Thesis

By

Olusola

OLORUNYOMI

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

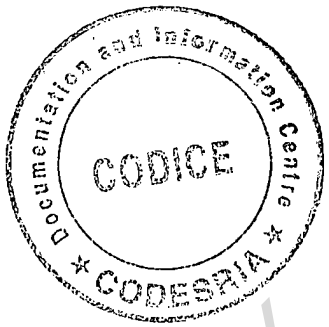
AFROBEAT SONG-TEXT NARRATIVE AND THE POETICS OF HYPERTEXT PERFORMANCE

March, 2005

2 8 SEP. 2006

05.0503
OLO
13109

AFROBEAT SONG-TEXT NARRATIVE AND THE POETICS OF HYPERTEXT PERFORMANCE



By

Olusola OLORUNYOMI
B.A. (Honours) ENGLISH, UNIVERISTY OF IBADAN
MA. English (Literature Emphasis), University of Ibadan

A Thesis in the Department of English

Submitted to the Faculty of Arts in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Ibadan

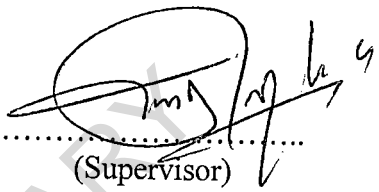
March, 2005.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by **Mr. Olusola OLORUNYOMI** in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

March 31, 2005
Date



(Supervisor)
Dr. A.O. Dasylva
B.A.; M.A. (Ife)
Ph. D. (Ibadan)

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The extended Afrobeat family, at home and abroad, thanks for sharing your wealth of experience. No gimmicks intended here: Ademola Dasylva, rare supervisor, quiet activist, distinguished scholar and, well, slave driver—I'm short of words of gratitude for the pain of academic rigor. And to ALL my colleagues in the department, I appreciate your concern. Permit me the indulgence to embarrass a few members of the department: Gbenga Olaoye, Sola Raji, Iyabo Ayinde, Remy Oriaku, Helen Okeniyi, Ayinde, Morakinyo and Remi Raji-Oyelade, I won't forget the gesture.

"Do NOT step on the soil of this house until your thesis is concluded;" that was what she said. Augusta Omamor; thanks for making this possible along with co-conspirator Afure Adebayo. Others extended the discourse beyond the walls of the classroom into the street, the bar, diverse undergrowths of knowing and forgetting; my token of gratitude to you all: Tosin and Yinka, Luvles, Falade, NeeYee, Eluma, Oladtdz, Ropo, Ihidero, Sonny, Jaret, Bolaji and Tosin, Olumide, Hughes, Baiye and Baiyere, Arogunmasa, Moyo, Awotedu, Mike, Bose and KunNiraN; also in this list: Tunde and 'aunty' Sade, Bose, Mr. Gaf., and my 'little kids' at home: Doyin, Funke and Bisi. The 'spiritual underground' at home: Odia, Oni-Ola, Babarinde, Doyin, Aremu, Omole, Irele, Egbokhare, Oladipo; and the Diaspora: Biakolo and Harry G.

Peju and Dele Layiwola, and the poet from Ikere—Osundare—I hope your confidence is justified. The Olorunyomis, in this wide, wild, world: *Ẹṣé o*.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

DEDICATION

Iwa & Bola,
This is for you…
Aunt Taiye and kid sister Tope,
And the recent ancestors:
Akinbayode and Owunola
Christians before the era of 'Prosperity Christianity'

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

ABSTRACT

TITLE OF THESIS: AFROBEAT SONG-TEXT NARRATIVE AND THE POETICS OF HYPERTEXT PERFORMANCE

The discourse of orality in contemporary Africanist scholarship is largely a discursive formation, and a site of ideological struggle for self-representation in contesting imposed colonialist master narrative. The concept of orality has continued to shape scholarly discourses in addition to informing creative production. This discursive formation is equally informed by the broad canons that have come to shape literary and cultural studies, especially in the electronic, multimedia age. By using the Afrobeat genre of music and performance as a major reference point in this study, the intention is two-fold: to explore the theoretical overlaps that are implicit in such a discourse, and 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 very profound mode of signification.

Given the multi-genre nature of the enquiry and its peculiar mode as a text, it is more appropriate to combine theoretical frames in conducting the analysis. The informing theoretical principle underlying the evaluation is performance theory. This is found to be quite apt in view of the usual need to justify the context of performance and the potential of this paradigm to deploy semiotic resources for textual appreciation. To this extent, the study made use of oral interviews primarily from Lagos, Ibadan, Accra, and Abidjan where, in addition to Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, artists like Tony Allen, Dele

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Sosinmi, Fasail Helwani and Werewere Liking were observed. Furthermore, video recordings were made. These raw data were transcribed, sometimes translated, and classified for further analysis.

The findings revealed the new direction of composition, performance, and transmission of oral literature/performance and its secondary variant such as Afrobeat, in the electronic age. In addition, it also calls attention to the changing context of intellectual property rights as evinced in digital sampling and manipulation, especially by the new Afrobeat acts. The research further demonstrated that a good measure of theoretical insights that inform canon formation, can be provided by the performers themselves, even when such perspectives may lack the finesse of standard academic practices.

Based on these findings, the field of oral literature, and the ancillary discipline of cultural studies, can now benefit from a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of contemporary performance mode. Scholarship in the field is further strengthened to acknowledge modes of *textuality* earlier ignored by virtue of inadequate approaches that had sought to foist external criteria on the African creative experience.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Keywords: Afrobeat, Song-Text narrative, Hypertext, Poetics, Performance

Word Count: 304

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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."

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."

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.

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 briefly was renamed as *Fela's Egypt 80 Band* but has now settled for *Seun Anikulapo-Kuti and the Egypt 80s.*

FESTAC

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

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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Olabanji Street, Ikeja; Kalakuta III, number 7 Gbemisola Street, Ikeja.

Lady's Night

Tuesday shows when females could enter free of charge.

NNG

Nigerian Natural Grass—meaning marijuana; Fela's counter lexicon to the non-"Indianess" of his variant of hemp.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.

Oyinbo

A Caucasian or persons with light pigmentation.

Shakara

Posturing, or feigning an offensive mood.

Short break

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

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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Zombie

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER FOUR

Song-Text Tradition and Aesthetic Resources

CHAPTER FIVE

Hypertext Imagination in Performance

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
MODES AND TYPOLOGIES OF ORALITY

Hypothesis

The research proposes that the discourse of orality, even as a literary category, is best situated in the context of cultural studies. This is informed, partly, by the fact that its mode of existence and constitutive essence also suggests a hybrid, multidisciplinary character, sometimes only affirmed by its context of performance.

In this sense, it has found easy nesting in the practice of literary cultural studies, and the study shall be considering how, besides the verbal, meaning can be signified through diverse extra-verbal semiotic *texts* such as visual image narratives, and dance. To this extent, the introductory remarks will endeavor to shed some light on the psychodynamics of orality, its narrative features, and the different schools of thought of oral literature. The research further contends that the concept of oral literature is also a site of a literary controversy that sometimes calls for the genre's self-justification of its 'literariness' as *text*. As a follow up to this, the nuances of the concept—*text*—and its implications on a performance tradition such as is of concern to this research shall be fully explored.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Scope of the Study

The research commenced on the premise that contemporary society is far removed from the era of pristine orality as a literary and human communicative mode, yet the concept of orality continues to shape scholarly discourses besides informing creative production.

It is of interest to this study to determine the degree to which aspects of the past can, at once, inform the present and also assist in better comprehension of this time interval in aesthetic-epistemological terms. It attempts to demonstrate how social and technological development affect aesthetic and literary production and appreciation

Given the general perception that popular art is a necessarily reactionary political narrative, it seeks to investigate the relationship between this form through analysis of song-texts and the literary sociology of audience reception and 'speak-back'.

Is literature simply that which is written, or are there features of the literary existing within oral 'texts'? What, indeed, is a *text*, or *the text*? This foregrounds the quest for the real significance of performance: whether or not the context of performance aids the exhibition of the broadest features of literature to the degree that written text has the tendency of eliding significant primary oral features. Furthermore, the study seeks to clarify whether or not every new production technique redefines the overall texture of an art form ranging themes such as compositional style, subject matter and narrative sequence, plot structure, and reception.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Methodology

Fieldwork is central to research in oral literature and popular culture, and the current study benefited tremendously from field trips, interviews and discussions relating to the topic. Afrobeat performers are varied in style and habitation. The current research was conducted primarily in Lagos, Ibadan, Accra, and Abidjan.

To capture performer comment, recordings were carried out on the electro-magnetic audiotape except on one occasion when the audio-visual recorder mode was used. Beyond interviews, however, several video recordings were played back for the purpose of close study and analysis by watching and listening to performance text. These raw data were also transcribed, sometimes translated, and classified for the benefit of further analysis. Besides, where possible, performances were attended.

An extended interview earlier conducted with Fela Anikulapo-Kuti before his death was transcribed and analyzed; subsequent interviews were also conducted with other band members, and other Afrobeat acts. This helped a great deal in constructing the social biography of the band, and the form, in the tradition of sociology of literature.

The researcher also took up the challenge of taking tutorial courses in musicology and dance. This assisted the researcher in becoming more familiar with professional procedures in music-making and dance theory and practice; it also facilitated the possibility of tracing the intersections between and interstices within music genres, the

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

semiotics of dance, and literature in the light of the multi-genre and multidisciplinary nature of the research.

A participant observer method was used and this meant staying for extended periods with case studies, while at other times using focal group discussion method. These were done at rehearsals and also in studios, and in the private residences of some band members. This also included other Afrobeat performers like Tony Allen, Femi Anikulapo Kuti and Duro Sosinmi, with their own independent bands.

The theoretical assumptions of the research also informed fieldwork methodology. For instance, the fact of employing performance theory prepared the researcher in identifying props and histrionics in the light of the semiotic reference of textual appreciation assumed by the episteme. This significantly aided the researcher in devising a framework that was inclusive and admissive of many extra-verbal modes of signification such as the iconography of costume, the cultural practice of *lived* experience, graffiti, and the mask.

Modes and Typologies

The concept of orality and oralism invariably attempts to address issues and perspectives whose implications predate the modes of communication of societies before the age of writing, Homer and the Greeks, the type of language used in oral communication; and, the type of consciousness informed by this oral state of being.

The contemporary subject of orality continues to be intertwined in an ideological

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

force field that also relates the concept to the idea of writing. Eric Havelock (1991) suggests that even writing must be considered as "both a social condition and a state of mind," (11) and as such orality and writing are not mutually exclusive; they exhibit a "creative tension" (11). The domestication of the subject by the likes of Isidore Okpewho (1979, 1983, 1992), and the major breakthrough in the discourse, particularly in the sixties, has emboldened and expanded the scope of oralism initiated through the following works: Marshall McLuhan (1962), *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*; Claude Levi-Strauss (1966), *The Savage Mind*; Jack Goody and Ian Watt (1968), "The Consequences of Literacy"; and, Eric Havelock (1963), *Preface to Plato*.

Against the penchant of looking at orality in Africa as a merely functional category, Okpewho in his works continually called attention to its aesthetic and literary values. McLuhan was preoccupied with putting orality on the map in the different studies of communication technology, while Strauss was interested in myths of the past, not new technology. He tended to use textual terms in his oral data, thereby suggesting a literate consciousness at work in a purely oralist context. On their part, Goody and Watt explore the cultural tradition of non-literate societies and the consequent social effect of writing, while Havelock explores his old passion of the status of orality and writing in the classical era and how this has come to inform recent studies in the field.

While the impetus given to the debate in the sixties must be acknowledged,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Havelock (1991) reminds us of major precedents to this era such as the doctoral thesis of Milman Parry (published, 1928 in Paris) acclaimed as "the founding document of the modern Homeric oralist theory of composition" (13). Other relevant texts in this regard include: Harold Innis' (1951), *The Bias of Communication*; Albert Lord's (1960) *The Singer of Tales*; and, Walter Ong's (1958) *Ramus: Method, and Decay of Dialogue*. Subsequently, a division arose between those leaning on the orlalist side, and others on the literate side of the equation.

Other perspectives continued to shape this discourse, such as those focused on Palestine during the time of Jesus. Werner Kelber's "The Oral and the Written Gospel" (1983) claims a fusion of oral memorization technique with materials that can be considered literate, designed for readers who nonetheless must read aloud in the three synoptic gospels. Havelock himself suggests in the same regard that the old testament, especially as written in a manner familiar to Judaic culture, records the oral-literate equation, "in which oral originals have been codified in script, first Phoenician, then Aramaic, and finally Hebrew" (17).

On his part, McLuhan (1962) places a negative evaluation on the printing press for encouraging linear or typographic thinking, which is nonetheless robust and an enriched consciousness than the emergent multi-media, electronic communication. Havelock pleads for the printed text, noting that "rather than being a negative force in cultural evolution, the printed book and its growing readership can be both cognitive and

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

social" (18). And that rather than revert to oralism, what is needed is to explore the possibilities of literacy, "a literacy of readers of communication by print, rather than a literacy by voice" (18). The scholar went ahead to propose some sort of overarching body of theory that can cover the oral-literate equation, a theory, as he conceives it, "that will state certain fundamentals of the situation to which all investigations can relate themselves?" (19).

Havelock however debunks the overstated assumption that classical antiquity serves as the basis of Western culture. The emphasis on classical influence, for him, relates more to "technology and the social and political sciences rather than the realm of metaphysical and moral values"; in other words, "the nuts and bolts of linguistic communication" (19). Even this contribution, he suggests, must be seen first and foremost as an instrument for the recording of preliteracy.

From this premise, he takes a survey of cultures such as those of Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, Hebrew Palestine, and elsewhere that preceded literacy in Greek. Havelock also queries the assumptions in the popular evolutionist school that have thus far privileged the use of tools and implements as the basis of the superiority of man over the hominids, noting that the latter also used implements. The critical process that has earned man its place is thus located in language, not upright posture; and, with this, the speech organs needing a parallel processing with the specialization of the brain. Literacy, therefore, for Havelock is more of a social acquisition than a natural one, and

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

this progress came about with man's ability to discover the ability to use the hand and eye, as supplements to the ear and mouth to draw visible shapes that can aid the recognition and retention of language as pronounced, and its denial, Havelock contends, is merely superfluous. But beyond this, the knowledge of this human inheritance renders inappropriate such labels as illiterate, the savage mind, or even the primitive with which the oral past is described, even sometimes by erudite scholars like Claude Levi-Strauss. Indeed, Havelock goes as far as to suggest that the scope of Strauss' enquiry, far from being the savage mind, is the oral mind!

The mode of enquiry adopted by Havelock is instructive in one respect. In his study of Greek literature and, by extension, the oral- literate equation, he went a step back in time by examining the pre-Socratic philosophers. This assisted him to answer the pertinent question on why some of those thinkers composed their most intellectual engagements in verse, and Homeric verse at that! He noted that a philosopher like Heraclitus published his thought in 'self-contained aphorisms" (22), which equates to the oral sayings of the status that is evident in the New Testament Gospels, "rather than in the connected language of prose exposition?" (22). Reflecting on the work of Parry, Havelock came to the conclusion that "down to the early fifth century in Greece, oralist rules of composition were still required in expounding even serious philosophic thought and some scientific" (22-23). But the subsequent Platonic prose marked a major shift from these rules; as it were, representing the first major prose effort of such magnitude

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

written in literate cultures. The broader implication of this for him is that the Platonic era marked the watershed in Greek culture which had depended, substantially, on an oralist culture based on a metrical and recitative literature for knowledge preservation and production, and a new literacy which would rely on prose as the medium for serious reflective methodological engagement in research, memory recall, and record-keeping—using two inevitable features of language: rhythm and narrative. The scholar rounds off by pleading for some space for the oralist inheritance, and mode of cognition to the extent that it is capable of enhancing knowledge acquisition—with rhythm, narrative, and action-orientation serving as a necessary supplement to contemporary prosaic culture.

In a sharp critique of this stance, in spite of Havelock's seeming positive accretion to orality, J. Peter Denny (1991) contends that not only is rational thought possible in an oral culture, the effect of literacy on human thought is sometimes misconstrued and exaggerated. While not discountenancing the leaps made possible by literacy, his research conclusion on agricultural and hunter-gather societies identifies only one distinct property that separates it from the literate society in the latter's advantage of 'decontextualization'. Denny makes this to bear in stating that "cross-cultural differences in thought concern habits of thinking, not capacities for thought. All humans are capable of and do practice both differentiated thinking and its opposite, integrated thinking, as well as both contextualized and decontextualized thought" (66).

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

In the same vein, Denny calls to question Walter Ong's sweeping generalization that writing facilitates "abstractly [sic] segmental, classificatory and explanatory examination" (78). Furthermore, Denny studied an equational statement from the Nuer religious thought, such as "a cucumber is an ox" which earlier scholars had seen as evidence of prelogical or magical thought. Evans-Pritchard whom Denny (1991) cites, had studied the phenomenon of logicality and rationality in non-Western societies and deciphered the seeming contradictions of the Nuer's when he observed:

> ...the reason why it was not readily perceived that the statements that something is something else should not be taken as matter of fact statements is that it was not recognized that they are made in relation to a third term not mentioned in them but understood...A cucumber is equivalent to an ox in respect to God who accepts it in place of an ox" (Denny, 1991:75).

A cucumber is accepted, in this context, as sacrifice—the latter being the third term that is omitted.

This quote helps to buttress the essence of Denny's position that decontextualization is not the only synonym for abstraction. Calling attention to the fact that abstracted classificatory models are practiced universally, and semantists recognize these in: state, process, and event,—the West's claim thus can only be limited to "decontextualized abstraction". Oralist communities nonetheless are active and highly nuanced performers in modes of abstraction that bear on 'generality' and 'insubstantiation'.

To this, David R. Orlson (1991) would add that the critical element in

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the oral-literate equation is the intrinsic incremental factors added to a new mode of communication. For him,

> writing takes language for its object and just as language is a device for 'fixing' the world in such a way as to make it an object of reflection. This 'objectification' of language through writing adds to the already existing set of devices for turning speech into an object of discourse that exists in...oral metalinguistic concepts..." (266).

In a more recent intervention that relates orality to a mode of textuality, Abiola Irele (2001) identifies three layers of orality: one, "ordinary communication with a purely denotative use of language, as in simple factual statements and commands"; two, "'formulaic' framework for speech acts, discursive modes, and indeed the structure of thought" which is associated with the rhetorical uses of language such as proverb, aphorism and the like; three, "strictly literary level, which is concerned with and reserved for the purely imaginative uses of language" (9). Text(ualization), for Irele, is not conceived of only as a "sequence—whether extended or not—of structured enunciations, which form therefore a pattern of discourse," but also "the nature of such specimens in the oral tradition that are endowed with the same character of literariness as written text" (9). In the light of this premise he affirms that the textual moment emerges with figures of speech that create a second order of language with constitutive elements—words—foregrounded, organized in highly stylized ways, and subjected to artifice so as to carry a special charge of meaning. In other words, a literary text, whether oral or written, is *language intensified.*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Irele somewhat reechoes the caution of Ademola O. Dasylva (1999) that literary behaviors that defy genre classification challenge us to reexamine the conventional western paradigm of textuality. Dasylva examines diverse attempts by earlier scholars at classifying the African oral narrative, and concludes by calling for an "Alter-Native" taxonomy that would be mindful of African epistemological imperatives or what, in a similar context, Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) calls the "vernacular" tradition. Dasylva warns of "thematic fluidity" of sometimes generic units, and cites the "*Ihamo* (narrative) which indexicates the internalization of moral ethics and cultural values of the youth" but yet has "a parallel in *Mushomo* (poetry)" (3), both of the current Democratic Republic of Congo. The rhetorical question he raises in relation to classificatory models based on a strictly linguistic principle is pertinent: "to what extent is the relevance of the exercise to the sociology of the tale-text?" (10). It would seem like the central concern of Dasylva in this debate is the issue of context, the "actual performance" which plays a decisive role in genre classification and brings about a "whole text" (37). Besides buttressing variety in performance styles, Okpewho (1992) explores embedded literary features in the oral narrative and their stylistic qualities such as we find in repetition, parallelism, piling and association, tonality, ideophones, digression, imagery, and allusion.

The characterization of orality adopted by Irele, and his challenge of the normative notion of the literary text as "linear and spatial" (10) approximates to the

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

perspective of the current research on literary hypertextuality. It does not merely foreshadow the concept of the hypertext based on writing, it goes beyond it by locating it in the context of performance. He advances this argument by noting that in spite of its temporal texture, orality nonetheless can generate a text with the same degree of interest and quality of those produced by writing. Critical to this reading is the notion of literature as "imaginative expression", and of such texts having achieved the status of canon, identified and preserved apart by the conventions of the African imaginative practice which equally express a structure of feeling, itself "determined by a profound correspondence between experience and imagination" (10). Examples of such canonical texts in the continent referred to include the heroic and praise poetry of the Zulu (Izibongo) and the Basotho, the court poetry of Rwanda and the great epics: Sundiata, Da Monzon, Mwindo, and Ozidi. Above all, he finds the most distinctive body of oral texts that correspond most closely to this notion of a canon in the Ifa corpus of the Yoruba.

Far from being a nativist response to oral misrepresentation, Irele duly acknowledges the capacity of literacy to preserve memory and even dialogue along space and time. What he really critiques is the attempt to valorize writing as an autonomous spatial language whereas, properly speaking, writing remains a second order of language, a representation of another. But even with this, it must be noted that an oral culture also preserves beyond the human memory through semiotic systems such

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

as drum language and other non-linguistic symbolic schemes "which serve both to give spatial resonance to human speech as well as to extend the expressive potential of language" (27).

In concluding this section it is important to note that scholars have generally tied the concept of pristine orality to the absence of the idea of writing, in general, and alphabetic and syllabic writing in particular. The research suggests that this is extremely harmful to the study of orality for the principal factor that there is hardly any such stage in the social organization of human society. An oral state of being has always had modes of 'writing', if by writing we imply the broadest sense of graphical representation of language; for one, any mode of spatial representation of thought and language is necessarily decontextual, and such representation has been copiously documented by Albert Bienvenu Akoha (1997) in a study that details the motions of 'writing' through the depiction of ideas, writing of words, and the notation of sounds (310). All these systems can be 'read' since they constitute a symbolism subject to being deciphered by a shared knowledge of (an) interpretive code(s). Therefore, rather than the binary differentiation promoted in relation to orality and literacy or of utterance and 'text', it may be more helpful to dwell on the substance of the *use* of language rather than its *modality*.

With this, the research shall now explore the more influential schools of thought on orality and oral narrative. Among others, they include the following:

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Evolutionism, Diffusionism, Psychoanalysis, Functionalism, Formalism, and structuralism.

Evolutionism

Charles Darwin's idea on the evolution of species, predicated on survivalism—within species and against other species—and adaptation to individual environments, had great impact on other scholars, particularly cultural historians. The latter embarked on identifying commonalities in the human specie and this invariably led them to such themes as religion, worship and the origin of ritual, and even social aspects of life such as governance.

The pronouncement of Adolf Bastian (Okpewho, 1992) that all human beings were created alike further encouraged this comparative cultural research amongst peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the more traditional areas of Europe. The commonalities they assumed in the different cultures cohered in their notion of "elementary ideas" (*Elememtargedcnken*). On discovering such similarities, the scholars posited the idea of "psychological unity" of mankind (165).

However, sticking to the Darwinian model implied conceding to the fact that, like biological species, the stories collected were immutable and unaffected by human agency since determinism informed Darwin's argument. Okpewho (1992) notes the assumption of cultural evolutionists: "...stories found among present-day 'primitive'

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

peoples have simply survived in their memories through several generations of transmission and that these conscious changes or contributions to the body of ideas contained in the stories" (165). Okpewho was, in this sense, referring to such members of the school as the British scholars such as Edward Burnet Taylor, James George Frazer, and Andrew Lang.

In his own case, Frazer (1911-36) provided documentary guide such as the 13 Volume, *The Golden Bough*, which others used to explore the field. Another important figure is John Roscoe (1911), a colonial officer in Uganda who published, among others, *The Buganda: An Account of Their Native Customs and Belief.*. Others include Reverend Henri Junod, Edwin Smith and Andrew Dale, and Roger Dennet. Junod (1912-13), a missionary in the Transvaal region of South Africa, published a 2-volume study of the Thonga, entitled *The Life of a South African Tribe.* Junod (1913), as cited by Okpewho, noted of the authorship of the stories he studied:

> This production is essentially collective: tales are not created, on all sides, by individual authors; but they are modified, altered and enriched, as they are transmitted from one person to another, to such an extent that new types, new combinations are adopted and a true development takes place (202).

In the same vein Roge Dennet (1898) had studied the Congolese, and his observation of the tale type reproduced below will help to shed more light on the metonymic implications of this form to be discussed later.

> Then, we have tales which begin: "A long time ago, before even our ancestors knew the use of fire, when they ate like animals," etc, which then go on to tell how a river-spirit first pointed out to them the mandioca root

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

> and the banana. These I think go a long way to prove that the agricultural age was prior to the pastoral and hunting age. (18)

A common thread runs through the work of cultural evolutionists, and that is the concept of change. As we have noted here Dale and Smith, for example, identify the moment of change in the development of the tale from an early stage of human psychology when man could not distinguish self from the animal. With Dennet, the tale is explanatory to finding clues about the origins and history of human economic activity, while J. Roscoe sees it as the movement of the tale from one generation of teller to the other, as aptly demonstrated by Okpewho (1992:167).

In relation to the pre-colonial African culture, the evolutionist scholars paid little attention to the creative essence of the texts studied. While Junod strikes slightly as an exception for making effort to explore the artistic merit of compositions, most of the other scholars were primarily interested in the broad study of comparative civilization. Not much value was given to the oral narrative tradition and the aesthetic of tales under study. As an offshoot of this anthropological method, there was also very little concern for authorship of creative production as there was the need to demonstrate that the colonial *other* was homogenous living in the earliest phase of the communal human civilization, and without particularities in the manner of developed civilizations.

Diffusionism

In terms of precedence, the diffusionist approach predates the evolutionist

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

school, and while it continues to appeal to researchers as a model oral literature, the same cannot be said for evolutionism.

Both schools subscribe to the idea of cultural change but while the evolutionists emphasize a vertical orientation to change (one stage to the other), diffusionists explain change as resulting from contact between peoples. Diffusionists explain observable commonalities as a product of earlier historical contact which may not be immediately obvious.

Diffusionism emerged in early 19th century among two trends identified as the Indianist School and the Finish School. The brothers Jacob and Wilheim Grimm are identified as the motivators of the Indianist school of thought. They posited that given that European tales had a lot of similarities with Oriental tales, therefore, the Aryan race must have descended from the central Asia region.

When Max Muller (expanded this theory, he saw "Aryan" not as a race but a language group to which all Europeans belonged. The other scholars of the Indianist School are the German, Theordor Benfey, and the French, Emmanuel Cosquin. Benfey worked largely on Indian tales and came to the conclusion that all Indo-European tales have their origin in India from where they diffused to other parts. Cosquin, following this model, concluded that the tales came from an older home in Egypt, even if the normative scholarly assumption remained India.

The Finnish School emerged at about the same period when, in 1828, Elias

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Lonrot collected Finnish heroic tales that were later published in 1835 as *The Kalevala*, "The national epic of the Finnish People" (168). This further spurred other Finnish scholars not only to collect tales and songs but also to index them as component units, thereby classifying them in the same process. It has been noted that Antti Arne's work constitutes the most exhaustive of this exercise in classifying "a large body of tales across the world into so-called types..."(168).

As evinced in the English translation by the American scholar Stith Thompson (1955-58) in *The Types of the Folktale*, the attempt was to reduce all known tales of the world into the smallest units of composition. On the other hand Thompson averred on this model, arguing that rather than an entire tale, the motif was the smallest unit. This led him to compile a six-volume *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955-58).

Diffusionists of this persuasion sought to track narrative units in terms of their type and motif across the globe. Broken down to its essentials, the diffusionists aimed at: a) Listing the various tale units that make up the tale; b) Identify origin of tales; c) Mark its route of diffusion or "travel units (169); d) Identify the archetype from which other variants emerged.

Psychoanalysis

Sometimes the notoriety which psychoanalysis, generally associated with Sigmund Freud, has achieved in allusion to sex-impulse, swamps an appreciation of the methodology of the school. Properly speaking, however, both Freud and Carl Gustav

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Jung were the chief proponents of this model of analysis in their study of mental health.

In the broadest sense, this method seeks to investigate the mental background of human activities. Freud particularly engaged his patients by attempting to reconstruct their studies in the light of activities that invariably led to their childhood. He made them narrate these events without interrupting them or suggesting appropriate images or words that could lead to those images. Piecing these apparently disjointed words and images together, Freud concluded that they could be traced to some sexual impulses in their childhood. This model was later extended to the study of myth and folktale of ancient people.

Freud justified his linking of mental disorder to dreams and myth in the light of repressed impulses in social living, which are however given a free rein in our sleep. Such dream enactments, he describes as "wish-fulfillment". Such irrational behaviors, according to him, also explain the inchoate logic of the folktale with its bizarre sequence of narration. While this reading may be individualist in terms of a single family history, its association to folktale takes a universal dimension. This is evident in his analysis of the Greek king Oedipus. Freud remarks of this narrative, "King Oedipus who slew his father, Laius, and wedded his mother, Jocasta, is nothing more than wish-fulfillment,—the fulfillment of the wish of our childhood" (Okpewho, 1992:171).

Carl Jung followed this Freudian model only to the extent that he negated the notion of the child sexual impulse in such a literal manner as the earlier proposition.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Besides positing that this sexual impulse is absent in early childhood, he dubbed this phase one of innocence, to which adult life attempts to reach back.

In studying the "science of mythology" among cultures as diverse as Greece, Asiatic Indians and American Indians, he identified some archetypes such as the mother-image which symbolizes affection, tenderness and "all-nourishing goodness (Okpewho, 171)," the child hero as constructed in heroic tales. He identified this as evidence of attempt to the innocence of childhood. Man in this model is imbued with the "anima", while the woman, "animus"—they both assist man to achieve the "superordinate personality." This is not a popular school in the study of the folktale in Africa, and even the effort of the American scholar, Paul Radin, to study African folktale along this archetypal form could not be sustained.

Functionalism

Functionalism is intimately tied to the growth of anthropology in the second half of the 20th century. To a large extent, functionalism was a reaction to the generally universal paradigm assumed by evolutionism, diffusionism, and psychoanalysis. The element of cultural context, which could alter general commonalities, informed this need to differentiate influence from place to place and cultures. J.G. Frazier was a pioneer of this anthropological school, intent on studying customs and tale types of communities outside Europe, in order words—the so-called primitive societies.

With this background laid, it took Bronislaw Malinowski and his contemporaries

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

like A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Franz Boas to firmly establish the discipline with their 'scientistic' investigation, but Malinowsky (1922, 1926) averred that there was neither a theoretical nor scientific basis to assume that human beings irrespective of cultural context behaved in the same, or even similar manner. Hence, he proposed the study of cultures from within its own customary practices, and especially how these customs assist the society to survive and the mechanism adopted in this regard. The element of function was thus introduced into the study of society and this is amply demonstrated in two of his works: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926). This mode of study (unlike the Frazer-type speculative deduction) encouraged fieldwork and systematic documentation that strives to relate social customs such as mode of commerce and work ethic to the supporting myth. This, he describes as a myth, once it acquires the features of repetition in a ritual context. According to him, the sacred hallow that are tied to these myths, as reference points, can be explained by their perceived truism to past practices and a guide to self-reproduction.

Yet, a significant dissenting perspective under this same rubric was pioneered by Edward Leach (1969) and Raymond Firth (1959) who, while acknowledging the utilitarian role of culture and narrative in society, were quick to correct the hypothesis of "functional unity" of society. They reasoned that life could not have remained unchanged, what more, that society changes with conflicts and contingencies. This assumption underscores their belief that conflictual interests such as access to power and

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

resources are central to any society. This earned them the label: "structural functionalist".

Also, for combining psychoanalysis with symbolic reading, unlike Malinowsky, they were tagged: "structural anthropologist". Both the trend represented by Malinowski and the Post-Malinowsky school are influential in the study of the tale in Africa. This is exemplified by William Bascom's study of the Yoruba story "Oba's Ear". While Malinowski paid attention to the literary elements and narratives of the people studied, many other functionalists were too content to simply examine them as ways of life and custom of the people.

Generally, the work of the functionalists helped to counter the erroneous conclusion that African oral narratives and literature revealed a level of thinking of the people. What particularly aided their mode of enquiry, particularly Malinowky, was the ability to situate the context of performance, including the state of the audience.

Formalism

Although formalism bares some resemblance to diffussionism in its mode of enquiry, it can be equally said to be a reaction to it. The two approaches proceed from breaking down the tale to examine the constituent units. While the diffussionists emphasize tale motifs to determine the tale type and also tracing its geneology, the formalists, led by Vladimir Propp (1968), are content with the arrangement of the tale type and their constituent units. This was amply demonstrated in his *The Morphology of*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the Folktale. Okpewho (175) notes that Propp acknowledged the works of earlier diffussionists such as Antti Arne "who reduced all the available folktales of the world into a manageable (tale-type) index for easy reference" (175).

However, he questions Aarnes's broad categorization of the folktale into three types, namely: animal tales, tales proper (i.e. human tales), and anecdotes such as the joke. He expressed doubt in a categorization that did not explore in detail the characteristic features of each category" (176). A major weakness in Propp's proposition is the depersonalization of the storyteller. Another taxonomy along a similar line is Alan Dundes' (1971) five functions captured in: friendship, contact, violation, discovery and end of friendship. Dundes made significant observations in relation to the African trickster folktale and those of the American Indian.

Structuralism

Structuralism strives to integrate the different models by combining aspects of the various approaches. In this sense, it exhibited a complexity that required more creativity in its application to interpreting cultural processes. Like the anthropologists, structuralists seek to examine social processes; the method, also like formalism, explores the structure of relationships of units of the tale, and the psychological motivation of symbols deployed in the culture as psychoanalysts do. Beyond this preoccupation with the social, compositional, and the psychoanalytical, the constituent methodology of structuralism lies in its penchant for the structural relationship of

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

cultural processes.

As espoused by its most representative figure, Claude Levi-Strauss (1970), structuralism unlike the social anthropology of Malinowsky which tended to read the different units of cultural processes as working towards social harmony and stability, interpreted "society as being constituted of a variety of elements and interests constantly in conflict with one another and held in some kind of delicate balance by certain institutions (178). This conflict-impelled interpretation was also applied to the study of oral narratives and particularly mythologies of different social and cultural groups. By his own admission in the analysis of myth, Levi-Strauss's concern is actually less of "how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact" (14).

Semiotics of the Non-Verbal Text

Afrobeat's mode of signification is essentially multimedia in accent, and the dance event, as in traditional (oral) performance, is central to the overall aesthetic meaning, even as non-verbal text. A good measure of the dance and choreographic styles observable during fieldwork constitute part of that welter of contemporary dance forms in the continent which remain, to a large extent, undocumented. The attempt here is to identify the different theoretical possibilities that are capable of shedding more light on the emerging form. 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

both an ideological and technical problem. Suffice 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 emphasising one over the other hand, ackowledge the potential inclusiveness of each. Although identifying varied dance types, Zagba Oyortey (1993), for instance, seems more at ease in 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" (185).

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

And even though Oyortey 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" (191)—he consciously avoids describing them as 'contemporary African dance.' Felix Begho (1996) 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" (178). 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 traditional 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 Oyortey'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" (184) In this sense, though, Africa has come to be differently

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

read by different people. To the colonial imagination, 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 the sense of a worthy ancestral past; 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 and narrative qualities as defined, for example, in dynamics. Can contemporary African dance forms such as Afrobeat and the Ivorian Zouglou1 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 (1998) attempt to describe some Yorùbá dances in relation to "set patterns of steps and gestures." She evolves such concepts as the "walk-step" dance and "fan-step" dance (209). 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 (1992). Is there such a thing as contemporary

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Taiwo has in a similar discourse described as a crisis of knowledge production in Africa? (Taiwo, Vol. I. 16 no 4). 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 Oyortey's work in "Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back," where he sheds light on the principle of gravity in Guinean 'Leoudiere' dance (188).

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'."2 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-

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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," (Adshead, 1988:29) — pelvic thrusting and shoulder blade movement. The Afrobeat dance is not simply enamoured by these forms for their own sake: they are geared toward narrating a story.

Afrobeat and Popular Culture

The concept of popular culture continues to attract diverse interpretations that sometimes make a distinct definition difficult. There is a sense in which popular culture begins to take the shape of the 'novelistic discourse', in strict Bakhtinian sense, because of its capacity to ingest into itself other subgenres, and a multiplural form ranging folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working class culture and the like.

To transcend this bug, a good starting point would involve clarifying the related concept of culture and examining its modality with another concept—ideology. Raymond Williams (1983) in *Keywords* suggests that culture is "one of the two or three

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

most complicated words in the English language" (87). This anxiety is hardly misplaced for he then proceeds to articulate culture in terms of "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development" (90); in other words, this can be related to the philosophical and aesthetic attitude of a people including the works of its artists and writers.

The second suggestion indicates "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group" (90), while the last is related to "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (90). John Storey (1993) notes that this third use of culture is "synonymous with what structuralists and post-structuralists call 'signifying practices'" (2), and that the average sense of popular culture may be more related to the second and third concepts of the word culture—both as *live* cultures and cultural *practices* which would qualify as cultural *texts*.

As regards ideology, the primary problem arises because many scholars would even go as far as using it interchangeably with culture, and popular culture in particular. Stuart Hall (1978) cautions that there is a sense of emptiness in the term when used this way, a sense of emptiness which Storey suggests is "politics", once we randomly substitute ideology for culture.

In the light of this, Storey ventures into clarifying five possible meanings of the term 'ideology'. One, he says, is to see ideology as "a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people" (3); this could include a professional or a

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

political group. The second relates to how a group could produce or foist false consciousness by masking, distorting, and concealing the social process of domestication by the privileged in society. The sub-text of this reading is best deduced from Karl Marx's popular formulation as cited by Storey:

> In the social production of their existence men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. (4)

Ideology in this sense points in the direction of power relations, and the third formulation by Storey actually derives from this. This is the sense of "society as conflictual rather than consensual," with texts presumed to be taking sides, invariably, as in the works of our case study, Fela. The fourth perspective is the Althurserian concept which tries, in the words of Storey, to "see ideology not simply as a body of ideas, but as a material practice" (5), while the fifth and last calls into play Roland Barthes' preference of seeing ideology as operating at a connotative level, that is, "the secondary, often unconscious meanings, texts and practices carry, or can be made to carry" (5).

Popular culture, from this context, would suggest the infusion of politics, ideology and power relations, even in its most nuanced form, to the matrix of cultural

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

practice. But even the term 'popular' has to be problematized, and for this we return to Williams who suggests four current meanings: "well-liked by many people; inferior kinds of work; work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people; culture actually made by the people for themselves" (Storey, 6).

It is also crucial to note that the discourse of popular culture has attracted a wide range of scholars and movements that straddle the 'culture and civilization' tradition with the likes of Mathew Arnold and F.R. Leavis, and the 'culturalism' school. The latter has been poignantly represented through such seminal works as Richard Hoggarts' (1990) *The Uses of Literacy*, Raymond Williams' (1965) *The Long Revolution*, E.P. Thompson's (1980) *The Making of the English Working Class*, and Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's (1964) *The Popular Arts*. In the context of popular culture in Africa, the debate has been most represented by insightful suggestions by scholars like Michael Echeruo (1977) *Victorian Lagos*, Biodun Jeyifo (1984) *Yoruba Travelling Theatre*, and the several treatises, among many others, of Obododima Oha, Ademola Dasylva, and Dele Layiwola. Major contributions have also come from Africanists such as Karin Barber and David Coplan.

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

definition has become all the more difficult. Karin Barber (1997) had partially alluded to this by 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" (2).

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 by 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 Theodor Adorno (1989) has argued. 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 attracted a sharp reaction from Dapo Olorunyomi (1991) who notes that there is nothing in the internal character of the

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

text to assist in the definition, while the externality of this reality cannot provide a sufficient basis for its definition.3

While the distinction between folk art and popular art is fairly clear, the same cannot be said of popular art and mass art. They tend to share features that overlap on several continuums. 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 later 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 (1997) 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" (057), 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."4

The morbid fear expressed by successive Nigerian governments 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 Lull (1992) 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the late 1980s (14).

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" (14). 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Notes

1. According to Funmi Adewole, Zouglou incorporates many theatrical elements in its movement style largely because the form evolved a mimicry of encounters between the Ivorien police and protesting students during the reign of Houphuet Boigny.

2. Funmi Adewole's unpublished "ETERE Dance Research Project: A Preliminary Study of the Movement Principles inherent in the dances of the Igbo People of Nigeria (November 1998), p.1-2.

3 Dapo Olorunyomi, "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 eoherent and uniform as the official culture.

4 In other words, he saw his music as a dynamic process, which over the period became increasingly spiritual.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER TWO

TEXT, TEXTUALITY, AND DISCURSIVE 'AFRICA'

The continually changing context of cultural, artistic, aesthetic, and literary production makes it imperative to re-examine traditional concepts such as (the) text, oral and written, and their mutations. A knowledge of the dynamics of orality and oral narrative helps us to understand contemporary culture in the same manner that the Yoruba ontological summation suggests in the pithy aphorism: B'omode ba subu a wo waju, b'agbalagba ba subu, aw'eyin (When a child falls, s/he looks forward; while an elder in the same situation takes a glance backwards for the antecedent cause). The logic of this summation is central to an understanding of the shaping of discourse in general, and literary/cultural formation in particular. But more precisely, orality in contemporary Africanist scholarship is a discursive formation; it is a site of ideological struggle for self-representation in contesting foisted privileging norms and narratives.

Invariably, therefore, this discursive formation is implicated in the broad canons that have come to shape literary and cultural studies. This study attempts to return to those normative assumptions of what constitute literature and the theoretical guiding maps that have intervened in giving shape to the discipline. In the present effort the enquiry is deepened further by examining the subsoil of written literature in oral narrative and performance and the consequent transpositions that are mediating it

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

through electronic technology. The particular transposition that is employed in demonstrating this claim is the rhetorical strategy and performance tradition of Afrobeat music. In the light of this, some questions have cropped up: Is Afrobeat merely another musical tradition or also a cultural and political narrative? How does one account for the nuances of its performance subtexts—especially in the light of the discourse of hypertext—in other words, what are our aesthetic criteria of measuring them? And, more significantly, what is the relationship between this musical form and the 'literary'?

From the outset, the multidisciplinary imperative of such a venture became obvious and compelling to the degree that it necessitates heeding the warning of Houston A. Baker (1993) concerning a theoretical approach that is capable of an "improvisational flexibility and a historicizing of form that are not always characteristic of academic responses to popular cultural forms"(34). The research inclination in this bid is two-fold. One is to explore the theoretical interface, as well as 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 very profound mode of signification. In other words, we have adopted a method of literary/cultural criticism, stressing the indefinite article *a* in order to show that this concept is not necessarily *the* only method of reading this text, or any other for that matter. It does not take too long, for instance, for any Afrobeat reader to discover the

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

potential of an implicit plural reading of conceptual and actual experience as essential to the form's aesthetic and political practice. This is not, however, to suggest that literal and normative meaning that have been encountered in the course of this research are necessarily overridden by wilful interpretation. Rather, and somewhat akin to Stanley Fish's (1980) 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" (306).

Besides examining the discursive formations of the 'text' and modes of 'textuality', it is also shown that Afrobeat performance is itself a signifying mode of post-colonial counter-discourse and, as such, a cultural narrative nested in *Otherness*.

Ubiquity of (the) Text

In grappling with the concept of the text, Walter Ong (1999) makes a distinction between natural language and computer language, noting that while the 'grammar' of the former is first used and then abstracted, the latter is first stated and used thereafter (7). Besides, when human beings communicate, they gesture towards a multimedia 'accent' by virtue of using the senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. This calls attention to the fact that a deep sense of language requires us to acknowledge how paramount articulated sound is, and that "thought itself relates in an altogether special way to sound" (7), even when writing does, indeed, enlarge language's potentiality and in the

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

process converts some dialects into 'grapholects'. By grapholect Ong implies a "transdialectal language formed by deep commitment to writing" (8).

Another source of the text-literacy conflation can be traced in western discourse to the art of techĕ rhĕtorikĕ, 'speech art' which referred to "oral speaking, even though as a reflective, organised 'art' or science" such that in Aristotles's "Art of Rhetoric—rhetoric was and had to a product of writing" (9). And even with Ong, we come to an appreciation of the word 'text' in a dual sense of the written, and that meant to be studied when he notes of classical practices: "...even orally compose speeches were studied not as speeches but as written texts," (10) and later, "such written compositions enforced attention to texts even more, for truly written compositions came into being as texts only, even though many of them were commonly listened to rather than silently read..." (10). Eric Havelock (1986) also re-echoed this problematic with the query: "Can a text speak?" (44).

With Ong one notices a definite worry on how best to capture oral imaginative expressions, for he even toys with the concept of the 'preliterate but buckles at the danger that this may be used in an unreflecting manner such as to be thought of as an anachronistic of a secondary modelling system (13). He finally settles for the term "text" which he thinks may be more appropriate to describe the oral utterance, especially that its root meaning connotes "to weave". This is close to the Greek

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

rhapsõiden, which suggests "to stitch songs together" (13). The argument here is that this would be less misleading than the concept of literature which refers to letters.

Northrop Frye (1957) had in *The Anatomy of Criticism* proposed for all purely oral art 'epos' which has "the same Proto-Indo-European root, *wekw* -, as the Latin word *vox* and this is grounded firmly in the vocal, the oral" (Ong, 1999:13). The term "verbal text" is used by Ong when referring to Japanese, Chinese and Korean attempts at visual articulation of sound-meaning (18)

The debate of naming is undoubtedly deeply ideological. It is instructive to note, however, that not all opposition to the use of the tem literature for pre-literate verbal forms have necessarily been inspired by a desire to undermine the value of creative oral productions. The confounding profoundness of orally-based creativity can sometimes lead to this dilemma. Ong's sarcasm against 'literate' societies is very apt here.

> It is demoralizing to remind oneself that there is no dictionary in the mind, that lexicographical apparatus is a very late accretion to language as language, that all languages have elaborate grammars with no help from writing at all, and that outside of relatively high-technology cultures most users of languages have always got along pretty well without any visual transformations whatsoever of vocal sound. (14)

While being mindful of the different strands of the debate, the choice of the use of the term text in this study derives, primarily, from a sense of its moorings from an oral state to its present constitution., even in its literate rendition. For one, the final constitutive element of what has come to be identified as literature is clustered around

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the body of that form—whether oral or written—identifiable in 'literariness', and this is hardly dependent, most often, on the mode of communicative experience. It draws, even derives from social life while at the same time being shaped by the communicative experience of its given age. As a concluding aside, a sense of irony, the simile, or metaphor derives, primarily, from articulation in language, irrespective of the mode or medium of rendition.

But beyond this formal use of 'text', the research proposes to extend the term to other discursive practices in its sense of a signifying practice that can accommodate other extra-verbal, non-linguistic modes of aesthetic communication such as the semiotics of dance, general visual narrative, and gesture. Following up closely on this, Meki Nwezi et. al. (RIAL, 2001) propose the concept "lingual text in music as song lyrics or recitative" (91) in describing the lingual fundamentals of African drum music. The authors persuasively demonstrate how the text in African music can be encountered in the following ways:

i.) as a vocal processing of language—song;
ii.) as instrumental processing of language—metasong ;
iii.) as choreographic processing of language—the visual poetry of dance as metaphor;
iv.) as symbolic documentation of cultural statements—the extramusical meaning of special music instruments and musical art costume. (91)

In a similar treatment of the Yoruba Oriki as literary text, Karin Barber (1991) besides noting of the form as a variant of praise poetry also observes that Oriki is "radically unlike the kind of 'literary text' which critics educated in the mainstream Euro-

COUESRIA - LIBRARY

American literary tradition are used to dealing with" (21). The most immediate repercussion of this is that there is a paucity of scholarly work on this form and its mode of textuality. Even when such texts are fluid and emergent, Barber argues that their narratives nonetheless have discernible internal logic.

Barber correctly locates the source of the confusion in treating oral narratives like Oriki as text in the western formal tradition of writing as due to the presumption of "fixity, visible form" and "a material existence detached from both author and reader" (24). The strong influence of critical traditions such as New Criticism of the first half of the last century also somewhat strengthened this orientation. Yet, there is the irony of critical traditions such as post-structuralism and deconstruction strengthening the features of orality, only that they were spawned from a critique of "writing". Applied to oral literature, they also seem to disempower agency, the critical element in enthroning the text.

Furthering the discourse, and responding to the charge of wilful interpretation of the 'text' as an attitude of the 'Newreader', Stanley Fish (1980) rebuts that although the 'text' may be determinate but only as a transient phenomenon because its normative feature is constantly in a flux that is at best realized by the performance of an interpretive community. What Fish is suggesting here is close (not necessarily in the nuances of its final resolution) to the contextual analysis of performance theory which is predicated on the formulation that an uttered sound or word of a linguistic

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

system only come to mean "because the words are heard as already embedded in a context that they have a meaning..." (309). He provides features of this non-context-free communicative mode:

> (i) communication does occur, despite the absence of an independent and context-free system of meanings, that (ii) those who participate in this communication do so confidently rather than provisionally (they are not relativists), and that (iii) while their confidence has its source in a set of beliefs, those beliefs are not individual-specific or idiosyncratic but communal and conventional (they are not sophists). (321).

Even here we can already sense an incipient Barthesian formulation that challenges a presumed trans-historical 'naturalness' of language, while in the same breath proposing a system of convention or code for articulating the meaning of a text. Roland Barthes (1967) in *Writing Degree Zero* even mutes the idea that "In actual fact, clarity is a purely rhetorical attribute, not a quality of language in general which is possible at all times and all places" (64).

With this it would seem that Barthes has further problematized the Saussurean conception of signifier-signified by introducing another mode of signification with implication on the 'code'. Frederick Jameson (1972) notes in this regard: "each literary work, above and beyond its own determinate content, also signifies literature in general...identifies itself for us as a literary product" (154). But Barthes' ultimate intention is at once a radical and an ideological revision of bourgeois trans-historicism and an attempt to empower subjectivity. To this extent in *S/Z* (1970) he pushed for a

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

role for the reader in literature and, by this far-sighted conclusion, foreshadowed the notion of the hypertext.

In reaction to the avant garde style of the likes of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, Barthes proposed the concept of the 'writerly' text since the reader had been "left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text" (4) And in this new kind of text the reader can fill the ellipses and emboss her own reading/meaning, thereby escaping and challenging bourgeois containment based on the falsehood of fixity. It is in this same sense that he makes a distinction, in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), between *Plassir* (Pleasure) and *Jouissance* (Bliss), the latter having the quality of a responsorial engagement to which the writerly text invites us. Barthes pursues the argument:

> Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (14)

But we must turn to *S/Z* to learn the codes required to *read* and *write* in this five-feature Barthesian game of textual defamiliarization summarized as: i) The hermeneutic code; ii) The code of semes or signifiers; iii) The symbolic code; iv) The proairetic code; and, v) The 'cultural' code. This reading, based on Balzac's *Sarrasine*, has deep implication for the next exploration for the moment of 'ideal' textuality, given Barthes' classification of the reading units into some 251 lexias in

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the mode of contemporary hypertext narrative—a mode that would appear native to traditional performance space and its re-emergence in Afrobeat performance.

The concept of 'hypertext' was itself coined by Theodor Nelson to describe the non-linear, non-sequential space made possible by the computer. Sven Birkets (1994) copiously cites a description of the term in a *New York Times Book Review* entitled "The End of Books" (June 21, 1992) by Robert Coover thus:

> Hypertext is not a system but a generic term, coined a quarter of a century ago by a computer populist named Ted Nelson to describe the writing done in the nonlinear or nonsequential space made possible by the computer. Moreover, unlike print text, hypertext provides multiple paths between text-segments, now often called 'lexias' in a borrowing from the pro-hypertextual but prescient Roland Barthes. With its web of linked lexias, its networks of alternate routes (as opposed to print's fixed unidirectional page-turning) hypertext presents a radically divergent technology, interactive and polyvocal, favoring a plurality of discourses over definitive utterance and freeing the reader from domination by the author. Hypertext reader and writer are said to become co-learners or co-writers, as it were, fellow travellers in the mapping and remapping of textual (and visual, kinetic, and aural components, not all of which are provided by what used to be called the author. (153)

Other authors have equally referenced this concept, and George Landow's (1997) entry into the debate, especially in relation to hypertext's interstices as the convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology, remains seminal.

Landow's sense of the hypertext dutifully acknowledges two critical voices: Roland barthes and Michel Foucault. Landow observes certain commonalities in Barthes' (1974) 'ideal' textuality which Landow summarizes as "text composed of

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms *link, node, network, web,* and *path*". (Landow, 3). Barthes had earlier characterized this mode of text:

> In this text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable...the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language (5-6).

Michel Foucault (1976) would also in *The Archaeology of knowledge* describe text in relation to network and links by suggesting that the "frontiers of a book are never clear-cut" because "it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network...network of references" (23).

Anticipating the potential misconception of this term, Landow makes a distinction between hypertext as described here and other possible forms of electronic textuality that can exist within hypertext without necessarily being hypertext themselves. These include: graphic representations of text, non-linear text, and, simulation. Landow does not however make a distinction between hypertext and hypermedia to the extent that he incorporates the latter in the notion of the text in hypertext with additional data in sound image, animation and related forms.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

It is significant to note that, so far, the notion of the hypertext has been based on the practice of writing. It would seem like the critical elements of the hypertext mode are present in the traditional festival performance setting; such a setting shares such mutual features like non-linearity, non-sequentiality, multivocality, and interactivity, in addition to the agency of the audience which is not as active in the reader of the written and print text. Indeed, applied to the average African performance context this formulation would seem obvious enough, at least not as much a radical revision as one finds in relation to the written text which seems to be the primary concern of most hypertext scholars. This, precisely, represents the crux of this research, to extend the frontiers of the notion of the hypertext and its reconstitution in a neo-oral context of Afrobeat performance.

There is also ample evidence of the same features in a substantial number of texts in modern African literature. Even when such a mode is necessarily decontextualized unlike in a performance tradition, it invariably echoes that central feature of orality that demonstrates *literature as text in situation*. What has sometimes been considered the limitation of oral narrative—its inhibited capacity for the sequential and classificatory—is precisely what recommends its shared narrative texture with the hypertext. Even the most 'readerly' fiction, in the strict Barthesian sense, is incapable of escaping incipient hypertextuality for two main reasons which

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

this research proposes to describe as: one, the *texture of signification*; two, the *narrative ancestorial*.

In the first instance, the psychodynamics of signification is independent of the individual writer such that even his attempt to create a textual closure can elude her. The extended metaphor in which fiction thrives is basically referential, while the cadence of narration through features such as point of view, perspective, and character variation, to mention a few, can be quite challenging to linearity in textual sequence. While it cannot be denied that a medium of narration such as the print foists a sense of spatial closure seeming to lock the text within pages with a certain sense of cold finality, nonetheless through flashback, allusion, digression and other such narrative codes, the narrative process has always strived toward the flighty as a latent hyperlink to action, situation, character, time-space and event, no matter the contrasting situation. Even as plot's dutiful agent, this is *narrative in essence*—reaching back to its own sense of freedom—explicable only in our second hypothesis: the narrative ancestorial.

The sense of 'discovery' of the hypertext in print, with its consolidation in digital narrative is in itself informed by a disjuncture from narrative's moorings in orality or what shall be presently considered the archaeology of narrative, that is, narrative's beginnings. For one, primeval narrative is essentially multimedia and hypertextual, and fully ingested with the texture of non-linearity, non-sequentiality,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

multivocality, interactivity; yet, with a more profound sense of agency beyond what, sometimes, even contemporary digital hypertext can cope with. In the light of this, the research proposes to segment and characterize the different phases in relation to the hypertext as follows:-

i.) Pristine oral phase — Manifest Hypertext

ii.) The age of writing — Phoenix or latent Hypertext

iii.) The digital age — Emergent Hypertext

This, in a broad sense, represents a rough schema of the form that hypertext narrative has taken from the primeval, pristine oral phase through the age of writing to the present time (of writing in light). The research suggests that in the pristine oral phase the element of the hypertext was *in character* of text, while it seems to resurrect in the age of writing (with all the ambiguities implicit in fusing the different phases of that age; indeed, one which we still live in, in spite of the electronic age). Emergent hypertext merely attempts to reach back to the earliest phase, which Dasylva describes as moment of 'whole text', and this phase continues to grapple with infusing the hypertext with all the senses (such as tactile, olfactory, 'feel', and 'mood') lost to the primeval age. The demonstration of incipient hypertext below draws, very briefly, from two slightly unfamiliar sources: the first is a sub-genre of oral narrative, while the second is from Niyi Osundare's (*Waiting Laughters*) poetry.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

The Yoruba sub-genre of riddle, *alo apamo*—as distinct from *alo apagbe*—is the classic case in point of a narrative form that, apart from embodying all the earlier stated features of the hypertext, most empowers the subject, here constituted as the *Audience Co-Author* (ACA). This riddling game requires a member of the audience or a listener to decipher the code of the question always posed in symbolic-figurative association. What is significant here is the role of agency, represented in the subjectivity of the ACA but capable of redirecting the non-sequential narration. The ACA (reader) here may, if nuanced in the encrypted posers, wrestle the narrative from the primary narrator (writer), renders the latter castrate, and redirects the entire narrative transaction. But once the ACA assumes this status of primary narrator, it has automatically reconstituted subjectivity in an Other (the new audience), thereby triggering off opposition to his/her own discursive practice and this continual subversion continues...

On the second demonstration, evidence of phoenix hypertext is replete in Niyi Osundare's poetry, especially as captured in the second-order semiology of conceptual time in *Waiting Laughters.* Osundare here resorts to signifying through the use of typographic space calculated at inviting reader- (audience) response in the configured, sometimes blank spaces created by the author in an attempt to approximate to the extra-linguistic mood inhered in oral poetry performance. This kinaesthetic narration attempts to capture the elusive and temporal sense of time as

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

visually represented, in a tradition that goes back to the caesura, the figurate, and pattern poetry.

Domesticating (the) 'Text'

Two intertwined factors have been suggested as explanation for the challenging textuality of oral literature and popular culture: the first arises from what Francois C. Dossou (1997:287) has aptly described as the penchant for the *scriptophilia* in Western discourse; the second, simply put, is accounted for by the specific etymological bind that informs the term 'literature' for those who have come in contact with it through the English language. It should be noted, in passing, that this element of the 'scriptophilia' actively informed Ruth Finnegan's (1970) conclusion on the supposed absence of drama in traditional Africa, thereby discountenancing other methodologies such as the salient admonition of Richard Schechner (1988) "that drama does not depend on written texts, but on *carefully scripted actions*" (103). (Schechner's emphasis)

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1982:23), long saw the stricture imposed by this when they noted: "One of the objections to 'literature' is its suggestion (in its etymology from *litera*) of limitation to written or printed literature; for, clearly, any coherent conception must include 'oral literature'. It is in this context that they propose the German term *Wotkunst* and the Russian *slovesnost*, which are less restrictive. Yet, the concept of literature defies easy resolution for, even the attempt to distinguish

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Both Abiola Irele (2001) and Kofi Agawu (2001) make the point manifest in relation to African literature and music in their recent works. Walking on the delicate rope of merging a universalist and regionalist episteme, Irele (2001) suggests that literature does not only communicate a structure of feeling "but also reflects a climate of thought" (viii). But no sooner, he calls attention to layers of commonalities in the corpus of African literature, a need for which he hopes the critic can begin to acknowledge at the level of points of convergence of literary traditions in spite of the differences in language, conventions, and historical development.

Irele is particularly mindful of an embedded counter-discursivity in post-colonial African literature, and the tendency among its writers and performers to testify to the central issues of conflict and dilemmas involved in the tradition/modernity dialectic (ix). This tendency, to say the least, has been most influenced by the discontinuity in the life of the colonial subject, and a certain subalternity of his status. He further pitches camp with Chinua Achebe's (1988) critique of Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* when the former notes that the

> Bigotry behind Conrad's shadowy and ultimately sinister depiction of the black character in his tale as a shaping element of the work, ... to interpret this factor as the driving force of a creative impetus conducive to the product of a great work of art. (Achebe, 1988 in Irele, 2001: viii)

Achebe is particularly animated by the tendency to represent Africa, conceptually, as "the place of negation" (Irele, viii).. He also alludes to Albert Memmi on the similar subject of the reaction of the colonial subject who, after acquiescing to colonial

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

education, undergoes a "violent reaction against the systematic assault upon consciousness and sensibility that it is ultimately recognised to entail" (viii). This observation of the colonial subject has a particularly insightful bearing on Fela as we shall later discuss.

Besides the several efforts of many black aestheticians across the globe who have attempted to grapple with the idea of African literature, Janheinz Jahn (1961, 1966), had proposed the term "neo-African literature" as an umbrella rubric covering contemporary African writing by Africans in the continent and the diaspora because he felt that this writing traditions were distinguished by a fundamental unity not only of reference but also of form. This is quite similar to Irele's (2001) allusion to a common thread in structure of mind of the African. Jahn captures this same experience as "Nommo", which is more or less a conceptual metaphor of black literature, that is Nommo as a living principle. On his own part, Irele concludes, urging the need to appreciate the tricky phraseology of 'African literature' since this literature is actually, more or less, literatures defined by several layers of the African experience in the colonial and post-colonial phases of its encounter.

In a similar vein Agawu (2001) notes, "In so far as they constitute complex messages rooted in specific cultural practices, the varieties of African music known to us today may be designated as text" (8). Apparently, Agawu was compelled to go this far in view of the fact that traditional music is generally not considered contemplative art.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

This premise was based on the artificial divide foisted on African music as a functional art as distinct from its capacity to be contemplative. No doubt this artificial divide is problematic and difficult to sustain given the myriad possibilities open to African music makers to enhance musicality for contemplation. This qualification, according to Agawu, does not merely speak to specific African music genres (such as the *Gbaya* and or "the wordless chant *Gogodze* sung by the Ewe of Ve, Volta Region, Ghana" (8), but many other such practices across the continent.

The contemplative mood is also sometimes extended through a deft instrumental compositional style when the verbal content is frozen to allow underlying musical procedures to sink in the listener. This could be accomplished with the playing out of turns of phrase, certain cadential approaches, or spontaneously composed embellishments. There is also evidence of this text-building in children's game songs that play with pitch, or as in instrumental teasing out of riddle messages for audience decoding: all this require close listening, often more contemplative than a good number of so-called elite musical performances. The penchant with the riddle, with its highly decentred system of encoding and polyreferential nature, calls attention to not only to a dynamic but also a reflective mode of composition and reception.

For tonal African languages, the aid to music becomes pertinent, but Agawu warns that we misconstrue this equation by reversing the order as if to suggest that African musics are forms of language. This is instructive because even this

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

relationship shows sufficient asymmetry to dissuade a presumptuous swap. Even when language informs music, as in situations of speech surrogacy, we have observed the possibility of similar tonal configuration with different semantic possibilities as shown below from Akin Euba's example (1990):

> Owo laye mo--- It is financial power that mankind recognises
> Aye mo juba----I acknowledge the importance of mankind
> Ola di pupo----- Prestige has become manifold
> Ise ni wura -----Work is gold (198)

In further stressing the case for music as text that is imbued with contemplative attributes, Agawu constructs four categories and layers of appreciation: uses of error; violence against natural language; singing in the throat; and signifying instrumental music.

In the first example, we are informed that errors committed during rehearsals and performance can exhibit a rich illustration of aesthetic norms, conventions of grammar and syntax. In this instance, the self-critique made by traditional African musicians and their audiences help to illuminate aesthetic contemplation only possible in a textured performance.

Natural language is violated in the course of music-making such as makes the relationship not only dynamic, but unpredictable. The example that Agawu gives, in furtherance of his long-standing research among the Ewe of Nothern Ghana, is the possibility of transformation of low tone to high tone away from language and in the

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

direction of music. This is usually away from the normal register of speech to a marked higher one, sometimes in the sense of a tonemic transgression which constitutes a form of violence against language.

In the particular instance of "Singing in the throat," we have illustration in forms such as ululation and humming; and in the case of the latter, for example, it is resort to "pure" music which in the words of Agawu, constitutes an embodiment of " a moment of excess, a moment of transcendence (13) when the word becomes incapable of reaching a certain layer of depth-experience, and therefore defers to a more articulate music as experienced particularly in the dirge. However, this moment of musical transcendence should not be misconstrued as being independent of language or supplanting it; rather, music and language supplement each other.

At the level of signifying in instrumental music, J.H. Kwabena Nketia (1968) provides three broad categories of Akan poetry of drum language: the signal mode; dance mode; and speech mode. Nketia contends that in the signal mode, "drums are assigned short rhythm or tone pattern that are repeated again and again" (27). This conforms with Agawu's notion that African music has an abiding prerogative to be functional. Indeed, Agawu emphasizes further the communicative strategies deployed in the drum-text and their, sometimes, overlapping roles. He also sheds light on the mode of transfer of the different forms. For example, the critic proposes that the speech mode of the drum-text is transferred by a semiotic process of the iconic. For

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the signal mode, he notes that although it is recognized iconically, nonetheless it is understood symbolically for the purpose a community or individual designs it sets out to achieve. He concludes by showing the possible overlaps, noting, "The speech mode is isomorphic with ordinary language, the signal mode with poetic language, and the dance mode with a heightened form of poetic language that at the same time points beyond itself" (14). This is, however, sometimes more involved since the speech mode could slip into a signal mode such as when popular musicians randomly evoke it but not necessarily for speech-making, and in addition the speech mode hybridises both the iconic and the symbolic as apparatus for signifying. The signal mode is noted for its contraction of the linguistic universe. But above all, the dance mode neither abandons speech nor signal, rather—and in the words of Agawu: "it becomes a repository for all three modes of drumming" (15). With this background laid, the research will now attempt to explore the different strands of textuality, that is 'text' in the manner that we have broadly outlined above as well as a discursive text such as the concept of 'Africa' as differently narrated.

Reading Discursive 'AFRICA'

There is a sense in which Fela's overall aesthetic oeuvre strove to define and affirm Africanity. Through his songs and narratives, ideological polemics, the varied performance contexts, and even lived experience, Fela's abiding penchant was always

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

to problematize the continent as a discursive text, and locate Africa as the setting of his aesthetic practice.

Fela's Africanist aesthetics and ideology did not occur by happenstance, as some of his cultural preferences 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 these 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 personalitè nègre*)," (Mudimbe, 1988:87) 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" (4).

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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. (89)

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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* (1963) and the more recent *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), respectively. The anti-colonial and anti-imperialist intellectual mood of this period aided the evolution of an aesthetic *engagé* that rubbed on African literature (oral and written), 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 (Nkrumah, 1965). 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, in the belief 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.

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: "domestication of political power," "criticism of colonial life," and finally, "celebration of the African sources of life." We are here borrowing Mudimbe's (1988) 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 is the experience noted by Colin Grandson (1978:74) 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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" (74). 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 theatre 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 Zaorou Zadi's *Didiga Theatre* (both Ivorien post-independence forms) were also cast in this latter mold.

Cultural Roots of Music-Making

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

and chants; the use of polymeters and polyrhythms, and musical instruments used as symbols" Sam Akpabot, 1986: Preface).

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, to make them "talk." This attitude is true of many African communities, and 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" (Akpabot, 58). Whatever the validity of this claim, the ancient Yorùbá dictum, Àyànàgàlú, asòrò ígí (Àyàn of Agalu, who speaks through the medium of wood), is suggestive of the kinship of music and the reconstitution of speech pattern (Akin Euba, 1988:7).

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 Iyánlá, Ìyá Àgàn, Keke and Afeere which form the Igbin ensemble used by its devotees (5), while Sango's preference is the Bàtá ensemble of Ìyá ìlù, Omele abo, Kùdi and Omele Ako. With these are the Ìpèsè, Orunmila's special drum, and Àgéré; beside Agogo

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

(metalophone) and Ṣèkèrè (traditional rattle) of Ògún. Beside 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, musicians have been able to develop a highly sophisticated use of musical instruments as speech surrogate" (9-10). 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 Sákárà 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 (Michael Echeruo, 1977), the Lagos elite showed considerable interest in this entertainment genre. But the pivot of this early

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.[1]

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 (Echeruo, 1977:68). 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 (70). 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."

Echeruo (1962) further suggests:

> Another factor outside the missions that was favorable to the growth of the concert in Lagos was the presence of a small, well-educated and "cultured" elite

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

made up mainly of the expatriate colonial civil servants and the Brazilian community, which increased in number after the emancipation.

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. (Nigeria Magazine, 1962, no 74)

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 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 Ilè Ife, that cradle of mankind as tradition relates. (Lagos Musical Journal, 1916).

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 (1982) 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

> which 'Western' influenced 'intellectualist' procedures of composition are rejected. (122)

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.

Origin and Growth of Musical Hybridity

While many African traditional rhythms and foreign styles constitute the background to Fela's beat,[2] 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 African soldiers with their newly acquired tastes of Western-style live music and night-club entertainment."[3] 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 the guitar background. Tam Fiofori suggests that the guitar styles that introduced the instrument to British West Africa were the *rhumba-merengue* and *samba* music of GV-70 rpm records that came via the Spanish territories of

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Africanized Cuba and Latin America.[4] Prior to this encounter, however, West Africans have always had the more complicated 20-string instrument known as the *kora*. This factor, perhaps, 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 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."[5] 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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,[6] two-and one-membrane conga drums, and the Western trap drum set with cymbals—that would serve as the immediate catalyst for Afrobeat.[7] 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Nigeria; it was a task that would have to be shouldered by Afrobeat, a subversive musical and cultural performance.

Cultural and Political Evolution of Music

Translating the pan Africanist vision of his youth into music, however, took a while after many unsuccessful attempts 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."[8] 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.[9] 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 trend was later noticed in Fela's composition. However, their attempt was to infuse the new experience with Highlife, an attitude

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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."[10]

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 Music[11] 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 (Moore, 1982:85).

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."[12]

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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

With *Jeun K'oku* one gets the sort of 'bold' and assertive vocalization, structured 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,"[13] 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

The bass line drum rhythm has been identified by Steve Rhodes (in a 1997 interview with the researcher) as *Egbaesque*, with its roots reminiscent of certain rhythms of the Orò cult. 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.[14]

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

understand the universe of Fela's thought on this and his imagined (African) continent, a paraphrase of his diverse readings is given in the concluding section of this chapter.

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." In

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

other words, before we can attain a life of comfort, we must be prepared to fight for it. The status of being the victim must stop.

1. This charge was made by Rev. J. Vernal in *Church Intelligence and Record* of January 1889, according to Michael Echeruo.
2. 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.
3. See Tam Fiofori's article, "Afrobeat: Nigeria's Gift to World Popular Music (1)" in *The Post Express*, August 16, 1997.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Tam Fiofori identifies the three-membranophone drum as a pivotal instrument also in Ijaw masqurade music.
7. Ibid.
8. See Tam Fiofori's "Afrobeat: Nigeria's Gift to World Music (2)," in the *Post Express* of August 17, 1997.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. This was Fela's preferred name for his style of music after his rejection of the title "Afrobeat,"
12. Tom Fiofori (2).
13. Ibid.

CODESRIA LIBRARY

14. 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER THREE

MUSIC AND TOPICALITY

Pre-Text

The preceding chapters help to illuminate the background to Fela's cultural and political activism that is, more often than not, aesthetically realized in musical performance. This sub-text to his committed art can only be best appreciated in the light of the artist's response to the overall violation of civic space since the pre-independence era.

This has meant that since Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960, the basic features of governance in Nigeria four decades later remained executive excess and the emasculation of the judiciary and the rule of law. The military held the reins for two-thirds of the entire period of nationhood and yet not less than five coup d'etats 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 appeared 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. Jurgen Habermas's (1986) 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.1 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Artistic 'Seeker's Passage'

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 (1963) 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 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 (1963), 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" (218). Michael Veal (1997) 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" (049), 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 supra-class 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*, *ITT*, 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 decry those forces constraining the liberation

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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" (049). It is this element of wishing into being and constructing into textual discourse that Benedict Anderson (1983) 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. (15)

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.

Song Text as Metonym of Social History

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,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 (1990) 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" (xiii)

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-

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 (1997) notes this of Nana Kwame Ampadu's "Ebi Te 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. (63)

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 *Woman 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 *Woman 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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"2 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Bone*, thereby revising 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
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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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-pata3 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—

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

"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 'disguising' 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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, policeman go slap your face you no go talk/Army man go whip your yansh you go dey look like donkey/Dem leave sorrow, tears and blood
>
> *My people seem to be too afraid/ Afraid even of non-visible 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 devising reasons to fear/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 Bone (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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 *Shuffering and Shmiling*, 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."4

The hidden transcript and symbolic refrain underlying the conclusion of *Shuffering and Shmiling* 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: Oro t'o ba ju ekun lo erin laafi nri—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" (Christopher Waterman, 1990:213), Afrobeat contests that hierarchy and proposes the redistribution of social

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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. Benett, 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.5

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-

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

faced roguish 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?"

Poetry of Cityscape

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 to 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."

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Shortly after his residence was burnt, Fela waxed *Unknown Soldier,* 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 6
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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 text. 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' (Joyce Oates, 1981: 187). Fela is not alone in equating the city to a negation of sublime spirituality. Stephen Spender (1981) 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" (45).

Whereas other romantics generally withdrew from the city—Wordsworth and Coleridge—into the English countryside; Blake—into mysticism; or Byron and Shelley

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 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.7
>
> *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*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

come im 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.*8

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 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."9

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Documentation and information Centre
CODICE
CODESRIA

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 couture, in animist and abstract lines, caught on particularly with Togolese and Beninoise textile hawkers who could be seen displaying such models for sale on the city's several beaches. The *Glendora*, 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 and vigorous intertextual engagement 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 warder (Nduka Otiono, 1996:29)
>
> *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" (Otiono, 55), in the same manner that Fela's carnivalesque performance is punctuated with "S'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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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*10
> *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*.

Lexico-Syntactic Deconstruction

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-

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Sapele-Warri areas of Deltà 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 conducted 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Unusi (Igbò), 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,"11 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. The suggestions of Ben Elugbe and Augusta Omamor (1991) on the subject are 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" (12).

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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" (Dick Hebdidge, 1977:427). While it is correct to state 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. No douubt, there are codes for identifying security agents, demobilizing enemies and generally 'surviving' which, is believed, 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*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 interrogative 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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:

i.) VIP (Very Important Person)—VIP (*Vagabonds in Power*)
ii.) BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)—BBC (*Big Blind* County)
iii.) BONN (West German city)—BONN (*Beast of No Nation*)
iv.) SAP (Structural Adjustment Program)—SAP (*Suck African People*)
v.) US (United States of America)—US (*Underground System*)
vi.) 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:

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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, Àbújá, the nation's capital, differently pronounced in this game of playful distortion could become Àbùjá, 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 'inviting the 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-óùn' (Motown), which is, "I have pawned my voice!" Such is the ribaldry of the *Yabbis* performance, quite often found too threatening and destabilizing to the soft underbelly of the performance of officialdom.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Notes

1 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.

2 This is how Iyiorcha Ayu describes the phenomenon in his book, *Essays in Popular Struggle*. Oguta: Zim-Pan African Publishers, 1985.

3 The overall boss.

4 From *Information*, Copenhagen, February 23, 1977.

5 From Fela's correspondences.

6 The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, held in Lagos in 1977.

7 From the track *Gentleman*.

8 From the track *No Agreement*.

9 As recorded in a private discussion by the Nigerian poet, Remi Raji.

10 Olusegun Obasanjo, the military Head of State of Nigeria between 1976 and 1979.

11 This was Fela's conception of his extended household.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER FOUR

SONG-TEXT TRADITION AND AESTHETIC RESOURCES

This chapter identifies the stylistic strategies with which Fela consciously canonized indigenous performance modes, against the 'privileging norm' of the Western musical tradition to which he was exposed as youth, and later studied at post secondary level. While the influences on him were undoubtedly varied, the Yorùbá-Africa aesthetic universe served as the fountainhead of an artistic practice and imagination with which he emphasized difference "from the assumptions of the imperial center" (Bill Aschcroft *et. al.*, 1989:2).

A Bardic Aesthetic Continuum

Expressing authenticity in cultural terms, as he had often done in his political rhetoric, meant tapping into a broad canvas of African folkloric past and taking from these diverse sources aesthetic forms that he transposed into contemporary, and an urban context. For one, 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

known as such through Sierra Leone and the Caribbean islands, with other traditional 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 (1977) examination of *Shuffering and Shmiling* 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.1

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 1980 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.2

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 (1977) 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."3 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 humanity should strive toward a technological option that will not destroy the environment.

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."4 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" (Kermode and Hollander, 1973:596). 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" (1968:12).

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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. 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 origin: "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 ko-ko ko-gi-ni je-je." There are suggestions that this particular rhythm is derived from the Olómolú ritual festival of the Ègbá.5 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

ODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 (1970) suggests that, "in its original form, laughing seems to unite against a third force" (132). Richard Schechner (1988), also in this connection, notes that, "Laughter presupposes, even creates, a 'we' that opposes a 'them'" (243). And in Nigeria, the theme of laughter as an aesthetic intervention in socio-political life preoccupies the poetry of Niyi Osundare (1990) *Waiting Laughters* and Remi Raji (1997) *A Harvest of Laughters*.

In the tradition of the Ègbádo Èfè 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 (1972) 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 sperms* (72)

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:

COLESRIA - LIBRARY

> 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. (Johnson-Odim, 1997:83)

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 (1977) in relation to Zulu music, of which he notes its use of instruments as "an indirect extension of the principles of vocal music" (23). 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, as demonstrated in the attached score sheet of transcription.

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," our finding indicates an Ègbá Olómolú 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

the more experimental dance mode (Nketia,1968:27). 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.6

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 scalic forms. Vic Giammon (1982) 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" (24).

Fela's attitude to the ensemble is undoubtedly one of an orchestra, and a musical extended family such as the traditional Yorùbá (household) ebí. 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 Párìkókó* mask, whose extended embroidery denotes large kinship ties, in the same manner that Margaret Drewal (1992) suggests its corollary with verticality, as a projection of corporate power in big cities like New York (22-23).

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Òrìsà 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 a license was given by a

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

member of the king's court in Sagamu, Otunba Julius Olapeju Adekunle Adedoyin (1991) when he noted:

> 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. (8)

Yorùbá mythology teaches that *Orò* was originally an *Ifá* diviner7 whom *Olódùmarè*8 honored, and subsequently became the assistant of *Obàtálá*, "god of the plastic arts."9 At some point in the interaction, *Orò* committed treachery against *Obàtálá* 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".10 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

threshold of the millennium is the basis for invoking this mythological yell in *Original Suffer Head:*

> Water, light
> Food, house
> *Yee-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" (Soyinka, 1976:145). 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 "eeríwo-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 alárìnjó dance mask and èfè performance. And it is with this structure that Fela contests transnational meddlesomeness in national affairs. It starts off with the ìjúbà 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

'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 *Udge* satirical form of the Urhobo and *Akpaja* of the Ishan. With Fela, however, there is only one long, eternal season of licence, which is unhindered by place or time.

In the track, Fela starts with a rather rapid incantatory form similar to ògédé, 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 Osiri 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 ìjúbà tradition. Even though ìjúbà, which

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 efè 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 Ógún—variously described as god of iron, creativity and patron of the industrial working class.11 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 Ógún:

> We greet you o great god Ogun o
> We greet you
> We greet you o great god 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
>
> *We pay homage to you great Ogun*
> *We pay homage to you*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

We pay homage to you, great Ogun
You are the deity who is opposed to oppression
You are the deity who is opposed to injustice
We pay homage to you
We 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 áló àpámò (riddle, as distinct from áló àpágbè—which is generically a folktale), that he uses. While also exhibiting attributes of the folktale, áló 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 (áló 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 the other…*

But, who are this 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 timeframe. 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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***
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) diviner 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 stealing dey…

*All African leaders/ Have only borrowed their **eyes**/*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

It is the White man's eyes they have borrowed/ Which explains why/
There is corruption/.Theft in high places…

The Trope of Journeying and Narrative Time-Space

In grappling with the aesthetics of time and space in literature, Mikail Bakhtin (1981) 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" (15). 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" (15) 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.

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

and fantasy. The time-space markers become known, and take the tone of the familiar" (15).

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, ìtàn, 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 cyclicity or indices on a human scale, tying it to the repetitive aspects of natural and human life" (91). 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 *Alụ 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 bò, 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 bò, 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: here you dey go?

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 cyclicity 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,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 time and place. Fela's device for circumventing this, as in *Shuffering and Shmiling*, 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*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Vocal: *In anticipation of enjoying in heaven*
Chorus: *Amen*
Vocal: *Christians keep blabbing*
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 ìtàn, 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 we 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

> Palava e dey find

and, therefore:

> Palava e go get o

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

beast herald of apocalypse: "these have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast."12 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…*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Style in Composition

Some of Fela's compositions in the immediate aftermath of the Kalakuta incident tend to be quite loose and uncoordinated. 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 such as modalism, hocketing and ensemble stratification. This latter development will be fully examined in the next chapter.

The structure of Fela's direct musical composition is equally as varied. 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 a Tiv-like 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 sharply differentiated from western house music style; it 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 6 ths or 3 rds .

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 1-4 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

for some degree of crossover jazz. This hybrid middle ground is essentially Fela's sense of the jazz crossover in the African context.

The 'OraLiteracy' Tension

A perceptive discussion of the nature of orality must necessarily take this into account, 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. This seems to suggest not only a flux in the psychological apprehension of the technology of language but also in its practice.

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. Primarily 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 mediated 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.13 Even in substantially literate

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.[14] 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 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,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 *Rererun,* 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-writing dialectic, represented as fictive-historical account respectively. In *Rererun* he starts off with,

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

COLESRIA - LIBRARY

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 at 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 'writteness' 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."15

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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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. Besides 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 Albert Lord's parlance cited by Benjamin Gray (Journal of American Folklore) as "the theme of repetition" and

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

"repeated themes," in the parlance of Albert Lord Vol. 84, No.333, P.33). 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,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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,(1984) 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'.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Ayak*ata*—Ayak*ata*
Ayak*oto*—Ayak*oto*
Ayak*iti*—Ayak*iti*
*A*yak*utu*—Ayak*utu*

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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Notes

1. From conversation on Call and Response Procedures in Fela Ransome-Kuti's *Shuffering and Shmiling* by Willie Anku.
2. From Braimoh's "Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: A Misunderstood Poet", a 1980 B.A. project in the English Department of the University of Ibadan.
3. View expressed by Magorie in *Anatomy of Poetry*. (London: 1955, 1977.)
4. Ibid. See p. 4 of the same interview.
5. This suggestion was made by the musician Tunji Oyelana.
6. 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.)
7. Ifa is the Yorùbá system for unraveling past mysteries and foretelling the future; the Pythagoreans of old share with the Ifa episteme the assumptions of the world as knowable through a mathematical combination of figures; the Babalawo is the male Ifa diviner while the Iyanifa is his female counterpart; they are both oracular priests of Ifa.
8. In Yorùbá mythology, Olodumare is generally regarded as the highest of the divinities.
9. This is how Wole Soyinka describes this primeval creator of forms.
10. This is also corroborated by Adeoye C.L. in *Igbagbo ati Esin Yorùbá.*(Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1985).
11. Given that Ogun 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 the researcher 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.
12. See Revelations Chapter 17:13.
13. 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.* (Exerter: BPC Wheatons, 1995.)
14. 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.
15. See Karin Barber's "Literacy...", p. 6, as indicated above in ed. Stewart Brown's *The Pressure of the Text.*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER FIVE

HYPERTEXT IMAGINATION IN PERFORMANCE

Following up on the theoretical assumptions in Chapter Two, the researh hopes to show how close the performance context of 'Divination Night' bears striking commonalities with the principle of the hypertext.

Divination Night is Fela's day of worship, a heigthened performance context which, in the researcher's view, is highly ingested with a prescient tone of the carnivalesque played out in diverse forms, intermingled with song, music, and the extra-verbal features of gesture, costume, mask display, dance, mime, and excessive revelry; in short, a simultaneous staging of an apparently dissonant but deeply interactive rhythm.

The concept of the carnivalesque was popularized by Mikhail Bakhtin who, in "Rabelais and His World," equated the form to a second-order semiotic system, and as he puts it, "Carnival is the people's second life, organised on the basis of laughter" (Rivkin and Ryan ed., 1998:45). Bakhtin came to this conclusion by studying the festivity of the Middle Age that exhibited "peculiar qualities of all comic rituals and spectacles..." (45). He links the festival, at the external level, to the feast of the church, but avers that all carnivals of the Middle Age (ecclesiatic, feudal or state-sponsored, led to any form beyond a replication of the existing world order. In other words, they merely endorsed "the norm, thereby betraying true human festivity" (45). For him, the official

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

feast, in celebrating normative truth, was invariably devoid of the tone of laughter, thereby betraying any true human festivity.

However, unlike the official feast, the carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the stricture of prevailing truth. The true carnival strove beyond inhibitions to embrace open spaces rather than enclosures, the borderless zone rather than boundaries, and a penchant to dehierachisize and query prevailing order in the course of the carnival. This mode sharply contrasted to the official feast that, more or less, was a "consecration of inequality" (45). At a deeper level, the carnival enthroned an intersubjective space to which all participants could claim ownership, not just at an ideational level but envinced in real life experience. It is this form of abundant spiritual excess, similar to the mode of representation found in Rabelais' novel—*Pentagruel*—that Bakhtin describes as carnivalesque. This form of 'speak back' to power, authority, and heirarchy is common in traditional festivals of poetic license. The closest experience of this form to Fela is the ribaldry of the efe-gelede performance tradition of the Egbado that has globalized among the Yoruba. It is replete with high burlesque, and an exaggerated form of representation, not necessarily of the individual but human corporate being in a flux.

The overall concern in this chapter, therefore, is to show how Fela transposes some 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. We pose the problematic: if ritual aesthetics is steeped in

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

improvisation, how do we recognize the ritual continuum when reconstituted as in Fela's performance? Would not even an avant-garde mask performance be obliged to reenact, as Fela continually demonstrates, at least some aspects of its constitutive form?

Part of the intention is to demonstrate how Fela's performance is a derivative of the incipient mulitimedia in masking forms, including the less ritualized strand of Egbado èfè-gèlèdè performance traditions, which has strongly diffused into the Egba and other Yoruba cultures. Although a gèlèdè masker, as suggested by Babatunde Lawal (1996), 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 (271).

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

entertainment and amusement, while the other is employed for the purpose of ritual.1 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 (1988) notes, "a dramatic genre can then be constructed from its code" (45). 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 did not necessarily attempt to faithfully recapture those idioms in their pristine states. In his treatment, such performances have been revised and transformed into modes of countercultural expressions of urban life.

Meta-Narrative of Festival Atmosphere

It is midnight at Fela's Afrika Shrine 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 "Bàbá Kuti," "Fela Baba," "Abàmi Èdá," "Augu-stine/o," "lénìyàn,"—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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 bandleader is standing on the stage centre, 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 syncopating 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Neo-Ritual Worship

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 the researcher's 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) oyàn 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.2

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 that informs the adaptive and transformational character of even formal ritual as a recreation of myth. Margaret Drewal (1992) captured this dynamism when she

COVENANT - LIBRARY

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" (27). 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 Orisa worship in the New World long after the middle passage. Besides, Orisa 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 "B'aradan, aaf'obe sebo"—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 (1997) 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" (5)

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-deconstructiveness of the cultural practice. For a culture whose sense of hierarchy emphasizes age

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

difference, one of the cognomens (and aphorism too) of the creation of Ile Ife, its spiritual headquarters, is rendered thus:

> Ogbon ko pin si ibikan
> Omode gban, Agba gban, lafi da Ile-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:

> Bí oní tirí
> Ola le ma ri be
> Ló mú Babaláwo d'Ìfá ororun
>
> *As things are today*
> *They may not be the same by tomorrow*
> *This explains why the Babalawo consults the Ifa oracle every week 3.*

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.

Ritual Continuum

Back to the ritual paraphernalia at the Shrine, the statuettes and other iconic representations of Yorùbá mythological divinities include Esu—trickster and divine interpreter; Sango—god of thunder and progenitor of the egúngún masquerade performance; Ogun—god of metallurgy, creativity and patron of the blacksmith; Orisa

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Ibeji—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,

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 mound 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 centimeter 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 preoccupied the attention of earlier critics like Ossie Enekwe (1981) 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" (152).

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" (155). 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.*

SODESRIA - LIBRARY

When the researcher 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. When we 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 ìdán 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!*

Besides Jejeleko, 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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, Ògun, drive *exuberantly* during the deity's festivals. We 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, ewù Ògún ni wán wò—"they have donned Ògún's toga." Elements of such residues, actively inform the ritual practice at the Afrika Shrine.

Deciphering the Ritual Code

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 Ègbádo-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 bòlòjò season when the gèlèdè

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

masquerade makes an outing. According to Babatunde Lawal (1996), during the gèlèdè performance, the elèfe (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" (83). Noting that it is more elaborate than gèlèdè, Benedict Ibitokun (1993) further suggests that èfè relates more to the liturgical and could, like gèlèdè, emphasize the fustian, hilarious and grotesque (20-21). For Lawal (1996), the term èfè itself refers, first, to the mask; second, to the mask's songs, poems, and actions; and third, to the entire concert. (113) 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 (1976), 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"(41) This experience is particularly true of the èfè-gèlèdè 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 èfè 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 èfè is also a site for a ribald encounter, where what in normal day-to-day expression

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

would be considered obscene is allowed free play. The èfè of Ilaro, according to Lawal, when paying homage to Èsù, 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 aesthetic evocation of several dimensions of time in an infinite play of signifiers, realized in the congealed narratives of these figural sculptures of condensed myths, current discourses, and a power to prognosticate, the mask narrative suggests not just the multimedia but, also, agency. Even in their supposed inert state, it

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

compels a visual discourse and an aural testimony, through their acolytes, to their concealed messages. Of these qualities of the mask, Harry Garuba (1988) notes:

> The mask play itself often exercises an anarchic force upon our perceptions, breaking down our compatmentalizing categories by being able to move uninhibited between reality and ritual, the referential and the semiotic. (207)

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 (207) through Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*. 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.4

The Aesthetics and Hermeneutics of Ritual Performance

The structure of performance at the Afrika Shrine also exhibits a unique time-space with the different 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 art and his musical form. The structure, definitely, flies in the face of the Aristotelian conception of the well-constructed plot with its emphais on a sequenced beginning, middle, and an end. This is how Aristotle formulates his concept :

> Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and an end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it ; an end is that which is naturally after something itself...as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it ; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and also has another after it. (George Landow, 1992 :181)

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. 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

texts. This phenomenon of man 'making' and reconstructing god is prevalent in West Africa, and Karin Barber (1997) notes this attitude of the Yorùbá toward their Òrìsà.

> Relations between humans and Òrìsà are in some sense a projection of relations between people in society . ... if the Yorùbá see the Òrìsà'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.33

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 Adáḥunse. 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 (ìròké), two important items for a babaláwo. The four divinities chosen by Fela for this counterculture worship are of both aesthetic and ideological significance. Èsù, for instance, is a pre-eminent player in the Yorùbá cosmic drama, particularly because while others are invoked, Esu is appeased. While the other divinities are not essential to every divination, Esu is—which explains why it is first appeased (as Fela also does) before proceeding with a ritual event. This is also borne

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

out of the fact that Esu is a potential spanner in the works. Aside from its legendary trickery, multivocal, and polysemic attributes, Esu is also the keeper of Ase— 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 Esu whose favorite abode is the crossroads. One of his encomiastic verses testify to this: Esu onílé oríta, that is, "Esu of the crossroads." And one of the libation bearers, Nicholas Ajimele, explained that the diagonal-cross-hand-stretch 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 Esu'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 Èsù figure in Louis Henry Gates' (1988 :35) seminal work, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. Gates makes an implicit binary differentiation of Esu as an interpreter rather than a performer. He somewhat arrived at this conclusion by suggesting that Esu is contiguous to 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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. Our suspicion is that Gates may be relating to the dispassionate qualities of Esu, which indeed buttress 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 Esu's juridical attributes. While not denying salient and overt critic features in this divinity, we misread cosmological narratives by denying Èsù his role as performer in the cosmic drama. Esu 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 (1983) "qualitative approach" (69). 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Orisa Ibeji is exceptional in this configuration to the extent 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—Ejire so alskisa d'onigba aso—"the twin transforms the pauper to the prosperous." Along with Òrisa Ibeji, Esu undisputedly falls into the mythic sphere—farther than Ògún who belongs to the sphere of the mantic'-legend. With Sàngó, 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 (1975:73-74), is a development of trance possession. Drewal (1992) 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 (182-4). 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

in Yorùbá ritual drama,5 while Fela's communion with the past is a sort of ritual device to affirm his presence with the ancestors, deemed to be capable of intervening in the affairs of man. This also somewhat complements Fela's last names —Aníkulápó-Kúti, 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 Àirí* (Unseen world), *Aiyé Okún* (the Ocean), *Oòrùn* (the sun), *Òsùpá* (the moon), *Aiyé Kurúkurú* (the void) *Orún* (the skyey heavens) (C.L. Adeoye, 1985 :11). 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 carnivalesque may merely be an attempt to approximate an experience that sometimes defies 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Òrìsà 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 basillica 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 *Òrìsà* and other African divinities. If Fela shows reverence to the 'mothers'—the *àjé* (*Iyá Òsòròngà*, sometimes equated with the 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 *Òrìsà*. This point is buttressed by an Ifá divination verse, *Odù Osá Méjì,* which narrates the ajé, on arrival to the earth, as putting to test the wits of *Orúnmìlà*—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. 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

followers. This conclusion on anthropormorphic qualities derives from our 1993 research on the nature of diets on which deities are fed. In the case of Osún—a river goddess and goddess of watery presence—one of her priestesses suggested that Osun's diets are basically environmentally friendly not only to fishes but aquatic life as well. Another instance of man 'making' god?

Music, Audience and Feedback (Setting) :

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 sufficiently 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

open parliament to judge their mood and get feedback on his own aesthetic and political practice.

Located within the Shrine are four fish-net-draped dance daises 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 we 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

> 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 souund 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 Buk,a 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 narrate 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 sang 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 reality 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.*

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 number 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 Afrocentric Kinesis

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 antiphonal instrumental 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 song 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 (1971) has noted that rhythm is "the most striking aspect of African music, with drumming displaying it in its most complex form" (51). In a study

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.

Beside 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 body 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 are brass instruments. As in the large, traditional plays like the bàtá ensemble of the Yorùbá, or even the more recent jazz music, whose internal dynamics are aptly described by Ralph Ellison in Paul Gilroys's (1993) *The Black Atlantic* as "an art of individual assertion within and against the group" (79), 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 defamiliarize 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.

Solos and Choreography

After Akinbosun's solo performance, there is a brief interval and then Fela comes in for the second tenor sax. Some breakaway group in the audience could be heard heralding him with, "Egún n'lá ló'n kèyìn ìgbàlè," 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

brought up stage, a job which falls to the same players of ritual rhythm: the metal gong and/or sticks player(s) and the sekere (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 rhythmic 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 stage center 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 aid in 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 executed. Were this a Dionysiac rite, Dodo would indeed be a maenad, like the Sàngó votaries of the New World described by Umberto Eco (1997). But the climax has only been prefigured.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.

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" (Adshead, 1988:29) — 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.

As noted by Zagba Oyoitey (1983:118) dance as a non-verbal means of communication draws from our everyday motions but it also gives an insight to its own

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

dynamics. 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" Adshead, 1988:2). 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, beside 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 definite 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 characterise 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.

Visual Narrative of Sonic Dissent

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, thereby achieving a multimedia format. It is this aspect of dispersed referentiality that deepens the sense of the hypertextual in Afrobeat performance.

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

sample of such authorization is the inscription on the album jacket of *ODOQ* by Ghariokwu 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* (*Glendora Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2):

> 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*.(055)

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. (054)

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:

> 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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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-historical 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 potential ironic twist in representation simply reminds of the multiple discursivity generally inhered in popular culture expression.

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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 symbolized 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—a free-willing agent—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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

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.

By and large, this is a pictorial narration of dissent, of the contest of values between dominance and marginality. And, with a style that buttresses the disjuncture 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 suggests a declamation of views deemed to be tilting the continent in the direction of "second slavery,"6 and a dependent political economy.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Notes

1. This is as true for the Yorùbá as many other African mask experiences.
2. This interview took place December 5, 1991 at Fela's No. 7 Gbemisola Street residence.
3. The Yorùbá have a five-day week.
4. Ibid.
5. 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.
6. 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.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION
MIDI AND THE FUTURE OF (AFROBEAT) MUSICAL TEXT

So far we have clarified the contrasting claims on the status of orality and oral literature, and their contexts in performance. This has also been carefully linked to the relationship of this form with modes of popular cultural expressive forms. In the same breath, the research has also problematized the concept of the text in its variegated usage, showing that the discourse is as much of literary as well as ideological interest. In the light of this mutative essence of the text, therefore, the present study will conclude by noting the impact of the Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) on popular music, in general, and the Afrobeat form and its sub-genre, in particular.

While selectively applying different theoretical modes, the research attempted to foreground the pertinent role of human agency in the best tradition of performance theory. This combinatorial approach made it possible to achieve a significant depth in examining and analyzing the different modes of textuality, such as has been presented by a case study as this. Furthermore, it is critical to call attention to the new direction of the electronic age poised to Afobeat and cultural performance in general. In conforming with the research promise not to foist arbitrary theory on the practice of cultural and aesthetic production, we shall commence with a quote by a neo-Afrobeat performer which foreshadows the impending challenge:

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Of sound, the spoken word, and technology

It should not be long before audio/visual
recordings become untenable as evidence.
Cleverly manipulated and placed in a
different context, your utterance would
acquire new meaning.

The quote above is Lagbaja's (Bisade Ologunde), the highly experimental Nigerian musician whose creative spiel is often channelled through an infusion of the multimedia. Lagbaja's comment on the album *Abami* (a post-humus dedication to Fela), strongly underscores the impact of new technology on art, in general, and the music text, in particular. What the artist is alluding to here is the evidence of sampling and looping, all made possible by virtue of the facility of MIDI. In other words, conversations, songs, speeches can be 'transplanted', thereby violating time and space, and the overall context of their original production. More critical for creative (and Afrobeat) production is the fact that the *space of place* is gradually yielding, in the general tradition of digital culture, to the *space of flow*, and with implication for the different phases of composition, context, performance, audience and feedback, among others.

Once Fela's Afrobeat tore off from its Highlife moorings and became a relatively stable genre, it began to generate a strong intertextual exchange from other performers. The earliest form of this interchange can be identified with efforts of the likes of Baba Ani (Lekan Animashaun), Sandra Isidore (Sandra Smith, Hugh Masekela, and Tony Allen with *Serere*, *Upside Down*, *Lady*, and *NEPA* respectively. It must be noted though that earlier on, many contemporaries of Fela (in the sixties and early seventies) playing

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

in a similar tradition include Wole and Segun Bucknor, Orlando Julius (now Ekemode), Geraldo Pino, Tunji Oyelana, Johnny Haastrup, and Bala Miller.

While maintaining the general rhythmic structure and texture of Afrobeat, Baba Ani, Sandra, and Tony Allen added new compositions to the pool. Masekela on his part adapted lyrics of *Lady*. But even this, as with the others, could be said to belong to the same corpus to the extent that it does not constitute a major shift as to be classified as a sub-genre. Femi Anikulapo-Kuti (Fela's son), Dele Sosinmi, and Ayetoro represent leading voices of a new generation of Afrobeat performers gradually tinkering with the primary principles and orientation of Fela's compositional preference. Although this can also be said of Tony Allen's current practice, Femi had demonstrated evidence of this shift when he infused electronic drumming into Fela's *Army Arrangement* after the latter had been jailed by the Buhari-Idiagbon dictatorship in 1985.

The different context in which the new generation Afrobeat acts are performing can be adduced as an explanation for this shift in style. For one, Fela's Afrobeat lacked (or shunned) the patronage of the nouveau riche, which seemed to sustain neo-traditional styles such as Fuji and Juju music—the latter being forms that shied from engaging and rebutting the client-patronage structure of the state and its dependent political economy. Added to this is the other context of diaspora Afrobeat performance in the western capitalist economy that does not only make it impossible to replicate the big band tradition, but also imposes its own cultural taste of the house music crowd. In this

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

in a similar tradition include Wole and Segun Bucknor, Orlando Julius (now Ekemode), Geraldo Pino, Tunji Oyelana, Johnny Haastrup, and Bala Miller.

While maintaining the general rhythmic structure and texture of Afrobeat, Baba Ani, Sandra, and Tony Allen added new compositions to the pool. Masekela on his part adapted lyrics of *Lady*. But even this, as with the others, could be said to belong to the same corpus to the extent that it does not constitute a major shift as to be classified as a sub-genre. Femi Anikulapo-Kuti (Fela's son), Dele Sosinmi, and Ayetoro represent leading voices of a new generation of Afrobeat performers gradually tinkering with the primary principles and orientation of Fela's compositional preference. Although this can also be said of Tony Allen's current practice, Femi had demonstrated evidence of this shift when he infused electronic drumming into Fela's *Army Arrangement* after the latter had been jailed by the Buhari-Idiagbon dictatorship in 1985.

The different context in which the new generation Afrobeat acts are performing can be adduced as an explanation for this shift in style. For one, Fela's Afrobeat lacked (or shunned) the patronage of the nouveau riche, which seemed to sustain neo-traditional styles such as Fuji and Juju music—the latter being forms that shied from engaging and rebutting the client-patronage structure of the state and its dependent political economy. Added to this is the other context of diaspora Afrobeat performance in the western capitalist economy that does not only make it impossible to replicate the big band tradition, but also imposes its own cultural taste of the house music crowd. In this

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

instance, the first to be expended by the new acts, of the originating Afrobeat style, is the long-form groove that has come to be associated with Fela. But even this is mere foretaste of the coming rupture on the old Afrobeat form by the emerging '*Nu* (Neo-) Afrobeat' school.

This is the tradition from which the New York based band—'Antibalas' works. In the album *Talkatif*, besides the group's more often instrumental rendition of Fela's composition, its collection includes the likes of Lagbaja, Femi Kuti, Sandra, Sosinmi, Masekela, Daktaris, and Baba Ani. The MIDI touch is evident in this collection but becomes more noticeable with the 'Masters at Work' and 'Red Hot + Riot'. The latter (an MCA Production, 2002) is geared toward "fighting AIDS through popular culture" with its AIDS benefit project. The entire collection of works revised include *Kalakuta Show*, *Shuffering and Shmiling*, *Water No Get Enemy*, *Gentleman*, *Sorrow Tears and Blood* (*Tears and Sorrow*), *Shakara*, *Lady*, *Zombie*, *No Agreement*, *Colonial Mentality*, and *Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am*.

Paul Lehrman and Tim Tully (1993), authors of *MIDI for the Professional*, announce with glee: "MIDI...has changed the way we produce music more than any other single technology since magnetic tape" (9). This, indeed, is hardly an alarm considering its impact on the status and context of musical text ranging the phases of composition, delivery/performance, arrangement, production and audience feedback. The primary most noticeable effect of MIDI is the effacement of the traditional status

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

and role: of composer, performer, context, audience and feedback—a current challenge to Afrobeat groups, particularly in Europe and North America. In the MIDI channel, for instance, a sequencer can send data to three synthesizers, playing different equipment (such as drum, bass, and piano) and simultaneously—with all its implications for the traditional music performance.

Beyond this it can also act surrogate for audience through soft wares that can generate responsorial effect, besides the ability to effect looping and sampling—the sort of experience hinted at by Lagbaja in the quote above. Lehrman and Tully further detail the MIDI's potential to its anticipated users such as,

> i.) Composers and arrangers who want to expand their horizons beyond traditional techniques and instruments. (Using MIDI instruments and computers makes it easier to try out ideas in composition and orchestration—and to generate sheet music quickly.)
>
> ii.) Composers of video and film soundtracks who want to throw away their click books and digital metronomes and compose in an immediate, iteractive environment of synchronized sound and picture.
>
> iii.) Post-production professionals who want to use the new tools and techniques MIDI offers for creating, editing, and placing music, sound effects, and dialog in video and film;Audio engineers and producers who want to automate and simplify sound control, lighting, and other production elements during live performances.
>
> iv.) Educators who teach composition, arranging, theory, ear-training, acoustics, principles of synthesis, experimental music, programming, or software and hardware interface design (10).

Such are the effects of the digital interface on musical (and other) performance texts. In the first place, this has implication for the regime of intellectual property rights; yet, this development challenges us to grapple with the traditional notion(s) of the text, and their

COVENANT LIBRARY

mode(s) of realization; themes that would seem to require further research and critical enquiry to unravel by scholars in the area study.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

WORKS CITED

Achebe, Chinua. *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays.* London: Heinemann, 1988.

Adair, Christy. *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens.* London: Macmillan, 1992.

Adebayo, Aduke, ed. *Feminism and Black Women's Creative Writing.* Ibadan: AMD, 1996.

Adeoye, C.L. *Igbagbo ati Esin Yorùbá.* Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1985.

Adewole, Funmi. "ETERE Dance Research Project: A Preliminary Study of the Movement Principles Inherent in the Dances of the Ibo People of Nigeria." (Unpublished, November, 1998.)

Adjaye, K. Joseph and Andrews, R. Adrianne, eds. *Language, Rhythm and Sound.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music.* New York: Continuum, 1989.

Adshead, Janet. "Describing the Components of the Dance" in Janet Adshead (ed.) *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice.* London: Dance Books, 1988.

_____., ed. *Dance, Gender and Culture.* London: MacMillan, 1983.

Agawu, Kofi. "African Music as Text." in *The Landscape of African Music.* (Eds.)

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Agawu, Kofi and Irele, Abiola. Indiana: Indiana University Press. RIAL, Volume 32, Number 2, Summer 2001. 8-16.

_____. *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Agbola, Tunde. *Architecture of Fear*. Ibadan: IFRA/ African Book Builders, 1997.

Ajayi, Omofolabo Soyinka. *Yorùbá Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*. New Jersey: African World Press, 1998.

Akoha, Albert Bienvenu. "Graphic Representational Systems in Precolonial Africa." in *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*. (Ed.) Hountodji, J. Paulin, Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997.

Akpabot, Samuel Ekpe. *Foundation of Nigerian Traditional Music*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1986.

Albert, O. Isaac et al. *Urban Management and Urban Violence in Africa*. Ibadan: IFRA, 1994.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

Apter, Andrew. *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power Society*. London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

_____. *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Agbola, Tunde. *Architecture of Fear*. Ibadan: IFRA/ African Book Builders, 1997.

Ajayi, Omofolabo Soyinka. *Yorùbá Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*. New Jersey: African World Press, 1998.

Akoha, Albert Bienvenu. "Graphic Representational Systems in Precolonial Africa." in *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*. (Ed.) Hountodji, J. Paulin, Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997.

Akpabot, Samuel Ekpe. *Foundation of Nigerian Traditional Music*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1986.

Albert, O. Isaac et al. *Urban Management and Urban Violence in Africa*. Ibadan: IFRA, 1994.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

Apter, Andrew. *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power Society*. London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Adshead, Janet. *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice*. London: Dance Books, 1988.

_____., ed. *Dance, Gender and Culture*. London: MacMillan, 1983.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back.* London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Ayu, Iyorchia, D. *Essays in Popular Struggle.* Oguta: Zim-Pan African Publishers, 1985.

Baker, A. Houston, Jr. *Rap and the Academy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Bakhtin, M.M. "Rabelais and His World." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Ed. Rivkn, Julie and Ryan Michael. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. 45-51.

_____. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* Texas: Texas University Press, 1981.

Barber, Karin, ed. *Readings in African Popular Art.* Oxford and Bloomington: James Currey, 1997.

_____. *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991.

_____. "Popular Arts in Africa," *Africa Studies Review.* vol. 3, no. 3, Emory: University of Atlanta, Georgia, 1987.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies.* New York: Noonday Press, 1990.

_____. *The Pleasure of the Text.* Trans. Richard Miller. London: Cape, 1976.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

_____. *S/Z* Trans. Richard Miller: New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

_____. *Elements of Semiology*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. London: Jonathan Cape, 1967.

_____. *Writing Degree Zero*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. London: Jonathan Cape, 1967.

Bauman, Richard, ed. *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Begho Felix "Traditional African Dance in Context," in Kariamu Welsh Asante (ed.) *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations* by Walter Benjamin (Ed.) Arendt Hannah, (Trans.) Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afro Asiatic Origins of Classical Civilization. Vol. II. The Archeological and Documentary Evidence*. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

_____.*Black Athena: Origins of Classical Civilization. Vol. I. The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985*. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

_____. *Black Athena: The AfroAsiatic Origins of Classical Civilization.* London: Vintage, 1987.

Birkerts, Sven. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age.* Fawcett Columbine/New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.

Blacking, John. *How Musical is Man?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973.

Bonton, Margorie. *The Anatomy of Poetry.* London: 1975.

Booth, Wayne, C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Braimoh, Lasisi. "Fela Aniulapo-Kuti; A Misunderstood Poet." Unpublished 1980 B.A. Undergraduate project, Department of English, University of Ibadan.

Brown, Stewart, ed. *The Pressures of the Text: Orality, Texts and the Telling of Tales.* Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 1995.

Chanock, Martin. "Justice and Rights in Context." Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town/Emory Law School, Emory University, 1997.

Child, John. *Organisation: A Guide to Problems and Practice.* London: Harper and Row, 1984.

Childs, Peter and Williams, Patrick. *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory.* London: Prentice Hall, 1997.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Collins, John and Richard, Paul. "Popular Music in West Africa: Suggestions for an Interpretative Framework." In Horn, David and Tagg, Philip (ed.) *Popular Music Perspective*. Sweden: The International Association of the Study of Popular Music, 1982.

Colin, Grandson. " The Chief in Contemporary Black African Theatre of French Expression." In Ogunba and Irele (Eds.) *Theatre in Africa.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1978.

Conteh-Mongan, John. *Theatre and Drama in Francophone Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Coplan, David. *In Township Tonight!* London: Longman, 1985.

Craig, David. (Ed.) *Marxists on Literature.* Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975.

Cuddon, J.A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* London: Penguin, 1991.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Curran, James et al., (Eds.) *Mass Communication and Society.* London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1977.

Dasylva, O.Ademola. *Classificatory Paradigms in African Oral Narrative.* Ibadan: Ibadan Cultural Studies Group, 1999.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Denny Peter J. "Rational Thought in Oral Culture and Literate Decontextualization." in *Literacy and Orality*. (Eds.) Orlson R. David and Torrance Nancy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Dossou, C. François. "Writing and Oral Tradition in the Transmission of Knowledge" in *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*. (Ed.) Hountodji, J. Paulin, Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997.

Drewal, Margaret. *Yoruba Ritual: Play, Performance, Agency*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Drewal, John Henry and Drewal, Thompson Margaret. *Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Dundes, Alan. "The Making and Breaking of Friendship as a Structural Frame In African Folktales." In *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*. (Ed.) P. and E. Maranda. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

Echeruo, Michael J.C. *Victorian Lagos: Aspects of Nineteenth Century Lagos Life*. London: Macmillan, 1977.

Echeruo, Michael J.C. "Concert and Theatre in Late Nineteenth Century Lagos," in *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 74, September 1962.

Eco, Umberto. *Faith in Fakes*: *Travels in Hyperreality*. London: Minerva, 1997.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Iranus. *Ethology: The Biology of Behavior*. New York: Holt, Rinahart and Winston, 1970.

Elugbe, Ben and Omamor, Augusta. *Nigerian Pidgin.* Ibadan: Heinemann, 1991.

Enekwe, Ossie. "Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland." In Ogunbiyi, Yemi (ed.) *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria.* Lagos: Nigeria Magazine special Publication, 1981.

Euba, Akin. *Essays on Music in Africa.* Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies,1988.

Ewens, Graeme. *Africa O-Ye! A Celebration of African Music.* London: Guiness Publishing Ltd., 1991.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Fiofori, Tam. "Afrobeat: Nigeria's Gift to World Popular Music," in *Post Express,* Saturday, August 16 & 23, 1997.

Firth, R. "Problems and Assumptions in an Anthropological Study of Religion." In *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.* 89: 129-48, 1959.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class?* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture.* London and New York: 1992.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language.* Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

_____. "What is an Author?" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews.* Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press, 1977. 113-38.

Frye, Northrope. *Anatomy of Criticism.* Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Eke, Peter. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 17, no.1, 1975.

Garuba, Harry. "Mask and Meaning in Black Drama." Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Ibadan, 1988.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Giammon, Vic. "Problem of Method in Historical Study of Popular Music." *Popular Music Perspective*, Sweden. 1988.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Goldstein, ed. *Black Life and Culture in the United States*. New York: Crowell and Sons, 1971.

Goody, J. and Watt, Ian. "The Consequences of Literacy." *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Ed. Jack Goody. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968. 27-68.

Grass, Randall. "Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: The Art of an Afrobeat Rebel." *The Drama Review* 30 (1986):131-148.

Gray, Benningson. "Repetition in Oral Literature." *Journal of American Folklore* 84: 333. (1971).

Grinker, Roy Richard and Steiner, Chrisopher B., ed. *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*. Oxford: Blackwell PVDC Publishers, 1997.

Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.

_____. *Legitimation Crisis*. London: Heinemann, 1975.

Hall, Stuart. 'Some Paradigms in Cultural Studies.' In *Annali* 3, 1978.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Hall, Stuart and Whannel, Paddy. *The Popular Arts.* London: Hutchingson, 1964.

Handy, Charles. *The Gods of Management: The Changing Work of Organisations.* London: Arrow Books, 1991.

_____. *Understanding Organisations*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976.

Harrison, Paul Carter. *The Drama of Nommo*. New York: Grove Press, 1972.

_____., ed. *Kuntu Drama*. New York: Grove Press, 1982.

Havelock, Eric. "The Oral-Literature Equation: A Formula for the Modern Mind" in *Literacy and Orality*. (Eds.) Orlson R. David and Torrance Nancy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

_____. *The Muse Learns to Write*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986.

_____. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984.

Hollander, J. and Kermode, Frank, ed. *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature, Vol. I.* London, Toronto, New York. 1973.

Horn, David and Tagg, Philip. *Popular Music Perspective*. Sweden: The International

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Association of the Study of Popular Music, 1982.

Hountodji, J. Paulin. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality.* 2nd Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Hoyles, Martin, ed. *The Politics of Literacy.* London: Writers and Readers, 1982.

Innis, H. *The Bias of Communication.* Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1951.

Ibitokun, Benedict. *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Geledeof of the Ketu-Africa Yoruba Sub-Group in West Africa.* Ile Ife: OAU Press, 1996.

Internet. "*2 Live Crew.* Alt.culture: 2 Live Crew." Hughes, Langston; Mingus, Charles and Feather.

Irele, Abiola. *The African Imagination.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

_____. (Ed.) *Research in African Literatures.* vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 1997, Indiana University Press.

_____. *Aime Cesaire Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal.* Ibadan: Horn Press, 1994.

_____. "Tradition and the Yorùbá Writer: D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka." *Odu II*, 1975.

Jameson, Frederick. *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism.* Princeton and London: Princeton

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Jaye, C. Michael and Watts, Chalmers Ann. *Literature and the American Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1981.

Jeyifo, Biodun. *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama.* London: New Beacon Books, 1985.

___. *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Threatre of Nigeria.* Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1984.

Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina Emma. *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria.* Champaign Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Joseph, A. Richard. *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic.* Ibadan and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Kelber, W. *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

Kennedy, Michael. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Kinni-Esi, Sylvia "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.

Landow, George. *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Lawal, Babatunde. *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender and Social Harmony in an African Culture*. London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.

Leach, Edmund. *Culture and Communication*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Leach, Edward. *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1969.

Lehrman, Paul and Tully Tim. *MIDI for the Professional*. 1993.

Lenin, V.I. *The State and the Revolution*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985.

Leonard. *Weary Blues*. Polygram Record, Compact Disc Digital Audio (841 660-2), 1990.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology: I*. Trans. John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

_____. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Lionet, Francoise. *Post Colonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Lord, Albert. *The Singer of Tales*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Lull, James, ed. *Popular Music and Communication*. Newbury Park and London: Sage Publications, 1992.

Mabinuori, Idowu. *Fela: Why Blackman Carry Shit*. Kaduna: Opinion Media Ltd., 1986.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. New York: Norton, 1926.

_____. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge, 1922.

Mamdani, Mahmood. "When Does a Settler Become a Native? Reflections on the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equitorial and Southern Africa." Text of Inaugural Lecture as A. C. Jordan Professor of African Studies, University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, 1998.

Manuel, Peter. *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1962.

Meyer, Leonands B. *Emotion and the Meaning of Music*. Chicago: University Press of

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Chicago, 1974.

Moore, Carlos. *Fela, Fela, This Bitch of a Life*. London: Allison and Busby, 1982.

Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Idea of Africa.* Bloomington, Indianapolis, and London: Indiana University Press and James Currey, 1994.

_____. *The Invention of Africa.* Bloomington, Indianapolis, and London: Indiana University Press and James Currey, 1988.

Mukerji and Schudson., ed. *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Negroponte, Nicholas. *Being Digital.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995.

Nietzche, Frederich. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals.* New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956.

Nketia, Kwabena J.H. "The Poetry of Akan Drums." *Black Orpheus*: vol. 1, no. 2. Ibadan: Mbari Club/Daily Times, 1968.

Nkrumah, K. *I Speak of Freedom*. London: Heinemann, 1961.

_____*Towards Colonial Freedom*. London: Heinemann, 1962.

_____ *Africa Must Unite*. London: Heinemann, 1963.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

_____*Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Heinemann, 1965.

_____. *Consciencism*. London: Panaf Books, 1970.

Norman, Jacobs, ed *Culture for Millions*. Boston: Boston University Press, 1964.

Norzick, Robert. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

Nwezi, Meki et. al. "Beyond Song Text—The Lingual Fundamentals of African Drum Music." in *The Landscape of African Music*. (Eds.) Agawu, Kofi and Irele, Abiola. Indiana: Indiana University Press. RIAL, Volume 32, Number 2, Summer 2001. 90-104.

Nyerere, Julius. *Ujaama. Essays on Socialism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Ogunba, Oyin and Irele, Abiola. *Theatre in Africa*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1978.

Okpewho, Isidore. African *Oral Literature*: *Background, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington and Indianopolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

_____. *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

_____. *The Epic in Africa*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.

Olatunji, O. Olatunde. *Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1984.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Olorunyomi, Dapo. "Towards an Aesthetics of Popular Arts." Ph.D. graduate seminar, University of Ilorin, 1991.

Olorunyomi, Sola. "Theatre in the Niger Valleys." *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts*. vol. 1, no.3, 1996.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologization of the Word.* London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

_____. *Remus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Orlson R. David and Torrance Nancy. "Introduction" in *Literacy and Orality*. (Eds.) Orlson R. David and Torrance Nancy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Osaghae, O. Eghosa et. al. *Urban Violence in Africa*. Ibadan: IFRA, 1994.

Osundare, Niyi. *Waiting Laughters*. Lagos: Malthouse, 1990.

Otiono, Nduka. *The Night Hides with a Knife*. Ibadan: New Horn, 1996.

_____. *Voices from the Rainbow*. Lagos: Oracle, 1997.

Oyortey, Zagba, "Still Dancing Downwards and Talking Back" in Helen Thomas (ed.) *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1983)

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale.*, Trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.

Proudhon, P.J. *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century.* London: Freedom Press, 1923.

Raji, Remi. *A Harvest of Laughters.* Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1997.

"Report of the Lagos Government on Administrative Board of Inquiry into the Disturbances at 14A Agege Motor Road, Idi Oro, 1977."

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America.* Hanover New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

Rowley, M.A. *Verbal Art as Performance.* Newbury: Newbury Publishers, 1977.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics.* Trans. Ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye with Albert Riedlinger, 1915. New York: McGraw Hill, 1966.

Schechner, Richard. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance.* London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

_____.*Performance Theory.* New York: Routledge, 1988.

Schipper, Mineke. *Beyond The Boundaries.* London: Allen & Co., 1989.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Seidman, Steven. *Jurgen Habermas on Society and the Public Sphere: A Reader.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Sklar, Richard L. *Nigerian Political Parties.* New York: Nok Publishers, 1963.

Smith, Robert. *Kingdom of the Yorùbá.* London: Methuen & Co., 1969.

Soyinka-Ajayi, Omofolabo *Yorùbá Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture.* New Jersey: African World Press, 1998.

Soyinka, Wole: *Death and The King's Horseman.* London: Eyre Methuen, 1975.

_____. *Myth, Literature and the African World.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Storey, John. *An Introduction Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Tagg, Philip. "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.

Taiwo "Colonialism and its Aftermath: The Crisis of Knowledge Production." *Callaloo* vol. I. 16. no 4.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Tell magazine, February 5,1999.

Thomas, Helen, ed. *Dance, Gender and Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1983.

Thompson, E.P. *The making of the English Working Class*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980.

Turner, Terrisa. "Petroleum, Recession and the Internationalization of Class Struggle in Nigeria."*Labour, Capital and Society*. Vol. 18, no.1 (1985).

Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition As History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Veal, Michael. "And After the Continentalist." *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts*. vol. 2, no.2, 1997.

Wastberg, Per. *The Writer in Modern Africa*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968.

Waterman, Christopher Alan. *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Wellek, Rene and Warren Austen. *Theory of Literature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.

West Africa magazine, May 2, 1981.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords.* London: Fontana, 1983.

_____.*The Long Revolution.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965.

Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Worcester, David. *The Art of Satire*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1960.

Young, Crawford. *Ideology and Development in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

APPENDIX I

FELA'S ALBUMS

(1)
TITLE - ARMY ARRANGEMENT-VOCAL

YEAR OF PRODUCTION - 1985

LYRICS:

Whether you like or you no like- 2ce
After you hear this true talk
If you like you cool

CHORUS: GEGE

If you no like you hang
If you hang you go die
You go die for nothing
We go carry your body Go
Police station you go die o
Wrongfully

CHORUS: GEGE 7ce

GEGE
100 words yabis on original particulars

Man de suffer he no fit talk na condition
Man dey suffer he fit talk na condition too
Suffer dey Africa paparapa-2ce
A a suffer paparapa-2ce

Condition dey paparapa
Me I know say you be African man
And you dey suffer paparapa
Which condition you dey I don't know
The condition me dey me I know
My condition don reach make I act

If your condition too dey make shake
And you still dey no talk the way you feel
Make you open your ear very well
To ear the true talk wey I dey talk
Listen make you dey gree for me every day
And night you ear me talk one day
You self go gree with me

OBAFESRIA - LIBRARY

To be act the way as de feel, I act the way as I de feel
Remember one day of course we must die

Nigeria gets money -2ce
Foreign money for oversea -2ce
Announcement start to happen
New paper carry dem paper
Radio dey shout for studio
Obasanjo turn vocalist
Yaradua road manager
Heavy Government statement
7 billion naira missing
Missing from oversea
Foreign currency scandal
Dem start to arrest ever' body o o o o
He no finish..... 3ce
Doctor lawyer hustlers, Engineer fotographers
All of dem kirikiri 10-15 years in jail

After one year inside jail
Civilian Government takes over
Dem realize all of dem
Dem say dem be innocent o o o o o
He no finish,.....7ce
2.8 Billion Naira -2ce
Oil money is missing -2ce
Dem set upn enquiries dem say
Money no lost, o o o o o o
Dem dobaru every' body
Supervisor Obasanjo
Them say make we no talk o o o
Money no lost dem shout again

Enquiry come close o o o o
He no finish.....6ce
Election story nko
Obasanjo plan am very well
He takes old politicians
Wey rule Nigeria before
The same old politicians
Wey spoil Nigeria before
Obasanjo carry all of dem
All of dem dey there now
He no finish.....5ce

We young Africans
De gets two ears for head
Them get two eyes too

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Them dey see the thing we de happen
Yes
Them dey ear am too
Two people they fat with gig money – big
And the rest dey hungry (yes)
Me Fela I challenge Obasanjo
Make he carry me go any court
I go open book for am
Na wayo Government we dey o o
Egbami o o o o 4ce
Na rijimo Government we dey o o o
Ye paripaa o o o o
Na party Government we dey
Egbami o o o o o
Rijimo ni, pady arrangeee

Wayo, wayo Economy
Add am together gif di answer
Army arrangement

(2)
TITLE -UP SIDE DOWN

YEAR OF PRODUCTION - 1976

LYRICS :

Open that book dictionary
Open am make we see - 2ce
Up side down he de there proper
Open am make we see
Them recognize the world for sure yes
Open am make we see
Because he get him meaning too
Head for down yansh for up
Up side down get him meaning too -2ce
Head for down yansh for up
I don travel I don see
Like any professor for this land
The thing wey I see I go talk
About up side up and down side down
For oversea where I see
Communication organize chorus pata pata
Agriculture organize chorus pata pata
System organize chorus pata pata

CADESRIA - LIBRARY

Education organize chorus pata pata
Electri organize chorus pata pata
Them people organise chorus pata pata
English man get English name
American man get American name
German man get German name
Russian man get Russian name
Chinese man get Chinese name
For Africa my house I don see
Like any Professor for this land
I don't have to travel anywhere
For everything dey under my nose
For Africa my house I don see e e
Village boku road no de
Land boku food no de
Area boku house no de
People no dey bear African name
People no dey wear African dress
People no know African grade
People no dey think African style
Communication organize chorus pata pata
Agriculture organize chorus pata pata
Education organize chorus pata pata
Dem System organize chorus pata pata
Electric organize chorus pata pata

(3)
TITLE -ROFOROFO FIGHT

YEAR OF PRODUCTION - NOT MENTIONED
(There are four tracks in this album)

LYRICS : (1) - ROFOROFO FIGHT

Get away fork off who are you go an' die
Fork away, get away who are you e
Go sheet
You dey craze I no craze fork away
Who are you e
Na two people dey yab so -2ce
Where them they yab roforofo dey -2ce

CHORUS:
Two people dey yab hen
Crowd dey look hen
Roforofo dey hen
Wetin you go see hen

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Roforofo fight e hen
Wetin yoy go hear hen
Roforofo fight e hen

If you dey among the crowd wey dey look
If you yourself you yourself de among
The crowd wey de look; And your friend
De among the two wey dey yab
Tell am tell am tell am make him
No fight o
Make him no fight because roforofo dey
Your friend don vex him don vex pata
Pata him no go hear -2ce
Bye and bye the fight go start
Bye and bye them go fall for roforofo o
Them face go be roforofo face
Them yansh go be roforofo yansh
Them body go be roforofo body
You no go know your friend be
You no go fit help your friend just
Because roforofo dey
If you want help your friend
Roforofo go rub for your face
If you want help your friend
Roforofo go rub for your yansh
You don tell am make him no vex
You don tell am before make him no
Fight o
Make him no fight because roforofo dey

CHORUS :

Roforofo don change them hen
Them go look like twins hen
You no go know who be who hen
You no go your friend from who hen
You don tell am before make him no fight
Roforofo de for there hen

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

LYRICS: (2) - QUESTION JAM ANSWER

When question drop for mouth
Question go start to run
When answer drop for mouth -2ce
Answer go run after am
When Qustion jam answer for road

Na another thing go sele O
Why you match my leg for ground
You no see my leg for road
Question don drop for mouth
Question go start to run -2ce
Why you put leg for road
You no see say I dey come
Answer don drop for mouth
Answer don start to run -2ce

LYRICS: (3) - TROUBLE SLEEP YANGA WAKE AM

When trouble sleep yanga go wake am
Wetin him de find. Palaver him de find o
Palaver him go get o .Palaver him go get
When cat sleep, rat go bite him tall
Mr. Tenant lost him job. Him sit down
For house. Him de think of chop. Mr
Landlord come wake am up. Him say
Mr. Pay me your rent
Wetin him de find: palaver him de find o
Palaver him go get. Palaver him go get
My friend just come from prison
Him de look for work
Waka waka day and night
Police man stop am for road
Him say Mr. I charge you for wandering
Wetin him de find
Palaver him de find etc.
Mr. Husband marry for church
He make big party
Then him start to spray
Because him love him wife
Mrs. Wife come run away
Bank manager run come
Him say Mr. Pay me your debt
Wetin him dey find for Lagos o
Palaver him dey find etc.
When trouble sleep yanga go wake am
Wetin him dey find, Palaver him dey find
Palaver him go get o. Palaver him go get
When cat sleep rat go bite him tall
Wetin him de find; Palaver him de find
Palaver him go get o. Palaver him go get

GODESRIA - LIBRARY

APPENDIX II

Transcript excerpts of recorded interview by Olusola Olorunyomi with Afrobeat pioneer Fela Anikolapo –Kuti on Thursday December 5, 1991 at Fela's No. 7, Gbemisola Street, Ikeja – Lagos. Messrs. Gbenga Aroyehun and Muyiwa Adekeye assisted with the camera. The interview was conducted in a breezy, informal atmosphere, amidst an ever rising cloud o f marijuana ' herbal' smoke wafting by the hung portraits of Malcolm X, Thomas Sankara and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. As often happens when he is within his residence, the Chief Priest was in his pants.

Q: …How did you come about the name "Cooler Lobitos"; it does not seem to have a direct bearing on African ideology.

A: … I change my name to 'African 70' in 1969 and again in 1985, I change the name of my music to 'African Music' because 'Afrobeat' is only a meaningless commercial name. So I changed back to 'African music', no more 'Afrobeat', though some call it 'Afrobeat' on their own.

Q: Many people assume your performance venue should be called a club but you call it a shrine. Is there any significant difference you attach to the two?

A: Why should it be a club?

Q: Well it's a …

A: Don't they play music in the churches?

CODESRIA LIBRARY

Q: Yes, they do.

A: What 's the matter with the name of a shrine?

Q: Save that is appears like the place you worship in.

A: Don't they worship in the church?

Q: Yeah, they do.

A: Don't they play music there?

Q: Year, they do.

A: So what's the problem? I say what's the problem? (Now becoming emphatic).

Q: Yeah, O.K., we want to know for instance...

A: No, you should know more. You have shrine to play music, without music, there's nothing like shrine.

Q: Is that also why you start all performances with ritual rites?

A: Not all performances.

Q: I see. What are the specific days?

A: There are days of worship, days of divination, etc.

Q: What days are those?

A: Saturdays.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Q: Can you explain to us the relevance of the background portraits of Nkrumah, Malcolm X, Chief Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti see around here?

A: Just a remembrance of their work.

Q: Coming to instrumentation Chief Priest, since you play African music, one wants to know if specific instruments have specific meanings, or you merely use them only in order to achieve melody?

A: (Silence, no answer, merely gazes on).

Q: For instance, are there certain kinds of instruments you would reject for not being of Pan-Africanist orientation? Take the Yoruba Ogboni as an instance, they have special cultic drums. I remember you were once interviewed on why you use a presumably western instrument as the guitar and you said the guitar is African.

A: There's no instrument that is not originally from Africa.

Q: Including the piano?

A: Yes, the piano came from the idea of the xylophone.

Q: Please, what are your favourite indigenous musicians or music forms.

A: Traditional music.

Q: Traditional? There are various types of traditional music.

A: All. Everybody has something to say.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

Q: I'd like to know about ...

A: Last question.

Q: This Movement Against Second Slavery (MASS)...

A: Is that your last question ?

Q: Chief Priest, this is very important.

A: Eh. eh. Is that your last question?

Q: (mischievous laughter).

A: Because I have to go in now. O.K. We have to continue from here, the Movement against Second Slavery. First of all, economically, we presently don' t have the money to run ' THE MASS', but it stays there as an idea for the moment. The point is that word is spiritual, it may have other effects in the future. It may not turn higher into a political party; it may transform into a force.

Q: A spiritual force?

A: It's possible. It's possible

Q: You're making a distinction between MASS and MOP?

A: O yeah, MOP was a political Party.

Q: Yeah, I know, but it was also an idea

A: Yes, the Mass is both political and spiritual too, but the political aspect is a bit weak for economical reason for now. The point is, it's more spiritual than

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

political. It's going to be a force, such that people would partake in. That's what I see about it, because we are not saying what is not there; we are saying what is there, but people cannot see. But with time they would see it because that is what Africa needs now, Africa doesn't need politics. Africa needs force (spiritual)—want force, something that has a meaning to people's lives. As regards MASS, people have to see that there is second slavery. They must see it, because when the white people gave us independence, they introduced confusion: voting, parliament, etc. It's the same way our own people dey give us independence, soldier for that matter, and people don't see it.

Q: But people are beginning to see it.

A: Uhu. So anytime they call it third republic, I say what third republic is this? Who is giving us independence? Soldier dey give me independence? So, who is what? What's the shit behind all these talking. Third Republic? How? You see, am just trying to show you the mentality of people who are ruling us. It means they have taken us as slaves already. So, this make person look deeper into life. Is life really what it is? Is Banbagida really a black man? Or are there two forms of a human being? Is there the spiritual form of a human being and the material form? If there are two forms, then is Banbagida really a white man, camouflaging as a Blackman? Because, these are the truths people have to investigate and understand. That is why MASS is a force. Uhum.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

APPENDIX III

The following photographs detail different moments of Afrobeat as musical performance and cultural politics

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

B. Fela, at the Afrika Shrine on Pepple Street, Ikeja, Lagos. (Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)

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

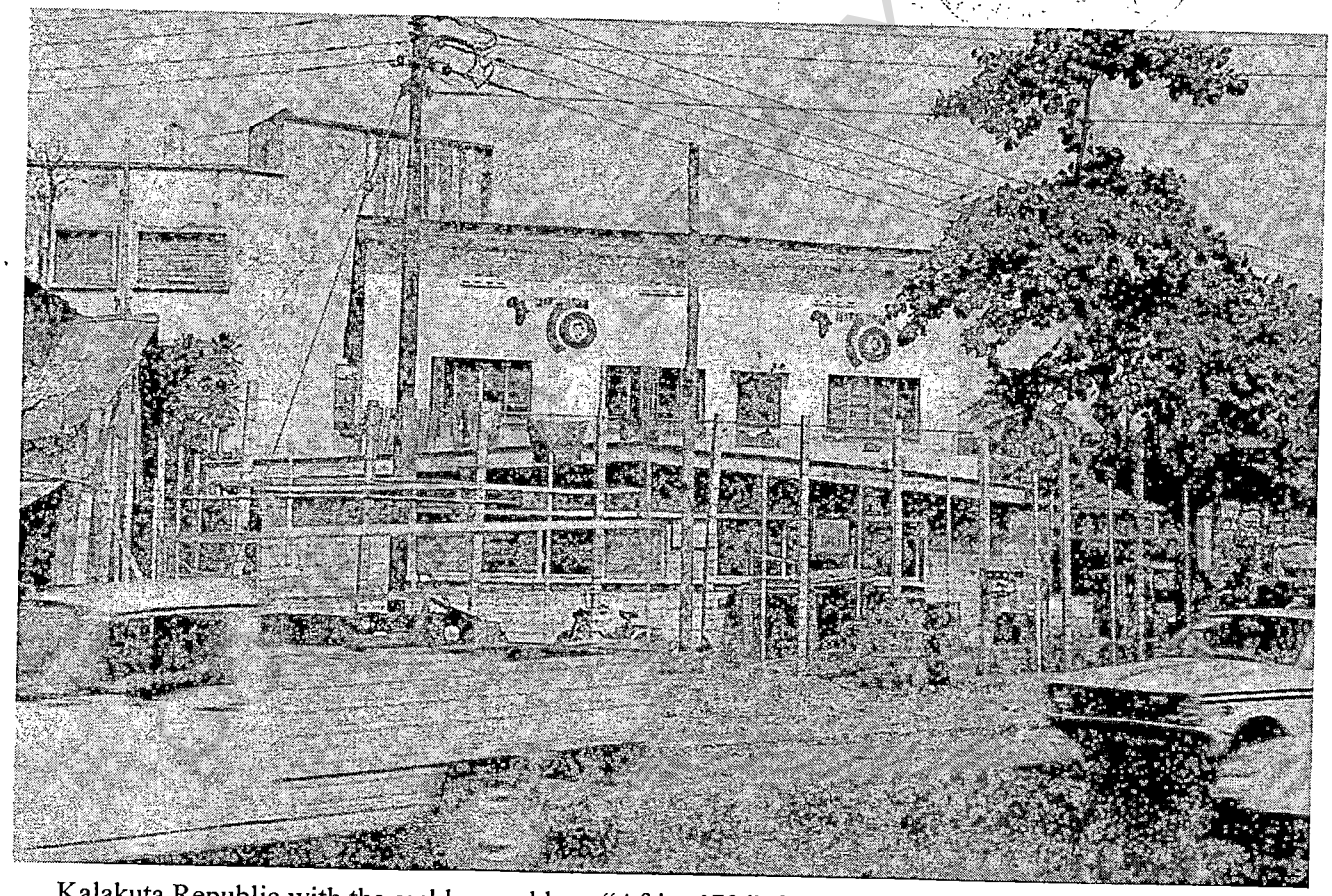
D. "Do not say Indian Hemp; say Nigeria Natural Grass (NNG)."—Fela (Courtesy, *TheNews* magazine.)

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

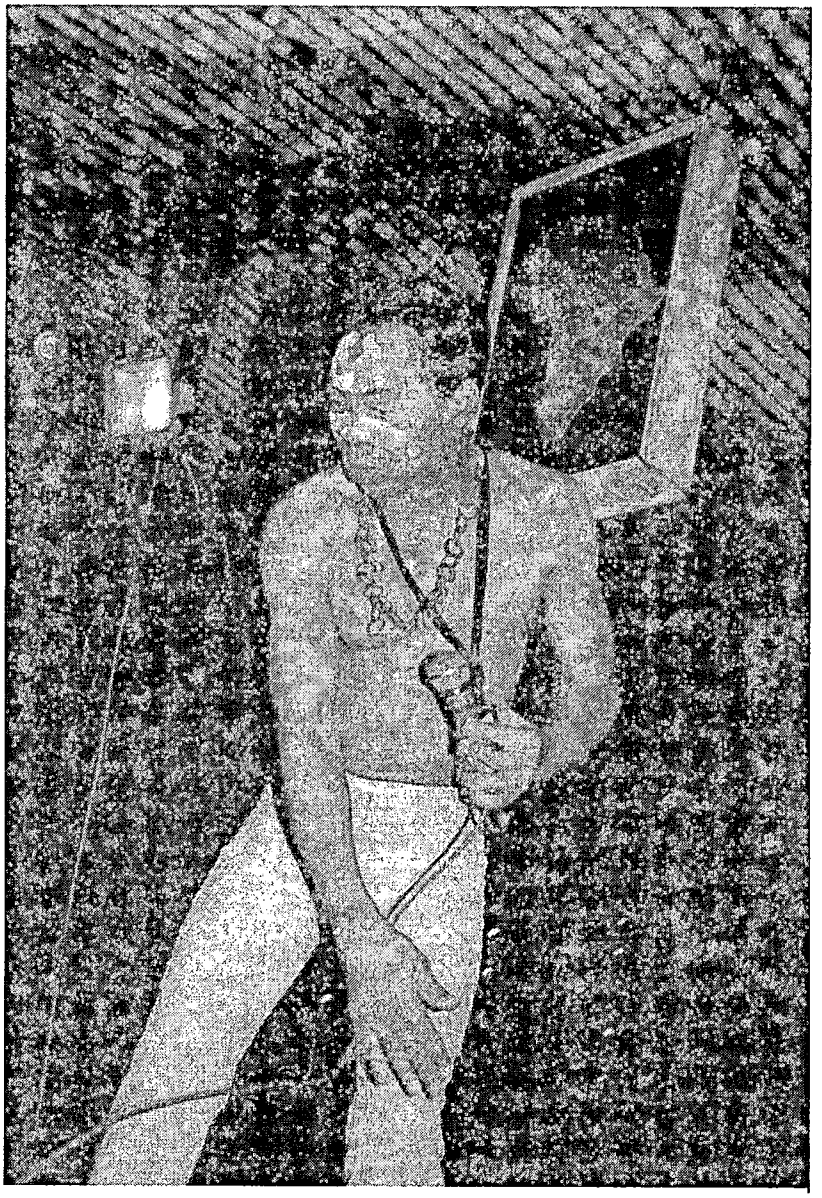
F. Fela in worship session, with an acolyte in crouching position, at the Afrika Shrine. (Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)

G. Fela's queens, and singers onstage in Europe, 1984. (photos this page courtesy of Juliet Highet)/ Multi-instrumentalist Fela on Piano, (Credit, Chico)

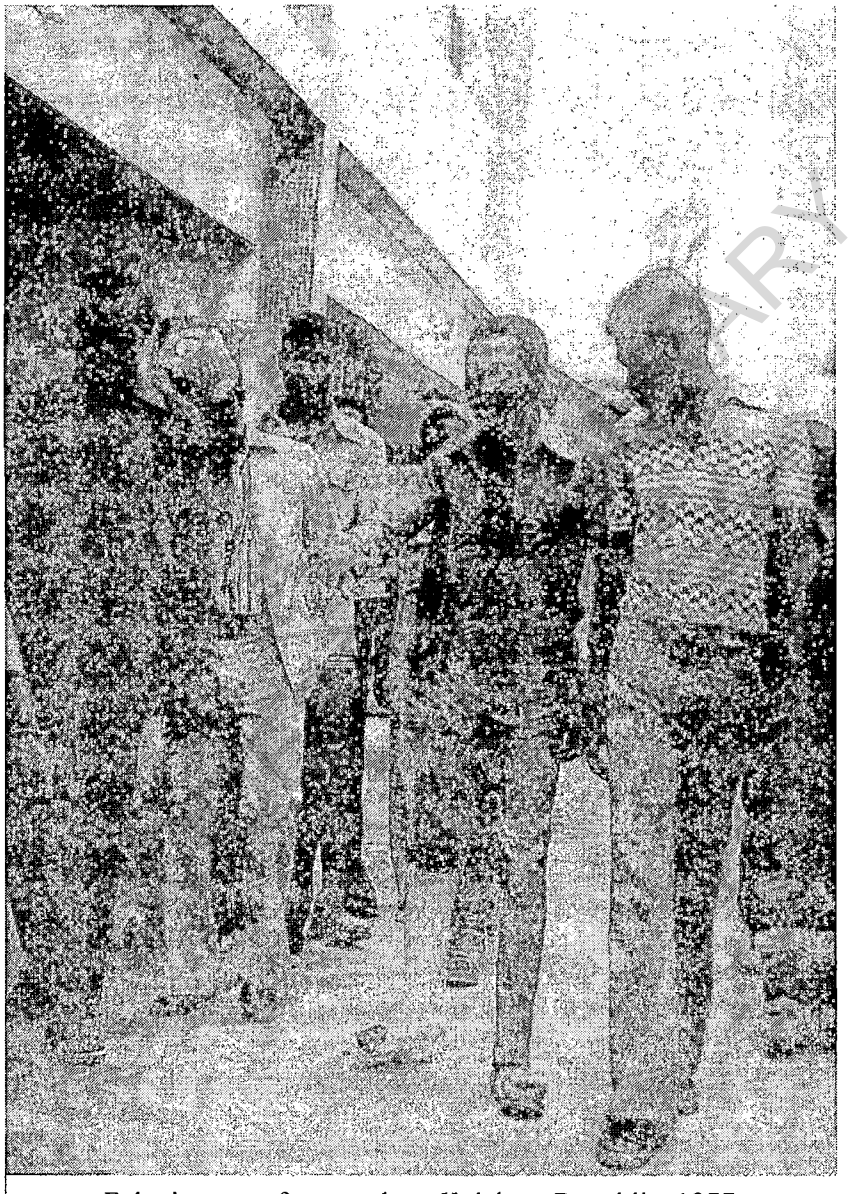
CODESRIA - LIBRARY



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



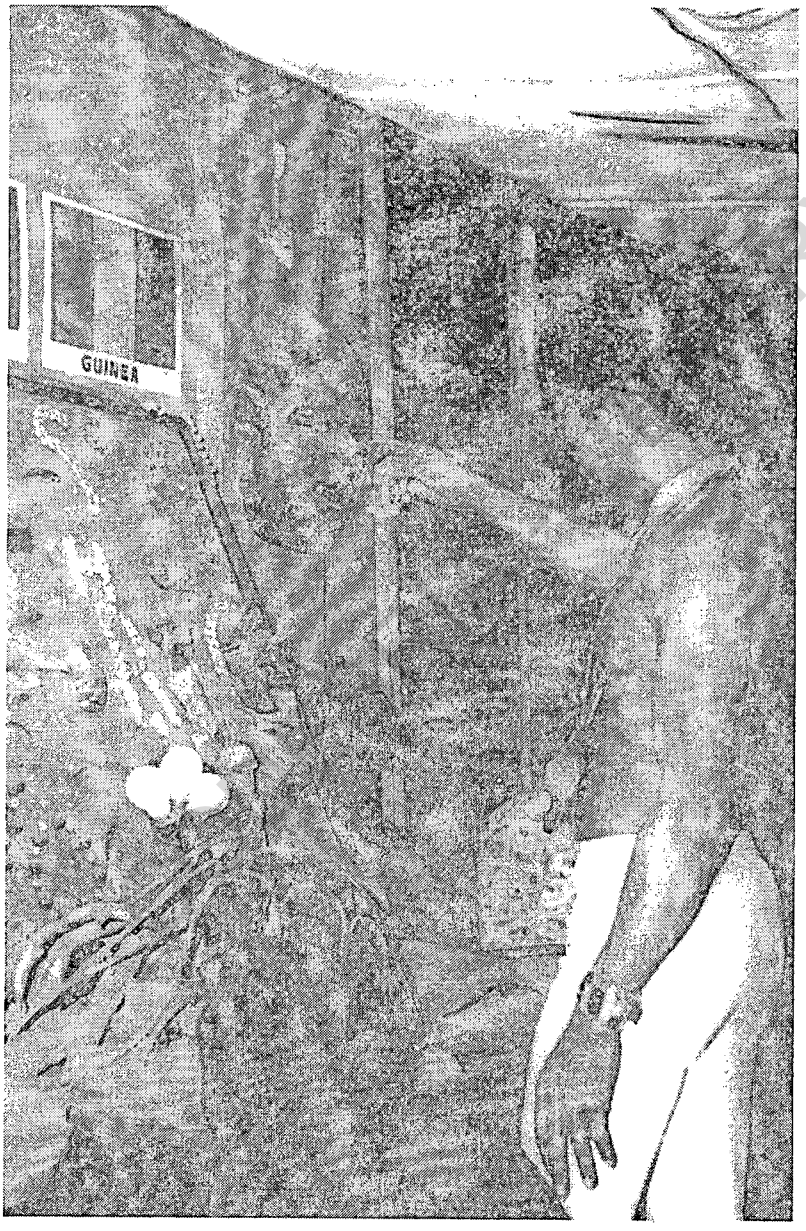
Fela, at the Afrika Shrine on Pepple Street, Ikeja, Lagos.
(Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)



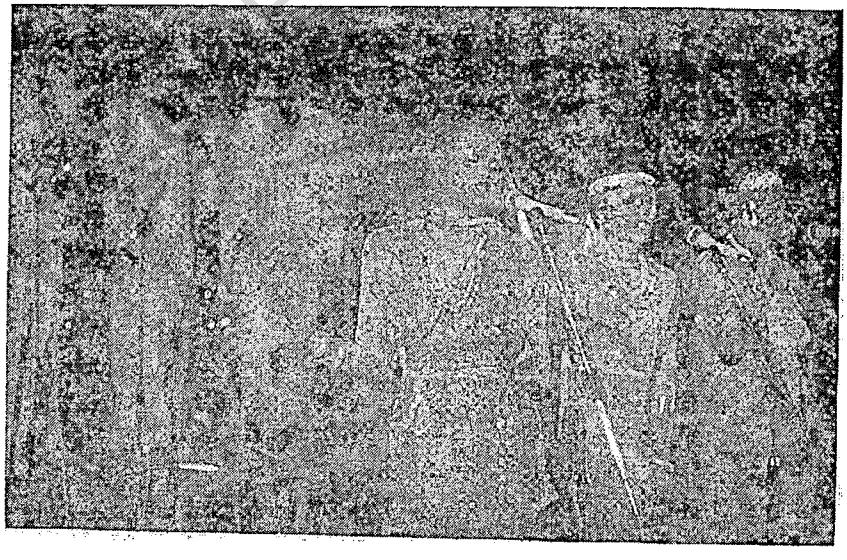
Fela, in cast, after attack on Kalakuta Republic, 1977.
(Courtesy, Femi B. Osunla)

"Do not say Indian Hemp; say Nigeria Natural Grass (NNG)."—Fela (Courtesy, *TheNews* magazine.)

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



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



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

250

250