

The Berliner Cult

THE BERLINER CULT was a secret one in the strictest sense, said Uncle Lekwot. There were no agendas to the meetings, the need to take minutes was never considered. 'We'd meet, we'd talk out our souls, we'd cry out our hearts, we'd laugh our stomachs off, and we'd go - in the name of Africa'. Even The Africa was a privatised secret, it became so when *We Shall Never Be Pacified* was adopted as the oath of allegiance. They swore to belong to each other, they shared the meaning of the oath, but the exact words were individual secrets deliberately locked in eleven languages by Cy's key question - Who the hell christened our blessed continent Africa? None of the African languages represented had "Africa" in its root vocabulary.

Also, they called themselves The Eleven-In-One, another secret so well kept it eluded the cybernetic tentacles of The Computer until The Cult metamorphosed into Twenty-three-In-One, the legally constituted body of Africans who fought and won **The First Battle Of Yunhouse**. Said **The Printout**: "In the beginning there were Twenty-three Africans, they religiously denied the virtues of English real ale in London pubs, preferring to get drunk on each other's blood... Out of the jungle they came, but the jungle did not come out of them".

The Gero Duo read this with considerable satisfaction, remembering how The Eleven-In-One rapturously dived into the jungle on that solemn night when they saw themselves pioneering the establishment of an African cult outside Africa, on English soil to be exact. And why not? Except for a minor problem: none of The Berliners had first hand knowledge of the constitution of an African cult, European education having carted them off to look at strange pictures and learn how to get their tongues around awkward sounds - such as "th" in "the thing" - whilst others in their peer groups learnt to make drums speak the language of the spirits. The London model of the secret cult therefore drew on fragmented childhood recollections of popular perceptions of secret cults. So, for example, had a suitable instrument been handy in the Camden Town Flat, The Berliners, following a member's suggestion, would have tattooed a chosen insignia (map of Africa?) onto a secret notch (the crotch?) of their anatomies, that notch would then become the Cult's password and members would greet each other with "Hello crotch" in a nominated African language.

'We may as well adopt "freeze" as our password', Cy told the gathering of freezing Africans on the night the subject of password was resolved. Lekwot had earlier gone to report the coal cellar empty, he found his landlady in bed, under half a dozen blankets, and reading *Paradise Lost* held in hands protected by mittens. The coalman failed to deliver, she told Lekwot. 'Now's is your chance to get a taste of real winter, a wonderful experience to write to your folks back home'. Would Lekwot like extra blankets? There were extra pairs of mittens for reading but they may not be long enough for his long African fingers. On the other hand, he could wait for his African friends to get warmer, 'Your laughter sounds like a blast furnace'. The visiting Berliners would not be put off their meeting. They adjusted their longjohns and long sleeve vests, tightened the wrap of their scarves, buttoned their overcoats and nestled together to hear Cy's peroration on the subject of a password for The Berliner Cult, thus:

'Here we are, Brothers, freezing in a foreign land. I mean you don't have to be versed in The Origin Of Species to infer that Homo Sapiens have forever used their power of locomotion to gravitate towards warmth. So what in the name of our ancestors are

we doing here?...Something happened to us, my Brothers. Something very sinister. Something totally disorientating. For a password that would be a trigger button of our experiences we need look no further than that something'.

The spellbound Berliners were referred to an article, The Significance Of 1884, in the latest edition of their new magazine, *The Africa Picture [No Spitting!]*, in which the Great Berlin Carve-up was described as The Scramble For Africa: 'That's what they think it was. That's what they'd like us to think it was. Brothers, mark my word, we'll all live to see many generations of reading-and-writing Africans borrowing "Scramble" - their coin in their intellectual market - to look at Colonialism. It'll be our historical destiny to watch this process that precludes, as counterfeit, all our original thoughts on our circumstances. It is our historical privilege and duty to resist the process...We shall never be pacified!.'

Echo: *'We shall never be pacified!'*

'Then our story begins with one nasty fact: that each and everyone of us here was born within blood-letting distance of the Great Berlin Carve-up of our continent!' He whisked his travel documents out of his coat pocket. 'Our parents don't have these documents. Our brothers and sisters don't have them. They've stayed pre-historic'. The Berliners were asked to cast their minds back to that moment at the pearly gates of history when they stood before a Colonial St Peter and were asked to declare who they were. His own father, with his hand on the Bible, was asked to repeat the words of a legal oath which said that whereas his son, Cyril, although born in the pre-historic time when births were not being recorded in the Colony, was actually born by his mother into the world on the 17th day of November 1891. The local interpreter transmitted the text of the oath with a wry smile: 'The Whiteman wants you to swear that the young man is your son. Just say yes'. Mr Naikule senior, irritated by the aspersion cast on his own blood, not to mention his manhood, wanted to reveal a family birthmark, on the left buttock, spotted and slapped by several generations of midwives, some of whom were available as living witnesses. But the interpreter firmly retained his hand on the Bible, turned to the Whiteman, 'The Old Man agrees to everything you say, and he so swears'. Local St Peter stamped and endorsed Cy's identity:

'Now you are somebody , keep your Declaration Of Age safe, remember your birthday, everywhere you go in England you'll be asked for it, without it you're nobody'.

'What did the Whiteman say to you, son?' 'He wishes me good luck'.

Cy paused. The Berliners all thought he would begin to stutter. But he did not. He continued: 'Lies! lies! lies! That is our fate'. The Berliners should watch out for the day in the not so distant future when the modern - meaning Europeanised! - African personality would be said to have complexes, for, as that African lied his way into becoming somebody, his soul would have somersaulted and contorted in fraudulent acrobatics until he knew not who he was, he would have matured without the benefit of the wisdom in "know thyself". To start afresh here in Camden Town, the Berliners were to discard exact days and months and revert to dating by events, seasons and moons, as it used to be where they came from. At least they would avoid the

temptation of birthday parties, a ridiculous notion, anyway, who in his right mind would want to indulge in the morbid arithmetic of countdown to death. Birth occurred once, everyday was affirmation of that birthday. However, it was very significant that members of the Berliner Cult shared the same birth season. Cy read from a piece of paper: 'In Africa, every age group has a club or society , often secret, through which the members assert their social relevance within their tribal community'. He had copied those words from an anthropological thesis in the University Library, but they would do for now .

'So, Brothers, we were all born in, and belong to, the age of The Pacification Of The Natives...'

...We shall never be pacified! ...

Therein lies the rub, continued Cy . And how it all began in the autumn of the year Eighteen Eighty-Four, in the city of Berlin in Deutschland, when men in very grey suits pored over an outline map of Africa dotted with named and soon-to-be-named landmarks now known as Nile, Niger, Congo, Senegal, Orange, Limpopo, Zambezi, Atlas, Cameroon, Kilimanjaro, Chad, Victoria, Nyasa, Tanganyika, just to name a few. Those men in the very grey suits didn't see any Africans on that map, and they have not seen any Africans since: 'If this cult of ours is to achieve anything it is to make ourselves visible...'

...We shall never be pacified ...

'Quite. Consider further, my Brothers, those trigonometric instruments, blunt and sharp, cutting, piercing, slicing and carving your invisible forebears: neighbours went to farm together and finished their days' work on different sides of national boundaries; families sat down to dinner and stood up as multi-nationals; couples went to bed in conjugal bliss and woke up with split lineages. If this picture sounds familiarly loud and clear it is because it echoes their Bible's depiction of the scenario to mark the end of the world. It was the end of our world all right. Our forebears did not know it then. But they knew it. Now we Berliners know that the end of that world was a dance called the Scramble For Africa. We shall call it Their Tumble Into The Jungle. That dance was choreographed in Berlin. When? In Eighteen...'

...Eighty-four!

'The cardinal rule for that dance was: Don't step on my toes! Because that was all they had: toe-holds in Africa. A person quarrels with his wife, he escapes to Africa, his refuge would be cited as a toe-hold; a social misfit is catapulted out of his society, he revives himself in Africa, the location of his new beginning was demarcated as toe-hold in the Dark Continent; a man possessed by John The Baptist Syndrome seeks out a bush spot to indulge a diet of locust and wild honey while calling for the Messiah all day and all night, his dinner table counts as toe-hold; a venturesome buccaneer loses his way in the jungle, it would be big, big news, the locus of his perambulations was cartographic evidence for a toe-hold...and so on.'Then they shoved their toes, nay their big boots, up the bottoms of our forebears, an act they called pacification of the natives...'

'We shall never be pacified!'

'Indeed. How could we, we who were merely unfertilised natives in the virginal wombs of our mothers when they arrived to prepare the floor for Their Tumble Into The Jungle. Notice, Brethren, their consideration, almost humane, for the animals of the jungles, the most troublesome of the beasts being, of course, our forebears who lived in organised communities of some description, spoke some sort of language and were capable of orchestrated nuisance, maybe even resistance to Operation Tumble Into The Jungle. So our ancestors had to be talked to, so they arrived, like they would in a zoo, armed with mirrors and breadcrumbs soaked in liquor , to tantalize and mesmerise our forebears into playing the game of putting their marks on pieces of paper . That was the game of-of-of...T -t-treaties...We'll spare ourselves the pain of reflecting on the contents of those treaties, which they, in accordance with the rules of Eighteen-Eighty-four, required to prove to themselves and to one another their entitlement to our lands, thus making squatters of our forebears. The treaties would have qualified for criminal land deals, if only they had been deals. But they were not even deals, as our forebears stressed when they returned to begin occupation of our lands. Our forebears beat the gongs and said NO! They mounted their Maxim Guns and the pa-pa...pa-pa...pa-pa...pacification b-e-ee-e-eegan!...'

Cy sat down.

There was a hush.

NEXT TALE COMING UP

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The twentieth century was less than two decades old.

And there were even fewer African students London.

Lekwot Abaka and Cyril Naikule met.

The Africa would never be the same again.