

## Mustapha

I first met Mustapha at a gathering of Africans living in Japan at a Catholic church in Tokyo. Mustapha was a young man from Guinea who worked at a demolition site. Mustapha himself wasn't a Catholic – he was actually Muslim. I think he came to the church in hope of meeting others from his homeland.

This chance meeting was the beginning of a friendship with Mustapha – afterwards he invited me to the home of a man from Zaire who worked for a U.N. agency in Tokyo, and later we even had dinner with the Guinean Ambassador. Later, I had the opportunity to go on exchange study to Paris, and near the end of my stay, Mustapha invited me to visit his hometown. I had so many intense experiences on the journey there, I can't possibly recount them all. And I still remember vividly the night I spent in Kindia.

Kindia is a provincial city, about 135km inland from Conakry, the capital of Guinea. Mustapha's brother worked at the agricultural research center there. So, Mustapha and I set out to visit him, and we stayed the night in Kindia. At the time, Guinea did have electricity, but there were still many power outages, so the research center generated its own power. The nights in Guinea were inky black, and after sunset, an unfathomable darkness spread outside the institute, which was located on the outskirts of the city.

Mustapha's brother was also a Muslim, but he enjoyed drinking vodka – he had studied at a university in Moscow. Through the night he offered us distant guests Russian vodka. After a while, we sat down with the whole family to watch a Hollywood movie, *The Terminator*.

At the time, streaming services didn't exist – not even DVDs were available yet, so we watched the film on VHS. The near-future world of *The Terminator* was enthralling to all of us, Guineans and Japanese alike. But, when I looked out the window, there was only the deep darkness of night. I couldn't help but feel a great sense of contradiction, enjoying images of futuristic American society, while in a surrounding where the basic infrastructure of life, such as electricity and running water, had not yet been fully developed.

While I marveled at how the development of convenient civilized life had come to a land described as a world of darkness, I felt a deep gulf between myself and my Guinean hosts. I had been able to visit this land from faraway countries, via airplanes and other modern transport. My hosts, too, were now able to know about the more distant world in almost real-time. But still, my hosts couldn't travel easily to my land. They have to stay where they are. Even though the world as a whole has become very civilized, civilization is not enjoyed equally. The lucky few may have the privilege of leaving their worlds, and possibly visiting mine. But many of our brothers and sisters must remain in their worlds, all the while knowing that a more convenient and comfortable world is developing outside of theirs.

### Questions, Answers and Hints:

- 1. The narrator is Japanese, but often conversed with Mustapha in another language. What language do you think this was likely to be, and why?**

**Answer:** French.

**Hints/Clues:** Although not explicitly stated in the passage, a perfunctory glance at the Wikipedia page will show the official language of Guinea to be French, and hence there is a strong likelihood Mustapha speaks the language. As for an in-text clue, the narrator mentions that he “had the opportunity to go on exchange study to Paris,” suggesting that he also has a familiarity with the French language.

- 2. Around when was the story set, and why?**

**Answer:** Late 1980s to early 1990s.

**Hints/Clues:** Most hints revolve around the Hollywood movie, *The Terminator*. The first film was released in 1984, and the sequel in 1991. Although it is not necessarily clear to which movie the narrator refers, there would have likely been a bit of a time-lag from the U.S. releases of either film, and their availability on VHS in Guinea. Further, the narrator mentions that “not even DVDs were available yet” – DVDs first went on sale in Japan in 1996, and in the U.S. the following year, suggesting the narrative is set before this time.

**3. In the Islam faith, is drinking alcohol acceptable?**

**Answer:** Generally not.

**Hints/Clues:** Although the narrator refers to Mustapha’s brother as drinking vodka, this is prefaced with a “but,” suggesting that this is not common practice for Muslims.

**4. Mustapha visited a Catholic church ‘in hope of meeting others from his homeland,’ even though he was a Muslim, a very different and conflicting faith. Why do you think he chose to do this?**

**Answer:** Because there were likely few Guineans in Japan at the time.

**Hints/Clues:** (Hints are related to the following two questions). Students should be encouraged to think about immigrant/exchange student populations in Japan, and imagine the demographics of those populations. Then, they should try imagining what these demographics were like around 30 years ago. Hints such as Guinea being a country “where the basic infrastructure of life, such as electricity and running water, had not yet been fully developed,” can be used to foster images of a country in which opportunities for international mobility are/were limited.

**5. Was Mustapha’s family wealthy?**

**Answer:** Likely yes.

**Hints/Clues:** Related to the previous question (and the following), Mustapha’s family seems to have had opportunities to travel – Mustapha himself in Japan, which included meetings with ambassadors and U.N. staff, suggesting connections that are often limited to the wealthy. In addition, Mustapha’s brother had the opportunity to study abroad in Russia, and works at an agricultural research institute – suggesting the family had the capital to support this professional trajectory.

**6. The narrator remarks of most Guineans that ‘they have to stay where they are,’ meaning in Guinea. How does the narrator feel about this?**

**Answer:** Answers will vary, but should be something like ‘uncomfortable,’ or ‘he feels that it is unfair.’

**Hints/Clues:** Answers can be drawn from the general tone of the text, in particular the final paragraph, but there are also a number of explicit hints to the narrator’s feelings, including “I couldn’t help but feel a great sense of contradiction,” “I felt a deep gulf between myself and my Guinean hosts,” and “even though the world as a whole has become very civilized, civilization is not enjoyed equally.”