

Nigeria – Lagos, la Vida Loca

TEXT:

By next year, more than half the world's population will for the first time in history be living in cities. This milestone in human civilization is being driven by the explosive growth of cities in the developing world.

Lagos, Nigeria*

*Population: ? ...and growing.

[music, city noises]

MAN #1:

[Inaudible] Africa and New York now. This is New York now.

MARIA VAN ZELLER:

So what does everybody think of Lagos?

CROWD:

[Inaudible].

MARIA VAN ZELLER:

It's nice, tidy, and good?

MAN #2:

I don't like it so much.

MARIA VAN ZELLER:

Why not?

MAN #2:

Because of the dirtiness.

MAN #3:

Really the major problem in Lagos is overpopulation. There is too much people in Lagos.

TEXT:

In 1950, Lagos was home to less than 300,000 people. Today, it's the world's fastest-growing "megacity," which the UN defines as an urban area with more than 10 million people.

MARIA VAN ZELLER:

Lagos is the craziest place I've ever been. [city noises] But it also represents a growing trend in the developing world, where all around the world more and more of the "rural poor" are moving from the countryside to the city. And they keep on coming despite the

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lack of jobs, proper housing, the crumbling infrastructure, and the high rates in crime.
[1:45]

FRANCISCO ABOSEDE:

We estimate about 6,000 people arrive in Lagos every day, because they believe that the streets of Lagos are paved with gold.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

This influx of people is probably going to pose some of the greatest challenges of our time. And Lagos definitely challenges whatever idea you might have of what the city of the future is going to look like. So what we set out to do in our short time there was to take a look at some of the critical issues facing the city. And this is sort of our whirlwind tour of Lagos.

TEXT:

*You won't find this place on a map.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

Nobody knows exactly how many people live in Lagos. We've seen estimates running anything from 12 million to 20 million people. But the fact is that those numbers are definitely growing, and people are coming into Lagos and they're running out of proper housing and places to actually build houses. So you see that there are whole neighborhoods built on swamps, like this one here.

TEXT:

It is projected that by 2015 Lagos will be home to 23 million people, with the vast majority of growth taking place in the slums. Worldwide, one billion people already live in slums.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So to go over the bridge we have to pay, yeah?

MAN:

Pay here.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

We pay five naira, which is less than five cents. Can I come in?

MAN:

Come on in. [Inaudible].

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

Oh, tickets. Thank you.

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MAN:

Oyibo [white man], are you coming? [laughter] You want to cross?

IBERI:

[3:12] [Inaudible]. That will show you the difference.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

We're here with Iberi(sp). He's a filmmaker here in Lagos, and he's come to show us the slum. And he's telling us the impressive thing about this slum is that the only thing that separates the slum from the rich area is this dirty water. Which is basically open sewage, right?

This mass migration of people into Lagos has created these sort of neighborhoods that do not officially exist. And if it weren't for the hijacked electricity, they'd basically be off the grid because the public services, that are already very limited in Lagos, just can't keep up with the pace of expansion. And often what begins as a squatter camp quickly develops into sort of a city within a city. People basically work here, they live here, and they sell everything here from food to clothes, to chicken, poultry over there, and they also have a factory that makes flour.

These neighborhoods are self-regulated. And many times they're also self-policed. So to enter this place, we had to seek permission from the local big man, who is the flour factory manager in this case. And to get his permission to film in his neighborhood, we had to give him a little something.

[to camera] Did you catch me paying the bribe over there?

TEXT:

*It's the information economy, stupid!

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

People come to Lagos from all over the country to try to make it. It's like anywhere else in the world, where people go to the big cities to look for jobs. The problem is that here there aren't many jobs available, so you see people trying to invent or improvise in order to earn a living. For example, traffic is a major problem here in Lagos, and one man's headache is another man's opportunity. So you see all these guys that are walking around in traffic, going from car to car, selling everything from magazines to water, food, toilet bowls... We even saw a guy back there with a sewing machine on his head offering his sewing services. It's like one big roaming market.

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FRANCISCO ABOSEDE:

Most employment areas are informal, in the sense that you see most people selling, most people trading, most people just doing things that are not structured. They constitute about 80% or 85% of total employment force in Lagos.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So the informal economy in Lagos is actually – 80% of the economy is informal?

FRANCISCO ABOSEDE:

[6:03] Yes.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So that is almost – that is the formal economy, you would say.

FRANCISCO ABOSEDE:

Yes. Indirectly, yes.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

[in traffic] So this is what they call the go-slow, is what they call traffic in Lagos. The things you see while sitting in traffic in Lagos. [laughter]

This is a great example of how people adapt to living in Lagos – there's a lot of traffic, it's one of the biggest problems of living in the city. So this guy has adapted his own handlebar to navigate through traffic. Look at this. He says a lot of people have this sort of handlebar.

TEXT:

*Sanitation is a way of life.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So after a few days in Lagos, we're thinking chaos rules, right? I mean, there's no way anyone can impose any sort of order in this chaos. But then we hear about this sanitation program, which, if you're going to start anywhere, you might as well start with one of the biggest problems in the city, which is the mounting heaps of trash and waste that you see in every corner of Lagos. And what you're about to witness is what is fondly called Environmental Day.

Three years ago the government started Environmental Day, which is basically a big cleanup day where it's mandatory for people to clean the gutters, sweep the streets, collect garbage. Basically there are no garbage bins around anywhere, you can't find garbage bins, so people just throw out their trash onto the gutters. So that's why the gutters get clogged. You see that, apart from this being unsightly, it's actually a huge

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health hazard too because this attracts all the mosquitoes, and malaria is a huge problem here.

MAN:

This is why we have too much malaria; all this malaria! Malaria, typhoid, you know...

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

It's on the last Saturday of the month. For three hours in the morning, from 7 to 10 AM, people have to participate in this cleanup day. And cars aren't allowed out on the streets, and it's actually very strange in a busy city like Lagos not to see any cars out.

OFFICER:

[8:52] The intention of the government is to create awareness about "cleanliness [is next] to godliness." So if the people come out, then it becomes part and parcel of their daily activities, because sanitation is a way of life. We want Lagos to compare like London, America, New York.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So you heard it here – Lagos is the London of the future. Right?

CROWD:

Yeah!

OFFICER:

And we pray that God will give us hope, life – long life so that we can do, to the best of our ability, to sustain Lagos as the best, cleanest city in the whole world.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

The cleanest city in the world.

OFFICER:

Yes.

TEXT:

*Area Boy Territory ...Proceed with Caution

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

This is part a market, part a motor park. This is what they call here – it's a bus station, basically. It's one of the busiest places in Lagos.

So we're trying to film the market and a huge crowd, a bunch of kids, gathered around Kayote(sp), our friend, asking what the hell we're doing here, and basically asking for money.

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[off camera] And this is where we get robbed of 40 dollars by what are known as the Area Boys. See, they were all celebrating. Area Boys are gangs of unemployed hoodlums who basically hang out on the freeway, in markets, in bus stations... They extort money from anyone who comes into their territory.

[on location] Now they say it's better for you to get out of here as soon as possible.

AREA BOY:

Gotta give me money.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

These area boys are such a fixture of life in the city that we even saw them a few days later at the governor's birthday party. [singing, shouting] We had crashed this party ourselves, and basically we watched while the well-connected and the VIPs celebrated behind armed guards and the gates of the city's only yacht club. [11:05] And meanwhile the Area Boys were all gathering outside and hoping for handouts from their wealthy leaders. Security is an issue in most major cities, but the difference is that in Lagos you see the rich and the powerful traveling around with armed escorts while the rest of the population is pretty much left to fend for themselves. But even when it comes to security, Lagosians have found an interesting way to adapt. Which brings us to our last day, and the most bizarre experience we had in this fantastic city of Lagos.

On the outskirts of the city there is a place called Epeland(sp), and in Epeland there is a king, who apparently also has his own personal trumpeter. [trumpet music] This king, the king of Epeland, ensures the security of the people that live in this neighborhood the old-fashioned way.

KING OF EPELAND:

We need more police. And at the same time, we have to use a traditional way of curbing crimes. What we did is that we arranged a vigilante group. That's what we will use as our security.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So here we have two vigilantes; they are part of the vigilante group in this area. And this is part of a larger network of several vigilante groups all throughout Lagos. Most of them don't have any uniforms or weapons, and it is believed that they work through black magic, what they call juju here.

VIGILANTE:

No need of gun. Gun is a wahallah.

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MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

What's wahallah?

VIGILANTE:

It is trouble. Trouble.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

What is the job of a vigilante?

VIGILANTE:

Vigilante is to guard the – all the area, and [if we] see any thief coming, call out, either to get him to do like this, like, till morning. Or like this... Everything is through us.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

I don't understand the jumping up and down. Can you...

MAN:

If you catch a thief now, they will use their magic [so] that the thief cannot do anything but jumping until morning.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

[13:38] So you have the power to make the thief do whatever you want?

VIGILANTE:

Yes.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

If it is jumping up and down all night, till morning, sweeping the streets till morning...

VIGILANTE:

Yes, till morning. Sweeping, yes. Or going like this...

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So you make them do very silly things all night?

VIGILANTE:

Yes.

MARIANA VAN ZELLER:

So sometimes you get here in the morning and you see people going like this...

People say about New York, if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere, right? Well, there's a very similar saying in Lagos, which is, if you can survive there, you can survive anywhere. And I think the key to survival has to be this ability to constantly

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adapt. And of course, as our friends the vigilantes will tell you, a little juju probably doesn't hurt.