

Afrobeat!

Fela
and the
Imagined
Continent

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Sola Olorunfemi



**AFROBEAT!
FELA AND THE IMAGINED
CONTINENT**

SOLA OLORUNYOMI

Co-published with
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To the fond memory of
Soladegbin Anikulapo-Kuti and Frances Kuboye;
Seun and members of the *Egypt '80* Band;
and Beko Ransome-Kuti—who dared to dream

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AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

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Glossary

Afrika Shrine

Fela's place of worship and nightspot. The aspect of worship started at the Empire Hotel (Fela's former shrine), but was given full expression when he moved to Pepple Street. During musical interludes, Fela breaks off to worship with band members and acolytes.

Afrobeat

This is the name by which Fela's music came to be known starting in the late sixties. And though the name survives, in a 1992 interview I had with him, Fela denounced the nomenclature as "a meaningless commercial nonsense with which recording labels exploited the artist."

Alagbon

Street where the Criminal Investigation Department is located; it also became the title track of one of his albums—*Alagbon Close*.

Area Boy

Term used to describe urban unemployed youth, prone to forming gangs and extorting money as a way of "coping" with city life. According to Mr. Jiti Ogunye, one of Fela's attorneys, the origin of the term can be traced to Fela's Kalakuta Republic and the Afrika Shrine, where members of the commune used the phrase to make a distinction between their group and rascally actions embarked upon by neighborhood gangs—the boys in the area, or "Area Boys."

Chiwota

Female godhead of some nationalities in Malawi.

Chop

Primarily to eat; can also mean to embezzle funds.

Comprehensive Show

Performance on Saturday nights at the Afrika Shrine. It is also the "Divination Night"—day of worship when the Egypt '80 Ensemble dancers come on stage. The outdoor "Comprehensive Show" does not include the worship ritual.

Correct Person

Persons considered ideologically in tune or simply positively dynamic.

Egypt '80 Band

The name of Fela's band. Fela constantly changed the name to reflect its musical and ideological orientation at different points in time; hence, from the early sixties, the band had evolved through *Highlife Rakers*, *Koola Lobitos*, *Nigerian 70*, and *African 70*. After Fela's death, the original band was briefly renamed *Fela's Egypt 80 Band* but has now settled for *Seun Anikulapo-Kuti and the Egypt 80s*.

Felagoro

A home-made alcoholic drink at Kalakuta Republic and the Afrika Shrine; it is brewed by boiling marijuana leaves with sodium.

FESTAC

Acronym for the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture.

Ìtàn

Yorùbá word for history story or fiction.

JJD and JJC

Acronyms for "Johnny Just Drop" and "Johnny Just Come." The JJD is a cultural pervert, one who is alien to his own culture or at times feigns ignorance of local customs. JJC implies the unpracticed steps of the newcomer, who is generally the uninitiated.

Jump

Sunday shows when he could jam with other musicians—including his son, Femi.

Kala-kusa

The "cell" where an erring member of the Kalakuta Republic is kept. More of a designated space than a conscious architecture; in the seventies, it was indicated with twine.

Kalakuta Republic

Fela's communal residence created out of the desire to accommodate "every African escaping persecution." "Kalakuta" was derived from the name of his prison cell of 1974; he also noted and justified its Swahili interpretation of "rascally." The word "republic" was later added to it "because I didn't agree with that your Federal Republic of Nigeria created by Britishman." The exigency of political activism led to his having to live in many places, but his more notable residences after Surulere, in Lagos, are named chronologically here: Kalakuta I, number 14A Agege Motor Road; Kalakuta II, number 1 Atinuke Olabariji Street, Ikeja; Kalakuta III, number 7 Gbemisola Street, Ikeja.

Kurukere

Used as a refrain or chorus but denoting insidious moves and motions—whether in the boardroom or in interpersonal relationships.

Lady's Night

Tuesday shows when females could enter free of charge.

Nkó

What? (as question); So what (as an offensive rebuttal).

NNG

Nigerian Natural Grass— a parody of Nigerian Natural Gas — meaning marijuana; Fela's counter lexicon to the non-“Indianess” of his variant of hemp.

No Jonesing

An omnibus phrase initially used as a form of reprimand against drug addicts who might be unable to control the effect of their drug intake or its withdrawal symptoms. Marijuana is declassified as drug at the Afrika Shrine and the Kalakuta Republic.

Ògá Pátápátá

The overall boss.

Opposite People

Persons considered reactionary or anti-revolutionary

Òrìsà

Yoruba word for a deity or deities, but in its common usage, an *Olórìsà* also implies a worshipper of divinities that might necessarily not be deities. Of all the ancestral forms of the Black Diaspora, Òrìsà worship remains the most popular.

Oyinbo

A Caucasian or persons with light pigmentation.

Shakara

Posturing, or feigning an offensive mood.

Glossary

Short break

Not an interlude; on the contrary, it implies the end of the day's performance.

Wùrùwùrú

A shady deal.

Yabbis and Yabbing

To declaim. Verbal rebuttal that could move from light-hearted banter to a crude ribaldry; but *Yabbis* is its own limit and its license goes only as far as there is no physical assault, following the Kalakuta dictum: "Yabbis no case, first touch na offence."

Yanga

Being "guyish" or trying to appear modern in a brash manner

Zombie

Name given to the military; denotes the regimentation and lack of personal initiative associated with the military ethics of "obey before complain" and "order from above."

Preface

I always knew that I had a date, someday, to describe Fela's Afrobeat musical innovation. However, the inclination to examine this musical and cultural practice only began earnestly during the Harmattan semester of 1982, even though, as a high school student, I had experimented with some of Fela's compositions with our tardy band, *Rimmer Kids*—so named after an English principal had died in a plane crash. A couple of events led to the 1982 event, one of which was the crisis in Nigerian institutions of higher learning that year. It started when, early one morning, students of the University of Ilorin were aroused by the whiff of a choking tear-gas smoke. The police had struck, apparently anticipating a protest against the federal government over what the students in an earlier press statement had tagged "the government's centrist position on the apartheid question."

A ding-dong situation ensued until about noon when students attempted to break through the barricade and the police, feeling their patience had been over-stretched, fired live bullets. I counted three students spattered in blood. A stampede ensued, increasing the casualty figure. Without waiting for an official announcement of the university's closure, students vacated their halls of residence in droves for fear of further assault by the police. I thought of where to go. "Where" for me meant anywhere in the country, but only one place immediately came to mind: Fela's 'Kalakuta Republic'¹ residence at House Number 1, Atinuke Olabanji Street. His residence, usually a commune, was styled 'Kalakuta' after the name given by inmates to the cell in which he was detained in 1974. This was 'Kalakuta II' after Fela had moved from an earlier residence. His first 'Republic' was situated at Number 14A, Agege Motor Road in Lagos but was burnt down on February 18,

1977 by a detachment of soldiers from the Abalti Barracks, also in Lagos. This event came to be known as the "Unknown Soldier"² episode—after the tribunal's ruling that the mayhem was perpetrated by unknown soldiers.

Lucky to have escaped arrest, I arrived at the commune and met an "Ideological Education" session, where the day's topic was the "impending revolution." This was usually an occasional session when residents and fans—more often made up of members of the Young African Pioneers (YAP), university students, and idealists of various hues—gathered to discuss social and political issues with the hope of arriving at some kind of "what is to be done." My report of the police raid on campus further incensed the atmosphere and some youngster clutching a copy of Che Guevara's Bolivian diaries murmured something about the inevitability of an armed insurrection against the Nigerian state. Someone else at the far end countered that an armed struggle was simply not feasible yet, and, gesticulating rather vigorously, pronounced that the revolution would come only when there was a balance between what he called "the subjective and objective conditions." Then he led the discussion through a winding disquisition on "Foco Theory" and "the Bonapartist State," concepts which randomly flew out from his assorted baggage of opposition registers. I began to show more interest in this group, in part for the allure of its naiveté, but in the main for its visionary energy. Merging the experience of this group with Fela's performance at the Afrika Shrine³ (Fela's nightspot), a clearer picture of a cultural event that was as liberating as it was potentially obscurantist began to emerge. I sensed the need to interact with this reality in a more contemplative fashion, and thus started the process of information gathering.

However, a long interval in the research effort ensued as I was handed an expulsion order at the university for heeding, as the union president, a nonviolent national class boycott in

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response to the collapse of higher education in the country. A few months later I was clutching a longhand version of my initial drafts as a harvest volunteer, while also doubling as a freelance reporter behind Sandinista lines in the Matagalpa region of Nicaragua, during the 1984-85 Contra offensive. And of all places, it was here that a Danish friend, obviously out of mischief, had referred to me as “the guy from Fela’s country.” We went over the subject for a while in the coffee fields and, then, I knew the work had to go on, even if only as an affirmation of the creative will of this Afrobeat community and the continent’s other silenced subcultures.

Much as in our adult life, Fela had always filled the average Nigerian child’s airwaves. Airwaves? Hardly so, more of an “aural wave”, for once the “musical warrior”⁴ drew the battle-line with the Nigerian state, he promptly got the “NTBB”—Not-To-Be-Broadcast—label slammed on his albums. By that singular act of exclusion from the legal airwaves, the state unwittingly aided the emergence of an alternative airspace that would later acknowledge Fela’s contestatory sonic. The partly atomized listener of the radio now gave way to discussion groups and coteries around record shops, especially in urban Nigeria, that sought to interpret, and would later reinvent, the meaning of his lyrics and activism.

But Fela was not always an open subject, especially when it came to writing a book on him. “Not quite a book, but a final year undergraduate essay,” I tried to explain. It turned out that my graduate thesis and a good measure of my doctoral dissertation also would be exploring aspects of the aesthetics, particularly the theatrical elements and the mask dramaturgic modes of his performance. When I finally decided to write this book on the art and cultural practice of the Afrobeat musician, it was due to one main compelling reason: there were far too few critical works on Fela’s immense contribution to social change and the evolution of a new musical idiom.

Nothing in my entire experience of cultural fieldwork prepared me for an encounter with "the Fela People." What one thought was an embarrassing question, they answered gleefully; but flew into a rage at an apparently innocuous inquiry. Quite often, I found myself in situations similar to Deirdre Bair's in the course of her biographical research on Samuel Beckett. Like Beckett, too, Fela granted me the right to follow my impulses, but was neither going to help nor hinder me. Could he see that he was some sort of romantic poet, and could we not return to these early impulses, I had once asked. It did not seem like a good day, and his reaction was rather sharp: "That term 'poetry' could be verbose, this is why you university people bore me."

Yet, I knew that I needed a compass to navigate the subject in spite of my knowledge of the fact that such an expressive art form as I had set out to study had not become of mainstream interest in our academia, at least not in our departments of English and literary studies, even with the pioneering efforts of the likes of Michael J.C. Echeruo and Isidore Okpewho, with *Victorian Lagos* (1977) and *Myth in Africa* (1983) respectively; and subsequently Biodun Jeyifo's *Yoruba Travelling Theatre* (1984). This invariably meant a dearth of relevant literature.

Indeed, the bulk of the earlier works on Fela, most often biographical notes, are to be found in the review sections of newspapers and magazines scattered across the globe, with a few others lurking in obscure journals. Against the background of this general dearth, the works of Carlos Moore (1982), Idowu Mabinuori (1986), Iyorchia Ayu (1985), Randal Grass (1986) and Tam Fiofori (1998) provide tentative reference materials. While the ethnological aspect in Moore is played to the fore, tracing, as it does, Fela's genealogy to the third generation in his three-dimensional narrative approach that brings into sharp focus Fela's complex personality, Mabin-

Preface

uori's contribution takes the tone of advocacy, detailing the musician's cultural and political practice, while also providing biographical information. Fiofori's essay provides a historical appraisal of Fela's musical development and the evolution of the Afrobeat form. It is with both Ayu and Grass that the art-society dialectic is given substantial preeminence, besides a treatment of the future of an art form that confronts a dominant, hegemonic power. Ayu, however, highlights the potential for obscurantism and the problem of drug abuse and nudism for a musical and cultural practice that he acknowledges as essentially emancipatory.

But for me, the question persisted: What is Afrobeat? As conceived by Fela, is it merely another musical form or also a cultural and political event? How do we account for the nuances of his performance subtexts—what are our aesthetic criteria in measuring them and, above all, what is the relationship between popular music and social change?

From the outset, the multidisciplinary imperative of such a venture had dawned on me, and I felt somewhat compelled to heed the warning of Houston A. Baker concerning the need for a theoretical approach that would be cognizant of an "Improvisational flexibility and a historicizing of form that are not always characteristic of academic responses to popular cultural forms."⁵ My inclination in this bid is two-fold. One is to explore the theoretical overlaps that are implicit in such a discourse; and, also, to bring into focus the theorizing of the 'self' by the aesthetic subculture, in order not to foist arbitrary theory on a form that can express a subtle but most profound mode of signification. In other words, I have adopted a method of cultural criticism, and the indefinite article *a* is here emphasized to show the "model" as *a* method and not *the* only method of reading this text, or any other for that matter. It does not take too long, for instance, for any Fela reader to discover the potential of an implicit plural reading of conceptual

and actual experience as essential to his aesthetic and political practice. This is not, however, to suggest that literal and normative meaning that I have encountered in the course of this research are necessarily overridden by willful interpretation. Rather, and somewhat akin to Stanley Fish's suggestion on how to read a text, here too it is not so much a case of indeterminacy or undecidability but of a "determinacy and decidability that do not always have the same shape and that can, and in this do, change."⁶

Generally, I have translated non-English words and passages—especially those in Pidgin English. Lyrics are rendered in the normal text, while their translation (also given except where their English approximation is obvious) is in italics. Tone marks reflecting current usage in Yoruba orthography have also been used. Yorubá is a tonal language, with three underlying pitch levels for vowels and syllabic nasals: the low tone is marked with a [`] grave accent; the mid tone is unmarked; and the high tone is indicated with an [´] acute accent. Subscript marks such as e and o are also used; e approximates to the e in the English word "yet"; the o is close to the o sound in "dog"; and the s is close to the English sh.

The first chapter, "Tradition and Afrobeat," traces the antecedent cultural and political contexts that shaped Fela's innovative Afrobeat music and performance. At the political level, I describe the evolution of the Nigerian state and the process of a post-independence elite formation and the reconstitution of a patronage system. The aesthetic-cultural dimension describes both the lyrical content and structural pattern of Afrobeat, detailing such early influences through neo-traditional forms, Highlife, and his London and American experience of the early sixties.

Chapter Two, "Bard of the Public Sphere," situates his musicianship in the context of his ideological evolution and the choice of a variant of Nkrumahist Pan-Africanism to define *dif-*

Preface

ference and contest the dominance of center cultures. In the same breath, it details how his song texts serve as metonyms of the social history of post-independence Africa.

The "Empire Sounds Back," which constitutes Chapter Three, appraises the African performance stylistic strategies with which Fela transposes folk aesthetic forms into the idiom of urban, popular (musical) performance. It also explores the crisis of neo-tradition and late modernity, besides other salient issues of his development of a counter-hegemonic social dialect of Pidgin English, which is becoming increasingly popular, particularly among the urban subcultures of West Africa.

Chapter Four, "*Idán*, or a Carnavalesque," narrates and analyzes the performance context at the Afrika Shrine. It also highlights a counterculture group-bonding experience through music, ritual worship, drugs and resistance politics in the ambience of a Lord-of-Misrule festival.

Chapter Five, "Alterity, Afrobeat and the Law," extends the interpretation of the Afrobeat form, as one that is an all-inclusive performance mode, of which music is only a part. It stresses Afrobeat's other political and ideological group practices. The chapter also explores Afrobeat's relationship with other alternative (musical) cultural practices, such as reggae, the African-American and French rap traditions, with examples taken from *Bob Marley*, the *2 Live Crew* and *Nique Ta Mere* respectively. Also here, Fela's vision of an imagined (African) continent, his micro-African commune, the Kalakuta Republic, its style of living, and organizational structure, are evaluated.

The "Afrobeat Continuum," which is Chapter Six and also the concluding chapter, integrates certain salient observations earlier noted on the wider issue of the future of Afrobeat in the post-Fela era, and poses questions about cultural and ideological retention and continuity.

The various appendices are meant to provide the cultural and political contexts of Fela's performance, and have also

been developed to include the following: a comprehensive annotated discography of the artist; an excerpt of the constitution of the Movement of the People (MOP), Fela's political party, which was refused registration prior to the 1979 election; a schematic bio-data, including an inventory of sonic censorship.

Perhaps this work could still have benefited from some more prolonged waiting—say, a month, a year, or even a decade—but to what effect? I did not set out to deliver a Torah to poor cultural earthlings. The 'ultimate,' eternal text, I've tried to remember, is the purveyor of the anti-intellect. And so, may this not be the last word on a cultural practice that, we hope, promises to play an influential role in twenty-first century black and African popular culture discourse. As we are apt to say, the ball is now in the reader's court.

Sola Olorunyomi
Brixton / Bodija

Preface

Notes

1. "Kalakuta Republic" is the name given to anywhere Fela lived after his 1974 detention; it is styled after the name given by inmates to the cell where Fela was detained. Fela conceived of his Republic as a micro pan-African village where all fleeing from institutions of containment were welcome.
2. The attack was ostensibly precipitated by soldiers who claimed that a teenager who had insulted their colleague fled into Kalakuta, and they demanded that Fela hand him over to them. Fela refused, saying it was the jurisdiction of the police to effect such an arrest. Moments later, fully armed soldiers had cordoned off Fela's residence. This incident stands out as perhaps the most violent encounter between the Nigerian state and the artists' commune. In the aftermath of the attack, the commune was razed by fire and some female residents testified to having been raped by the marauding soldiers to an Administrative Board of Inquiry set up afterwards by the military governor of Lagos State, Commodore Adekunle S. Lawal. Many others, including children and visitors, were brutalised and hospitalised, and Fela's seventy-year-old mother—Mrs Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti (who later answered to Anikulapo-Kuti with her son when the latter changed his name)—was thrown down from the first floor of the building. Her health declined after this incident and she died a year later from the shock. Coupled with this, Fela lost the sound track of his film—*The Black President*—and the Board of Inquiry could only reprimand the artist for waxing the track *Zombie* which, it noted, unduly caricatures the military institution. The Board comprised the following: Chairman, Honourable Mr. Justice K.O. Anyah; Member, Wing Commander Hamza Abdullahi; Legal Secretary, Mr. T.A.O. Ogundeyin; and Adminis-

trative Secretary Mr. G.A. Oshunmakinde.

3. Fela changed the name of his performance venue from 'Afro Spot' to 'Afrika Shrine' once he began to conceive of his music and venue as distinct from the sheer revelry that characterises a regular night club. He gradually began to emphasize a deeply spiritual experience, where fans and acolytes were expected to dance only after appreciating this dimension. From the Empire Hotel of the late seventies, he started incorporating ritual elements into his performances and increasingly ribald political pronouncements.
4. This was how John Collins, the (Highlife) music scholar at the University of Ghana, Legon, described a tendency in Fela's music in my interview with him in May 1998.
5. See Houston, A. Baker, *Rap and the Academy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 34.
6. See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 306.

*Idan pa
Ohi Oye mu*

A Confounding experience this;
Yet the buffoon hollers: a mere harmattan haze

Ookun - Yoruba aphorism

I

Tradition and Afrobeat



*That voice sprouted again and
Crawled into their skulls and began to howl
His voice walked ahead and came behind
And rocked the earth like storm ...*

They did not return

The voice survives. . .

—OLU OGUIBE¹

*Cloud without shade
Cumulus without shower
Saturday night at the bard's
An overcast of cannabis*

—SOLA OLORUNYOMI²

Far beyond the Pepple Street venue of his performance, the bass drum's deep throbbing and the wailing horns of Fela's *Egypt '80 Band* could be heard resonating into this silent Lagos night. As we inched into the swanky marijuana-fumed atmosphere of the Afrika Shrine (Fela's nightspot), an all-female choreography could be seen attempting the impossible task of duplicating the rather racy rhythm, the twists and turns of the track *Army Arrangement*. A chorus in the background kept crooning:

One day go be one day
 One day go be one day
 Those wey dey steal-i money for (Africa) government
 One day go be one day

A day of reckoning is coming
A day of reckoning is coming
For those plundering (Africa's) government's resources
*A day of reckoning is coming*³

Then the beat descended into a repose, as the singers also took a cue by stretching out the last line—"One-day-go-be-ooone-daaaaay." I eagerly turned to a colleague and asked: "Did you see that?" I had meant the fusion of the choreographic idea with the lyrics. "Kind of funky," he replied after pondering for a while, and I knew he was only trying to be polite though a very dynamic moment had been lost in that short phrase.

Many other gestures, too, by both African and Western 'expert' observers who seek to describe Fela's Afrobeat performance and context remain largely breezy and faddish. Quite often, these experts have been too content to gloss over Afrobeat's definitive moment simply with the usual refrain, "jazzy and African-Latin flavor," without giving it the benefit of its nuances.

Africa, then, in the logic of this stereotype, comes over merely as a repository of the call and response and improvisation, while the West, ostensibly, supplies the premeditated notations. It is the sort of generalization that presents even a formally trained musician such as Fela as incapable of enduring processuality just as the Euro-American is consigned only to the cold calligraphy of sheet-scored music without the capacity for "life" and spontaneity. I argue against this primarily from an ideological point of view even though such assertions are equally technically false. The likes of Bach, Handel, Mozart and Beethoven were all renowned not only as composers but also *improvisers*, whose works, according to Philip Tagg, were canonized (scored) as the music's purest form of concretion—and were later suffocated by being locked in institutional preserving jars called "Conservatories."⁴

We may attempt to limit the scope of the Afrobeat genre by a definition based on its intrinsic musical qualities, but its ultimate meaning can hardly subsist without a consideration of its reception, which, as Karin Baber notes of the popular arts in general, are based on conventions—and those conventions are seldom obvious by looking at the art object alone. This theme is further expanded in Chapter Five. The intervention of the audience in a canon formation of this sort can be quite insistent as the examples of Afrobeat and Highlife have shown. Although Fela had used the term "Afrobeat," he eventually denounced it as "a meaningless commercial nonsense" with which recording labels exploited the artist.⁵ The name persists only due to the insistence of Afrobeat's audiences, spanning the avid fan to music reviewers and the media, such that, at the present, varieties of this form continue to foreground Fela's "roots" Afrobeat as its grounding metaphor. In the case of Highlife, Graeme Ewens notes: "Yebua Mensah, brother of E.T. Mensah and a co-founder of dance band in highlife, told the writer John Collins how the name caught on in Accra.

"The term highlife was created by the people who gathered around the dancing clubs such as the Roger Club, to watch and listen to the couples enjoying themselves ... the people outside called it highlife as they did not reach the class of the couples going inside, who not only had to pay a relatively high entrance fee of about seven shillings and sixpence, but also had to wear full evening dress, including top hats if they could afford it."⁶

Each musical idiom, like every cultural production, has always evolved from antecedent forms, and in an electronic age such as ours, the question to pose is how this or that form is appropriated to create a new musical register. Of jazz, for instance, Esi Kinni-Olusanyin notes that although it "descended from the blues and ragtime, many elements of the work song, spiritual, and ring shout are incorporated into it."⁷ In the same way that Highlife drew its form as "one of the first examples of fusion between the old world and the new, and a prototype for all African pop,"⁸ Fela's Afrobeat also tapped a myriad of sources ranging from basic Nigerian traditional rhythms, Highlife, jazz and Latin elements—over a structure that is essentially a criss-cross African rhythm. However, this process is quite tenuous and the attempt here is not to define his artistic production in relation to an ostensibly foreign mainstream "corpus which constitutes the canon against which it [his form] is measured."⁹

In many traditional African cultures, including the Egba Yorùbá in which Fela was raised, music and dance are intrinsically tied to everyday experience. This process could be of a sacred event, thereby incorporating ritual elements, or a secular one, involving music and dance as accompaniments to social gatherings such as sport, general entertainment and, at times, an instrumental jam session. Some of the following have been identified as general practices of the tradition: call-and-response pattern of vocal music; the bell rhythm of the gong,

which denotes time lines; the predominant use of the pentatonic scale; the speech rhythm growing out of tonal inflections of African words and chants; the use of polymeters and polyrhythms, and musical instruments used as symbols.¹⁰

Some traditional mythologies guiding both instrumentation and musical presentation, in certain instances, continue to serve as cultural survivals and forms of retention, even with the current dispensation of popular music. This is at times made manifest in the animist conception of musical instruments and the attempt by musicians to emboss on them a vernacular idiom, so to speak, to make them "talk." This attitude is true of many African communities, and Sam Akpabot alludes in this connection to a Yorùbá mythology "that only trees located near the roadside are suitable materials for the construction of skin drums because they overhear humans conversing as they walk past and are therefore able to reproduce their language."¹¹ Whatever the validity of this claim, the ancient Yorùbá dictum, *Àyànágàlú, asóro ígí* (*Àyàn* of *Agalu*, who speaks through the medium of wood), is suggestive of the kinship of music and the reconstitution of speech pattern.¹²

Therefore, drums—in particular—and other musical instruments are deemed to be repositories of language, with the different *Òrìṣà* (deities) expressing marked preferences of drum decoder for invocatory purposes. Hence, *Obatala's* quartet includes *Iyanlá, Ìyá Àgàn, Keke* and *Afeere* which form the *Ìgbin* ensemble used by its devotees,¹³ while *Sango's* preference is the *Bàrà* ensemble of *Ìyá ìlù, Omele abo, Kùdi* and *Omele Ako*. With these are the *Ìpèsè*, *Orunmila's* special drum, and *Àgéré*; Besides *Agogo* (metalophone) and *sèkèrè* (traditional rattle) of *Ògún*. Beyond the fact of the drum's centrality in most of Africa's orchestra, this aesthetic-religious function probably explains the prevalence, among the Yorùbá, of tension drums with their wide range of tonal configuration and a cultural addiction to "talking with musical instruments since Yorùbá is a tone language, musi-

cians have been able to develop a highly sophisticated use of musical instruments as speech surrogate."¹⁴ The complexity of this form is most noticeable in the traditional all-drum orchestra which may have between two to twelve drummers, with each assigned parts, and which together create a musical rhythm that exhibits syncopation, polymeter and polyrhythm—in an atmosphere where all the other arts could be aptly represented.

While neo-traditional forms such as *Àpàlà* and *Sákára* were part of Fela's growing experience, it was in the direction of the more broad-based Highlife that he moved, having also played with Victor Olaiya's band, a prime exponent of Highlife in Nigeria from the 1950s. However, the features of protest and rebellion that later characterized his art predate this era. As early as the 19th century, Lagos was the hub of "pop" concerts which the nascent cultural nationalists would later take as an important reference point. Although the "pop" concert in Europe was, historically, a lower middle class affair, and had quite distinct features from the Lagos concert of this period,¹⁵ the Lagos elite showed considerable interest in this entertainment genre. But the pivot of this early concert was the Mission House, so much so that there were open conflicts between the Catholic Mission and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) as regards poaching of members of the congregation through the lure of concert. The Catholic Mission was once accused of trying to lure Protestant members to its fold on this account.¹⁶

However, once these concerts took a secular tone, they were disparaged as heathen. The *Lagos Observer* of January 18, 1883 criticized this trend, which it described as "exhibition of low forms of heathenism." Shortly after this, it was further described as "rude expressions in the native language and dancing of a fantastic kind." The Lagos street of this era was rich and ebullient with drama festivals, masquerades, bards and musicians, and the colonial government was constantly in conflict with the artistic community and had to ban local drumming at

a point.¹⁷ Echeruo notes that this cultural event helped to develop a culture of art review with a level of sophistication that could only have been the result of exposure to music and music criticism in Europe, or else through Lagos and Abeokuta.¹⁸ As often happened then, the attempt was primarily to approximate the standard of the European center. Echeruo further details the pronouncement of a reviewer of St. Gregory's Grammar School's chorus rendition of *Fanfare of Mirlitous* in the *Observer* of December 3 and 17, 1887, which stated: "Orpheus could not have done better."

Another factor outside the missions that was favorable to the growth of the concert in Lagos, writes Echeruo, was the presence of a small, well-educated and "cultured" elite made up mainly of the expatriate colonial civil servants and the Brazilian community, which increased in number after the emancipation.¹⁹ There is no doubt that the existence of a Western-type music school in Abeokuta as far back as 1861 and the launch of the *Lagos Musical Journal* in 1915 served as important precursors. The enthusiasm of the Brazilian community in these concerts has also been located in their earlier African experience prior to the slave period in South America. Whatever may be said of outside influence in stimulating awareness of these concerts, interest in concerts by Nigerians was evidently a carryover of a rich indigenous culture of love of song, dance, ritual and theater.²⁰ By the early and middle 20th century the cultural ground was already shifting from a mere attempt at imitating European forms to seeking an authentication of what was considered as indigenous; a ground which in part had been paved by one "Cherubino" who, in the *Lagos Musical Journal* of 1916, asserted:

The legends of Troy it must be admitted, for interest, stand pre-eminent; but what can equal for beauty and poetical embellishments the legend of Ile Ife, that cra-

dle of mankind as tradition relates.

It was in the context of this cultural undercurrent that Nigerians started seeking alternative musical forms. Having learnt that the colonial explanation of Christianity was one in which only Victorian hymns could be sung, the Nigerian independent Baptist, Mojola Agbebi, subsequently rejected all forms of European music in worship.

Other Nigerians followed this path of indigenization. John Collins and Paul Richards note in this respect:

Fela Sowande (b.1902), having established a reputation as Nigeria's leading 'symphonic' composer, subsequently argued the case for grounding Nigerian musicology in the study of African religion. Akin Euba has moved in the direction of works, more accessible to mass audiences in which 'Western' influenced 'intellectualist' procedures of composition are rejected.²¹

Therefore, as Echeruo has aptly noted, when Highlife eventually developed more confidently in both Ghana and Lagos in the 1920s and '30s, it was an attempt, long after Juju, at cultural self-assertion after an era that had been dubbed as schizophrenic. This pull and tension between the forces of "Europeanization" and "authenticity" would later be manifested in the musical practice of Fela (then Ransome-Kuti). This cultural identity crisis was not immediately resolved though, at least not during the Highlife days of his Koola Lobitos band.

Oh! High, Highlife

While a criss-cross of African traditional rhythms constitutes the background to Fela's beat,²² the immediate beginnings of

Afrobeat are to be located in Highlife. It would take until after World War II for Highlife to become the most influential dance music in Anglophone West Africa, with "the influx of the returning demobilized Black soldiers with their newly acquired tastes of Western-style live music and night-club entertainment."²³ This process was also aided by rapid urbanization.

As a measure of cultural-self representation, local musicians attempted to play their diverse folk music with a guitar background. Tam Fiofiori suggests that the guitar styles that introduced the instrument to British West Africa were the rumba-merengue and samba music of GV-70 rpm records that came via the Spanish territories of Africanized Cuba and Latin America.²⁴ Prior to this encounter, however, West Africans have always had the more complicated 20-string instrument known as the kora. This factor, most probably explains the ease with which the musicians embraced "modern guitar," while also adapting it to the principle of the pentatonic scale to which traditional string instrumentalists had grown accustomed.

Highlife, which had started off as "palm-wine" guitar music—so called because of the social occasion of palm-wine refreshment during performance—was soon transformed into an orchestra which, apart from guitar, included in its typical ensemble brass instruments such as trumpet, trombone and tuba, as well as reed instruments. Other Western-style instruments of this form are the trap drum and cymbals, accordion, xylophone and keyboard, with the brass and reed instruments now carrying "the tones, in harmony led by the trumpet."²⁵ These were also the general features of the jazz-Highlife hybrid era of Fela's music, which was fused with a melange of West African traditional styles. Some of the Highlife titles to his credit in this period include *Onifere*, *Yeshe Yeshe*, *Lagos Baby*, *Lai Se*, *Wa Dele*, *Mi O Mo*, *Ajo*, *Alagbara*, *Onidodo*, *Keep Nigeria One* and *Araba's Delight*. Others are *Moti Gborokan*, *Se E Tun De* and *Ako*—all produced between his Koola Lobitos

Band and the Highlife Jazz Band (1958-1969), although Ray Templeton (see discography) had tracked down *Aigana* to the "Highlife Rakers" production of 1960. The musical influences on Fela at this point ranged from soul and blues, Geraldo Pino's style (including the reciprocal influences with James Brown), through a number of Highlife musicians, notably E. T. Mensah, Victor Olaiya and Rex Lawson.

In terms of structural pattern, it was Rex Lawson's brand of Highlife with its emphasis on the musical complexity of traditional Nigerian drum rhythms—combining the three-membrane drum,²⁶ two/and one-membrane conga drums; and the Western trap drum set with cymbals—that would serve as the immediate catalyst for Afrobeat.²⁷ Besides this, however, Highlife had somewhat served its time as a cultural tool for African "authenticity" as it was wont to be presented in the early decades of the century. By now, independence had been achieved and the new nation had to confront issues of development and the post-independence elite who, to a large measure, bestrode the landscape with the air of internal colonizers. The new elite, like its colonial forebears, promptly put a leash on the anticipated democratic project. With a restive population, its organized labor sector and the student movement finding itself confronted by an increasingly diminished "public sphere" for alternative visions (in Nigeria the civil war was already raging), a period of disillusionment would set in and the status quo had by the mid-sixties begun to be challenged on these terms. And with its breezy, generally covert political themes, obsessively hedonistic lyrics—of transcendental love, of women and wine—and a rather sedate rhythmic structure, Highlife was simply not best positioned as the medium for the brewing post-independence confrontation, at least in Nigeria; it was a task that would have to be shouldered by Afrobeat, a subversive musical and cultural practice.

Continental Crisis as Muse

This development, however, did not occur by happenstance, as even the choice of some cultural preferences earlier discussed have their roots in the overall attempt of Africans, as part of the anti-colonial struggle, to evolve discursive strategies of Otherness—on whose plank the twin concepts of negritude and black personality would later rest. The political and ideological subsoil that would later characterize Fela's overall oeuvre was grounded in this amalgam of spiritual quests.

Early in the century, peoples of African descent had fashioned and projected ways of being 'black'—in efforts that were both scholarly and artistic. The negritude movement, which "aimed initially at recognizing the black personality (*la personnalité nègre*),"²⁸ was one such effort, largely because the colonial project had created a dichotomizing system. It was a structure that brought to the fore the tensions of reconciling the past with the present while also orienting activist Africans toward the future. As V.Y. Mudimbe has pointed out, these paradigmatic oppositions were—and still are—evident in the binary differentiation of "tradition versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilization; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies."²⁹

The conferences of Bandung, Paris, and Rome, with their sharp polarizing views on the African condition, had actually been preceded by the negritude initiative, the fifth Pan-African Conference, and the creation of *Presence Africaine*, all within the first half of the century. Mudimbe copiously details an intellectual engagement by African precursors in certain representative domains of this era:

In anthropology, studies of traditional laws were carried out by A. Ajisafe, *The Laws and Customs of the*

Yorùbá People (1924), and J.B. Danquah, *Akan Laws and Customs* (1928). Analysis of African customs were published; for example, D. Delobson's *Les Secrets des Sorciers Noirs* (1934), M. Quenum's *Au Pays des Fons: us et Coutumes du Dahomey* (1938), J. Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God* ([1944] 1968), and the excellent researches of K.A. Busia and P Hazoume, respectively *The Position of the Chief in Modern Political System of the Ashanti* (1951) and *Le pacte du Sang au Dahomey* ([1937] 1956). In the field of history the most prominent contributions to African nationalism were J.C. de Graft-Johnson's *African Glory: The Story of Vanished Negro Civilizations* (1954) and Cheikh Anta Diop's *Nations nègres et culture* (1954), in which he analyses the notion of Hamites and the connections between Egyptian and African languages and civilizations.³⁰

The third leg of this influence came from African descents of the Americas such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Langston Hughes, Claude Mackay, George Padmore and Richard Wright, among others, whose writings and lifestyles helped to shape the quest for an African identity. On a broad ideological and political platform, there was the strong intellectual current represented by Marxism which, especially between the 1930s and 1950s, was undoubtedly the greatest influence on the activist African intelligentsia and even nascent statesmen.

It was in this context that Sartre's 1948 essay, *Black Orpheus*, and Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, could have such profound impact on the negritude movement in particular and Africanist theoretical paradigms in general; a boost would be given to this a little later when, at Sorbonne in 1956, a meeting of the First International Congress of Black Writers

and Artists was held. Although the events of these times could only have had a remote impact on Fela, his unique family background, with highly politicized parents (Fela's mother was a socialist and women's activist, while his father was an educationist and labor activist), did greatly help the retention in later life of those values he could not have fully comprehended in his childhood. Two other thinkers that would later influence Fela were Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney with their seminal works: *The Wretched of the Earth* and the more recent *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, respectively.³¹ The anti-colonial and anti-imperialist intellectual mood of this period aided the evolution of an aesthetic engagé that rubbed on African literature (written and unwritten), music, and the other arts, even if Fela would later quarrel with aspects of the negritude outlook. The general intellectual and potentially emancipatory thrust of Fanon's works became an important rallying point for (black) African dissonant voices, even after asserting in *The Wretched of the Earth* that there will not be a black culture because, for him, the black problem is of a political nature.

Yet, there were other voices like Nnamdi Azikiwe's *Renaissance Africa*, Obafemi Awolowo's *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, and particularly Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah—with their several treatises on African socialism. By the time Nyerere made the *Arusha Declaration* in 1967, the creed of *Ujama* was finally spelt out in an explicit manner—showing a rather non-aligned path in the ideological divide between capitalism and communism. Nkrumah however underwent several phases, at the end of which he concluded that the essential contradictions of the political economy were those between labor and capital, on one hand, and, on the other, the colony and imperialism.³² It is evident that a consistent trend by the 'native' other during this phase, was the general sympathy for socialism, albeit reinterpreted in several ways to express *African identity*; it was also a factor which informed Fela's accommodation of the ideology

as an important tool for the broad anti-imperialist coalition when he noted that:

Although Marx, Lenin and Mao were great leaders of their people, it is however the ideology of Nkrumahism, *regarded as an African socialist system*, that is recommended because it involves a system where the merits of a man would not depend on his ethnic background.³³

In the context of the performing arts such as theater and music, three major moments of relating artistic reaction to political processes can be delineated: first, "domestication of political power," second, "criticism of colonial life," and third, "celebration of the African sources of life." I am here borrowing Mudimbe's classification—applied only to literature—but which is equally apt to the other arts too. The manner of these aesthetic reactions were, however, not necessarily chronological. Of significance here is the experience noted by Colin Grandson since the William-Ponty Teachers' College days (in Senegal since about 1933), which was then Francophone West African "nursery" of its political elite. Of its theater, Grandson observes that "the historical Chief and his present equivalent, the political leader, appear as the main character in more than fifty per cent of the Black African plays of French expression since independence."³⁴ It took a while before plays of the William-Ponty influence could frontally challenge, in any fundamental sense, the colonial heritage although they evoked a pre-colonial past based on legends and myths, an indication that reactions to colonialism were not always uniform. On the other hand, in Anglophone West Africa, while the theater practice of the earlier Hubert Ogunde of Nigeria straddled the first and second moments, it was the third phase that Fela's performance predominantly came to articulate—even while taking

retrospective glances at the earlier two phases. Werewere Liking's *Village Kiyi* performance project and Bernard Zaourou Zadi's *Didiga Theatre* (both Ivorian post-independence forms) were also cast in this latter mold.

The Nigerian story itself dates back roughly to 1914 when the then Governor-General, Lord Lugard, amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates of a geographical expanse that incorporated some 250-plus ethnic groups. The British government introduced indirect rule, ostensibly for administrative convenience, but had by that act also entrenched a divisive factor that would continue to distract the attention of the new nation. While the anti-colonial movement—especially those grouped around the Zikist movement³⁵—sought to unify the country along a broad anti-imperialist coalition, the country that emerged after independence was largely balkanized along regional groupings with the new political elite unwilling to tap, even as a symbolic reference, the resistance efforts of the Aba Women's Revolt (1929), the Iva Valley Coal Miners Massacre (1949), the pan-regional coalitions of the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) led by Chief Micheal Imoudu (1941), and the general strikes of 1945 and 1964.

The consistent disrespect for the rule of law even after independence has its roots in the attitude to the constitution. A consistent pattern in constitution-making in the country is characterized by the twin factors of its elitist formulation and the lack of an inclusive process of sufficiently accommodating the anxiety of its diverse citizenry. Hence, since the first 1922 Richards Constitution, Nigerian constitutions have always been handed down either by colonial officers or military officers, with the inescapable attitude of a benefaction from a benevolent despot. The 1951 Macpherson Constitution drove the most decisive wedge in the way of a national labor perspective through its introduction of a "tripartite division of Nige-

ria, break-up of national unions to conform to necessities of new political set-up and the development of new regional organizations restricted in membership and jurisdiction to regional boundaries.”³⁶

The political manifestation of a dependent economy that emerged at independence, as noted by Richard Joseph, was one that played up a patron-client relationship within the civil polity, such that even two decades afterward (in 1979), the political parties that emerged invested in such grand patron figures as the following: National Party of Nigeria (NPN)—Alhaji Makama Bida; Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN)—Chief Obafemi Awolowo; Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)—Mallam Aminu Kano; National Peoples Party (NPP)—Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe; Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP)—Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim.

Characterizing the nature of the emergent state, Richard Joseph contends that any fruitful discussion about Nigeria must take into account the “nature, extent and persistence of a certain mode of political behavior, and of its social and economic ramifications”³⁷ and suggests a conceptual notion of “prebendalism” to explain the centrality in the Nigerian polity of the intensive and persistent struggle to control and exploit the offices of state.³⁸

According to Joseph, the historical association of the term “prebend” with the offices of certain lords or monarchs, or through outright purchase by supplicants, and then administered to generate income for their possessors, arose in ancient Greece. Hence, the adjective “prebenda” is used to refer to “patterns of political behavior which rest on the justifying principle that such offices should be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of the office holders as well as of their reference or support group.”³⁹ This background helps to explain why Fela devoted enormous attention to the political “patron” in order to undermine its symbolic figure, since it was precisely the

patron-client relation that provides a sustaining framework for the manifestation of prebendal politics in Nigeria.

This patron-client ties reflect a social relationship which has become a crucial element—perhaps even the defining form—of governmental process in Nigeria under which lies an economic stratum that has been variously described as a “government by contract” and a “rentier state, in which revenues derive from taxes or rents on production, rather than from productive activity”⁴⁰ and an “inverted pyramid, tearing precariously on a hydrocarbon pinnacle.”⁴¹ In this case it was the oil revenue, the mainstay of Nigeria’s economy, that was at stake. The centrality of the state in deciding who becomes the patron—since state power conferred the ability to control enormous economic resources—turned Nigeria’s politics into warfare, “a matter of life or death.”⁴²

In other words, the emergent “national” bourgeois class is one whose claim to that appellation is not necessarily derived from any productive venture as such, but merely in relation to agency commission doled and received from transnational corporations. Broadly speaking, its outlook is neither national nor market-driven, as it also shows a marked preference for allocation derived from oil wealth as middlemen, import-export agents and commission-takers. As a divided, sectionalized—even tribalized—group, this comprador alliance with foreign capital has been unable to forge and crystallize an enduring national identity. This critical element in the nature of national class formation, especially the narrow and particularistic pursuit of the elite, has substantially distorted the crust of the working class and other ancillary sectors, foisted a false consciousness, and reduced the emergence of a self-conscious opposition without reference to primordial allegiances. This attitude survives even in recent history, such that when General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the national elections of 1993, won by Chief Moshood Abiola, it was not too difficult for the General

to raise the bogey of a potential southern/Yorùbá domination of the polity if the result of the elections were honored. This blurring of class-referenced attitude, which cuts across the board, has been assisted by an interconnected patronage system (with varying degrees of influence among the different nationalities), which allows for a member of the working class stratum to image himself as participant in the sharing of national economic largesse. Hence, a member of the working class sufficiently angered in a quarrel may retort: "Do you know me? Do you know who I am?" The silence in the altercation here carrying the unspoken undertone: Do you know whom I am connected to? Usually such a hidden scarecrow is some member of the armed forces, connected to the brag by no more than, "We come from the same village." Such is the strength of the image of the new patron—the Nigerian military.

Invariably it is the civil society that has had to bear the effect of the elite in-fighting that has characterized the years spanning 1960 to the present, having, as it does, to live with urban chaos in housing, transportation, health services and the phenomenal increase, among others, of "the Area Boys"⁴³ syndrome, occasioned by economic hardship and the anonymity bred by inter-urban migration. Lagos, Fela's predominant site of performance, is the worst hit by the contradictions engendered by the political economy primarily because it is the center of the nation's industrial and financial sector, and the main port of entry into and exit from the nation, even after 1976 when Abuja became the capital city. Coupled with this cosmopolitan ambience, Lagos emerged with a much stronger working class and protest tradition, but also took on board a variety of social crises, such as youth drug-addiction, mental disorder, alcoholism, unemployment, displacement and violence. A 1996 fieldwork reveals that about 17.5 per cent of households in Lagos experience frequent occurrences of urban violence, which implies about two households in every ten; and a quarter

(24.7 percent) of all households have fallen victim to at least one residential burglary—with the prospect of the form of violence being armed robbery which accounts for 47.37 percent of such attacks.⁴⁴

The middle class response to this phenomenon, which had become rampant by the 1970s, was to withdraw into fortresses, behind high-wall fenced apartments. And because there was hardly ever any long-term approach to solving these social problems, the military governments since the 1966 coup have often resorted to a task force operational method that sought to whip the population back to the “correct path.” The urban poor became the immediate target of the marauding soldiers who charged at them in a manner reminiscent of the brutality with which the colonial West African Frontier Force (WAFF) soldiers maimed protesting Nigerian women during the Aba Women’s Revolt of 1929. This “season of anomy” as the title of Wole Soyinka’s novel published in 1973 pictured it, continued unabated through the civil war period, the oil-boom and post oil-boom era of the seventies—including the structural adjustment phase and the rise of military autocracy and “maximum” leadership after the overthrow of the Shehu Shagari regime in 1983.

The spate of urban violence rose to even higher heights in the nineties with the new dimension of bomb-throwing as a means, apparently, to settling political scores. After the death of General Sani Abacha, who ruled between 1993 and 1998, his Chief Security Officer (CSO) Major Hamza Al-Mustapha confessed to having knowledge of bomb-planting engineered on the instruction of his former boss.⁴⁵ Besides this, it became public knowledge that the late dictator had a special “hit-squad” which eliminated the political opposition and hounded the press. In 1994, the residence of Dan Suleiman, an anti-military-rule activist, in Victoria Island, Lagos, was petrol-bombed and his personal effects set ablaze. This was followed

by a bomb blast in the Ilorin Township Stadium in 1995, venue of the launching of the Kwara State Chapter of the Family Support Program (FSP), a pet project of the then First Lady Maryam Abacha.⁴⁶

It was not until 1996, however, that incidents of bomb explosion became a statistical bi-monthly with six explosions recorded during the year, three of which occurred in the single month of January, under a military dispensation that had continually triggered coups, countercoups, and phantom coups since 1966. This, in a sense, was a product of the military's bitter internal contradictions and an attempt to use state power for personal benefit. This was the political environment to which Fela reacted.

Some Sort of Ègbá Boy

Against the anxiety and idealism of a young man, the home that Fela returned to in 1963, after his training at Trinity College to study music, was one that would be taken over by the rule of the jackboot and martial tunes. Born into the Ègbá-Yorùbá Family of Reverend Ransome-Kuti and nee Thomas on October 15, 1938, Fela was the fourth of five children. A number of antecedent factors helped to shape his musical and cultural practice.

The Ègbá, since about 1830, have been concentrated in the metropolis of Abeokuta and along the districts around River Ògùn in present-day Ògùn State.⁴⁷ Even though hemmed between the Òyó Empire and the British who would soon arrive on the coast, the Ègbá quite early sought autonomy and, led by Lísàbí their national hero, rebelled against Òyó domination and fought into retreat a reprisal team sent from the Òyó Kingdom.

From this point on, the Ègbá state attempted to, and did, make real its independence. A new constitutional order was

introduced into the state, along with a national anthem and flag, and trade with the coast and the hinterland was intensified. Soon, the missionaries would arrive in Abeokuta, and with their entourage, cultural assets such as printing presses, educational institutions, factories, and a new literacy—which will further make visible (even when attacked by the missionaries) certain cultural elements such as the all-female G ẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ mask and its satirical agency the Ẹ̀fẹ̀. Though he was deprived of interacting with the tradition as a youth (his paternal family of clerics disparaged it), Fela would later reach back into this cultural antecedence much later in his musical and artistic career, and rework substantially traditional, even cultic, codes into his performance.

Of particular interest to Fela was the Ifá system of thought and aesthetics. Ifá is the Yorùbá divination system through which its priests try to decipher shrouded events: past, present or future—of whole communities and individuals. The teachings of Ifá are embodied in the Odù—usually a collection of anecdotes that refer to the theme in a narrative detour. A practice that predates Islam and Christianity the Odù of Ifá are of two types: the Ojú Odù (principal Odù)—sixteen in number and represented by Ikin sacred nuts of the same number—and the Omo Odù (minor Odù)—which are 240. Both the principal and minor Odù are arranged in a specific order of seniority and the hierarchical ordering is of great significance in the interpretation of Ifá's (also known as Orúnmìlà and Agbónmìrègùn) message. Regarding the world as a vast mathematical pattern (a trait which the Pythagoreans, Hebrew Cabala and other equally ancient cultures share with it), the Ifá priest combines these numbers and configures their result. The process of deriving the Odù may be effected by casting cowry shells or pieces of kola nuts. The Ifá divination process is quite hierarchical with the Babaláwo and Iyánífá at the apex. Unlike the Babaláwo and Iyánífá, who are the oracular priests of Ifá,

the Onièşgùn and Adáhunse are less specialized and therefore do not have a ritual procedure as elaborate as the former.

Beyond this cultural flux of his formative years, there was also the repressive atmosphere of colonial district officers and tax collectors extorting money for and on behalf of the colonial government. Even as a child, his activist mother took him along to political rallies; and he would recall the incident which led to his dad being stabbed in the eye with a bayonet by a trigger-happy soldier as a reprisal against the activist Reverend Father who had presumably "disrespected" the British Crown. These early exposures had a profound effect on his cultural and political attitude later in life, as Fela was wont to constantly allude to the events.

Fela's mother would later visit the Soviet Union and China, meeting Mao Tse Tong at a time when such an action was considered highly treasonable. A foremost activist and human rights advocate, she organized women groups across the country and mobilized Egba women toward the deposition of Sir Ladapo Ademola II, the Alake of Egbaland. When the latter was later reinstated, she was said to have withheld her recognition and support.⁴⁸ Her choice of political party was the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe whom she considered a most forthright pan-Africanist of that era. Fela later met the late Osagyefo, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who preached Pan-Africanism.

In the early sixties Fela studied music at Trinity College, London, though he had always played music at home given the fact that his parents and grandfather were themselves accomplished musicians. Both in Britain and the United States, Fela had played in salons where he had a series of encounters with white racists. Furthermore, the sixties were years of many unusual social and economic events with their devastating effects on the psyche of conscious black youths like Fela. Such events included the Black Panther era, the invasion of the Bay

of Pigs by the United States, and the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, whose memory had lingered. Sandra Smith, an African American girlfriend, lent him the biography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley, and this simple event became a date-maker of his ideological initiation as a Pan-Africanist. As a complement to his musical engagé, Fela later formed the Young African Pioneers (YAP) in 1976 and the Movement of the People (MOP), in order to pursue this vision, although the latter was refused registration for the 1979 election.

Musical Afrobeat: Cultural and Political Evolution

Translating his Pan-Africanist vision into music, however, took a while after many false starts that included experimentation with American soul style music and Highlife. The striving to evolve other layers of contemporary African styles of music had always been part of the effort of that generation of young Nigerians who enrolled in music schools in England in the late fifties and early sixties. While the older generation comprising Adams Fiberesima, Akin Euba, Sam Akpabot and Laz Ekwueme “chose to study classical music and returned to Nigeria as music academics ... or worked in radio and television stations as music directors ... another group of students chose to study dance and popular music.”⁴⁹ In this latter set were the likes of Wole Bucknor, Briddy Wright and the then Fela Ransome-Kuti. With others like Mike Falana, Lasisi Amoo, Fred Coker and Dele Okonkwo—who also went to Europe to further their careers—they got involved in diverse musical forms: European Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, Rock ‘n’ Roll and the emerging pop music of the sixties.⁵⁰ As a remote influence, the jazz music of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and Charles Mingus—with whom they occasionally had jam sessions—came to have an imprint on their musical style. This would be noticed later in

Fela's composition. All the while, however, their attempt was to infuse the new experience with Highlife, an attitude informed by their conviction that the new musical form had to be rhythm-driven, and as noted by Tam Fiofori, "with a strong percussive section."⁵¹

For Fela, the solution to this search did not emerge until many years later when he suddenly realized that he was playing to empty halls and that his music did not reflect his new consciousness. It was during his 1969 American visit that he finally decided on a new rhythm, as he recalls: "I said to myself, 'How do Africans sing songs? They sing with chants. Now let me chant into this song: la-la-la-laa...' Looking for the right beat I remembered this very old guy I'd met in London—Ambrose Campbell. He used to play African Music⁵² with a special beat. I used that beat to write my tune, man ... I didn't know how the crowd would take the sound, you know I just started. The whole club started jumping and everybody started dancing. I knew that I'd found the thing, man. To me, it was the first African tune I'd written till then."⁵³ Meanwhile, this decision had also been preceded by his increasing interest in black studies and African cultural forms. He changed the name of his band from "Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Highlife Jazz Band" to "Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Nigeria 70," under which he produced the new rhythmic experiment of *My Lady's Frustration* in the 1969 Los Angeles sessions. Far away in the United Kingdom, another contemporary and friend of Fela, Peter King, had also started a similar fusion described by Tam Fiofori as "Afrojazz, with faint elements of Highlife, a very distinct flavour of modern jazz and a predominant emphasis on percussive rhythms."⁵⁴

It was however in *Jeun K'oku*, and more determinedly with *Why Blackman Dey Suffer* that we get the definite shift to the structural pattern of contemporary Afrobeat. With *Jeun K'oku* one gets the sort of 'bold' and assertive vocalization, struc-

tured in an upbeat, fast tempo reminiscent of James Brown's lines, "Say it Loud/I'm black and proud." The instrumentation of the ensemble—now called *The Africa '70*—also reflected this transition that included in its percussive section, a trap-drum set of bass drum, snare drum and cymbals, two tom-tom drums, then a three-membrane drum. Later in the *Egypt '80* Band he added the gbèdu, the 'big conga drum,' basically a Baoule-type *Attoumgblan*, two-a-piece interlocking membrane drums and a second bass section that intensified the rhythm. Together with an amplified rhythm machine, two keyboards, rattles, metal gong, sticks, the bass and tenor guitars, he had defined his rhythm section. The horn section was made up of a trumpet, alto, tenor (first and second) and baritone (first and second) saxophones.

The basic format of most of Fela's compositions is easily identifiable in his percussion that usually starts off with a signature rhythm that introduces rhythm messages. This could be with the keyboards, "the two guitars in unison or counter points,"⁵⁵ the trap drum or even the two membrane drums in unison or counterpoint. In many of his compositions, usually the rhythm is kicked off with a double, regular-interval beat on the bass drum, and against this bass drum, a snare drum beat interlude breaks the monotony and thereby serves as antiphonal to the defining bass drum. Against this general background, the rattle, gong and rhythm guitars come in to pave way for the piano and later the horn section, after which the chorus and cantor take over.

The bass drum rhythm has been identified by Steve Rhodes as *Egbaesque*, with its roots reminiscent of certain rhythms of the Orò cult.⁵⁶ What is equally incontrovertible is the choice of most of his simple Ègbá chants such as "tere kúte" or "joro jára joro," which are built on harmonies based on the pentatonic scale. It is a format Fela respects and does not depart from in any fundamental sense. Even the choice of

playing in the pentatonic scale can be seen as not only musically but also ideologically motivated. Schooled, as he was, in the Western musical tradition, his preference is shown in an attitude to music that incorporated the improvisational and oral with its accompanying limited strictures. Unlike Highlife music which followed the European harmonic structural pattern, the structure of Fela's Afrobeat, in the main, gravitates toward traditional modal scale. His African musicianship is further exhibited through the use of such West African traditional techniques like ensemble stratification, modalism and hocketing, a point such scholars as John Collins and Michael Veal have also noted.⁵⁷

By reflecting the tonal character of the African speech pattern in the instrumental section, Fela invests his total ensemble with the power of a speech surrogate that serves as the 'inner voices' one often gets in his music. Besides this, the structure made it easier for the commentary of the cantor—a role assumed by Fela in the mold of the traditional griot and the "Chief Priest," as he was later styled, who must make pronouncements. To understand the universe of Fela's thought on this and his imagined (African) continent, a paraphrase of his diverse readings is given in the opening of Chapter Two.

At the level of lyrical content, he constantly questions received notions through his strident political commentaries, rude jokes, parodies and an acerbic sense of humor and satire. The predominant persona of his narrative is a troubadour in quest of justice and fair play, trenchant and uncompromising in exploring the nuances of everyday life and depicting the subject as victim of authoritarian constructions, while at the same time seeking to reposition him from this status to that of a genuine creator of culture through his diverse social roles. The subject (in *Alagbon Close*), even as a night-soil man sings: "I be agbepo; I dey do my part; without me your city go smell like shit," to which the chorus responds: "Never mind, I dey do my

part, I be human being like you.”

Vocal: I am a night soil man. I play my social role; without me the stench in your city would be unbearable.

Chorus: Never mind. I am only playing my role. I am as human as you.

Even when his lyrics acknowledge the transcendent, he is quick to introduce the conscious, mediating role of human agency so as not to depict a helpless humanity in a naturalistic state. Drawing on a romantic African past in *International Thief Thief (ITT)*, he concludes that the current status of the underprivileged class is alterable provided he is ready to fight International Finance Capital: “We must fight dem (transnationals such as ITT) well well”. Shortly before this, in *Original Suffer Head*, he cautions: “Before we all are to jefa head o, we must be ready to fight for am o sufferhead must stop.”

Before we can attain a life of comfort
We must be prepared to fight for it
The status of being the victim must stop

Coupled with this, he evolved a choreographic idea that sought to interpret the ideological underpinnings of his song texts. This theme is given full treatment in Chapter Four.

And once Afrobeat took a definable character, it created the basis for experimentation by several other musicians. Many, including Roy Ayers, Lester Bowie, Manu Dibango, Hugh Masekela, Paul McCartney and Ginger Baker, had visited and jammed with Fela by the seventies and later cloned his form. Old precursors of the form with Fela such as Johnny Haastrop and Segun Bucknor, with a later convert like Blackman Hakeem Karim, continued to play in the background while a crop of younger Nigerian artists such as Femi Anikulapo-Kuti and his

brother Seun, Charly Boy Yinusa Akinbuosu, the masked Lagbaja (Bisade Ologunde), KunNiraN (Kunle Adeniran), Dele Ogunkoya, Dede Mabiaku, Amala, Bodun Ajayi, Bright Chimezie and Funso Ogundipe are introducing new forms.

While Gudrun Holck, in Denmark, Dele Sosinmi's "Gbedu Resurrection," in Britain, Dele Ogungbe's "The African Connection" and Tony Allen's "Afrobeat Revenge" in France are extending the frontiers of the form, Salif Keita of Mali and Youssouf N'dour of Senegal are also drawing on the inspiration of Afrobeat while giving it their respective local flavors.

Notes

1. See Olu Oguibe's "The Voice," an excerpt from the collection, *A Gathering Fear* (Yaba-Lagos: Kraft Books, 1992), p. 10.
2. From the poet's unpublished collection, "Whispers of the Dust."
3. Unlike in the recorded album, the word 'government' is occasionally substituted for 'Africa' in live performances.
4. See Philip Tagg: "Open Letter: 'Black Music', 'Afro-American Music' and 'European Music'" in *Popular Music, African Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. 8, no. 3, October, 1989), p. 290.
5. This view was expressed by Fela in a 1992 interview with the author.
6. Graeme Ewens in "The Highlife Zone," *A Celebration of African Music* (London: Guinness Publishing Ltd., 1980), p. 80.
7. See Sylvia Esi Kinni, "Africanisms in Music and Dance of the Americas," in Goldstein (ed.), *Black Life and Culture in the United States* (New York: Crowell and Sons, 1971), p. 55.
8. Graeme Ewens, *A Celebration*, p. 80.

9. In a similar vein, Abiola Irele notes of a tendency in literary criticism to define Africa's creative process mainly in relation to a presumed European corpus against which it must be measured. See his introduction to *Aime Cesaire Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1994), p. xiii.
10. Samuel Ekpe Akpabot in *Foundation of Nigerian Traditional Music* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1986), preface.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
12. Akin Euba suggests that Ayan may be regarded as the ultimate ancestor of all drummers. See *Essays on Music in Africa* (Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1988), p. 7.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.
15. Cited from *The Oxford Companion to Music* by Michael J. C. Echeruo, in *Victorian Lagos: Aspects of Nineteenth Century Lagos Life* (London: Macmillan, 1977).
16. This charge was made by Rev. J. Vernal in *Church Intelligence and Record* of January 1889.
17. See Echeruo *Aspects of Nineteenth Century Lagos Life* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 68.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
19. Michael J. C. Echeruo in "Concert and Theatre in Late Nineteenth Century Lagos." See *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 74 of September 1962.
20. *Ibid.*
21. See John Collins and Paul Richards, "Popular Music in West Africa: Suggestions for an Interpretative Framework," in David Horn and Philip Tagg (ed.) *Popular Music Perspective* (Sweden: The International Association of the Study of Popular Music, 1982), p. 122.
22. Fela is quite conscious of this cross-cultural borrowing, and he informed me that his inspiration derives primarily from traditional music. Once, I pressed for specificity and

he replied, saying: "Everyone (of the traditional musicians) has got something to say" Tunji Oyelana also confirmed that he had on occasions been invited to the Shrine by Fela for some interaction on folk forms in which Oyelana specializes; this was corroborated by band members. The *Gbagado Gbogodo* series is a product of such interaction.

23. See Tam Fiofori's article, "Afrobeat: Nigeria's Gift to World Popular Music (1)" in *The Post Express*, August 16, 1997.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Tam Fiofori identifies the three-membranophone drum as a pivotal instrument also in Ijaw masquerade music.
27. Ibid.
28. See V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa : Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, and London: James Currey 1988), p.87.
29. Ibid., p. 4.
30. Ibid., p. 89.
31. Fela constantly alluded to these works in his numerous public lectures.
32. This is the general thrust of Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1965).
33. See section on "A Felasophy" in Chapter 2.
34. Cited in "Theatre in the Niger Valleys," *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts*, 1995, pp. center spread.
35. The Zikist movement was formed on February 16, 1946 and named after Nnamdi Azikiwe whose exemplary nationalism inspired the youth in the first place. The founding members were Dr. Kola Balogun (president), Chief MCK Ajuluchukwu (first secretary), Mokwugo

- Okoye, Abiodun Aloba, Nduka Eze, Habib Raji Abdallah, Oged Macaulay and Harry Nwanna. Source: "Anonymity of Martyrdom" by Kayode Komolafe, *Sunday Concord*, Sept. 27, 1998), p. 8.
36. See Wogu Ananaba in *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria* (London: C. Horst and Company 1969), p. vii.
 37. Richards A. Joseph in *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Ibadan and Cambridge: Spectrum Books and Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 1.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 40. This observation was made by Terisa Turner, in "Petroleum, Recession and the Internationalization of Class Struggle in Nigeria." *Labor, Capital and Society* 18(1): 1985.
 41. See Crawford, Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 219.
 42. Excerpts from the presidential address by Claude Ake to the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association in *West Africa*, May 25, 1981, pp. 162-3.
 43. Term used to describe urban unemployed youth, prone to forming gangs and extorting money as a way of 'coping' with city life.
 44. General referencing from Tunde Agboola's *Architecture of Fear* (Ibadan: IFRA/African Book Builders, 1997).
 45. See *Tell* magazine no 5, 1998.
 46. See details in *Tell* magazine, no. 6, February 5, 1996, and *The Guardian* of December 22, 1996.
 47. See Robert Smith in *Kingdoms of the Yorùbá* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 94.
 48. See Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina Emma in *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Lagos: Crucible Publishers, 1997), p. 6.
 49. See Tam Fiofori's "Afrobeat: Nigeria's Gift to World

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Music (2),” in the *Post Express* of August 17, 1997.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. This was Fela’s preferred name for his style of music after his rejection of the title “Afrobeat,”

53. See text of interview in Carlos Moore’s *Fela, Fela this bitch of a Life* (London: Allison and Bugsby, 1982), pp. 85-88.

54. Tam Fiofori (2).

55. Ibid.

56. The view was expressed in an interview with the musician Steve Rhodes in Lagos, November 1997.

57. This has been observed by the music scholar John Collins. See also, Michael Veal, “And After the Continentalist” (*Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts* vol. 2, no. 2, 1997), p. 048.

2

Bard of the Public Sphere



*Here, we walk the streets
where laughter is hidden in deep places
and stores cannot shut their doors
choked with hearts that bleed from gathered wounds
and you will see nothing can grow here, but agony. . .*

—OGAGA IFOWODO¹

The Afrobeat vision as espoused by Fela is largely scattered in his public lectures, media reviews of interviews he granted, his private correspondences, short articles in the few books that have devoted chapters to his life and art, and views expressed by the artist in his *YAPNEWS*, a newspaper of the Young African Pioneers (YAP) founded by Fela in the late seventies for the propagation of the anticipated African revolution. Such materials have either abridged or further expanded aspects of his outlook as expressed in the manifesto of the Movement of the People (MOP). While the manifesto is primarily designed for Nigeria, it is set in a tone that makes it a

replicable document for the entire African continent.

Tracking a Fela-Afrobeat vision, therefore, would include such views as expressed in the various media and the manifesto. Altogether, they engage a broad spectrum of ideas such as the African origin of (ancient) civilization; slavery and Western technology; religion and Òrìṣà worship; colonialism, multiple imperialism and collaborating elites; the notion of an African nation-state; and his version of "What is to be done?" Other more subtle concerns range from the nature of knowledge production and its dispersal, architecture, spirituality citizenship, economy and development, to traditional medicine and the use of marijuana, the environment, the judiciary and administration of justice, international relations and a myriad of other domestic issues. Fela's musical composition and political practice are, in the main, resonant of this ideological outlook, an outlook well thought-out—even if often provocative. Its most representative outline, here styled *Felasophy*,² I have found necessary to paraphrase in the first person, in consonance with Fela's general mode of delivery at his numerous public lectures.

A Felasophy

Africa is the origin of (ancient) civilization as the continent was in the forefront of the world's adventure, and the Black Pharaohs of ancient Egypt who built the pyramids and had obsession for the world of the dead contributed to the advancement of material civilization, besides teaching the Greeks several things which they would otherwise not have known. It is a misnomer, therefore, to credit 'Greek Philosophy' with inventions that originally emanated from Africa. Since about 4,100 B.C.—the period of the first Solar Calendar ever made by man—through the beginnings of the Great Pyramid Age (built during the reign of Pharaoh Djoser about the

Third Dynasty), the building of the Grand Lodge, whose oblong shape is based upon Masonic principles and is presently copied by all secret societies, mosques and churches, and the circumnavigation of the entire continent by Hanno—a native of Khart-Haddas (Carthage)—in 600 B.C., prior to Vasco da Gama's sail, Africa continued to contribute to world knowledge in science and the arts—long before the plunder of the continent by Alexander II (The Great) in 332 B.C. It was only with the occupation of the eastern limits of North Africa that Caucasian incursion into the continent took place, making possible the theft and pillage of invaluable documents—especially that of the Grand Lodge of Luxor (Thebes)—by Greek authors—including Mr. Aristotle—who are on record to have also partaken in this debauchery.

The similarity in cultural survivals in the language such as naming, belief system and the mode of worship of archaic religions developed in the Nile valley during this period attest to the truism of a once ebullient black culture in this part prior to its dispersal. The whole of the African continent was once Bilad al Sudan (The land of the Blacks), and not just the southern region to which Africans have been subsequently pushed from the north by Arabs. This is the continent's connection to the sun as what the Black man benefits from the ultraviolet rays of the sun is manifold. No wonder the African is so full of rhythm. The rhythm of the sun's rays is responsible for the vitality in movement of the rhythmic African. The Asiatic and Arab people who now occupy parts of North and East Africa are no more native to the African land than are the Dutch and British who likewise occupy and control the southern regions of the continent.

The background to many African religions derives from the ancient Black Egyptian Mysteries Order which regarded the human body as a prison house of the soul that can be liberated from its physical stricture through the disciplines of the Arts and Sciences, and a man can indeed transform from his mortal

features to become a deity and god, as contained in the notion and ethical concept of the *Summun Bonum* or the greatest good, to which all of humanity must aspire. Black Africa's notion of one Supreme God, creator of the universe, predates that of the Jews by several thousands of years before Abraham; the role of the numerous sub-deities on whom Western writers dwell in relation to Africa is precisely the same as those of Patron Saints in the Christian world. Religion, however, is a personal experience, a thing of the soul.

The connection to the Mysteries can be seen even in the survivals of our languages which harbor, as in Yorùbá, notions, concepts, and names of deities of ancient Egypt such as Amon, Osiris, Thoth, Anu, Ra and the four elemental deities among others. Ra, for instance, survives now only in name because the majority of the Yorùbá no longer worship the sun god as a result of the impact of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, though the words *Ìrāwò*, *Rárá*, preserve the idea. The literal meaning of *Ìrāwò*, a star, is that which appears when the Ra (the sun) has wò (set). Also, the Yorùbá expression *Rárá*, "Not at all," or "No-no" is probably an old way of swearing by the sun God—Ra. The word *Amon* exists in the Yorùbá language with the same meaning as it had in the language of the ancient Egyptians; which suggests that the Yorùbá words *Mó*, *Mímó*, meaning purity, holy and sacred are derived from the god's name. Thoth—the Egyptian god of truth and righteousness—may also be seen to have been replicated in the Yorùbá word for truth, though with a slightly different spelling accounted for by the time interval. *Tì-ò-tí-tó* in Yorùbá means—that which belongs to *Ò-tí-tó* (truth) (Thoth?). The last syllable—*tó*, also means "right," and "fairness" in Yorùbá. Does this not therefore explain the strongly held belief of many Yorùbá that they had descended from the parts around the Nile valley? This idea can also be related to the field of plastic arts, especially of those works found in the Ife-Benin axis,

Besides the evidence of some African root words found in Greek and Roman languages; they all point to the interaction, albeit devious interaction, those cultures had with us. For us as Africans, the point therefore is to relate this to the Black experience in order to forge a binding unity and transform our situation so that the Black man must not carry shit again.

The human person is enhanced in traditional African religion, unlike Christianity and Islam which find scriptural justification for keeping fellow humans in bondage. Otherwise, how do you explain the religious justification that since Africans were 'heathens' and kaffirs they could be confined to bondage and slavery, a justification which is even coded in Genesis 9:25: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant shall he be unto his brethren." And these are supposed to be Black people? Bishop Berkeley put the same idea into philosophical language when he said: "Negroes are creatures of another species who had no right to be admitted or included in the sacrament." And, yet, the Nigerian State commits enormous resources to financing pilgrimages to the holy places of these religions, when countless siblings of the pilgrims themselves lack basic health care and good education. If I had my way, I would withdraw government subvention to these pilgrimages.

I am very clear in my mind that it was the transatlantic slave trade that created the basis for the Euro-American industrial revolutions and, along with colonialism, caused the greatest assault on the psyche of the African personality. Not even my own family could escape from the brainwashing that accompanied this experience, such that my grandfather had to add "Ransome" to his name and became Reverend J.J. Ransome-Kuti; this is the source of those slave names you get all over our West Coast. Brothers and sisters, I tell you something today, colonialism committed a type of genocide in Africa that was not equaled by the crime committed by Adolf Hitler and his fellow Nazis. The colonialists gave the phrase "punitive expe-

ditions" to their raids because they wanted to make sure that there was no legacy for our people to see that we are not the "Barbarians" that they claimed us to be, and on which they rested their argument in order to attack us.

Having reflected on this African past, I have come to the conclusion that we need grassroots unity because the change of guard at independence has only replaced white oppressors with black ones, which explains why institutions without political mandate, such as the African military, cannot see the anomaly of their being in government. Besides collaborating with foreign powers, neo-colonial and reactionary African puppets carry out genocide against their people indiscriminately. Between the months of April and May 1978, the combined forces of the Nigerian Police and Army opened fire on demonstrating Nigerian students killing more than nine of them.³ Is this not worse than the carnage visited on Africans by the likes of John Vorster of South Africa and Ian Smith of Zimbabwe? And yet the Nigerian Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, under whom this sordid situation occurred, is a Black man; brothers and sisters, this is why I say there is also a class thing to this wuru-wuru⁴ business. Until these neo-colonial agents are defeated, it will be impossible to embark on any fundamental type of knowledge production whereby Africa can devise a syllabus that would relate black civilization to art, philosophy, literature, African language and pedagogy, including religion, history, science and technology, and the mass media.

Although Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Mao Tse Tung were great leaders of their people, and some of their thoughts useful for the rest of humanity, their perspectives nonetheless remain foreign ideologies in specific instances. Nkrumahism, an African socialist system, is what I would rather recommend for Africa because it is authentic for us, and it involves a system where the merits of a man would not depend on his ethnic background. All borders and boundaries

fettering the union of African peoples ought to be abolished. There is the need for the introduction of the use of indigenous languages or mother tongues as the medium of instruction in our society since it is the starting point of the revolution, such that in our courts of law an accused person may have the opportunity of understanding the judicial process. Community courts need to be set up in order to administer petty complaints so as to reduce remanding citizens in detention for long periods without access to justice. An administration of justice that would be corrective rather than punitive should also be devised. If prisons must be built, then they should be such that would be psychologically curative. In this regard, I find the British social security scheme a humanizing experience for its citizens, and since this logic is at the root of African humanism, the African revolution must reintroduce this gesture, which has always existed in the African system.

Partly because the media in Africa were introduced as instruments of perpetuating colonial rule, they have performed poorly. Forms such as proverb, ritual and story can be incorporated in the communication process in order to achieve meaningful development. An African film center should be created to further enrich the communication experience; the camera should narrate stories in the true tradition of the African style of narration.

In line with the agricultural principle of Nkrumahism, which sought to mobilize all farmers into an agricultural revolution, when the revolution comes, an agricultural commission made up of nutrition, ecology and economic experts would be set up to study the prevailing climatic condition and how it can affect production. There would be farm settlements and loans would be disbursed to private farm settlers.

Our sense of industrialization should not however be tailored along the Western experience, which has brought about a progressive loss of respect for life, for nature, for the environ-

ment they live in. Indeed, what we need is not technology but 'naturology.' We should have bricklayers and carpenters guilds who, in their construction, will take our climatic and geological conditions into consideration. Someday, the so-called industrialized world will become totally uninhabitable as a result of the violation of their environment. An example of the potential of indigenous African industry can be seen in the type of soap produced by our mothers, which is superior to foreign soap since the 'black' soap does not contain caustic soda, and it is pure and natural; this is what I use, which explains why my skin is fresh.

It is conducive to the spirit of national development to organize a real and concrete defense program that will mobilize all able-bodied youth into the people's militia, a strategy that will demystify the lordship and elitism of the military. This is not new in the continent as pre-colonial history teaches us of the Amazons, the women's army of the Dahomey Kingdom.

The economy will be based on solely government-owned industries, private ownership directed by government economic and industrial policies, and co-operatives. The system of international capital controlled by the International Monetary Fund does not serve the interest of the African, much less the Nigerian. Efforts will be geared to creating an African monetary system in an economy that will not be controlled by capitalists or the bureaucratic elite.

Research into traditional medicine will be encouraged and subsidies will be provided for the development and building of herbal clinics with the collaboration of ideologically oriented doctors of African descent. Besides, the population will be encouraged to patronize the products of such research, which is the basis of any cultural revolution. Medical students will be encouraged to take a special course in genuine and valuable traditional medicine outside the walls of the university. Neighboring African countries shall be invited to share their knowl-

edge in traditional medicine with Nigerian herbalists' unions.

We must develop our museums in a way that conveys the mood of an Afrika Shrine where the treasures of the ancestors can be better understood. Museums should not be seen merely as tourist centers as they convey different moments and time of the African existence. Time is a complex thing. Time is the importance of the moment. Death is an aspect of time. Time is not straight and linear. The death of a human is a transition into the supernatural, spirit realm; it is not time ended. As humans we are made of diverse energies of which, quite often, we are not conscious.

We also relate to other energies which may be living or inert. The world above us is made of spirits, with a hierarchy of spirits in which a head spirit is preeminent. In the material world, women may serve as sisters, wives, and mothers pursuing different careers. Women who are capable of leadership shall be given such responsible positions in government as would allow them to use to the maximum all their skills and potentials. However, the man still remains the head of the family. In the spirit world, women are àjé. The Àjé whose physical manifestation could be womanhood is a spirit being with potentially positive and/or negative energies. As in the drama of life, the conflict that propels this force is both negative and positive—the negative symbolized by the black àjé, and the positive symbolized by the white àjé. The òyè rules us, rules the world, even when men assume that they have the edge. My mother is àjé, and so are all our sisters and wives.

Africa is the center of the world and the African space straddles everywhere in which Africans and peoples of African descent live. Africans in the Diaspora are every inch African, hence the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U) must reserve some space for these Africans to partake in the activities of the body

The bulk of this paraphrase comes from Fela's recorded public lectures on the generic theme of "Essence of Culture in

Development," delivered in several public institutions in Nigeria.⁵ Besides this, the MOP document and other views on an imagined African continent expressed in the diverse media are always couched in a tone of agitation. The concluding paragraph of the MOP document, for instance, rings a tone reminiscent of the Communist Manifesto. Inter-alia it reads:

Such is the battle of MOP
So is the ideology
And this is the beginning of the struggle
For our SECOND INDEPENDENCE
We must WIN
We dare not, we must not
We cannot
Fail or Falter
(Emphasis, Fela's)

Song Text as Social History

It is against the background of this ideological outlook, and developments in the aftermath of independence, that we can properly locate Fela's musicianship and cultural practice. Way back in the constitutional conference that preceded Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960, two radical politicians—Mallam Aminu Kano and Chief Bello Ijumu—canvassed for and succeeded in ensuring the inclusion of a human rights clause in the constitution, though a basic feature of governance in Nigeria four decades later remains executive excess and the emasculation of the judiciary and the rule of law. The military has held the reins for two-thirds of the entire period of nationhood and yet not less than five coup d'états and seven other unsuccessful bids (excluding phantom charges) have been recorded in this intra elite in-fighting to control state power.

In the interval, there appears to have been a reversal of the patron-client relationship such that, unlike in the first two decades when the politician played patron, this role was effectively usurped by the military from the mid-eighties, although the slide had begun from the first coup of 1966. Jürgen Habermas's notion of the dynamics of the 'public sphere' quite candidly describes the Nigerian experience under the military, especially in relation to the distinction he makes between citizens' right to public discourse without being subject to coercion, and the coercive power of the state as the counterpart, that is, a negation of the political public sphere as such.⁶ And having stayed long enough to generate its own version of primitive accumulation, the military had discovered the need for power independent of the national *public sphere* in an environment where the disbursement of resources was totally centralized.

Meanwhile, the military threw overboard federalism as a character of the national constitution, imposed a unitarist state (*de facto*), and paved the way for subsequent central governments to decimate opposition and pressure groups including trade unions, the students' movement, professional bodies and opposition parties. Thenceforth, the human rights situation regressed as the political *public sphere* shrank. Evidence of military pressure on the *public sphere* could be seen as wanton violation of rights through arbitrary arrest and detention, detention without trial, torture, indiscriminate killing, abduction and kidnapping, military attack, fanning of ethnic and religious embers, and general brutality against the public psyche became commonplace. The language of hegemonic discourse was further entrenched through the sole control of the electronic media by the state, and even when, by the mid-nineties, licenses were approved for private broadcast, allocation was largely to perceived client figures under a very strict regime of censorship.

It was precisely in this atmosphere of sonic censorship that Fela emerged with his Afrobeat form, first as a reformer and

later as a totally counter-hegemonic activist artist. Fela's journey to the latter position took the sort of Bakhtinian 'seeker's passage' or, more contextually, what Frantz Fanon has described as the 'three stages of the native intellectual.' Fela tangibly conforms to this broad and often overlapping schema in which the native intellectual starts off, first, with a blind embrace of the values and ethos of the colonial Center—usually after a dose of its education; second, with an utter rejection of colonial legacy and a romantic retreat into a 'native' cocoon, a swing informed by a harsh realization of otherness; and, third, a more critical reappraisal of ideological imperatives, in which instance one, as in Fela's case, is led to the identification of the indigenous elite as a significant collaborator in undermining genuine development on the continent.

Describing the crucial intermediate phase, Fanon says, "In order to ensure his salvation and to ensure escape from the supremacy of the white man's culture, the native feels the need to turn backward toward his unknown roots."⁷ Michael Veal is quite apt in identifying, as part of the first phase, that era in which Fela was working in the self-conscious "high-modernist modes of Afro-American jazz music,"⁸ especially after his London, Koola Lobitos student days. Right after this era, Pan-Africanism became Fela's leitmotif all through till the end; what however distinguished the third phase from the second is the tinge of class character that he brought to bear on the latter Pan-Africanism. The second phase was characterized with songs like *Keep Nigeria One*, *Black Man's Cry*, and *Buy Africa* which celebrate black aesthetics in the ambience of a supraclass African setting, one in which the interests of both the indigenous political elite and the marginalized sectors of society find a point of convergence. By the time he started waxing *Zombie*, *Alagbon Close*, *IIT*, and *Sorrow Tears and Blood*, which lampoon military and other authoritarian hegemonies in contemporary Africa, it was clear that he had finally

unmasked the bogey of the ideological unanimity of contending classes.

Opinions have been quite diverse as to whether Fela is a contemporary offshoot of the pre-modern style or a postmodern performer. Though an artist resident in the so-called developing world can integrate into the maelstrom of technological postmodernism, Fela constantly resisted this incorporation insofar as it portended to define the center as the source of a 'mainstream corpus' against which his own practice was going to be measured. After *Army Arrangement* was waxed with electronically simulated drumming while Fela was away in prison in 1985, he subsequently expressed displeasure with such 'innovation,' preferring his more rustic drum beat and generally 'unaffected' style.

This is, however, not to suggest that his position is not at times tenuous. For instance, the focus of his lyrics constantly decried those forces constraining the liberation of a modern, African cultural energy but, then, he posits an alternative outlook that shudders at the prospect of the consequent dismembering of traditional society that would emerge from such a transaction. In this sense, his vision embodies the ambiguity and dream of an imagined pre-modern and post-revolutionary Africa, a feature which Michael Veal identifies as "a timeless vision of African utopia."⁹ It is this element of wishing into being and constructing into textual discourse that Benedict Anderson dwells upon in the *Imagined Communities* when he noted that:

all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.¹⁰

Is this apparent contradiction of Fela's utopia, then, not a concrete factor of everyday lived experience? That we are constantly deconstructing and reconstructing our potentially multiple identities into being? And that every act of construction is simultaneously an act of deconstruction of an Other and vice versa? Perhaps, then, Fela's conscious attitude was to simply buttress his own preferred mythology

The often veiled setting of Fela's narrative space is urban West Africa, even when Lagos serves as a symbol for both the subregion and the entire African continent. The prevalent interest of his lyrics are those often-contrasting situations of power relations between the *big Oga* and the marginal *my people*. In between these two extremes are to be found diverse modes of coping, of acquiescence or, on the other hand, of resistance modes with a large repertoire of subcultural linguistic codes. The vehicle for the transmission of Fela's alternative message was often indirect in the early stage, but later became direct, akin to the discursive modes James Scott describes as the 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts. The 'public' transcript pertains to the nature of contesting power relations, which is resolved in favor of the status quo, while the 'hidden' transcript relates to forms of resistance to dominance in more subtle and oblique ways such as in gesture, joke, humor, and parody—which "insinuate a critique of power."¹¹

Song lyrics that formed part of this early phase include *Water No Get Enemy*, *Alu Jon Jon Ki Jon*, and *When Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am* (better known by its chorus line, "Palava"), and the vehicle of the narrative transmission is undoubtedly in the hidden transcript. A common denominator that runs through them all is the proverbial form of their rendition. To the ear unfamiliar with Afrobeat, these may appear like a quaint rehash of a familiar traditional form, but even when they relate to myth as with *Alu Jon*, for instance, the metaphor is actually in reference to the present, reflecting on man and his

practice in the universe. Here is a narrative of how in an era of famine all animals agreed to devour their parents, but the dog in his or her wisdom did not, as s/he hid mother dog in the spheres, an act of foresight that pays off when the mother decides to send down foodstuff to assuage the hunger of the times. It is a most decentered narrative depending on who is doing the telling, but here the construction is a morality-driven tale that emphasizes the need for forbearance and the will to seek fundamental social solutions rather than a rash and unreflecting one. Highlife music is replete with such disguised texts, and Kwesi Yankah notes this of Nana Kwame Ampadu's "Ebi Tè Yie" ("Some are favorably positioned") which was released during the military regime of the National Liberation Council. Yankah's transcription of the song text goes thus:

There was once a meeting of all animals to discuss the concerns of the animal world. All the animals were present, including Leopard and the orphan Antelope. It so happened that Leopard took a seat directly behind orphan Antelope and started mistreating him. He clawed Antelope's tail to the ground, making it impossible for him to actively participate in the discussion. No sooner would orphan Antelope begin to speak than Leopard would silence him, with the warning that the meeting was not meant for skinny creatures. The mistreatment went on until orphan Antelope could bear it no longer. He plucked up courage and made a loud plea to the presiding chairman, "Petition on the floor, point of order," he said. "Mr. chairman, secretary elders here assembled. I move for an immediate adjournment of the meeting, because some of us are not favorably positioned. Some are favorably positioned, others are not." As soon as the meeting saw through the words of the orphan Antelope, there was an immediate adjournment.¹²

Fela, however, had other less symbolist song lyrics within the same time frame, characterized by a ribald social commentary in such numbers as *Lady*, *Na Poi*, *Open and Close*, and *Wóman na Mattress*. Although these numbers do not constitute the overriding abiding aesthetic practice of the artist, the patriarchal views expressed in them represent the contradiction of a liberationist who encourages a retrograde image of the female gender, and thereby not only reduces the incentive for a healthy public sphere, but also demobilizes his own potential ideological allies. In one such track (*Lady*) the narrator objects to the self-confidence shown by the new African woman (*Lady*), who is seen as defying her traditional role set. Unlike *Lady* the valorized African woman

Know him man na master/ She go cook for am/ She
go do anything him say/ But *Lady* no be so...*Lady* na
master

*Acknowledges the man as her superior/She cooks for
him/Obliges his instructions/But this is unlike the Lady/
Who sees herself as a peer and an equal to the man*

It is the same sexist orientation that informs *Wóman na Mattress* which, as the title suggests, emphasizes a patriarchal gender construction of womanhood and makes no distinction between it and biological femininity. Latter song lyrics like *Akunakuna* attempt to transcend this early sexism, through a lyrical depiction and denunciation of violence visited on women by law enforcement agents (*trying to fuck women by force for road by night*); this though is still a reading based on the woman as a factor in class power relations and alliance. However, with *Open and Close* and *Na Poi*, the eroticism described is not necessarily sexist; rather, it is simply a description of basic sexuality and the discourse of which has been censored by successive puritanical

regimes in Nigeria. Fela consistently quarrels with an attitude in Nigerian public life that suggests that discussion of sex, sexual knowledge and emotional expressions of such dimensions of social life was taboo. And so, in the spirit of a no-holds-barred sonic, he is here saying: "Let's talk about sex/and all the good/all the bad that makes life," like the *Salt and Pepa* musicians! Invariably, therefore, sexual narrative often becomes a metaphor for contesting a circumscribed literary-artistic public sphere.

The theme of culture alienation preoccupies Fela's lyrical concern from *Yellow Fever*, through *Johnny Just Drop (JJD)*, *Gentleman*, *Colonial Mentality*, to *Upside Down*, and *Big Blind Country (BBC)*. The reconstruction of the African personality, distorted by a psychology of dependence through skin bleaching (in *Yellow Fever*), and the feigning of foreign cultural habits (in the other albums), constitutes the thrust of these albums. (*BBC* is yet to be waxed.) Implicit in these narratives is the suggestion that these "psychic vices"¹³ constitute a more subtle, though non-physical, coercive ideological assault on the African image. For the African who is persistent in altering his pigmentation, the point in *Yellow Fever* is driven home with sarcasm and derisive humor:

You go yellow pass yellow
you go get moustache for face
You go get your double colour
Your yansh go black like coal

You will exceed your attempt at a lighter pigmentation
Your moustache will [arising from bleaching effect]
sprout all over the face
Your skin will show patches of different colors
Your buttocks will be as black as coal

To negate such a cultural dependence, Fela advocates the evolution of a grassroots and inclusive framework for genuine democracy. This is the literal subject of *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense*, where the artist focuses on the inability of the national elite to define a common understanding, as basic as an electoral principle, for its own self-perpetuation. Hence, democracy goes wild: "demoNcracy crazYdemo, demoNstration of craze." In spite of this bleak political atmosphere, he finds a position of resignation incompatible with his Afrobeat vision; hence, *Fear Not for Man*, *STB*, and *No Agreement* continue to stoke the ember of civil resistance against dominant powers.

By the mid-seventies, Fela began to critique general social decay and the characteristic license to freedom without obligation that African dictators bestow on their agents in order to brutalize the public psyche. The diverse instances of abuse of power are captured in *Customs Check Point*, *Alagbon Close*, *Authority Stealing* and *Confusion Break Bone (CBB)*. In reaction to the general lawlessness and urban violence that greeted the post-civil war years (starting from about 1971), the military government of General Yakubu Gowon promulgated a decree that carried a death penalty on convicted armed robbers. Fela denounced this move in his public lectures, pointing out that the instance of armed robbery was hardly the causal agency but the consequence of a crisis that had its roots in the deep structural inequality of society. He went ahead to wax *Confusion Break Bones*, thereby deconstructing government's perception that armed robbery was more inimical to society than the diverse ways by which elite treasury-looting are carried out. A narrative reclassification is carried out whereby three layers of robbery emerges in "Leg Robbery," "Arm Robbery" and "Head Robbery" and the personae insists:

Vocal: The first one na leg robbery
 Chorus: Leg robbery

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- Vocal: Where man go go pick pocket
Chorus: Leg robbery
Vocal: The man go start to take leg run
Chorus: Leg robbery
Vocal: The second one na arm robbery
Chorus: Arm robbery
Vocal: Where man go go steal big thing
Chorus: Arm robbery
Vocal: E go take gun defend himself
Chorus: Arm robbery
Vocal: The third one na Head robbery
Chorus: Head robbery
Vocal: Where oga pata-pata¹⁴ go go steal
Chorus: Head robbery
Vocal: E go take position steal all free
Chorus: Head robbery
Vocal: Free stealing na him policy
Chorus: Head robbery
Vocal: Head robbery. Which head we get e never steal, which president we get e never steal before?

The mood and choice of registers used here is instructive. While in the first two instances of “Leg” and “arm” robbery he merely narrates, in the latter, there is an authorial intrusion—“Free stealing, na him policy ... which head/president we get e never steal?”—as a means of contesting the source of social violence and identifying the political elite as culprit.

If *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense* intensifies the theme of non-physical, ideological tool of coercion by identifying the school system as an outpost for mind-conditioning, albums such as *Coffin for Head of State*, *Sorrow Tears and Blood*, *Army Arrangement*, and *Zombie* name the African military as agents of domination and armies of occupation in their respective

countries. In *Overtake Don Overtake Overtake (ODOO)*, he cautions against the easy allure of naming whereby military institutions feed citizens with faddish and radical-sounding appellations. He cites examples from Libya—"Liberation Council," Liberia—"Redemption Council," and Zaire—"Revolutionary Council." Slogans notwithstanding, the consequence is "soldier go, soldier come." The lyrics are not really averse to the military institution as such, but the fact of the military becoming an elitist cult, and a law unto itself, without recourse to the civil society. Images of rape and social defilement are basic to his description of military violation of public space. He ponders in *Confusion Break Bones* :

why dem like to burn di things wey cost money
 government fit sell to people wey no get money
 government fit sell to people cheape, cheape
 but na di burn burn, na im dey sweet dem pass
why do they show preference for burning
expensive [seized] goods
government could sell same to low
income earners
government could auction same to citizens
but they [government] appear to derive joy in
burning

He is unable to reconcile himself with the sadistic impulse that drives the Nigerian military, in particular, to destroy wares and goods seized from traders (ostensibly for selling in non-designated areas), rather than turn such items over to charity or auction sale. He ponders on why it seems to revel in setting such products ablaze—*na di burn burn, na im dey sweet dem pass!* Fela posits in *International Thief Thief (ITT)*, however, that the military and other African governments are only fronts for transnational governments, describing their leadership as 'dis-

guising' in BONN.

Very much a poet of hope, as of rage, he consistently stresses the need for perseverance (on the part of the marginalized), in order to carry through the African revolution. Between *STB*, *No Agreement*, *Fear Not for Man*, and *Original Suffer Head*, he explores the delicate nuances and tribulations that would necessarily confront the activist in pursuit of social redemption. *STB* is a particularly deep introspection into those ever-present incentives for doubt in social activism; here, he narrates the sort of challenge faced by the average member of an African family who may get compromised by sheer obligation to kinship concerns:

My people self dey fear too much/We fear for di thing
we no see/We dey fear for di air around us/We fear to
fight for freedom/We fear to fight for liberty/We fear
to fight for justice/We fear to fight for happiness/We
always get reason to fear/We no want die/We no want
wound/We no want quench/We no want go
I get one child/Mama dey for house/Papa dey for
house/I want build house/I don build house/I no
want quench/I want enjoy/I no wan go/So, police-
man go slap your face you no go talk/Army man go
whip your vansh you go dey look like donkey/Dem
leave sorrow, tears and blood

*My people seem to be too afraid/ Afraid even of non-vi-
sible things/Fearful of the air around us/We fear to fight
for freedom/We fear to fight for liberty/We fear to fight
for justice/We fear to fight for happiness/Always devis-
ing reasons to be afraid/We don't want to lose our lives/
Not wanting to be injured/Not wanting to die/ Not
wanting to go (die)/Because: I've got an only child/My
mother is still alive/My father is still alive/I desire to*

build a house/I've just built a house/ I don't want to die/I wish to have some fun/I don't want to go (die)/As a result, you are unable to reply when the police slaps you/The soldier also whips you but you can only look on like a donkey/The aftermath: they leave sorrow, tears and blood ...

The collective social memory of the continent is occasionally tapped by the artist through retro tracks like *ODOO*, *Look and Laugh*, *Confusion Break Bones (CBB)*, and *Pansa Pansa* which review his earlier works. *ODOO* revisits *Follow Follow*, *Zombie*, *Shuffering and Shmiling*, and *Unknown Soldier*, as refreshing intertextual mnemonic device for highlighting shared struggles. The three albums narrate the anguish of a poet who is particularly pained by the personal and social toll the struggle has taken, and yet with victory not quite in sight.

Wetin I no sing?/About in dis country?/Sing-sing-sing/Till dey come/Burn burn my house/All my property/Burn burn dem/Beat beat me/Kill my mama/I must to looku and to lafu

What theme is it that my songs have not explored?/In this country?/Singing all along/ Until they came/And burnt my house/All my property/All burnt/Then they beat me up/And killed my mother/I can only watch and laugh

In spite of identifying as exceptions figures like Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Ahmed Ben Bella and Nelson Mandela, in *CBB* and *US*, the artist laments the absence of any ennobling mark recorded by Africa's ruling classes that is worthy of lyrical celebration. This situation seems to have consigned the artist with a social mission to a melancholic singer. It

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is with unmistakable pathos and almost self-doubt that the message is rendered in *CBB*:

Movement One:

My problem e no small at all
Nothing dey for me to sing about
If something good dey I go sing
Nothing good sef to sing about
Nothing good sef to sing
All di things wey dey e no dey good

Movement Two:

Vocal: If I sing say water no dey
Chorus: Na old news be dat
Vocal: If I sing say food no dey
Chorus: Na old news be dat
Vocal: I come sing say inflation
Chorus: Na old news be dat
Vocal: I come sing say Corruption
Chorus: Na old news be dat
Vocal: I come sing say mismanagement
Chorus: Na old news be dat
Vocal: I come sing say stealing by government
Chorus: Na old news be dat
Vocal: Di problem still dey paparapa

Movement One:

*Mine is an enormous problem
There is virtually nothing else for me to sing about
If there were such issues, I would readily sing
But there is really nothing to sing about
Nothing to sing about
All that there is does not suggest the positive*

Movement Two:

Vocal: If I sing about lack of water

Chorus: That would be an old news

Vocal: If I sing of lack of food

Chorus: That would be an old news

Vocal: Then try to sing of inflation

Chorus: That would be an old news

Vocal: Should I sing of corruption

Chorus: That would be an old news

Vocal: Then I sing of mismanagement

Chorus: That would be an old news

Vocal: Should I sing of theft by government

Chorus: That would be an old news

Vocal: The problem simply persists

There is something quite ominous about the tone of this, and especially the last retro tracks. As a case in point, immediately after the last review track—*Underground System*—Fela ceased to wax any other album till his death. (See discography.) It reads like a rare irony of an artist ‘writing’ his own epitaph, having gone full circle as the composition of this musical evangelist shows. It is also suggestive of an activist artist with a peculiar hunch for the limits of reform, believing, as he did, in the inevitability of social revolution, even if the arts would only aid the crystallization of that process. It waits to be seen if Nigeria, nay African nations, can transform themselves into a modern state without some degree of class and ethno-national upheaval as evinced by this poet of rage. Particularly on *Suffering and Smiling*, Knud Vilby a Danish writer, records Fela yabbing to the audience that, “Suffering has become a joke in Africa. In this society we have no values, no organisation and no objective. That is why we smile and suffer. Smile and Suffer But we will fight for a new society, fight to death. We, the

African pioneers, are going to change the society”¹⁵

The hidden transcript and symbolic refrain underlying the conclusion of *Shuffling and Smiling* is what his “I dey looku and lafu” is about in *Look and Laugh*; which is also a device explored in *Teacher*: “Why I dey laugh?/ Man no fit cry.” It actually derives from a Yorùbá dictum: *òròt’ó bá ju èkùn ló, èrín lááfín nrín*, implying that, “We laugh over an issue whose import is beyond sobbing.” Far from being mere cynicism, in its ultimate meaning, it is laughter both as elixir and as anticipation.

But the bard who must remain faithful to his art invariably gets in the way of entrenched interests. While succeeding Nigerian governments kept attacking Fela’s Afrobeat practice, the state paved the way for the popularization of other forms of music not considered threatening to the status quo. Whereas, for instance, “Juju portrays a traditional hierarchy mitigated by the generosity of the wealthy”¹⁶ Afrobeat contests that hierarchy and proposes the redistribution of social wealth. In the same vein, besides hostile governmental action, Afrobeat would soon encounter corporate intrigue from Decca, a recording label, over the radical song lyrics of Fela. Shortly after the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), Fela’s residence was razed to the ground on February 18, 1977 by an army detachment from the Abalti barracks, ostensibly for failing to release to the marauding soldiers a youngster who had fled into the sanctuary of Kalakuta Republic after a scuffle with these military personnel. This tension built up, and six months later, in a classic sonic censorship alliance between transnational (musical) corporate interest and the domestic comprador bourgeois class, Fela received a letter dated August 1 from Decca, complaining about certain aspects of his composition. Signed by one D.G. Bennett, manager for Decca (West Africa), it reads:

Our London Headquarters has advised us to get you to correct *STB/Colonial Mentality and Observation, Frustration of My Lady*, by removing the objectionable words. They will be happy to wax and release the two records if words like "POLICE BEATING A WOMAN AND SOLDIERS ASSAULTING PEOPLE, and A JUDGE WEARING WIG AND GOWN AND SENTENCING HIS BROTHERS TO JAIL" are removed from *STB*."¹⁷

Fela objected, went ahead and released the album, and thus signaled the birth of his own label—Kalakuta Records—with *STB* and *Colonial Mentality* as its first vinyl (LP Kalakuta KK001-A). There were, however, other forms of radical music censorship, more veiled but equally as pervasive in the course of Fela's musical advocacy. There were instances of hurriedly cancelled contracts by agents who got pressured to limit public space for the expression of Afrobeat performance; there were other times of bare-faced rognish occupation of outdoor venues of performance, or the boarding up of the Afrika Shrine by government agents even in defiance of court orders. Rather than be cowed, Fela would retort in his traditional sarcasm: "How can a government claiming to reduce unemployment be depriving a community of artists its legitimate means of income?"

Hostile Cities, Inhospitable Streets

A recent publication by the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) on the state of the African city may have as well adapted Lagos as its generic reference when it noted:

The city is losing its public spaces and community areas; fortress-like private urban development is spreading, accentuating the social spatial and temporal segregation that already exists.¹⁸

Noting that in the area of crime Lagos exceeded the national average of cases reported to the police, the writer adds:

The population of Lagos grew from 266,406 in 1953 to 665,246 in 1963; and the estimated population of greater Lagos rose from 1.14 million in 1963 to 3.55 million in 1976 and 5.69 million in 1991 respectively.¹⁹

With the increasing crisis of urban growth in the continent, it is hardly surprising that a UNESCO study, cited by Jinmi Adisa in the same volume, puts the number of street children and youth in Lagos at about 10,000, a not too dissimilar figure in many other African cities such as Nairobi which, in 1992, had 5,000 street children, and had by 1995 jumped to 40,000! Enugu, Owerri, Kano, Kaduna and Ibadan are a few other cities in Nigeria with a poor record of urban management and healthy space for displaced youth.

The situation has been complicated by the fact that the post-civil war army in Nigeria has 'taken advantage of its professional training by using violent means to grab political power,'²⁰ installing renegade factions of the civil political class, extorting the civilian population and creating a general atmosphere of fear and terror, particularly in the cities. Hampered by political considerations, the criminal justice system can hardly intervene on behalf of a hapless population, and as Adisa puts it, giving that legal aid is expensive, "The criminal justice system...offers little succor to the poor."²¹

The centrality of Lagos in this scheme derives both from the fact of its developed working class and protest tradition

that dates back to late nineteenth century and also the fact of its being Fela's site of practice. According to Makinwa Adebunsoye, "by the early 1970s it was estimated that metropolitan Lagos had 38 percent of all the industrial establishments in Nigeria, offered 45 percent of all industrial employment and produced over 50 percent of total industrial output."²² Being home to early militants like Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Michael Imuodu and Mokugo Okoye, from across the country there could hardly be any more suitable setting for a political evangelical music such as Fela's.

The Lagos of the seventies reflected the height of the oil boom opulence, and the decadence witnessed in the next decade was occasioned largely through persistent mismanagement by a combination of a military and bureaucratic elite. Then the capital city of Nigeria, both government officials and members of the elite class displayed such conspicuous consumption (particularly between the regimes of General Yakubu Gowon, 1966-1975 and Alhaji Shehu Shagari, 1979-83) such as citizens had hardly ever imagined up till then. Chauffeurs of government officials blew sirens past traffic hold-ups, ignored the traffic lights (when they ever worked), and government Mercedes convoys sped past in utter disregard of speed limit. The elite solution to the chaotic traffic situation was always ad-hoc. Once, an army colonel named Paul Tarfa became a household name and a scarecrow for erring kids in Lagos, in his fire brigade bid to sanitize the city's incessant traffic jam. For months on end, along with his cohorts, he would wield horsewhips in the middle of traffic and whip the population silly as a "means of resolving the perennial Lagos traffic problem."

Shortly after his residence was burnt, Fela waxed *Unknown Soldierz*, bringing into focus this general injustice and the urban traffic situation. Deploying a familiar distance of the third-person narrator, the lyrics query the legitimacy of such military assault, asking:

Wetin dis Fela do?
Dis government e bad o
Fela talk about soldier
Wasting money for Festac
Fela talk about soldier
Flogging civilians for street

What has this Fela done?
This government is bad
Fela talks about the military government
Mismanaging funds for Festac ²³
Fela talks about the military government
Flogging civilians in the street

It is however in *CBB* that the most graphic illustration of urban traffic chaos is given, not just as a literal event but also as emblematic of an elite that has lost initiative in shaping an enduring national perspective.

Motor dey come from east
Motor dey come from west
Motor dey come from north
Motor dey come from south
And policeman no dey for centre
Na confusion be dat o o

Since then, none of the subsequent regimes has achieved a measure of planning for the city and, whatever his assumptions, by the time General Ibrahim Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), with the dependent nature of the state and official corruption at its peak, all that was left of the city's industrial production base had disappeared. In this grim atmosphere, Fela had reacted to the acronym S-A-P as "Suck African People."

The city has always preoccupied Fela's aesthetic imagination, and he found in urbanity an apt metaphor for the decentering of texts. For him, in this sense, the urban serves as the impulse for the transposition of aesthetic folk forms which he reconfigures into the context of city life. Themes impelled by the city and themes on the city abound in these albums: *Bonfo*, *Abiara*, *Shakara*, *Lady*, *Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am (Palava)*, *Go Slow*, *Alagbon Close*, *Monday Morning in Lagos*, *Upside Down*, *Johnny Just Drop*, *Yellow Fever*, and *Zombie*.

Poets and other artists have always engaged the city once it emerged as a melting pot of various cultural topographies, with a good number of literary city forms emerging as a product of the human imagination: the heavenly city, the kingdom of the dead, the city of God, the city of man, the city of the plains ... attracting to itself presumably opposed images of the 'sacred' and the 'secular'.²⁴ Fela is not alone in equating the city to a negation of sublime spirituality. Stephen Spender had earlier noted that "... ever since the industrial revolution, the poets, instead of regarding the cities as centers of civilization, have regarded them as destructive of the conditions of which the supreme achievements of poetry in the past were created."²⁵

Whereas other romantics generally withdrew from the city—Wordsworth and Coleridge—into the English countryside; Blake—into mysticism; or Byron and Shelley into their individual interiority; in Fela's case, he simultaneously adored the rustic while also confronting a skewed urban space with its own very registers. In this, he was spiritually in consonance with Niyi Osundare and Okot P'Bitek, two major African poets whose verses betray a suspicion of the city's ultimate intentions. He expressed the language of the new experience in a manner that romantics of the last century like Tennyson, Browning and Mathew Arnold did.

Almost invariably, the poet engaging the city with this

Bard of the Public Sphere

sense of nostalgia becomes messianic. He aligns with the proletariat and champions their cause—which is precisely where the motif of proletarian-hero-as-victim in Fela's works derives. The proletarian is always,

going him way
the jeje way
before,
somebody come bring
original trouble.²⁶

*Going his way
minding his space
until,
some meddlesome bloke
aggressively challenges him to a duel*

Hardly making a distinction between the working class and the urban poor, we find his lyrical advocacy fusing the disparate concerns of the marginalized. Narrating the trivia that the disposable income of an average worker has come to, a situation that frustrates his every attempt to purchase a fan in the tropics, he concludes that *enjoyment can never come in way/ in Africa him father land*. There are other moments of aptly captured but disturbing images of the urban poor such as the anecdote of the emaciated worker who is wondering at the event of an earth tremor, unaware that the only tremor that there is, is his weak and trembling legs that are no longer able to support him. The narrator calls his attention to the ailment:

Looku you
No be ground dey shake
Na your leg dey shake
Looku you

*Mind you
There is no earth tremor
It is your legs that are trembling*

Much akin to Maxim Gorki's treatment of the city, particularly in *The Lower Depths*, Fela engages the urban space in a manner that brings to the fore its inhabitants not as peripheral, shadowy figures but as victims of its alienation who, however, are bent on repositioning themselves to alter their states. Generally, his character type, even if a victim, is an unyielding and an interrogating subject, singing along with him—*No agreement today/ No agreement tomorrow/ Now/ Later/ Never and Ever*²⁷

According to Fela, the city, as presently designed, suffocates—not just physically but also psychologically. In *ODOO*, he critiques the all-pervasive presence of the military in national life as psychological aggression meant to breed acquiescence by its sheer blackmail of dominance. This concept is expanded in *Go Slow* where individual and collective space is denied, arising from chaotic urban planning that has left in its wake an unbearable environment both for living and reflection:

Lorry dey for your front
Tipper dey for your back
Motorcycle dey for your right
Helicopter dey fly fly for your top o
You sef don dey for cell

*There is a lorry ahead of you
There is a truck behind you
A helicopter is hovering over your head
You are already entrapped in a cell*

Dictators also become victims of the state of siege they unleash

Bard of the Public Sphere

on society (by becoming prisoners of their own creation), as happens in the president's entourage described in *MOP*:

One police go follow am
Hundred police go follow am
Riot police go follow am

One police follows him
A hundred police will follow him
Riot police will follow him

The theme is further intensified in *Akunakuna*,

... he must get dispatch rider at any time
Bazooka go drop for front at any time
Long range tank must dey for back at any time

he must constantly be escorted by an outrider
(because) a bazooka can suddenly be dropped ahead
A long range tank must always be behind (the
entourage)

The city, in other words, imprisons and, for him, imprisonment is not merely a physical expression but "every condition of the leash."²⁸

Much later, the artist's persistence in reinventing an urban lore and creating alternative mores, deploying a language of resistance and contesting official 'truth' came to rub on the younger generation of Afrobeat musicians—a theme which is fully explored in the concluding chapter. Given the pan-generic nature of his creative enterprise, the cultural practice came to bear on the other arts too. Even though for centuries the continent's plastic and textile arts had always experimented with forms, the histrionics of his band, and his own peculiar cou-

ture, in animist and abstract lines, caught on particularly with Togolese and Beninise textile hawkers who could be seen displaying such models for sale on the city's several beaches. The *Glendora Review*, an "African Quarterly on the Arts, Vol. No. 2", has a cover design in the traditional Fela album mosaic. The Nigerian media, scholarly journals and literary works engage in a Fela referencing in the choice of headlines, titles and mythopoesis. A 1997 journal article in the mode of post-modernist theorizing by Pius Adesanmi in the Post Express Literary Supplement (PELS) had the same title as Fela's "Clear Road For Jaga-Jaga."

Perhaps the broad latitude of the PELS can be better understood by the fact that its editor, Nduka Otiono, stands out as a particularly experimental writer whose fiction and poetry keep straddling genre classification, and between his *Voices in the Rainbow* (poetry) and *The Night Hides with a Knife* (fiction), we find a very intimate intertextual engagement with Fela's art. In spite of the limitations imposed by calligraphic representation, *The Knife* qualifies as performance fiction in the same manner that *Voices* anticipates more than a contemplative read. Otiono's intimacy with Fela does not derive merely from the similarity of a thematic concern that ranges from urban chaos, social displacement to unemployment and military rule, but the ability to convey the narrated mood with complementary registers. These are registers, like Fela's, hewn from the public works department and the urban subculture. The prisoners' song in "Crossfire" illustrates the point:

Sin-ci norning, I never sumoku
God go punish -i warder²⁹

*Since morning, I haven't had a smoke
May God punish the warder*

All through the two collections, we are intermittently shocked by a staccato of rude registers in the writer's bid to riffle up, into public consciousness, those silenced discourses of the underprivileged. Hence, we find a libertine, even desultory register only appropriate to match the occasion, which may confound only if we fail to locate a Lord-of-Misrule festival setting already created. Nothing is sacrosanct in this festival such that Sandra's breast may hang "... firmly with the pointed arrogance of a teenager's,"³⁰ in the same manner that Fela's carnivalesque performance is punctuated with "ş'orído?" (have you seen the clitoris this way?)

The manipulation of diverse proximity of authorial distances aids Otiono's interventionist aesthetics. With the opening of "A Will to Survive": "Survival is a cruel battle of wits," coupled with the narrative technique of "Wings of Rebellion" (chapters in the fiction), we find social commentary distilled into the voice of a self-conscious narrator, very much in character with Fela's constant displacement of the third-person for a first-person personae who could equally be the author-artist, as we find in *Army Arrangement*:

Me Fela I challenge Obasanjo
I say na wayo e dey
all di time

*I, Fela—challenged Obasanjo*³¹
Saying he's been deceitful
all this while

Besides the fact that allusions are constantly made to Fela's lyrics by Otiono's characters, Fela is also incorporated into the narrative transaction, such that his tape is rolling in the background (as the story tells us), thereby serving as a narrative subtext meant to testify to a committed art. What invariably

emerges is a Felaesque narrative space, expansive and non-linear, where a rude narrative voice prances unhindered, declaiming and *yabbing*.

Conscious Caliban

The choice of a language of communication has always coincided with Fela's perception of who his primary audience is and, even here, we find convergence with the three broad Fanonian stages he underwent. He sang mainly in English in that phase of his high modernist mode of African-American jazz tradition with tracks like *My Baby Don't Love Me* and *Everyday I Got My Blues*; in Yorùbá, during the reactive ethno-nationalist phase (having experienced racism in the West); and pidgin, once Pan-Africanism became his main ideological focus, and the need to cultivate disciples to this creed.

His version of Pidgin English strove towards the Midwest variant spoken in the Saple-Warri areas of Delta State in Nigeria—generally regarded as the standard Nigerian Pidgin (henceforth NP). The convenience of this variant for other users of the form, in the vortex of a politically charged language situation like Nigeria's, cannot be divorced from its emergence among minority nationalities. Its cultural dominance over politically dominating larger language groups such as Igbo, Hausa and Yorùbá poly-nationalities is not new in history. A most ready example is the cultural incorporation of Fulfude by Hausa language in spite of the fact that Fulfude was the language of the conquering Fulani nationality after the 1804 jihad in northern Nigeria.

This is not to suggest, however, that the NP both at Kalakuta Republic and the Afrika Shrine does not hold promise for the inflection of many other variants in Nigeria and, particularly from Anglophone West Africa. On the contrary, research con-

ducted in the subregion reveals a symbiosis of loan words derived from those sources and the broadcast of registers of Fela's cultural practice in these countries. Constantly referencing Ghanaian folk forms in several lyrics, a country he considered his spiritual home, he sings entirely in Twi in the track *Fefe Na Eye Fe*. Phrases and terms used in *ITT* such as Ichibuzi (Tonga), Tiafi (Gaa), Sakarame (Ethiopia), Saluga (Hausa) and Unusi (Igbo), used to describe the traditional method of feces disposal in various parts of the continent, are only a few of the breadth of such borrowings.

This is hardly surprising for, apart from the role of the mass media in popularizing a deviant cultural practice (especially outside Nigeria), Kalakuta in its heyday was residence to "every African escaping persecution,"³² a truly micro Pan-African commune. An important factor that aids the normative role that NP plays in the commune is the existence of a creolized pidgin among the younger generation from the Midwest (mainly Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw) for whom pidgin is a first language, spoken as a primary language in a manner that pidgin is not among the numerical majority Yorùbá nationality in the Lagos area. I find the suggestions of Ben Elugbe and Augusta Omamor on the subject quite persuasive, both on the count that "Pidgin is decidedly a recent development in metropolitan Lagos" and the fact that "there was linguistic heterogeneity all along the coast, except for the Yorùbá part."³³

For a language that first emerged from contact established with trading and colonizing missions in the Niger Delta, and later transferred to the 'interior' Midwest, Fela's role in further broadcasting the language was preceded by first 'domesticating' it in Lagos, and transforming it (along with other composers) into a valid medium for serious musical composition. By using pidgin to contest the 'airspace' of the linguistic (English) code of officialdom, he gave prestige to it and helped in transforming it into a prominent language of the broadcast

medium. Being the official language of the commune, this status came to confer a privilege on the variant which others aspired toward as a means of gaining the social exclusivity and identity against official culture which the republic typifies. This is in many respects similar to the manner in which Rastafarians and other subcultural groups use language as an "effective means of resisting assimilation and preventing infiltration by members of the dominant groups."³⁴ While it is correct that pidgin has become a language used by all classes in the Nigerian society, as Elugbe and Omamor assert, it is indisputable that there is a higher dexterity of use, with a variety of coded decoys and hidden transcripts, among persons for whom it is the only medium of communication. This is more so for a community of artists constantly targeted by a repressive state. This dexterity is manifested at the various levels of Kalakuta speech act, ranging the lexical-conceptual structure of their tenses, morphological realization patterns in verb phrases and an increased syntactization in word order. Surely there are codes for identifying security agents, demobilizing enemies and generally 'surviving,' which I believe disclosing, will not only further endanger these habitués but also amount to an abuse of confidence generously granted a researcher.

The structural pattern of the more open transcript noticeable in the song lyrics conforms with the general usage of NP in a number of ways. Fela uses the repeated adjective qualifier to intensify meaning as in the lines "Na *so so* water for Africa," and "Good *good* things e go dey happen" of *Original Suffer Head* and *Pansa Pansa* respectively. Juxtaposed against the abundance of water so described, he says there is not a drop for citizens to drink. In *Alagbon Close*, he narrates the ordeal of the suspect against whom the police "... go bring dem dog to *bite bite* you." Not done, the police "... don butt my head with dem gun." In capturing this brutality against his person, Fela transforms a noun (butt, of a gun) into a verb, a process. The inter-

rogative clause "No be" in BONN anticipates an affirmation:

No be outside police dey?
No be outside soja dey?
No be outside court dem dey?
No be outside magistrate dey?
No be outside dem kill dem students?
No be outside all dis dey happen?

The affirmation is eventually given by the chorus: *Na craze world* (it is a crazy world), implying the extent to which the public sphere has been circumscribed in spite of the presumption of living in a free ("outside") world.

Like Victor Jara, the Chilean folk singer persecuted for his alternative vision, Fela is essentially a deconstructionist whose creative spiel is at its best when subverting standard norms and coinages. He stretches to the limit the centrifugal potential of language through his re-coinage of standard acronyms and words in order to subvert actual and perceived hegemonic constructs. During *Yabbis* sessions in the Shrine, in between the night's musical performance, he either heightens the trivial into a grotesque, laughable proportion, or deflates presumed formal categories such that they are relieved of their larger-than-life image and re-cloaked in their-ordinary human dimensions. In other words, he creates a burlesque scenario with which he demythologizes the dominant discourse of the ruling elite while at the same time empowering the margins. In a country where the military uniform is dreaded by citizens as a semiotic of power symbolized in the repressive state, Fela, in *Fear Not For Man*, emboldens the margin to deride it, reminding that:

Uniform na cloth
Na tailor dey sew am

*A (military) uniform is also made of normal threads
(And just as well) sewn by a tailor*

Playing his usual Hermes, he alters each of these standard acronyms into novel utterances:

VIP (Very Important Person)—VIP (*Wigabonds in Power*)

BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)—BBC (*Big Blind Country*)

BONN (West German city)—BONN (*Beast of No Nation*)

SAP (Structural Adjustment Program)—SAP (*Suck African People*)

US (United States of America)—US (*Underground System*)

COP (as in police)—COP (*Country of Pain*)

While he taints in the negative such references that appear to reinforce institutions or concepts of (authoritarian) power, he cloaks in positive registers others that pertain to his vision of African humanism; hence:

MASS (as in the political mass)—MASS (*Movement Against Second Slavery, and Music Against Second Slavery*)

MOP (as in cleaning up)—MOP (*Movement of the People*.)

These ribald practices inform the performance of *yabbis* at the Shrine, where Fela highlights otherness: that latent silence and potential alternative in every discourse. The linguistic potential for this has its background in his Yorùbá tonality, where any utterance beyond the phoneme can become victim of a tricky

polysemy Hence, *Àbùjá*, the nation's capital, differently pronounced in this game of playful distortion could become *Àbùjà*, a short cut.

In what must now appear like an irony, given that he died of an AIDS-related complication, Fela had said that the developing world was bound to contract AIDS once it started taking aid from the developed world. In another breath, he could not understand the whole fuss about the emergence of violent cults in Nigerian universities given that the institutions are structured along a 'Fa-Culty' system, which in Yorùbá will translate as 'invitation to cult.' Germany, he says, can hardly be blamed for the world wars of this century since the Yorùbá rendition of the name 'Jà-mà-ni', with a silent [i] initial position, means 'it is about war'. When officials of Motown, the American recording label arrived in Lagos to sign a contract with Fela, he suddenly gave an impossible condition that frustrated the business executives. Once they left, Fela explained to fans and acolytes at the Shrine that he reneged when he suddenly realized the Yorùbá etymology of 'Mo-ta-òùn' (Motown), which is, "I have pawned my voice!"

Between the 'Mass' and the 'Popular'

By describing Afrobeat as a popular music we may not necessarily be stating the obvious, because there has been a major confusion in clarifying such related but different terms like 'popular,' 'mass,' 'folk,' and 'people's' art. As a result of the ideological inflection assumed in the discourse of some of the forms, a watertight definition has become all the more difficult. Karin Barber had partially alluded to this in noting that "there is a vast domain of cultural production which cannot be classified as either 'traditional' or 'elite,' as 'oral' or 'literate,' as 'indigenous' or 'western' in inspiration, because it straddles

and dissolves these distinctions."³⁵

Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel attempt to distinguish between 'folk,' 'popular,' and 'mass' art. The identification of popular art as an interest of study, for them, is itself informed by the significant difference observable between the form and folk artistic production in the same way that written literature was predicated on oral literature. The main distinction they make between folk art and popular art is that, unlike the latter, folk art is a pre-industrial variant of popular art. Barber complements this view in identifying another level of difference in the fact that, generally, unlike in folk music proper, popular music is produced by professionals and they are mainly in the urban centers. With mass art, there is general agreement that it shares the modern medium of communication with the popular arts; unlike popular art, however, it is considered a product of mass mechanical reproduction besides being potentially politically reactionary as Theodore Adorno has argued.³⁶ To further clarify the popular art debate, Karin Barber isolates two features of the same phenomenon: "emanating from" or "belonging to" the people; while the first aspect is concerned with the origin, the latter emphasizes the interest it serves. Even this has received a sharp critique by Dapo Olorunoyi who notes that "there is nothing in the internal character of the text to assist in the definition, yet the externality of this reality cannot provide a sufficient basis for its definition."³⁷

While the distinction between folk art and popular art is fairly clear, the same cannot be said of popular art and mass art. Since their features could overlap on a continuum rather than through any fundamental lateral shift, to insist on a rigid taxonomy may only impoverish the debate. It is perhaps more helpful to identify the features identified with each, especially in relation to the sort of ideological preference earlier expressed by Adorno. For instance, even while in general decline, elements of the folk survive, and supposedly mass forms such as the Nigerian Jùjú

and Fújì music, and the so-called junk press have demonstrated the potential of popular forms in specific contexts. In the aftermath of the annulment of the general elections of 1993 by General Ibrahim Babangida, this "junk" press—so-called because of a preoccupation for its breezy, personality slant of story ideas—momentarily joined the pro-democracy advocacy media offensive, contrary to the general public's perception of their traditional practice. The latter Fújì music, too, in spite of its conservative ideological character has, through a secularizing hybridity, blunted the sharp edges of the Islamic orthodoxy from which it emerged. It must be added though that these are only tentative gestures and a more compelling reason for such shift could also be the promise of an expanded income space in articulating the sensibilities of such diverse persuasions.

Many factors inform the classification of Fela's musical practice as popular (music) art, as distinct from mass (music) art. An important distinction usually alluded to in the debate is the relationship between the artist and his audience. Mass art, as it were, presumably panders to the whims of its clientele and does not engage them in problematizing their social situations in a manner that popular art does. By refusing to act the commercial art superstar, or what Michael Veal refers to as "substituting the myth of art as a communal enterprise in place of the Western myth of the concert hall, or of the artist as separate, other-worldly sphere,"³⁸ Fela was invariably re-enacting the subversive griot of ancient times, with the burden of delivering his art uncorrupted by material lure. Rather than pander to the whims of even his audience, he challenged their claims, *yabbed* their assumptions and constantly invited them to a debate. Quite often at the Afrika Shrine when the audience would request that a particular number be played, he would counter after a mild debate, "I used to play that kind of stuff when I was blind like you now are."³⁹

The morbid fear expressed by successive Nigerian govern-

ments against a popular music expression like Afrobeat is not unique; countries as diverse as the Soviet Union and Canada have had to embark on such ventures at different times. A popular music research conducted by James Lull⁴⁰ reveals that while the Chinese government embraces Western classical music as part of its 'spiritual modernization,' it strictly limits importation of youth-oriented popular music to avoid the sort of incidents in which China's most famous western-style domestic pop musician, Ciu Jan, became a central figure in the ideological and cultural uprising for "freedom and democracy" in the late 1980s.⁴¹

While the Nigerian state forbade the airing of Fela's Afrobeat (even after his death, only a select few 'harmless' numbers can be aired), it actively encouraged other mass music forms like Jùjú through generous allocation of air time and patronage, mainly because, unlike Afrobeat, Jùjú does not challenge its ideological assumptions or the elite project to "reproduce ... its structure of dominance."⁴² Herein lies the uniqueness of Fela's Afrobeat form which, even as a popular musical idiom, exhibits a rare capacity to locate society's sense of place, time and event, while also challenging the patronage structure on all these fronts.

Notes

1. From Ogaga Ifowodo's "Homeland," *Homeland and Other Poems*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1998, p. 49.
2. A phrase generally used, especially by members of the Young African Pioneers, to describe Fela's ideological outlook. It is gaining increasing popularity with the evocation by Dede Mabiaku, one of the new-generation Afrobeat musicians in Nigeria.
3. This is in reference to the 1978 incident when the General Olusegun Obasanjo regime clamped down on the student movement and banned its umbrella organization, the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS). The event has since then been generally tagged "Ali-Must-Go," after the name of the federal commissioner for education, Col. Amadu Ali.
4. Implies a shady deal.
5. I would also like to acknowledge the particular recording of Mr. Idowu Mabinuori in *Fela: Why Blackman Carry Shit*. Kaduna: Opinion Media Ltd., 1986.
6. See Jurgen J. Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996; see also Steven Seidman's *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, p. 233.
7. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963, p. 218.
8. See *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts*. (vol. 2, no. 2, 1997, p. 049.)
9. Ibid.
10. Benedict Anderson in *The Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1983, p.15.)
11. James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance:*

- Hidden Transcripts* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, p. xiii.
12. Kwesi Yankah, "Nana Ampadu, the Sung-Tale Metaphor, and Protest Discourse in Contemporary Ghana," Joseph K. Adjaye and Adrienne R. Andrews, co-eds. *Language, Rhythm and Sound* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), p. 63.
 13. This is how Iyiorcha Ayu describes the phenomenon in his book, *Essays in Popular Struggle* . Oguta: Zim-Pan African Publishers, 1985.
 14. The overall boss.
 15. From *Information* , Copenhagen, February 23, 1977.
 16. Christopher Alan Waterman in *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music* . Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 213.
 17. From Fela's correspondences.
 18. Sam I. Mukoro in "Intra-Urban Pattern of Violent Crimes in African Cities: Lagos, Nigeria," in Isaac O. Albert et al. (eds.) *Urban Management and Urban Violence in Africa* . Ibadan: IFRA, 1994, p. 65
 19. *Ibid.* , p. 66.
 20. *Ibid.* , p. 110.
 21. Jinmi Adisa, "Urban Violence in Lagos." in Eghosa G. Osaghae (ed.) *Urban Violence in Africa* . Ibadan: IFRA, 1994, p. 140.
 22. *Ibid.* , cited by Jinmi Adesina, p. 140.
 23. The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, held in Lagos in 1977.
 24. Joyce Carol Oates, "Imaginary Cities: America," in Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts, eds. *Literature and the American Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature* . New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1981, p. 187.
 25. *Ibid.* See Stephen Spender's "Poetry and the Modern

- City" p. 45.
26. From the track *Gentleman*.
 27. From the track *No Agreement*.
 28. As observed in a private discussion by the Nigerian poet Remi Raji.
 29. See Nduka Otiono's *The Night Hides with a Knife*. Ibadan: New Horns, 1996, p. 29.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 31. Olusegun Obasanjo, the military Head of State of Nigeria between 1976 and 1979.
 32. This was Fela's conception of his extended household.
 33. Ben Elugbe, and Augusta Omamor, *Nigerian Pidgin*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1991, p. 12.
 34. See Dick Hebdidge, "Reggae, Rastas and Rudies," in James, Curran, et. al. (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1977, p. 427.
 35. Karin Barber, ed. in introduction to *Readings in African Popular Art*. Oxford and Bloomington: James Currey, 1997, p. 2.
 36. See *ibid* and Michael Etherton, *The Development of African Drama*. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1982, p. 361.
 37. Dapo Olorunfemi, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Art." Ph.D. graduate seminar, Ilorin. 1991. Indeed, a rather timely caution has been given by others who observe that the designation 'popular culture' may be misleading insofar as it carries the implication that popular culture is as coherent and uniform as the official culture.
 38. Michael Veal, "And After a Continentalist," in *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts*, vol. 2 no. 2. 1997, p. 051.
 39. In other words, he saw his music as a dynamic process, which over the period became increasingly spiritual.
 40. See introduction to James Lull's "Popular Music and

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Communication," in James Lull (ed.) *Popular Music and Communication*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992, p. 14.

41. Ibid.

42. Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect,'" in James Curran et. al. (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Edward Arnold, 1977.

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3

The Empire Sounds Back



*My body is a temple
Of angry music
Flames in my brain
Itching forms in my blood*
—Remi Raji¹

*Whoever chose the path of stones
Whoever wove the tunes into the clouds,
and made the street jump
in the frenzy of a dance
or made the heads of the Palm sway
In the eternal parable of the wind
let them gather
a timeless wind crossed our path.*
—OBI NWAKAMA²

I shall proceed in this chapter by identifying the stylistic strategies with which Fela consciously canonized indigenous performance modes, against the 'privileging norm' of Western musical tradition of Trinity College, London, where he studied in the early sixties. While the influences on him were undoubtedly varied, the Yorùbá-Africa aesthetic universe served as the fountain head of an artistic practice and imagination with which he emphasized difference "from the assumptions of the imperial center."³

As a distant echo of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), by Bill Ashcroft et. al., and somewhat implicated by its currency in contemporary academic discourse, I use the term 'post-colonial' in certain sections of this chapter and book, but my usage is by no means suggestive of an aftermath of colonialism that denies the reality of neo-colonialism, dependence, and imperialism, no matter the subtleties of international finance capital in the post World War II era. The term, for me, is akin to the sense of 'post-contact'; that is, predating the independence of the colonies, as used by Francoise Lionet (1995), as a "condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists, the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination."⁴ While not denying the fact that conditions of marginality do induce their own circumstances for the outburst of creative energy, it needs to be added that the cultural ingredients from which this impact was made, in the case of Fela's Afrobeat, was not always 'post-contact' but hewn largely from an ebullient tradition prior to the colonial encounter. Even with its relative timidity at expressing difference, the earlier West African Highlife had signaled the possibility of a plural practice of music.

Moreover, Fela's choice of pidgin English as a medium of lyrical composition and general use, even if primarily motivated by the desire to reach out, must be seen as a tacit attempt to achieve what Ashcroft et. al. also describe as 'abrogation and appropriation.' The validity invested in the form by Fela, as an

other's legitimate medium of communication, in itself constitutes a step at abrogation, while its deviant form of reconstituting standard usage of English language, and reinvesting them with new meanings, amounts to no less than appropriation, a unique way of "de-colonizing the language."⁵ Presumably for example, the English language could not have anticipated the noun 'gentleman,' either as a referent of an idiot or an imposter; but this precisely is its lyrical rendition in the track, *Gentleman*. When Fela sings of "we we" as against "dem dem", or "suffer-head" as against the *subversive* "jefa-head" (*JTT*), he is simply investing a youthful pidgin language with registers that delineate class-laden values and power relations. By retaining a structural similarity, albeit partially, with standard English as the 'head' in 'jefa-head', he dilutes meaning in a manner that can still afford recognition. The nature of sameness in the earlier 'dem' is equally testimonial to this tradition, though at the phonological level with the standard English 'them.'

'Griotique'

Expressing authenticity in cultural terms, as he had often done in his political rhetoric, meant tapping into an African folkloric past and taking from these diverse sources aesthetic forms that he transposed into contemporary, and an urban context. He was particularly animated about the past due to what he perceived as the absence of an elite-driven indigenous mode of knowledge production in the aftermath of colonialism, which contrasted with other such examples he could confidently cite in relation to selective aspects of pre-colonial Africa. To buttress this past in a single performance like *Clear Road for Jaga-Jaga*, for instance, he fuses the Peul *Gerewol* rhythm with the Hausa *Gumbe* (both, initiation motions), and the latter known as such through Sierra Leone and the Caribbean islands, with other tra-

ditional formulae as call and response, wordplay game of abuse and its sense of irony

His call and response technique is particularly involving, as Willie Anku's examination of *Shuffling and Smiling* has shown by his identification of three features of the form: alternating—"where the chorus picks up from the end of the call"; overlapping—"where the call section starts while the chorus passage is not yet ended"; and interlocking—"where repeated chorus passages and the call sections integrate." The technique itself further reinforces the art-society dialectic in the sense that it defines the communal ethos of many African societies where, according to Anku, the entire community—the chorus—provides a response to, and anticipates the music leadership—the call.⁶

This attitude finds greater significance in the general poetic craft of the ensemble, both in its lyrical and instrumental-rhythmic patterns. Then there is also the attitude to poetry expressed by Fela, which largely informs his artistic practice. In a 1982 interview with Lasisi Ehimele Braimoh, he said this much of poetry:

Poetry to me is music. Poetry is an expression which is understood the way the poet wants his audience to understand it. Everyday talking is poetry; an everyday occurrence. Who chooses poetry? Is it because some people are well read that they think they can arrogate to themselves the power to pinpoint poetry? No, man, poetry is everywhere. The whiteman makes them difficult to understand by putting for example what they call poetic verse.⁷

Central to this observation are his twin concepts of 'audience' and 'poetic verse' with which he expressed preference for the

free verse tradition and a poetry of communal creation and participation, an echo of a romantic tradition. A sort of modern-day griot, Fela's inclination is much aligned to Boulton Margorie's view that the blank verse, "Without a traditional metrical form, has made the reproduction of normal speech rhythm more exact than is possible within the conventional verse forms."⁸ Fela's romantic vision of the poetic craft exhibits an all-inclusive perspective of the arts and the environment we live in as evinced in the same interview with Braimoh. According to him:

In about 20 years time, Europeans and Americans won't be able to walk inside the rain because of atmospheric pollution caused by industrial wastes. What I want from technology and advancement is less difficulty for the human race.⁹

If you must have a balanced artist, he says, you need a knowledge of your environment, and the ability to appreciate suffering and privation. It is only then that "you will have a higher mind; if you don't see your environment, you can't be an artist."¹⁰ Relating this perception of the artist's role in society to the activist art and politics he pursued can hardly be said to be gratuitous. Making poetry accessible to the widest possible publics was for him obligatory in the Wordsworthian sense of writing in "the language of men."¹¹ There is a sense in which he was partly re-inscribing a tradition of the artist in Africa (and we must presume, in all folk environments), as Soyinka says, "as the record of mores and experience of his society and as the voice of a vision in his own time."¹²

Fela fused this poetic attitude with a particularly traditional satirical mode of story telling; and for the satirist in his context, a tilt towards cultural activism was almost inevitable. As in

the griot tradition, such an artist combines both social history and his personal autobiography as a critical launching pad in this process of myth-reading. Preempting the opponent's rebuttal, for instance, the Yorùbá traditional poet first declaims himself, satirizing his own background including possible physical deformities from which he might be suffering. He further highlights his hidden past, just in case he is in error of such secrecy and then takes on his target. Fela, in *BONN*, starts by referring to himself as "basket mouth" who is about to start "to leak again o." Through that self-exposure, he has weaned others from any license of criticism they might have of both his art and the message thereon. Besides the other names alluded to in *Colonial Mentality*, as examples of cultural self-negation, he includes his own family name too, "Mr. Ransome make you hear, colo-mentality." It is a potent, leveling performance mold by which traditional society ensured that figures of power got an accurate account of the community's feeling toward them; and this is assured since the bearer of the tale is protected by the season of license during which such an unraveling usually occurs. The context of this mode of performance at the Afrika Shrine, however, takes on an added character, and this is exhaustively explored in the next chapter, along with the immediate folk influences that define the practice.

Added to this ambience of the folk artist he recreates is the incorporation in song lyrics of the artist's compositional techniques. In *BONN*, he renders in a speech mode: "To play African music, you must be able to produce a real groove, and then you introduce the drum." Another measure of oral performance technique is exhibited shortly afterward when in the same studio-recorded track he invites the player of the second bass guitar to key in: "second bass o jare." Sometimes, this compositional device is merely an acknowledgment of the intertextual relationship with ritual practice as in *Why Blackman Dey Suffer*, where he reenacts a ritual tune, adding a note on its ori-

gin: "This rhythm is called 'Kogini kókó, kogini jèjè', used in some particular kinds of shrines in my hometown, Abeokuta city; it goes like this, ko-gi-ni kó-kó ko-gi-ni jè-jè." There are suggestions that this particular rhythm is derived from the Olómólú ritual festival of the Ègbá.¹³ It is, however, in *Look and Laugh* that the bond between artist and audience is given full expression, such as to almost defy the inherent separation of a studio-recorded album. Here, as in *Unknown Soldier* too, the community is represented by the chorus to whom a plaintive narrative voice explains why he had not waxed any record lately

Since long time I never write new tune
Long time I never write new song
Many of you go dey wonder why
Your man never sing new song
My brother no be so tabi I wan keep quiet
My brother no be so tabi I no wan write new song
For you to think and be happy
I just dey looku and dey laughu

*For a long while now I haven't written a new tune
For a long while now I haven't written a new song
And many of you [that is the fans] would wonder why
Your man has not sung a new song
My brother it isn't that I simply want to keep quiet
My brother it isn't also that I simply do not want to write
a new song
To excite your imagination and aid deep reflection
I am only for now simply observing and laughing*

This concept of laughter, as a reaction to an adversarial circumstance, continues to serve as a powerful aesthetic tool in many cultures. Iranus Ebil-Eibesfeldt suggests that, "in its original form, laughing seems to unite against a third force."¹⁴ Richard

Schechner, also in this connection, notes that, "Laughter presupposes, even creates, a 'we' that opposes a 'them.'" ¹⁵ And in Nigeria, the theme of laughter as an aesthetic intervention in socio-political life preoccupies the poetry of Niyi Osundare (*Waiting Laughters*, 1990) and Remi Raji (*A Harvest of Laughter*, 1997).

In the tradition of the Ègbá folk artist, Fela alludes rather liberally to, and evokes, a sensuous imagery in many of his compositions, even within a serious thematic concern. And beyond the èfè tradition, sexual allegories have always powered on the imaginative subsoil of even the most elevated Yorùbá mythopoesis. Wole Soyinka's creative rendition of a cognomen of the deity Ògún, is rendered thus:

Ogun is the lascivious god who takes
 Seven gourdlets to war. One for gunpowder,
 One for charms, two for palm wine and three
 Air-sealed in polished bronze make
 Storage for his sperm ¹⁶

From available evidence, this tradition continues to flourish among the Ègbá, and was indeed, part of Fela's growing experience. The protesting women, led by Fela's mother, who deposed a ruling Ègbá (Alake) monarch, equally resorted liberally to this allegory, as an intertextual formula, even while subverting the phallic symbol, when they sang:

Idowu (Alake), for a long time you have used
 your *penis* as a mark of authority that you are
 our husband. Today we shall reverse the order
 and use our *vagina* to play the role of husband
 on you. O you men, *vagina's* head will seek
 vengeance. ¹⁷

The bond with poetry is also expressed in acoustics and instrumentation in two principal ways: one, through a musical practice that occasionally derives signature rhythms from notes of folk tunes and songs; and, two, the tendency to make instruments more or less 'vocalize' and 'speak.' This is quite similar to the experience captured by David Coplan in relation to Zulu music, of which he notes its use of instruments as "an indirect extension of the principles of vocal music."¹⁸ After a while, even when Fela had not set out to give instrumental transcription of songs, this practice came to be associated with many of his easily chantable notes. Given an environment where citizens sought to get even with a thieving elite, many of Fela's tracks got 'rewaxed' through such creative reception of Afrobeat's interpretive community.

This is, again, a very pervasive 'talking drum' musical syndrome of the Yorùbá. As with the earlier example of the ritual sound, "ko-gi-ni kó-kó," my finding indicates an Ègbá Olómólú ritual drum rhythm with no vocal accompaniment; yet, Fela talks of it as if it is verbalized sound, only because he could decipher the linguistic inflection of the talking drum's coded tonal text. In this respect, one finds an attitude to instrumentation that gravitates between the signal or speech mode and a combination of the two, besides the more experimental dance mode.¹⁹ Yet, a track like *Everyday I got my Blues* deeply resonates an American soul music experience. With its rather languid pace, yet swift change in vocal tempo, and the constant punctuation in *rests*, the track evokes a similar structural pattern with some of the Harlem Renaissance poetry of Langston Hughes.²⁰

Besides, Fela's genius is quite often exhibited in the poetic quality of his composition. This feature resides in a style that makes the instrumental section convey diverse moods. In an attempt to capture a sense of social decay and chaos in *Army Arrangement*, a combination of notes both on the keyboard

and the horn section is introduced such as to effect an apparent discordance in the chord sequence. This is combined effectively with ensemble stratification as multiple layers of different sections are simultaneously playing off and to rhythm. In *BONN*, Fela gradually builds the chorus in an ascendant progression, at the height of which *rests* are suddenly inserted. This forces the beat to revert to a new time line, which is defined afresh by the rhythm guitar—thus creating beauty with such contrast from a maximum rhythm, to a plain hocketing device that nonetheless intensifies expressive effect. At other times, he introduces instrumental *chiasmus*—by reversing the note or scale order, in a tradition that is reminiscent of many West African traditional musical compositions. Then, there are instrumental jam sessions when the entire ensemble appears as if turned into a momentary house of madness; and this is when the symphonic element in his composition is most noticeable. In *Army Arrangement*, all the wind instruments start blowing to a finale and suddenly the trumpet withdraws into a shorter time line. This is reiterated for a while after which the dissonant notes join the main ensemble, and together they glide into a new movement.

Does this suggestion of instrumental behavioral pattern imply that music encodes ideology? This is indeed not the intended suggestion, especially if by “encode” we imply inscription in its scalar forms. Vic Giammon has somewhat clarified this relationship by noting that when we make such assumption that music inherently encodes ideology, we have only altered the true relationship of music as an art form that is ideologically that is socially invested with meaning. Even these contextual social meanings are neither eternal nor immutable, just as signifier and signified are not fixed, and in the words of Giammon, “meanings are produced because both are part of systems of difference.”²¹

Fela’s attitude to the ensemble is undoubtedly one of an

orchestra, and a musical extended family such as the traditional Yorùbá (household) *ẹbí*. This is also no less a statement of a projected corporate power and image of the band, in the same tradition of large *bàtá* ensembles or even the horizontal strength displayed by the *Ègbá Párikókó* mask, whose extended embroidery denotes large kinship ties, in the same manner that Margaret Drewal suggests its corollary with verticality as a projection of corporate power in big cities like New York.²²

In the bid to negate the assumptions of cultural practices of center nations as normative culture, Fela grafts a myriad of Yorùbá and other African folk compositional styles and injects into them practices from other parts of the world. The center nations, for Fela, are not only the industrialized countries of the West; he redefines the center-periphery model in cultural terms. This new formulation implicates the source-nations (and regions) of Islamic and Christian influence—two major religions contesting the Nigerian spiritual space—and it is hardly imaginable that a Fela *yabbis* session would not devote some time to questioning the claims of these faiths and the privileges extended to them by the state. In cognitive-aesthetic terms, he employs registers of *Ọriṣa* worship as an allegory of alternative spirituality and the need for cultural reawakening. The refrains of votaries of the *orò* cult is an important signifier of silenced cultural options which he often uses.

An explanation of its contemporary performance and a short background of the cult's origin might help to further illustrate the point. The annual celebration of the *orò* festival is geared toward driving off evil, while at the same time celebrating life in a community. The festival's entourage excludes women, as they are forbidden to behold it; and in its regular rounds in a community the *orò* exposes deviant traits of members of the community, spotlights taboos, and admonishes their contravention. In doing so, the *orò* is empowered by a season of poetic license to denounce even the community's

most senior citizens, including the (king) Oba. A testimony to such license was given by a member of the king's court in Sagamu, Otunba Julius Olapeju Adekunle Adedoyin when he noted that:

if anybody steals and thinks that nobody knew about it, the oro would expose and castigate the person. Even the last [festival] one that just ended, the [king] Kabiyesi said he listened attentively when they came near the palace.²³

Yorùbá mythology teaches that orò was originally an Ifá diviner²⁴ whom Olódùmarè²⁵ honored, and subsequently became the assistant of Ọ̀bàtálá, "god of the plastic arts."²⁶ At some point in the interaction, orò committed treachery against Ọ̀bàtálá and was demoted on account of this. Shocked by the prospects of this demotion, orò broke down and began to express his regret by wailing, to which his votaries would later respond in "éèpa," "yéèpa," "yéèpàrìpà."²⁷ In many Yorùbá folk tales, the chorus of songs could generally take the orò responsorial form, depending on the gravity of the theme of narration. In popular usage, the phrase has come to denote only a degree of anguish.

With Fela, this ritual code is reconstructed to depict a continent's betrayal by its post-independence ruling classes. Hence, in a number of his lyrics, we find a profusion of cultic refrains meant to connote the depth of anguish of the man on the fringe who has been victimized by state policy. The resort to this device is more representative in *Original Suffer Head* and *Overtake Don Overtake Overtake (ODOO)*.

The scandal in African governments' inability to provide basic essentials like electricity without persistent power outages, decent running water, and shelter at the threshold of the millennium is the basis for invoking this mythological yell in

Original Suffer Head :

Water, light
Food, house
Yé-paripa-o
Wetin do dem

This form approximates what Soyinka calls a 'choric' lament, which is better exemplified in his description of tragedy in traditional Yorùbá myth as "the anguish of (cosmic) severance, the fragmentation of essence from self."²⁸ If anything, what the Fela narrator seeks is a means by which that severance could be bridged, or at least diminished.

In *ODOO*, the refrain comes in the form of "ee-yà," a lexical contraction of "eeriwo-yà" of the Ogbóni cult, and it is tinged with pathos because *Overtake Don Overtake Overtake (ODOO)*—which means that the solution has been overwhelmed by the problem. Coupled with his Yorùbá rendition of the acronym into òdo—a zero state—Africa's stasis under the grip of its despots can hardly be more graphically depicted.

In the case of *ITT*, its general structure is a hybrid between the egúngún alàrínjò dance mask and èfè performance. And it is with this structure that Fela contests transnational meddlingness in national affairs. It starts off with the ijúbà or homage, paid usually to ancestors and forerunners of the art form. This is followed by a statement of intent, which could also be accompanied with a vow of honesty and truth in the subsequent presentation. The message is then delivered after these preliminary acts of 'path-clearing.' Meant to restore the collective health of the community, the message, as in an Ègbá èfè satirical performance, could be quite blunt, even if laced with witticism and irony. Èfè is biting and does draw venom, during its season of license, like the *Udige* satirical form of the Urhobo and *Akpa-ja* of the Ishan. With Fela, however, there is only one long, eter-

nal season of license, which is unhindered by place or time.

In the track, Fela starts with a rather rapid incantatory form, similar to ògèdè, usually delivered in a fast but normal voice pitch. Here we have *wellu wellu wellu wellu welluwelluwelluwelluwellu*. Apparently, given the import of the subsequent lyrics, he pays homage to the ancestors and diverse African deities. He invokes their wrath on himself, and calls on these deities to strike him if his subsequent narration departs from the noble path of truth.

Na true I wan talk again o
If I dey lie o
Make Osiri punish me o
Make Edumare punish me o
Make land punish me o
Make Ifa dey punish me o

*It is the truth that I am about to tell again
If I ever lie
May Osiris punish me
May Edumare punish me
May land punish me
May Ifa punish me*

This device of invoking ancestors and transcendental essences is particularly significant in the Yorùbá mythic imagination, and its ijúbá tradition. Even though ijúbà, which implies paying homage—either to ancestors or forerunners of an art form—is more a feature of the apidán masking tradition, other less sacred and social performance traditions have come to embrace it. With due process observed, the artist launches his tirade, which Fela amply does in this track, at the height of which, like in the èfẹ tradition, he names the culprits, “like Obasanjo and Abiola” whom he claims are undermining national aspiration by collaborating with

transnational interests.

When not manipulating the more subtle cultic cultural codes in his composition, he makes direct allusions, through exaltation, to his patron-saint deities and embellishes their attributes in the tradition of oral heroic poetry. Hence, in *Condom* he exalts Yemoja, the Yorùbá river goddess, and Ògún—variously described as god of iron, creativity and patron of the industrial working class.²⁹ Here, he sings:

Great Yemoja
Great Yemoja
Great Yemoja (o mother) yeye o, we greet you
goddess
Great Yemoja
Goddess of all water o, we greet you goddess
Great Yemoja

Further on, he reverts to Ògún:

We greet you o great Ogun o
We greet you
We greet you o great Ogun o
You are di god wey be di enemy of oppression
You are di god wey be di enemy of injustice
We greet you
We greet you, o great Ogun o
Wé pay homage to you great Ogun
Wé pay homage to you
Wé pay homage to you, great Ogun
You are the deity who is opposed to oppression
You are the deity who is opposed to injustice
Wé pay homage to you
Wé pay homage to you, great Ogun

Evidence of traditional forms in Fela's performance have often been discussed largely in terms of external digression, or, at best, as overt verbal allusion by the artist to such influences. However, as indicated in *ITT*, beyond cursory allusion to such forms, Fela's songs are substantially structured *ab initio* around such motifs as riddle and divination. And as in *Underground System (US)*, it is the structure of àlò àpámò (riddle, as distinct from àlò àpágbè—which is generically a folktale), that he uses. While also exhibiting attributes of the folktale, àlò àpámò is a hidden transcript that thrives on symbolic association and discovery by its players. It is structured around a riddle image that must be decoded. An example of the form can be derived from the poser: "A slim, long stick touches the sky and the ground, what is it?" Or, "What is it that builds a house but would rather live in the open?" The standard answers to the two are "rain" and "a bee." This structure is equally quite evident in the transposed literary tradition of the Yorùbá diaspora of Cuba. The poet Nicolás Guillén appropriated this form (àlò àpámò) in the entire five stanzas of his poem, "Riddles." Also couched in the form of call and response technique, the first stanza reads:

In his teeth, the morning,
and in his skin, the night.
Who is it? Who is it not?
—The Negro

This is the precise form the poser is put in *US*:

We be about fourteen of us
We dey do one club together
When e reach by turn by turn

*About fourteen of us
Formed an exclusive club
To take our turns one after another*

But, who are the fourteen “of us” doing “one club together”? Later in the song we come to realize that the reference is to member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It is a measure of fidelity to an ancient narrative tradition that he does not specify the members of this club, hence, “*about fourteen of us*.” Also incorporated in this narrative technique is the *èsúsú* tradition of the Yorùbá mutual benefit society, wherein monetary contribution is made, with each member taking turns to collect the whole, at specified intervals. A member who consciously defaults, having benefited from the pool, is deemed treacherous for violating the trust of the community. The necessity for the evocation of this form becomes clearer once the song reveals the gang up by conservative regimes “Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Senegal”, against the aspiration of the young, radical leader of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara, from becoming the Chairman of the regional body. Meanwhile, this triumvirate is ‘defaulting’ having benefited from their leadership of the regional body.

While the compositional style of *ITT* is thought to be generally extensive in depicting ritual motion, *BBC* is particularly intensive in capturing that critical interface of the diviner’s exploration in mythological space and the return to a more historical time frame. The three basic motions of divination—which involve exploring, encountering/deciphering, and pronouncing—are relived both in the song text and the rhythmic pattern. The moment of exploration in divination is typified by the forlorn look betrayed by the (diviner) Babaláwo, who is momentarily ‘lost’ in the journey to the other world as he tries to decipher the ritual script. He may fall into occasional soliloquy with his ritual text, querying it or answering its queries. “What is this my eyes are *seeing*?” is a familiar way the Babaláwo expresses surprise at an unfolding divination. Almost invariably the preoccupation is with “*seeing*.” Even when he eventually “*sees*”—that is, deciphers—the message, it could be

a process of gradual revelation, during which time a ritual (encounter) dialogue ensues. *BBC*, as a ritualistically structured song text, starts with a counterculture diviner responding to a highly expectant (community) chorus:

Fela: Wetin my eye dey see
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: African eye dey see
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: You must find your own
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: Traditional medicine
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: African medicine
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: So you can seeeee
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: Di correct thing
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: With di correct eye
 Chorus: Tell us now tell us now
 Fela: Na wah o!!!

Fela: What is this that my eyes are seeing?

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: That my African eyes are seeing

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: You must find your own

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: Traditional medicine

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: African medicine

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: So that you can see

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Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: Properly

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: With a clear vision

Chorus: Tell us now, tell us now

Fela: This is incredible!!!

What is significant here is not so much that Fela makes lyrical allusion to these symbols, but that he composes the track along this form, such that each phase of the ritual journey is marked with an increase in rhythmic pace and accentuation of tempo. As in the context of actual divination, his revelation comes rather gradually; initially it is cryptic, but later becomes explicit. After this partial revelation of the need for an Afro-centric perspective, he makes, like the Babaláwo after deciphering, a more direct pronouncement.

*All African leaders/Na hire dem hire eyes/Na Oyinbo
eyes dem rent/
Dat is di reason why/Corruption dey/Authority steal-
ing dey*

*All African leaders/ Have only borrowed their eyes/
It is the White man's eyes they have borrowed/ Which
explains why/
There is corruption/ Theft in high places*

In broad cognitive-aesthetic terms, Fela exhibits three distinct time-space schemes in his lyrical and visual narratives, which are namely: mythic, mytho-historical and historical. The mythic time scheme appears the most expansive, with an ease of transgression of time and place by characters. It is a world of suspension of concretion and reality in our everyday understanding of the terms, as Bakhtin (1981) argued, even when employing

symbolic representation. But with historical time, the time-space scheme is compressed and becomes restrictive. "Concretion and reality take over illusion and fantasy. The time-space markers become known, and take the tone of the familiar."³⁰

In grappling with the aesthetics of time and space in literature, Mikail Bakhtin introduced the concept of the 'chronotope'. According to him, a "chronotope is a unit of analysis of texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented." He further notes that, since time can not be separated from space, we have time-space, that is, the "chronotope" as the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships"³¹ as artistically expressed in a narrative event. This concept is quite similar to the mask narrative form in its mutual capacity to enthrone an omnibus narrative viewpoint, while also simultaneously expanding and collapsing time and place. Fela draws from the Yorùbá aesthetic cosmogony, whose earliest form of time-space discernible is the adventure chance time. A profusion of this motif abounds in the Yorùbá oral performance fiction, *itan*, the sort of narrative space explored by the pioneer Yorùbá language fiction writer, D.O. Fagunwa. This form is similar to the Greek adventure time, which "lacks any natural, everyday cyclicality or indices on a human scale, tying it to the repetitive aspects of natural and human life."³² As described by Bakhtin, in this kind of time, nothing changes: the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings do not change, people do not even age.

With the exception of *Alu Jon Jon* and *Egbe mi o*, this appears to be the least represented time-space device explored in Fela's works. Given the paucity of such a motif, one might be led to the conclusion that this time-space scheme is irrelevant to a modern artistic enterprise which tends to emphasize the contemporaneous. Such a conclusion would however be inadequate since these works under reference reflect a vision of

man and his place in the universe. Though their symbolic scheme and resonance derive from an older cultural context, their metaphors are actually in reference to the present.

Another aspect of this form is the motif of the road which, as also noted by Bakhtin, exhibits such features as surprise, chance meeting and adventure time in a work of art. The road serves as a trope for the Yorùbá, in cognitive-aesthetic terms. Its aesthetic deployment, even in everyday speech, serves as a primed prefix to a wise-saying, rendered as Yorùbá b ọ, that is, the "Yorùbá retorts or returns." "Retorts", in this sense, shares a verb and semantic equivalence with "returns". In other words, knowledge and discovery are predicated on a temporal and spatio-spiritual journey and a Yorùbá casually requests for a moment of reflection by saying moún b ọ, meaning: "I am reflecting", whose literal rendition comes over as, "I am coming." Hence, the tradition abounds with tales of exploits and expeditions in quest of knowledge which, in more recent literary history, the hunters of D.O. Fagunwa, try to fulfill. And, invariably they are questers (on behalf of the community) for social redemption. *Why Blackman Dey Suffer* exhibits this trait with a time-spatial mode that fuses both the mythical and the historical. With *Unknown Soldier*, only the journey motif is emphasized as the time-space is quite contemporaneous. It is the chorus that brings us into an awareness of this motion with its persistent query:

Chorus: Where you dey go?
Vocal: Make I reach
Chorus: Where you dey go?
Vocal: Don't ask me
Chorus: Where you dey go?
Vocal: Wait and see
Chorus: Where you dey go?

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

Chorus: *Where are you headed?*
Vocal: *Let me get there*
Chorus: *Where are you headed?*
Vocal: *Do not ask me*
Chorus: *Where are you headed?*
Vocal: *Wait and see*
Chorus: *Where are you headed?*

In the context of the carnage visited on Kalakuta Republic, which eventually inspired this song, the use of the journey motif also serves the purpose of the artist in highlighting the different phases of the military assault, in addition to aiding a sense of narrative suspense. In the intervals, usually punctuated by the chorus, the cantor gives it a dramatic touch by locating the diverse settings—one, in Fela's house; two—the cast: which comprises band members, Fela's mother, Beko Ransome-Kuti, a French man and soldiers; three—costume: which includes guns, helmets, petrol can, matches; and four—the overall mood: described as dangerous and highly expectant. Then, at the height of the tale, the chorus yells: *Jagba jagba jagba—Jugbu jugbu jugbu*, an onomatopoeic approximation to the sense of violence once the *Republic* was set ablaze and its inhabitants assaulted.

Beyond the feature of journeying as a creative motif, the real life-time-space (partly explored in *Unknown Soldier*) abound in tracks such as *Zombie*, *Alagbon Close* and *Kalakuta Show*, where the emphasis is the everyday cyclicality of experience. An aspect of this form is discernible in the fusion of personal autobiography of the artist and the social biography of the African continent. Fela's personal experience, quite often, serves as a shorthand for narrating the implication of social living, and those of Africa's larger polity.

While historical time brings into sharper focus events and persons being narrated, it could hinder an easy transgression of

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time and place. Fela's device for circumventing this, as in *Suffering and Smiling*, involves a lyrical fusion of space by suspension of time present. Here we have:

Put your mind out of this musical contraption
before you
Put your mind in any godam church or mosque
Now we are there...

With this 'collapse' of time-space, we are summarily transported away from his venue of performance, to some "godam church or mosque", where he unleashes his verbal tirade on official religion:

Vocal: Suffer suffer for world
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: Enjoy for heaven
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: Christian go dey yab
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: In-spi-ri-tu-heaven-o
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: Muslim go dey yab
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: Allahhu Akibar
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: Arch Bishop na miliki, Pope na enjoyment,
Imamu na gbaladun...

Vocal: Suffering in the world
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: In anticipation of enjoying in heaven
Chorus: Amen
Vocal: Christians keep blabbing

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

Chorus: Amen

Vocal: In-spi-ri-tu-heaven-o

Chorus: Amen

Vocal: Muslims keep blabbing

Chorus: Amen

Vocal: Allahu Akibar

Chorus: Amen

*Vocal: An Arch Bishop's life—is one of ease/ That
of the Pope—one of enjoyment/ And so is the
Imam's too*

After this anti-clerical swipe, Fela does not forget the 'compression' of time-space, and so the Chief Priest in him, like the raconteur of *itàn*, transports his listener/audience back to their initial listening spot(s):

Now, we have to carry our mind
from those godam places,
back to this musical
instrument before you

Although I had earlier indicated the ritual structure of *ITT*, this is by no means the only notable attribute of the track. Indeed, *ITT* provides the clearest evidence of the diversity of creative time-space. The incantatory motion earlier alluded to and the reflection on time past constitute aspects of mythical time. Hence:

Vocal: Long long time ago

Chorus: Long time ago

Vocal: Long long long time ago

Chorus: Long time ago

This "long time" of the discursive text is the same basic folk

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tale formulaic of 'once upon a time ... in a very distant land'. From this we get a jump into historical time, which, unlike the last example, can be measured and quantified.

During the time dem com colonise us
Na European man na him dey carry shit

*At the point of colonial encounter
It was the European who had the culture of bucket latrine*

The next jump is an intra-historical time transition. This time is from colonial time to post-independence neo-colonial time.

Many foreign companies
Dey Africa carry all our money go
I read about one inside book
like dat dem call im name na ITT

*There are many foreign companies
In Africa that have depleted our resources
I read about one
Whose name is ITT*

Fela's most recurrent motifs are the quester, the aimless balloon (yeye ball) and the beast/monkey. These questers, re-imaged after his own stoic resolve, show rare determination. Although a jailbird, the quester of *When Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am* is ready to confront another law enforcement agent in the event of an unlawful arrest, because, it is

Palava e dey find
and
Palava e go get o

The balloon imagery derives from its being airtight and, therefore, light, which makes it susceptible to being blown around easily, thereby giving the appearance of an object that lacks focus. Fela uses this to parody the suspect course on which leaders are steering their nations. Quite often Fela uses it as a repeated theme and, at other times, as an external digression. Hence in *ODOO* we have,

When I see say our life dey roll
like one yeye ball
Wey one yeye wind
Dey blow for one yeye corner

*When I observe the motion of our life
Similar to a random balloon
Which some random wind
Is blowing into some obscure corner*

The aimless back-forth and circuitous movement goes on and eventually leads to:

When our life roll small
E go go knock
Head for stone

*After a period of random motion
Our life crashes
Against a boulder*

This is the essence of the message: there is bound to be a collapse, in the absence of some sort of ordering presence in the affairs of a nation. It is the classic case of a rudderless state ship piloted by a leadership without vision.

The beast as an image of ultimate destruction is found in

many cultures and is, in a sense, a universal archetype. In Judeo-Christian tradition, we have a promise of the beast herald of apocalypse: "these have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast."³³ An interesting Judeo-Christian transposition of the beast image in Western literary thought is captured graphically in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian, the archetypal hero, engages in a fierce duel with the beast on his way to the Celestial City. Among the Yorùbá, the Ìjálá poets particularly, being a guild of hunters, are most prolific in beast narratives, as chilling and gruesome as you could get.

With Fela, the beast image is explored, first, as a simile and, second, as the essential character of the neocolonial elite, whose hegemonic project is to diminish the humanity and psyche of the governed. This should be resisted, the artist warns in *BONN*, because:

Animal can't dash me human right
Human rights na my property

*An animal can not offer me human rights
Human rights is my fundamental right*

Some of Fela's compositions in the immediate aftermath of the Kalakuta incident tend to be quite loose and uncoordinated. One explanation for this by band members, among others, was the difficulty encountered by the band at this point. For one, the band was cash-strapped and there were some difficulties in getting venue for rehearsal and regular sessions, apart from the factor of desertion by some old hands. However, the latter compositions—many of which are yet to be waxed—have the old verve, and indeed bear deeper resemblance, particularly to codes of many West African traditional compositional styles. This latter development will be examined in the next chapter.

The structure of Fela's direct musical composition is equally as varied, and a description at this point can only be broad in highlighting the most recurrent motifs. Fela starts a new composition during rehearsal by first working on the rhythm section, which in itself has been preceded by identifying a musical motif, in style and theme. While the lyrical thematic thrust of *Original Suffer Head* derives from the question of underdevelopment, the rhythmic style is inspired by the traditional Tiv polyrhythmic beat, especially as led by the trap-drum and the two-membrane drums.

The introduction of *Original*, for instance, proceeds with the organ (playing tenor), and later rested for the tenor guitar to interlock with the rhythm guitar. As evident in this piece too, his tenor line is almost always 'vocalizing,' and also staccato. This structure allows it to serve as a counterpoint that can easily harmonize with the bass which is also structured in a similar fashion. He assigns a speech mode to his bass line, the outcome of which would have been ineffectual if the bass had been clustered. This particular emphasis sharply distinguishes his Afrobeat style from rag, where you have the rag-dub intertwining the bass guitar with the drumbeat.

On the other hand, the drum pattern of Fela's middle and late period is evidently syncopated funk, a style largely pioneered through the effort of the master-drummer, Tony Allen. Coupled with this, the Afrobeat hi-hat often comes after the beat, and also works with the clef off-time. Basically its clef has quiver beat, while the *sèkèrè* comes in crochet beat.

Back to rehearsal time, Fela would always commence with the horns only after putting the rhythm section together. This is partly informed by the fact that he often gets the appropriate cues for the horns from the harmonies of the rhythm section. While the baritone saxophone serves as root in this section, and sometimes moving from the 7th to the tonic in the minor scale, the alto saxophone usually plays either in the 13th or 4th

chord, and the tenor saxophone in 6ths or 3rds.

The horns are sometimes deployed to do rhythmic holds against which the trumpet(s) and other pieces of this section interchangeably sound counterpoint. Fela sometimes joins this with riffs on solos. A highly percussive African free style jazz, Afrobeat often has a movement of 6th added 4th to 7th as inversions (which is a chord I-4 popular arrangement in jazz). It is a mode that we can readily associate also with other composers like Herbie Hancock, George Benson and Grover Washington Jr who strove for some degree of crossover jazz. This hybrid middle ground is essentially Fela's sense of the jazz crossover in the African context.

The Ora(1)iteracy Tension

I recall once watching an American movie with my six year old nephew in Lagos who, on sighting the film's hero sipping a can of Coca-Cola, expressed in pleasant surprise: "Oh, so the whites also drink *our* Coke." I find this comment quite instructive in respect to the power of the media in shaping our imagination and dictating, in the most subtle of manners, our choice of diction and even articulation. No doubt, a perceptive discussion of the nature of orality must necessarily take into account all of this, and how the age of the multimedia and information technology has significantly altered the pattern and rhythm of speech, reconfigured the tense structure, and diluted our imagination such that even the basic origin of influences, once easily assumed, has now become an exercise for deep, contemplative investigation.

Where is the old orality? And why are scholars still enamored by this mortifying label in reference to the creative process in Africa, as if it were still pristinely oral? Through code-switching, inter-language, borrowings and other such

intermeshing processes, the new orality has become mediated, even by the world of calligraphy. Primary oral forms get scripted, broadcast, and then creep back into the oral domain, at times so discreetly that language users are unaware that they are partaking in post-literate orality in some kind of secondary orality. Yet, there is the osmosis of oral forms (as exhibited by neo-traditional Yorùbá music and theatre) 'striving' to the structure of writing, and written forms (as the body of works of many African writers show) 'aspiring' to the 'condition' of orality.³⁴ Even in substantially literate environments like the United States, the metaphysics of calligraphy still subsists. When in the summer of 1997, the major networks first broke suggestions of an affair between Monica Lewinsky, the White House intern, and President Bill Clinton, little attention was paid to these "breaking news." However, when the Newsweek magazine came on board with the same story item, public attitude became more focused on the issue.³⁵ This feature of finding validation through the print medium is an all-pervasive one, and subsists at the subconscious level as would be presently shown.

Fela is quick at pointing to the fact that Africa had a scribal culture before its contact with the West, not just through pictogram and ideograph but an ancient alphabetic order whose reason for its loss he defers to 'a matter for a future symposium.' What is interesting in his cultural practice to the orality-literacy dynamics—as often formally defined—is his tendency to romanticize the past in a manner that suggests that he is, contrary to his musical and cultural practice, oblivious of the continuity of that past in the present.

In spite of scoring his own music, he always exhibited the spontaneous ambiance of the folk artist. However, beyond this, his lyrics pay significant attention to the oral-written interface in a manner that somewhat privileges the written. One way he does this is by invoking the authority of the written

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word as the final arbiter of 'truth', as we find in *ITT* when he tries to convince his audience and listener about Africans' environmental awareness prior to the colonial contact:

I see some myself o
I *read* am for book o

So also in *Perambulator*, he contests the claim of the source of (ancient) civilization as having originated not from Africa but Europe, and he seeks scribal justification, hence:

Na we open dem eyes
No be me talk am
Na *book* talk am
We are the ones who civilized [the Europeans] *them*
This is not my own conjecture
It is a fact in the book

In *Army Arrangement*, he anticipates that those he satirizes might go to court and thereby forewarns them of his own 'legal literacy':

Make e carry me go anywhere
I go open *book* for am
Let him (presumably, start a legal action)
I will open the (legal) books

He takes a common adage, "A fool at forty is a fool for ever", in *Reverun*, and justifies it again in terms of calligraphic representation:

Na so di *book people* dey call am
That is how the book [read as the literate] *people call it*

However, in *US*, where he narrates the death of his ideological soulmate, Thomas Sankara, the appeal to literacy is an attempt to inscribe a historical personage into immortality. Another mode of representation is a conception of the oral-written dialectic, represented as fictive-historical account respectively. In *Rererun* he starts off with,

Na *tori* I wan tell o
History dey inside small

Underlying this construction, is the presupposition that if the 'tori', or story he refers to is considered as belonging to the fictive realm, then there is an element of 'history' (read as 'the written') which should justify his claim. The tension between orality and 'literacy' is also exhibited in the process of composing a new song. Fela might score his song in musical notation, but not all his instrumentalists can read these notes! Hence, he goes a step further by writing out individual parts and humming them out, therefore relying on their auditory and mnemonic attention.

As earlier hinted in *Griotique*, and the beginning of this section, the free *versifier* may ultimately be working under other restrictions, including those imposed by his or her own condition of freedom, and also partly because the poetic tradition is plural in nature. This is an equally important feature of oral rhetorical devices such as parallelism, repetition, the verse line, tonal counterpoint, imagery, improvisation and the like, used in many of Fela's compositions. It may appear gratuitous to remark that a Fela verse line is rhythm-driven and thereby directed not at visual coherence but at aural reception, only if we overlook the mediation that 'writtiness' has imposed on musical production such as to render many song lyrics into what Karin Barber in a different context had described as "Aspiration to the condition of Writing."³⁶

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A close observation of his song text reveals that more often than not, lineation is determined by a co-occurrence with the breath-pause—in the manner that *Gentleman* and *BONN* show

Gentleman :

Africa hot/ I like am so
I know what to wear
But my friend don't know
He put him socks/ He put him singlet
He put him trouser/ He put him short
He put him tie/ He put him coat
He come cover all with him hat
He be gentleman

While also in *BONN*, we have:

No be outside police dey
No be outside court dem dey
No be outside magistrate dem dey
No be outside Buhari dem dey
Na craze world be dat
Animal in crazeman skin

Isn't the police in the outside world?
Isn't the court in the outside world?
Isn't the magistrate in the outside world?
Isn't Buhari in the outside world
It is a crazy world
Animal in the garb of the deranged

As with these two examples, most of the lyrics take this pattern revealing an average of seven to eight syllables per melodic line in such instances of adherence to the breath-pause criteria of

lineation. Even with the examples cited above, there are exceptional, overloaded lines, and as in such other circumstances, easy comprehension—even by the most ardent fans—become somewhat difficult. Judging by the structural pattern of such lines, a compelling guess for this choice is that the artist is more preoccupied with achieving a semantic wholeness informed by the feeling that such lines represent a unit of thought which, if broken, may compromise a unified meaning. The lines of *Army Arrangement* amply illustrate this:

If your condition too dey make you shake—
and you still dey no talk di way you feel/
Make you open your two ears very well—
to dey hear di true talk wey I dey talk

*If you are still intimidated by your circumstance
and are unable to speak up
Then open your ears and listen to the truth of my
talk*

Even though rendered in one long, almost muffled line each, it will be noticed that each of these lines can be 'conveniently' broken into two at the hyphenated points, as indicated above. Like the folk artist that he strove to be, Fela tended to over-narrate. One probable reason for the retention of this line might have been the danger of intruding in a unit of thought whose comprehension could be hampered if not allowed to run on. Aside from this, the latter sections of each of the lines appear to be predicated on the first sections, which take on the character of a subject. Nonetheless, one needs also to note a certain tendency in the artist to over-vocalize.

Another important index of the idiom of oral performance is the use of repetition as an aesthetic device. And as regards its relevance to a popular expressive art as Afrobeat, explanations

may not be entirely lacking, but they are oftentimes limited in scope, owing to the tendency to analyze popular art as a bound and fixed text. Beyond the use of repetition as a means of oral improvisation and mnemonic device, with Fela, the form comes to acquire the symbolic status associated with "the theme of repetition" and "repeated themes," in the parlance of Albert Lord.³⁷ What Lord refers to as the theme of repetition, designates the recurrence of incidents in a single tale or song in a pattern of organization that provides the basic structure of that tale or song. A repeated theme is also a motif or theme and is therefore not a basic feature of an oral tradition. "Repeated themes" however constitute a form of repetition only by virtue of their recurrence from tale to tale or song to song. A similar clarification is useful between the often confusing terms of "formula" and "convention". Whereas a formula is simply a verbal construction that is repeated *within* a work or performance, a convention on the other hand is a verbal construction that *recurs from work to work in an oral tradition*.

Starting with the use of an apparently harmless street name like "Ojuelegba", one discovers a gradual encoding and metaphoric transformation that presents us with the images of confusion and total anarchy. "Ojuelegba" is the same intersection where vehicles converge but with neither traffic light nor a warden to control road users. This imagery subsequently stuck due to its usage in many succeeding performances where Fela had intensified it as emblematic of national chaos.

Repetition can be full or partial, and as in *BONN* Fela uses full repetition to emphasize and intensify the theme of the repeated line. However, this situation is somewhat revised when Fela experiments with partial repetition. In such instances we have the repetition of the line structure, but not all the lexical items as in,

Beast of no nation, *egbekegbe*
Beast of no nation, *oturugbeke*

And in JJD, we have,

The way we dey *walk* down for here
The way we dey *talk* down for here
The way we dey *yab* down for here

Beyond these two forms, we also have lexical repetition as distinct from lexico-structural repetition and Fela's device here is the repetition of words within lines that are not structurally identical. Unlike the example above we have,

If something *good* dey I go sing
Nothing *good* sef to sing
Nothing *good* to sing
All the things wey dey—e no dey *good*

The constant repetition of 'good' here, as with the other situations, is an effective stylistic means to emphasize and intensify the theme of his utterance in an almost didactic order. Elsewhere, the artist taps into the traditional word-play as we find in parallelism and tonal counterpoint which are two particularly effective means of structural alteration in music making. In *CBB*, "Larudu regbeke" is contrasted to "Regbeke Lau." What has been done here is the reversal in the second clause of "regbeke" to the position of a head word. Apart from devices like tonal word-play, according to Olatunji O. Olatunji,³⁸ one of the configurations which strikes the listener to Yorùbá poetry is the device which consists of contrastive tones through a deliberate choice or distortion of lexical items. In *BONN*, both the lead vocal and chorus continually contrast the initial 'Ayakata'.

Ayakata—*Ayakata*
Ayakoto—*Ayakoto*
Ayakiti—*Ayakiti*
Ayakutu—*Ayakutu*

These tonal counterpoints may not necessarily lend themselves to a distinctive meaning outside of the context of usage, except occasionally with the head words. In spite of this, however, they give aural satisfaction while also intensifying the sense of the utterance.

Pictorial Narrative

Beyond the use of the sound track as a medium of communication, the Afrobeat tradition has also been extended via a peculiar discourse on album jackets and sleeves, in the same manner that oral performance ingests into itself diverse artistic idioms ranging from the aural to the visual. Although designed by different artists over the period, what is now associated with the typical Fela album sleeve-look are those body of works done by Lemi Ghariokwu between 1974 and 1990 which undoubtedly constitute a corpus on their own merit. A cross between illustration and cartoon, a basic feature of these jackets is their diverse narrative pattern on the one hand and, almost, a direct extension of the social realism of the song lyrics.

Since Fela authorizes the form, there emerged a constant dialogue between him and the fine artist, and between the artist and the general context of Afrobeat performance, which is then transferred into pictorial representation in this relay order. A sample of such authorization is the inscription on the album jacket of *ODOO* which reads: "This painting has been sanctified by our ancestors to support the Movement Against Second Slavery (MASS)." And on how the sleeves are finally produced, this is the fine artist's testimony on a 1974 album,

Alagbon Close :

Having listened ardently to the numerous recounting of the harrowing experience from the man himself and been privy to the various stages of composing the new tune, it was a fait accompli.³⁹

Shortly after this, he continues:

The next two album covers *No Bread* and *Kalakuta Show* followed in tow of Fela's vitriolic statement on vinyl. My *No Bread* was an elaborate oil painting, a mélange of social ills plaguing a developing nation fuelled by the then recently introduced Udoji Bursary Awards for public workers—a fallout of the oil-boom to volume. 'Mr. Inflation is in town' was one of the warnings in the painting.⁴⁰

A quotation on *Alagbon Close* cover, of the Greek philosopher—George Mangakis, "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny"—is an example of how an album sleeve is transformed into an intertextual site for oppositional narrative. On the album cover of *Coffin for Head of State*, Fela incorporates rebuttals on the military and civilian elite from his "MOP Message", as part of a collage of newspaper cuttings, claiming that:

It is twenty-one years now since our so called independence. Today we have no water, no light, no food, and house to hide our heads under...WELL TO AN INGLORIOUS CORRUPT MILITARY REGIME, WHICH

CHANGES TO A MORE RETROGRESSIVE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT (Emphasis, Fela's.)

Complementary to the general mood of his song texts, the basic feature of representation is pictorial realism: the pictures and illustrations 'show' and 'name' names in a rare iconicity of resemblance. The sense of resemblance could be specific, as the portraits of Nigerian Heads of State since independence in *CBB*, who are recognizable and known; or general, as the female features, of *Yellow Fever*, which though has no specific personal reference, capture without abstraction. As often, however, the pictorial characterization is hardly generic.

The illustrations may occasionally depict, simultaneously, a multiple time-spatial category. In *ODOO*, for instance, we find the prevalence of a mythic ambience buttressed by a perspective which recedes into a rustic and romantic setting, at once enchanting and magical. In combination with the perspective, the 'realism' of this mythic space is achieved with a sublime color choice in the background, which is meant to celebrate traditional African values. This background reflects a gentle blue sky from which interlocking hills jut out into a lush, green environment. The landscape sprawls into a podium, where it is hugged to a stop by a giant piano with which it achieves harmony of nature and man. Fela is in front of the piano (in repressed smile) with his "queens," in the background, donning traditional Yorùbá attire. Right below the podium and immediately before members of the "Egypt '80 Band," is a pre-historic-like brook on which a saxophone and flowers are floating. The dimension and perspective reflect an ambience of the romantic, as the authorizing agency of the sonic in which, it appears, the artist is well pleased.

In *Original Suffer Head*, we find a gradual slide from the predominantly mythic discourse of *ODOO* into a mytho-histor-

ical context. Aspects of the historical are 'indicted', it seems, through contrast with evidences hewn from the mythic universe, and there is a fusion of the other-worldly with the here and now. It is with *JJD* that the artist moves us closer to a historical representation, with more familiar symbols and icons.

Illustrated by the 'Poatsan Arts Trade Ltd. in Lagos, the dominant colors of *Original* are red, yellow and green, the conceptual colors of the African continent in Rastafarian imagination. The predominant yellow color to the right side of the illustration is probably used to capture the glitter of opulence radiated by images of profligacy and wealth—luxury cars, fashionable high-rises, an airplane and a private jet.

This is contrasted to the scenes of poverty and squalor below. Here, indeed, is a story of Africa's poor and the urban ghetto, with its citizens literally chained, a sight reminiscent of the chain gang of the slave trade era. This pictorial narrative of the album's theme centrally features a map of Africa dressed in black, an interesting irony in view of its intended signifier of darkness, uncertainty—even doom. But this is not even a regular map; it is also a face which wears a look of misery and melancholy. Tears of blood cascade down her cheeks, presumably on account of the state of affairs around her.

This African mask head is burdened by numerous problems, including economic deprivation, symbolized by the 'UNESCO' aid attached to it. The depiction of power outage and water scarcity testify to the story of general collapse. Strapped on Mr. Africa's shoulders is a barrel of petroleum spilling away, typical of the culture of waste for which the Nigerian, nay African, public service has become known.

The sense of desecration in blindfolding the FESTAC mask is made visible by the feeling of sacredness reflected from the mask's background with a halo of red and yellow glitter. Re-invoking a constant theme of the lyrics, the mask has actually been blindfolded by a Christian-Islamic alliance symbol-

ized with the cross and the crescent.

Yet, another polemic has been flagged off on the same cover as official policy is somewhat critiqued as Mr. 'Billionaire Rice Importer', overfed and in a rather arrogant posture, doles out money to the beggarly army of the jobless whose votes he buys. His political party is the "Nazi Party of Uselessness," and the ballot boxes wear the Nigerian national colors: green-white-green. Beside this opulence we find coffins of dead government policies. However, on the side of the masses we find Fela's notable saxophone, ostensibly blaring the message of hope.

The 1977 caricature of *Johnny Just Drop (JJD)* is a particularly successful intervention in pictorial cultural criticism. With a profuse use of vibrant colors, now emblematic of Fela's album sleeves, we are confronted with a narrative directed at deriding the African 'been to'. The 'been to' in the Nigerian context is a cultural pervert; he has traveled to the center nations—at times only for a brief period but returns with airs of superiority over his folks. At other times though, a 'been to' has stayed far too long to remember the basic social code of conduct of the community he or she left.

It is this hybrid consciousness that the *JJD* story tells. This anti-hero literally drops with the aid of the parachute to his ancestral home (later revealed through name tags), but everything about his appearance points him out as a stranger. He is dressed in a western double-breasted suit, socks, heavy boots and a bowler hat to match on a very sunny day! The lure is toward the farcical, which is revealed through his tie, draping to his knees, and his profuse sweat.

In response, the crowd gathered around him stares in consternation, derision and even pity symbolized by Johnny a character with transient identity. Judging by his forlorn look, he might as well have dropped from the airplane overhead, and it is instructive to note the verb 'drop', used in the context.

In contrast to Johnny all the other characters here, indicative of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, are clad in indigenous dress which are well suited for the climate. The hope which the vibrancy of their color choice radiates can only be contrasted to the drab gray and sullen blackness of Johnny's imposed style. The flip side continues the narrative of Johnny's drop from an 'Ofersee Hairways', a linguistic violence committed against the norm—'Overseas Airways', to indicate the general Afrobeat practice of ribald distortion. He is eventually unmasked as his briefcase bursts open mid-air, and his real names are revealed: Ogunmodede; Chibuzor; Abubakar, names from three of Nigeria's major ethnic groups: Yorùbá, Igbo and Hausa; Johnny, after all, is only but an impostor, a *follow follow* man! Occasionally, as in this case too, words complement the picture in order to enhance better comprehension and this is how this text is concluded with the artist's comment on the album cover:

The JJD man is commonsight. He has been to London, he has been to New York, Paris, Tokyo, Hamburg, what have you? He is proud about it! In the hot baking sun, he is the only African man in suit and tie ... he is the youngster in smoked denim faded jeans, he is also in high 'guaranteed' platform shoes. He is the alien in his country, his motherland! Wait until his 'slangs' and fonetics! In a nutshell, he is what I have painted on this album cover. He has just dropped.⁴¹

By and large, this is a pictorial representation of dissent, of the contest of values between dominance and marginality. And, with a style that buttresses the disjunction of elite policy—through a frugal use of generic characterization, and extensive

asymmetric form—what we invariably find is a pictorial extension of Fela's lyrical temperament. This temperament is at once contestatory and declamatory of views deemed to be tilting the continent in the direction of "second slavery,"⁴² and a dependent political economy

Notes

1. This is an excerpt from Remi Raji's "An underground poem", in *A Harvest of Laughter*. (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1997, p. 61.)
2. Excerpts from Obi Nwakama's "A String Lullaby" for Fela Anikulapo-Kuti.
3. See *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Riffiths and Helen Tiffin. (London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 2.)
4. See Françoise Lionet's *Post Colonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 5.)
5. Op. Cit. (*The Empire Writes Back*.)
6. See appendix section on Call and Response Procedures in Fela Ransome-Kuti's *Shuffling and Smiling* by Willie Anku.
7. From Braimoh's "Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: A Misunderstood Poet", a 1980 B.A. project in the English Department of the University of Ibadan.
8. View expressed by Magorie in *Anatomy of Poetry*. (London: 1955, 1977.)
9. See the Braimoh interview.
10. Ibid. See p. 4 of the same interview.
11. See F. Kermode, and J. Hollander (eds.) *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*. (Vol. I London, Toronto and New York, 1973, p. 596)

12. See Wole Soyinka's "The Writer in a Modern State," in (ed.) Per Wästberg's, *The Writer in Modern Africa*. (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968, p.21.)
13. This suggestion was made by the musician Tunji Oyelana.
14. Cite Iranus, Eibl-Eibesfeldt in *Ethology: The Biology of Behaviour*. (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1970, p. 132.)
15. Cite Richard Schechner in *Essays on Performance Theory*. (1977 rpt as *Performance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988, p.243.)
16. See Wole Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems*. (London: Methuen, 1967, p. 72.)
17. See Cheryl Johnson-Odim's and Nina Emma Mba's *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome Kuti of Nigeria*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997, p. 83.)
18. See David Coplan's *In Township Tonight!* (London: Longman, 1977, p. 23.)
19. See J.H. Kwabena Nketia's "The Poetry of Akan Drums." (*Black Orpheus: A Journal of the Arts in Africa*. Vol. 1, No. 2. Ibadan: Mbari Club/Daily Times, 1968, p.27.)
20. Listen particularly to "Weary Blues" by Langston Hughes, and co-produced with Charles Mingus and Feather Leonard. (Polygram Record, Compact Disc Gigital Audio (841 660-2), 1990.)
21. Cite Vic Giammon in "Problem of Method in Historical Study of Popular Music." (Sweden: *Popular Music Perspective* 1982, p. 24.)
22. Margaret Drewal makes a comparison between the Egba Parikoko mask whose extended embroidery she describes as a semiotic of power in the same sense that skyscrapers in New York would constitute corporate power. See Margaret Drewal. *Yorùbá Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*. Indiana:

Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 22-23.

23. See *The Comet*, Saturday, July 24, 1999, p.8.
24. Ifa is the Yorùbá system for unraveling past mysteries and foretelling the future; it shares the assumptions of the Pythagoreans of old who regarded the world as knowable through a mathematical combination of figures; the Babalwo is the male Ifa diviner while the Iyanifa is his female counterpart; they are both oracular priests of Ifa.
25. In Yorùbá mythology, Oiodumare is generally regarded as the highest of the divinities.
26. This is how Wole Soyinka describes this primeval creator of forms.
27. This is also corroborated by Adeoye C.L. in *Igbagbo ati Esin Yorùbá*. (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1985.)
28. See Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 145.)
29. Given that Ògún is symbolized with iron, considered a central ore in industrial production, the deity also came to be identified as patron of the industrial working class in Cuba. Hence the ethnologist, Miguel Barnet, informed me in Cuba, that the working class is also on account of this and the deity's vanguard role in cosmological narrative, considered the children of Ogun.
30. See M.M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*. (Texas: Texas University Press, 1981, p. 15.)
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 91.
33. See Revelations Chapter 17:13.
34. Such trans-generic features of contemporary Yorùbá art is the focus of Karin Barber's "Literacy, Improvisation and the Public in Yorùbá Popular Theatre" in Stewart Brown (ed.) *The Pressures of the Text: Orality, Texts and the Telling of Tales*. (Exeter: BPC Wheatons, 1995.)

35. This issue was buttressed by leading media practitioners like CBS's News Consultant, Carl Bernstein and Larry King during the latter's programme in the wake of CNN's broadcast of the incident in September, 1998.
36. See Karin Barber's "Literacy", p. 6, as indicated above in ed. Stewart Brown's *The Pressure of the Text*.
37. Cited in Benningson Gray's, "Repetition in Oral Literature." (*Journal of American Folklore* , Vol. 84, No 333, p. 33.)
38. See Olatunji O. Olatunji, in *Features of Yorùbá Poetry* . (Ibadan: UPL, 1984.)
39. Cite Lemi Ghariokwu in *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts* . (Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 054)
40. Ibid., p. 055.
41. See details of album jacket in appendix section on discography
42. This is how Fela describes the neo-colonial condition; he subsequently formed the Movement Against Second Slavery (MASS) as a way of raising awareness around the theme.

Plate 1



Welcome to Lagos !
Home of Afrobeat
(Courtesy Andrew Esiebo)

Plate 2



Kalakuta Republic with the emblazoned logo "Africa '70," shortly before it was destroyed by military personnel on February 18, 1977 (Courtesy, Knud Vilby)



Fela's mother, Funmilayo, in hospital after assault on her by military personnel during the Kalakuta incident.
(Courtesy Femi B. Osunla)

Plate 3



Fela in worship session, with an acolyte in crouching position, at Afrika shrine (Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)



Plate 5

Fela's Marriage Ceremony, Central Lagos (Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)



Fela, in cast, after attack on Kalakuta Republic, 1977.
(Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)

Plate 7



Fela (middle) with the Extended Family Jazz Band, Lagos. (Left) Cousin Fran and husband (right) Tunde Kuboye.
(Courtesy, Tunde Kuboye)



A testimony to confrontational art: Fela performing after his brush with military personnel who burnt down his Kalakura Republic residence in 1977.
(Courtesy Femi B. Osunla)

Plate 9



Fela with late President Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, at the Afrika Shrine, Lagos (Courtesy Femi B. Osunla)



Tony Allen—world acclaimed master drummer of Fela's bands between the mid sixties and late seventies.
(Courtesy, Glendora Review)



Barrister Femi Falana, human rights activist and one of Fela's lawyers
(Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)



Lester Bowie, African-American jazz musician and collaborator with Fela.
(Courtesy Glendora Review)



Lekan Animasaun (Baba Ani), Fela's band leader since the late sixties. (Courtesy Glendora Review)

Plate 11



Dancer, as well a machad in Fela's ritual parlance, in a 1983 Performance in France (Courtesy, Bernard Matussi re)

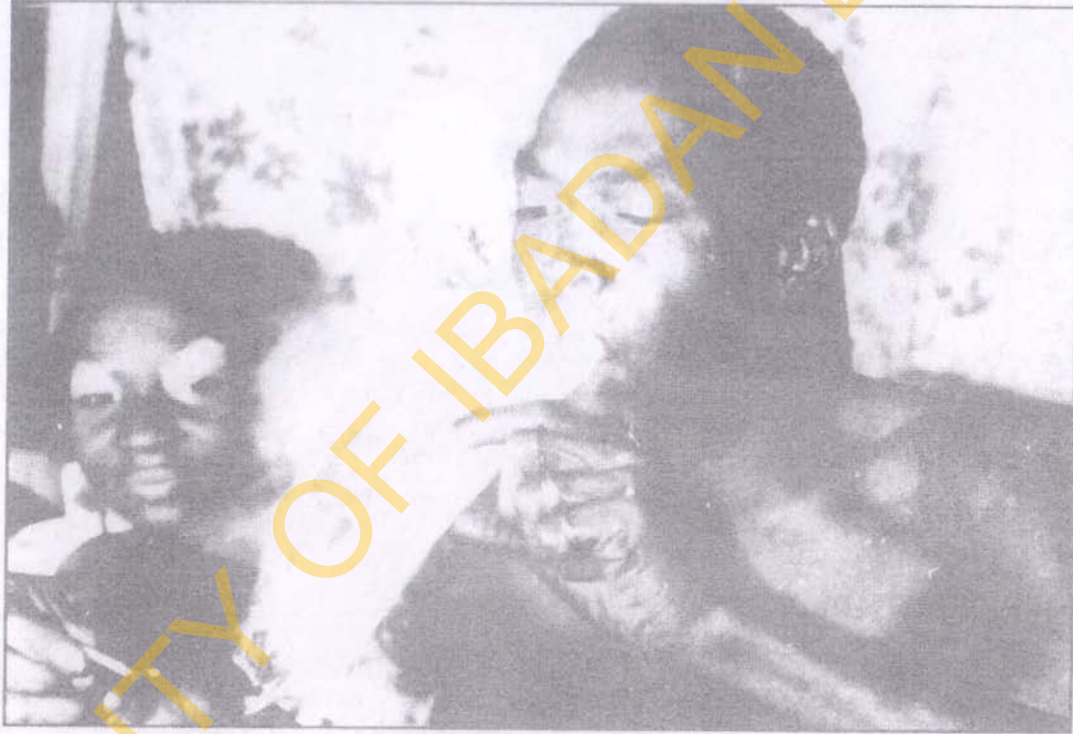


Plate 12

"Do not say Indian Hemp; say Nigeria Natural Grass (NNG)."- Fela. (*The News magazine, Lagos*)

Plate 13



A white cock sacrifice to the soul of Pan Africanism by Fela, symbolized here with a bust of Kwame Nkrumah.
(Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)



Fela at the Afrika Shrine (Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)

Plate 14



Plate 15

New Afrobeats acts: (L-R) Femi Anikulapo-Kuti (Positive Force); Lagbaja (Bisade Ologunde); Dede Mabiaku (Underground System).

Plate 16



Femi Anikulapo - Kuti, Afrobeat Ascension
(Courtesy: *The Observer Music Monthly*)



Seun Anikulapo - Kuti.
Says: "For Ever Lives Afrobear" (F. E. L. A.)
(Courtesy *The Observer Music Monthly*)

Plate 17

4

Idán, or a Carnavalesque



*I thought I had finally come to my land of bones
When the hellish birds of an evening
Drew out my ears
To the sublime path
That gave demons eternal voices
And since then, all evening
Gypsies have been making music from bones...*

—SANYA OSHA¹

There is a definite preference here, as would have become obvious from the preceding chapters, for the use of the term “performance” in describing Fela’s overall artistic oeuvre. The term captures an all-inclusive framework within which Fela’s music is only a part, albeit a significant one, besides other instances, so to speak, of ‘stepping out of the self’ as shown through the nuances of the subtexts of dance, mime, gesture, costume and mask display—which add profound meaning and perspective to his song texts.

The central concern here is how Fela transposes earlier forms of aesthetic experience, and in what ways such transformations express a ruptured cultural continuum from folk aesthetic to popular aesthetic practices of urban, industrial life. If ritual, for instance, is steeped in improvisation, how do we recognize the ritual continuum when reconstituted as in Fela's performance? An avant-garde mask performance is obliged to reenact, as Fela continually demonstrates, at least some aspects of its constitutive form.

The intention is to demonstrate how Fela's performance is a derivative of masking forms, including the less ritualized strand of Ègbádò èfè-gèlèdè performance traditions. Although a gèlèdè masker, as suggested by Babatunde Lawal, is not a spirit medium like the Egúngún, it obviously has spiritual connections with it in the general sense of influence. It is this connection that Fela shows without suggesting that it is its essential character. Besides, with Fela, the èfè-gèlèdè aesthetic is merely an appropriated form, for indeed he deconstructs the gèlèdè 'aspiration for social order' by blessing reversal behavior in the context of an alternative cultural practice.²

The nature of transposition of the mask code needs not be direct because the mask—even as an ideational category—does not offer itself to a simple, literal interpretation. In other words, the undecoded mask is fossilized message, a single instance that is representative of other instances, other spaces and times. As a storehouse, it is a repository of ancient and current knowledge such as myth, legend and history, which makes its language cryptic and its message diverse. Broadly speaking, there are two types of mask: one represents a living person and therefore serves profane uses of entertainment and amusement, while the other is employed for the purpose of ritual.³ What is exciting in the idán or carnivalesque experience of Fela's Afrika Shrine, is the attempt to amalgamate these diverse sensibilities and moods.

The process of deriving meaning from the mask in a dramaturgic sense is such that once the mask has been foregrounded as the primary genre, as Harry Garuba notes, "a dramatic genre can then be constructed from its code."⁴ Indeed, Garuba suggests that the mask in this sense serves as a crucial enabling conceptual metaphor of African and Black drama. The scenario captured below does not relate to Fela's outdoor performance; rather, the aesthetic pronouncements are most evident during his 'Divination Night' and 'Comprehensive Night' Saturday shows on Pepple Street. Fela's reenactment of ritual through song and drama is not an attempt to faithfully recapture those idioms in their pristine states. In his treatment, these events have been revised and transformed into modes of countercultural expressions of urban life.

Pepple Street

At about 10 p.m. on Saturdays, Pepple Street—demarcated from the Nigerian Police Force College by a short fence—takes on an eerie mood. Located in the Ikeja suburb of Lagos, the street bears the burden of housing the Afrika Shrine where, besides the Sunday and Tuesday performances, Fela adds a 'Divination Night' where the audience is treated to new musical compositions and a deviant ritual service. The 'Comprehensive Show' follows immediately after this. On normal days, Pepple is equally capable of looking just as sane as any other street. With only about two artisan shops, the street has bowed to the commercial pressure of the crowd that peaks on three days of the week: only confectionaries and bars dot this single lane bypass.

That is, legally. There is a myriad of other mobile trading in marijuana and other hard drugs. The 'Big Boys' (Ọmọ n'lá) bring the 'stuff,' although they know that Fela is averse to the

sale and consumption of hard drugs. Unlike cocaine and heroin, marijuana is not included in this classification because, according to Fela, "It is grass, it is medicinal." Even the 'Big Boys' have to be careful of the policing 'Shrine Boys'. The Big Boy who is unsure of the field gets some urchin from the Pepple neighborhood to help spot potential junkies. "It is too expensive for the masses," complained some of my interviewees, and so they would rather stick to the more economical marijuana. A sizable majority, though, had bought into Fela's validation of marijuana as herbal medicine and the exception he made for it in contrast to the other drugs. By the mid-eighties, the street price of 'crack' in the neighborhood was about sixty naira, while in the less industrialized city of Ibadan, it was going for about fifty five naira—though with the associated risk of being mixed with yam flour.

Around the Shrine, contour-lined faces milling around the street corridor betray an unnamed anxiety. Bands of youth in thick-coated lipsticks, baseball caps, fez caps, corduroys and denim jeans sway by in swagger style. Christian Dior, Alicia Alonso—irreverent perfumes make frantic efforts to impact on the whiff but get wafted off by a teenager's single puff of marijuana. The sky of Pepple Street on Saturdays is a momentary overcast of marijuana smoke. A youth conclave ranging from the 'Yuppie' to the serving 'Youth Corper' and the O'Level Awaiting Result candidate all unite in their search for laughter and by a singular wish to be relieved of the institutions of containment they have huddled through all the week long.

Inside the Shrine, the Chief Priest of performance is yet to arrive and the band is filling in with a general intermission, sometimes, with guest artists. The restive crowd is caught between the performance and its own excitement. Someone in the corner is making a larger-than-life claim, and though his motley crowd seems to know better, it nods in agreement. Two figures in the dimly lit parts, a non-commissioned officer

and his police sergeant accomplice, have abandoned their duty posts and are using precisely the same excuse to shunt a cue to purchase marijuana. One hawker takes the offensive, trying to convince her clients that her price is not outrageous, indeed, she blames government economic policy on the slight price variation of marijuana: "Dis gofment is bad. How come wey small wrap of Igbo dey cost three naira, me self fear o!" (*This government is bad; how do you explain the fact of a small wrap of marijuana costing three naira; I'm indeed confounded too!*)

Not too far off, a similar disputation is going on; but it appears the hawker is charging at an elderly smoker for having tripped off his 'market.' Their voices come alive as the smoker retorts to an accusation of being 'high' on marijuana: "Sure, yes, it's the only way to ensure that you are employed." A potential source of emotional outburst suddenly dissolves as the crowd, including the accuser, bursts into laughter—agreeing that there was some logic in the defense.

It is midnight and there is a sudden eruption at the gate as a small cluster of youngsters guide a figure in the direction of the stage, and the charged atmosphere yields to catcalls, whistling and shouts of "Bàbà Kuti," "Fela Baba," "Abàmi èdá," "Augu-stine/o," "lèniyàn,"—some of Fela's more familiar sobriquets. He does not mount the stage just yet, waiting for the finale of the intermission. Then Baba Ani, the oldest member of the group and now band leader, formally announces Fela's arrival. The catcalls resume and the crowd is querying and accusing Fela of omnibus offenses. "Who the hell are you to keep us waiting?" "Any member of your household ever got a wrist-watch?" "Serves you right that the government detained you the last time!" It is an unending list of jibes and rude talk.

The band leader is standing on the central stage, slightly elevated by about three feet. A neon light in blue background reflects a map of Africa in red contrast. Behind the band is

inscribed the slogan: "Blackism—Force of the Mind." The worship cubicle housing deities is on the left-hand corner, midway between the stage and the audience. The band leader follows all this motion, smiling, adding to the general swooning atmosphere through his one-liner replies, but generally trying to quiet the crowd. He seizes the microphone, tells a little anecdote about the African condition, on the need for fortitude in challenging dictatorship, and then, "introducing to you the one and only A-bà-mì-È-dá, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti," coinciding with a spontaneous outburst of percussive rhythm, followed by brass instruments, guitar and all, in no particular order; they are let loose in a staccato fashion, now cresting, now troughing, swooning and swooning into the far night and without being anticipated: stops! Microphone in one hand, a long wrap of marijuana in the other: "Everybody say yee-ye," here is Fela trying to give pep to the night's performance.

On Whose Side are the (gods) Òrìṣà?

Properly speaking, the active incorporation of an indigenous form of worship in Fela's performance predates the 1977 event of the burning of his Kalakuta residence, with his Afrika Shrine then located at the Empire Hotel, off Agege Motor Road, Lagos. It took until the Shrine moved to Pepple Street for a grandiose elaboration of the worship form, as an open opposition transcript for contesting normative religious practices, to take root. Livid with anger and protesting one of my questions in a 1992 interview, here is Fela's reading of the Shrine as a conscious hermeneutical practice which, according to him, remains valid in spite of its peculiar circumstance of counter-cultural behavior. He also noted that all the basic elements of a worship experience is relived during his Divination Night:

Don't African mothers expose their bodies in the shrine when they wear small dress? Even you see their (breast) *Ọyàn* at the shrine? So, you don't know? Don't they have music at these shrines? Don't they also have music in their churches? (That) When you have ritual dance ... ladies dance semi-nude? I say in our traditional shrines, don't they have naked ladies dancing? Don't you know about it? That in Africa, they dance bare-breasted at shrines? Sometimes self, the woman go go completely naked? Oh, that is why I say you university people bore me.⁵

The description here, therefore, is one typical of the decade between 1987 and 1997. Before proceeding with this deviant worship style, it is necessary to note the abiding principle which informs the adaptive and transformational character of even formal ritual as a recreation of myth. Margaret Drewal captured this dynamism when she delineated a broad spectrum of ways by which improvisation can transform ritual through "psychic transformations or, of esoteric verses turned into narratives, spontaneous interpretations, recontextualization, drumming, dancing, chanting, parody, ruses, reconstitution of conventions and individual interventions into the ritual event."⁶ In the context of Yorùbá rituals, for example, the basis for this self-renewal and reconstruction is in-built in the internal character of ritual's epistemology. This partly explains the survival of the Yorùbá *Ọrìṣà* worship in the New World long after the middle passage. Besides, *Ọrìṣà* worship does not lend itself as a body of necessarily coherent, uniform, and orthodox doctrine but more as embedded cultural practices; this also informs the dictum to ritual which says "*Baá rí ígún, á f'òbè ṣ'ẹbọ*"—implying that if we cannot get a bat for sacrifice, we could as well be content with using a similar bird. Taking a continental overview, Martin

Chanock has argued persuasively that "religious practices have nowhere been permanent, uniform and unchanging and both they and the doctrines produced through practice have constantly been in flux."⁷

In other words, attempts at representing one orthodoxy both on its merit and above other competing forms, may be no more than efforts to privilege a false sense of coherence and truism of a particular creed. A number of aphorisms in Yorùbá culture further lend weight to this attitude, besides showing the essential self-destructiveness of the cultural practice. For a culture whose sense of hierarchy emphasizes age difference, one of the cognomens (and aphorism too) of the creation of Ile Ife, its spiritual headquarters, is rendered thus:

Ọgbọ ò pín sí bì kán
Omódé gbán Àgbà gbán, l'a fi dá Ilé Ife

*Knowledge is limitless
Ile-Ife is founded on the wisdom of the young and the elderly.*

In an explicit acknowledgment of the vicissitudes of life and the unstable character of casual 'truth,' even the Babalawo re-echoes the tradition by affirming that:

Bì òní tírí
Olá le má ribé
Ló mú Babaláwo d'Ìfá Ọṛọ́n

*As things are today
They may not be the same by tomorrow
This explains why the Babalawo consults the Ifa oracle every week.*⁸

And these are by no means occasional or chance remarks, for there are innumerable instances of other contexts, be they of gender or general power relations, in which the power of language to posit an alternative outlook is brought to the fore.

Back to the ritual paraphernalia at the Shrine, the statuettes and other iconic representations of Yorùbá mythological divinities include Èṣù—trickster and divine interpreter; Ṣàngó—god of thunder and progenitor of the egúngún masquerade performance; Ògún—god of metallurgy, creativity and patron of the blacksmith; eré ìbéjì—a symbol of fertility and of twins. Also adorning the worship cubicle are portraits of black figures including Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba and Funmilayo Ransome Kuti. There is also the Asante stool, a symbol from the Asante of Ghana. There are earthen mounds containing honey, a palm-oil-soaked wick and cowry shells. Some kola nuts are placed in a covered calabash, while a keg of palm-wine and three bottles of Gordon's Gin are tucked in a corner. A sacrificial fowl in the cubicle watches with distrust. The accompanying musical instruments for divination rites, mainly the percussion, are the metal gong, occasionally interchanged with sticks, the bass drum and its set with cymbals. The cubicle is lighted with red, blue and green bulbs.

Worship commences with the lighting of the wick by an acolyte and, simultaneously, the ritual rhythm starts with an interlocking clanging of the metal gong and sticks. Then the bass drum and cymbals are unleashed in an upbeat and fast pace. For a while it is repetitive, with the metal gong defining the time line, but suddenly takes a faster pace, reaching its crescendo just about the same time the rising smoke from the burning wick gets to a peak. At that moment, Fela emerges with a few votaries—all masked in white (traditional chalk) powder on their faces. Like the other worshippers, he is not wearing any top.

The repetitive rhythm is maintained in the background with

occasional sharp and intruding antiphonal trap-drum beats. Fela leads his fellow worshippers to the cubicle. He assumes a crouching position, picks up some cowry shells and lobes of kola nut, throws them on a tray and begins to observe intently. His brows betray different moods from anxiety and perplexity to elation and satisfaction. He takes a bite of the kola nut and dips his left fingers into the honey pot for a taste. Some Gordon's Gin is sprinkled on the floor, for deity appeasement, after which he empties the contents of the bottle in the four fire points earlier lit. Infused with methanol, the flame rises, bathing the Chief Priest from torso up, but he does not move.

He grabs the fowl and rips it at the neck with bare hands. He stands up gradually with the fowl, raises it slightly above his head and opens his mouth to start sucking the dripping blood. His body is covered with sweat; his eyes, thunder-shot, are glittering; his teeth, blood-red, are grating. He merely glares into space, momentarily suspended in the middle of nowhere. He is seemingly attempting to move but somehow restrained by what the rest of us cannot see. His biceps are enlarged in this mimetic struggle to break off; his head gradually drops to the right and he starts to chant or mumble, but it is still incomprehensible.

With unsteady steps, he moves to the right of the cubicle and picks a shredded canvas which has been soaked in water. Gripping it with two hands, he swirls it round, moving backwards some seven steps but with head thrust forward and eyes intent on the deities. He repeats this motion and then replaces the canvas. He finally pours some palm-wine into a calabash and takes a sip, after which he gradually seems to gain consciousness of his immediate surroundings.

The remaining content and an extra calabash are handed over to the libation assistant, who also receives the content in a diagonal cross-hand-stretch, takes a sip and then goes upstage with the two calabashes of palm-wine to 'feed' the remaining members of the band. Back on stage, Fela is handed a nine cen-

timer joint of marijuana. He takes a long drag, as if it is some oxygen survival dose. He emits the smoke in one cloud-cluster and his head momentarily disappears into it. He emerges to start prophesying: his ambience is of one who has just returned from a distant journey. Is this worship or performance; is this ritual or play?

These posers on the dramatic experience have indeed pre-occupied the attention of earlier critics like Ossie Enekwe who suggests that:

Function determines the nature of drama in every culture. In 5th century B.C. Greece, for instance, poetry was central to drama because for the Greeks it was the most desirable and perfect art form. In Asia and Africa, on the other hand, mime and music are of the essence in the theatre. While the mainstream European theatre is syllogistic in form, the Asian and African theatres are ritualistic. In Greek tragedy where moral rhetoric is emphasized, the moral order must be reflected by the order of events—"the right of the story" ⁹

Enekwe goes a step further to suggest that, "A ritual can become entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency" ¹⁰ Posing the question of the character of Fela's performance as an either-or situation, indeed, amounts to creating an artificial dichotomy; and one that can only yield a binary mind-set incapable of appreciating textual conflation. The validity and continuity of ritual need not be based always on its efficacy or otherwise, and this can be said of all religious experiences. Inhered in this practice is an internal mechanism for explaining ritual success or failure based on the twin factors of eternal

hope and belief in a causal agency. There is always a 'reason' or 'cause' for a failed ritual, a burden which is invariably borne by a ritual scapegoat. This point can be illustrated with a 1996 ritual slippage at the Shrine. On that occasion, Fela reached out for a fowl, as he had always done, severed its head, but there was hardly any blood dripping down. Confounded, the ritual assistant sent for another one, but the experience replayed itself in a similar fashion. This was the last occasion a fowl was sacrificed at the Shrine, but that was not all.

This event was considered ominous enough for Fela to further appease the warring deities shortly after Divination Night. Joined by fellow worshippers, they reached for the crossroads between Pepple Street and the Ikeja intersection and according to Dare Jejeleko, an acolyte and resident of Kalakuta:

Fela come make ètùtù, chant some incantation, turn the chicken round and round above his head, and come flung am away I think you understand? After this, he come start to walk towards the car to go home, but he no look back at the ètùtù.

Fela made a ritual propitiation, chanted some incantation, swirled the fowl over his head and flung it away. I hope you understand? After this, he walked toward the car without glancing backwards.

When I returned to Jejeleko shortly after Fela's death, he had an explanation for the slippage. He still did not think the event was merely accidental. Rather, for him, the event ought to have been apprehended as a ritual foreboding by Africa's ancestors, who were warning the country through Fela, of the final clampdown on the opposition by the General Sani Abacha regime.

Idán, or a Carnivalesque

When I called his attention to the fact that the regime had already jailed several opposition figures before the event, he simply went on to the second explanation—the fact that the event was also a signal from the ancestors to Fela to come home and rest; and concluding, he added:

You know sey Fela no fit just die like dat, the spirit must to show am for eyes korokoro. Dat is why when Fela just dey laugh and shake him head for stage, we no know say him don see idán for face ... aaah Abami himself!

You know that Fela couldn't just have died without the spirits forewarning him. That was why Fela shook his head and smiled on stage, we didn't know that he was actually communicating with these spirits ... aaah the unfathomable himself!

Jejeleko apart, most Kalakuta residents also share this view and are quick to point out several instances where ritual's efficacy had assisted them to thwart unwholesome designs of state policy against their Republic. It is also instructive to note that the event of the slippage did not stop the continuation of ritual worship at the Shrine; it continued, albeit in a modified and self-renewed form. This appears consistent with the manner in which religious groups attempt to contain new experiences. There appears to be a similarity here with how the hippies of the early seventies explained away their inability to make the physical structure of the American White House collapse after weeks of levitation, or how the spiritual is substituted for the material by religious groups in order to resolve the experiential.

The moment of ègùn (trance possession) transforms the player in a ritual drama, who may take up features of the deity being celebrated. Even when the context of ritual is altered,

residues of its origin may still subsist as we also find among commuter drivers in Yorùbá land, who, in an attempt to recreate the bacchanalian ambience of their patron deity, Ògún, drive *exuberantly* during the deity's festivals. I inquired from Baba Bogunbe, the Babaláwo in charge of Ifá Oséméjì Shrine in Ibadan, if there was no safer way the drivers could conduct their celebration, and his reply was, èwù Ògún ni wán wò—“they have donned Ògún's toga.” Elements of such residues, actively inform the ritual practice at the Afrika Shrine.

In analyzing the outlined ritual process, it is essential to keep in mind that folk aesthetic form is what is being transformed into a multi-ethnic, multinational, urban context here—with its rippling changes in meaning and figural devices. A number of West African performance traditions foreground the practice we have just described. However, it is the èfè-gèlèdè practice of the Ègbádò Yorùbá that is most prevalent, serving, more or less, as its authorizing metaphor. Èfè and gèlèdè are intertwined. Èfè is primarily a satirical form, and it is the high point of the bọlọjọ season when the gèlèdè masquerade makes an outing. According to Lawal, during the gèlèdè performance, the eléfè (humorist) prays for the collective well-being of the society and satirizes social misfits in the community. He “represents the collective voice of the people ... and can even ridicule the Oba (king) of the town during his performance with no fear of reprisal.”¹¹ Noting that it is more elaborate than gèlèdè, Benedict Ibitokun further suggests that èfè relates more to the liturgical and could, like gèlèdè, emphasize the fustian, hilarious and grotesque.¹² The term èfè itself refers, first, to the mask; second, to the mask's songs, poems, and actions; and third, to the entire concert.¹³ An additional contemporary usage of èfè is to equate it to a joke. Gèlèdè, on the other hand, is *essentially* a female mask primarily concerned with the ethics of guaranteeing social peace and order.

Participants in a ritual, in the words of Edmund Leach,

share "communicative experiences through many different sensory channels simultaneously ... verbal, musical, choreographic and visual-aesthetic 'dimensions' are all likely to form components of the total message."¹⁴ This experience is particularly true of the *ẹfẹ-gẹlẹdẹ* event as well as the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Afrika Shrine. Apart from the songs, which were always pouring forth as a background refrain in an *ẹfẹ* performance, a visual countenance is added to the carnival with the display of the mask. The *akunbe* or *amuti* plays the painter, and (wood carrier) *arugi* refers to the masker. The *ẹfẹ* is also a site for a ribald encounter, where what in normal day-to-day expression would be considered obscene is allowed free play. The *ẹfẹ* of *Ilaro*, according to Lawal, when paying homage to *È ẹ̀sù*, a divine messenger, describes the latter as "the one with the big penis and big scrotum." At other times it tells allegorical stories. As with all Yorùbá masks, it gives pre-eminence to the 'mothers,' a term not quite captured by the English 'witch.'

Either in their traditional context or in Fela's reinterpretation of this tradition, ritual symbols are neither meaningless nor arbitrary. Going through the ritual motions of the Afrika Shrine just described, it would be noticed that the impact of the repetitive clanging here, as in many traditional worship, is largely invocative—a device by which elements of the ethereal world are invited into ritual proceedings. As in many other religious experiences, this sort of repetitiveness momentarily numbs a ritual agent and prepares him or her for trance possession.

A Divination Night performance exhibits several dimensions of time of the 'worlds' later described. Time present, past, and future dialogue and compete for attention. An aspect of this is evident in the display of ancestral masks which trigger this dialogue with the past, and graffiti which compel one to acknowledge the present. Through their simultaneous evocation of several dimensions of time, realized in the congealed narratives of these figural sculptures of condensed myths, cur-

rent discourses, and a power to prognosticate, the masks suggest a multimedia event. Even in their supposed inert state, they compel a visual discourse and an aural testimony through their acolyte to their concealed messages. Of these qualities of the mask, Harry Garuba notes:

The mask play itself often exercises an anarchic force upon our perceptions, breaking down our compartmentalizing categories by being able to move uninhibited between reality and ritual, the referential and the semiotic.¹⁵

This practice finds eloquent affirmation particularly in the West African theatrical tradition, an aspect of which has found its way into the black Diaspora. At the literary level, an aesthetic continuum has been demonstrated by Garuba through Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*.¹⁶ Time-space is 'fused' and 'expanded' quite dramatically in these works. Garuba further notes that their stage eschew the linear, Aristotelian, unified plot structure based on causality. Time-space is ruptured as we find in Soyinka's *A Dance*, whose world alternates between a world of the living and the dead. Characters in Walcott's *Dream* step out of socially acknowledged realities into the supersensible world; in this sense, they affirm the validity of a cultural continuum.

The structure of performance at the Afrika Shrine also exhibits a unique time-space with the different, progressive segments such as dance (actual and virtual) time, and ritual (virtual and actual) time. Even with both, Divination Night can hardly adhere to a set time, partly also because of the improvisational character of performance. Divination Night does not quite have a beginning, middle, or an end in the strict sense. The night's performance 'starts' with an intermission,

'starts' again with Fela's first number, then there is the ritual interlude after which Fela talks about 'starting' the show proper. Yet, after the finale, Fela talks about having a 'short break,' which suggests that the day's performance is concluded, while also affirming the continuity of the musical form.

The ritual paraphernalia and cosmic players represented at the Afrika Shrine denote a specific rung of ritual participation in a mode similar to Ifá divination practice earlier described in Chapter One. However, in spite of its attempt at achieving determinacy through numerical combinations, an epistemological inclination also noted of the Pythagoreans of ancient Greece, the Ifá corpus exhibits an interesting ambivalence: its determinacy is unstable. Inhered in Ifá's narrative verses are suggestions of textual instability and plurality of meaning, a factor which has tremendously aided its process of reconstitution without losing relevance over the period. It is precisely this potential afforded by the latter that Fela seized upon to redirect the energies of the gods, dragging them to do his random battles and battles of other victims of dominant powers that people his diverse narrative texts. This phenomenon of man 'making' and reconstructing god is prevalent in West Africa, and Karin Barber notes this attitude of the Yorùbá toward their *Orisa*.

Relations between humans and *ÒrìṢà* are in some sense a projection of relations between people in society...if the Yorùbá see the *Òrìṣà*'s power as being maintained and augmented by human attention, this is because they live in a kind of society where it is very clear that human individual's power depends in the long run on the attention and acknowledgment of his fellow man.¹⁷

Fela's ritual assemblage obviously falls short of a *babaláwo*'s repertoire (a *Babaláwo* is not just a diviner but also an oracular priest of Ifá, the primeval diviner), but approximates to other lower rungs of divination practices, such as those of the

Onísègùn and the Adáhunṣe. But Fela did not set out in the first place to faithfully recreate any such structure; it was just sufficient if his practice testified to an alternative outlook in a society where both the colonial and independence elite denigrated indigenous worship forms. He was only too content if his practice achieved, or at least encouraged, a heterodox discourse.

Absent in the cubicle of this unorthodox worship are the Ifá sacred nuts (*ikín Ifá*) and a staff for tapping the divination tray (*ìróké*), two important items for a *babaláwo*. The four divinities chosen by Fela for this counterculture worship are of both aesthetic and ideological significance. Èṣù, for instance, is a pre-eminent player in Yorùbá cosmic drama, particularly because while others are invoked, it is appeased. While the other divinities are not essential to every divination, Èṣù is—which explains why it is first appeased (as Fela also does) before proceeding with a ritual event. This is also borne out of the fact that Èṣù is a potential spanner in the works. Aside from its legendary trickery, multivocal, and polysemic attributes, Èṣù is also the keeper of *aṣé*—utterance-efficacy—that which enables what is appeased or/and invoked to come to pass. While the palm-wine in the two calabashes that Fela hands over to other votaries may symbolize the bacchanal diet of Ògún, the diagonal-cross-formation in handing them over has greater bearing to Èṣù whose favorite abode is the crossroads. One of his encomiastic verses testifies to this: Èṣù onílé oríta, that is, “Èṣù of the crossroads.” What better setting to commit mischief by the legendary trickster! Nicholas Ajimele, a band member and one of the libation bearers, explained that the diagonal-cross-handstretch was also meant to denote the crossroads, as the point where ritual offerings are placed and expected to be dispersed in order to be efficacious.

During ritual motions, Fela performs with and interprets the dialogues of characters in the ritual text in a manner that is similar to Èṣù's capacity for role conflation. These are roles that

cast him as both performer and critic in the mould of the traditional griot. And it is worthwhile to relate this to the reading which has been given to the Èṣù figure in Louis Henry Gates' seminal work, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*.¹⁸ Gates makes an implicit binary differentiation of Èṣù as an interpreter rather than a performer. He somewhat arrived at this conclusion by suggesting that Èṣù is contiguous with Ògún—in the sense that the former stands for the critic's muse in the same way that the latter represents the artist's creative muse. However, drawing such a watertight boundary in the context of oral and folk performance renders such a claim inadequate, primarily because in this context, and even when such is reconstituted as Fela does, critic and artist are fused. My suspicion is that Gates may be relating to the dispassionate qualities of Èṣù, which indeed buttresses the argument of a critic's muse more or less. That is, the critic as a supposedly detached interpreter. But then, those qualities are more of Èṣù's juridical attributes. While not denying salient and overt features of the critic in this divinity, we misread cosmological narratives by denying Èṣù his role as performer in the cosmic drama. Èṣù is also not just a performer, but indeed the *agency* for dramatic conflict and the *essence* of denouement. This role of "unknotting" contradictions and conflict, Gates himself acknowledges, is the most universal attribute of the divinity's encomiastic verses from Africa to the New World.

Fela's sculptural representation of the four divinities as against the deification of Nkrumah, Lumumba, Malcolm X and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti in pictorial representation, appears to reinforce the distinction made by earlier scholars between "historical" and "romantic" legends especially as proposed in Okpewho's "qualitative approach."¹⁹ This approach attempts to classify and qualify these terms on the basis of scientific recognition of the relative weights of fact and fiction. The historical legend, in this sense, bears greater evidence of

fact and of lived experience, while the romantic legend lends itself to the fictive, that is, the mythical legend.

Òrìṣà Ibejì is exceptional in this configuration in that it has no particular human referent, either immediate or distant. Like sacred sculptures of woman-on-her-knees, it is deemed to bring good luck and prosperity, and this is captured as—Èjiré ṣò alákiṣà di onígba aso—“the twin transforms the pauper to the prosperous.” Along with Òrìṣà Ibejì, Èṣù undisputedly falls into the mythic sphere farther than “Ògún who belongs to the sphere of the romantic legend. With Ṣàngó, we have a more historical time frame. As a hermeneutics of cultural practice, Fela invokes personages of the mythic and ‘romantic’ legend to validate the truth of his art and claim, as we find in *ITT*.”

By calling his performance venue a Shrine, Fela obviously intended it to be more than a night club; a factor which informed the fact that he anticipated it as a place of communal celebration and worship. Hence, he prophesied, which, according to George Thompson (1975), is a development of trance possession. Drewal suggests that chanting and drumming performed prior to the outset of possession trance invoke the deity, bringing him into contact with the priest. In this circumstance, the priest becomes possessed and starts to pronounce the will of the gods.²⁰ The voice of the god(s) that we get to hear at the Afrika Shrine is a class-conscious one, and one that is unapologetic in its partisanship on behalf of marginalized classes, oppressed nationalities and even the aesthetic subculture.

The white (traditional chalk) powder face-masking of some band members and acolytes at the beginning of the worship relates to the symbol of man conquering death in Yorùbá ritual drama,²¹ while Fela’s communion with the past is a sort of ritual device to affirm presence with the ancestors, deemed to be capable of intervening in the affairs of man. This also somewhat complements Fela’s last names—Aníkúlápó-Kútì, which mean “I have got death in my pouch,” and “the one

who never dies," respectively cultural signifiers that refer to this same concept of continuity. For the Yorùbá, it is not simply an ideational category, because by the power of the mask, a person could be 'bathed' so as to assist him or her to overcome the vicissitudes of life. What is evident from the foregoing is that Fela's role in the ritual drama is quite diverse. A number of cosmic players whom Fela interacted with inhabit the settings and 'worlds' as the following, among others: Aiyé Àírí (Unseen world), Aiyé Okún (the Ocean), Odrùn (the sun), Òsùpá (the moon), Aiyé Kurúkúrú (the void) Orún (the skyey heavens).²² Invariably therefore, by associating his dance with a mode of worship, he plays *medium*; by intervening in dialogue with characters of the supernatural world, he plays *medium spirit*; but above all, he personifies *message ultra vires*, by virtue of transmitting to his audience his ritual journeys and encounters with the extra-terrestrial.

A generic description of this performance as idán or a carnivalesque is merely an attempt to approximate an experience that sometimes defy such classification. What we have here, among others, is a rippling hybrid of ritual, spectacle, music, song, dance, ruse, pun, and irony. Fela's attitude to ritual is dual in the following sense: one, while not recreating it *in situ*, he believed in its potency; second, he needed to revalidate the myth, hence he recreated cosmological tales in ritual, for what is a ritual but an *active* myth? If the myth is inert, without repeaters, without its rituals; then it would simply become metaphors as Greek myths are today or worse still—forgotten. Fela did not want to see this happen for two basic reasons. First, he wished to use Òrìṣà worship as a cultural statement for identity validation and, in the process, to contest the dominance of Islam and Christianity on the continent, especially since the colonial and post-independence elite has treated all other spiritual experiences as ludicrous. Second, as a means of averting the effacement of a cultural identity. He argued that

many of Africa's political elite have justified their looting of the public treasury and emasculation of public opinion by affective appeal to the authorities of the Koran and the Bible.

Often, at the Shrine, Fela would cite how after many years of iron-handed rule, the late Houphuet Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire built a basilica in the eighties to placate Ivorians, who are predominantly Catholic. A Nigerian corollary exists in General Ibrahim Babangida who, having annulled the 1993 election, invoked the phrase *in-sha-Allah* as an explanation of the first cause, ostensibly implying that the incident was a deft engineering of an almighty God. If the Koran and the Bible are constantly used to validate the oppression visited on the continent, Fela reasoned that such references could not be a tool to salvage the African people. Yet, his ritual experience is also of an aesthetic value, in the sense that a central conception of traditional ritual is also the possibility of using aesthetics to neutralize evil. No doubt, the dramatic canvas of the Afrika Shrine is wide and its figural devices deep.

In relation to the historical ancestor, over the period, a gradual process of semiotic 'overcoding' of Kwame Nkrumah began to take place, both at the Afrika Shrine, and in Fela's lyrics, as Nkrumah came to be presented and identified as the most notable figure of all the other contemporary ancestors. What followed was his deification as a symbol of Africa's gestate alternative. This is precisely what Soyinka does with the deity—Ògún—in his works by making him straddle the mythosphere like a colossus, and Ògún begins to appear like the representative of the other deities. It is in this dual sense that the Shrine is home to both visible and invisible dramatis personae, a factor that informed Fela's constant allusion to the Orisà and other African divinities. If Fela shows reverence to the 'mothers'—the àjẹ (Iyá Òsòròngà or the so-called witches),—by constantly alluding to their power, it is borne out of a cultural knowledge that they could stand a shade higher than

even the Òrìṣà. This point is buttressed by an Ifá divination verse, *Odù Osá Méjì*, which narrates the àjé, on arrival to the earth, as putting to test the wits of Òrúnmìlà—one of the highest of Yorùbá divinities.

For the Yorùbá, the dramatic, conflictual, and aesthetic qualities of the intervention of supernaturals in the affairs of man derive from the character of the ritual text itself. The Yorùbá 'supreme' God hardly expresses an authoritarian attitude over its 'subjects,' although there is a basic human attribute to the deities and a certain life-nearness to their constitution which make interaction cordial and mutually respectful with their followers. This conclusion derives from my study of the nature of diets on which deities and divinities are fed. In the case of Osún—a river goddess and goddess of watery presence—her diets are basically the sort of meal that is environmentally friendly not only to fishes but aquatic life as well. Another instance of man 'making' god?

A prophetic tinge seems to lace Fela's later practice. His own journey into ancestorhood had been preceded by securing a space for himself in the worship cubicle at the Shrine; this self-representation was in the form of a carving of Fela, blowing into a saxophone on a world map. This carving had been presented to him by the Sigma Club of the University of Ibadan in 1992. Lyrics composed about this period, an example of which is *Clear Road*, also buttress an increasing preoccupation with Òrìṣà worship and a gradual deification of the self. The song text talks of a Fela just returning from prison, and as it is usual with him, he does not allow the prison environment to fetter his imagination. As with *Akunakuna*, which he composed in Maiduguri prison, or the introduction of the second bass guitar—conceived of in Benin prison—here again, Fela gets new insight from prison. He talks of his spirit "just dey rise dey go," he, "Onílé Òrì ṣà of Africa." (My spirit is on the ascent, I, a custodian and priest of the Orisa.) Then he

becomes a medium spirit: "With my eyes wey dey for back/I see say Nigeria don dey change... (*With my hind eyes/I can see Nigeria changing...*)

The song narrates Fela as having achieved a prophetic and multiple vision. This vision had given him the privilege of clearer insight with which he had then concluded that the continent was at the brink of catastrophe, by virtue of the betrayal of its political elite. He sees Nigeria, for instance, going "From positive to negative From the land of living to land of death." But for Africa not to "die", and "scatter," he invokes the intervention of the ancestors, as he is confident that "Our ancestors dem no dey sleep o/Our ancestors dem no go gree o." ("Our ancestors are not asleep; besides, our ancestors will not sit back while the continent is being destroyed.") Whatever form the cultural code of performance and composition might take, Fela's abiding aspiration was always to narrate and put the deities in the service of society's underdogs.

Music, Audience and *Yabbis*

With the worship session over, the band commences the 'final' phase of the Comprehensive Night Show. In between the two, Fela resumes *Yabbis*, during which time he reveals more prophecies, yielding clearer insights into instructions ostensibly received from the ancestors. The revelations convey hope, while at the same time they are expressed in registers of pun and anger. A particular revelation may require the Chief Priest to instruct fans and acolytes to boycott an election, support a political cause or predict the fall of a military dictator in the continent.

His audience does not necessarily agree with all of his observations, and in such instances members exercise their right of dissent. The general debate may become so intense and inconclusive as to spill into the next performance. A fan who feels suf-

ficiently opposed to a viewpoint may mount the podium, take the microphone from Fela and express his or her opinion. If the crowd can relate to his views, they applaud him, otherwise he or she gets a jeer. Although not given to merely playing to the gallery with his fans on issues of political and ideological conviction, Fela nonetheless uses this open parliament to judge their mood and get feedback on his own political practice.

There are four fish-net-draped dance daises located within the Shrine for individual dancers. Each of the dancers takes a turn, as the performance progresses, to mount the central stage for a solo dance. Toward the end of the day's performance, again, they mount the stage for the group's choreography. Like other members of the band, they might be masked. Their hairdo is often plaited or woven; 'perming,' that is, chemically relaxing the hair, by an unwritten law of the group, is considered an expression of inferiority complex and an attempt to ape Caucasian values. Dancers are highly ornated and don synthetic raffia, over which beads hang somewhat loosely around their waist. Male members of the band are costumed in Fela's favorite orange color soft cotton, though this is only one of the many colors of the band's histrionics. Embossed on the outer edge of each trouser and shirt is a map of Africa with designs in linear motifs.

Since the audience can exercise its preference for what track is to be played, on this particular night, *Akunakuna* is in popular request, and I shall be using this performance as an example of a typical 'Comprehensive Show' at the Shrine. Inferences will also be drawn from other performances. A rather racy beat on a conga drum sets the tone of the rhythm, interlocking with another contrapuntal conga rhythm. The cantor comes alive in Fela, who at the moment is trying to explain the background drum pattern.

Dem just transfer me from Kirikiri prison to Maiduguri, no break no jam. So I come reach Maiduguri prison now and for night I come dey hear dis sound, I dey hear am: 'ki-jim-ki-jim-jim-jim, ki-jim-ki-jim-jim.' I come ask of the sound from my cell mate, Alhaji Buka. Alhaji Buka come say Fela, na di sound wey dem dey play when dem wan go dash woman to man at night.

I had just been transferred from Kirikiri prison to Maiduguri Prison. Once at night in Maiduguri prison, I started hearing the sound 'ki-jim-ki-jim-jim-jim, ki-jim-ki-jim-jim'. I then asked my cell mate, Alhaji Buka, what the rhythm meant and he said it was the music played on betrothing a maid to her husband.

"Brothers and sisters" (meanwhile the background beat is still steady while Fela is making all of this comment), "this is called *Akunakun* — *Senior Brother of Perambulator* ." Band members are gradually keying in: sticks, metal gong, bass drum, then in quick succession the other instruments. Fela is still prancing around the stage, now and again pulling a joke at the expense of his audience or simply *yabbing*. At times he buys time this way when, as often happens, an instrument or equipment has broken down and maintenance hands are trying to fix it. Satisfied that everything is in place, he faces the band, indicating a countdown with his fingers and at count zero, the rhythm guitar slides in, and after a while, short riffs can be heard on the keyboard. The wind ensemble comes next as the trumpet, baritone, and tenor saxophones begin to alternate against the defining rhythm of the larger section. Other individual instruments are pitched against the basic rhythm in this order for a while, and the singers begin their chorus line.

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As frequently happens in his performance, the trumpet pioneers the short solo improvisatory call and response with the wind section. The trumpeter is also keying in, for the vocal's mnemonic benefit, the introductory notes of *Akunakuna*. Fela begins the song in a speech mode by requesting a chorus line from his back-up singers and the audience, "For dis one you go help me answer say 'ka-chire,' that means commot your dress (get undressed). Are you ready now, *oya* let's go." The audience joins in this chorus. By now, the later night 'crawlers' are trooping in trying to secure seats. Fela continues improvising on this for a while, suggesting new dance steps which he says are "better than your funny disco dance; na so our correct people dey dance am for village." "That is how African people in the villages—uncorrupted by modern ways—dance." He suddenly notices one of the dancers who, apparently, had 'permed' her hair and he retorts: "See dis copy copy woman wey go perm im hair..I beg na so una dey spoil Africa." (See this woman who is blindly imitating foreign ways by using a chemical relaxer on her hair; this is not a proper African orientation.) His mind flicks to an advertisement on hair relaxer and he adds: "Na so one useless man for inside TV dey go perm im hair too with Afrosheen, which kain man be dat sef?" (I saw a man on TV applying Afrosheen to perm his hair—what manner of a man is that?) Another countdown and he is at the edge of the stage, singing:

E no easy e no easy o, e no easy to be Nigerian..
E no easy if e Head of State e no be citizen at any time

It isn't easy to be a Nigerian
It isn't easy if the Head of State is not a citizen

Then he goes into another interlude during which only the percussion section is supplying the background rhythm in anticipation of the cantor's commentary. He is trying to nar-

rate the audience reaction to some desultory registers contained in one of his songs during a tour of the predominantly Islamic city of Kano.

I go play for Kano na im somebody tell me say make I no sing dis kain song because small pickin dey there. I come reply say, wait, my pikin wey sing for you now self na small pikin.

Once on my musical tour to Kano, someone challenged me for singing a song whose lyrics were sexually explicit because it could corrupt minors. I told the person that my child who had just sung for the audience was also a minor

Some fans retort that he should justify the claim, to which he replies:

My pikin? I don teach am everything. Fuck o, woman o, as e dey there e know everything because I no believe say di tin wey person must know for future, you must hide am from am when e small. [There is a mix bag of audience roar, cat-calls and all.] Na im be sense, because if God no want make we know, e for no put am there. Then some Christian-Muslim go go hide am say 'it is immoral.' How can di sweetest tin be immoral? Dem dey craze, everybody say yeeyee.

I have educated my child on the issue of love making, because I do not subscribe to the idea of shrouding information from a minor—especially since they are bound to confront this reali-

ty later [There is a mix bag of audience roar, cat-calls and all.] *That seems the sensible thing to do, for if the creator preferred us to be ignorant of sexual matters, he would not have created humans with sexual organs so visible. Why should some Christians and Muslims say such knowledge is immoral? How can the sweetest thing be immoral? They must be crazy. Everybody say yeeyee.*

With ripples of the digression yet unsettled within the audience, and without glancing backwards, he signals with a raised thumb and a battery of horns blares back as he bends into the microphone to sing:

In dis case of Nigeria, we get important places/One of di important places, we get court of law and justice/In dis court of law and justice, serious people dem dey thereeee—/Make you hear di nonsense tin dis serious people dem dey do/Make you hear di yeye tin dis serious people dem dey do.

In Nigeria, we have important places/One of the important places, is the court of law and justice/ There are supposedly serious people in these institutions/ Just listen to the nonsensical things these supposedly serious people are doing.

Henceforth, the horn section assumes a responsorial interchange with the cantor, overlapping into his melodic line. But immediately after the first attempt, the audience embosses its own meaning on the horn interlude, reconfiguring the trisyllabic musical notes as “O-jo-ro,” a pidgin phrase implying a

fraudulent act.

Vocal: Police go go arrest people for road for wandering

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Police wey no get destination

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Police wey dey waka parambulating

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Police wey dey wander about di street

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Police go stop somebody for road

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Just because im get gun-authority

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Harassing di man wey get destination

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Harassing di woman wey get destination

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Trying to fuck women by force by road by night

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Police go charge dem for wandering

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Police di wanderer, e go charge you for wandering

Audience: Ojoro

Vocal: Stevie Wonder himself don start to wonder...

This way the cantor goes on narrating incidents of violation of the rights of food vendors by the police and other law enforcement agents. His narrative detour takes us round real and imaginative streets, while at the same time detailing, in deep sarcasm, the items confiscated and tendered in court as exhibits against the traders who have equally been arrested. Among others, they include: *poff poff* (doughnuts), *akara* (bean cake), *steaming rice*, okra, ice cream, and 'Ghana Bread.' Meanwhile, the audience is noting and announcing the num-

ber of these items in their order of rendition. The performance itself is beginning to take the dimension of a multiple narration. At one level, there is a compelling story line of the song lyrics and a gentle sway of back-up singers, each competing for aural and visual attention, respectively. Again, this is interwoven with suggestive gestures of dancers and other band members and the exuberance of a rather licentious audience that is tentatively muse-struck. Yet, a first-time visitor marveling at the band's dexterity with mouth agape and hands clasped to his head also becomes a victim of quick wit by dancing fans. The audience begins to yell at that moment when the song narrative reveals in sarcasm that the trial magistrate is bent on tasting each of the confiscated confections, as a necessity for impartial adjudication! A significant aspect that lends meaning to the night's revelry is the dance event, and it may be worthwhile to examine its relationship with song texts and the general Afrobeat tradition.

Dance as Kinetic Statement

The Afrobeat dance exhibits a variety of physical, expressive styles, ranging from gentle, graceful motion to vigorous athleticism. An attempt to classify the forms draws from Afrobeat's own faltering process of canon formation and codification. In the track *Lady*, Fela makes a distinction between two dance styles. One he calls 'Lady Dance' and the other, 'Fire Dance.' Fela had used the former term rather prejudicially in relation to stylized Western dance steps of the caricatured 'over-educated' African female. Generally speaking, however, *Egypt '80* dancers were always doing varieties of the generic 'Fire Dance'—defined by Fela as a dance of total expression. This, indeed, is given credence, especially in circumstances when dancers define their movement in response to the instru-

mental call. Also of interest is the fact that the dance orientation is female gender-specific for the simple fact that there were no professional male dancers, and Fela was always naming dance registers largely only in relation to the practices of these professionals. Invariably, therefore, forms that have been consciously projected bear a substantial female imprint, even though both males and females execute these movements.

There were occasional dance tutors who trained incoming dancers and one, 'Teacher Ajayi Ogunde,' as far as some dancers could recollect, was the last dance tutor before Fela's death. The tutor takes them through general lessons on the technical foundation of choreography as a means of executing practical movements. Together, they then simulate general movement coordination, after which they may now choreograph some of Fela's music. Dancers are encouraged to incorporate their respective local styles, and this way a short dance phrase may reveal the source of a particular influence. While being subsumed under the group's general choreography, local colors can still be noticed in dancers' styles. The *Egypt '80* dancer very often yields a viewpoint that merges with the group's choreography some aspects of her cultural experience.

Since most of the lyrics are narratives, the 'literate' dancer finds herself extending the narrative frontier in dance steps that aspire toward a lyrical meaning in the mode of musical visualization. The dancer of *Zombie*, for instance, almost invariably reenacts a regimental calisthenics: marching, saluting, and 'pissing'. With the groove in motion, Fela could occasionally punctuate the melody, retorting "ju-di, ju-di, ju-sile ee"—an oblique reference suggesting "shake your bottom," meant to empower the audience to partake in the dance event.

Esi Kinni-Olusanyin has noted that rhythm is "the most striking aspect of African music, with drumming displaying it in its most complex form."²³ In a study evaluating the art of dancing itself across Africa and the black Diaspora of the

Caribbean and the United States, she identifies the dancer's body as incorporating both the sensibilities and the more direct dynamics of expression, translating them into movements that correspond to the music. Such correspondence of body movement to musical rhythm is achieved in two ways by *Egypt '80* dancers: by metaphrasing—that is, dancing in direct correspondence to the music's inflections; or paraphrasing, through a general approximation to the rhythm without necessarily 'duplicating' the music's particular inflections. This way, and through a combination of other processes, the dancers are able to create a movement vocabulary that expresses satire, aesthetic pleasure or even an assertion of their collective and individual femininity.

Besides the more obvious fact of dance as aesthetic pleasure, noticeable in the dexterity of the solo dancer, a filmed 1991 satirical performance of *Teacher* was choreographed with a theatrical element that saw each dancer holding a book upside down while attempting to browse through it in complementary movement to the rhythm! The choreographic message is as palpable as the lyrics lend it: "Teacher, don't teach me nonsense." Such movements are also exhibited in the unwaxed number, 'Clear Road?'. The number details the declining value of the Nigerian national currency (Naira). The song highlights the different phases of decline in:

Vocal: When Naira fall
Chorus: Many people fall with am
Vocal: When Naira sick
Chorus: Many people sick with am
Vocal: When Naira crash
Chorus: Many people crash with am
Vocal: When Naira jam
Chorus: Many people jam with am
Vocal: When Naira quench

Chorus: Many people quench with am
 Also as in *Zombie*, the “devalued currency dance” is executed by visualizing in dance and body movement the song text—the progressive illness, fall, crash and ultimate death of a sickly national currency

Live performance at the Shrine also serves as rehearsal time for new compositions, as a result of which a particular number can be prolonged to twice its studio time. Once the rhythmic structure of the number has been set, a variety of improvisations could then proceed, usually starting with the horns and brass instruments. As in the large, traditional plays like the *batá* ensemble of the Yorùbá, or even the more recent jazz music, whose internal dynamics are aptly described by Ralph Ellison as “an art of individual assertion within and against the group,”²⁴ each solo flight here is an attempt at self definition. The instrumentalist often starts with conventional folk tunes that are quite familiar to the audience. Tonight, the tenor saxophonist appears to be more preoccupied with a game of aural teasing as he explores the instrument’s potentials: its flute-like softness, its string-like modulation, and its capacity for a strident shriek. The audience is thrilled, but the performer is not done yet. He is aware that the penultimate soloist is the baritone saxophonist, equally an accomplished player, with an enthralling instrument that has caught the fancy of the audience; so, he must define himself against his colleague while at the same time asserting his skill, for instant judgment, before this musical parliament at the Shrine. Bent on stretching the audience tonight, he goes on, blaring a phrase now and again, transposing it, revising it, but generally refusing to make an instrumental sentence. Ultimately though, he is aware that his virtuosity is acknowledged only at that moment when he fully demonstrates the ability to de-familiarize the tune, while at the same time making it recognizable. He does this, and departs with a final, extended falsetto. “Y.S.” (sobriquet for Yinusa

Akinbosun), the audience roars, even as Fela clasps the performer's hands in appreciation.

Fire Dance

After Akinbosun's solo performance, there is a brief interval and then Fela comes in for the second tenor sax. Some break-away group in the audience could be heard heralding him with, *Egún nílá lóma kẹ̀yìn ìgbàlẹ̀,* "meaning the biggest masquerade is usually the last to emerge from the grove. In certain moments of his improvisatory play, Fela starts off as if in dissonance with the basic rhythm beat—giving the feeling of being momentarily lost in a labyrinth of the multiple potential notes he could use. But once he keys in and begins 'riffing' (as in his extended solos), and starts attempting to pierce through the background wall of responsive horns, he effects an acoustic mood of turbulence. It is about time now for the restless dancers to be brought up stage, a job which falls on the same players of ritual rhythm: the metal gong and/or sticks player(s) and the *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (rattle) player. As in the *Egúngún* masquerade solo performance, they move toward a particular podium clanging and shaking their instruments as a sign of 'calling' the solo dancer. This motion is repeated for a while and, tonight, the audience is anxiously awaiting the last dancer, Dodo.

Shouts of "Dodo" momentarily drown the speakers as she is 'called' forth to mount the stage for her solo performance. There is deep anxiety both on the part of fan and band, over the anticipated contest. She takes her time, acting oblivious of the revelry around her as she knots the Nigerian Midwestern, neo-traditional popular dance histrionic of white kerchief around her waist. The suspense is in good effect as the audience is closing in around the stage. Not even Fela, known for strictness of performance time, seems bothered. Everybody knows: it is Dodo's day. She descends the rungs in brisk rhythm-

mic movement, then stops to enact a brief fore-dance and, again, shouts of accolade rend the air. Aware that they can not hurry her up, the ritual 'summoners' begin to clang more vigorously in circles around her. Done, she proceeds to the central stage and takes fast rhythmic strides across its breadth, as if defining the space as her's, and challenging the instrumental soloist and the entire ensemble to a contest.

She is 'greeted' gently by the tenor sax from the yet-to-be-waxed *Condom*, a role which in other performances could be played by the trumpet. Fela triggers the contest by first releasing short, sharp and angular chirping notes, which Dodo duplicates with an ease of corresponding dance steps. However, the tenor blare becomes more obtrusive in an attempt to heighten the tempo, a feat achieved as the percussive section and a reiterative and responsive horn section gets dragged to shorten its rhythmic time line. This raciness is heightened when the 'Big Conga Drum,' beaten with faster drum strokes, is unleashed on the newly defined rhythm. The leader-call also begins to change tempi, with a freer use of changing time signatures, thereby making the rhythmic structure more complex. Within the short spate of time allotted to her, Dodo executes diverse varieties of Fire Dance: at once doing the swivel dance, and at other times, pelvis gyration—a motion based on the contraction and release of the groin, or alternating with a hop-step and shoulder blade movement. Even when her arms complement the dance, they are also constantly in aid to keeping the balance of a highly stylized athleticism. At the height of the music's raciness, however, a highly experimental Dodo, not to be beaten by a tempo that could only have been matched by a mechanically simulated marionette, simply deconstructs the pace by redefining motion: she stands still, in trance-like concentration, and then bursts into unpredictable body jerks in contrastive movement to the beat, as if she were a contrapuntal rhythm. For her, such a dance style suffused with mediumistic qualities can be effortlessly ex-

cuted. Were this a Dionysiac rite, Dodo would indeed be a maenad, like the *Şàngó* votaries of the New World described by Umberto Eco.²⁵

After a while, the tempo relapses to the basic rhythm beat in anticipation of cresting again with a fusion of different layers of call and response. These layers involve the cantor and the chorus, the solo instrumentalist and the solo dancer, the solo instrumentalist and the horn ensemble, and then the entire ensemble as leader-call and the audience as chorus. But to heighten the pace, it is the solo tenor sax that is now challenging the dancer by playing the agent provocateur. Dodo responds in an erotic and sensuous movement at the height of which she jumps and clasps to a column at the edge of the stage and, along with the sax, motions alternately in crest and trough, in trough and crest—to which the audience responds in a prolonged applause to her semantics of dance which, no doubt, is an anarchic display of femininity, an open challenge to contemporary definition of 'proper' female gender posture in patriarchal Nigeria.

A good measure of the dance and choreographic styles observable here constitute part of that welter of contemporary dance forms in the continent which remain, to a large extent, undocumented. Coupled with this is the fact that the dance history of Africa is equally entwined in the general inquiry of what constitutes an African identity. This is both an ideological and technical problem. The former is the main thrust of the next chapter but suffice it to say that as a politically charged theme, the point of divergence is not easily delineated by a dichotomy between observances of the Western scholar and those of his African counterpart.

Nonetheless, a safe starting point can be captured by a simple phrase: that between the universal—which emphasizes a unanimity of forms—and, on the other hand, that which seeks a reading based on the particular and divergent. By this is

meant an attitude to dance analysis that predicates observation on African dance forms as nondescript or at best, homogenous and, on the other, one that identifies and names observable nuances in the corpus of African dances.

No doubt these are two extreme positions and most analysts, while generally emphasizing one over the other hand, acknowledge the potential inclusiveness of each. Although identifying varied dance types, Zagba Oyortey, for instance, seems more at ease using the generic label "African people's dance," noting that in spite of the continent's diversities, "historians have traced broad migratory patterns showing common origins and destinations." He uses this term to describe sub-Saharan and diasporan cultures. And in the context of Britain, he notes that diasporan Africans would refer to "those African/Caribbean artists who first created spaces for African and Caribbean dance in Britain." North Africa is excluded primarily because that part of the continent is largely "inhabited by Berbers and Arabs who have more cultural affinity with Middle Eastern and Oriental cultures."²⁶

And even though Zagba identifies recent recreational dances on the continent—such as Kolomashi, Tumbe, and Okpe (in Ghana), and "the gumboot dance of South Africa which came out of the migration of Africans into urban areas for work"²⁷—he consciously avoids describing them as 'contemporary African dance.' Felix Begho attempts to name this broad subgenre as such, but the distinction he makes between 'contemporary dance' and 'neo-traditional creative dance' is somewhat suspect and inadequate. According to Begho, the "salient" difference between the two is that "the former is a tendency toward avant-gardism, whereas the latter leans toward conformism."²⁸ It must be noted in response, however, that while it is correct to say that the general context of oral tradition tends to foist acquiescence, counter-discourses and avant-garde forms have nonetheless always existed within tra-

ditional cultures. The advantage of the current electronic, multimedia age over traditional societies is that there are more channels for (cultural) dissent and plural narration beyond the capacity of one dominant discourse to block the emergence of other discourses. Beyond this, Begho's account of contemporary African dance forms is comprehensive and sensitive to its nuances. At the heart of Zagba's reluctance to name some forms as 'contemporary' is the fear that such ideological misrepresentation could pigeonhole African dances along some evolutionist discourse, wherein "there was the assumption, therefore, that these were transitory cultures that would in due course follow Europe into an industrialised and 'scientific' culture."²⁹ In this sense, though, Africa has come to be differently read by different people. To the colonial Other, the continent had to be a *tabula rasa* in order to justify the morality of its enterprise; to the African in the Diaspora, the continent testifies to an ebullient cultural heritage before the middle passage—and the preservation, or even showcasing of it, would aid this 'heritage project';³⁰ and, yet, while the African on the continent seeks to acknowledge the values of past forms, the least of his aspirations is the retention of staid forms and non-transcendence into renewing contemporary dance and other cultural practices.

Beyond the ideological underpinnings of interpretation, there is also the technical issue of dance theorists on African forms concentrating more on the sociological circumstance of dance history as opposed to their technical qualities as defined, for example, in dynamics. Can contemporary African dance forms such as Afrobeat and the Ivorian Zouglou³¹ styles, for instance, be discussed in relation to the placement of feet and the basic positions of feet, arms and head—including their design in time and space? Can a notational principle, such as Labanotation, be evolved to capture these emerging forms? A refreshing new effort is Omofolabo Soyinka Ajayi's attempt to

describe some Yorùbá dances in relation to “set patterns of steps and gestures.”³² She evolves such concepts as the “walk-step” dance and “fan-step” dance.³³ While this may also be linked to ideological attitude in certain respects, there is the general technical factor of dance still being, relatively, marginal to critical studies in the arts, as argued by Christy Adair.³⁴ Is there such a thing as contemporary African dance as we can talk of ballet, fox trot, or jazz dances? Does a denial of its nomenclature obviate its objective existence? Couldn't the denial of its existence be at least accounted for by what Femi Tàiwò has in a similar discourse described as a crisis of knowledge production in Africa?³⁵ This may be no more than the inability, so far, to codify and canonize dance text based on its movement principle. In spite of his non-usage of the term ‘contemporary,’ this appears to be the direction of Zagba’s work in “Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back,” where he sheds light on the principle of gravity in Guinean ‘Leoudiere’ dance.³⁶

It is, however, with Funmi Adewole that we get a more frontal approach to theorizing and codifying contemporary African dance forms. Her dance research projects are generally geared in the direction of identifying patterns, movement principles, and origination. She challenges the “idea that ‘African dance’ consists of a series of immutable classical dances and is therefore static.” Adewole argues persuasively that “Western dance theater on the other hand is considered dynamic and innovative because the forms and movement vocabulary used in theatrical dance derived from a number of ‘techniques’.”³⁷ It is this vision of the dynamic nature of African dance forms that informs her experimentation with contemporary forms such as ‘Afrobeat’ dance and the possibility of its fusion with theatrical dance in general. It is important to qualify what makes these forms ‘contemporary.’ In the first place, they are no longer tied to specific aspects of traditional dance either as

ritual or as a secularized form in a one-to-one relationship. Second, the dance subgenres, even when occasionally motivated by communal experiences, usually have identifiable choreographers; African dances have finally become integrated into the dynamics of the international cash nexus and commodity exchange. Additionally, the distinct attribute of Afrobeat dance is evident in its bold fusion of diverse African forms and the reiteration of certain movements formulaic in the continent. This includes a certain earth-bound motion in spatial progression, extensive use of the feet—gyrating generally in a flat-footed position and shuffling on the heel, “posture with knees flexed, (or with) body bent at the waist,”³⁸—pelvic thrusting and shoulder blade movement. The Afrobeat dance is not simply enamoured by these forms for their own sake: they are geared toward telling a story

Dance as a non-verbal means of communication draws from our everyday motions but it also gives an insight to its own dynamics.³⁹ In other words, “Each dance genre and, within this, each style, uses *some* of the humanly possible actions of the body selected from the gestures, bends, extensions, twists and turns.”⁴⁰ Some of the movement practices of a society may be carried over and, as in the case of a contemporary form as Afrobeat dance, we can identify such cultural retention. There is a wide range of retention in the Afrobeat dance, which draws from the diverse cultural settings of its dancers and experimental fusion of the general African dance environment. The basic primary posture of Afrobeat dance is very much in consonance with the flat-footed initial position that is characteristic of most African dances. The solo dancer is relatively more economical in her use of space than the choreographed dancers, besides also being amenable to improvisatory techniques. Two tendencies are observable here: while the solo dancer is on her individual dais, there is a practical constraint of space which, over the years, has come to yield a defi-

nite movement attitude that could be minimalist in space usage but vigorous in its combination of general body language, especially the creative combination of the heel and sole of the foot, and movement from the waist through the torso. This dance form has also come to characterize female Afrobeat dance gestures which emphasize a dexterity of foot work in combination with a creative arm posture and pelvic gyration. The second attitude of the dancer performing her solo on the central stage, as in the case of Dodo described above, is one of less space restraint—thereby allowing for an expansion of the earlier contracted form.

It is in this expanded form that the dance's features, dynamics, and movement principles become easier to comprehend. Within the broad category of 'Fire Dance,' for instance, are other distinctive styles such as 'Open and Close,' 'Bend-Bend,' and 'Pampa-Lobo,' among others. The closest equivalent to 'Open and Close' is the butterfly dance of the Caribbean, wherein the legs and possibly the arms, too, are twisted inward and flexed outward, rhythmically 'Pampa' is more similar to female initiation motions in the Senegal-Mali-Burkina axis, and the 'One legged skank' of the Caribbean, than any popular dance form in Nigeria. The dance action here is predicated on one leg in second, ballet position, then the second limb is raised—with foot pointing hindward, and then the raised limb effects a swivel in full circle. Meanwhile, the dancer's posture could be erect or bent around the waist, while the arms are also engaged in the dance and, needless to say the motion is quite fast. The movement origination here, however, is not the leg, which is basically supportive, but the pelvis, based on a principle of contraction and release. While the solo dancer adheres to this general principle, she is constantly improvising with her arms and the degree of swivel. The principle of contraction and release could still be retained while she is in a crouching or flipping position.

Afrobeat choreographic dance also experiments with the concept of the horizontal and group bonding in movement progression, wherein members may hold on to each other's hands while defining diverse visual shapes on stage and, quite often, they contract into a circle: arms-on-arms, and with heads bent into the circle as if taking a collective vow. With a large ensemble in the background, the image thrown up by the subtext here, is evidently the expansion of the concept of the large and extended household, now redefined as an extended musical family which Fela had replicated in his Kalakuta Republic residence.

Notes

1. From the poet's unpublished collection *Ghost Music*, 1988.
2. This clarification is made by Babatunde Lawal in *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), p. 271.
3. This is as true for the Yoruba as many other African mask experiences.
4. Cite Harry Garuba's "Mask and Meaning in Black Drama: Africa and the Diaspora." (Ph.D. thesis in the English Department of the University of Ibadan, April 8, 1988.)
5. This interview took place December 5, 1991 at Fela's No. 7 Gbemisola Street residence.
6. Margaret Drewal in *Yorùbá Ritual: Play, Performance, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 27.
7. See Martin Chanock's paper, "Justice and Rights in Context," delivered at the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town under the theme of 'Cultural Transformations in Africa: Legal, Religious and Human

- Rights Issues.' (March 11-13, 1997, p. 5.)
7. The Yorùbá have a five-day week.
 8. Ossie Enekwe, "Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland," in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine Special Publication, 1981), p. 152.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
 11. Babatunde Lawal in *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), p. 83.
 12. B.M Ibitokun's *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu-Africa Yorùbá Sub-Group in West Africa*. (Ile-Ife: OAU Press, 1993), pp. 20-21.
 13. Babatunde Lawal's *The Gelede Spectacle*, p. 113.
 14. See Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 41.
 15. Harry Garuba's "Mask and Meaning in Black Drama: Africa and the Diaspora." (Ph.D. Thesis in the English Department of the University of Ibadan, 1988, p. 207.)
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. This is the overall tone of Karin Barber's "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yorùbá Attitudes Towards the Orisa," in Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner (eds.) *Perspective on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).
 18. See Henry Louis Gates' *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 35.
 19. See Isidore Okpewho in *Myth in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 69.
 20. See George Thompson's "Anatomy of Poetry" in David Craig (ed.) *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 73-74.) See also Margaret Drewal's *Yorùbá Ritual: Play, Performance, Agency*

- (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 182-4.
21. This is how members of the *Egypt '80 Band* interpret this device; a confirmation was also made by Pa Bogunbe of the Ifa Ose Meji Shrine in Ibadan.
 22. Translation by the author from C.L. Adeoye's *Igbagbo ati Esin Yorùbá* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1985), p. 11.
 23. Sylvia Esi Kinni in "Africanisms in Music and Dance of the Americas," in Goldstein (ed.), *Black Life and Culture in the United States*. (New York: Crowell and Sons, 1971), p. 51.
 24. Quotation made from Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 79.
 25. See Umberto Eco's *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Minerva, 1997).
 26. Zagba Oyortey in "Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back" in Helen Thomas (ed.) *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 185.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
 28. Felix Begho's "Traditional African Dance in Context," in Kariamuwelsh Asante (ed.) *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1996), p. 178.
 29. Zagba Oyortey in "Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back," in Helen Thomas (ed.) *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 184.
 30. It is important to note that in a city like London, some efforts at experimenting with contemporary African forms are emerging. Apart from Peter Badejo, the Nigerian choreographer, Zagba Oyortey cites Corrine Bougard, artistic director of Union Dance as another example of a contemporary African dance group.
 31. According to Funmi Adewole, Zouglou incorporates many theatrical elements in its movement style largely

- because the form evolved a mimicry of encounters between the Ivorian police and protesting students during the reign of Houphuet Boigny
32. Composition has been part of the concerns of Doris Humphrey's focus on dance theory. See Janet Adshead's "Describing the Components of the Dance." Janet Adshead's, ed., *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice*. (London: Dance Books, 1988), p. 28.
 33. Omofolabo Soyinka Ajayi in *Yorùbá Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture* (New Jersey: African World Press, 1998), p. 209.
 34. See the introduction to Christy Adair's *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
 35. See Olufemi Taiwo "Colonialism and its Aftermath: The Crisis of Knowledge Production." *Callaloo* vol. I. 16. no 4.
 36. See Zagba Oyortey "Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back," in Helen Thomas (ed.), *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 188.
 37. Funmi Adewole's "ETERE Dance Research Project: A Preliminary Study of the Movement Principles inherent in the dances of the Igbo People of Nigeria (November 1998), pp.1-2.
 38. See Janet Adshead's "Describing the Components of the Dance" in Janet Adshead (ed.) *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice*. (London: Dance Books, 1988), p. 29.
 39. See Zagba Oyortey in "Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back," in Helen Thomas (ed.) *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1983) and Janet Adshead's *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice* (London: Dance Books 1988).
 40. Ibid, Jane Adshead p. 2.

5

Alterity, Afrobeat and the Law



*And you say God knows about these things?
And you say logic connects these things?
And you say I shouldn't learn to mourn well?
This is endsong, the cornerstone where they cry*

—CHIEDU EZEANAH¹

*Watch it, irate child
You don't learn how to fall into a pit
All it takes is the first step*

—MARY OLORUNYOMI²

As conceived by Fela, Afrobeat is primarily a cultural and political musical practice or—better still—an aesthetics of cultural politics. Its performance is equally characterized by the creation of a liberal cultural space that is admmissive of a free discourse of society's fears, doubts, and inhibitions: be it governance, sex, or the yearnings of restive youth in general. Thus, Afrobeat is not simply a musical rhythm but a rhythm of alterity realized largely in song and

musical text, but also in cultural and political action. It incorporates the amalgam ideology of the Kalakuta Republic commune and the creative excess of the Afrika Shrine. In these enclaves, Fela tried to live out some of his dreams—as far as national political authorities would tolerate them. These were for him channels of communication as well as ways of representing distance from the homogenizing ordering of society. Incidents whereby Fela contested hegemonic laws were quite diverse and were not often obvious. By ‘law,’ I am referring to normative discursive practices in general—and institutions that support them. This often volatile terrain was Fela’s regular polemical turf, where he tried to re-image the continent in relation to itself and others. Fela’s imagined universe, of which Africa was its epicenter, takes off from an idyllic renaissance Africa with a scribal culture. He makes this manifest through his lyrical narratives. He arrives with an omnibus baggage that testifies against conventional attitudes to education, gender, technology, power, life and death, among others, in contemporary Africa. In displacing the colonial narrative of the African story, he somewhat substituted it with an Africanist grand narrative that tended to romanticize the continent’s pre-colonial experience, especially in relation to class stratification and internal ideological polarities.

Though he challenged the statute books in court, his regular site of struggle was in positing alternative ways of living and actually living in alterity to the norm. In the first place, he created a communal residence, named it “Kalakuta Republic,” and did partake in sharing with ‘brethrens’ and other residents. For the Nigerian state and its prebendalist elite, this was playing dangerously as these symbolic actions portended a humanism it could not afford its own citizens.³ Worse still, to emphasize communality as in the seventies, in an age when the state canvassed the ideology of private property, and members of the political class engaged in fierce

primitive accumulation of capital deriving from oil wealth—it was only going to take a while for the state to make a rebuttal of his claims.

Then, there was his idea of a republic within a supposedly federal republic that was incapable of guaranteeing the primary conditions of republicanism—of a society of equal citizens with equal access, even in its most cynical bourgeois sense, to the means of happiness? Even at that, a linguistic quarrel had been provoked. The semantic field of the quarrel could only be extended when the Afrika Shrine was founded and accorded the reverence of orthodox Islam and Christianity which were the state's unofficial religions. The political elite in Nigeria continues to encourage the liturgy of these two sects by consciously cultivating both their leadership and congregations, at times by building mosques and churches, even if it is against the expectation of a secular state as enshrined in the constitution. In so doing, the state expects a measure of cooperation from these institutions, part of which includes preaching the ideology of acquiescence.

But, with Fela, here comes a ribaldry of Afrobeat worship at the Afrika Shrine with a liturgy so decentered, so dynamic, the state could not vouch for it. Rather than the selective acquiescence of "The will of Allah" or the pacifism of "Turning the other cheek," the chief priest of worship here is riled in anger, as spokesperson of Africa's ancestors who have asked him to denounce the treachery of the post-independence elite.

By appearing in his underwear, though only within his residence,⁴ and daring to suggest and remind of the ordinariness of life, in a society where over-clothing—and especially military histrionics—served the semiotics of power, he seemed to have been marked for extinction by the state, and his entire career would be dogged by the sheer wish to defend that alterity. Then, he smoked marijuana and encouraged society to

acknowledge it as a medicinal Nigerian Natural Grass (NNG), and not Indian hemp, thereby confounding the state's counsels, who, on checking their statute books, could not find any trace of such a phrase—Nigerian Natural Grass! This must be a queer one then, an enigma, a corrupter of youth—the authorities seemed to have reached a consensus.

Fans and Acolytes: Identity and Privilege

There is a wide spectrum of Afrobeat fans as in their degree and mode of dedication. The fan ranges from the top business executive to the factory worker, student, spy, layabout and the petty gang leader. For ease of clarification, they can be classified into three broad categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary fans. What is immediately evident in terms of appreciation of Fela's music is that these different layers of fans overlap across class differentiation, at least in the Nigerian experience, such that quite a sizeable membership of the middle class may commingle with members of the lower classes with whom they have struck a convergence of aesthetic preference.

The tertiary fan stops short of going beyond emotional dedication. He would procure new Fela albums and follow the progress of the Egypt '80 Band, both locally and during international tours. Usually he identifies with Fela's song lyrics, but is not necessarily prepared to attend his performances at the Afrika Shrine. At times, such fans feel pressured by their social position and, in the context of a political economy where the state plays "Lord of the Manor," they are wary of jeopardizing their interests by appearing to legitimize Fela's oppositional politics.

Unlike the tertiary fan, the primary fan does not merely subscribe emotionally to Fela's aesthetic practice but goes

some distance by actively supporting the Egypt '80 group through his attendance of their outdoor functions. He also ventures to justify or, at least, explain Fela's practices which, occasionally, members of the tertiary group may be defensive about or simply explain away in the regular refrain: "Well, I like his music but not necessarily his lifestyle." Quite often, members of the primary group punctuate their sentences with such refrains as "Fela don talk am," "Fela's talk, no be ordinary eye o," suggesting a prophetic tinge to Fela's pronouncements. More than any other set of fans, this group is primarily responsible for a mythic reading of Fela as a folk hero and a historical legend. They not only canonize their idol, they also venture to codify Afrobeat practice. With them, actual and fictive narration, in respect to the folk hero, take the tone of the fantastic. They remind one that it was Fela who once predicted after his divination at the Afrika Shrine that Windsor Castle would be gutted by fire, and shortly afterward it came to pass. In the tone of a revanchist anger I was reminded of Fela's prediction that those responsible for destroying his Kalakuta Republic would set against each other, and that some would go to jail. "And what about the striking air transport staff," a battery of voices once asked me, "who had vowed that no airplane would be aided to land in the Lagos airport? Wasn't it until they heard that Fela was in one of the planes that they quickly called off their strike in order for Fela to have a safe landing? Oh, my brother—believe!"

This was the most privileged group at the Afrika Shrine. Some of them would rather gain free entry into the Shrine on performance days than pay; not so much because they are necessarily incapable of paying but as a gesture of double-checking on the acknowledgment of their fraternity. There were occasions when such fans, on gaining entrance, would then return outside to find some other persons whose bill they could pick. Once inside the Shrine, more often than not, they

sit in the rows closest to the stage and indulge in catcalls.

Yet, there is the last set of the secondary fan who, while adoring Fela, try to maintain a critical distance. When they are close enough in his performance, they attempt and do partake more vigorously in the *yabbis* banter—a process through which Fela gets the much-needed feedback on his aesthetic and political practice.

The Nigerian state has been generally more wary of the primary and the secondary fans, as it is through them that the ideology of Afrobeat is often-times expressed in social action, which may include confrontation with the physical coercive apparatus of the state. With them, Fela had challenged the legitimacy of Nigerian laws on several occasions, the most memorable being the 1977 Kalakuta incident when Fela's number 14A Agege Motor Road residence was burnt down by soldiers from Abalti Barracks, and the "Coffin for Head of State" aftermath, when Fela dumped a replica of his mother's coffin at Dodan Barracks, then the seat of government.

The two groups sustain this sense of resistance culture through fan-bonding experience, especially during tours with the Egypt '80 group. Fela's communal sensibility further encouraged this as many fans would have their transport fares underwritten by the management of the band. Fans also greet one another in a variety of ways: by clasping each other's hands in a doubled 'High-Five,' with the clenched fist 'Black Power' salute, or simply by exchanging gentle clenched-fist-shake, often repeating the motion a couple of times while mumbling "rootsman," in an apparent syncretism with Rastafarians, and reggae fans. The bonding experience is at times expressed in sharing moments to smoke marijuana, engaging in heated debates on national and international resistance politics, or simply 'moonlighting.'

Until the Shrine was invaded and occupied by units of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 1997,

it had gathered regular habitués. A really dynamic informal trade sector within the Shrine and in the adjoining streets also flourished during this period. The variety of trade included food vendors, water hawkers, drinking bars and a myriad of kiosks offering for sale cigarettes, marijuana, chewing gum, perfumes, and the like. For traders operating within the Shrine, a mandatory tax of three Naira per day was paid, but by late 1996 and early 1997, the rate had moved to twenty Naira. There was not to be any tax exemption and revenue generated was channeled into the collective pool of "Chop Money."

Both at the Shrine and his residence, there were constant habitués who were essentially made up of the primary fan, who may include the general hustler, the gambler, the irate student and, to some degree, lower cadres of the Nigerian military and the lunch-time executive who has only made a quick dash down street to 'drag' a quick puff of the banned weed. All mingle in a Shrine that attempts to create a leveling culture and, to a considerable degree, all participants aspire toward this new culture code.

The essential habitué is ideologically syncretic and also somewhat malleable. Because his vision is highly messianic, the character of his consciousness is basically informed by the political hero figure, which in this case is Fela. The habitué hovers between the quest for a private material uplift that is taking rather too long to come and a belief in social change that may not necessarily be backed by any revolutionary organizational strategy.

In this dispensation, he rocks ding-dong in some 'imaginative inner dimensions'⁵ where long-term strategy could become easily expendable, where solutions come in spatio-spiritual dimensions and, usually, the energy for change could be deferred to an amalgam god who may come in the garb of Šàngó, Chiwota, Amadioha, Osiris or even more recent ancestors. Between puffs of his marijuana, the habitué muses,

"one day go be one day" a phrase with the oblique sense of the biblical judgment day, denoting an anxiety for a quick resolution of social crises. In this instance, though, it is a rather secular sense of judgment day when the underprivileged will partake in restructuring political and economic imbalances.⁶

Fans' reception and reaction to Fela's performance and music is not necessarily one of an 'expert' opinion, at least not in the sense of Adorno's *communis opinio*. Their expertise—if it can be so described—emanates from being good listeners and keen observers of Afrobeat's style over the period. Distinct from a minority fold of experts made up of musicians at home and abroad, music scholars and musically educated enthusiasts, this group operates not necessarily with the full awareness of Afrobeat's technical and structural patterns. As always happens with such primary fans and, as noted by Adorno, "having unconsciously mastered its immanent logic, (it) understands...the way we understand our own language even though virtually or wholly ignorant of its grammar and syntax."⁷

Our good listener has the capacity for a dynamic and meaningful hearing. The group's sense of music is dynamic because it is sustained by a historical appreciation of Afrobeat's motion, detailing all the musical shifts in Fela's career, and also relating the form to its proper cultural and political contexts. The group's ability to decode those complex cultural indices that appear to confound outsiders are born of a necessary inner knowledge that can always be assumed of an interpretive community. The group invariably developed its own preference of musical registers such that while the expert espoused 'rhythm,' 'harmonics' and other musical highfalutin, it talked of 'groove'; while the expert noted an 'upbeat tempo', the group talked of 'heavy vibes.' For the group, there was hardly any drum 'throbbing' but *gbedu dey jam*. Then Fela responded in pentatonic scales and caught the tonal fancy of the

group's social dialect. Thenceforth, every rhythm became a semantic field, every instrument a speech surrogate subjected to fans' wilful interpretation.

Anarchy and the Republic

The Kalakuta Republic, in its heyday drew its citizenry from the widest imaginable places. Members of the commune included the undergraduate, the dropout, the repressed but artistically talented youth, the job seeker, the rebelling ward of an elite, and the simply adventurous from such far-flung places as Ghana, Togo, Equatorial Guinea, and Zaire. There were also the black brothers and sisters from the diaspora. All commingled in their individual search for laughter and the desire to break out of institutions of containment. Though they may soon learn to develop a sense of personality, partake in the never-ending debate about the African revolution, and even become instant recruits to combat despotic regimes, they have nonetheless subscribed to a new form of institutional containment which Kalakuta was, with its rules and social organization.

Between Kalakuta I, II and III, there were general rules regulating interpersonal relationships, accommodation, eating, domestic chores, drugs, and sex. Excepting the stop-gap Kalakuta II at Number 1 Atinuke Olabanji Street, where Fela stayed with the commune shortly after the destruction of Kalakuta I, he always maintained an expansive architecture in anticipation of the demands of an open household. As he puts it, the Kalakuta Republic was created out of the desire to accommodate "every African escaping persecution,"⁸ and, as a result, bands of youth and children from the neighborhood easily strolled into the compound.

Apart from these 'ideological residents,' Kalakuta also

comprised members of his immediate family including his wives and children, some of his singers, dancers and their friends, and a host of domestic staff. On daily administration of the commune, there is the supervisor who ensures that basic hygiene is observed; and he keeps a tab to guarantee that members' conduct does not violate the mnemonic laws of the commune.

Every member of the commune is expected to perform some domestic chores relating to the collective hygiene as may be defined by older members. Age does not necessarily determine this but at times the length of stay does, or the role set of the individual. There are, however, cleaners whose primary duty is to maintain a healthy environment. Male and female members of the commune live in separate apartments and it is prohibited to proposition any of "Fela's girls."

Theft is highly abhorred and a member who indulges in lying is treated with utter contempt. He or she is considered "not manly enough" to speak the truth. While members may smoke marijuana, *gbanna*—such as cocaine and heroin—is strictly forbidden as this invites the strictest punishment which may include instant expulsion for "Spoiling African Youths." It "spoils" in the same manner that "stretching" or "perming" of one's hair does. It is a product of *colo-mentality*.

No one is allowed to park a car in front of the commune in anticipation of picking up any female member as this may suggest that the *republic* is made up of whores. So also is it a great crime, perhaps the greatest, for any military personnel to enter the *republic* with his uniform on. And they hardly did except on occasions that they were sufficiently armed to arrest citizens or the *republic's* president, Fela himself. Severe penalties greet persons indulging in physical fights, but members may deploy verbal rebuttal and abuse in the tradition of *Yabbis*. A dictum is coined for this: "Yabis, no case; first touch na offence," implying that while verbal umbrage can be tol-

erated, physical assault is sanctioned.

Quite often, foul language is used between quarrelling persons or groups. And at other times, a feuding group may resort to Fela's lyrics by improvising its lines in order to gain an upper hand in a dispute. A resident may describe an antagonist as a "follow follow" meaning that such a person lacks originality or self-reflection. The "Shakara" man or woman is a braggart, while the "mumu" or "ode" is one on the verge of idiocy.

Though a respondent claimed that "there is no seniority in Kalakuta," this can hardly be sustained, to the extent that the mode of entry and role played within the commune came to confer a measure of *idiosyncrasy credit* (a credit earned for a peculiar moral and attitudinal consistency) on some members. This belief might have been sustained by the rather obsessive leveling code of conduct of members, including Fela, who answer to their first names without the appellations of 'Mister' or 'Madam,' which, by an unwritten law, was considered inconsistent with the republic's code of conduct. A curious paradox, though, because Fela's wives were also regarded as "queens"—perhaps in the spirit of an ambiguous postmodern feudal republic!

In an extreme situation, an erring member may be confined in the in-house "cell," *Kala-kusa*, though fine and verbal reprimand were generally the preferred modes of correction. *Kala-kusa* was more of a designated space than a conscious architecture. In the seventies, it was indicated with twine. Confinement does jeopardize the inmate's freedom of movement and reduces access to smoke or to socialize. A good rapport with the Kalakuta supervisor may enhance a lenient treatment while serving time. Theft, hooliganism and bad conduct are the most basic reasons for confinement.

The mode of feeding in Kalakuta was always dynamic. While residents survived on a bare stipend, that could be as low as two hundred naira per week at Kalakuta III, there was

a more communal approach to feeding at Kalakuta II of the early eighties. Stipends were partly generated from the "Chop money tax" of the informal sector operating at the Afrika Shrine by the late eighties.⁹

A near equivalent to this sense of an artistic commune is the *Ki-Yi M'Bock Village* founded by Werewere Liking in Abidjan. A native of Cameroon, Ms Liking first came to Abidjan in 1975 and a decade later founded the center. The name *Ki-Yi* is derived from Bassa of South Cameroon, implying a knowledge of the universe. In the context of artistic creation, the micro-village operates as a community in a living and work space equipped with infrastructure for creating, promoting, and diffusing the arts—including recipes from all over Africa.

Like Fela, Liking's continentalist vision was inspired by Kwame Nkrumah. She translated this vision into a Pan-African movement on contemporary artistic creation. Her performance attempts to unite in one oeuvre, the creativity of writers, poets, plastic artists, actors, singers, and dancers "with a view to presenting a utopia of a new Africa that dares to dream for itself."¹⁰ Her sense of total theater is a spiritual replication of the divination night performance at the Afrika Shrine, with its experimentation of associating theater with dance, ritual, puppetry, and choreography.

The day-to-day running of Fela's band and the commune was based on a variety of organizational structures that overlapped. The different modes of structure and control mechanism do correspond to what Charles Handy (1976) has identified as the power, role, task, and person cultures, or as differently classified by John Child (1984), as the personal centralized, bureaucratic, output, and cultural controls.

Both within the commune and the band, Fela played the focal role, with other members having to fit in differently in the role set, and taking cues about their duties and obliga-

tions from Fela, the player of this focal and substantially melodramatic role. Fela played the role as a counterculture hero, but at the same time resisted the image of the commercial superstar; he was content to be acknowledged as an artist with a strong folk sentiment. He buttressed his role choice through the way he lived and the ideals he preached: an austere sense of dress, the clenched fist 'black power' salute, the chain smoke and a linguistic choice that often confounded, among others, were only symbolic testimonies of what he endorsed. This social mode of behavior were grand rules that generally defined the attitude of members of the organization and fans, who could be seen replicating them over time.

In strict organizational terms, Fela was central to this movement by operating a minimalist bureaucracy and thereby having to delegate power to the different strands of relay authorities such as band leaders and supervisors (in the case of the commune). As a result of the limited bureaucratic practice and an aural-dependent code of conduct, quite frequently there arose conflicting role assumptions. All you had to do to justify your claim, it seemed, was to legitimate your position on an assumption of what Fela's attitude would be on a particular issue. The centrality of Fela to the structure and the privileges derived thereon, emanated from two sources. As the founder of the group, with the passage of time, he sustained its crests and troughs in the face of state hostility, which eventually earned him an 'idiosyncrasy credit'—that stage when members of the group came to offer a freely given devotion and loyalty to him as the central figure. This attitude by members largely derived from what many saw in him as a personality with a deep sense of self-denial and a readiness to share; there was also a knowledge of the fact of one from a middle-class background who had integrated with the subculture and thereby committed a 'class suicide;' and a consistent advocacy for human rights that did not suggest a sense of personal gain.

Members think about all of this, and in a moment of personal contemplation you could hear a resident or member of the band sighing and exclaiming: "Ah! Fela don try o!"

But such an avowed loyalty by the group—which might include fans and a highly expectant civil population that sought to invest in a messianic figure—created its own contradictions. The first problem that arose was one of an uncritical relationship with this central figure such that rather than be critiqued, his errors were consistently rationalized, and individuals with dissenting views were invariably tagged 'saboteurs' or even 'agents'—especially since the group's primary antagonist is the Nigerian state and its coercive agencies. This structure thus sustained Fela's indulgence and those of members of the group—especially the young women with whom he engaged in casual sex. This way the Nietzschean dictum of God-as-the-supreme-nihilist becomes applicable to Fela—the Chief Priest himself—for, as Friedrich Nietzsche states, "when a god climbs to the top of the mountain and there is no path to break and thereby becomes responsible to himself . . . God becomes the supreme nihilist."¹¹

This limited role of the bureaucratic culture in the group, in most parts, derived both from political expediency and Fela's artistic temperament. He seemed to personify the *pure will* that found itself hemmed by societal requirements of structure and ordering. And his continual conflicts with political authorities as from his first arrest in 1974 up until 1997, when he died, hardly left room for a different outlook in this free-willing spirit.

Another side to the group's mode of organization is seen in the use of the task culture which emphasizes getting the job done. Unlike in the power culture, acknowledgment comes not by a balance of influence as much as in the ability to deliver. This is a more representative team culture and influence is based on expert power and individual assiduity to

the team; and it is one whose absence is hardly conceivable in group musical production.

Each of these disparate management cultures have had to be used—either singly or in combination—depending on the particular circumstances in which the organization had found itself. Properly speaking, the flimsy bureaucratic structure that later came to typify the group was, to a large extent, accentuated by the 1977 destruction of Kalakuta Republic. As with the 1984 incident when he was jailed by the Buhari-Idiagbon regime, or between 1996 and 1997 by General Musa Bamaïyi (the head of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency), these extreme situations exposed the bare bureaucracy base of the organization as external intervention was always resorted to in order to shore up for the absence of this central figure. Since there was hardly room during such events for a properly functioning organizational chart, a new central figure invariably arose. In 1984, Fela's activist brother, Doctor Beko Ransome-Kuti, took over the band and supervised the commune while Fela's son, Femi, became the lead singer, *de facto*. What explained fan and member loyalty to policies enunciated by Ransome-Kuti on behalf of the group, was their sympathy for his activism as a scourge of military regimes, and a human rights advocate. But as always in such situations, he remained an external figure, not having the same 'sacred' authority as the displaced central figure.

Folk Hero in the Dock

Fela's friend, old confidant, and one-time manager, Baba Ojomo, claims that while he had been detained 39 times, Fela had been detained for several times over. By the last count, Fela had suffered dozens of stitches from assaults by agents of the state and the Nigerian military.

Fela's encounter with the 'law' also had a legal dimension aside from our treatment of the concept as normative practice. The nature of charges preferred against him ranged from abduction, possession of Indian hemp, aiding and abetting criminals, to contravention of national currency law, disturbance of public peace, and illegal assembly. The last charge was an oblique reference to his more direct public political protest. He also dragged a couple of institutions to court, such as Decca, a recording label, over issues of censorship, corporate intrigue, and breach of contract. Once, Fela himself appeared in court as a private prosecutor. All through this process, he hired attorneys who were not only ideologically sympathetic to his cause but practiced a form of legal advocacy that emphasized not only the legalistic but also the political character of cases. The more notable of these lawyers were Mr. Kanmi Isola Osobu, a left-wing activist at some point in his career; Mr. Tunji Braithwaite, a publicist and presidential candidate of the defunct National Advancement Party (NAP); and Mr. Femi Falana, a labor and human rights lawyer, and leftist activist from his student days at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University).

Some of his more celebrated cases were the "expensive shit" affair of April 30, 1974, and the undeclared foreign currency charge of September 4, 1984. But above all, the February 18, 1977 burning of Kalakuta Republic drew by the sheer magnitude of the loss incurred and the number of persons involved, the widest attention to another site of Afrobeat engagement with the law. When Fela was arrested on April 30, 1974, the charge preferred against him was "possession of weeds suspected to be Indian hemp." Shortly after being granted bail, the police raided his house, searched for weeds of Indian hemp and, apparently, got possession of what they thought was the banned substance. Fela asked to verify the authenticity of the weed, but once the police hand-

ed it to him, he quickly swallowed everything, which then led to a new arrest. At the police station he was waited upon to produce a stool sample for a laboratory test. This experience would later serve as the basis of the record *Expensive Shit*.

On his way to a foreign tour on September 4, 1984, Fela was arrested at the Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos, supposedly for failing to declare the 1,600 Sterling in his possession. Subsequently, he was tried and Justice Okoro Idogu sentenced him to five years imprisonment. He was released seven months later after the trial judge confessed that he was pressured by the Buhari-Idiagbon regime to jail Fela.

All of this does not, however, measure up to the incident of February 18, 1977, unarguably his strongest collision with military power, when Kalakuta I was burnt down by soldiers from the Abalti Barracks. Several citizens of his republic were severely assaulted, some of the women were raped, while the sound track of his film *The Black President* was burnt. His activist mother was thrown down from a one-storey building, and she would die a year later from the shock experienced during the incident. This led to the Lagos state government setting up an Administrative Board of Inquiry headed by Justice Kalu Anyah of the Imo State High Court, with Wing Commander Hamza Abdullahi of the Nigerian Air force as member.

There were two major build-ups to the burning of Kalakuta. Shortly before this event, Fela had confronted the General Olusegun Obasanjo regime about the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). All through the FESTAC event, Afrika Shrine served as an alternative festival and almost took the shine off the official festival. Furthermore, Fela had only recently released his most acerbic satire of the military, *Zombie*, which the military establishment and government found most embarrassing as it portrayed soldiers as unthinking figures akin to automated mariottes. In the trial, Nuhu Ottabor, the officer in charge of

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

Abalti Barracks, Warrant Officer 2, Boniface Agor, and other soldiers testified to their reception of the *Zombie* track sung as:

Vocal: *Zombie o Zombie* }
Chorus: *Zombie o Zombie* }(2ce)
Vocal: *Zombie no go talk unless you tell am to talk*
Chorus: *Zombie*
Vocal: *Zombie no go go unless you tell am to go*
Chorus: *Zombie*
Vocal: *Zombie no go come unless you tell am to come*
Chorus: *Zombie*
Vocal: *Zombie no go think unless you tell am to think*
Chorus: *Zombie*
Vocal: *Zombie o Zombie—Chorus: Zombie o Zombie* }
(2ce)
Vocal: *Tell am to go straight—Chorus: Na joro jara joro*
Vocal: *Tell am to turn right—Chorus: Na joro jara joro*
Vocal: *Tell am to turn left—Chorus: Na joro jara joro*
Vocal: *Tell am to go kill—Chorus: Na joro jara joro*
Vocal: *Joro jara joro o Zombie wey na one way* }(2ce)
 Joro jara joro ... oooh }
 Attention!
 Quick march!
 Slow march!
 Turn right!
 Turn left!
 Join di line! (Chorus repeats
 Fall off! *Zombie*, after
 Fall in! each line)
 Stand at ease!
 Put am for reverse!
 Open your hat!
 Sa-l-u-te!
 About turn!

Alterity, Afrobeat and the Law

Order! }
(Repeat 2ce)
(Chorus till fade, then—) Dis-mi-ss!!!

The board of inquiry concluded that the song was inspired by “an attempt to bring the military into disrepute and ridicule.”¹² The board further affirmed the version of the troop’s story that Kalukuta caught fire through an explosion of a generator set kept near the commune, and not sabotage work by the troop from Abalti Barracks. The panel thus went ahead to castigate “the use of the word ‘Republic’ by Mr. Fela Anikulapo-Kuti or any other individual to describe his domain within the Federal Republic of Nigeria,” and called for its immediate prohibition. The recommendation continued:

The use of this word is not only misleading but, in the circumstances of the instant case under investigation, leaves the impression of a separate and distinct republic proclaimed within the Federal Republic of Nigeria in defiance of the constitution.¹³

In spite of evidence to the contrary, the board concluded that the soldiers involved in the mayhem were “unknown.” The entire judgment resonated the fact that the government could do no wrong, a maxim that barrister Femi Falana would later describe as belonging to the “imperial maxim of the British imperialist era, a maxim that had been abandoned in 1946, but was applied against a Nigerian family in 1977!”

Rebel Sonic Soulmates

Beyond Nigeria’s shores, the stricture between the bard and the law appears unending, even this long after Plato’s *The*

Republic. Beyond the more restrained Kiyi M'Bock experience, three other musical groups whose aesthetic thrusts are as contestatory and defiant of the law are Bob Marley, the French Nique Ta Mere (NTM) and the American 2 Live Crew, Kool Shen and Joey Starr, led by Luther Campbell. Allusions will be presently drawn from two of these experiences as an illustration on the dangers that creative and popular artistic imagination portend for hegemonic social structures. The 2 Live Crew's encounter with the law, on an obscenity charge after the 1989 album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*, is evident of an aesthetic practice that evokes and privileges subcultural forms, as with practices of many other rap groups. In June 1990, a Florida judge noted that *As Nasty*, including the single *Me So Horny*, was legally obscene. The ruling was overturned on appeal, partly also due to the expert testimony of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Noting that the 2 Live Crew's sound is representative of a code of black public knowledge, he alluded to the possibility of missed satire in the Crew's creative production.¹⁴ In an op-ed essay for the *New York Times* in June 1990, Gates, Jr. noted:

2 Live Crew is engaged in heavy-handed parody turning the stereotypes of black and white American culture on their heads. These young artists are acting out, to lively music, a parodic exaggeration of the age-old stereotypes of the oversexed black female and male. Their exuberant use of hyperbole (phantasmogoric sexual organs, for example) undermines—for anyone fluent in black cultural codes—a too literal-minded hearing of the lyrics.

To this, Houston Baker would later add that "2 Live Crew is less a causal site of agency than a single point of imbrication

in an intricate social (and preeminently materialist) narrative."¹⁵ No matter one's divergence from this particular reading, it is evident from other instances of rappers' aesthetics that popular music is capable of articulating the generalized anger of a community's excluded subculture. For instance, in the summer of 1992, Ice-T's *Cop Killer* created a furor, while NWA's (Niggers With Attitude) *F— the Police* led to an official letter of protest from the FBI to NWA's record company. Earlier on, the group's *Straight Out'a Compton* had given impetus to anti-establishment expressivity. In not too dissimilar circumstances, youth anger was echoing in a plea for an expressive space across the Atlantic: one, against a racist American structure, the other, against an indolent and thieving Nigerian political elite. It is precisely this self-assertive tenor, as a familiar youth oppositional attitude, that the young Nigerian fan of the nineties identified in rap music, and came to embrace it as a worthy ideological complement to Afrobeat. In spite of this, however, reggae music and the Rastafarian outlook remain Afrobeat's fans' closest ideological ally, with Bob Marley playing something of a Fela double cast in their imagination.

On the other hand, *Nique Ta Mere* (literally "Fuck your mother" in French), was the first incident of rappers condemned by the French law, on the heels of its June 1997 confrontation with the National Front, a right-wing group. Shen and Starr, from Saint-Denis (or little Chicago in the parlance of local folks), used to sing on Parisian metros, putting their signatures on the wall and writing graffiti, to buttress lyrical content, in a tradition that is similar to Afrobeat. They compared police attitudes to a class sense of justice and its lack of humanism. The preamble to their lyrics states:

I fuck and piss on Justice because all the
police are fascists. They are the ones who

commit assassination. Where are the fucking cops who have been harassing us all the year round? The fascists are not only in Toulon, you'll see them everywhere, usually three of them—dressed in blue and driving a Renault 19. They are not far from you, precisely just behind you at the gate. You'll probably see how am talking about—these people are dangerous for our collective liberty and freedom. Our enemies are the men in blue. They are just waiting for an excuse to beat us up, but surely we'll piss on them.¹⁶

This was greeted with outrage by the French law and establishment. The trial judge anchored the judgment on three counts: disregard of republican morality, outrage toward the state, and inciting to violence and crime. On the basis of this, the NTM was banned for six months from performing on French territory after being charged a fine of Cf 50,000, a penalty that fueled greater reaction across Europe and renewed the old debate of artistic liberty. A Swiss judge, Pierre Cornu, equally declaimed the NTM's lyrics as outrageous, citing a parallel provocation in an earlier artist, Renaud, who had sang:

It is about time to end dialogue with the
Cops, what we need now are rifles and
Molotov cocktails.¹⁷

But Judge Cornu's preference is for Brasseur's *Le gorille*, whose lyrics of the sixties merely make oblique references to the alteration of social power and the political economy. No doubt, Brasseur could be tolerable largely because he did not

challenge the ideological foundation of the state.

The counter discourse to this, however, was articulated by the mass rejection of this penalty—considered rather severe—kicked off with a mass demonstration in Paris. Drawing a wide collage of subcultural aesthetic alliance that included rappers, reggae artists and the civil population, the alternative voices drew salient parallels to concerts of skinheads which principally incite to hate and general violence without being reprimanded. This, they contended, simply suited the state's ideological convenience. And, in a rare performance of audience reaction, fans reclaimed NTM's lyrics:

The police is always asserting the form over the content, moreover if the color of your skin does not conform to their manual, they become a real organized gang...¹⁸

Reinventing a Continent

The 'concept' of Africa which Fela partook in, like many other discourses on the continent, is varied and multifaceted. Constantly in renewal, the 'idea' is neither unitary nor complete. Discursive Africa is as problematic today not only because of its externally defined nomenclature but, as also evident here, consequent upon the subjectivism of how its intellectuals have come to construct it, and inhibitions posed by its structural, material base. Let us first take a look at this nomenclature and its earliest documented constructs.

Both anthropological evidence and documented history of the earliest contacts between Africa and the other continents reveal a relationship that can, at the very least, be described as mutually respectful, even if the continent had been variously described.¹⁹ From *Africa* of the world atlas of

Gerald Mercator (1595), through *Africa* of J.W. Heydt (1744), Martin de Vos's sixteenth century *Allegory of Africa*, or Andreas Schutler's 1770 painting, *Africa*, and Cesare Ripa's 1765 *The African Allegory*— which linked the continent's name to *Afer*, Abraham's son—we are confronted with a diversity of comprehension of both the peoples and the geography by the accounts of early travelers and explorers. The Greeks once named it Libya, a name that was also used in reference to "any black person in Aithiops," while the Romans had a province in their empire by the name Africa.²⁰ It is instructive to note that in the latter phase, an element of curiosity of its otherness was already creeping in.

The work of Alain Bourgeois, a French scholar once resident in Senegal cited by Mudimbe, helps to illuminate the context of this early interaction:

It is clear that the Greeks, not only during the Homeric and Classical periods, but also during the Alexandrine period—poets, historians, moralists—knew Negroes far and near, appreciated them without a dilettante's curiosity, without any racial prejudice, on the contrary with the most favorable sentiments and the most flattering terms.²¹

Earlier on in the same text, Bourgeois had noted:

...contrary to many nations concerned with Africa only for her wealth in gold, ivory and manpower, two millennium ago the Greeks looked at Negroes as human beings, with admiration and in brotherly fashion.²²

But even long before Bourgeois, Cheikh Anta Diop or even

Senghor, Herodotus, a Greek philosopher, had written in a similar vein and would be later disparaged for daring to allude to the possibility of an African influence on Greek culture and civilization. He had stated:

I will never admit that the similar ceremonies performed in Greece and Egypt are the result of mere coincidence—had that been so, our rites would have been more Greek in character and less recent in origin. Nor will I allow the Egyptians ever took over from Greece either this custom or any other.²³

In other words, there was an Africa that was related to on its own terms, so to speak, as merely a variant of the Same. And particularly in relation to its arts, which, because of their *newness* of form to the unpracticed European eye then, they were yet regarded no more than “the mysterious diversity of the Same.” Strictly speaking, it was not until the eighteenth century, as Mudimbe aptly notes, that they entered into the frame of strange—even “ugly” artifacts.²⁴ It was at this point that African alterity became a “negative category of the Same.”²⁵

This was a crucial century in the overall construction of the African identity, a moment of firming up ideas and concepts which in the earlier period might only have been tentative and baseless. It was the age of the ‘new’ *discoverers*, forerunners of colonialism, such as J. Bruce’s expedition into Ethiopia in 1770 and Mungo Park’s journey along the river Niger in 1795. Since disturbed Christian minds would have to be placated (earlier on “In 1562, Francisco de Victoria justified colonial conquests on the basis of Christian trade rights, explaining that it was God’s intent that all nations should trade with each other”²⁶), and colonialism had to be justi-

fied, 'new' proofs had to be 'discovered' of Africa's pathological inferiority. And since Africans necessarily had to be inferior,

the technique of Yoruba statuary must have come from Egyptians; Benin art must be a Portuguese creation; the architectural achievement of Zimbabwe was due to Arab technicians; and Hausa and Buganda statecraft were inventions of white invaders.²⁷

This attitude is replicated in other spheres of colonial interaction and its knowledge base between disciplines as far-flung as the humanities, botany, and anthropology. It was precisely in this context that Africa started acquiring such synonyms as 'primitive' and 'savage.' Confronted with the fact of African influence on Greek civilization, an analytical detour had to be made; and this is the focus of Martin Bernal's work in the first two volumes of *The Black Athena: The AfroAsiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. In these works, Bernal probes two conflicting historiographies on Greece: one, an Ancient; two, an Aryan—which he considers a conscious reversal of the earlier model (Vols I&II).

It was precisely this epistemological ethnocentrism that Fela would later react to and denounce, beside devising aesthetic canons that foregrounded his claims. But even within the continent, he constantly critiqued in his pronouncements all attempts to make African ethnophilosophy an extroverted discourse. Apart from the more recent publications—from the early nineties onwards—Fela's personal bibliography on this subject included all of the earlier thinkers and texts cited in this section, even if Nkrumah remained the central inspiration of his concept of Pan-Africanism. He read, assimilated, and entered into polemics on these issues, citing copious

materials to the amazement of many scholars in Nigeria and abroad who had not had the benefit of this aspect of the performer's inclination. And of all of Nkrumah's works, three texts correspond, albeit in an overlapping manner, to the development of Fela's conception of an African identity. These texts include *Consciensism*, *Africa Must Unite*, and *Neo-colonialism*, *The Last Stage of Imperialism*. There are suggestions that the concept of Nkrumahism itself is problematic in view of the claim that he did not author some of the works credited to him. Whatever the truth of this claim, what is indisputable is the existence of a coherence—both of logic and content of these works—such as to lead one into agreement with Paulin J. Hountodji's submission that the central question is "How should one read Nkrumah's works?"²⁸

There were obvious discontinuities and even revisions of positions earlier taken by Nkrumah in a manner that saw the African statesman and political thinker in a dynamic development while engaging concerns of the African condition. On the question of violence, we see a fundamental shift in the latter Nkrumah, from a Gandhi-influenced pacifism to an acknowledgment of the inevitability of revolutionary violence in the context of seizing state power by oppressed classes. *Consciensism* (1970) represents his clearest thinking on the presumed communal ethos of pre-colonial Africa. Nkrumah's later works do acknowledge the existence of class struggle in the continent (as evinced in *Neo-Colonialism*), although he started off more reluctantly by positing this as a sequel to an external imposition. What Nkrumah was invariably saying at this phase is that the labor-capital relation in Africa was incapable of generating surplus value or, at best, that surplus value could only be externally generated.

He advocated African unity in *Africa Must Unite* (1963), arguing that a critical element in foisting dependency and neo-colonialism is through the balkanization of states and

peoples. Although a position that is not essentially wrong, as a political and an ideological project, he seemed to have underestimated "the differences in political and ideological orientation between the various African states."²⁹ In recognition of this limitation, he would later develop a handbook that emphasized grassroots and peoples-to-peoples contact since political leaders do not always represent the popular will of their people.

A radical departure here is that Fela has a concept of Africa as a black continent. Even when he tries to move into a non-racial category of Africa, he does not quite get too far from that initial conception. The attempt to transcend the racially based category in his interpersonal relationship is symbolized by his mode of signing his personal letters with the phrase—"best African wishes" rather than "best black wishes" of the seventies.³⁰ He also attempts to grapple with this in his attitude to the negritude movement. According to him:

Negritudists think along the same line as J.K. Aggrey in his theory about the black and white keys of the piano. Negritude does not give the blackman his full expression.³¹

In spite of this claim, there is still a sense in which Fela is undoubtedly in agreement with certain strands of the negritude movement, such as those represented by Aime Cesaire, Jules Monnerot, Birago Diop and even Senghor, to the extent that they try—in spite of being different hues of socialists—to "determine a strategy for promoting the *individuality* of African culture."³² (Emphasis mine.) Thus, theoretically he agrees on the individuality of the blackman, but rejects those binary postulations of his vocation and potential that preoccupy Senghor's imagination. This can only be said to be a theoretical concession because, quite often, the implication

of some of Fela's positions places him in this same negritudist mold. The distinction he tries to make between 'technology' and 'naturalogy' for instance, has the suggestion that the African (read black) is incapable of quantitative and analytical knowledge, even when Fela as an individual is a self-evident negation of this stereotype.

This view remains a very romantic outlook of the African—a particular type of African who has not agreed to be integrated into the Western maelstrom. And that African was a very simple, non-complex type, one in the Rousseauian African golden age fantasia of "perfect liberty, equality and fraternity"³³ Hence, his choice is for "naturalogy," not technology, the latter being derived from the insatiate lust for profit rather than genuine progress and concern for the human person. But in doing this, he somewhat swings to the extreme of denying universal references of certain knowledge production—of which the African is also part creator—by branding them as "Western." Ultimately, his is an African that has distanced the self from a society in which he is not in control: This African appears to be overwhelmed by the 'interference' factor of colonialism.

Another rung of the African identity debate is the sort of distinctions made by Ali Mazrui and Kwabena Nketia. Mazrui has, since the mid-seventies, put forth the idea of a supposed triple heritage to which Africa subscribes or is implicated in, by virtue of the prevalence of Western (and Christian), Oriental (and Islamic) and indigenous values in the continent. However, Nketia, like Fela, rebuts this claim, arguing that the African context is better captured by a description that acknowledges only "one heritage," that is, the indigenous, "and two major invasions," those are, Western and Judeo-Christian, and, Oriental and Islamic.³⁴ Again, we see here a problem of definition arising from a difference in the paradigms deployed. Is Africa being defined by geography, race

(read pigmentation), religious values or even language?

Yet, another strand to this debate is Fela's conception of *citizenship* in the context of defining an African identity. From his perspective, all *negro* Africans would qualify as citizens of the continent even if colonial intervention had reduced them to *ethnic citizens*. And as Mahmood Mamdani has aptly pointed out in the case of the equatorial region of Africa, the colonizing forces assumed citizenship while "Natives were said to belong NOT to any *civic space*, but to an *ethnic space*."³⁵ Discussed in relation to the post-eighteenth century European colonizing forces, Fela's position is quite clear: they were neither *citizens* nor do they belong to an *ethnic space*—even when they might have usurped *citizenship* rights as *settlers*. However, he rejects the qualification of any black African in the continent as belonging to anything less than a *civic space*; in other words, no black African should be regarded as a *native settler*, a somewhat contradictory term which could also be based no longer on a racial but an ethnic category as Mamdani suggests. Arising from this, Fela calls for the inclusion of the black diaspora into the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). It is also this reading that informs his support for the Biafran secessionists during the Nigerian civil war—even when he believes in a united and democratic Nigeria. Fela reads the incidence of the *araba*, when thousands of Igbos were killed in northern Nigeria on the eve of the war, as a classic reading of an Igbo (re)classification as *Native Settlers*. The Igbo thus became an *ethnic stranger*—as against a redefined indigenous *ethnic citizen*, a privilege which the predominant Hausa-Fulani groups extended to non-Igbos during the riots.

In application to the entire continent, Fela's position is quite tenuous and an appropriate way to describe it is that he regards non-Negro Africans as *Native Settlers* in so far as they seek to redefine Africa away from its indigenous values. In

relation to Arab Africa in particular, his position is a hybrid of an anthropological and ideological reading. The anthropological stems from Fela's articulation of the concept of the indigenous, more or less, as those who first peopled this (Africa) land. Ideologically, there could hardly be any room for accommodation once such groups also exhibit(ed) extroverted settler mentality by partaking in an ideology of (superior) racial complex, or were implicated in the less-talked-about negro enslavement across the Sahara.

However, what makes Fela's position challenging is that he fuses certain animistic structures with a diasporic image of (black) Africa, so that the old ancestors of ancient times were now replaced by a new set of ancestors such as Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, who are determinate in their thinking and accessible. By bringing together these diverse, identifiable African ancestors to build a common image out of them, he demonstrates a clear preference for the continental to the ethnic ancestor. This distinction between the nationalist and the continentalist underscores his 'universalist' conception of Africa, what in the discourse of African philosophy would be described as "unanimism"—that is, an African culture that is unitary and to which all Africans subscribe.

This explains why Fela never came to terms with the idea of national and regional boundaries in the continent, and the sense of ease with which he intervenes (through his lyrics and physical intervention) in local politics, especially in the West African subregion. This is what the Ghanaian police in the early eighties might not have been mindful of when he was taken in at the Adabraka police station in Accra after he challenged a Lebanese whom he deemed was violating the rights of a Ghanaian trader. Obviously, there were various levels of conceptual confusion between Fela and the Lebanese on the one hand, and on the other, the police. While the police, on

this particular occasion, saw in the Lebanese a higher citizen—by virtue of his potential links with members of the Ghanaian ruling class—Fela challenged the Lebanese's claim to that citizenship not only in respect to Ghana but to the entire continent. However, neither the Lebanese, the police, nor even the trader who was being assisted could understand the basis of Fela's effrontery since he was not considered a Ghanaian citizen, a prospect which Fela would have considered ludicrous since he was already African which, by his own reckoning, simply meant a variant of the Same. This conception could only have been strengthened if on a casual visit to Ghana (which he did quite often), he is greeted with *akwaa-ba* which resonates in his Yorùbá as *ẹkúàbò*. Or when another Twi retorts *mi ba sesi ya*, he immediately recognizes *mòún bọ ní sisínyí*—both meaning 'I shall be returning shortly'

This attitude, for him, means that you had cultures with their formal integrity relating across many interactive spaces in a manner that made it possible for them to share ideas, not necessarily until colonialism but through contact predating the colonial moment. He was specific about the indices of that unanimity one of which is cultural values, in terms of the ways Africans live. One of the interesting ironies of his outlook is that while being an advocate for the working class, he takes, quite often, a very peasant view of lived experience. For instance, he would emphasize the choice of a chewing stick to a toothbrush, or eating with bare hands rather than European cutlery, which he sees as striving to be as natural as you can get.

In his thrust toward an aesthetics of the unanimist, Fela compares readily to two other African performing artists, Werewere Liking (as earlier indicated) and Wole Soyinka. With the latter, this comes to bear in *Ogun Abibiman* where Soyinka's experimental fusion of a mythical figure, Ògún (Yorùbá—Nigeria), and a more contemporary ancestor, Shaka (Zulu—South Africa), with whom he explores a time-

less mutuality of these figures. In addition, Fela also relates the idea of being African to the idea of the original or early man, who is free, unencumbered by conventions and apparatuses of containment. This is the central theme of the track, *Africa, Center of the World*. His music from *Jean Koku* (1971) keeps pointing at that element of authenticity, the purity of the human as a person free to act and create. Without asserting it in any clear theoretical frame, he subscribes to solarism and the climatic influence on culture. Oftentimes, he repeats the "natural" warmth of the African whom he contrasts to the European whom he finds rather cold. He is in this sense attributing a certain happy-go-luckiness to the sun, which puts a sparkle in every situation.

The circumscription of the dream of a self-conscious Africa, arising from the weak nature of its economy, led Fela to suggestions of causative factors similar to those once espoused by A.M. Babu in: "the inherited backwardness from the primitive structure of colonial economy, failed attempts to formulate policies for restructuring these economies after independence, and a proliferation of weak and self-seeking leadership and coup makers."³⁶

In spite of his forays in (political) group organizational efforts, however, Fela is essentially in a strict Bakuninian sense, an anarchist. Not believing in the Other's grand narrative, he settles for the Foucaultian type single issue, interventionist symbolic actions: challenging individual instances of oppression, standing up for a Ghanaian trader cheated by a Lebanese, snatching the helmet of a 'rude' policeman, and commissioning a driver to cruise around town with a Mercedes Benz fixed with a carriage, to convey fuel in order to trivialize a symbol of elitism. This interventionist stance is often realized in his lyrical discourse as the troubadour and quester for truth. It usually comes off as "me Fela I challenge..." as we find in *Army Arrangement*. Apparently hav-

ing frequently succeeded in a lumpen mode of advocacy he elevated the form into a theory of living.

Anarchism here does not suggest the absence of organization, or as in the everyday usage of the destructive instinct. Fela's sense of anarchism is simply a commitment to freedom in a specific manner that was not going to make compromises because convention requires him to do so. He was a man who used authority himself and exercised it effectively; people respected and deferred to him and that gave him the freedom to act outside the code he created for his followers. The primary and general fan followed him but Fela was hardly himself a follower, at least not of an immediate, visible authority. Those whom he supposedly followed were highly rarefied and not quite immediate. Nkrumah, Lumumba, Garvey Du Bois and Malcolm X were dead. Though there was a mythical conception of authority which Fela relates to, but here on earth—and surely in his republic—he was the boss.

In relation to the broad sense of organization of civil society, the most he could tolerate was the 'minimal state,' one in which citizens ought to be treated as "inviolable individuals, who may not be used in certain ways by others as means or tools or instruments or resources."³⁷ He shares certain basic ideas with many radical thinkers of the century in identifying layers of contradictions between labor and capital, imperialism and the developing world, private property and social production, and a timid acceptance of the necessity to abolish the state. Through his examples and precepts, he invariably affirms Lenin's thesis in *State and Revolution* that "So long as there is the state there is no freedom. When there is freedom there will be no state."³⁸ But these are ideas equally shared by anarchists; in addition to Fela's disdain for structure and organization, even when he created them for contingency purposes. His soul was essentially etched in the lines of anarchism's polemicist, J.P. Proudhon, who had identified

some of the state's domestic "inconveniences" in the fact that:

To be governed is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so...That is government; that is justice; that is its morality.³⁹

Fela needed not to have been self-conscious of theoretical anarchism—either as philosophically deriving from the Hegelian axiom of “negation of negation,” or as a perspective of the necessity for the absence of a central authority—but all the organizations he helped create were aimed at first distancing themselves from authority and disrupting what that authority considered the norm. Ever since his youth, he had hankered after the displacement of central authority when he founded “The Planless Society” and “The Planless Times Publication”—organizations that were promptly banned by the school authorities.

Notes

1. From the poet's unpublished collection, "Endsong II."
2. In the manner of my mother's constant recrimination to a child playing dangerously
3. This had less to do with how much members of the household were paid, which was indeed barely on subsistence level, as a statement symbolized by the very act of his style of living.
4. He neither appeared this way in public nor on stage while performing as occasionally suggested in the popular media.
5. A similar experience is described by Dick Hebdige in "Reggae, Rastas and Rudies" in James Curran et. al. (ed.) *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 427-439.
6. Ibid. A similar experience of the Rastafarian subculture was equally documented.
7. Theodor W Adorno *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Continuum, 1975), p. 115.
8. From Fela's correspondence.
9. Details given by Jide John, one-time supervisor at the Kalakuta Republic.
10. Cited from brochure of the *Kiyi M'Bock* company
11. See Friederich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956, pp 96-7.
12. "Report of the Lagos Government on Administrative Board of Inquiry into the Disturbances at 14A Agege Motor Road, Idi Oro, 1977."
13. Ibid., p. 21.
14. Surfed on "alt.culture:2 Live Crew"; and Houston Baker's *Rap and the Academy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

20. V.Y. Mudimbe in *The Idea of Africa* details the evolving forms of African identity. For the specific quotation, see *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, and London: James Currey 1988), p. xi.
21. See Mudimbe's *The Idea*, p. 20.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
23. Martin Bernal: *Black Athena: The AfroAsiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Vintage, 1987), p. 100.
24. *The Invention*, p. 10.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
28. Paulin J. Hountodji's *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 131.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
30. Information from Fela's correspondence.
31. See Lasisi, B.A. project, 1980.
32. See Mudimbe's *The Invention*, p. 86.
33. T. Hodgkin in *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 1957,) pp. 174 -5.
34. See *ANA Review*, a quarterly publication of the Association of Nigerian Authors, 1995.
35. In Mahmood Mamdani's "When Does a Settler Become a Native? Reflections on the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and Southern Africa." Text of 1998 Inaugural Lecture as A.C. Jordan Professor of African Studies, University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies.
36. See A.M. Babu's "The New World Disorder—Which Way Africa?" in Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (ed.) *Pan Africanism: Politics, Economy and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p. 90.

37. See Robert Norzick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 334.
38. V.I. Lenin *State and the Revolution* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), p. 91.
39. See John Beverly Robinson's translation of J.P. Proudhon, *General Ideas of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Freedom Press, 1923), pp. 293-4.

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6

The Afrobeat Continuum



*The memory of the dead
is the memory of the living
the monologue of the dead
is the monologue of the unborn...*

—Maik Nwosu¹

Fela died on August 2, 1997. And though his life was particularly eventful, once the announcement of his exit was made, the events leading to his interment began to bear a symbolic imprint. The airwaves were filled with diverse castings of his 'second' death in a fortnight.² And to die August 2, on the birthday of his beloved brother, Beko Ransome-Kuti, who was serving a 15-year jail term imposed by the General Sani Abacha regime, fans insisted, was indicative of a unique bond between them.

In anticipation of being able to control the crowd, the family had fixed a week-day Tuesday, August 12, for the burial. But when they brought his corpse to the Tafawa Balewa Square (TBS) for the lying-in-state a day earlier, over half a

million people paid their last respects. He was draped in his favorite orange color and, it seemed, he was having his first peaceful sleep in 58 years. The rite of passage, again, testified to a uniquely Afrobeat counterculture experience.

While the guttural blare of the baritone saxophone persisted at the far end corner of the expansive square, acolytes sprinkled his casket with the forbidden leaves of marijuana—for whose possession he was arrested and had just been released from detention a few weeks earlier. Then, for good measure, a jumbo-size wrap of marijuana was placed between his fingers; for who knows how scarce such stuff could be on this long eternal way? The sum of 300 Naira was also tucked into the coffin for contingency expenditures along this journey into ancestorhood. And in a show of final defiance, Baba Ani—the band leader—called on the Nigerian State to dare arrest the corpse for violating the law of the land!

The burial rites, while taking an unconventional tone, nevertheless resonated a traditional 'cosmic vision.' Through their acts and symbolism, fans and acolytes, to a large extent, were acting out a cultural script that affirmed the continuity of life after death and the possibility of dialogue with characters of the supersensible world. The imaginative space is hardly different from that which Soyinka identified in his *Death and the King's Horseman* when he notes:

The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition.³

Much earlier, Soyinka had captured this continuity for the Yorùbá, which he says operates both through the cyclic concept

of time and animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness. And with Afrobeat fans, too, it is not simply ancestor veneration for its own sake, but a protest ritual. Here we are in the terrain of anti-establishment social praxis and throughout the duration of the rites, the laws of Kalakuta Republic were evoked, while those of the Nigerian state were momentarily suspended.

After eleven hours of lying-in-state, the casket was taken to Fela's Gbemisola residence, but it had to endure a seven-hour traffic jam as citizens would not allow a free passage to the hearse, with each neighborhood along the route insisting on paying a last respect. Later in the evening the corpse was brought to the Afrika Shrine on Pepple Street, Ikeja, a suburb of Lagos. Worship rites started against the background of a dark and silent stage; but figures in white wrapper, a symbol of the Ogbóni cult, could be gleaned faintly from afar. Out of this silent night came the intermittent clacking of wooden rattles. These communicants of ancestral voyage clanged away in the dark, first with the metal gong—sharp and intruding—and then the conga followed in a staccato fashion. From the depth of the darkness, these figures began to chant “Yeeepaaariipaa, Yeeepaaariipaa” repeatedly in a manner reminiscent of the mythical yelling of anguish by assistants of the Yorùbá deity Obàtálá, as earlier described in Chapter Four. This code, mythology teaches, had since mythical time been adopted by worshippers of the orò cult. It prefixes their ritual encounter and denotes a vow of commitment to a collective cause—the ethos of awo. With the introduction of the percussive section (no guitar, piano or saxophone), and the energetic chirping of cymbals, the beat took a faster pace, reaching crescendo with the rising smoke of a burning wick tucked away in an inner cubicle housing the deities.

The ritual paraphernalia are a mélange of diverse African ancestors as earlier described, but something is amiss today: the inscriptions of Šàngó, the Yorùbá god of thunder, and Ògún, the muse of creativity deity of metallurgy and patron of

the blacksmith. These were quite visible during Fela's last worship here. Are these signals of a new beginning, a foretaste of post-Fela Afrobeat cultural practice?

This 'omission' may be partly explained by the oral nature of liturgy at the Shrine, a factor that plays up the improvisational. Added to this is the fact that, as a result of Fela's oppositional politics, the Nigerian state had always attacked the sanctity of his place of worship, thereby resulting in a constantly shifting Shrine with contingent itinerant gods. During such raids, hapless deities were destroyed or carted away. On this particular night, the limitation of the mnemonic became evident when the officiating acolyte stepped in. He skips (some would suggest 'forgets') the preliminary divination motion, squats in a strange pose and revises the entire ritual order.

Further still, he neither tastes the honeycomb nor throws the cowry shell—a process considered obligatory to gain access to spiritual realms. And so it was time to partake of the ritual sip of palm-wine, and he does just that, but fails to hand over the calabash to the deceased's children in a diagonal-cross-hand stretch. Fela had always insisted on this diagonal-cross-formation as a recreation of the traditional *orita*, the crossroads where a ritual offering is generally placed.

Meanwhile, the smoke has enveloped the worship cubicle and it was homeward journey for a migrant soul, after all the path had been cleared. The old faithful and habitués of the Shrine break down in tears as pallbearers adorning moody gray *àdìrè* with black berets arrive to carry off the raffia-woven casket. The entire hall makes the clenched-fist black power salute.

By noon next day the body would be interred and Fela's daughter, Yemi, would be pleading with the throng of crowd: "I take Fela name beg you, make una no harass innocent citizens, Fela could be angry o!" A few weeks later, a rash of deaths would ravage the household, snatching Fela's daughter Soladegbin and his cousin Fran Kuboye, and the population

would interpret this in the context of àkúfá, implying one who is drawn as a fellow traveler in another's death. Then there would be the need to 'properly' propitiate the warring spirits, which was eventually carried out during the unveiling of the Fela mausoleum when nine Ifá priests, led by the paramount Apèná of Lagos, Chief Nasiru Dosunmu appeased the collaborative deities.

With the pallbearers making their final round at the exit of the Afrika Shrine, I gazed at the stage again and it was bereft of the Chief Priest. It was like returning to the stable without your favored stallion. At this same spot a while back, I had watched the frail frame blare away at his tenor saxophone, holding the audience spell-bound for a while. Then, the female dancers, all tattooed and in raffia-type synthetic skirts, would wriggle in, inviting a thunderous applause from the crowd... Those were days when the mind would rove, pondering the irony of this son of a clergyman who deviated into Òrìsà worship. Surrounded, as he was, by a crop of brothers and one sister trained in orthodox western medicine, he insisted on alternative African medicine. He idolized his mother, but held patriarchal views of other women. He was opposed to drugs such as heroin and cocaine, and yet affirms marijuana as medicinal herb; after all, "it is grass; it is African!" He was a hybrid of the traditional and avant-garde. His life: one continuum of alternative voicing.

Once named Fela Ransome-Kuti, he altered it to Fela (He who emanates greatness) Anikulapo (I have got death in my pouch) Kuti (the one who never dies). He had been born 'twice,' first as the third and, later, the fourth child of his parents. Like his spirit-companion Azaro in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, he also felt compelled by peer pressure to return to the idyllic world of primal voids and fresh beginnings. The annoyance that drove him to his initial death, according to him, was the sacrilege committed by his parents in allowing a German missionary to "name me 'Hildegart.'" Throughout

his life, he celebrated this ethos of the *àbíkú*—children who in the cosmogony of Yorùbá belief keep hovering between the land of the dead and the living.

His musical style may reflect diverse influences, including aspects of Afro-American jazz, but they all merely overlay a crisscross African rhythmic style, a structure that is essentially indigenous, and infused with the crest and trough, the pulse of Africa's daily living in an age of disillusionment. The aimless balloon (*yèyè* ball as he calls it) depicts the lack of an ordering presence in national political life, while the beast image, reminiscent of the apocalyptic, transgresses the land, trudging the continent's nurseries and plucking the moon out of its night. His performance venue he called a Shrine, which, as Grass reflects, was intended to be more than a night club; he conceived of it as a place of communal celebration and worship. Rather than the 'tribal' communalism of old, however, his new society became a "rallying point of radical pan-Africanism."⁴

Fela used the mask costume of spiritual (traditional chalk) powder on his face as symbol of man conquering death. His communion with the ancestors was a sort of ritual device to negate absence and affirm presence with these beginnings. This form merely complements the name Anikulapo-Kuti, a cultural signifier that refers to this concept of continuity. It is not just an ideational category for the Yorùbá, it implies both sameness and difference. By the power of the mask you cannot die; when 'death' is eventually reckoned, however, it is deemed to represent only an aspect of existence, one lives on in other forms and could indeed reincarnate. Any wonder, therefore, that Fela aggregated this consciousness shortly before his demise when he proclaimed: "I am not dying, I am only going to the land of the spirits."

Abàmi Èdá, the unfathomable, is a sobriquet fans invested in him, and he was to embody the features of a number of deities he worshipped. For his vanguardist role and, almost,

Dionysian excess, he was invariably playing medium for Ògún; while his preoccupation with mask dramaturgy and the celebration of the fire ether are to be found in Şàngó, the thunder god and progenitor of the Egúngún mask. Then there is his sublime spirituality in herbal medication, which is answerable largely to the meta-intellectuality of Osányìn, the primeval herbalist. But above all, Fela was the embodiment of Èşù, the archetypal trickster, god of fate, undecidability and interpretation. In this sense, he was for Africa and the Black world a telling Hermes, with an artistic oeuvre well positioned for the twenty-first century.

Quite often I have been asked: who steps into Fela's shoes? And in the form of an answer this is how I reply: "I followed every stage of the final rites of passage and saw him interred with his favorite oxblood shoes on!" However, the question is not totally misplaced especially if we begin to recast it in terms of his effect on a broad artistic movement. There is a sense in which the sheer breadth of Fela's artistry coupled with a larger-than-life image, did not allow for an early emergence of confident, young Afrobeat acts. And with his death, we can only contemplate the direction of the Nigerian, African and global post-Fela Afrobeat scene. For one, we have to contend with a tendency in history of that factor of appropriation of cultural forms of subordinate classes by the ruling class. Such transformation, or even hijacking, is evident in religion and music—as we find in early Christianity, jazz and, to some degree, juju music. From a mass movement that aggregated the collective voice of the underprivileged classes (being itself constituted by members of these classes), and was somewhat seen in opposition to the state, Christianity was to later receive the endorsement of the same state that had held the faith in suspicion. There are suggestions that Christianity "was originally a movement of the oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and freed men, of poor people deprived of all rights, of

peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome."⁵

However, in less than 400 years after its appearance, it became the recognized state religion of the Roman Empire, albeit with a hierarchical structure, and less mass movement orientation such as would reduce the potential radical spontaneity of the faith as was evident in the "organisation of the Bohemian Taborites."⁶ It is also a measure of the success of such appropriation that when we now listen to jazz music, our mind quite often conjures the image of the genteel upper class rather than the pioneers who were of the lower class extraction. Though the process has not gone its full circle with juju, owing to a blurring class formation and stratification in Nigeria, it is significant to note that juju music too is a creation of the cosmopolitan Lagos 'underdogs' of the 1930s,⁷ though the form's major preoccupation in the nineties has become the legitimation of the status quo.

Even prior to Fela's death, evidence of such appropriation had become manifest in the profile of the succeeding generation of Afrobeat artists in Nigeria. There is a sense in which this trend is inevitable owing to a cultural economy that dictates the necessity for the creation of a material basis and structure for the survival of the form. Someone had to pick up the bill of the musical ensemble, its instruments and equipment, the club house and its overseas tours, which, invariably turns out to be the corporate patrons or/and cultural institutions, including recording labels and individual patrons with primarily a faddish interest. The artist who shops for support from such quarters may find himself inadvertently having to anticipate the concern and mood of these patrons. Fela's ability to resist the potential of art patrons foisting their preferences on him was accounted for primarily by the fact that, later in his career, he became his own patron, and this made it possible for him to retain the peculiar radical verve of his composition. After achieving this status, it was the cultural establishments that

needed him to legitimate their projects.

The gradual slide of post-Fela Afrobeat into an elite art (as distinct from art music) is not always obvious, partly because the basic formulae are still retained in its rhythmic structure, costuming, choreography and, to some degree, the character of song text. Fela's conception of Afrobeat was, however, one of a cultural praxis—through which he expressed a distinct aesthetic and ideological vision of art and life. What the more influential Nigerian protégés of the form such as Femi Anikulapo Kuti (*Positive Force*), Bisade Ologunde (*Lagbaja*), Dede Mabiaku (*Underground System*), Dele Ogunkoya (*Afro-Gbedu Ensemble*), Charly Boy, Dele Sosinmi (*Gbedu Resurrection*), Tony Allen (*Afrobeat Revenge*), KunNiraN (*Afara-Oyin*), Funso Ogundipe (*The Aiyetoro Band*) and Juwon Ogungbe (*African Connection*) have retained, to varying degrees of success, is more of the aesthetic than the latter, even though their nomenclatures are undoubtedly resonant of Fela's Afrobeat temperament.

Though the new age Afrobeat may sing on behalf of the masses and express a Pan-African yearning—at times in club houses with gate-taking far above the national minimum wage—it is neither 'privileged' with a deviant republic which created a truly African micro cosmopolis from which Fela easily drew his vocabulary and allusion, nor is its social context the sort of idealism and *zeitgeist* of the sixties and seventies which propelled the youth of Fela's generation to redemptive causes. More so, it is now a unipolar world, with the abiding influence of the intellectual African youth being determined more by Bill Gates and the stock exchange than by Frantz Fanon or Kwame Nkrumah. Besides, as far as Nigeria is concerned, the era of the oil boom is over and, as in many other African countries, the national currency has had to be devalued in excess of 100 per cent, in spite of efforts to redress the slide through the creation, in the eighties, of a two-tier Foreign Exchange Market.

Rather than one based on class alliance, the new rallying

call of youth is informed by a creed of a universal ethic sponsored by a rash of post-cold war non-governmental-organizations or other multilateral institutions—even transnational corporations such as Rothmans Kingsize, which is set on a task of uniting the African and Western youth through the puff of tobacco and musical dance steps. The young Afrobeat artist, deprived of the traditional patron, has found himself inadvertently responding eagerly to clinch contracts with these agencies, perhaps to offset the band's bill. With this, an apolitical attitude sets in, and is rationalized with the suggestion that Fela's self-sacrifice and persecution by the state has somewhat atoned for steps taken by these musical scions, such as renders superfluous the necessity to reenact the ritual of the activist artist. The Afrobeat artist who aspires to transcend this role begins by evoking aspects of the Fela symbolism, both in form and content.

Notes

1. Excerpt from Maik Nwosu's "Elegy for Twigs" in the poet's collection: *The Suns of Kush* (Lagos: Mace Associates, 1996 p.43).
2. Fela had been rumored dead a fortnight before he finally died.
3. See Preface to Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.
4. See Randall Grass, in "Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: The Art of an Afrobeat Rebel." *The Drama Review*, 30 (1986): 131-48.
5. See Frederick Engel's "On the History of Early Christianity" in *On Religion*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975 p. 276.
6. Ibid.
7. Christopher Waterman's *Juju*, p. 228.

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Appendices

Discography;

Excerpts from the Constitution of the Movement of the People (MOP);

Fela's Bio-data and Inventory of Sonic Censorship.

Discography

Album titles and tracks are in bold/italics highlight. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following people for assisting in tracking some of these albums. Special thanks to Messrs Taiye Olagorusi, Jimi Agbebaku, Babarunde Jimoh and Adu James of Mr. T's All-Fela-Music-Centre, Ikeja, Lagos. Toshiya Endo's compilation on the internet was a most useful reference and, by proxy, Yoshiki Fukazawa, Michael E. Veal and Ray Templeton—through whom a good chunk of the missing gaps was filled. While the current edition has benefited from earlier efforts, it is also an upgraded version—*Author*

1958-63

Fela Ransome Kuti and The Highlife (Rakers) Band.

(7" RK 1) *Onifereb/wBonfo*

This was produced on Fela's R-K label, during his student days at the Trinity College, London, between 1958 and 63.

1960

Fela Ransome-Kuti and His Highlife Rakers

Aigana b/w Fela's Special (7" Melodisc 1532)

This recording was tracked down by Ray Templeton.

1966-67

Fela Ransome Kuti and the Koola Lobitos

(45 NPJ Perlophone Nig. 420)

Yeshe Yeshe b/w ?

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

1966-67

Fela Ransome Kuti and the Koola Lobitos
(7" HNS (1058) EMI Nig.)
Mr. Who Are You b/w ?

1969

Fela Ransome Kuti and the Koola Lobitos
(7" HNLX 5033 EMI Nig.)
Keep Nigeria One b/w ?

1969

Fela Ransome-Kuti and Koola Lobitos
Live recordings at Afro Spot
[A] *Everyday I Got My Blues / Moti Gborokan / Waka Waka*
[B] *Ako / Oloruka / Lai Se / Se E Tun De*

1969

Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Koola Lobitos
(PNL 1002 EMI Nig.)
Great Kids / Lagos Baby / Lai Se / Wa Dele / Mi O Mo / Ajo / Iya Mi Osho O! / Aruba's Delight.

1969

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Nigeria 70
The '69 Los Angeles Sessions (HNLX 5033 EMI (Nig.). Re-released in 1993 on CD Stern's STCD 3005.)
My Lady Frustration / Viva Nigeria / Obe / Ako / Witchcraft / Wayo / Lover / Funky Horn / Eko / This is Sad.

1970

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70
(7" HNEP 526 EMI Nig.)
Blackman's Cry. This same album was pressed by Polygram Records Ltd. (PH 2002 A & B) in another album collection

Appendices

containing *Shakara, Chop and Quench; Let's Start.*

1970

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Fela's London Scene (LP EMI HNLX 5200; re-released on Editions Makoossa M 2399)

[A] *J'ehin-J'ehin/ Egbe Mi O*

[B] *Who're You / Buy Africa / Fight to Finish*

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

(7" HNS1322 EMI Nig.)

Ariya (Part 1) b/w *Ariya* (Part 2)

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Nigeria 70

Monday Morning in Lagos (Part 1)

Monday Morning in Lagos (Part 2)

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Shenshema (7" HNS1299 EMI Nig.)

Shenshema (Part 1) b/w *Shenshema* (Part 2)

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Going In and Out (7" 062 EMI Nig.)

Going In and Out (Part 1) b/w *Going In and Out* (Part 2)

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Fogo-Fogo (7" HNS 1472 EMI Nig.)

Fogo-Fogo (Part 1) b/w *Fogo-Fogo* (Part 2)

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

Beautiful Dancer; Jeun K'oku (Chop & Quench); Blackman's Cry (HNLX 5043 A); *Na Fight -o; Who're You Jeun K'oku* (B).

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Why Black Man Dey Suffer (LP African Songs AS 0001)

[A] *Why Black Man Dey Suffer*

[B] *Ikoyi Mentality Versus Mushin Mentality*

According to Toshiya Endo, this was "initially recorded for EMI, but EMI refused to release it."

1972

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Open and Close (LP EMI HNLX5090: re-released on Parthe Marconi 062-81957)

[A] *Open and Close / Suegbe and Pako*

[B] *Gbagada Gbogodo*

1971

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The African 70 with Ginger Baker. Live!

LP Regal Zonophone SLRZ 1023; re-released on Parthe Marconi 062-04933)

[A] *Let's Start / Black Man's Cry*

[B] *Yeye De Smell / Egbe Mi O (Carry Me, I Want to Die)*

1971

Ginger Baker (with Fela Ransome-Kuti (vo, kbd) Stratavarious (LP Polydor 2383 133)

[A] *Ariwo / Tiwa*

[B] *Something Nice / Juju / Blood Brothers 69 / Coda*

1972

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Appendices

Alu jon-jon-ki-jon (7" HMV HNS1119)

Alu jon-jon-Ki-Jon (Part 1) b/w *Alu jon-jon-ki-jon* (Part 2). Re-released in 1973 on Zanophone (EMI)- SLR 7 1034 with *Chop & Quench (Instrumental -A)* ; *Eko Ile; Je 'nwi Temi (Don't Gag Me -B)*

1972

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Egbe Mi O b/w *Chop & Quench* (7" Stateside GSS0029)

... Also released in UK as a single "*Egbe Mi O* b/w *Chop & Quench*"

(7" Regal Zonophone RZ 3052) in 1972

1972

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Shakara LP EMI 008N; re-released on Editions Makossa EM2305 and Pathe Marconi 062 82718)... An edited version of *Shakara* was later released in two parts as a single (7" Creole CR 105) in the United Kingdom in 1975.

[A] *Shakara Oloje*

[B] *Lady*

1972

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

(*Roforofu Fight* LP Jofabro Nigeria JILP 1001; re-released on Editions Makossa EM2307 and EM2309)

[A] *Roforofu Fight*

[B] *Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am*

[C] *Question Jam Answer*

[D] *Go Slow*

1973

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

The first Na Poi (LP EMI HNLX 5070 A&B)...In a plain

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

white cover without any art work (according to M.E. Veal);
re-released 1976 Afrodisia Decca (WA) AWAPS 152, DWAPS
2004. [A] *Na Poi* (part 1
[B] *Na Poi* (part 2) / *You No Go Die Unless You Wan Die*

1973

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70
(LP Regal Zonophone EMI-SLRZ 1034; re-released on
Pathe Marconi 062 81290)

[A] *Alu Jon-Jon-ki-Jon / Chop and Quench*

[B] *Eko Ile / Je'n Wi Temi Afrodisiac*

1973

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70
Gentleman (LP EMI NEMI 0009; re-released on Pathe
Marconi 2C 062 81960 and Creole CRLP502)

[A] *Gentleman*

[B] *Fefe Naa Efe / Igbe*

1974

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70
Alagbon Close (LP Jofabro Nigeria JIL1002; re-released on
Editions Makossa EM2313)

[A] *Alagbon Close*

[B] *I No Get Eye for Back*

1975

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70
It's Not Possible (LP EMI 006N; re-released on Pathe
Marconi 052 81958 and on Sterns 3008)...Prod. by Ginger
Baker. The name of the track 'He No Possible' was changed
to 'It's Not Possible' in the Stern's-version LP

[A] *It's Not Possible*

[B] *He Miss Road / Monday Morning in Lagos*

Appendices

1975

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

[A] *Monday Morning In Lagos / Shensbema / Don't Gag Me*

[B] *Beggar's Song / Alu Jon-Jon-Ki-Jon / Chop & Quench*

(Instrumental) Fela's Budget Special (LP EMI HNLX 5081)

...Low-priced compilation album

1975

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Expensive Shit (LP Soundwork Shop SWS1001; re-released on Editions EM2315)

[A] *Expensive Shit*

[B] *Water No Get Enemy*

1975

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

[A] *Noise for Vendor Mouth*

[B] *Mattress* (LP Afrobeat ABR O-11)

1975

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Everything Scatter (LP Coconut PMLP1000; re-released on Creole CRLP509)

[A] *Everything Scatter*

[B] *Who No Know Go Know*

1975

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Confusion (LP EMI NEMI 0004). In Kalakuta parlance, upon the release of *Confusion Break Bones* (1990), this earlier recording was referred to as *First Confusion*.

[A] *Confusion* (Instrumental)

[B] *Confusion* (Vocal)

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

1975

Tony Allen and The Africa 70 (With Fela Ransome-Kuti)

[A] *Jealousy*

[B] *Hustler* (LP Sound Workshop 1004)

1976

Fela Ransome-Kuti and The Africa 70

Kalakuta Show (Kalakuta Records (kk001);

Re-released on Editions Makossa M2320 and Creole CRLP507)

[A] *Kalakuta Show*

[B] *Don't Make Ganran Ganran*

1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

The Best of Ransome-Kuti (HNLX 5043)

[A] *Beautiful Dancer*

[B] *Jeun Koku I & II*

[C] *Black Man's Cry*

[D] *Who Are You*

1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Ikoyi Blindness (LP Africa Music AMI 001)

[A] *Ikoyi Blindness*

[B] *Gba Mi Leti Ki N'dolowo (Slap me Make I Get Money)*

1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Yellow Fever (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2004)

[A] *Yellow Fever*

[B] *Napoi*

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1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Upside Down (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2005)

[A] *Upside Down*

[B] *Go Slow*

1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

No Bread (LP Soundwork Shop SWS1003; re-released on Editions Makossa EM2382 (*Unnecessary Begging*)

[A] *No Bread*

[B] *Unnecessary Begging*

1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Before I Jump Like Monkey Give Me Banana (LP Coconut PMLP1001)

[A] *Monkey Banana*

[B] *Sense Wiseness*

1976

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Zombie (LP Coconut PMLP1003; re-released on Creole CRLP511)

[A] *Zombie*

[B] *Mr Follow Follow*

1977

Fela Ransome-Kuti and Africa 70 Organisation

Excuse—O (LP Coconut PMLP 1002)

[A] *Excuse-O*

[B] *Mr Grammarticologylisationalism*

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70
Jonny Just Drop (JJD) (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2023)
[A] *JJD* (Instrumental)
[B] *JJD* (Vocal)

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70
Sorrow, Tears and Blood (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2025;
recorded but unreleased)
[A] *Sorrow, Tears and Blood*
[B] *Colonial Mentality*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70
Opposite People (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2026)
[A] *Opposite People*
[B] *Equalisation of Trouser and Pant*

1977

Tunde Williams and The Africa 70 (with Fela Anikulapo-Kuti
(ts, p, prod)
Mr Big Mouth (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2030)
[A] *Mr Big Mouth*
[B] *The Beginning*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70
Stalemate (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2033)
[A] *Stalemate*
[B] *African Massage (Don't Worry About My Mouth-O)*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Appendices

Fear Not for Man (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2035)

[A] *Fear Not for Man*

[B] *Palm-Wine Sound*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Why Black Man Dey Suffer (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2036; recorded but unreleased. The track *Why Black Man Dey Suffer* was released in 1986 on Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2251)

[A] *Why Black Man Dey Suffer*

[B] *Male*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Observation No Crime (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2037; recorded but unreleased.

[A] *Observation No Crime*

[B] *Lady*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

I Go Shout Plenty (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS20386; recorded but unreleased. The track *I Go Shout Plenty* was released in 1986 on Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2251, and *Frustration of My Lady* in 1993 on Lagos International LIR6)

[A] *I Go Shout Plenty*

[B] *Frustration of My Lady*

1977

Tony Allen and The Africa 70 (with Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (Co-prod.)

Progress (LP Coconut PMLP1004)

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

[A] *Progress*

[B] *Afro Disco Beat*

1977

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Sorrow, Tears and Blood (LP Kalakuta KK 001-A)

[A] *Sorrow, Tears and Blood*

[B] *Colonial Mentality*

1978

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Shuffling and Smiling (LP Coconut PMLP1005)

[A] *Shuffling and Smiling* (instrumental)

[B] *Shuffling and Smiling* (vocal)

1978

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

No Agreement (LP Decca Afrodisia DWAPS2039)

[A] *No Agreement*

[B] *Dog Eat Dog*

1979

Tony Allen and The Africa 70 (Fela Anikulapo-Kuti
(co-prod)

No Accommodation for Lagos (LP Phonogram POLP 035)

[A] *No Accommodation for Lagos*

[B] *African Message*

1979

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Unknown Soldier (LP Phonodisk Skylark SKLP003A)

[A] *Unknown Soldier* (instrumental)

[B] *Unknown Soldier* (vocal)

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1979

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

V.I.P. Vagabonds in Power (LP Kalakuta KILP001)

[A] *V.I.P.* (instrumental)

[B] *V.I.P.* (vocal)

1979

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

International Thief Thief (ITT) (LP Kalakuta no suffix)

[A] *I.T.T.* (instrumental)

[B] *I.T.T.* (vocal)

1980

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Authority Stealing (LP Kalakuta no suffix; recorded at phonogram studio.)

[A] *Authority* (instrumental)

[B] *Authority Stealing* (vocal)

1980

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Roy Ayers

Music of Many Colors (LP Phonodisk PHD003)

[A] *Africa—Center of the World* (Fela)

[B] *Blacks Got To Be Free* (Roy Ayers)

1981

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Coffin for Head of State (LP Kalakuta KALP 003)

[A] *Coffin for Head of State* (instrumental)

[B] *Coffin for Head of State* (vocal)

1981

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

Original Sufferhead (LP International 2; Arista LIR 2)

- [A] *Original Sufferhead*
[B] *Power Show and Original Suffer Head Continuation*

1981

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80
Sorrow, Tears and Blood b/w Colonial Mentality (7" Arista 408) —Edited versions of the original recordings

1983

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80
Perambulator (LP Lagos International LIR6)

[A] *Perambulator*

[B] *Frustration*

1984

Fela Kuti
Lady (part 1) b/w *Lady* (part 2) (7" EMI EMIDJ5441)
—A shortened and edited version of the original recording, presumably for promotion.

1984

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80
Live in Amsterdam - *Music Is the Weapon* (LP EMI FELA 2401293; re-released in Nigeria on Polygram PH2000 and PH2002):

[A] *Movement of the People* Political Statement Number I (Part 1)

[B] *Movement of the People* Political Statement Number I (Part 2)

[C] *Give Me Shit I Give You Shit*

[D] *Custom Check Point*

Appendices

1985

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Egypt 80

Army Arrangement (LP Celluloid CEL6115)

[A] *Army Arrangement* (instrumental)

[B] *Army Arrangement* (vocal)

1985

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Army Arrangement (LP Yaba - Celluloid CEL6109)

[A] *Army Arrangement*

[B] *Cross Examination / Government Chicken Boy*

1985

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Egypt 80

Army Arrangement (LP Kalakuta K007)

[A] *Army Arrangement* (instrumental)

[B] *Army Arrangement* (vocal) (but actually *Cross Examination*)

1985

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense (LP Polygram PH2004)

[A] *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense*

[B] *Look And Laugh*

1986

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 70

I Go Shout Plenty (LP Decca-Afrodisia DWAPS2251)

[A] *I Go Shout Plenty*

[B] *Why Black Man Dey Suffer*

These tracks were taken from 1977 recording, without Fela's permission

1986

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Africa 80

Fela in Concert (Video View Video NTSC1305)

Movement of The People Political Statement Number 1 /

Army Arrangement / Power Show (instrumental)

Copyright: Captain Video / Lagoon Production, 1981

1988

Oluko Imo with The Africa 70 (with Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (ts, prod)

Oduduwa (LP Arigidi 01-7)

[A] *Oduduwa*

[B] *Wére Oju Le*

According to Michael E. Veal, *Wére Oju Le* was sung over an unreleased Africa 70 instrumental track that seems to be unreleased Decca material from 1977

1988

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense

(PH2004 Polygram Nig (Video Hendering Video HEN2090)

1988

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Fela Live (Video Hendering Video HEN2091)

1989

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Beasts of No Nation (LP Kalakuta K008; re-released on Yaba JU-UDR360153)

[A] *Beasts of No Nation* (Instrumental)

[B] *Beasts of No Nation* (Vocal)

Appendices

1989

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Overtake Don Overtake Overtake (LP Kalakuta K009)

[A] *Overtake Don Overtake Overtake* (instrumental)

[A] *Overtake Overtake Don Overtake* (vocal)

1990

Fela Anikulapo and The Egypt 80

Confusion Break Bone (LP Kalakuta K010)

[A] *Confusion Break Bone* (instrumental)

[B] *Confusion Break Bone* (vocal)

1990

Fela Anikulapo and Egypt 80

Just Like That (LP Kalakuta 011)

[A] *Just Like That*

[B] *Movement of The People Political Statement* Number 1

1990

Fela Anikulapo and Egypt 80

Confusion Break Bone

[A] *Confusion Break Bones* (Instrumental) KALP 010

[B] *Confusion Break Bones* (Vocal)

Confusion Break Bones / Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense

Recorded live at Glastonbury, England. Copyright: Arts International Limited 1984

1992

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and The Egypt 80

Underground System (LP Kalakuta KALP013; CD Sterns STCD1043)

[A] *Undergrand System*

[B] *Pansa Pansa*

Yet to be released:

Country of Pain

Big Blind Country

O. A. U.

N. N. G. (Nigerian Natural Grass)

Government of Crooks

Clear Road for Jaga Jaga

Music Against Second Slavery

Football Government

Bamaiyi

Akunakuna, Senior Brother of Parambulator

Condom Scallywag and Scatter

Chop and Clean Mouth Like Nothing Happened

Cock Dance

**Excerpts from the Constitution of the Movement
of the People (MOP)**

(Aims and Objectives)

Motto: Work, Truth, and Happiness

Part One

Name

The name of the Party shall be the Movement of the People (MOP).

Aims and Objectives

National:

- (a) To fight relentlessly to achieve and maintain the second Independence of the People of Nigeria;
- (b) To serve as the positive political vanguard for removing all forms of oppression and for the establishment of a democratic government;

Appendices

- (c) To secure and maintain the complete unity of all the 19 federal states as one people;
- (d) To work for the speedy reconstruction of a better Nigeria, in which the people shall have all the rights to live and govern themselves as free people without military interference;
- (e) To promote the political, social, and economic emancipation of the people, most especially to abide fully by recommendations of the Festac colloquium for the emancipation of black people as recommended to African governments;
- (f) To undertake and encourage cultural research into our traditional heritage, and build up in the people of Nigeria the pride of being African;
- (g) To propagate as much as possible in Nigeria the principles of Nkrumahism which are all necessary and relevant to speedy and pragmatic national development.

International:

- (a) To work with other nationalist democratic and socialist movements in Africa and other continents, with a view to abolishing imperialism, colonialism, racialism, tribalism and all forms of national and racial oppression and economic inequality among nations, races and peoples and to support all action for world peace;
- (b) To support the demand for a West African Economic System and an African Central Monetary system and of pan Africanism by promoting unity of action among the peoples of Africa and of African descent;
- (c) To fight continuously to establish the pride of the African personality and the pride of all people of African descent.

Bio-data and Inventory of Sonic Censorship

October 15, 1938

A year before the outbreak of World War II, another male child named Olufela is born into the Ransome-Kuti family at Abeokuta, western Nigeria. He is the third in the line of five children, with elder sister Dolu, elder brother Olikoye, the deceased Hildergath and Beko. Subsequently after his primary education, attends "secondary school under the tutelage of Reverend and Mrs Ransome-Kuti at Abeokuta Grammar School."

1958-1962

Music student at Trinity College, England; hanging out with friends such as J.K. Braimoh, Segun Bucknor and cousin Wole Soyinka; playing Highlife for fellow Nigerians in a combo called *Koolá Lobitos*. Returns to Nigeria in 1963.

January 7, 1961

Fela Ransome-Kuti marries Miss Remi Taylor in London.

May 4, 1961

Yeni, Fela's first child, is born.

1964

Joins the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, NBC, in Lagos.

1969

While on tour of the United States, meets Sandra Smith, an Africa-American woman who introduces him to Alex Haley's *Biography of Malcom X*, the book that most influenced him along pan-Africanist line.

Appendices

November 23, 1974

His residence is invaded by the Nigerian police, and he is arrested and charged for abduction.

April 13, 1976

Changes his name to Fela Anikulapo-Kuti.

February 18, 1977

His residence, Kalakuta Republic at No 14A Agege Motor Road, Lagos is burnt down by soldiers after he refuses to hand over a member of the household who, apparently had earlier had a scuffle with some military personnel. During the assault, the sound track of his film *The Black President* is burned, while many visiting friends and band members get generally brutalized; Fela's aged mother is pushed off the story building and many young women are raped by the marauding soldiers.

February 21, 1977

Forty three members of Fela's African 70 Band are arraigned before the Igboere magistrate court, Lagos, for willful damage to a Nigerian Army motorcycle.

February 24, 1977

Lagos state government orders a public inquiry into the cause of the disturbance at Fela's residence.

February 1978

Marries 27 dancers and singers of his band under a traditional rite.

March 18, 1978

Withdraws his son, Femi, from school in protest against the presence of soldiers in schools.

April 13, 1978

Her health having progressively declined since military personnel attacked her on February 18 of the previous year, Fela's activist mother dies at the age of 78 at the Lagos General Hospital.

July 13, 1978

Fela and members of his organization occupy the premises of Decca, a music company for alleged breach of contract by the company.

October 4, 1978

Announces intention to become the country's president and thus launches his party, Movement of the People (MOP).

October 27, 1978

Goes to Berlin for the international jazz festival.

October 30, 1978

Ruins of the burnt Kalakuta Republic are leveled.

December 1978

Announces that the Movement of the People (MOP) is refused registration.

December 17, 1978

Announces opting out of the 1979 presidential race.

February 22, 1979

At a news conference, announces that five of his 27 wives have deserted him.

October 2, 1979

Arrested along with son, Femi, and fifty nine others; appears

Appendices

before a Lagos magistrate court charged with attempting to breach the peace.

October 30, 1979

Deposits a replica of his mother's coffin at the front of Dodan Barracks, then seat of the Nigerian military government.

April 1, 1980

Acquitted along with other accused persons on the charge of depositing the coffin at Dodan Barracks.

March 1980

Accepts police invitation to serve as member of the police Public Relations Committee.

September 5, 1980

Sixty members of his band are arrested in Milan, northern Italy over 34kg of hemp found on an American woman traveling with the group.

September 5, 1980

Released from detention in Milan after the American woman admits to drug offense for which Fela had been held.

September 7, 1981

First wife, Remi, separates from him.

March 13, 1981

Leaves for Europe with a 70-member band with the aim of spreading the message of his movement, MOP

December 2, 1983

Arrested by the police for allegedly masterminding a robbery

December 4, 1983

Sues at a Lagos High Court in a bid to prevent his landlord from ejecting him from his house.

February 29, 1984

Eldest daughter, Yeni, quizzed for alleged armed robbery

June 1984

A documentary film entitled *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense* on Fela's political life is broadcast to a British audience by the BBC.

September 4, 1984

Arrested at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport on his way to the United State for a musical tour for allegedly failing to declare 1,600 Pound Stirling found on him.

September 7, 1984

Appears before a federal High Court charged with illegal possession of foreign currency

September 8, 1984

Arrested in the middle of a press conference at his Ikeja residence by six armed plainclothes detectives.

September 13, 1984

Appears before the Port Harcourt zone of the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Tribunal on a two-count charge of exporting 1,600 Pound Sterling and ostensibly failing to declare same to customs on September 4, 1984.

November 4, 1984

Sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Exchange Control (Anti Sabotage) Tribunal, having been found guilty of

Appendices

charges preferred against him.

November 15, 1984

Moved from Ikoyi prison to the Maximum Security Prison, Kirikiri, Lagos.

December 24, 1984

The Supreme Military Council confirms his jail sentence.

January 3, 1985

While still in detention, mobile policemen raid his house.

January 24, 1985

Admitted into the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) from Kirikiri prison.

April 15, 1985

Fela's family and other residents of his household are ejected from No 1 Atinuke Olabanji street, Ikeja ostensibly for owing the landlady the sum of 80, 000 Naira.

April 25, 1985

Moved from Kirikiri prison to a prison in Borno state.

May 20, 1985

Ejected members of Fela's household move to his new three-story building at No. 7 Gbemisola street, in the Ikeja suburb of Lagos.

April 23, 1986

Released from prison after spending 532 days in connection with non-declaration of foreign currency

June 23, 1986

Reacts to the bomb blast that killed Newswatch chief executive, Dele Giwa, and holds the military responsible for it.

September 3, 1986

Criticizes the federal government order curtailing movement of citizens after midnight in Lagos and parts of the defunct Bendel state.

November 5, 1986

Goes on a tour of ten states in the United States, including: New York, Houston, Chicago, and San Francisco.

July 14, 1987

Fela is rumored dead arising from an AIDS—related illness.

May 11, 1988

Fela congratulates French President Francois Mitterand on his reelection and calls on him to persuade western governments to sever relations with the then apartheid government of South Africa.

February 15, 1989

Calls on President Ibrahim Babangida to ensure that he, Fela, is fully compensated for the burning down of his Kalakuta Republic residence.

July 10, 1990

Fela is rumored dead again.

March 30, 1992

Summoned over a N.04 million tenancy suit against him by Mrs. Nene Benite on the property on Pepple street, where Fela's Afrika Shrine was located.

June 25, 1992

Urges elder brother, Prof. Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, then Minister of Health, to quit Ibrahim Babangida's government over the detention of his junior brother, Beko Ransome-Kuti.

January 25, 1993

Fela arraigned along with four of his fans before a Yaba Magistrate court on a two-count charge of murder and conspiracy in connection with the death of one Mr. Adesanwo Shokoyo, who was an electrician at the Afrika Shrine.

April 6, 1993

Freed after spending 76 days in Ikoyi prison.

February 2, 1996

Fela and 30 members of his band are arrested by armed plain-clothes men from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) at his Gbemisola residence, allegedly for possession of Indian hemp.

February 13, 1996

Regains freedom after being detained by the NDLEA.

July 8, 1996

Police seal off Fela's Afrika Shrine on Pepple Street, Ikeja, Lagos following the arrest of four men at the Shrine allegedly for armed robbery.

April 9, 1997

Arrested for possession of Indian hemp by agents of the NDLEA, headed by General Musa Bamaiyi.

April 12, 1996

Fela's lawyer, Barrister Femi Falana, files a N100m suit

AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT

against the NDLEA, asking the court to declare that the invasion of Fela's house on Gbemisola street by a team of security operatives is illegal.

April 16, 1997

Fela ordered to be remanded at Kirikiri by the Miscellaneous Offences Tribunal pending his arraignment for alleged possession of Indian hemp.

July 20-31, 1997

Renewed rumors of Fela's death.

August 2, 1997

Fela is confirmed dead by elder brother, Olikoye, a professor of medicine who noted that Fela had died due to heart failure and complications arising from AIDS.

August 11, 1997

Fela lying-in-state at Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos.

August 12, 1997

Fela is interred at his No. 7 Gbemisola residence in the Ikeja suburb of Lagos.

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In the sixties, as signs of decay began to show in the capitalist experiment of the newly independent African countries, a "bard of the misrule" emerged on the streets of Lagos. Often shirtless and armed with his trademark saxophone, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti tore his way into popular culture with Afrobeat music. Blending ethno-traditional forms with the reigning highlife and jazz rhythms, Afrobeat drew lyrics from the flip side of neo-colonial society and Fela's London and American experience in the sixties.

In the two decades that followed, Fela ruled the nights from Afrika Shrine, his signature night club, and the days from the turntables of the restless city dwellers along the Atlantic coastline. Fela's Afrobeat became a dynamic mode of expression in the social history of post-independent West Africa and generated a counterculture that bonded through music, drugs, resistance politics—and ultimately, the nascence of an Afrocentric contemporary global culture.

In *AFROBEAT! FELA AND THE IMAGINED CONTINENT* a popular artist, a counter-hegemonic activist of the hardest grain, meets his most cerebral, disquisitional interpreter. —ODIA OLFIMUN, former President, Association of Nigerian Authors.

This is not just another addition to a growing Fela scholarship but a fascinating and frequently insightful study. It is both a celebration of Fela's uncommon virtuosity and an exploration of his mystique. —NIVI OSUNDARE, Professor of English, University of New Orleans.

A major contribution to Fela scholarship in particular, and African popular culture studies in general; it explores Afrobeat as musical practice and cultural politics. —TIJUMOLA OLANIYAN, Associate Professor of English, University of Virginia

An original effort. Like Fela's life, this account of it is not only a wild ride but a magical African musical mystery tour. —DAVID COPLAN, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Sola Ogunjimi, a poet, bassist and editor of *Glendon Review*, teaches Cultural Studies and African/Africa-Diaspora Literature in the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The author has published extensively on related themes in his research in West Africa, the Caribbean and Nicaragua where he worked in the literacy and harvest volunteer project, while also doubling as a freelance journalist behind Sandinista guerilla lines during the "Contra" offensive of the mid-eighties.



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