



# THE BUEA CHRONICLES



**Monday, July 10th, 1967**

As my trip throughout England and Spain finishes, I'm getting ready to finally head to Morocco. Africa has always been a great curiosity for me, and this is why I decided to begin this journal. Back in London I attended to a wedding, and shortly before the ceremony I bought a beautiful Rolleiflex to take some pictures, but ended up forgetting about the film. I was in a rush planning my trip the next day and didn't pay attention to anything else.

Right now I'm in a hotel in Madrid, close to Puerta del Sol. The weekend I've spent here was delicious, and I decided to get some rest today. My taxi will arrive early in the morning, however I'm not getting much sleep... it's already 1.40a.m. and I'm extremely restless during my last night in here. Maybe it's because I have this feeling about Morocco... Many surprises are expecting me!

**Thursday, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

Since the moment I first inhaled some African air, my senses got more accurate. I know is sounds silly, but it's true. There is something about this place, and I get fonder of it every day. It's been three days since I arrived here, and so far I'm making the most of my staying.

This morning, during breakfast in the hotel, there was an English middle-aged couple sitting next to me, and we ended up knowing each other. After talking to them for a few minutes, I learned that they are leaving tomorrow, so I decided to ask if they wanted to join me for dinner later. There are still many tips I need about Casablanca, and they already gave me great ones. They suggested a cute coffee shop nearby and assured me it is the best cuscuz in town. I'm meeting them within half an hour.

It's about time to get ready!

**Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

Sally and Mark gave me something to think about after our get-together. Before coming to Morocco, they went to Lagos and Benin City, in Nigeria, and had the time of their lives. It seems that Nigerians are adorable and captivating. We spent most of our evening talking about their adventures, and I got very curious.

I would never take them for adventurous; however their eyes were shining when they described Nigeria. Sally said that despite the mosquitoes, she had absolutely loved everything about that country, specially its people. They warned me to always carry some repellent in my bag, because things can get messy otherwise. The heat and the humidity make everything easier for the bugs and harder for us.

When I got back to the hotel, I kept thinking about this African tour. Morocco can't be my final destination. I'm feeling inspired! Yesterday I went to Mohamed V, the airport, and bought a ticket to Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. I think this is one of the craziest things I have ever done. My flight leaves tomorrow afternoon, and it's about time I start packing. I'm glad I started this journal. I bet there will be many things to write about.

### **Monday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

As I landed in Lagos, there was a huge cloud of mosquitoes annoying me and the other passengers. I reached for the repellent inside my bag and ran. The heat made everything worse, but when I got to the hotel I felt better and relieved. When Sally and Mark told me about the bugs and the weather, they surely meant what they said. The staff is lovely, just like everybody else in here. Yesterday morning I went for a walk and ended up at the public market. There was an incredible variety of things there, and I bought souvenirs for everyone back home. At noon the sun was almost unbearable, and I decided to make a pit stop at a small restaurant to have some water and eat a local meal.

It was almost dark when I got back to the hotel feeling extremely tired, but I still wanted to know more of Lagos. I just got out of the shower and my bed calls for me. Tomorrow is going to be a long day, and I intend to wake up early.

### **Tuesday, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

Indeed it was a long day! My feet are killing me! I know there are still many things to do around here, faces to see and places to go, but I don't feel very good at the moment. My stomach hurts, and I am very tired. I'm trying to remember the things I've eaten since I got here... the food is very spicy. Yesterday I had some Kilishi, made from meat cut into very thin slices which is then spread out to dry. A special preparation of chilli pepper, spices and local herbs is then prepared into a paste which is lightly brushed on both sides. This is then briefly grilled. Among other Nigerian dishes I've tried, like Suya and Tsire, Kilishi is my favorite so far. However I don't think my body agrees with me. I'm feeling warm and weak, as if I have a fever. I hope it'll pass during the night; otherwise I'll need to get some meds for my insides.

### **Thursday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

Last Tuesday I had to come to the hospital. I started pilking all over my room, and it didn't stop until I got to Reddington Hospital in an ambulance. I felt really bad, and at some point even fainted. I'm glad I still had the strength to call the reception for help... I could be much worse if I hadn't. Now that I've been medicated and understand what happened, I'm more relaxed. I probably got food poisoned eating contaminated meals in the streets. I hope it wasn't that Kilish. The doctors say I'm infected with amoebas, but in no time I should be out of here. The treatment is very fast.

Right now I'm in room number 453, and I share it with an older woman. I don't know what happened to her. There are always many people around visiting. They speak in a different language and I can't seem to understand it. Yesterday night I was very curious, and tried to call her, but there was no answer... I'll try again tonight, even though I'm not leaving here before Monday. It sucks!

### **Friday, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967**

I've learned that my roommate's name is Poline Nijawira. She is 61 years-old and recovers from Malaria. It's a terrible disease caused by mosquito bit, and she's been here for a couple of days. We got the chance to speak for a short period of time before she fell asleep again because of her medication.

As far as I can tell, she's not from around here. She has travelled a long way looking for her grandson Popo, who was taken away from her by her daughter-in-law when her son passed away, and Poline ended up losing track of them after getting the disease. She is here with a large group of people, and they are heading to West Cameroon, a country that shares borders with Nigeria. When I was about to ask her about the place they were going to, she no longer answered... the meds made her sleep again, and I feel even more curious right now. Maybe tomorrow we'll continue our conversation.

### **Saturday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967**

Fortunately Poline and I got the chance to keep talking. I told her many things about me, my family and our life in Brazil. She looked fascinated, but the truth is I was the one fascinated by her and her hurtful story. She is very sad and worried about her whole situation, but continues to be a very strong woman. I liked to meet her; she inspires me with her strength.

This afternoon, after her visitors went away, she asked me what my plans were after leaving the hospital. I told her I was heading to Benin City as well, but after that I still didn't have anything else in mind. Poline remained in silence for a while, and ended up inviting me to join her search. At first I thought about declining the request because I wanted to know more of Nigeria. I asked her about her destination after leaving the hospital, and ended up hearing a very interesting story: on the foot of Mount Cameroon, a volcano not far from here, there is this little city called Buea, Poline and her group's next stop. It seems like it's an unusual place, full of mystery and magic. I didn't answer her at first, but somewhere in my mind my decision was made, and that's when I decided to postpone my trip to Abuja and join my new friend in her crusade. A mix of emotions is running through my veins right now, and I like it! My taste for adventure always gets the best of me.

The doctors came to check on us before our sleep. They had great news: I could go back to the hotel on Monday morning, and Poline was free to go as from that moment. She was cured.

### **Monday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

For my surprise, Poline was waiting for me in front of the hospital. I was released early in the morning, wishing to pack my bags and face the long boat trip from Lagos to the harbor of Bota, as Poline instructed me and everyone one in her group yesterday. She was very influent, and acted like their leader. That explains all those people visiting here at the hospital: they were waiting for her to go back in the road. Their trip was on hold for about three weeks after Poline caught Malaria, and they had people waiting for them in Buea. Our group was going to be housed by them, and they were almost twenty days late. We landed in Bota and organized the next move. Our destination wasn't that far away anymore. At night we were waiting for the transportation that would take us to Buea, and Poline started telling me about this doctor who lives there. People believe he can bring back anyone who is lost. That's when I understood the reason she was going there. A few tears rolled down her face, as she was holding a black and white photograph of her grandson. I had goose bumps all over my body and my heart beated very fast. Something is definitely going to happen in Buea.

Poline has a very strong personality. She is kind to the others, and I noticed she became their leader by providing them strength to carry on. Even though I should sleep before arriving at Buea, my mind is restless. I'm starting to actually realize how crazy all this situation sounds. What would Mark and Sally say about this adventure? I bet they would be proud of me. Well... I know I am.

Someone said we were getting close to our destination. It is time to take my camera!

### **Wednesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

It's real! This is place is real! The minute we got here I saw lots of people, Buea citizens and our large group. I still had enough film to keep taking pictures of everything.

It took us a while to organize our next move, but Poline was able to deal with everything. She gathered everybody around her after asking for some information about the doctor's hut, and people paid her a lot of attention. She had it under control, and I began helping her to plan our next moves. I'm getting more and more involved in everything and we spent the rest of the day accommodating everyone in Buea families' houses. People here are very hospitable. Poline and I are sharing a room in Bandele's house, an old friend of her and her family. Once we settled down, the weight of my trip felt heavy on me. I slept like a rock for many hours, and had uncountable dreams, which now I can't remember. I barely left my room yesterday, and Poline told me I was talking in my sleep. She stayed around, and waited for me to go to the doctor's temple. It wasn't about her anymore, she said... It was about us, all of us. Her kindness moved me once again, and I felt pretty lucky for meeting her by chance in that hospital in Lagos.

In the morning I left our room looking for Poline. Bandele told me she had gone for a little walk and shouldn't take long to be back, so I sat with him in the porch as his wife offered us some food she made in the kitchen that is situated out of the house. While I was trying to remember my dreams from last night, Poline arrived, and her news were very exciting. She explained to me that tomorrow morning we are heading to the temple. The doctor heard about our arrival and scheduled a visit for us. We had a very busy day ahead. My friend said we should rest, because there were a lot of things happening in the spiritual plane. I realized that was the reason I dreamt so much. The

energy around the city was flowing fast, and we should expect great things to happen anytime. Poline took my hands, looked me in the eyes and thanked me for being there. We stayed like that for a while, talking without words before we went back to our room and got some sleep.

### **Thursday, July 27th, 1967**

We just got back to Bandele's house after spending the whole day at the temple with the others. I had no idea what was waiting for me when I woke up this morning, and this feeling remains regarding tomorrow.

Once we got to the temple, we met our group in line to be assisted by the doctor's disciples. There was a huge panel full of photographs of missing people. Poline also displayed her grandson's portrait among the other ones.

The temple was a large building with small windows, and it was closed when we got there. I was looking forward to know what was inside of it, and curious about meeting Master Gundo, the doctor. He wasn't there though. A young man opened the door, and asked for the people to give more information about who they were looking for. Poline went in line and I started to know every corner of the temple. They don't allow pictures inside, but I took a few ones for the record when none of the disciples was looking. It was crowded inside, and I could feel the energy Poline told me about the night before. For a moment, I didn't actually feel like myself, for my perception of things was far too accurate. I felt light, as if I was flying, and my eyes were shutting. Suddenly, one of the disciples put his hands in my head and started saying some words in a different language. As my eyes opened, I saw his ones turning white for a quick moment. Then he smiled at me and congratulated my family. I didn't understand a thing. Then he said I was going to have wonderful news within the next weeks.

Buea is definitely both mysterious and magical. It can't be explained.

### **Saturday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

Tomorrow is going to be a remarkable day. Yesterday the doctor announced that he and his disciples are performing a ritual to bring back the missing ones. Bandele's family and he confirmed his reputation of being a miracle worker, but I couldn't help noticing their apprehension. Maybe there's something more to this story than the people who live here is telling us. I tried to say this to Poline, but she ignored it. She's really hopeful for the ritual that might bring her grandson back to her. Every foreigner is. A small group is getting together tonight to pray and ask for their relatives. Poline is with them, and she invited me to come, but I was very tired. These past couple of days was full of activities at the temple.

At some point of the day I always miss my family so much! Since my arrival at Buea I haven't sent them many postcards as I did in Europe, Morocco or Nigeria, where I had plenty of free time at the hospital. I get Poline's pain towards her missing grandson, and everybody else's too. Even though I know my family is safe and waiting for me, to spend such long time away from them makes me feel very lonely sometimes. I guess this is why I'm here now, trying to help these people. As I

said before, hopefully they will get what they are asking for so hardly. Tomorrow will be the day. Great events are coming. Everybody is saying that. I'm looking forward to meet Master Gondou. Everyone talks about him, but I haven't met him yet. Except, maybe, in my dreams.

### **Sunday, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

It's very late now, and despite being overwhelmed with everything that's happened, I couldn't sleep before writing down about the ritual performed at the doctor's hut.

The whole day was very festive. People brought food and drinks, there were many children playing everywhere, and I finally got to meet the sorcerer in person. He was dressing a traditional costume with many adornments, and a very unusual mask (I never saw his face). His disciples were wearing white, and followed him around the temple. After noon, the celebration was taken outdoors, where people danced and chanted in the middle of the streets. I felt great energy coming from everyone, and the clear day got really heavy and dark when thunders and cold wind announced a storm. Luckily I took some pictures during the whole day, before people got soaking wet. Poline was gifted with an enormous power throughout the whole ritual, and from the minute we stepped in the hotel she felt heavily asleep. I'm convinced there was a very brave entity on her today.

I will try to get more sleep. Deep in my heart I feel scared, but the reason of it remains unknown. This is certainly the most different experience I have ever had.

### **Tuesday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967**

I woke up with some heavy knocking on the door. Poline got scared, and gave me a look from her surprised eyes. Something happened. A man died the other day, and his funeral was finally about to begin. It's an expensive event here, and even some of the important families in here take some time to put together enough money. I still didn't understand what Poline and I had to do with it. Bandele then explained that the dead man's wife sent for me, because she heard about this foreign lady who takes great pictures. At first I didn't want to go, and my mind made a quick excuse, but people needed me. After twenty minutes, I was on my way.

Funerals here are very different than the ones in Brazil. The mourning family welcomes their guests at home. The dead man was lying in a bed in the living room, and his wife, Minala, remained seated by his side. Once we got there, I gave the widow my condolences, and started taking pictures. She was very grateful to me, and ended up introducing me to some very important people in town. Her family was very wealthy, and friends with Mr. Jua, the prime-minister here in West Cameroon. He and the dead man were best friends. Jua was clearly very sad, but he was very friendly and kind towards me, asking me a lot of questions. During the endless four hours funeral, the prime-minister introduced me to some other people he was friends with, and invited me to a party at his house. His birthday was next weekend, and his family would be there too. Of course I said yes! I also thanked him for his kindness, as we left Minala's house.

## **Thursday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1967**

On Wednesday, me and Poline got to know a little bit more about Mount Cameroon from Bandele. Buea is located at its foot, and it is actually one of Africa's largest volcanoes, rising 4,040 meters above the coast. As a matter of fact, it is impressive, because it rises above the city from wherever you look at it. Also, this volcano has the most frequent eruptions than any other one in West Africa.

Bandele also told us more stories about West Cameroon's history, its independence and its people. Our host is a kind man and he looks very strong despite his old age. He was a good friend of Poline's father back in the 40s when they lived in a small town in Nigeria.

When we realized, we were in the middle of the afternoon, and none of us had had lunch yet. I offered myself to cook, and Bandele also gave me some tips about African spices. Things are very good around here... I feel happy!

During our late lunch, I started asking him about Master Gundo's work in the community. His answers were quite vague, and suddenly he told us he had to leave. His food was still in the plate, and I looked in Poline's eyes. What just happened?

Last night when I was almost asleep, I heard Poline talking in her dreams in a foreign language. It reminded me the language one of Gundo's disciples spoke to me in, and I noticed I had heard that language several times back in Brazil, during specific situations.

It's a very rainy season around here, and today it didn't stop raining! So I decided to spend the afternoon writing letters and post cards to my family and friends (including Sally and Mark). I really miss them, but there's something more to this trip. I can't go back home just yet... there are many things to do around here.

Bandele called me at the door. There was an officer with a fancy car outside, and they brought me the official invitation to the prime-minister's birthday party. It will take place at his house, on August 5<sup>th</sup>, next Saturday, at 7p.m. and everybody must wear evening gown. Très chic!

I still have a good dress from the wedding I attended to in London. A seamstress will fix anything wrong about it.

## **Sunday, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

I definitely had much to drink yesterday at the party and woke up this morning feeling dizzy. Now it's around 8p.m. and even the light from the lamp bothers me. Champaign always go to my head in a heartbeat. I can barely write anything down. However I must say the party was flawless. His official house is enormous and beautiful. I took some pictures of it before going inside. Jua turned 63, and he has been prime-minister for 10 years now. People really like him around here. He is kind and generous, and I wish I could say the same about Brazilian politicians.



Poline is taking good care of my hangover. She knows about herbal medicines, and laughs at me, saying that I look like an adolescent. I should sleep some more. My body doesn't fight back the way it did when I was younger...

### **Wednesday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

I'm fully recovered now. It's around 9a.m. and Poline and I are going for a walk. We got to really know each other these past couple of days. She's very anxious about her grandson, and told me that her late son has been appearing in her dreams almost every night saying *ITELE*, which in Yoruba, a Nigerian language, means "next" as she explained to me. I guess it explains the things she was saying the other night during her sleep. I wonder what it really means...

Master Gundo's ritual hasn't brought anyone back yet, but it is known that it can take weeks or months before anything happen. Would Poline's grandson be the next person to come back from the missing? At the hut, I overheard people saying that children are usually the first ones to get back.

### **Friday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

I came to know there is a national holiday next week. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of the present month, people from West Cameroon celebrate the Assumption of Virgin Mary. It sounds very festive! That made me think how much Brazil and Africa are alike when it comes to religion. Everyone's free to believe in whatever they want to. However, there is ONE belief in common: Master Gundo, the doctor. Let me explain: today I saw a miracle coming true. It was a beautiful day, full of white clouds in the sky with rays of light passing through them. My friend and I were taking our usual walk when I looked up and stared at that beautiful view for a while. Then I told Poline that was the image I associate to God's figure. She looked up too, in silence, very respectful towards my God. Suddenly we started hearing footsteps coming from behind us in growing speed. We turned around just in time to see a little girl dressed in white. We recognized her instantly from the photos of the missing people panel outside the doctor's hut. For a moment I could not move. The little girl kept on running, and she was heading to the temple all by herself. Her mom was there, praying for her, and it looked like she knew it.

I'm still shocked right now. Sleeping is not an option... I need some fresh air!

### **Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

The anxiety about next Tuesday has taken control over me, and Poline told me she feels the same way. It's funny how people from Buea are used to these miracles, because they act so naturally about it. Now that I've seen it happens, I'm sure this episode will repeat itself after the next ritual. Just like that little girl, someone's going to come back in people's lives.

The mystery regarding Buea and Master Gundo is a fact especially now I've seen its realness with my own eyes. It'll never be taken away from me.

Here's a piece of paper I found in our room today. It's from the hut.

### **Tuesday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

It's early in the morning, and neither I nor Poline slept a bit. My body feels tired, but I'm wide awake. We are getting ready for the celebration. It's the Assumption's day here, and I begin to feel the energy growing everywhere. Even the air we breathe is thicker. When we get back, I'm writing everything that's happened. My camera has a brand new film; after all I'm in search for miracle's evidence.

11.45p.m. – we just got back from the temple. Poline fell heavily asleep, while I struggle with my eyes to write about the celebration. Master Gundo was wearing a different mask today, one that has something to do with Yemoja, the representation of the Virgin Mary in African religions. Yemoja is a goddess related to the sea, an African "orixá" also known as "the great mother". There was a beautiful statue of her represented as a mermaid, and many people would dance and chant around her. Gundo's disciples were wearing white again, and they never left Yemoja's side. I remember seeing the once missing little girl in her mother's arms, and they were truly happy! I'm sure Poline's time will come. We both pray very hard for it. ODOIÁ, YEMOJA! Make our wishes come true.

### **Wednesday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

My impression of Buea today is that it suffers from a massive hangover. Every bit of energy was placed in yesterday's ceremony. People are exhausted, and so am I. I just hope it works for Poline's grandson.

I woke up rather early today, and for some reason couldn't go back to sleep. I guess it was something about my dreams that didn't let me. Then I got dressed and went for a little walk outside. There was silence everywhere, and I was practically by myself. Not even the dogs were barking. As I kept on walking, I realized I went back to the place where Poline and I saw the little girl. I'm sure I went there because I wanted to wait and see if anyone would come back again.

But no one did.

At least not today.

### **Friday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

Today I woke up for bad news. Another man died in town. I was surprised in a bad way... in less than 3 weeks, two people died! It's a very odd thing for such a small town. For a moment, I didn't think Gundo was such a miracle worker. Why couldn't he keep these people alive?

Bandele gave me a note. The dead man's granddaughter asked if I could take pictures of their family. As I agreed, I started to get ready and invited Poline to come with me, but she didn't want to. She was too exhausted. The waiting was hard on her, even though there is hope. This is too much for every one of us actually.

When I got there, the dead man was, once again, lying in a bed in the middle of the living room. The funeral was a lot like Minala's husband: people brought plenty of food, but it was barely eaten. I felt very lonely there, even though the young lady who wrote to me tried to keep me company. There was only Buea citizens there. I was the only foreigner.

Later that afternoon I went back to Bandele's house. My head was filled with strange thoughts. The funeral gave me a lot to think about the rituals performed by Gundo and the deaths. I couldn't help wondering about the short period of time between one and the other. Something doesn't feel right about this, but I guess I'm probably very tired and starting to get delusional.

### **Saturday, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1967**

There is a silent expectation in the air...everybody's wondering who will be blessed by the last ritual, and how much longer will it take before anyone comes back from the missing.

Poline is very apprehensive. I can hear her prayers through the night, and even during our morning walk. Will her dream come true? Will her grandson actually be *ITELE*? It's that mystery again. No one can know.

Down at the temple, people are organizing a welcome back party. There are signs everywhere, along with candles and popcorn. Deep inside me, the strange feeling I had yesterday remains. I believe there's a connection between the rituals and the dead people. It's a horrible feeling. It makes me want to get away from here as soon as possible.

### **Tuesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967**

Today was the day! Another one came back: Poline's grandson!! It's still very hard to believe it, even though I have seen the same situation happening before. However this time everybody was gathered at the temple planning the welcome back party. These past few days since the ritual, every night we would wait for the missing one to return. We got dressed and went to the temple to pray for our beloved ones and we waited. Everyone was dressed up as usual, and some women organized signs that said "welcome". I was able to take a picture of this moment! We celebrated for a long time before going back to our houses. Poline is very happy. I've never seen her like this.

As we got back to Bandele's home, I found a telegram on my bed. I opened it and realized it was from my family in Porto Alegre. I had to read it several times to actually understand and realize

what it meant. In my hometown, my daughter has just found out she is pregnant!!!!!! What a blessed Tuesday this is! I'm truly happy for becoming a grandmother. I hugged Poline, who couldn't stop crying either. Tomorrow morning I'm writing back to my family. It's time to go home!

### **Wednesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1967**

I managed to say goodbye to everyone. Poline and Popo were by my side the whole day. Bandele was kind enough to give me his homemade bracelet, which I had absolutely loved, and told me it was for protection and a safe trip back. I thanked him with all my heart as my eyes got watered. We went everywhere, first to the temple and last to the prime-minister house. I said goodbye to some people who work for the government and was at the birthday party too. Poline offered herself to take a picture of us before I left. Everybody was so kind to me that part of me wanted to stay. I've learned to love Buea and its people, and farewells are always hard for me. The only one I didn't say goodbye to was Master Gundo... I couldn't find him anywhere.

It's late at night, and I'm on my way to Yaoundé, from where my flight will leave. Whenever I start to think about the strange coincidences between the rituals, the deaths and the return of lost people, I get goose bumps. But now it's all been left behind.