



Jagua Nana

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Tells the story of Jagua Nana, an ageing high-lifer and habitue of the seedy club Tropicana, which is an evocation of the chaos and intensive life of Lagos.

Jagua Nana Details

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Author : Cyprian Ekwensi

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From Reader Review Jagua Nana for online ebook

Mónica Espinoza Cangahuala says

I liked the story and writing very much. I would definitely recommend this book if you want to explore Nigerian and African literature. Also if you are interested in multiculturalism. Perhaps I am in the minority yet I think Jagua Nana is not a heroine but an antihero. She brings about her own undoing, tragedy, exacerbates problems for herself and those around her.

Lessons and musings after reading it:

- Don't pin your hopes and dreams on others. Especially men. No one will save you but yourself.
- Slow and steady wins the race
- Doesn't matter if you're young or old we all suffer and have a hard life. Don't assume someone has it better than you.
- Nigerian politics seems the same as Aruban politics. But ours is vanilla compared to them.
- Having many lovers or just one is no one's business and neither will get you further ahead in life, economics or happiness.

Max says

Nigerian popular fiction. The first part is very amusing, the second not very focused. Not a masterpiece but very entertaining. Very good for female adult readers.

Mena says

Wow. This sure wasn't Chinua Achebe. Ekwensi's kind of scandalous, but in a really great way - Jagua Nana is an incredible character: impulsive, jealous, sensual but with a weirdly understandable/justifiable moral code and sense of self. Lagos was pretty crazy in the 60s, apparently (not that that's changed) and although the story was pretty intense, it had a number of humorous and poignant moments (especially its ending).

Eric says

Few major works of fiction anchored on professional prostitutes/prostitution exist in African literature. Chika Unigbe's On Black sisters' street is already something of a classic, and some years ago SA's Futhi Ntshingila published Shameless. But Ekwensi published his own work well over 50 books, a book which acquired a measure of notoriety when it was well known and well distributed. Jagua Nana is actually a very well written book, as Ekwensi was an acknowledged dexterous story-teller even if some self-styled critics tended to undermine him. Here he presents a magnificent picture of a

veritable, shameless, calculating and ruthless African prostitute. Jagua has sunk low - well below the nether rungs of degeneracy, and she lives within her own rules. A cardinal rule for her is to regard sex as an easy route to quick money, and the richer the clients the better; especially "white" clientelle who apparently hold the keys to lots of money. And local "big men" politicians too. She sleeps and milks them all, but still has an eye on her own marital and romantic future - she fastens her claws on young promising Freddie. It does not matter that he is like 20 years younger than she is. There are plenty of events, twists and turns, most of it prurient, but what does it matter? Jagua has set out her stall, and prostitution for her is life. Even when she is forced back to the rural areas (village) where she continues providing sex for men, including pertinent aristocracy. At last even at her age, she gets pregnant! Does it matter that she would not know the biological father of the child? Sadly (perhaps) she loses the child; but at least by a stroke of great fortune, she finds out that she has a fantastic unexpected horde of money, and of course she has no qualms helping herself to it. She can now become a very important merchant of sorts, and de-emphasize selling her aging body all over the place. We hope so anyway!

Dora Okeyo says

Jagua comes to life with every page in this book.

Ifeyinwa says

I loved this book! It helped to shape my reading future. Special kudos to the author!

Christine says

One of my favorite books.

Alasdair Ekpenyong says

"All de young men in Lagos dem talk sweet sweet--like you doin' now, Freddie. But when dem get a gal on de bed, you never see dem again. And if dem give de gal belly, she mus' carry de belly alone, and dem will run and lef' her. So I use to fear."

Edward Aribisala says

When I was in high school in the 60s, this was the scandalous book that we boys exchange for 3 other novels. Well written and believable . This was the Nigerian atmosphere just after the independence. He had a follow up, "Jaguar Nana's Daughter" . May Cyprian's soul rest in peace .

Adam Fleming says

I like to read fiction by African authors. This one wasn't the best but if you want a slice of life in Nigeria in the mid-Twentieth century, it's an interesting archetype study of a woman in Lagos.

Priyanka Sofia says

Such a hidden gem of Nigerian literature. Jagua Nana is an unforgettable character. rtc

Ebba Kalondo says

Brassy, sassy and the vulnerable warrior, jagua nana is an icon of the urban black asskicker!

Wessel van der Merwe says

A great book! Jagua Nana the main character - her thoughts, her values the plain issues of her life set in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria in a very humoristic but believable, real and convincing.

Ugo Agada-uyah says

A hilarious but touching depiction Lagos live in the mid-twenties. Enjoyed it.

Caroline says

[Note, I'm going to publish this same review for all three novels discussed, because reading them in parallel helped me understand them more deeply. As usual I celebrate serendipitous co-readings.)

I have just finished three novels about displacement, countries in transition, and how human relationships change in such times. One set in Nigeria in the 1950s (*Jagua Nana* by Cyprian Ekwensi), one in the contemporary Czech Republic (*Spaceman of Bohemia* by Jaroslav Kalfar) and one in an unnamed country, Greece, England, and the US (*Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, in an uncertain time but probably about now).

Each novel is also at least in part a road trip; they contain one or more journeys of varying length and means of transit, from lorry and canoe to spaceship and motorcycle to science fiction doorways. Each book ends with a return to childhood home, but in very different ways. I enjoyed each of them, and appreciate their very different styles and atmospheres.

I would have to say that Hamid's is the most accomplished. I can't make an informed judgement about Ekwensi. He writes in a fairly simple style, with his points spelled out, but this may be a purposeful decision that draws on traditional storytelling methods. As his protagonist is a relatively unschooled woman driven by her passions, this works pretty well. Kalfur has good control of his novel until the last twenty or thirty pages, when as a first-time novelist he tries to cram in four novels worth of overwrought philosophizing in the form of endless questions; he was perhaps poorly served by an editor who didn't rein him in. I imagine he'll cringe when remembering these pages in future years, because he does have a lot of promise and I look forward to more from him. Of the three, he is the one who I will be most likely to choose more of, once it arrives.

Hamid is extensively reviewed so I'm not going to say much here, other than I was surprised by his rather optimistic story. It is a reminder that there are still many good people trying to do good things, and that we are a creative species. In the end, though, it was not a book I would press on people, saying 'you have to read this.' I would say in fact that it is in the end mostly a story about a relationship. It offers a lyrical reading of the subtle changes in that relationship, and is also optimistic about how two caring people can develop and care for a deep love.

Published in 1961, *Jagua Nana* is about a newly independent Nigeria trying to establish self-government. This is told through the eyes of a woman who has moved from rural Nigeria to Lagos in search of intensity: freedom to live in the moment, especially at the Tropicana bar. She ends up living on men, although she also falls for a young teacher struggling to climb upwards via an education in England. Eventually two of her lovers enter a deadly struggle for election to the Lagos Council. In the middle of the novel she travels back to the countryside in a gesture meant to capture the young teacher. There, she manages to reconcile two warring factions using her sexual allure. Back in Lagos, however, she fails in trying to reconcile the two candidates. Modernity has driven men to a level of lust for power and money that cannot be constructively solved.

Ekwensi is successful in conveying her outsized sexuality and its effect, and also in portraying a wide variety of Lagos and country men: conforming to Western middle class models, political boss, young criminal, wise elder, smart leader trying to negotiate the changing world, pious and righteous rural man who condemns city life, etc. He made a good literary choice in deciding to portray this struggle from the view of a woman driven by short term and self-interested goals, who is largely immune to the issues the men are in conflict over. In the end, though, she is captured by tradition and must go home to care for her aging mother. Against her will, she finds some peace (but is still driven by her obsession with activity and change). We leave her a bit more mature, but uncertain whether her passions will again overwhelm her sense. We have no doubt that Lagos is in trouble.

I don't want to say too much about the plot of *Spaceman of Bohemia*, because it is much more dependent on its plot than is *Jagua*. But there are plenty of ideas as well, many circulating around the experience of the Czechs under the Russians. Complicity, retribution, reconsideration.

Again there is a careful examination of a developing relationship, between the astronaut and his wife. The outcome is different but feels as complete and natural as in *Exit West*. Well done.

Kalfur handles the parallels between his spaceman's situation and that of the religious reformer and martyr (?) Jan Hus well; it underlines the importance of Czech history and the consequences of our decisions that

are depicted throughout the novel. It doesn't feel forced until the very end, when the similarity of what is decided makes sense, but the prose about it is a bit much. Also at the end, there is another parallel with *Jagua*, a questioning of whether the city/civilization/science/intellectual life is, on balance, worth it. Or do they always corrupt; are we better off on the land?

I really like *Spaceman* and recommend it, despite the meltdown in the last few pages. There is plenty here to chew on and a great story to enjoy. Plus, you will love Hanus.
