events in somewhat patronizing terms rather than the premiers' own voices.⁵⁵

Members of the House of Representatives were also concerned with the message that this representation of Nigerian government would send to the larger world, but their real ire was reserved for what they regarded as portrayals of Nigerians as "primitive people".⁵⁶ One speaker noted that the royal tour offered a "golden opportunity [...] to advertise Nigeria properly abroad", but that the film in depicting Nigeria as "uncivilized" and exotic had instead "disgraced the country". Facing a broad attack and demands that the film be withdrawn, Kola Balogun, the Minister of Research and Information, promised that the lines in the script that described the North as "emerging from the primitive into the modern world" would be excised. The underlying perspective that surfaced in that remark would have been impossible to erase. Ultimately, the government agreed that the entire film would be re-edited in response to concerns, although apparently in the end few substantial changes were made. The UNIP member Dr. Udo Udoma was cheered when he stated that "if the film could not be censored properly it should be destroyed".⁵⁷ Adebayo Adeyinka, an NCNC member from Ibadan linked what he regarded as the film's distortions to the deeper question of freedom and its meanings. He argued that the film's contents represented the perspectives of the British officials who continued to dominate key positions in the Federal Information Services and other key government offices.

A few days later Ndukwe Obi wrote in the *Daily Times* that he suspected that "the editor and the writers [...] probably never sought African opinion", or if they did they must have ignored it. Echoing the comments of the MP Adebayo Adeyinka, he stressed the need for Nigerianisation. He encouraged the legislature to start working towards a "true film unit in which African trained technicians can have a say". "Self-government would be a mockery", Adeyinka had pointed out on the floor of the House, "if expatriates remained in control". He reminded his colleagues the house had for several years pressed for the acceleration of Nigerianisation, yet the Chief Secretary's office remained dominated by British officials and was "crowded with secretary-typists who were expatriates' wives".⁵⁸

Although the major film distributors were apparently less than enthusiastic, *Nigeria Greets her Queen* was picked up by Gaumont and shown widely following a premiere, appropriately enough at the Empire Theatre on Leicester Square in London, on 22 March with sneak previews for various dignitaries before that.⁵⁹ Reviews were generally positive,

55 Ibid.; Nigerian Daily Times, 15 March 1956; F. Alagogo, Should the Film Have Been Withdrawn? (letter to the editor), in: Nigerian Daily Times, 21 March 1956, p. 3.

56 Members Attack Film of the Royal Tour, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 17 March 1956, p. 2.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Royal Film on Shown in the U.K. Today, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 22 March 1956, p. 1.

but the tone of the published commentaries suggest that the concerns of the Nigerian critics that the film would reinforce imperial stereotypes had merit.⁶⁰ In Nigeria the controversy over the documentary soon faded, and in any case, there were a number of voices arguing that the criticism was overblown. Predictably, an editorial in the *Daily Times* was titled “Keep It!” Acknowledging that a longer film would have been better, the editorial charged that the real objection was that the movie did not show a staged version of an imagined “modern” Nigeria.⁶¹ In a letter to the editor, Deborah Iweh, wrote a few days later that she was “ashamed” of government plans to withdraw and re-edit the film. Claiming credentials as “as good a nationalist as the best of them”, she saw nothing wrong with the movie and “nothing to be ashamed of” and regarded government plans to revise the film as a “dangerous precedent” of legislative censorship.⁶²

The editorial in the *Daily Times* inadvertently got the nature of the controversy correct, when it asked the question, “What would such critics rather have – a ‘Stupendous, super-coloured’ production starring Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable?” rather than a movie that showed “the people as they really welcomed their Queen”.⁶³ In a city with many cinemas and a huge audience of movie-goers, there were more than a few people in Lagos who imagined freedom in self-consciously modern, cinematic terms and with a sophisticated understanding of the nature and power of the medium. The editorial had argued that “those who want the film withdrawn apparently don’t want the rest of the world to see us in our everyday clothes”.⁶⁴ But who goes to the movies to see “everyday clothes?”

3. *Freedom: The Movie*

Just as Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip were beginning their tour in Nigeria in 1956, a group of 29 African and European women and men associated with Moral Rearmament arrived in Lagos, having rejected an official request to postpone their visit.⁶⁵ The group, including the Scottish Labour MP (and committed supporter of Moral Rearmament) John McGovern, planned to stage performances of the play, *Freedom*, that had been presented at a MRA assembly in Switzerland the previous summer and elsewhere in Europe and to scout out the possibility of filming a movie based on the play.⁶⁶ Given the Queen’s tour and its role in reinforcing Nigerian ties to Britain, customs officials were

60 British Critics Praise Royal Tour Film, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 22 March 1956, p. 16.

61 Keep It! (editorial), in: Nigerian Daily Times, 17 March 1956, p. 5.

62 D. Iweh, Should the Film Have Been Withdrawn? (letter to the editor), in: Nigerian Daily Times, 21 March 1956, p. 3.

63 Keep It! (editorial), in: Nigerian Daily Times, 17 March 1956, p. 5.

64 Ibid.

65 Atlanta Daily World, 2 February 1956, p. 3.

66 Ibid. McGovern provided a rapturous account of the Queen’s visit to Lagos to the House of Commons. UK, House of Commons, Debates, 20 Feb. 1956, vol. 549, cc 34–40. Also, J. Gibbs, *Freedom, London 1955: A Story of Modern Africa Written and Acted by Africans, or Perhaps Not*, in: T. Morosetti (ed.), *Africa on the Contemporary London Stage*, Cham 2018, pp. 19–43.

unsurprisingly jittery about a play called “Freedom”. They impounded a banner, which they later handed back, showing a map of Africa with “freedom” written across the top and the words “all aliens quit” at the bottom. It was, a British official commented, “the most unfortunate thing to bring to Nigeria at the present time when there is a political truce and the Queen’s arrival is pending.” He added that “it could inflame certain elements and cause dissension”.⁶⁷ In response, a local representative of Moral Rearmament noted that “a lot of people in the play are Nigerians and Nigerians also had an active part in writing and producing it”. To dispel any seditious suspicions, he went on to assert that they had “united conviction and guidance from God” that this was the moment to explore opportunities for filming in Nigeria.⁶⁸ A few days later the play had its opening performance in Lagos “amid scenes of colossal enthusiasm”.⁶⁹

The performance attracted what the press described as a “cross-section” of Nigerian life, including a number of dignitaries, such as founding Action Group leader Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, the wife of Privy Councilor and political veteran Sir. K. A. Abayomi. The play was apparently very well received with the audience “breathlessly” engaging with a plot that offered “the answer to a nation’s problems”.⁷⁰ Plainly, the customs officials who described the play as “the most unfortunate thing” had little to fear regarding the play. The banner that stated “all aliens quit” was only a prop for actors who played protestors whose militancy would be quelled by the Moral Re-Armament individualist credo. Moral Re-Armament publicity characterized *Freedom*, somewhat dubiously, as an “all African play”.⁷¹ Set in the fictional country of Bakondo, the play included a cast of characters who closely resembled the African labor leaders, traditional rulers, and politicians that MRA carefully cultivated and invited to seminars in their famous Swiss retreat. As Ismay Milford has described it, “individual transformation” was seen to be the “route to global socio-political change”, even if MRA activities were in fact deeply rooted in Cold War politics and hostility to socialism.⁷²

One of the members of the cast in Lagos, Dr. G.A. Ademola, son of the Alake (hereditary ruler) of Abeokuta, in southwest Nigeria, spoke from the stage after the final curtain:

This play is a reflection of our life – its conflicts, its hatreds, its bitterness. It will carry conviction to each one of us individually. We in Nigeria know to our distress the great havoc that is being done in our country by the political dishonesty of some of us and some of our leaders.

67 Atlanta Daily World, 2 February 1956, p. 3.

68 Ibid.

69 African Play, ‘Freedom’ is Greeted by Enthusiasm, in: Atlanta Daily World, 7 February 1956, p. 2.

70 Ibid.

71 Gibbs, *Freedom*, London, 1955.

72 I. Milford, A New World in the Swiss Alps: Moral Re-Armament, Religious Internationalism and African Decolonisation, in: *Cultural and Social History* 19 (2022), pp. 587–603. Also: P. Boobbyer, Moral Re-Armament in Africa in the Era of Decolonization, in: B. Stanley and A. Low (eds.), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, Grand Rapids MI 2003, pp. 212–236.

He went on to stress, that the play had come “at an opportune time. For us there can only be freedom when our nation and ourselves are led by absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love”, the four pillars of MRA.⁷³ John Amata, who claimed to have taken part in 1953 demonstrations in Nigeria against the coronation, linked the message of the play to that of the current royal tour: “We in Nigeria are enjoying a wave of goodwill with the visit of the Queen. Moral Re-armament is the ideology that can make that permanent.”⁷⁴ In the final lines of the play, a main character, “the King”, announced to the crowd: “now I see a new age planned on God’s guidance [...]. To be a part of this great uniting force of our age should be the crowning experience of our lives.”⁷⁵

This kind of appeal to individual religious internationalism seemed to offer to many a different kind of freedom, a different more personal relationship between the individual and the collective, whether that was class-based, political or ethnic.⁷⁶ Certainly, Moral Re-Armament and the message of the play *Freedom* found considerable support during the 1950s among many Nigerians and across Africa, including from the most prominent of MRA enthusiasts in Nigeria, none other than Nnamdi Azikiwe, publisher and leader of the NCNC. In an account he gave to the political scientist Richard Sklar, Zik recalled that while in England in 1949 he and a colleague had made tentative plans for a trip to Prague and Moscow as part of a scheme to get the USSR to promote the Nigerian independence cause at the United Nations. For whatever reason the trip to eastern Europe didn’t come off and instead they accepted an invitation to spend a few days at MRA Swiss retreat at Vaux, a sojourn that apparently had a transforming impact on Azikiwe, at least for a time.⁷⁷

For a time, and during a period during which the “Freedom Movement” in Nigeria virtually disappeared, Azikiwe retained close ties to the MRA leadership.⁷⁸ In 1952 he gave a talk to Nigerian students in London at the home of the MRA leader, Frank Buchman, in which he claimed that although his participation in MRA activities had been a “bombshell” for Nigerians, the MRA had in fact been able to “grapple with the main problems facing humanity today”.⁷⁹ In his remarks, Zik stressed the importance of individual actions, which when multiplied could bring change. He emphasized, however ingenuously, that his encounter with MRA had led him to forego political infighting in favor of common purpose. Invoking the Moral Re-Armament credo, Azikiwe told the

73 African Play, ‘Freedom’ is Greeted by Enthusiasm, in: Atlanta Daily World, 7 February 1956, p. 2.

74 Ibid.

75 Milford, Moral Re-Armament.

76 Ibid.

77 Sklar, Nigerian Political Parties, p. 77, fn 104.

78 Other African leaders, notably Kwame Nkrumah, had been quite hostile to MRA, and Azikiwe would later claim that MRA claims regarding its influence over his thinking had been exaggerated. Sklar, Nigerian Political Parties, p. 77, fn 104.

79 N. Azikiwe, *Spiritual Rebirth for Africa*, London 1952, p. 4. Given MRA tendencies to script messages, it is uncertain how closely the published version follows his original remarks. See Milford, Moral Re-Armament, for discussion of MRA scripting practices.

student audience, “It is not *who* is right, but *what* is right that matters.”⁸⁰ Emphasizing both the grand scale of the aspiration for freedom and the power of the individual to manifest it, Azikiwe wrote that “We have a war on our hands: an attempt to make life worthwhile for humanity at large, irrespective of race, or nation, or class, or caste.”⁸¹ The Moral Re-Armament team was ultimately successful in producing a film version of *Freedom*, filmed in color in Nigeria and released in 1957, which had modestly successful runs in Nigerian cinemas in the late 1950s. Promoted as the “All-African Colour film, *FREEDOM*” when it played at the Queen’s Cinema in Ibadan in April 1959 it competed for audiences with movies such as *Naked Paradise*, *Cyclone Fury*, and *Noose for a Lady*. The movie, like the play, tells a story of Africans fighting for land and against each other. Gradually, during the movie, a reactionary representative of the colonial power, the local King, revolutionary militants and various local people discover ways to work together in a “spiritual insurrection” and unite in order to make a plan for their country and in typical Moral Re-Armament rhetoric, “remake the world”.⁸² However far-fetched the plot of *Freedom* turned out to be, the essentials of the MRA message did resonate with many, who saw individual opportunity, personal autonomy, and personal responsibility as critical elements of freedom. In this environment of disquieting change and optimism, MRA and similar organisations (including religious organisations) offered a connection and an affinity to the larger world that was very much a part of the aspiration for freedom.

4. As Up-To-Date as Piccadilly Circus

The same global impulse that attracted young people to the international Moral Re-Armament community pushed many other urban Nigerians to embrace global modernity. In those exciting years when citizens of states-in-the-making looked forward to, in MRA parlance, “making a new world”, many saw freedom less in terms of cultural independence than in full membership in global cultural communities. The movement toward self-government drew many to embrace and promote “national” dress and music and theater; yet at the same time those same people and others saw freedom in their right to identify with people across the globe through film, literature, and consumer culture. These desires linked to aspirations for greater opportunity and affluence, to taste from the table of that “inexhaustible feast of freedom”. It was time, in the words of NCNC supporter Magnus Williams, to drink “the wine of self-government”.⁸³ These desires for higher standards of living and diverse opportunities were bound up in a vision of a new, modern Nigeria that celebrated rich local cultures yet embraced new technology and

80 Azikiwe, *Spiritual Rebirth for Africa*, pp. 5–6.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

82 <https://letterboxd.com/film/freedom-1957/>, accessed 14 May 2023; the film is available on Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/132420183>. The movie was shown widely especially in Africa and it was estimated (by MRA) that 300,000 people in Kenya alone saw the film. Milford, “Moral Re-Armament”.

83 M. A. O Williams, *Today is D-Day for Nigeria*, in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 29 January 1952, p. 5.

economic development. Just as many urban Nigerians rejected representations of their country as a colonial territory or backward (for example in the film, *Nigeria Greets Her Queen*), they saw manifestations of their nationhood in their economic, religious, political and cultural engagement with the larger world and in the modern transformation of Lagos and other cities and towns.

In the exciting weeks leading up to the opening of the national parliament in 1952, Lagos was also caught up in neon fever. The *Daily Times* announced that

in the near future Lagos will become as up-to-date as Piccadilly Circus, London or Broadway, New York because on 23 January a new kind of animated sign would be switched on. Located in the city center near Victoria Street it would advertise the 'famous Hercules cycle in a novel animated manner [...]. Penetrating the darkness, this brilliant lighted sign will mark an epoch in the development of Lagos

and would supposedly mark the emergence of Lagos on the cutting edge of advertising practice.⁸⁴ The sign itself featured two images, one showing the Hercules bike and the other showing the crowds gathered to watch the sign turn on. The sign seems to have generated great excitement, and initially it was illuminated for only five minutes each evening in order to prevent the gathered crowds from blocking traffic.⁸⁵ A few days later a large advertisement appeared in the *Daily Times* promoting Hercules bicycles and touting the new “mechanically operated, animated” neon sign, a “wonderful latest addition to the sights of Lagos”. A well-dressed Nigerian biker pictured in the middle of the ad with his high-end Hercules asked, “Have you seen it?” And then admonished on-lookers, “please keep moving and do not obstruct the traffic!”⁸⁶

A decade or more earlier, local Lagos papers generally carried smaller and simpler advertisements that offered patent medicines and other inexpensive consumer items, but by the 1950s the advertising had become considerably more sophisticated and transnational. In place of small box ads for dry goods, there were now large promotions for costly items like bicycles and phonographs and by the late 1950s, air conditioners. In the same week that the federal parliament convened, the *Daily Times* carried a full-page advertisement for Dodge cars. Automobile ads were quite common in the press but this one was notable for its scale and because it included five separate images for “the most wanted car of 1952”, each of which featured American scenes populated by American consumers.⁸⁷ In July 1958, an advertisement for air conditioners appeared adjacent to an ad for bicycles that showed a man in an academic gown and cap. with the copy: “progressive people – go by cycle. Men and women with up-to-date ideas want to get about quickly, comfortably and easily. A bicycle’s the thing!”⁸⁸ That adjective, “up-to-date” surfacing

84 Nigerian Daily Times, 18 January 1952, p. 5.

85 First Neon Sign in West Africa, in: Nigerian Daily Times, 26 January 1952, p. 6.

86 Nigerian Daily Times, 2 February 1952, p. 2.

87 Nigerian Daily Times, 25 January 1952.

88 Nigerian Daily Times, 3 July 1958, p. 10 and p. 8.

yet again to portray Nigeria as anything but “backward” and in this case associated with advanced education.⁸⁹

To mark American Independence Day in 1958 the *Daily Times* published a “Letter from America: Behind the Great Bustle”, that reflected on the Nigerian identification of the United States with abundance, modernity, progress and freedom.⁹⁰ “Back home you picture America as a wealthy, overflowing country”, the author wrote. “You can see in your mind’s eye these towering buildings, jolting out from the ground [...]. You picture a country where everything is taken care of.” Perhaps you think “of bombs and jets and satellites. You think of almost everything essentially good”.⁹¹ But do Americans, the author asked, “have democracy and freedom for all practiced truly and sincerely?” The letter provided numerous examples of poverty and racial discrimination to show that they did not. Yet in the end no society was more “up-to-date” than the United States. And nothing defined the qualities of American culture globally quite like cinema.⁹²

American movies dominated the screens across West Africa in the 1950s, and theaters were a ubiquitous presence in Nigerian cities and towns, including Lagos where there were as many as fifteen cinemas.⁹³ For urban youth especially the movies provided a window on global culture and European and North American style, affluence and culture and linked them to their overseas counterparts. By the mid-1950s, Nigerians saw more or less the same features as movie-goers in the United States, although some months later.⁹⁴ The movies that circulated among Lagos cinemas included crime dramas, musicals, romances and of course westerns. Such films exposed audiences to American landscapes and cities, and also took them inside homes, shops, and places of work. Even if many were far from realistic in their depictions of life, they exposed cinema patrons to quite radical notions of generational conflict, class difference and gender roles. Like theater patrons everywhere, Nigerians brought a critical eye to the action they saw on screen, but they certainly registered the material culture and lives depicted.

Advertisements for film showings were daily features in the press, but the movies themselves attracted little attention other than occasional concern regarding “hooliganism”.⁹⁵ Now and then a story appeared regarding a particular film or film star, but otherwise cinema was simply regarded as a common feature of urban leisure life. Even though a 1952 commentary on movie-going in Nigeria in the education department magazine, *Nigeria*, concluded that films represented “a profound danger to national character”,

89 The paper also included ads for typewriters. *Nigerian Daily Times*, 5 July 1958, p. 11.

90 P. Osugo, Letter from America: Behind the Great Bustle, in: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 4 July 1958, p. 5.

91 Ibid.

92 R. Melnick, *Hollywood’s Embassies: How Movie Theaters Project American Power around the World*, New York NY 2022; B. Larkin, *Circulating Empires: Colonial Authority and the Immoral, Subversive Problem of American Film*, in: B. T. Edwards and D. P. Gaonkar (eds.), *Globalizing American Studies*, Chicago 2010.

93 O. Goerg, *Tropical Dream Palaces: Cinema in Colonial West Africa*, Oxford 2020. See also C. Ambler, *Celluloid Freedom: Cinema and Decolonization in West Africa*, unpublished paper 2022.

94 Based upon an analysis of press advertisements for movie showings in Lagos in the *Nigerian Daily Times* and the *Daily Service*.

95 Bishop D.F. Ade Jones, *Hooliganism and its Attendant Dangers*, in: *Daily Service*, 3 March 1952, p. 1.

the content of the article nicely illustrated the pervasive appeal of movies.⁹⁶ The author claimed that theater-goers abhorred the accounts of divorce and cinematic depictions of kissing, but it was plain enough that they went back for more. Distributors and audiences took a special interest in movies that included Black actors or somehow involved Africa. Advertisements typically made note of the presence of a “Negro” actor in a cast and in 1952, for example, Willie Payne, the Lagos-born, London-based movie actor and dancer (and descendant of the nineteenth-century Black Lagos luminary John Augustus Ontonba Payne) made a successful Nigerian tour.⁹⁷ Newspapers also gave considerable space to Black performers, notably the dancer and impresario Pearl Primus who had made a visit to West Africa and in 1952 presented her West African influenced dance performances on the London stage.⁹⁸

Audiences certainly did not swallow Hollywood whole. Although there was generally little criticism of the quality of American films and their very limited and distorted depictions of Blacks and Africa, by the late 1950s the Tarzan films began to attract considerable negative attention. Various versions of the Tarzan story had been popular mainstays of Nigerian theaters in the 1950s, but in April 1959 at a time when *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* was drawing in patrons in multiple theaters, the *Daily Service* columnist, Layi Adebayo, took aim at *Tarzan and the Lost Safari* starring Gordon Scott.⁹⁹ In the film a white (or perhaps Brown?) Tarzan leads wealthy survivors of a plane crash out of the jungle, but a Black “jungle tribe” kidnaps one of the women thus requiring Tarzan to rescue the hostage. Echoing the criticism of cultural distortion in *Nigeria Greets Her Queen*, Adebayo asserted that “from whatever angle you look at it, this film is an outrage on the intelligence of the African, nay, the Nigerian of 1959”.¹⁰⁰

As independence approached, intellectuals and political leaders began to press harder for cultural decolonisation, but for the many thousands of cinema-goers that patronized Nigerian cinemas American movies continued to be the draw. Tastes were changing, however, and by the late 1950s Indian movies were making up a growing proportion of the movies exhibited, reflecting the appeal of Bollywood style, and perhaps even an emerging sense of community with a newly-independent nation prominent among the non-aligned states. Yet as Nigeria gained its independence, West African youths were simultaneously caught up in the global craze for rock and roll and the films that featured it.¹⁰¹ An advertisement for the Odeon Cinema in Ibadan for Saturday Night June 6, 1959, a little over a year before independence called on young people not to dedicate themselves to national development but to join their counterparts around the world and

96 A. Oyolola, The Influence of the Cinema in Nigeria, in: *Nigeria: A Quarterly Magazine of General Interest* 39 (1952), p. 211.

97 *Nigerian Daily Times*, 18 April 1952, p. 10.

98 *Nigerian Daily Times*, 4 January 1952, p. 6.

99 L. Adebayo, Film: Tarzan and the Lost Safari, in: *Daily Service*, 4 April 1959, p. 9.

100 Notwithstanding a prominent role as a “savage African king” for Nigerian actor Orlando Martins. Adebayo, Film: *Tarzan and the Lost Safari*.

101 Steven Salm has documented the contemporary rock’n’roll craze in newly-independent Ghana. ‘Rain or Shine we Gonna’ Rock’: Dance Subcultures and Identity Construction in Accra, Ghana, in: T. Falola and C. Jennings (eds.), *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, Rochester NY 2003, pp. 361–375.

“clear the floor for the original and biggest Rock’n Roll and Rock’n Sock picture you’ll ever see. Starring the World’s top rocker-socker, kid Elvis Presley”. The film was Elvis’s hit, *Loving You* and patrons were warned: “you’ll rock, sock and roll. Those likely to become hysterical please stay at home.”¹⁰²

102 Daily Service, 6 June 1959, p. 12. For an analysis of the appeal of Elvis in East Africa, see A. Gurnah, Elvis in Zanzibar, in: A. Scott (ed.), *The Limits of Globalization: Cases and Arguments*, London 1997, pp. 116–142. Manthia Diawara vividly describes the appeal of global popular culture in Mali, against the backdrop of independence in his memoir, *We Won’t Budge: An African Exile in the World*, New York 2002.