

# The Day Faith Died<sup>1</sup>

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**I**T WAS A HOT AND MUGGY AFTERNOON in the rainy season when Faith became careless and hit Charity. The police report at Muyuka, mid-point on the Victoria-to-Kumba run in the forest region of the Cameroon, simply listed it as “Faith jams Charity.” For Faith, a five-ton lorry, it was the end of an illustrious 12-year career of carrying passengers and cargo along the 250 miles between the humid seaport town of Victoria and the cool Northern grasslands of Bamenda. For Charity, a five-year-old seven-ton youngster already rebuilt several times, there would be other days.

The lorries had originally come to the Cameroon from England and Germany as stripped-down vehicles with no cabs, beds, or protected passenger or cargo areas. In Victoria, or Bamenda, or one of the other major cities, African craftsmen, working only with blueprints emeshed within their minds, would take the skeletons of iron and transform them into commercial vehicles of iron and mahogany or iroko for the new owners.

With a crew of a driver, motor-boy, and clerk, and as many as 40 passengers and five tons of cargo, the lorries would wind their ways through the narrow, earthen roads between the humid forests and the cooler grasslands, bringing their cargoes with irregular frequency to even the remotest places.

The valuable cargo of kerosene, petrol, canned goods, metals, and cash crops of coffee, cocoa, and castor beans would first be loaded onto the lorry. Then, passengers would be added—one by one, or several at a time—throughout the trip. The one or two first-class passengers would ride in the cab with the driver. Second-class passengers would ride in a protected area or compartment behind the cab. And third-class passengers, fighting and cursing one another for space, would sit on or beside the cargo. And when there were goats or chickens to be transported to market, they too, would find a place on the lorry—often on the sides, or on the roof, but occasionally with the other cargo and passengers.

The lorry may have been a business, an institution of the people, but it was a personalized business. It was anthropomorphized, becoming, in the eyes of the people, as human as the passengers it transported. It was praised, blessed, and pampered when it behaved properly; it was blamed, cursed, and kicked at when it did not behave. Its parts became personal extensions of human parts. Its headlamps were known as *eyes*; and, in the West African Pidgin-English (hereafter

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<sup>1</sup> Data for this article was collected in the Cameroon between 1947-1961, and 1966, 1974.

appearing as WAPE), spoken throughout the area, a motor-boy, seeing a head-light burned out, might tell his driver, "drowba, wan *ai fo mowtow now de.*" (literally: "Driver, one eye of the motor (lorry) is not there.")

The lorry's tires were known as *feet* (WAPE: *mowtow-fut*; literally: "motor feet"). A flat tire was "mowtow-fut don bos" (literally: "the motor foot has burst") or "bris don komot fo mowtow-fut" (literally: "the breeze (air) has come out of the motor foot").

The cab was the *house* (WAPE: *has fo mowtow*; literally: "house for the motor"); the roof was the *head* (WAPE: *het fo mowtow*; literally: "head for the motor"); its radiator and grill was known as the "mouth with teeth" (WAPE: *mof witi tik*).

The engine was the lorry's belly (WAPE: *belifo mowtow*; literally: "the belly of the motor"); the piping, wiring, and tubing were the intestines (WAPE: *rowp fo mowtow*; literally: "ropes of the motor"). And the exhaust was the *anus*, from the WAPE *las fo mowtow* (literally: "the last thing of the motor; the behind").

It was important that so personal an object as a lorry be named, for not to name a lorry was as unthinkable in the Cameroon as not to name one's new-born child. Broad horizontal signs—often measuring one or two feet wide and as much as 12 feet long, were placed on the sides of the lorry; semi-circular signs, as much as six feet wide and up to two feet high at the center, were placed just above the cab. Few could not know the name of a particular lorry.

The Cameroonians would know their lorries only by name; official numbers or licenses meant little. Officials in West Cameroon, following British custom, recorded the lorries by name; numbers for official verification, were secondary. However, the French officials of the East Cameroon discouraged licensing by name—it did not fit into their concepts of efficiency. It was a number, not a name, that the French recorded. The Cameroonians, of course, never worried about a lorry's number, for a number was impersonal; a name was not.

The naming of the lorries was, for the most part, along religious and proverbial lines. Behavioral values, personal and place-names, historical allusions, attributes of lorry and owner were also included in the naming of the lorries.

## RELIGIOUS<sup>2</sup>

Cameroonians show both a personal and communal awareness of a supreme being, or of supernatural powers, or of influences which control man's destiny. This awareness or conviction is noted in the names of lorries—for reverence, gratitude, humility and the human will to serve and obey are easily aroused. The great number of lorry names reflect this religious heritage:

All For God, All Things Do Fear God, Be Looking at Jesus, Believe in God, By God's Grace, By the Grace of God, Christ Is the King, Christ

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<sup>2</sup> The categorizations of lorry naming are not all-inclusive; however, further sub-division could lead to oversegmentation. Names of certain lorries could fall within more than one category; in such cases, the authors determined which category the name best fit, based upon knowledge of either the lorry or its crew.

the Supporter, Come Down My Lord, Everything Is Possible With God, Forgive Us Our Sins O Lord, Glory Be to God, God First, God Helps, God Is Above, God Is Good, God Is My Leader, God Is Our King, God Is the Key to All Things, God Knows the Best, God Lead Our Parents, God Leads, God—Opportunity, God Save Me, God Will Provide, God With Us, God's Case—No Appeal, God's Children, God's Foreknowledge, God's Grace, God's Mercy, God's Speed, God's Time, God's Will, Hope in God, I Still Hope in Thee O Lord, If Men Were God, In God We Trust, Jesus Helps, Jesus Only, Lead Us O Lord, Let God Decide—Not As You Think, Lift Up Your Eyes to the Lord, Lord, Lord Hear Our Prayers, Love of Jesus, Mercy of God, Nothing Pass God, O Jesus, Oh God Remember Your Promise, Oh God What Shall I Do? Omnipresent God, One God Will, One With God Is Majority, Remember God, Remember Thy Promise O Lord, Save Me O God (SMOG), Thank God, Thank God Today, Thanks to God, The House With Nobody—There Is God, The Lord Is My Shepherd, The Lord Will Decide, The Supreme Mercy of God, Thy Kingdom Come O Lord, Thy Will Be Done O Lord, Trust in God, Trust in God and Do the Right, Trust in God—Why Worry?

#### APHORISMS AND PROVERBS

The Cameroonian in everyday verbal behavior is given to the use of aphorisms and proverbs. Suggestive expressions are continually utilized in teaching the young. This verbal phenomenon becomes an important aspect in the naming of lorries, for it has always been a memory device among pre-literate peoples. These short, motto-like expressions are often ingenious pithy formulations of the truths and sentiments of the people, and their language and culture:

A Greater Tomorrow, All Well, Beware of Friends, Brother Is Brother, Charity Begins at Home, Do the Right, Everything Has an End, Golden Rule, Help Me and I'll Help You, Honesty Is the Best Policy, If a Man Worries You—Send Him Ahead, Let Good Be True, Let the Times Rest, Let Them Say, Live and Let Live, Love All and Trust Few, Love Is Divine, Love Thy Neighbour, Man Proposes—God Disposes, Man Shall Not Be a Wolf to Man, Many Drops Make a Mighty Ocean, Nobody Knows Tomorrow, No Condition Is Permanent, No Harm in Trial, No King Is God, No King Is Lord, No Money—No Friends, No Be Ashamed, No Telephone to Heaven, Nothing Is Greater Without Loss, Nothing Without Labour, One Destiny, Self Help Is the Best, Show the Light, Take It Easy, The Bones Shall Rise Again, Think of Tomorrow, Time Is Money, Time Shall Tell, Trust Yourself, Try Again, Wait and See, Wealth Is Help, Who Knows Tomorrow?, Why Worry?, Work and Pray, You Help Me—I Help You, Young Men Must Live.

## VALUES

Every group of people, large or small, establishes values or goals. There are many universal symbols, many universal goals, but each group signals its peculiar world-view by abstract lexical sound symbols. These symbols, now written down on lorry head-boards, declare themselves as names to all the world:

Ambition, Blessed, Charity, Confidence, Courtesy, Endurance, Faith, Freedom, Fortune, Grace, Joy, Labour, Modesty, Obey, Prosperity, Perseverance, Peace, Progress, Sweat, Try Unity, Wisdom, Wonder.

## ATTRIBUTES OF LORRY AND OWNER

Many names given the lorries function like giant advertising billboards, pointing out qualities or characteristics of the man and his machine. These characteristics may be essential and intrinsic, or accidental:

Addition Transport, All Roads, Ambition Bus, Be Kind Transport, Body Comfort, Channel of Good Will, Clear Conscience, Daily Service, Day By Day, Destination, Early Bird, Early Morning, Easy Going, Easy Motion, Ever Jolly, Ever Ready, Evidence of Labour, Faithful Servant, Go Ahead, Good Friends Transport, Good Hope, Good Manners, Good News, Great Aim, Happy Home, High Life, Homeward, Hope Rising, Jolly Bus, Lucky, Man of God, Man of Good Will, Man of Peace, Man of War, Mine Is Yours, New Man, One Way, Onward, Pioneer, Promised Land, Real Family, Result of Good Work, Safe Journey, Servant of Wisdom, Slow to Anger, State Express, Sunny Service, The Busy Bee, Traveler, Traveler's Friend, Welcome—Well Come.

## PERSONAL AND PLACE-NAMES, NICKNAMES, TITLES

Lorries may be named after geographical or topographical localities. Personal and descriptive nicknames are also found. Titles refer to dignity, rank, office, and privilege:

Africa, Bekom All-Roads, Bekom Star, Cape of Good Hope, Captain Cock, Chico Ahead, Congo, Duke, Ghana City, Lagos Boy, Long Joe and Brother, Mark of Zorro, Mayor, New Nigeria, Nigeria, Prince, Prince of Niger, Rocky Boy, Sabuga Hill, Tarzan, We-We The Boy.

## INDEPENDENCE

In the early 1960's after almost 90 years of colonial rule by the Germans, French, and British, the area now known as the Federal Republic of Cameroon declared its independence; two great halves—one British-ruled, one French-ruled—merged. Names of lorries reflect not only the fierce independence of the people, but a common bond of brotherhood after independence.

The Capitol, Commonwealth, Federal United, Golden Star, Increase Federal, Independence, Independence Now, United Brothers, Unity Is Strength, Victory Centenary Bus, Welcome Brother, Without Bitterness.

MISCELLANEOUS

Another category deals with a mixture and variety of lorry names that defy categorization:

Am I Late?, Blue Moon, Cha-Cha-Cha, City Bee, Compliments, Daily Moon, Daily Star, Echo, Future Will, Greater From Soil, Hosannah, Let Us Pray, Life Buoy, Life of Life, Light, Life and Love, Little Drops of Water, Living Stone, Moon and Stars, Morning Star, Son of Weather, Tango, Sons of the Weather, The Hope, The Life, The Life Man, The Road, Three Stars, Trouble, Urgent Message, We Thank Our Father and Mother, Wee-Wee.

WEST AFRICAN PIDGIN-ENGLISH

The Cameroon area of West Africa, with its plantation systems and highly mobile working force, has made West African Pidgin-English the “king of communication.” WAPE, a trade and market language uniting peoples of different ethnic backgrounds, contributes an exciting dimension to the study of lorry names in the area:

*Day No Be One* (WAPE: *de now bi wan*; loosely translated: “Not all days are carbon copies.” If you have trouble today, tomorrow may bring happiness. Each day has duties and responsibilities).

*Fine Country* (WAPE: *fan kontri*; loosely translated: “This is a good, beautiful land”).

*God Dey* (WAPE: *got de*; loosely translated: “God exists; just look around”).

*Lefam for God* (WAPE: *lefam fo got*; loosely translated: “Leave things alone; they will work out; do not worry and tie yourself into knots”).

*Money Hard* (WAPE: *moni hat*; loosely translated: “Money is sweat and toil. Rewards come by perseverance”).

*Man Pikin* (WAPE: *man pikin*; loosely translated: “a he-man with strength, ability, and a cunning mind”).

*Man no Rest* (WAPE: *man now res*; loosely translated: “Work, work, work; man never rests. Life is not a holiday”).

*Man No Be God* (WAPE: *man no bi got*; loosely translated: “Man is not God. Accept me for what I am—I am not God”).

*Nothing Pass God* (WAPE: *noting pas got*; loosely translated: “Nothing in this world surpasses God”).

*No Worry* (WAPE: *now wori*; loosely translated: “Do not worry—play it ‘cool’”).

*Softly, Softly Catch Monkey* (WAPE: *sofli-sofli kas mongki*; loosely translated: “Patience, endurance and a cunning way will catch the monkey. Being in a hurry frightens the monkey”).

*Sea Never Dry* (WAPE: *si neba drai*; loosely translated: “The sea [ocean] will never dry up. There is enough for all. Tomorrow is another day”).

*Wonder* (WAPE: *wanda*; loosely translated: “The world is full of awe and mystery”).

*Water Pass Gari* (WAPE: *wata pas gari*; loosely translated: “Do not get in over your head.” *Gari* refers to grated cassava).

### CONCLUSION

One day, a lorry, perhaps ten years old, perhaps more, was abandoned in a deep ditch on Sabga Hill. The rains, potholes, and a zealous driver had forced it off the narrow road. Abraham, the driver, his crew and many friends tried to repair it, literally to carry it from the ditch. For six months local mechanics tried to breathe life into the lorry but it remained immobile, a final protest against the 175,000 miles it traveled since it was built. On its cab was a sign, a brightly painted sign, visible only to the curious who approached. And, for many months, the once-proud lorry named "Lefam for God" remained in the ditch, letting nature take its course.

The days of the cargo-and-passenger lorry are almost over in the Cameroon, replaced by modern trucks and rugged taxi-cabs that glide over blacktop highways and bump over wash-board earth. But, with the death of the passenger lorry, a part of the folklore and folk history of Cameroon also dies.

### STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

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9. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months.

TOTAL PAID CIRCULATION: 1,000.

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Editor