

The Forgotten People And Islands Of Lagos

SUNDAY, 10 APRIL 2011 00:00 BY TUNDE AKINGBADE SUNDAY MAGAZINE - KALEIDOSCOPE



User Rating: / 3

Poor Best

LUCIA Troksiarova, a Slovak-born lady with Austrian extraction, is cruising and shutting between the forgotten islands and creeks off the coast of Lagos. The islands are sandwiched between the Atlantic Ocean and the estuaries.



Troksiarova has been carrying out health enlightenment campaigns and treatment of the villagers on the islands, which are located about 45 minutes by boat from Lagos with the assistance of Dr. Olamide Dosekun, her friend and other project assistants. She has been christened Adunni, the name given to Susanne Wenger, the Austrian-born devotee of Osun deity in Osogbo, who passed on few years ago.

Meeting Troksiarova for two hours was engaging, as we were on the boat from Ikoyi on a tortuous ride on the long stretch of waterways to the islands. It was initially frightful for me, a non-swimmer, who hadn't sailed in over a decade. Gradually, the stability came and mid into the deep waters of the estuary network, I examined my safety kit, all wrapped around me. Our first port of call was Ago Ajo, a village set up by Otunba Adewunmi on an island not far from Badagry about 40 years ago. There I met Mr. Olu Adewunmi, a legal practitioner and 50-years-old son of Otunba Adewunmi. He brought Troksiarova to Nigeria, to help in the development of some of the island villages.

There are 36 villages in the kingdom. How did Otunba Adewunmi discover Ago Ajo? And why did he go there? His story is very striking and strange.

Otunba Adewunmi was a successful legal practitioner. At the age of 52, he retired from active work and decided to look for a place where he could be more fulfilled; away from the crowd. He acquired a small land in the area, expanded it and named it Ago Ajo. In order to get the people more involved in community development, he built a church and other facilities, which brought them together. They used to be atheist.

About 30 years later, his son Olu thought of developing the area, elevating the people in terms of provision of healthcare and education and making the place a tourist destination. He got Troksiarova involved. She has been working there for the past one and a half years and her story about life in Ago Ajo, Moba, Petepete and other villages is deep. She knows everyone in the villages and has identified with their problems.

After I arrived at Ago Ajo, Olu took me through the village and showed me the little house, which his successful father built there in order to be close to nature.

My mind went to Henry David Thoreau in the United States. I once visited his small home near Walden Pond in Massachusetts. Thoreau lived at the pond in 1845. He was born in the village of Concord and had been influenced from his youth by his brother, Joshua, to develop a deep appreciation for nature. He stood against all forms of slavery and economic injustice. He condemned the destruction of the Walden forest and in "Shuttle from wasteland - political and environmental in balance between Africa and USA..."

Olu Adewunmi said while trying to develop the islands and elevate the people under the Sail Harbour Foundation; it is of utmost importance to leave the mangrove and the forest as they are. In order to give the people a sense of commitment, the villages are being given healthcare.

In the journey with Troksiarova to the island village of Taffi Hausa, where medical treatment was given to the children. Investigations showed that the villages have no operating medical centres, and there is only one secondary school that binds them together. It's very expensive to get children from primary school. When they finish schooling, there are no jobs for them.

Abass Aliu has finished his secondary school; he has no job and he does not have hope of continuing his education. His father, Taffi, founded the village. The man came all the way from Kano; hence it's called Taffi Hausa. Taffi Hausa has one primary school called LA Primary School. The men are fishermen and the women also beep them in their vocation. There are other islands inhabited by immigrants from Ghana and other neighbouring countries and everyone is happy together in the community.

Abass Aliu said his father, who founded the village, died around 2006 when he was over 80 years. Aliu had never been to their ancestral home in Kano but he has elder brothers who travelled there once in awhile. His Yoruba language is fluent and the accent is deeply Yoruba. He called on those who fan the embers of ethnic hatred to learn from the unity in the village.

We left Ago Ajo in the afternoon for Taffi Hausa across the lagoon system. The young captain of our boat, who took us from Lagos with so much ease, suddenly found it difficult to start the engine of the boat. He finally succeeded after a few trials as we had drifted into the water.

The journey to Taffi Hausa was to be about five minutes. Just at a point in the middle of the wide coastal water, the outboard engine jerked and stopped. The young captain tried again but the engine would not start. In the middle of nowhere, my mind went to Mr. Mungo Park, the European explorer, who sailed to River Niger from its source at Futa Jalon Mountain in Sierra Leone enroute the mouth of the Niger at the Delta Region of Nigeria. But the boat capsized at Bussa in present day Niger State.

"Was this trip in quest for a story worth it?" I reflected as we drifted on the water. Then the risk that stared this group of volunteers in the face as they tried to bring succour to the faces of the people in those islands dawned on me.

Somehow, we were paddled back to the shore at Ago Ajo. We took another boat. Alas, we made it to Taffi Hausa where the women and their kids were waiting for us. Within a short time, Troksianova set up a small base for the treatment under a mango tree. It was in front of the only primary school that was renovated in 2009. But there was the old school site, completely destroyed. The school was built by Alhaji Lateef Jakande's UPN government. It had collapsed and no one had gone near the structure, which has become a place for all kinds of reptiles.

The heat from the sandy soil was intense. The temperature was about 34 degrees centigrade. Dosekun brought out her medical examination equipment and began to check and treat the kids. She prescribed drugs, gave medicated soaps, ointment and powder for heat rashes. There were other materials to fight the menace of mosquitoes. Sick old women also came out and an old woman quipped; "Pass me not O gentle Saviour! It's not a song you sing while on your knees. You have to go for it!"

As the doctor examined the kids and they showed their bodies, I reflected again on how my own father, an epidemiologist, had done similar things that Dosekun was doing: checking kids with scabies and yaws in the landscape 40 years ago, about the same time that Otunba Adewunmi moved into Ago Ajo. While the world has moved forward, we seemed to have forgotten some people in the creeks.

As the treatment was going on, Troksianova called me and indicated that we had to head towards Moba, another village on the other side of the islands. But that was not to be. We got information from Olu Adewunmi that a traditional festival was going on in the town and it would have been an abomination for us to be there. It was the 'Oro' festival and women are forbidden from seeing the "Oro" cult!

03/05/2011

The Forgotten People And Islands Of ...

We raced to Ago Ajo and from there cruised back to Lagos through other islands such as Ikare and Ibeshe in company of the visiting resort managers from South Africa.

[< Prev](#)

[Next >](#)

Author of this article: **By Tunde Akingbade**

Show Other Articles Of This Author