

AFROBEAT, FELA AND BEYOND: SCENES, STYLE AND IDEOLOGY

by

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Afrobeat first emerged in the late 1960s amid the rapidly changing postcolonial terrain of Lagos, Nigeria. Created by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (1938-1997), the genre blends scathing anti-establishment lyrics with Yoruba traditional music and Western forms, particularly jazz. Fela's ideological dictum: "Music is the Weapon of the Future," encapsulates his view of music as an oppositional tool, his enactment of which led to frequent violent confrontations with the Nigerian state. Throughout his lifetime, Fela held hegemonic sway over afrobeat's stylistic and ideological trajectories. However, following his death, the genre has witnessed a global upsurge with protégés emerging in New York City, San Francisco, Paris, London and other cultural capitals of the world.

In my dissertation, I chronicle afrobeat's transnational networks and discuss processes of stylistic and ideological affiliation through which such networks have emerged. Using the conceptual tool of genre as social process, I combine archival and ethnographic data collected during several months of fieldwork in the United States and Nigeria, in order to argue the conditionality of genre definitions and boundaries.

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PREFACE

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Above all, this dissertation is dedicated to my father, Oba Olusanya Adegboyega Dosunmu (Amororo II) whose unwavering support and faith in me has carried me through. THANK YOU.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In a list featuring icons such as Nelson Mandela, Pablo Picasso and the Beatles, *Time Magazine*, in 2006, named Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (1938-1997) as one of the heroes of the last sixty years. In the article, afrobeat, a form of dance-protest music created by Fela, is described as “revolutionary;” a soundtrack of resistance that gave Nigerians hope during a dark era of military dictatorship.¹ Over the last two decades, a different type of afrobeat revolution has been underway as diverse cities around the world gain new Fela protégés. Once the self-declared “Black President” of a Lagos-based counterculture, Fela has become the iconic center of a worldwide movement.

Olufela Ransome-Kuti² was born in the town of Abeokuta in Southwestern Nigeria. Scion of an elite Christian family, his father Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti was a respected Anglican clergyman and founding chairman of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). Fela’s mother, Funmilayo-Ransome-Kuti, was a foremost women’s rights activist and nationalist who, in the 1940s, led a series of landmark protests against separate tax rates for women that resulted in the abdication of the Egba monarch, Oba Ademola II.

Fela received his early education at Abeokuta Grammar School where his father was principal. It was under the stern tutoring of Rev. Kuti that Fela learnt the rudiments of music and piano. As a teenager, Fela started making periodic trips to Lagos—some 60 miles south of

¹ Simon Robinson, “60 Years of Heroes: Fela Kuti,” *Time Magazine, Europe Edition*, 168/21 (2006).

² Born Olufela Ransome-Kuti, he changed his last name to Anikulapo-Kuti in 1975. In this dissertation I will generally use “Fela” as he was, and still is fondly called by fans, or Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Within the context of events that occurred before 1975, I will use Fela Ransome-Kuti.

Abeokuta—where he made his first forays into the world of Nigerian popular music singing with The Cool Cats, a band directed by highlife veteran, Victor Olaiya. In August 1958, Fela traveled to England to attend the Trinity College of Music, London. He spent the next five years taking courses in music history, theory, harmony, counterpoint, and trumpet. While in London, Fela also immersed himself in the city’s vibrant nightlife, forging musical affiliations with the West Indian community, and especially the jazz scene. It was during these years that Fela began his decade-long quest to forge a distinctive “global” sound. Upon returning to Nigeria in December 1962, Fela began pushing the stylistic boundaries of the Lagosian soundscape; forming a jazz quintet at first, and later, a highlife-jazz fusion band called Koola Lobitos. Though floundering initially, Fela continued to experiment, tapping ideas from current popular music trends and blending those influences with indigenous African rhythms. It was this heady mix of highlife, jazz and traditional African music that Fela labeled “afrobeat” in 1968. The following year, he traveled to the United States where he encountered Black Panther activism, an experience that spurred him on to new ideological and creative directions.

By the early 1970s, Fela and his Africa ’70 band had taken the city of Lagos by storm with a new sound hailed as “intriguing...one of the greatest achievements by any Nigerian popular musician this century.”³ With widely popular hits such as “Jeun Koku,” “Open and Close,” “Shakara” (Oloje), “Lady,” and “Gentleman,” Fela revolutionized the Nigerian urban soundscape. Afrobeat was distinctive; cosmopolitan yet local, and representing, particularly to the youth, all things progressive.

During the 1970s, afrobeat evolved into an identifiable counterculture. The movement—libertine and populist in orientation—drew adherents from a cross-section of Nigerian society. Regular convergences took place at Fela’s communal residence and the Afrika Shrine, where he performed several times weekly. When he was not delivering quirky tunes like “Ikoyi Mentality Versus Mushin Mentality,” “Question Jam Answer,” and “Shakara,” Fela railed against the

³ Critic, “Birth of a New Sound,” *The Nigerian Daily Times*, July 22, 1970

government, Christianity, Islam and “the West.” Fans, equally charged, provided an interactive audience for Fela’s marijuana inflected diatribes. In 1974, fifty officers of the Nigerian police force raided Fela’s commune and arrested him for Indian hemp possession, an offence punishable by a 10 year prison sentence. Although, Fela got out of jail in a relatively short time, this experience—popularly known as the “Alagbon episode”⁴—radically altered his views on the penal system and its value to society. In 1975, Fela dropped “Ransome,” the name a European missionary had bestowed on his grandfather, Canon Josiah Jesse Ransome-Kuti, and took up instead, “Anikulapo:” *he who holds death in his pouch*. Following the Alagbon Episode, Fela christened his commune, Kalakuta Republic, after the name inmates called the cell in which he had been detained. *Kalakuta*, a Swahili word meaning rascal, asserted Fela’s unflinching commitment to dissidence. The postfix, Republic, registered the secession of his commune from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Beginning with the songs, “Alagbon Close,” and “Expensive Shit”—both derisive denouncements of the 1974 incarcerations—Fela’s hallmark wit steadily gave way to a more scathing form of antiestablishment rhetoric that infuriated successive military regimes. Government responded with increasingly violent raids and censorship. By the 1970s, much of Fela’s catalogue had been blacklisted as NTBB (Not To Be Broadcast) by the state owned media.

I grew up in Lagos during the 1980s and 90s, a time when government induced media censorship ensured that my exposure to afrobeat was rather limited. I recall noticing a few of Fela’s records in my father’s vinyl collection; but in an age of audio cassettes and music videos, those records were nothing more than ancient relics to me. Furthermore, my middle-class, moderately conservative upbringing ensured that attendance at Fela’s weekly Afrika Shrine events was not even remotely feasible; and the idea of parleying around the notorious Kalakuta Republic, even on a curious whim,

⁴ “Alagbon,” refers to the infamous maximum security prison located at Alagbon Close, in Lagos.

was far from the scope of my imagination. In retrospect, it all seems ironic; for, I lived just a few blocks away from Shrine and commune. There was reason enough for my self-induced censorship. Within the neighborhood and beyond, *awon omo Fela* (Fela's brood)—as habitués of Fela's residences were called—had a controversial reputation. To be around Fela was to be demonized as a criminal, drug user, or morally lacking. In spite of apparent proximity, Fela's immediate sphere was to my world as Mars is to earth: close, but infinitely distant, *and* different. Perhaps afrobeat was played occasionally in the rickety black and yellow buses that maneuvered the pothole-ridden roads of Lagos; I recall that it sometimes streamed from distorted loudspeakers meshed within the metropole's crowded open markets. Amid the teeming cacophony of the Lagosian soundscape, I stayed aloof to afrobeat for a significant period of my life.

Incredible stories about Fela Anikulapo-Kuti come more readily to my mind. His legendary marriage to 27 women on the same day; his extended siege on the Decca offices in Lagos; his gift of buckets full of feces to an eminent business tycoon; the 1977 raze of Kalakuta by 1000 soldiers of the Nigerian army; the death of Fela's nationalist mother from injuries incurred during the raid; Fela's 1979 march to Dodan Barracks, seat of the military regime, where he delivered a replica of Mrs. Kuti's coffin to the Nigerian head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, in a symbolic gesture of ill will. These were more than just aspects of the icon's public persona; they were an integral part of Lagosian folklore.

Afrobeat inscribes Lagos, a metropolitan maelstrom where the volatile interactions between tradition and modernity, the old world and the new are enacted. Fela's musical repertoire is replete with songs that narrate life in the city: its vagaries, joys, frustrations and boundless penchant for spectacle. It is easy to read into afrobeat's jerky rhythms, rambunctious horns, sinuous guitars, and dissonant timbres, the surreal workings of a city where everything is tilted at an angle beyond reality. But more than just a metaphor for the city, afrobeat exudes a Lagosian essence that is neither merely reflexive nor derivative. Afrobeat is Lagos.

It is within this milieu that my private contradictions with afrobeat inhere. Although, I did not consciously listen to afrobeat, I lived the impossible realities of Lagos from day to day. Whether Fela was singing about a roadside raucous (“Rofofo fight”), the crisis of cultural identity (“Gentleman”), or traffic gridlocks (“Go Slow”), I had a fundamental apprehension of these experiences. Even though afrobeat was foreign to me, I was nevertheless a product of the same social conditions and cultural history from which it emerged. I nurtured an intrinsic affinity with the music.

My first real encounter with afrobeat occurred while I was a corps member with the National Youth Service of Nigeria. I was posted to the village setting of Osisioma, Abia State in Eastern Nigeria, where I taught music at a secondary school called St. Bridget’s College. I remember lying on my bunk bed and listening to the radio one Sunday afternoon, when big, bold sounds that seemed familiar engulfed the airwaves. Gripped, I listened for hours. Once I had discovered afrobeat in this way, Sunday afternoon listening became a ritual. Nigeria had made a tenuous transition from military dictatorship to democracy, and the presence of afrobeat on the radio could not have been entirely coincidental with the end of institutionalized autocracy. Still, I found it ironic that I had to travel so many miles to discover something that was native to the city in which I grew up. Regrettably, my Osisioma encounter with Fela’s music was momentary. After my year of national service, I moved back to Lagos and forgot about afrobeat. I would not return to this music for some time, in yet another place far removed from its origins.

In August 2003, I traveled from Lagos, Nigeria to Pennsylvania in the United States where I had been accepted into the graduate program in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh. While casually visiting with an American colleague of mine one day, I noticed that the music he was listening to sounded familiar. The disc spinning on his CD player was titled *Talkatif*, by a New York-based afrobeat band called Antibalas. Much about the CD intrigued me, from its Pidgin English title

to its unique album art which I would later learn was created by Fela's artist, Lemi Gharioku. The music itself left me a little ambivalent, however. I thought that the band, while technically sound, lacked the essence of Fela's afrobeat. Most of the songs were instrumental, and the few vocal numbers performed by the only Nigerian member of the band, Duke Amayo, struck me as pale in comparison to Fela's gruff declamations. On the whole, though, the experience left an impression strong enough to make me revisit Fela's music.

Even before I left Lagos for Pittsburgh, I knew that I would need a palliative for the anxieties of dislocation which were bound to ensue from being abroad. I therefore brought with me a random collection of local CDs, including a poorly done "party mix" of Fela hits, to which I danced whenever I needed my "Nigerian fix." Afrobeat had become for me, a sonic emblem of identity. I must have worn it loudly for it drew the attention of my roommate, who one day remarked,

"That's Fela Kuti, right?"

"Yes." I replied, pleasantly surprised, but also curious: *what could a young, middle class, white composer of avant garde music from Washington State know about Fela or afrobeat?*

My quest for answers to the above question led me to discover a wide network of afrobeat musicians from diverse backgrounds residing in cities around the world. Given the paradox of my own relationship to afrobeat, I wanted to know how it was that afrobeat, politically charged and distinctively Lagosian, had found its way to the American soundscape. What stylistic and ideological transformations have occurred in the course of afrobeat's westward migration? I also became curious about afrobeat in Lagos. Perhaps it wasn't too late to make up for all those years of institutional and self-induced censorship. These musings lie at the core of my dissertation.

1.1 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The present study is an investigation into the global state of afrobeat. Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, throughout the four or so decades of his career, held hegemonic sway over afrobeat. Even today, his influence looms large across the global afrobeat soundscape. Thus, a substantial portion of this dissertation narrates and analyzes Fela's creation and development afrobeat. Beyond Fela's practice, however, I also examine the contemporary afrobeat scene. In particular, I focus on two locales: New York City and Lagos, both epicenters in the birth, growth and diffusion of the genre. I describe, on the one hand, the ways in which widely dispersed musicians signify allegiance to Fela's musical discourse; and on the other, how such musicians have advanced the musical genre that Fela created. My aim in this dissertation is to synthesize both historical and contemporary events in order to present an inclusive view of the current state of afrobeat.

The global proliferation of afrobeat bands has been spurred by several interconnected occurrences. Fela's passing in 1997 renewed worldwide interest in his music. A few years later, MCA/Universal and afterwards Wrasse records embarked on massive reissue projects, making his previously hard to find catalogue widely available. Hip-hop artists and producers like Ahmir Questlove of The Roots, Q-Tip, Common, Timbaland, Missy Elliot, Blackalicious, Mos Def and Black Star were already sampling Fela's grooves and riffs, exposing previously unfamiliar listeners to afrobeat. Concurrently, clusters of musicians and artists who shared an appreciation for afrobeat were forming in New York City. In 1997, the first incarnation of Antibalas, a Brooklyn-based afrobeat band made up predominantly of Americans was formed. The next decade saw Antibalas embarking on intensive touring schedules of college towns, festivals circuits, and miscellaneous venues across the United States and beyond. These tours played a vital role in bringing afrobeat to wider audiences. Fans, in turn, became protégés and new afrobeat bands mushroomed across the United

States, Europe and Japan. Similar patterns were unfolding in other places. A global movement had begun.

Citing the events stated above and linking them one to another, while informative, leaves critical questions about the current state of afrobeat unanswered. In what ways has afrobeat been transformed during the course of its transnational migrations? How have musicians in diverse settings and cultures adapted the music to local contexts? What musical and ideological traits have been retained, and why? With this dissertation, I hope not only to map the networks behind the emergence of widely dispersed afrobeat scenes, but also to address the mechanisms through which those networks have come into being, the modes of stylistic affiliation between musicians, and the role of ideology in the construction of afrobeat identities.

1.2 STATE OF RESEARCH

Perhaps, compelled by Fela's dominance over afrobeat, scholars have approached the genre conservatively. Focus has primarily been on Fela, his music and his practice, with only marginal mention of contemporary afrobeat scenes in cities around the world.

The first critical studies on afrobeat appeared in the early 1980s. Since then, afrobeat scholarship has witnessed sustained growth. Scholars have approached the study of Fela's music from various perspectives, ranging from the sociological (Labinjoh 1982; Fairfax 1993), Marxist (Iyorchia 1985, 1986), historical (Veal 2000), postcolonial (Olorunyomi 2003) and literary (Olaniyan 2004). To varying degrees, all of these studies have an underlying biographical tone; difficult, perhaps, to avoid considering the intrinsic relationship between Fela's art, his lifestyle and his ideologies.

Carlos Moore's *Fela, Fela: this Bitch of a Life* (1982) stands out among early publications⁵ Written in a collaborative voice between the author and Fela, Moore presents a quasi-autobiography that combines detailed transcriptions of interviews with Fela about his life and career, and the author's own prose. Also notable is Idowu Mabinuori's *Why Black Man Carry Shit* (1986), a biographical sketch written from the author's unique perspective as an influential participant in Fela's countercultural movement. A more comprehensive biographical account is given by Michael Veal (2000) who, in addition to detailing historical contexts, also charts a running analysis of afrobeat's stylistic evolution.

Expectedly, a pervasive theme in the scholarship on afrobeat is the relationship between music and class politics. Ayu Iyorchia's (1985, 1986) Marxist analyses are notable in this regard. Although, Marxist approaches have been commonly applied to African literature and theater studies,⁶ very rarely has it been applied to music, Iyorchia's studies being the exception. Espousing the thesis that "in all class societies, artistic creation is formed, many times sub-consciously, by class interests,"⁷ Iyorchia positions Fela and his praxis as oppositional within a dehumanizing class conscious society. He further situates afrobeat within the broader context of protest music to which North American jazz and Jamaican reggae may also be added. Ayu pays particular attention to parallels of language use between reggae and afrobeat, asserting that just like the patois of Jamaican reggae, afrobeat's Pidgin English enabled Fela to attract a proletariat audience consisting of restless urban Youth, and the working class.⁸

⁵ A new edition with a forward by Gilberto Gil and an introduction by Margaret Busby was published in 2009 by Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago.

⁶ See, for example, the collection of essays in Gugelberger, *Marxism and African Literature*, 1986; Jeyifo, *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theater of Nigeria*, 1984.

⁷ Ayu, *Essays in Popular Struggle*, 4

⁸ Ayu, *Creativity and Protest*, 12

Sola Olorunyomi brings a broader approach to his analysis of afrobeat. In his book, *Afrobeat!: Fela and the Imagined Continent*, the prominent postcolonial theme of subversion is deeply explored using theoretical concepts formulated by scholars such as Franz Fanon, Mikhail Bakhtin and James Scott.

Tejumola Olaniyan's book, *Arrest the Music!: Fela, his Rebel Art and Politics*, is a comprehensive study that consciously aims to avoid the biographical mould, subscribing instead to literary criticism and historiography as analytical tools. Olaniyan explores ideas of self-presentation and representation as they play out in the emergence of a musical style couched in the antinomies of the postcolonial state. The author's engagement with the multidimensionality of Fela's art and person results in a deep analysis of incongruities and essentializations in Fela's ideology and musical practice. Afrobeat is the sort of complex phenomenon where issues like sexism and the strong representation of women conflate. Olaniyan successfully addresses such antinomies.

In spite of Olaniyan's effort to avoid the biographical mould, it is arguable how successful he is in completely sidestepping this pervading approach to afrobeat studies. He, along with Olorunyomi and Veal, does broach the subject of afrobeat "beyond Fela's practice," but mainly as a brief epilogue. In recent years, two theses on "American" afrobeat have appeared: Matt Sakakeeny's *American Afrobeat: Transnational, Intercultural, and Multiracial* (2005), and Ian Frederick Gendreau's *Sound the Alarm: Politics, Music, and Appropriation in Contemporary North American Afrobeat*. Both welcome contributions to the afrobeat scholarship, these studies nevertheless risk introducing a new "one-sidedness." In their exclusive focus on contemporary scenes, the authors fall short of connecting contemporary events to history, thereby presenting only partial windows into the formation of afrobeat's transnational networks. Afrobeat chronologies, however, resist neat linear progressions within circumscribed locales; significant events overlap across place and time. It is my

goal, in this dissertation, to synthesize the synchronic and diachronic, and by so doing present the first truly transnational study of afrobeat.

1.3 SCOPE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

I began fieldwork in the city of Los Angeles where I stayed from June to August, 2007. In September 2007, I moved to New York City, and in October of that year, I traveled to Lagos, Nigeria where I conducted research until January 2008. Following my Lagos excursion, I entered a second phase of fieldwork in New York City, remaining there until March 2008. I then moved out West again, to San Francisco, where I did research until the end of May 2008. I returned once again to New York City in June 2008 for the last phase of my fieldwork, which ended in August 2008.

I collected much of my data through formal and informal interviews. I mainly interviewed individual musicians, the majority of whom play in afrobeat bands. However, I also interviewed music industry personnel and individual audience members at various afrobeat events. It was my goal from the onset to make my analysis as inclusive as possible, thus my venturing out to the East and West Coasts of the United States, and Lagos. By August 2008, I had gathered over 50 formal interviews, and as I entered the “lab” phase of my research, it became clear that I would have to use my data selectively. My decision to focus on New York City and Lagos is based on the fact that both cities are major hubs in the transnational flow of afrobeat. Nevertheless my work in the West Coast of the United States, particularly San Francisco, also afforded me critical analytical insight that informs this dissertation. For example, it was only through comparing my field-experiences on both coasts that New York City’s pivotal place in transnational afrobeat discourse became evident. Conducting research in San Francisco also allowed me to meet several musicians who played in Fela’s bands:

Africa '70 and Egypt '80, and now live in the United States. This dissertation also incorporates data that I gathered elsewhere in the US, namely, Washington D.C., and Pittsburgh, PA. Ethnographic work in Nigeria enabled me to collect data similar to that which I collected in the US, as well as gain crucial historical perspectives from afrobeat's birthplace.

One major difference between my United States and Lagos experiences played out in the nature of interviews that I was able to schedule. In the United States it was customary for me to interview several musicians from the same band. However, the interviews I conducted in Nigeria tended to center on individual band leaders, particularly Fela's sons, Femi and Seun Kutí, other alumni of Fela's bands still residing in Lagos, as well as music industry personnel and individuals who shared their recollections of the Lagos afrobeat scene during Fela's lifetime. In Lagos, I also met and interviewed a handful of "underground" afrobeat enthusiasts whose primary engagement with afrobeat occurs in private home studios.

Most of my observations within the field took place directly in bars, clubs, and other performance venues where afrobeat events were hosted. These events gave me opportunities to interact informally with musicians, audience members and music industry personnel. What multisited fieldwork has enabled me to do is to map out broad trends that connect divergent locales. I employ a comparative schema because multisited fieldwork is inherently comparative. However, I have also tried to construct a transnational discourse that simultaneously addresses the state of local scenes while investigating the interaction between those scenes.

I did extensive archival research at the library of Guardian Newspapers in Lagos, and at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., collecting newspaper and magazine articles. An invitation to create a new press kit for Antibalas gave me access to a wide range of archival material on the band. The internet provided an extensive mine of information, available on blogs, websites, social networking sites, streaming media and online magazines and newspapers.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 Multi-sited ethnography

Anthropologist George E. Marcus describes an approach to ethnography embedded in the world system as one which moves out of the “intensely-focused upon single site of ethnographic observation and participation... in local situations... to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space.” The resulting “mobile ethnography” he continues, “defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation [rather, it] takes unexpected trajectories in tracing cultural formations across and within multiple sites of activity.”⁹

In ethnomusicology, Jocelyn Guilbault’s seminal study on zouk in the Lesser Antilles (1993) is one such example of multi-sited ethnography. My study of afrobeat in multiple geographical and historical settings follows in this vein. However, the markedly different histories and socio-economic conditions of the sites of activity that I investigate (Nigeria, a third world, postcolonial state, and the United States, a dominant world power) presents unique methodological complexities that situate my study squarely within the sphere of Marcus’s unexpected trajectories of cultural mappings across multiple sites.

1.4.2 Modes of construction in multisited fieldwork

Marcus outlines six methodological techniques in the practice of multisited ethnography, which “might be understood as practices of construction through... movement and of tracing within

⁹ Marcus, *Ethnography in/of the World System*, 96.

different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it.”¹⁰ Three out of the six methodological techniques listed by Marcus have been applicable in my research.

1.4.2.1 Follow the people

In this mode of construction, the researcher follows and stays with the movements of particular groups or initial subjects as in migration and diaspora studies.¹¹ My study of afrobeat across transnational boundaries has led me along the migratory paths of African musicians who have either relocated permanently to the United States, or whose musical performance and touring routes perpetually situate them in multiple locales at various times.

1.4.2.2 Follow the thing

According to Marcus, this mode “involves tracing the circulation through different contexts of a manifestly material object of study... such as commodities, gifts, money, works of art, and intellectual property.”¹² The flow of material objects such as records, CDs, journalistic writing and DVDs, has allowed individual musicians and bands to construct meaning translocally. Mapping such discursive networks has, in turn, given me insight into identity formation in local afrobeat scenes.

1.4.2.3 Follow the biography

The life history approach is a longstanding method of data collection, and life history interviews feature prominently in my research. According to Marcus, “Life histories reveal juxtapositions of social contexts through a succession of narrated individual experiences that may be

¹⁰ Marcus, *Ethnography in/of the World System*, 106.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Marcus, *Ethnography in/of the World System*, 107.

obscured in the structural study of processes as such. They are potential guides to the delineation of ethnographic spaces within systems shaped by categorical distinctions that may make these spaces otherwise invisible... ”¹³ The succession of musicians’ biographies that I collected during fieldwork provides me with data across wide ranging sites, which I consolidate in order to show broad trends or specificities in the ways that afrobeat scenes have been constructed across time and place.

1.4.3 The baseline

Marcus’ modes of construction are predicated on an “initial baseline” which serves as a sort of model in the mapping of cultural formations across wide geographies. In other words, in “following” *the thing, the people, and the biography*, it is crucial to delineate a series of traits that will make *what* and *who* one is following recognizable. The concept of a baseline hearkens back to traditional acculturation studies,¹⁴ and continues to function as a vital analytical tool for the study of culture change. Fela’s musical corpus and ideologies supply a baseline for my study of “post-Fela” afrobeat. As Marcus observes, however, the baseline is subject to contingency and malleability as one traces it. While Fela’s musical repertoire and ideologies constitute the baseline for this study, I found that musicians’ engagement with Fela’s blueprint varied from one scene to another conditioned by the broader cultural histories and social practices of each locale.

¹³ Marcus, *Ethnography in/of the World System*, 110.

¹⁴ See Herskovits, 1958.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical inquiries that I undertake in this dissertation are twofold. On the one hand, I seek to understand the mechanisms that have engendered the formation of individual afrobeat communities within geographically circumscribed settings such as Lagos, Nigeria and New York City. On the other hand, I am confronted with the need to situate such local sites within the totality of global space; that is, within a worldwide ecology of afrobeat practice. The challenge, then, is to integrate analyses of “the whole” and the “particular.” I find the theoretical concept of “genre” particularly germane to my chosen approach to the study of local and global afrobeat topographies.

1.5.1 Genre in popular music studies

Franco Fabbri’s 1982 essay, “A theory of musical genres: two applications,” heralded growing scholarly interest in “genre” as an analytical tool for the study of popular music. He defined genre as “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules.” Inherent in Fabbri’s precept of *socially accepted rules* is the notion of “genre” as a contested site with fluid boundaries. Fabbri is here making the point that while genre ultimately delimits clusters of music and music-related texts within conceptual boundaries, the structuring power of those boundaries is contingent on consensus worked out within the permeable contexts of collective discourse.

Over a decade later, Fabbri’s ideas would be expounded by other scholars, including Simon Frith (1996) whose “genre worlds” denotes the total operative sphere of a genre inhabited by

musicians, listeners, and mediating ideologues in a complex interplay of roles and ideas.¹⁵ Keith Negus, in *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (1999), advances arguments similar to those made by Frith and Fabbri. His formulation of “genre cultures”—echoed shortly thereafter by Toynbee (2000)—addresses “the interplay and uneasy interaction between economics (music as commodity, various business strategies and organizational structures) and culture (the practices, interpretations and ways of life of musicians, fans and industry workers) and the ways in which the two blur and fuse.”¹⁶

Fabian Holt (2007) offers the most recent and perhaps most nuanced book-length study of genre in popular music. Echoing scholars discussed earlier, Holt defines genre as “a type of category that refers to a particular kind of music within a distinctive cultural web of production, circulation and signification.”¹⁷ Holt, however, argues that the conceptual tools of “genre world” and “genre culture,” while drawing attention to the “collective and general,” give little consideration to the role of the “individual” and the “particular” in the construction of culture.¹⁸ He therefore advocates a “need to examine the dynamics of genre formation at many different levels and sites” in order to “understand music genres in the totality of social space.”¹⁹ Integrating the general and the individual, Holt adopts the concept of “genre culture” to refer to “the overall identity of the cultural formations in which a genre is constituted,” and “local formations of genre cultures...as scenes.”²⁰ He goes on to state that “[g]enre scenes are translocal because they share ideas and representations

¹⁵ Frith, *Performing Rites*, 88

¹⁶ Negus, *Music Genres*, 3

¹⁷ Holt, *Music Genres*, 2

¹⁸ Holt, *Music Genres*, 7

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Holt, *Music Genres*, 19

of the same genre with scenes in other cities...” Genre cultures, in turn, are sustained by “transnational” networks.²¹

Beyond his illuminating analysis of the synchronous relationship between individual sites and collective genre identity, Holt also formulates a “general framework” for apprehending the linear trajectories that connect history to contemporary practice in the life of a genre.

1.5.2 A general framework of genre

Genres are not self-inventing, but emerge within preexisting ecologies in which heterogeneous musical forms and styles relate intertextually. While each musical genre follows its own unique evolutionary trajectory, two basic phases of development remain common to all: the formative stage, and subsequent stages.

During the formative stage of a genre’s development, a core network of subjects converge around certain texts and values that will come to define the genre. This cluster of iconic artists, influential fans, critics, producers and ideologues constitute what Holt terms, “center collectivities.” Early discursive networks forged via various media formats facilitate the circulation of influential recordings and help to establish genre codes and conventions. As formative boundaries congeal, the genre comes to be identified by a distinctive name and a definitive canon.

Subsequent stages of growth bring genres into a dialectical relationship with the “mainstream,” which, in turn, engenders further negotiations of genre identity. Corporate-owned mass media technologies facilitate widespread dissemination which, on the one hand, broadens a genre’s social space, and on the other, subjects it to new aesthetic and ideological values. Innovations inscribed by corporate agents or new recipients during the popularization process may

²¹ Ibid.

be considered “foreign,” or “adulterating” by a genre’s center collectivities, who then create discourses of resistance in an effort to preserve “authenticity.” Particularly transgressive innovations may lead to fissures within the “genre culture,” in which case, new “center collectivities” then converge around those transgressive texts, signaling the potential emergence of a new genre.

1.5.3 Scenes, style, ideology

In view of my stated goals to simultaneously examine afrobeat practice in individual sites and as a collective transnational culture, I adopt the formulations outlined above. I follow Holt in designating the networks of afrobeat musicians, fans, producers and other agents working within geographically circumscribed settings as afrobeat scenes. Thus, in chapter two, “Scenes and Networks,” I examine the emergence of the afrobeat scenes in Lagos and New York City. Though anchored within physically defined topographies and local cultural histories, each scene consciously affiliates with the other translocally. As I will show, Lagos and New York City afrobeat scenes, like afrobeat scenes elsewhere, are connected via complex transnational networks and share material emblems of group identity that connect them to a worldwide “afrobeat culture.”

In chapter three, “Musical Style,” I consider how musicians in widely dispersed scenes articulate collective afrobeat identity through musical texts and conventions. Taking off on the premise that genres emerge out of preexisting musical formations, I map the evolution of musical style in Fela’s entire corpus in order to highlight the influences of highlife, jazz, and traditional African music that collectively constitute the stylistic matrix out of which afrobeat was forged. In spite of Fela’s hegemony over afrobeat during the formative stage of its development, his vast body of work reveals a stylistic heterogeneity often glossed over in contemporary afrobeat practice. I go

on to discuss the implications of this selective engagement with Fela's repertoire on canon construction, as well as its impact on the discourse of authenticity and transgression in contemporary afrobeat culture.

Chapter Four, "Ideology," considers the matrix of philosophical creeds and values that define Fela's practice. Using a framework similar to the one employed in my discussion of musical style in the previous chapter, I consider Fela's role as afrobeat's chief ideologue. I outline the doctrines of Black Nationalism, Lower Class Partisanship and Libertinism that constitute the ecology of ideologies from which Fela would distill what he called "Africanism," or "Blackism;" in turn labeled "Felasophy" by his fans. I follow this with an examination of Fela's direct involvement in partisan politics and the ways in which his music embodied his ideologies while narrating events in the political history of Nigeria. Subsequently, I analyze contemporary afrobeat scenes in Lagos and the United States in order to map emergent transformations in ideological discourse as afrobeat enters new settings with diverse cultural histories and political systems distinct from those that shaped Fela's practice in Lagos, 1970 to the late 1990s.

I begin the concluding chapter of this dissertation by reiterating some of the major events in the history of afrobeat from its emergence in 1970s Lagos to its subsequent migration westward. This sets the stage for a brief consideration of developments that have transpired since I left the field in August 2008. Particularly, I reflect on the Broadway musical, *Fela!*, currently playing at the Eugene O'Neil theater in New York City, which I posit as ushering in a 2nd Worldwide Afrobeat Movement. I prognosticate New York City's emergence as afrobeat's new global capital, and ponder potential new directions in the genres' evolutionary trajectory as it increasingly becomes invested in corporate capital in expanding markets.

2.0 SCENES AND NETWORKS

In 2002, New York Times journalist Jon Pareles made the peremptory declaration that “Afrobeat, the simmering, politicized Nigerian funk invented by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, has outlived its creator and leaped across borders.”²² He was reviewing a show which took place at an alternative performance space in Manhattan called the Knitting Factory.²³ The main act was Psycho on da Bus, a Paris-based band led by renowned Nigerian drummer Tony Allen, and the opener was Brooklyn afrobeat band Antibalas. Pareles was writing at an apical moment in the contemporary history of afrobeat. What Fela had started in the regional context of Nigerian/African musical-political discourse had moved onto the global arena.

Accounts of the contemporary state of afrobeat, like Pareles’s article cited above, often convey a binary sequence of historical events: *In the beginning, Fela created afrobeat in Lagos, Nigeria; today, afrobeat thrives abroad.* While such “roots-legacy” narratives provide commentaries on bookend moments in afrobeat’s evolutionary trajectory, they offer little insight into the complex processes that have fostered the genre’s diffusion across time and place. What migratory paths have carried afrobeat from 1960s Lagos, Nigeria to present day New York City, San Francisco, London, Paris? What social, cultural, and political mechanisms have propelled the transnational diffusion of afrobeat? How exactly has afrobeat “leaped across borders?”

²² John Pareles, “Part Parade, Part Strut, Part Funk,” Pop Review, *New York Times*, January 22, 2002.

²³ The Knitting Factory has since relocated to Metropolitan Avenue in Brooklyn.

This chapter chronicles afrobeat's emergence in 1960s Lagos and its subsequent diffusion to the United States. Musical genres are collective, cultivated through the circulation of musical ideas and other cultural texts via heterogeneous networks of musicians, fans, producers and other culture brokers. The history of afrobeat is thus a history of human agents affiliating across vast territories through time. It is, as I will show, a history of the formation of local scenes, and the forging of transnational networks which connect such scenes one to another.

2.1 POPULAR MUSIC IN LAGOS: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTS

It has been widely remarked that in Africa, music is a social activity inextricably woven into everyday community life.²⁴ Particularly in ethnically homogenous societies where communal ideals and collective experience govern aesthetic value, music seems poised to generate mass appeal. In view of this, it may be said that the generality of African musics are popular. While mass appeal is a defining trait of popular culture, the notion of the “popular,” as invoked here, takes into consideration other key elements, including urban centeredness, heterogeneity of style, professionalism, the impact of media technologies and the corporate industry.²⁵ West African popular musics, defined in these terms, would not emerge until the early decades of the 20th century, a cumulative result of events and processes dating back to the fifteenth century when Europeans first made contact with the region. Trade between Africans and Europeans led to the establishment of port towns along the continent's western seaboard; and as Euro-African trade flourished, so too did West Africa's port towns. By the late nineteenth century, these coastal towns had developed into

²⁴ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 21
Euba, *Music in Africa*, 26

²⁵ See, Nettl, 1978

urban centers of economic, cultural and social interchange. It was within such heterogeneous contexts that West Africa's popular musics were forged. Lagos, birth place of afrobeat, was one such urban crucible.

2.1.1 Lagos

Nestled on the Bight of Benin in southwestern Nigeria, Lagos is a conurbation of islands connected to an adjacent mainland area through a system of bridges, creeks, rivers and lagoons, all of which drain into the Atlantic ocean. With an estimated population 11 million, Lagos is Nigeria's largest city, and one of the fastest growing metropolises in the world.²⁶ Nigeria's former capital city, Lagos remains the country's most important port and West Africa's major industrial, financial and cultural nerve center.

The city was first settled in the fifteenth century when the Awori, a Yoruba subgroup migrating southwards, settled on Lagos Island. Shortly afterwards, Edo invaders from the eastward Kingdom of Bini took control of the island, naming it Eko. Bini political hegemony lasted nearly four centuries during which the Yoruba *oba's* (kings) of Lagos paid tribute to their Bini counterparts. While fishing and farming constituted the major occupations of the island's pioneer settlers, domestic trade with mainland communities also flourished, attracting Ijebu and Bini traders during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁷ Around the same time, refugees fleeing enslavement in the neighboring kingdom of Dahomey began to settle in Lagos. These early waves of migration established Lagos' reputation as a multicultural outpost, a factor that remains integral to the city's contemporary ethos.

²⁶ <http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>, accessed 9/26/2010

²⁷ Peil, *Lagos*, 5.

In 1472 Portuguese explorers and merchants made the first European contact with Lagos. One such explorer, Rui de Sequiera, named the lagoon waters surrounding the island settlement *Lago de Curamo*,²⁸ a name which the city came to adopt in 1854.²⁹ During the eighteenth century, Lagos became involved in the slave trade³⁰ and within a short time emerged as a major West African port, rivaling and ultimately surpassing neighboring Porto Novo and Badagry in its supply of captured Africans to European and American slavers.³¹ Slave Trade Acts passed in 1791 and 1807 by the French and British respectively proved ineffective in quelling Lagos' involvement in the trade. This was partly due to the island's intricate network of creeks and lagoons which provided effective cover for slave ships attempting to outwit the antislavery squadrons stationed on the Gulf of Guinea. At a time when West Africa's maritime centers witnessed a decline in slave revenue, Lagos saw its fortunes rise. Great Britain's attempts to reorient Lagos' economy towards "legitimate" trade in palm oil, indigo, cotton and other cash crops was met with stiff opposition by the merchant elite of Lagos, one of whom was the intransigent Oba Kosoko of Lagos. Finally, using the pretext of abolishing slavery, Great Britain launched a naval attack on the city in 1851. Lagos was captured and Oba Kosoko deposed. Kosoko was replaced with the more amenable Akintoye who signed Britain's antislavery treaty. In 1861 Lagos was annexed by the British crown, thus beginning one hundred years of British colonial rule. In 1886, Lagos Island became the capital of the Protectorate of Lagos, and in 1906, the capital of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. When, in 1914, the Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated into the Crown Colony of Nigeria, Lagos, yet again, was instituted as capital city.

²⁸ Perhaps in reference to the coastal city of Lagos, Portugal (*Lagos* meaning "lakes") from which major Portuguese expeditions to Africa embarked at the time.

²⁹ Peil, *Lagos*, 6

³⁰ Okonkwo, *Protest Movements in Lagos*, 1

³¹ This was due chiefly to the large numbers of captives produced by the spate of internecine conflicts that occurred in the Yoruba heartland during the Oyo Empire's prolonged decline.

The establishment of British Colonial rule transformed multiethnic Lagos into a cosmopolitan city of global proportions. From the mid-nineteenth century on, European merchants, colonial administrators, civil servants as well as other non-European expatriates began settling in the city, bringing with them unique social and cultural influences. Where traditional beliefs and Islam had constituted the two staple religions of precolonial Lagos, Oba Kosoko's 1851 ouster paved the way for Christian missionaries who subsequently gained a major foothold in the city. Following its declaration as a free colony, Lagos witnessed an influx of expatriate Africans from Sierra Leone, Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, and other parts of the Americas. The Sierra Leone emigrants, known locally as Saro, were captive Africans—largely of Yoruba stock—rescued on the high seas by antislavery squadrons and repatriated to Sierra Leone³² where they received Western education and cultivated Christian ethics alongside European social norms. African returnees from Brazil and Cuba constituted the Aguda community of Lagos who, like their Saro counterparts, traced their origins back to Yoruba land following liberation in the New World. Collectively, the Saro and the New World Returnees constituted the black elite of nineteenth century Lagos. Emulating the cultural and social norms of European bourgeois society, the African returnees acquired an intermediate class status that straddled Lagos' wage-earning grassroots and its privileged European community. Nevertheless, as clergy, lawyers, doctors, educators, journalists, engineers and musicians, Lagos' expatriate communities became major players in the social, cultural and political life of the city.

Lagos's emergence into a cosmopolitan center of cultural activity was matched by its growing commercial status and development into an urban metropolis. Within fifty years of British

³² Established by British humanitarians as a "National Home for Negroes," Sierra Leone was first settled in 1787 by the "Black Poor" of London, which included liberated Africans, and African Americans who had earned their freedom by fighting on the side of the British during the American Revolution. London's "Black Poor" also encompassed white women (intimate companions of repatriated black males) and a few Asians.

rule, a Liverpool steamer began making regular stops in Lagos.³³ In 1896, a railway connecting the city to the Yoruba interior was constructed; and in 1898, electricity arrived in the city.³⁴ All of these developments reinforced the city's status as "the Liverpool of West Africa," a major commercial hub and bastion of modern progress. Consequently, Lagos would attract incessant spates of wage-seeking migrants from the Nigerian interior and beyond. British journalist Edmund Morel chronicled the rapid developments he witnessed during a 1910 visit to Lagos:

Today, Lagos is a picturesque, congested town of some 80,000 inhabitants, boasting of many fine buildings and offices and European and native merchants' residences, churches, wharves, a hospital, a tramway, a bacteriological institute, a marine engineering establishment, to say nothing of cold storage, electric lights, hostels, a race course and other appurtenances of advanced civilization.³⁵

Such adulatory comments belie the growing class polarization and social inequalities playing out in colonial Lagos; for, while the city's European and Black elite could afford to flaunt their modern accretions and pristine settlements, its escalating migrant population fashioned a transient existence in expanding slums cut off from economic sources. In a newspaper article, one local observer writing contemporaneously with Morel lamented: "No amount of glare and glitter of improvements and progress can compensate... Electric lights, metalled roads, motor cars etc., etc. afford but poor consolation to a hungry person. It is like asking for bread, but being given a stone."³⁶ The bifurcation of physical space that often ensues from class polarization continues to plague

³³ Okonkwo, *Protest Movements in Lagos*, 2

³⁴ Echeruo, *Victorian Lagos*, 21

³⁵ Morel, *Nigeria*, 7

³⁶ "Progressive Lagos," *Lagos Standard*, 18 May 1910.

contemporary Lagos, a city of extreme wealth and poverty, sophistication and grit. Nevertheless, Lagos' entrepreneurial vigor, cultural ferment, social heterogeneity and vibrant urban imagery would make the city a most auspicious place for the emergence of afrobeat, but only within the context of certain precursory developments in the musical life of the city presently examined.

2.1.2 Precursors and Prototypes

The social, political and cultural contexts discussed above profoundly impacted the musical life of Lagos. While nineteenth century Christian missionaries and *Saro* expatriates introduced harmoniums, European hymns, concert music and other Western musical practices, imperial agents recruited Africans into military brass bands such as the Royal Nigeria Constabulary Band (est. 1894) where they learned marches and standard Euro-American martial fare. On their part, the Brazilian-Cuban community of Lagos disseminated Spanish and Portuguese styles such as serenatas, *fados* and polkas alongside New World reinterpretations of African musical traditions like *samba da roda*. They also introduced carnival traditions: *bumba-meuboi* and *caretta*, and the samba drum, the latter an important instrument in early juju bands.³⁷ Like the European bourgeoisie whose influences they absorbed, West Africa's black elite frequently held musical entertainments, including ballroom events where Western dances like the waltz, polka, cha-cha-cha, and quadrilles were performed. Born in 1898, Oba Akinsanya recalled the social life of the Lagosian elite during his youth:

How did high society live then? Oh, it was a really posh society. It was the tail end of the Victoria [sic] era and the sophisticated people were very smooth and elegant.

Women went about in long skirts; they wore big corsets and their busts were padded

³⁷ Waterman, *Juju*, 31-33

high up; they wore elegant hats with feathers and they had gloves in their hands with chic umbrellas. The men wore high collars and top coats; everything dandy like that... we were living under the influence of British Colonial people and we adopted their fashions... at that time, grand ball dancing was very popular in England and it sort of filtered through to West Africa... Then you had to learn to dance methodically; you had to specialize in the dance steps: foxtrot, square dances, lancers...³⁸

These various musical forms and activities would go on to significantly influence the popular music of Lagos. Musical performance, traditionally a communal event mainly held in public arenas, was recontextualized within new physical spaces such as social halls, theaters, clubs and other venues designed with performer-audience boundaries in mind. Nevertheless, the introduction of Western aesthetic values did not obliterate indigenous musical practices; as Nketia states: “Most of the... political, social, and cultural institutions that supported traditional practices flourished in spite of the presence of Christianity, Western cultural institutions and colonialism.”³⁹

The role played by the church, elite institution and the military in fostering exposure to Western musical influences would have remained limited without the mediation of an emergent working class of including seamen, stevedores, artisans, laborers, truck drivers and railway workers. Coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds inland from the coast, these wage-seeking migrants possessed a social mobility that enabled them to effectively navigate the complex terrain of urbanizing West Africa. Christopher Waterman describes them as cosmopolitans, “adept at interpreting multiple languages, cultural codes, and value systems, skills which enable them to

³⁸ Quoted in Sad Sam, “An Era that ended with the Waltz and Foxtrot,” *Spear Magazine*, August 1966.

³⁹ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 16

construct styles that express shifting patterns of urban identity.”⁴⁰ The transient nature of the migrant condition allowed this urban wage force to diffuse cultural artifacts across vast geographies. Migrant laborers such as the Kru of Liberia were vital conduits in the dissemination of guitars, mandolins, harmonicas, tambourines and other Western instruments that have become regional markers of popular music in West Africa. As “master syncretizers of modern Africa,”⁴¹ this wage earning force is also responsible for the marriage of indigenous and Western idioms that resulted in the emergence of West Africa’s distinctive popular music genres. As social mediators, equally at ease giving private performances in elite parlors as they were busking on the streets of West African cities, they were also the principal propagators of the region’s twentieth century popular music forms. Beginning in the early twentieth century, mass media technologies like the radio, phonograph, and 78rpm vinyl discs would expand the scope of heterogeneous musical influences diffusing into West Africa, accelerate the pace of ongoing syncretization and create new markets for emergent popular music forms.

It was within the above discussed flux of cultural heterogeneity, social mobility and identity formation that West African popular musics emerged during the early decades of the twentieth century. One early prototype that served as the template for many twentieth century West African popular music genres was “palmwine.” A collective of distinctly West African finger-picking guitar styles, the genre was so called because it grew out of waterfront shacks where migrant workers gathered at the end of their daily work to drink palmwine and sing to the accompaniment of guitar and percussion. In addition to “palmwine,” Lagos, during the early 1900s, saw the advent of a range of prototype forms including asiko, kokoma, and agidigbo. Out of these prototypes emerged a range of distinct genres, including juju and highlife. Each of these genres articulated in distinctive sonic

⁴⁰ Waterman, *Juju*, 9

⁴¹ Ibid.

registers, Lagosian reactions to European colonization. Reflecting the heterogeneity of the urban environments out of which it grew, Lagos popular music sought to harmonize African and European cultural legacies in a new African modernity. As the struggle against colonial rule gained momentum during the mid-50s, West African popular musics came to embody the optimism of the independence era. More than any other genre, dance-band highlife exemplified the spirit of the age.

2.1.3 Highlife

Dance-band highlife is a fusion of traditional West African recreational musics with elements of European hymnody, sea shanties, big-band jazz, and Euro-American ballroom styles.⁴² At inception, the term “highlife” reflected the intricate connection between music and class identities at play in urban West Africa at the dawn of the twentieth century. Yebuah Mensah, a Ghanaian musician who witnessed the advent of highlife observed that,

During the early twenties, during my childhood, the term “Highlife” was created by people who gathered around the dancing clubs such as the Rodger Club (built in 1904) to watch and listen to the couples enjoying themselves. Highlife started as a catch-name for the indigenous songs played by such early bands as the Jazz Kings, the Cape Coast Sugar Babies, the Sekondi Nanshamang and later the Accra Orchestra. The people outside called it “Highlife” as they did not reach the class of the couples going inside, who not only had to pay a then relatively high entrance fee of 7s. 6d., but also had to wear full evening dress including top-hats⁴³

⁴² See Collins, *Music Makers of West Africa*, 1-2

⁴³ Quoted in Collins, *West African Pop Roots*, 21

One musician played a fundamental role in formalizing the structure that ultimately became standard amongst dance-band highlife musicians across the West African region. He was the Ghanaian musician Emmanuel Tetteh Mensah (younger brother of Yebuah Mensah quoted above), popularly regarded as the “king of highlife.” Born in Accra, Ghana in 1919, E. T. Mensah began playing the flute as a youngster in the Accra Orchestra. The Accra Orchestra, established around 1930 by one teacher Lamptey, was one of the many prestigious groups that entertained West Africa’s European and Black elite by performing waltzes, foxtrots, quicksteps and other Western dance forms. During the Second World War, British and American troops stationed on the West African coast introduced swing to local West African musicians and it was in this context that E.T. Mensah later came under the influence of one such Scottish soldier, Sergeant Leopard, a professional saxophonist. Mensah, recollecting the early days of his emersion into swing, told John Collins:

It was Sergeant Leopard who taught us the correct methods of intonation, vibrato, tongueing, and breath control, which contributed to place us above the average standard in the town.⁴⁴

When Mensah later formalized the highlife structure, it came to draw heavily on swing elements, including various variations of the “walking bass,” instrumentation, and form. Into these, he incorporated indigenous rhythms, instruments and songs. Mensah’s highlife structure would circulate through a network of West African musicians exposed to his repertoire primarily through his extensive tours across West Africa with his Tempos band during the 1950s. When Mensah embarked on his first tour of Nigeria in 1950, the musical materials upon which he drew in shaping

⁴⁴ Quoted in Collins, *West African Pop Roots*, 23

the structure of highlife music were already in copious circulation. However, highlife as Mensah played it was not yet in existence. John Collins recalls Mensah stating that, "...when he [E.T. Mensah] first went there [Nigeria], the dance bands such as Bobby Benson's and Sammy Akpabot's, were only playing ballroom music and swing."⁴⁵ Bobby Benson, in particular, held sway as the most innovative popular entertainer. After extended residences in the United States and in London (1944—1947) where he gained exposure to a wide range of Western musical and theatrical forms, Bobby Benson returned to Nigeria with his wife, Cassandra, with whom in 1948, he established the Bobby Benson and Cassandra Modern-Theater Party. Theater parties, also known as Concert Theater, Concert Parties or Variety Theater, were quite common across West Africa at the time. These shows incorporated comic skits with singing, dancing and dialogue in a type of vaudeville form which drew heavily on American and British prototypes. What appears to have distinguished Bobby Benson's act from the many other acts which populated Lagos at the time was his eclectic musical repertoire and innovativeness, as attested to in the following reviews:

Cassandra and Bobby's *Congo Samba To jass*, [sic] staged on Friday 2nd September at Glover Hall, made such a big hit that repeat performances were demanded and staged on the 5 and 7 instant and drew as large an audience each time.

Jass [sic] a musical, *Samba*, a Spanish play, and *Miss Coatt*, a comedy, were early hot favorites among the various items in the show.

Jass a 'boogie woogie and Kangaroo jitterbug' was performed by the whole band and thrilled the audience with perfect timing, rhythmic movements and tuneful harmony.

⁴⁵ Collins, *African Pop Roots*, 11

It is understood that further demand for another repeat has been made in Lagos, Ibadan and Other Towns.

When Bobby Benson and his Jam Session Orchestra got their new Kit Kar, they decided to take a joy ride around the Western towns and see how the other half lives.

The other half would not let them go, so they gave them the good old Calypso, then Samba, then Blues and all the titillating stuff that Lagos dance band fans had grown to associate Benson with, and their trouble began.

First one town in the Western province then the next and still the next, until Lagos Jazz fans grew furious and sent Bobby a telegram, to come home at once.⁴⁶

But even Bobby's musical and theatrical dexterity would be challenged in the wake of E.T. Mensah's West African tours. For where Bobby's repertoire consisted simply of well executed performances of Western popular forms, E.T. Mensah had indigenized these forms, infusing them with local rhythms, and singing in a range of African languages, English and Pidgin English. In Nigeria, Mensah's success was so profound that it altered the local soundscape. Scores of musicians and band leaders began to imitate the new musical structure which Mensah had formalized. But almost as soon as E.T, Mensah's brand of highlife gained a foothold in Nigeria, local musicians started to adapt its structure to the heterogeneous musical forms already in circulation. In this, Bobby Benson would take the lead. Already the director of a wildly popular big band and adept in Western musical genres like swing, samba etc., Bobby was advantageously placed in exploiting the new musical expression streaming in from Ghana. Moreover, Bobby Benson was the proprietor of the most popular night

⁴⁶ Clark, *Hubert Ogunde*, 49-51

club in Lagos, Caban Bamboo (the first in Nigeria to be owned by a Nigerian, and later to become the prestigious Hotel Bobby, now defunct), where his Bobby Benson Jam Session Orchestra was resident. So when Benson, influenced by Mensah, began to speak in the new musical vernacular, he became by far the most successful. Bobby's Jam Session Orchestra became a Nigerian musical institution through which successful Nigerian highlife musicians like Cardinal Rex Jim Lawson, Zeal Oniya, Roy Chicago, E.C. Arinze and Eddie Okonta, and Victor Olaiya (under whose direct influence Fela would later come) would pass, earning Bobby the revered title of Godfather of Nigerian popular music. The musicians who apprenticed under Bobby Benson represented a cross-section of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, a unique phenomenon at the time. While other urban popular music forms like juju and apala tended to reflect ethnic sensibilities at the regional level, Mosunmola Omibiyi notes that the recruitment of highlife band members was done across ethnic and national boundaries.⁴⁷ Consequently, Nigerian highlife songs were composed in a multiplicity of languages and incorporated musical ingredients that reflected the ethnic diversity of band members. In terms of agency, language and style then, highlife mirrored a plurality which both drew on and gave access to a burgeoning cosmopolitan society, and registered the growing national identity of the developing polity. Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, national unity came to be understood in terms of a harmonious coexistence of heterogeneous groups as expressed in the Federal motto "Unity in Diversity," rather than in the invention of a culturally or linguistically homogenous society. Because of its multiethnic ramifications, highlife came to be widely esteemed as "Nigeria's first truly National music."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Omibiyi, *Popular Music in Nigeria*, 158

⁴⁸ Olaniyan, *Afrobeat*, 8

2.1.4 Crisis

In 1958 when Fela left Nigeria for England to study music, highlife was the most popular music in Nigeria. Fela was himself a highlife musician, having begun his professional music career performing with Dr. Victor Olaiya's Cool Cats, before traveling overseas. In London, he enrolled at the Trinity College of Music, but also became an active participant in London's vibrant and eclectic night club scene. This latter experience gave him direct exposure to a wide range of musical styles, particularly jazz, as well as West Indian and Latin American musical styles. To this mélange, Fela, along with other West Africans, contributed the music symbolic of their regional identity: highlife. Thus began a lifelong process of musical experimentation which ultimately produced afrobeat. While still in London, Fela enlisted some Nigerian friends, including J.K Braimah and Wole Bucknor, as well as some West Indian musicians, in forming a band called Koola Lobitos around 1961/62.⁴⁹ Koola Lobitos played an eclectic repertoire including highlife, calypso, cha-cha-cha, and the twist, and was, according to Paul Oliver, "one of the top names on the bustling London Scene of the 1960s."⁵⁰ Band member J.K. Braimah attested to the band's diverse repertoire when he told Fela biographer, Carlos Moore, "... we used to play highlife, Fela's compositions, and some other numbers like "I am the O-by-a-wo-wh-y", and things like that..."⁵¹ However, of the many popular musics to which Fela gained exposure in London, it was jazz that made the biggest impression on him. As he would later recall, "...my four and a half years in Britain allowed me to really get in touch with jazz. At school I studied classical music. But outside of Trinity I *played* jazz."⁵²

⁴⁹ Moore, *Fela*, 57

⁵⁰ Oliver, *Black Music in Britain*, 96

⁵¹ Moore, *Fela*, 57

⁵² Moore, *Fela*, 62

Fela's love affair with jazz continued after he returning to Nigeria in 1963. While working as a producer at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), he formed a new band called the Fela Ransome-Kuti Quintet. Fela, on the one hand, wanted to become a jazz musician in the tradition of Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and Clifford Brown whom he idolized; on the other hand, he wanted to advance the highlife tradition by infusing it with contemporary jazz elements. According to Fela's drummer, Tony Allen, he played "strictly jazz" with Fela one year after the latter returned from England.⁵³ A 1964 article which appeared in *Spear Magazine* appears to support Tony Allen's claim.

Let's Dig Jazz

What do you know, Men, what's news? Jazz, hit town and its swinging. The date: Monday, 6th of January 1964. The place: Ivy's Nest (Cool Cats Inn) Apapa Road, Lagos. Time: 9pm. And Jazz took off to a flying, swinging start. The artists: Fela Ransome-kuti Quintet.

That was the night—the opening night of an indoor weekly jazz scene. On that night, there were only a handful of fans. But since then word has got around that there's something good swinging up there. Now already, the band gets a full house.

From all corners of Lagos, the fans, of all races and colour make their way to Ivy's Nest, Monday nights and listen to jazz. Many of them have little or no jazz background. But it doesn't matter. The band itself is not expert either; it doesn't matter—for their hearts are in it and something's coming off alright. And what's more important, jazz is catching.

⁵³ Tony Allen, liner notes for the compact disc, *Home Cooking*, released in 2003

For the leader of the quintet, Fela Ransome-Kuti, his job is his hobby. A trained musician and music producer at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, he has pledged himself to make jazz part of the Lagos scene. And man, he may well succeed.⁵⁴

In spite of Fela's attempts to cultivate a Lagos jazz scene, in the 1960s jazz was not popular in Nigeria, and Fela was not successful. He confirmed this in a 1967 interview with Shawn Kelly of the Voice of America: "*straight jazz* as it's played in the states is not working here. I found that out when I came back from England. We started to play jazz... people wouldn't listen."⁵⁵ Ultimately, Fela settled for the fusion of highlife and jazz, an experimental new form that he aptly called "highlife-jazz."

Despite moorings in the highlife tradition, highlife-jazz embodied a crisis of identity. Experimenting per se was not unfamiliar in the history of Lagosian popular music. Only a decade earlier, musicians across the West African coast had lapped up E.T. Mensah's swing-style highlife arrangements with enthusiasm. But if the stylistic trajectories of West African popular music and American jazz had reached a convergence during the 1950s, they had decidedly parted ways shortly thereafter. In light of highlife's investment in the fervent nationalism of the Independence Era, Fela's persistence in referencing contemporary jazz was perceived by some as a capitulation to foreign (western) aesthetic values at the expense of African musical traditions. In 1966, Cardinal Rex Jim Lawson, leader of the Mayor's highlife band and Fela's arch rival reacted to Fela's highlife-jazz:

⁵⁴ Spearman, "Let's Dig Jazz," Reviews, Drama, *Spear Magazine*, February 1964

⁵⁵ Fela, in an interview with Shawn Kelly of the Voice of America, held on November 9, 1967. Available online at: <http://author.voanews.com/english/africa/blog/index.cfm?mode=cat&catid=2F108743-CC98-F031-0BF7EB05335DDB3E>. Accessed, September 14, 2009.

If Fela wants to play highlife, he should go deep into African music for adaptation instead of going whiteman-wise. You can only realize Fela plays highlife when he takes the vocal—after that it is jazz all the way. His discs are unpopular, so I don't comment on them⁵⁶

What Jim Lawson failed to state was that by the mid-60s, highlife, too, was fast losing its popularity. Particularly to the younger music buying demographic of Nigeria, highlife had begun to sound staid and formulaic. Where it had once been considered modern and iconic of the age, highlife was now viewed by a significant cross section of the Nigerian youth as a vestige from the colonial era which, having served the nationalist interests of their parents, now proved inadequate in articulating the complexities of their contemporary postcolonial experiences. One commentator put it this way:

highlife music had been fully stretched. It had been stretched to a point where our local musicians could not dream up anything new, it was doubted, and quite rightly too, “unprogressive.”⁵⁷

If anything, the idealized “Unity in Diversity” that highlife embodied was fast losing its grip on the imagination of many Nigerians, so much so that by 1967 the newly formed country would plunge into a devastating three-year Civil War that dealt the death knell to the several emergent constructs of national unity, including highlife music. Fela's innovations, however, failed to fill the musical void in the Lagosian popular music soundscape. Highlife-jazz came across sounding

⁵⁶ Dapo Odebiyi, “Fela Ready to meet Rex Lawson,” *Sunday Times*, April 10, 1966

⁵⁷ Liner notes, Fela Ransome-Kuti and his Koola Lobitos, “Afrobeat on Stage... Recorded live at the Afrospot,” issued by Phillips West Africa, (PLP001R), (date unscripted).

disjointed and confused, leaving audiences aloof. In an age of proliferating media technologies and easy international travel, Nigerian youths were as eager as ever to engage with the global popular discourse. They turned, therefore, as they had in the past to Western pop music. Tony Amadi, an influential journalist based in Lagos noted:

...Highlife only emerged to dominate the scene of entertainment because of a seeming desire to be independent of foreign music. The calypso came too in the middle sixties but it appealed to a few.

Today, to the young ones, all types of musicals are but flat and dull if it is not pop music. Ironically, pop is not old in the country but its comparatively short history has met a tremendous fan base⁵⁸

2.1.5 Hepcats and Soul Explosion

It has already been established that trends in Western popular music were steadily filtering into Lagos since the nineteenth century. During the 1960s, however, the city (like other African cities) witnessed an unprecedented rash of Western popular music fads due to an increased proliferation of media technologies and the growing ease of transatlantic travel. In the decades preceding, first hand exposure to the musical trends of Europe and the United States had been the preserve of musicians of high status like Bobby Benson, who could afford to travel abroad. In turn, it was these privileged few who disseminated the latest foreign musical trends locally. From the decade leading up to Nigerian Independence on October 1, 1960 and on, a growing demographic of Nigerian youth

⁵⁸ Tony Amadi, "Pop Panorama," *Sunday Times*, April 17, 1996

traveled abroad, particularly for educational purposes. Like Fela, many of these individuals returned with novel musical ideas which they then tried to integrate into local scenes. Those who didn't travel abroad—and this constituted the majority—nevertheless keenly followed their European and American popular pop music stars via media technologies: records, radio and television, which now became more widely accessible. This democratization of media technologies meant that Lagos youth were able not only to absorb the latest foreign musical trends, but also emulate the subcultural elements of style allied to such trends.

Across West Africa, secondary school students aspiring to stardom picked up guitars and formed garage bands which came to be known as copycat bands or beat groups, after the British beat or Merseyside Sound phenomenon that emerged in Liverpool beginning in the late-50s. Overwhelmingly male in membership, these bands took on what was referred to as “zany” names like Cyclops, Hykkers, Spiders, Junkers, Fanthom Four and Clusters.⁵⁹ A considerable teenage fan base emerged in support of Lagos' beat groups, and participants in the new phenomenon came to be known collectively as hepcats. Lagos' hepcats considered themselves a youth movement somewhat akin to the British “mods” or “rockers,” and donned what one commentator described as “flashy, offbeat, sleek, glib and zany looks.”⁶⁰ Compared to Europe's post War youth movements, however, Lagos' hepcats professed no substantive ideological creed. Their primary goal, it appeared, was casual opposition—particularly in the area of fashion and music—to their parents' generation and other defaulters whom they mockingly referred to as “squares.” The following excerpt from a Nigeria Daily Times article sheds some light on hepcat sensibilities:

⁵⁹ Victor Dogu, “On the Hep-cat Beat,” *The Young Ones*, *Spear Magazine*, September 1965

⁶⁰ Ibid

You will hear them all talking about it—from the first form to the final year student. It is the beat group craze. And they are Nigeria's "HEPCATS." Nigerian students and youths have found a past time in beat music. You have to be with it the hepcats' way or you're a square. The Nigerian "square" is to the "hepcats" the way the British "Rocker" is to the "Mod." The foppish snobbery is ever there. Only difference is that Nigerian hepcats and squares do not riot like the British Mods and Rockers. If they (I mean the hepcats and squares) happen to meet at the Bar Beach for instance, they would not even exchange glances not to talk of a big riot like the Brighton one of last year between the Mods and Rockers.⁶¹

Lagos hepcats did not define themselves by specific genres *per se*, but dabbled freely in the latest foreign musical trends. Beginning in the late 50s, rock n' roll, the twist, bluebeat etc. all made splashes in the Lagos music scene. None, however, had as big an impact as soul music. Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin, amongst other soul singers, gained enthusiastic audiences far and wide, but it was the Godfather of Soul, James Brown, who cast the continent into a spellbound frenzy. As the soul craze gained momentum, hepcat identity gave way to the new "afro" culture, complete with afro wigs, platform shoes and bellbottom pants. Copycat bands turned to soul as their new object of emulation, and James Brown clones, passionately vying to create the best impersonation of the American icon, emerged across West Africa. Faced with what one observer called "the ominous threat of pop music," highlife suffered in popularity. In turn, local highlife musicians responded in a number of innovative ways, including playing mixed sets featuring highlife and soul hits, incorporating elements of soul music into their highlife compositions, and composing original soul numbers. Overall, however, the "copycat" bands, which now featured soul impersonators, fared

⁶¹ Paul Pry, "The Age of Beat Music," *Daily Times*, June 18, 1966

much better commercially. In time, their standard repertoire of cover songs came to be replaced with original tunes and by the mid-60s, the most successful bands: Cyclops, Hykkers, Clusters, etc., were being picked up by major record labels. As the 60s wore on, “copycat” bands began to localize their music by incorporating indigenous elements into Western pop formats. Out of this emerged, in the 1970s, the “afrorock/afrofunk/afrosoul” movement which produced a slew of experimental bands, the most popular of which were the Clusters, the Funkees, Ofegbe, BLO, Segun Bucknor and his Revolution, the Lijadu Sisters, and the Joni Haastrup led Monomono. The “afro” movement was in fact a continent-wide phenomenon which diffused to Europe where the band Osibisa, consisting of Ghanaians, Nigerians and South Africans, achieved major mainstream success during the 1970s, presaging the emergence of worldbeat in the 1980s. However, in the early, imitative years of the “afro” movement, one “copycat” in particular gained widespread popularity across West Africa for his electrifying James Brown impersonations. He was the Sierra Leonean singer, Geraldo Pino.

In spite of the dwindling of highlife audiences, and a near impermeable aversion of Nigerian audiences towards jazz, Fela continued to play his jazz-flavored highlife variant throughout most of the 60s. Like many other musicians, however, he incorporated elements derived from the current foreign trends and even recorded some soul originals, but his efforts proved lackluster, particularly given the challenge that came from the unassailable Geraldo Pino. Pino toured Nigeria in 1966 and '67 with great success, dazzling audiences with his flashy convertible Pontiac and state of the art sound equipment.⁶² Above all, it was the soulful inflection of his voice, and his striking command of James Brown’s stage mannerisms that mesmerized audiences. Fela, recalling the devastation he felt upon witnessing Pino, told Carlos Moore,

⁶² Moore, *Fela*, 74

I was playing highlife jazz when Geraldo Pino came to town in '66 or a bit earlier with soul. That's what upset everything, man. He came to town with James Brown's music, singing, 'Hey , hey, I feel all right [sic] , ta... ta... ta... ta...' And with such equipment you've never seen, man. This man was tearing Lagos to pieces. Wooooooh, man! He had all Nigeria in his pocket. Made me fall right on my ass, man... What worried me was that he was going to come back again to Nigeria. I'd seen the impact this mother-fucker had in Lagos... I wanted to split town, leave, disappear. Go far away. To America... After that motherfucking Pino tore up the scene, there wasn't shit I could do in Lagos.⁶³

By 1967, the explosion of soul music on the Lagos popular music soundscape had left Fela so morally and financially depleted that he considered giving up music. Finally, in 1967, Fela departed for Ghana in search of greener pastures.

2.2 BIRTH OF AFROBEAT

... one day in Accra we entered this club, Ringway Hotel. The place was packed, man! Geraldo Pino was playing there. Ohhhhhh, come and hear this music-o!...The whole place was jumping. The music carried me away completely. To me, it was really swinging music... Oooooooooo, I was enjoying this music! Can you understand my

⁶³ Ibid

situation at that club that night? Needing to find a job myself, but enjoying the music so much that I even forgot I myself was a fucking musician...⁶⁴

Ghana did not exactly provide the refuge that Fela sought, as he came to realize when he encountered Pino and other soul music acts there. Fela did finally get hired to play in a club in Ghana; however, encountering Pino made him realize that there was no running from the soul explosion. He could either resign in defeat, or respond with something equally impactful.

After seeing this Pino, I knew I had to get my shit together. And quick! I went back to Nigeria, but soon after returned to Ghana in '68. "One day, I was with a friend sitting down in a club in Accra, listening to soul music. Everybody was playing soul, man, trying to copy Pino. I said to myself: "This James Brown music... This is what's gonna happen in Nigeria soon-o." I saw it so clearly. That's why I said to myself, "I have to be very original and clear myself from shit." I was still hustling. Hustling to make bread. "I must clear myself from this mess. I must identify myself with Africa. Then I will have an identity." That's what I was thinking to myself. Raymond Aziz a Nigerian-Ghanaian who was sitting next to me, looked at me kind of pensively.

"You Ok, man?" he asked.

I said: "Raymond, you see that my music. I must give it a name-o, a real African name that is catchy. I've been looking for names to give it. And I've been thinking of calling it Afro-beat."⁶⁵

⁶⁴Moore, *Fela*, 74-75

⁶⁵ Moore, *Fela*, 25.

On August 18, 1968, Fela Ransome-Kuti announced in the Nigerian media that he was “coming out with a new sound called AFRO BEAT.”⁶⁶ The disclosure, a brief personal statement published in the *Sunday Times*, was brusquely titled, “Fela drops highlife.” For Fela, who began his musical career playing highlife, the genre had become a meaningless tag, “a lose [sic] term that has no reference to any concrete happening in life.”⁶⁷ It is not clear if by this, Fela was addressing the somewhat arbitrary application of the highlife label to a broad range of West African popular musics. In any case, “highlife,” a designation coined in celebration of the display of European social norms by colonial West Africa’s black elite, bore little resonance with youth audiences in postcolonial Nigeria. Fela’s announcement signaled the beginning of a reassessment of his ideological trajectory. Professing to shun the colonial discourse, he disclosed that his intention in the early 60s had been to create “an entirely new sound with an African personality,”⁶⁸ and global appeal. In actuality, Fela’s pan-Africanist vision during these early years of his career was much more musical than political in scope. Stylistically, Fela now considered the heady amalgam of highlife and jazz that he called his “sound” sufficiently idiosyncratic and removed from highlife’s conventional structures as to warrant independent categorization. Though, earlier on in the decade Fela had christened his music “highlife-jazz,” he was now ready to drop the highlife tag completely. To wrest his “sound” from highlife’s subjugating influence, Fela now relabeled his music AFRO BEAT. With the new appellation, Fela hoped to achieve three things. First, he would resolve, once and for all, the sense of ambiguous musical identity implicit in “highlife-jazz.” Secondly, through Afro-Beat, Fela aspired to create a “new trend worthy of emulation,”⁶⁹ in the Nigerian music scene. He was no longer satisfied with having just innovated a stylistic variant of highlife, nor was he aspiring to create a musical novelty that

⁶⁶ Victor Dorgu, “Fela drops Highlife,” *Sunday Times*, August 18, 1968

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ ibid

would continue to alienate audiences. Fela realized that in the popular music sphere, audiences are vital; and in order to generate and sustain mass appeal, he would have to not only introduce original ideas but ensure that such innovations were widely accessible to prospective fans. The catchy new label, “Afro-Beat” heralded a renewed populist outlook in Fela’s artistic growth, one that would be realized in subsequent years through the appropriation of various indigenous and foreign musical texts and conventions. Thirdly, by calling his music “Afro-Beat,” a contraction of “African” and “Beat,” Fela was unequivocally renewing his commitment to a pan-Africanist musical discourse. His music would constitute a source of cultural pride, not just to Nigerians, but to the generality of Africans, and “the black race.”⁷⁰

Beyond the lofty rhetoric, however, Fela’s 1968 afrobeat manifesto provides no hints on the aural character of the anticipated sound. To reinvent musical identity, to “create a brand new sound,” more would be required than simple nominal change. It remained to be seen how Fela Ransome-Kuti would translate ideological rhetoric into musical practice. What musical texts would Fela harness in creating his avowed new sound? Particularly, given the fact that Fela “dropped” highlife because it appeared to him to have lost its social and cultural relevance, how did he intend to imbue his “new sound” with contemporary relevance? How would he situate aesthetics and ideology to the cultural history and the everyday life of his locale?

In 1969, Fela embarked on his (in)famous ten-month tour of the United States, a journey which ultimately landed him in Los Angeles at a time when the flames of the Civil Rights Movement were far from smoldering and the Black Power Movement was very much active. His intention was to bring his music to entertainment’s global capital, where he hoped to gain international recognition. However, the trip was a financial failure, as Fela himself would admit: “I went to

⁷⁰ Ibid

America and when I did come back, I only had \$10 in my pocket. I was completely broke, man.”⁷¹ In Los Angeles, Fela met Sandra Smith (later Isidore), a young African American lady and friend of the Black Panther Party. Smith introduced Fela to the writings of Malcolm X and other black activists which generated in him a profound ideological awakening. Although Fela had named his music afrobeat and outlined new musical and ideological goals in 1968, this was merely a foreshadowing of transformations to come. “I was just another musician,” Fela states retrospectively, “playing with Koola Lobitos and singing love songs, songs about rain, about people... What did I know?” Fela’s true epiphany occurred in Los Angeles, in 1969; for only then did he consciously begin redirecting his music towards a cultural nationalist discourse.

It was in America I saw I was making mistake. I didn’t know myself. I realized that neither me nor my music was going in the right direction... As soon as I got back home I started to preach. I had decided to change my music. And my music did start changing according to how I experienced the life and culture of my people.⁷²

It was in Los Angeles that Fela composed what he called his first real African song, “My Lady Frustration,” using a “special beat”⁷³ he claims to have heard from veteran Nigerian musician Ambrose Campbell in London. While still in Los Angeles, Fela changed the name of his band from Koola Lobitos—an appellation he would describe as meaningless, “foolish” and “stupid”⁷⁴—to Nigeria ’70. Upon returning to Nigeria, the band took on the name Africa ’70.

⁷¹ Moore, *Fela*, 78

⁷² Moore, *Fela*, 89.

⁷³ Moore, *Fela*, 85

⁷⁴ Moore, *Fela*, 110

In Nigeria, Fela continued to consolidate his various musical influences, adding to his jazz and highlife background a wealth of Yoruba traditional musics and lore, and a smidgen of soul. The vibrant new sound that emerged was enthusiastically received by audiences and critics alike. Beginning in 1971 with the monster hit, “Jeun Ko Ku” (“Chop and Die”), Fela produced hit after hit. On songs like “Yellow Fever,” “Rofofo fight” and “Gentleman,” Fela offered satirical commentary on social vices: while songs like “Buy Africa,” and “Why Blackman Dey Suffer” preached cultural pride and Afrocentrism.

Around 1971, Fela changed the name of his club from “Afro Spot” to “Afrika Shrine,” stating that he no longer wished to play in night clubs, but rather in a meaningful space with “roots.”⁷⁵ During the early 70s, Fela declared his residence a commune open to “every African escaping persecution,” a decision he connected both to his experience of racism in Los Angeles, and to traditional models of communal living.⁷⁶ In 1974, following a series of incarcerations, Fela named his communal compound “Kalakuta Republic,” declaring it autonomous from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Following his 1974 internments, Fela’s music took on a decidedly more confrontational tone. Kalakuta Republic nurtured a decidedly libertine environment that attracted a motley retinue of university students, professionals, and wage-earning constituents who, suffused in marijuana, engaged in an array of ideological debates. In 1975, Fela changed his last name from “Ransome-Kuti,” which he now considered a mark of colonial subjugation, to “Anikulapo-Kuti:” *one who carries death in his pouch—and therefore cannot die*. On February 18, 1977, some 1000 soldiers of the Nigerian army raided Kalakuta Republic, completely razing the commune while brutally assaulting its inhabitants. One of those attacked was Fela’s 77-year-old mother, foremost nationalist and women’s rights activist, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Mrs. Kuti, who was thrown out of a window three stories

⁷⁵ Moore, *Fela*, 110

⁷⁶ Moore, *Fela*, 109

high, died a few months later from the injuries she incurred. With each government sanctioned attack, however, Fela riled against the establishment with even more venom. He also kept his hedonistic lifestyle apace, and on February 20, 1978 he married his 27 chorus girls on the same day, calling them his “Queens.” Fela also became more involved in partisan politics, creating his own Movement of the People Party (MOP) in 1978 with the goal of running in the presidential elections the following year, but he was disqualified. In 1978, most of the musicians in Fela’s band, the Africa ’70, deserted after playing at the Berlin Jazz Festival. Returning to Nigeria, Fela regrouped and called his new band the Egypt ’80. As the ’80’s progressed Fela delved deep into mysticism. His music became darker, slower and more complex. The ’80 brought Fela more brutal confrontations and incarcerations; however, he managed to perform in the US in 1986 at an Amnesty International Concert held at the Giants Stadium in New Jersey. He returned to the States in 1990, and 1991 on tour. On August 2, 1997, Fela died of heart failure and other AIDS related causes. The city of Lagos stood still as a reported one million people turned out to pay homage to the hero they fondly called *Abami Eda* (the enigmatic one).

2.3 THE LAGOS AFROBEAT SCENE, POST-FELA

For many years, Fela appeared to be the only afrobeat musician in Lagos. While some local artists like Sunny Okosuns and juju maestro king Sunny Ade incorporated elements of the genre into their styles, these were only brief forays having little significance on the evolution of the genre. Fela’s hegemony over afrobeat was nevertheless contested in more profound ways, even if these contestations were not immediately visible. Beginning in 1975, Tony Allen, Fela’s original drummer began carving an independent path for himself with the release of solo offerings like *Jealousy* (1975),

Progress (1977) and *No Accommodation for Lagos* (1979). Initially, Allen's efforts had been supported by Fela—Fela's Africa '70 band had backed up Allen, with Fela himself both producing and performing on the albums. But Allen ultimately parted ways with Fela in 1979, forming his own band with which he recorded a new album, *No Discrimination* in 1980. In 1984, Allen moved to Europe where he began a long string of collaborations with African and European musicians including King Sunny Ade, Manu Dibango, Ray Lema, Damon Albarn, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Air, Paul Simonon, and Susheela Raman. On subsequent albums like *Black Voices* (1999) and *Home Cooking* (2002) Allen's progressive experimentation with electronica, dub, R&B and rap, would push afrobeat's sonic boundaries, widening its circulation in the global soundscape.

In 1989 Fela's son Femi Kuti broke off from his father's band, forming his own Positive Force band. A recording deal with Motown records in 1995, and performances at venues in Europe and America helped to bring Femi's brand of afrobeat to international limelight. Like Allen, Femi's experimentation with new global sounds and his collaboration with international artists like Mos Def, Common, Macy Gray and D'Anjelo brought recognition that earned him a 2003 Grammy nomination in best World Music Album category, for the album, *Fight to Win*.

The following ethnography presents a snapshot of the current state of the Lagos afrobeat scene. As will become evident from the ethnography, Femi Kuti has built a substantial countercultural fan base with shared behavioral codes, much in the same way that Fela did beginning in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the ethnography also shows that Fela still looms large in the Lagosian consciousness. What the ethnography does not reveal is that Femi is not the only afrobeat musician currently residing in Lagos. There is also an "underground" sprinkling of afrobeat and afrobeat related musicians working anonymously from home studios. However, Femi, like Fela before him, appears to be the central force in the Lagos afrobeat scene. One may ask what became of all the other musicians who played with Fela when he was alive? I discovered the answer to this question,

not in Lagos, but in New York City and San Francisco, where some of them now reside. Like Tony Allen who is now based in Paris, many of these musicians are presently engaged in one way or the other in propagating afrobeat within their local communities, as I will show later in this chapter.

2.3.1 *In the field:* FELABRATION at the New Afrika Shrine

The New Afrika Shrine sits squat and defiant in the heart of the Central Business District of Ikeja, the Lagos State Capital. Red gabled roof, faded ochre walls and a weathered, all-enclosing concrete fence, the performance space-cum-community center of sorts is an oddity amongst oddities in the desultory hodgepodge of structures that chart the sprawling city of Lagos. Within the immediate vicinity of the Shrine are private- and government-owned corporations such as Tisco Nigeria Ltd., and the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank. There are also multinational industries like Cadbury Plc. and Coca-Cola. Most notable is the presence of the State, marked by the Federal High Court building, and the State Secretariat which houses the offices of the governor and deputy governor. A house of protest, where throngs of disenfranchised Nigerians gather several nights a week to engage in dissident music making, is the last thing one would expect to find in such environs.

Yet, if you walk down NERDC road at night, the brooding presence of industry and establishment might be lost on you as it oftentimes was on me during my multiple trips to the Shrine from October to December 2007. Instead, your senses might be overwhelmed by an alternative space, dense with the clamor of informal transactions and the ever-present haze of *igbo* (marijuana). The street is shrunken, narrowed on both sides by cars and makeshift kiosks where men and women, sitting around tottering tables, smoke, flirt, and drink Guinness, Star and other factory distilled beers, alongside local brews like *khaikhai*, *ogogoro* and *paraga*. The night is speckled with the naked glow

of hurricane lamps, and thick with a suffusion of smells: burning cannabis, stagnant gutters, and savory suya from *mallams'* tables. Children, carrying trays on their heads, navigate the maze of human traffic as they hawk sweets, biscuits, cigarettes, lighters. An assortment of handy items, from cell phone recharge cards to condoms, can be purchased in this transitory setting. You can even order an instant meal of *indomie* noodles, hardboiled egg and tea. In front of the Shrine is a fleet of *okadas*, the everywhere-present commercial motorcycles that many Lagosians have taken to in order to beat the impermeable traffic of the overcrowded city. In spite of the congestion, many travel to the Shrine in their cars, finding unconventional ways to subvert space, like parking in the middle of the crowded street. Here, indeed, is a microcosm of Lagos, a city that never ceases to confound and amuse with its propensity for transformation and innovation.

Tuesday, October 16, 2007 is like any other Tuesday or Thursday at the Shrine: rehearsal nights for Femi Kuti and his Positive Force band. It is, also, an opportunity for anyone to hear live afrobeat free of charge. The annual FELABRATION—a celebration of Fela's life—takes place in October, so the usually populated shrine is even more packed at this time. Christmas lights adorn the palm trees outside the concrete fence, hinting of the weeklong festivities. As I approach the building with its Africa-shaped embossment of Fela, both hands raised in the black power salute, I am reminded of the defiance, the radicalism, and the struggle against oppression that the Shrine represents.

Inside, the Shrine is spacious. A large stage stands elevated in the front, the words, Movement Against Second Slavery, written on the wall behind it. A few feet from the stage, on both sides of the hall, are two cages, each of which houses a dancer whenever Femi Kuti performs. In the back there is a bar, a balcony and bathrooms. Also, a large T.V sits propped inside a metal frame attached to the wall. People often come here to listen to music, but sometimes the Shrine is simply a venue for socializing, shorn of agenda and open to all. I am early today. I observe a mixed crowd of

mainly youngsters assembled in front of the T.V. screen. The English League is on, and although this group of Nigerian enthusiasts has no national stakes in the football competition, you couldn't tell it from their deafening cheers. Unlike most Nigerians, I am not an ardent football fan, so I turn my attention to other things.

It is not until well past midnight before Femi Kuti's Positive Force band gets on stage. The band consists of 2 trumpeters, 1 flugelhorn player, 1 trombonist and 2 saxophonists on alto and tenor. There are also a drumset player, 3 percussionists, 3 guitarists and a keyboardist. The band opens the show with an instrumental rendition of the Fela classic, "Gentleman." After this, "Feso J'aiye," a popular tune originally by highlife legend I.K. Dairo is performed with the Positive Force bandleader singing lead vocals as Femi is not yet on stage. These two opening songs are played with a rather laid back disposition, giving the impression that the band is just warming up. In the audience, one or two individuals dance alone, but most people just sit around tables, talking, drinking, enveloped in an ever-thickening haze of marijuana.

The spacey atmosphere in the Shrine begins to warm up when the band breaks into Femi's popular hit, "Truth Don Die." The piece begins with the "wah-wah" sound of a lone synthesizer, as it plays in succession three chords—ascending then descending—that outline the modality of the piece. This brief opening statement, repeated a few times, segues into a sprightly groove in which interlocking rhythm and tenor guitar riffs tinkle over a bouncy bass line. Congas and other percussion add spontaneous flourishes, until finally each instrument locks into syncopated polyrhythm, driven by the staggered kick of the drum set. At this point, three bikini-clad dancers enter, positioning themselves on the front-left corner of the stage. Simultaneously, two others mount up the cages on the flanks. The dancers' faces are painted, and their bodies are suffused in beads of varying colors and sizes. Beads adorn their arms, legs and waists. Beads are strung diagonally across their torsos and dangle from each dancer's ears. The beads accentuate the rapid gyration of hips writhing and

shimmying in choreographed precision. The element of spectacle provided by the dancers is well received by the audience, more of whom are now up on their feet dancing. Finally, Femi appears on stage, positioning himself in the center while raising clenched fists towards the crowd. With loud cheers, the audience gestures back in kind. Without uttering a word, Femi steps to the keyboard and begins to play with great intensity a progression of two chords on the piercing upper register of a Hammond XB2 organ. Then, with a sudden gesture of the arm, he signals to the band, ushering in a brisk and propulsive horn theme. Stepping to a microphone, Femi begins to chant in pidgin English:

Truth don die o!

Truth don die o!

Na yesterday him talk

Him want to travel for the world

To bring de people him word

De true word of God

Make people stop to lie

Say na lie lie spoil de world

If people stop to lie

Enjoyment go full de world ...

These are the opening lyrics to a parable which narrates the tragic event of the demise of Truth. Truth is an itinerant preacher who has decided to bring people the *true word of God*. His message is simple: “*If people stop to lie enjoyment go full the world.*” Resolute, Truth gets on a motorcycle at Ipodo, a street popularly known in Lagos as the site of a crowded open-air market. His destination is the Lagos International Airport where he intends to begin his worldwide mission. While trying to

negotiate an intersection, Truth fails to notice a commercial bus and a trailer approaching from his left and right respectively. He crashes right into the colliding vehicles. Shocked onlookers rush Truth to the hospital, but his head has been crushed in the accident and the doctor is unable to save him. Truth dies, leaving ample room for Lie to populate the world unchecked. It is a lamentable fate, for Lie, we are told, is the one who *spoils* the world.

Like much African music, “Truth Don Die” is built on a call-and-response structure, with alternating lead and chorus parts. Femi Kuti declaims the main narrative content while a chorus of singers or horns provides commentary. Occasionally, the audience too sings along, blurring conventional “performer-audience” conventions, and generating a communal atmosphere, intense with energy.

For a few brief moments after the opening piece, Femi stands back, casting a neutral gaze on the ecstatic audience. Finally, stepping to the microphone, he exclaims, “*ararara!*” to which the crowd responds “*orororo!*” This brief verbal exchange is a familiar part of *Shrine* lingo, which, while having no definitive lexical meaning, nevertheless functions as an important communicative code. In this particular case, the verbal exchange could be translated as a call to order, for, not long afterwards, the cheering abates. Femi addresses the audience: “People said FELABRATION would not work. They called us hooligans, criminals, *amugbo*. But it did! Fela will always have support.” The ovation resumes while the band breaks into “Sorry Sorry,” another one of Femi’s hits.

The event continues in this fashion with Femi playing familiar songs that generate in the audience varying modes of physical embodiment. The high point of the night arrives during the performance of a song called “Shotan.” In afrobeat repertoires, “Shotan” is not markedly different in style: corrosive indictments declaimed in call-and-response form that unfurls over pulsing, horn-drenched grooves. What distinguishes “Shotan” from other afrobeat songs are the practiced performative actions that accompany the piece. As the bass guitar churns out the opening notes of

the piece, the audience, as if cued, begins to throw plastic bottles and cardboard cartons formerly containing water and other beverages into the air. Femi, by now shirtless, invokes on the audience abuses normally associated with the notorious bus conductors of Lagos: “A b’o n si’ere ni?” (Are you mad?) “Ab’o n yama ni?” (Are you *piece of shit*?) To these rhetorical questions, the audience responds with spastic bodily exertions. Then, in a guttural voice, Femi utters in rapid succession the words: “Se were!” (*get mad!*). As ordered, the audience takes the frenzy to a heightened level. While the gyrations of the dancers on stage and in the cages accelerates, on the floor, people in the audience are now throwing plastic chairs, tables and beer cans into the air, simulating what looks like a mob scene. A brief chant, adapted from a popular children’s ditty, precedes the main vocal text, an “I-told-you-so” denunciation of the Nigerian electorate for voting in President Obasanjo’s government, in a much turbulent transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule.

Jangirofa—epo moto

Epo moto—I’o fa wahala

We don tell you many times before

Say the gov’ment of Obasanjo

go carry all of us go for hell

You carry your pompous self about

You say you no want to hear

Now everything come dey scatter for your face

Senior Mugu Shotan o

See-saw—fuel [for the] car

Oil—is the cause of our [Nigeria’s]
troubles

We have told you many times before

That the government of Obasanjo

Will lead us straight to hell

You say you do not want to hear it

Now everything has blown up in your
face

King of fools, are you satisfied?

2.4 WESTWARD MIGRATIONS

Although Fela's 1969 Los Angeles experience was a watershed event in the evolution of afrobeat, Fela would not return to the United States until 1986, seventeen years later. In between this time, however, he performed several times in Europe, including a two week visit to London, during which he recorded the album, *Fela's London Scene* at EMI's Abbey Road Studios. He also performed at the Berlin Jazz Festival in 1978, and in Amsterdam, 1981. The significance of these European performances is that they helped to familiarize Western audiences with Fela's afrobeat beat music. Even though Fela would remain largely unknown in the United States until the 1980s, afrobeat was already filtering into the American popular music soundscape, impacting it in significant ways.

One of the earliest and often cited manifestations of afrobeat's influence on American popular music is in the work of the rock band, Talking Heads. Beginning in 1979, with the song "I Zimbra" featured on the album, *Fear of Music*, the Talking Heads began to experiment with African polyrhythmic approaches to their music. This musical direction was fully explored on subsequent albums of the early 1980s: *Remain in the Light* (1980), *Speaking in Tongues* (1983), and *Naked* (1991). In 1981, Talking Head members David Byrne (Scottish) and Brian Eno (English), collaborated on "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts," an album named after a novel by the Nigerian author, Amos Tutuola. The album, described as "a pioneering work for countless styles connected to electronics, ambience and Third World music,"⁷⁷ drew on an eclectic array of global soundscapes, including, "Fela Kuti-

⁷⁷ <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:smazef5khgf5~T1>, accessed 02/12/09.

influenced funk.”⁷⁸ Even though neither Byrne nor Eno had read Amos Tutuola’s novel when they created their album, both of them were familiar with the author’s earlier novel, “The Palm Wine Drinkard” (1952). Tutuola’s novels were written in a form of Nigerian Broken English, and drew on a wealth of Yoruba mythological imagery, elements which both surface subsequently in Fela Kuti’s music.

These early musical creations by the Talking Heads have been cited as strongly impacting the world of American popular music. Fela’s afrobeat, in particular, has been noted as greatly influencing the rock bands: “The African-funk direction taken by the Talking Heads and other rock bands in recent years was largely inspired by Fela and Afrobeat”⁷⁹ As implied earlier, a lot of these African influences were entering America via Europe. Particularly significant was the longtime association between world-renowned English drummer Ginger Baker, and Fela. Along with Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker formed one third of the acclaimed British blues-rock band, Cream. According to Baker, he first met Fela around 1960/1961 when the latter, as a student at Trinity College of Music in London, would “come and sit in the all-night jams which I played in.”⁸⁰ This initial contact was momentary, however, leading to no musical partnerships. Even as a member of Cream, Baker had begun to immerse himself in West African drumming, visiting Ghana in the 1960s. He later moved to Nigeria in 1970 where he resided until 1976. During this period he formed significant associations with several local musicians including Fela. In Nigeria, Baker and Kuti renewed their friendship, and Baker became a regular visitor to Fela’s club, the Afrospot, occasionally sitting in for Tony Allen, Fela’s drummer. While in Nigeria, Ginger Baker established the first sixteen-track recording studio in Nigeria, Arc studio, for EMI. There, he recorded and produced some of Fela’s

⁷⁸ Alexis Petridis, “David Byrne and Brian Eno, Everything That Happens Will Happen Today,” Pop Review, *The Guardian*, August 15, 2008. Accessed online, 2/12/09
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/aug/15/brianeno.popandrock>.

⁷⁹ Robert Palmer, “Past and Present Fuse in African Pop,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1982.

⁸⁰ Ginger Baker in an interview with Jay Babcock, <http://www.jaybabcock.com/ginger.html>, accessed 02/12/09.

most well known songs including “Expensive Shit,” and “Water no get Enemy,” (both from the album “Expensive Shit”). Baker is also featured playing drums with Tony Allen on the albums, *Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Africa ’70 with Ginger Baker* (1971), and *Fela’s London Scene* (1972). In 1972, Ginger Baker released the album, *Stratavarious* (Polydor) with a mixed bag of musicians from Africa: Guy Warren (later known as Kofi Ghanaba) from Ghana; Alhaji Brimar from Nigeria; Bobby Gas from the UK; and Sandra Danielle from the US.⁸¹ On this album, Fela featured as a singer and played organ, piano and percussion. The strong Yoruba elements that define the album are hinted by track titles such as: “Ariwo,” “Tiwa” and “Ju Ju.”

Ginger Baker formed the band Salt in 1972 with a group of Nigerian musicians: Laolu Akins, Tunde Kuboye, and twin vocalists, Taiwo and Kehinde Lijadu amongst others. Though Salt was short lived and made no recordings, the group toured Europe and drew explicitly on African (Nigerian) as well as European musical elements. Ginger Baker’s Air Force, formed in 1969, though also short lived, earned more international acclaim. The rock-jazz-fusion band featured at least two Nigerian musicians, Remi Kabaka and Joni Haastrop, front man of the Clusters and Monomono, popular pop groups of Nigeria during the 1970s.

Ginger Baker’s associations with Fela and a wide array of Nigerian musicians illustrates the cross-continental interaction between Europe and Africa going on in the 1960s and 1970s. During those decades, afro-rock bands like Osibisa were playing a mix of African and Western styles music which had become very popular in the UK. Fela distinguished his music from forms such as afro-rock, afrofunk and afrosoul, and in 1971, shortly after recording *London Scene* at the Abbey Road Studio in London, he was certain that, given afro-rock’s success, his *afrobeat* would soon becoming the “hottest thing”⁸² on the European soundscape. Although it would be much later before afrobeat

⁸¹ Real name: Sandra Smith, and later through marriage, Sandra Isidore.

⁸² Critic, “Getting the Message to Fans” *Daily Times*, Wed. April 28, 1971, p. 7

would gain some level of popularity in Europe, and it is certainly arguable to what extent afrobeat became all the rage that Fela thought it would be, there was definitely a fast rising awareness of afrobeat circulating within the popular music world. This awareness is attested to in Paul and Linda McCartney's decision in 1972 to record the much acclaimed *Band on the Run* album in Lagos, Nigeria. Bored with recording at Abbey Road Studio in London, and seeking the inspiration of an exotic locale for his next album, Paul McCartney asked EMI for a list of all their international recording studios. Aware of Ginger Baker's adventures with Nigerian musicians, and surely cognizant of the waves that African musicians were making in Europe at the time, the McCartneys chose Lagos, Nigeria as their geographical. While in Lagos, McCartney watched Fela's band perform live. He described his reaction to that experience to the UK Guardian: "the best band I've ever seen live ... When Fela and his band eventually began to play, after a long, crazy build-up, I just couldn't stop weeping with joy. It was a very moving experience."⁸³ McCartney began to negotiate recording his album with some Africa '70, band members, but Fela, accusing McCartney of trying to steal black music, resisted the move in a much publicized scuffle. Reflecting on the incident, McCartney stated:

We were gonna use African musicians, but when we were told we were about to pinch the music we thought, "Well, up to you, we'll do it ourselves." Fela thought we were stealing black African music, the Lagos sound. So I had to say, "Do us a favour, Fela, we do OK. We're all right as it is. We sell a couple of records here and there.

I thought my visit would, if anything, help them, because it would draw attention to Lagos and people would say, "Oh, by the way, what's the music down there like?"

⁸³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/aug/15/popandrock5>

And I'd say it was unbelievable. It is unbelievable ... it's incredible music down there. I think it will come to the fore.⁸⁴

At least one Nigerian musician did end up recording with McCartney in Lagos, the percussionist Remi Kabaka. Ginger Baker also played percussion on the album. *Band on the Run* became a very successful album, reaching number 1 in the US on multiple occasions, going triple platinum, winning a Grammy award in 1975, and ranking 418 on Rolling Stone magazine's list of 500 greatest albums of all time. While *Band on the Run* may not have ended up exposing Nigerian musicians to the world as McCartney had hoped (an act which Paul Simon would achieve much later with South African musicians on the album, *Graceland*), nevertheless, both McCartney and Ginger Baker's travels to Lagos were significant landmarks that inspired a flux of rock musicians to Africa in search of new musical directions. In an article titled "Rock Goes African," published on July 28, 1983, the *Washington Post* described the development thus:

Like reggae music a decade ago, African music is now hailed as "the next big thing" for western popular music to embrace or exploit. It was easy to dismiss the much-publicized trips of Paul McCartney and Ginger Baker to music-rich Nigeria in the early 70s, at least one African pop star, Fela Kuti, had gained international fame with his intensely soulful Afrobeat music. David Byrne and Eno got hip to Afrobeat and, with their commercially and artistically triumphant collaboration on the Talking Heads' "Remain in the Light," new wave musicians started to look past Jamaica to Africa for exotic dance beats.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ "Melting Pot of Pop," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1982

The strains of African music being imprinted on Western popular music were first to be heard in the music of a “handful of rock elite.”⁸⁶ But as these experimentations with African music proved more and more successful in pop music, record company executives began to float the idea of promoting the African artists whose ideas had innervated Western pop music for so long. The idea seemed all the more plausible given the death of Bob Marley in 1981. Marley’s worldwide success had been financially rewarding for the music industry, marking a major breaking point in the emergence of the “world music” phenomenon during the 1980s. With Marley’s demise, the niche “Third World” music industry now sought a replacement.

Meanwhile, back in Nigeria, Fela’s diatribes against corrupt establishment and the dictatorial military regimes which held sway in Nigeria became increasingly acerbic. This mounting tension between Fela and the Nigerian government and its elitist cohorts would come to a head in 1977, immediately after the much celebrated Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). FESTAC was a global celebration of black culture and civilization that featured a series of artistic, musical and cultural displays, as well as oratory and colloquia. During the month-long event held in January 1977, the city of Lagos played host to delegates from fifty-five countries across Africa and its American, European, Asian and Oceanian diasporas. Initially invited on board the FESTAC planning committee, Fela later opted out of the government-selected committee in a much publicized disagreement over a list of recommendations which Fela had drawn up for the event. Fela was not the only one who voiced opposition to the manner in which the government was going about the event. Indeed, several prominent Nigerian intellectuals and artists, including playwright Wole Soyinka,⁸⁷ also voiced displeasure over the rampant corruption and disorganization which appeared to be plaguing the event. But Fela was by far the most vociferous in his criticism. His

⁸⁶ *ibid*

⁸⁷ Fela’s cousin and recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature

opposition was expressed in two ways. Firstly, Fela audaciously organized a counter event, a “mini-FESTAC,” at his Afrika Shrine scheduled to take place in tandem with FESTAC. Many international musicians, including Stevie Wonder, Archie Shepp, Gilberto Gil, and members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, flooded the Shrine night after night, some of them sharing the stage and jamming with Fela. Having gained such an auspicious audience, Fela then used the opportunity to rail at the government. *New York Times* journalist John Darnton, at the time resident in Nigeria, recalls: “On Sunday afternoons, when he laced his show with rambling, pot-inspired diatribes against Christianity and the rich people on Ikoyi island... he began saying things that no Nigerian newspaper would dare publish. ‘You think dey go give up power,’ he scoffed at the military’s promise to hand the government back over to the civilians in 1979. Then lapsing into Oxford English, ‘Tell me, what African man in a uniform with shiny brass buttons has ever done that?’⁸⁸ Later that year, Fela recorded the song “Zombie,” a satirical piece which caricatured men of the Nigerian military as programmed clones following orders without reason. “Zombie” became a monster hit in Lagos and was released in the US by Mercury in 1977. It remains, even today, Fela’s most popular and biggest selling song, a fact that is instructive not only of its widespread musical appeal, but also of the height of Nigerian disenchantment with autocratic military rule during the 1970s.

On February 18, 1977, shortly after the FESTAC celebrations, Nigerian soldiers laid siege on Kalakuta Republic, ultimately razing the commune after in a brutal attack. Women were raped with broken bottles, some had their nipples smashed with stones, men were dragged about by their testicles, Fela’s 77 year old mother was thrown out a window three stories high, and Fela was beaten unconscious.

As a result of the unparalleled brutality of the incident, Fela, already popular in Nigeria, became a continental superstar with unprecedented mass popularity across Africa. Abroad, the

⁸⁸ John Darnton, “Nigeria’s Dissident Superstar,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1977

reporting of Western journalists like Darnton helped create international awareness about the incident—which came to be tagged “The Fela Affair”—and deified Fela as a folk hero of countercultural movements worldwide. So quickly and so high did Fela’s profile rise in the international scene that in 1984, when he was again arrested by the Nigerian government on trumped up drug charges, Amnesty International declared him a political prisoner.

For the international music industry, all of this meant that Fela had a compelling *and* marketable story. It was a personal narrative which not only fitted with reggae’s global appeal as a musical genre steeped in Third World politics and ideology, but also one that could easily feed into the expectations of the post-Vietnam, post-Cultural Revolution rock/folk music audiences for whom political artists like Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Jimi Hendrix were already icons. So it was that in the 1980s several recording companies, including Polydor, Motown and world music powerhouse, Island Records, approached Fela with record deals. However, in order to package his music for the Western market, Fela was asked to reduce the length of his songs, sing in English and tone down the caustic tone of his political lyrics. Fela refused to compromise in any of these areas, and the proposed contracts fell through. Fela ultimately signed a record deal with Arista but made only two records with the label. As one British writer stated, “Fela Kuti’s music was once seen as the apex of progressive, exciting African music; then abruptly, he became yesterday’s man.”⁸⁹

Nevertheless, afrobeat continued to filter into the US music scene throughout the 1980s and 1990s. James Brown’s much publicized 1970 visit to Nigeria gave his band members an opportunity to meet Fela and watch him perform live. James Brown’s bassist, Bootsy Collins, would later cite Fela as an influence particularly on songs like “Stretchin’ Out (In a Rubber Band),” and “Jamaica” which he recorded with the group *Sweat Band* in 1980. James Brown’s long time arranger Alfred “Pee Wee” Ellis would also cite Fela as a significant influence. Along with other former James Brown bandmates:

⁸⁹ David Toop, “Sound Check: Underground System,” *Wire*, February, 1993.

Fred Wesley, David Matthews and St. Clair Pinckney, they recorded “Africa, Center of the World” in homage to Fela’s song of the same title. In 1983, P-Funk pioneer George Clinton incorporated snippets of Fela’s song, “Mr. Follow Follow” in his song, “Nubian Nut,” released in 1983. Jazz trumpeter Lester Bowie lived with Fela for six months in 1977, during which time the two musicians developed a long-term friendship. Bowie ended up recording with Fela and featured as a guest trumpeter with Fela’s Egypt ’80 band in New York during one of their US tours. Together with the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Lester Bowie recorded a version of Zombie on the album, “Ancient to the Future,” released in 1987. In 1994, Jazz saxophonist, Branford Marsalis used samples from Fela’s song, “Beasts of No Nation” on the collaborative hip-hop-jazz album, “Buckshot Le Fonque.”

The underground Brooklyn group X-Clan was one of the earlier hip-hop acts to incorporate samples of Fela’s music into theirs, with the song “Grand Verbalizer, What Time is it?” in 1990. Given hip-hop’s affinity to the funk-jazz movement of the 60s and 70’s, X-Clan may very well have been exposed to Fela’s Afrobeat style through George Clinton’s “Nubian Nut”, or even the Art Ensemble of Chicago’s rendition of “Zombie.” What is certain is that, even before the time of Fela’s passing in 1997, afrobeat was already circulating and definitively impacting the world of hip-hop/dance music. The outfit Masters at Work (MAW), highly influential in the house music/hip-hop scene, cites Fela as a long time influence.⁹⁰ As early as 1993, their music began to revolutionize the underground dance music scene, and in a gesture of homage, they had tried to bring Fela to New York for a collaborative project, but this plan fell through due to Fela’s deteriorating health at the time. In fact, Fela died shortly after the 1997 release of the group’s groundbreaking album, Nu Yorican Soul—the album on which Fela would supposedly have collaborated with MAW. A few weeks after the announcement of Fela’s death, MAW released as a tribute, “MAW Expensive,” a reworked version of Fela’s “Expensive Shit.”

⁹⁰ Patel, *Power Music*, 33

In spite of these forays into afrobeat during the 1990s, it was Fela's death in 1997 that became the watershed event that drew widespread recognition to his music across the United States. In a direct response to Fela's passing, MCA/Universal began reissuing Fela's extensive catalogue. Later, UK based Wrasse records would re-package the catalogue for a second wave of reissues. The capstone of the MCA releases was the 2001 tribute CD *Red Hot+Riot* used to bring awareness to Fela and raise funds for AIDS victims in Africa. The CD boasted an elite lineup of hip-hop, R&B, jazz, Latin and pop artists from the US, Europe and Africa, including Dead Prez, Talib Kweli, D'angelo, Macy Gray, Common, Meshell Ndegeocello, Yerba Buena, Bugz in the Attic, Nile Rogers, Archie Shepp, Kelis, Sade, Baaba Maal, Cheikh Lo, Les Nubians, Manu Dibango, Tony Allen, Femi Kuti and a fast rising New York City band called Antibalas.

Although Fela did not make it back to New York City before he died in 1997, the city, a major cultural crossroads, would nevertheless become one of the epicenters of the global afrobeat movement that emerged in the 1990s. One band in particular would play a central role in the emergence of local afrobeat scenes in the United States and beyond. That band is Antibalas.

2.4.1 Antibalas

Originally hailing from Philadelphia, Italian-Mexican saxophonist Martin Perna got his first introduction to afrobeat in 1991 when he heard Fela's song "Sorrow, Tears and Blood," sampled on X-Clan's song, "Grand Verbalizer, What time is it?" However, as he told me in an interview, "it was probably two or three more years till I learned who Fela was... but then... I didn't have any sort of musical goals... I was in a totally different career direction and playing music wasn't part of my life."⁹¹

⁹¹ Personal communication, October 6, 2008

As a student at New York University, Perna met Gabe Roth, with whom he would be roommates over several years. Roth, a multi instrumentalist, producer and songwriter, had the vision of starting a funk/Soul band in the mould of James Brown/70s retro funk, a departure from the prevailing P-Funk of groups like Cameo or Funkadelic, which were prominent at the time. It was through Roth that Perna met the drummer Phillipe Lehman. Together with Roth, Lehman established the now defunct DESCO Records, an independent label for which Roth's band, "Soul Providers," recorded. Lehman, a French-American, had seen Fela perform live in Paris in the 80's, and even painted a mural for one of Fela's shows. An avid record collector, Newman had a large collection of Fela's records at a time when they were scarce in the US and the MCA/Universal reissues had not flooded the market. Through Newman, Perna was exposed to Fela's back catalogue, a factor which contributed to the formation of Antibalas in tandem with Fela's demise. Also a drummer, Phillipe had studied drums with Jojo Quo, a Cameroonian who had played with Fela on and off in the 1980s and was now resident in New York City. Roth, Lehman, and Perna, along with a handful of other musicians, teamed up to bring Roth's vision alive by forming the band Sharon Jones and the Soul Providers. In the early years of Soul Providers, they recorded for Lehman's now defunct Desco Records. Currently, the band is called the Sharon Jones and the Dapkings and they record for Roth's current label, Daptone Records.

Lehman's long-term exposure to Fela's music, and his associations with Jojo Quo amongst other African musicians, prompted him to suggest that they record an afrobeat record. They formed a studio band which they called The Daktaris and recorded the disc "Soul Explosion," which became very successful with retro-soul/world music audiences. The project left a very deep impression on Martin Perna, who recalled to me: "they wrote all these songs and got me to record flute and tenor on maybe five or six of the songs, and when I heard them, I was like 'Oh man, this is... fuck all the

funk stuff, let's play this, you know, let's make songs like this, let's make afrobeat!"⁹² The Daktaris never made the transition from a studio band into a live band, however, and in order to fulfill his vision, Martin Perna would have to start his own band.

In the winter of 1997, Perna formed the band Conjunto Antibalas. The name of the band reflected Martin's Latin American background as well as his other big musical influence, the Puerto Rican-American innovator and pioneer on the New York Latin music scene, Eddie Palmieri. Drawing members from the Dapkings and other musicians around the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, the band quickly grew to eleven members, including Luke O'Malley on guitar, Jordan McLean on trumpet, Michael Wagner on trombone and, on keyboard, Victor Axelrod, who had seen Fela perform in Brooklyn's prospect park in the early 90s. Egypt 80 drummer Jojo Quo also sat in with the band occasionally and recorded with them on their first album.

Abraham "Duke" Amayo, a fellow Brooklynite, came to be the only Nigerian member of the band. Born and raised in Nigeria, Amayo, as he is popularly called, grew up accompanying his uncles to Fela's Afro-Spot where, even as a child, he immersed himself in Fela's music. Although he had some musical background, and even performed with secondary school bands, Amayo never saw himself as a professional musician. He had come to Howard University in the 1980s on a soccer scholarship to study graphic arts. Amayo was well on the path of establishing a successful clothing line in New York and had set up a studio in Brooklyn which he named Afro-Spot after Fela's 1970s club. A chance meeting with Martin Perna and Gabe Roth would change all of this:

Gabe and I were walking around in our neighborhood and he [Amayo] was doing fashion at the time...African inspired, very futuristic clothing... I always walked past [Amayo's] store and it was never open; fascinating because he had this sign, he had a

⁹² Personal communication, October 6, 2008

fashion show a couple weeks back that said like, Featuring Nigerian Drummers, and [I said] we gotta let him know that we have this afrobeat project, so we went over there, and he happened to be there, and Fela was actually on the sound system, *awww men!* so we actually had something to talk about... and when I told him that Jo Jo Quo was playing drums for us one night, he was like, “ok,” that legitimized it in a certain way for him to come out, check us out, and then there was some gig that we had very soon after that, where one of our percussionists had to leave town. He basically was fleeing the police and had to leave town within 24 hours, and I found out more of the story like months after, but he was just like, I can’t make the gig, so I called Amayo up, I’m like men, “[I know] all Africans can’t play drums, please don’t get the wrong idea about me calling you, but..do you?” ... So he came out that night, had a great time, and he was like “oh, men, you guys can really play,” and I was like, “Thank you, you know, we try anyway, it’s open you know,” so it just became very organic, he started coming to practices, started... I mean, he had some musical background as a teenager, but I don’t... he can talk more about it, but I’ve never heard him say that he had developed long standing musical goals. It was like him revisiting this thing that he had left way back in his life.⁹³

At the time, Antibalas’ repertoire consisted of their own instrumental compositions and Amayo ended up joining the group as a percussionist. Shortly after he joined, his other band mates discovered that he could sing. He started to compose words to songs like “World War IV” and “Dirt and Blood.” The band also began to cover Fela originals, like “Chop and Quench” and “Army Arrangement,” with Amayo singing lead. In addition to playing percussion and singing with

⁹³ Personal communication, October 6, 2008

Antibalas, Amayo, a trained martial artist, now directs his own separate afrobeat band called Amayo's Fu-Arkist-Ra, which blends afrobeat with Chinese traditional lion dance rhythms.

Antibalas recorded their first album, "Liberation Afrobeat I" for the Roth/Lehman-owned DESCO records, and has since built a discography of nine releases spread across six independent labels, and appeared on several compilation discs. However, it was through live performances that Antibalas has built the global following which it has today. Beginning with their first show at Nick's Pub in Harlem, Antibalas has toured far and wide across the globe, playing over 500 shows in diverse countries, including, USA, Canada, England, Ireland, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Belgium, Turkey, Japan, and Germany. They have graced venues such as Brooklyn Academy of Music and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, and also participated in most major music festivals including Montreux Jazz Festival, Bonnaroo Music Festival and WOMAD. They hold a reputation as one of the most exciting live afrobeat bands, and have shared the stage and established relationships with several musicians who worked with Fela including Femi Kuti (Lagos), Tony Allen (Paris), Jojo Quo (New York City), Dele Sosimi (London), and Tunde Williams (San Francisco). Additionally they have shared the stage or recorded with a range of prominent pop musicians, including Angelique Kidjo, TV on the Radio, and James Brown. During the first decade of their existence, Antibalas embarked on extensive college town tours, a major factor in bringing afrobeat music to the awareness of young, predominantly white middle-class Americans. Ezra Gale, co-founder of San Francisco band, Aphrodesia put it like this to me: "...in the last couple years, the more we travel, it seems that there is an afrobeat band in every city now...[and] Antibalas deserves some credit for that."⁹⁴

As will become evident in the following closing ethnography, Antibalas remains at the core of the broad and interwoven networks that propel New York City's afrobeat scene.

⁹⁴ Personal communication, February 28, 2008

2.4.2 *In the field: afrobeat party in New York City*

“*What would Fela Do?*” These words stood out to me from the clutter of stickers, flyers, posters and other such paraphernalia on the basement walls of Max Fish Cafe in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. It was a mildly chilly night in late February 2008, and I had traveled from Queens on the subway to meet Kaleta, front man of the New York afrobeat band, Akoya Afrobeat Ensemble. The rehearsal space was small and dingy; stuffy, yet colder than the air outside. We did not waste any time in removing two single-headed, cylindrical African drums from the assortment of musical instruments and sound equipment that littered the room. These drums, Kaleta told me, were his special *kaleta* drums. In an attempt to distinguish his style from those of several other contemporary afrobeat bands resident in New York City, Kaleta had christened the drums with his own name after commissioning and shipping them from the Republic of Benin. It seemed like something that Fela Anikulapo-Kuti would do.

Born Leon Legan Majekodunmi in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin, Kaleta grew up in Nigeria where he played guitar in several high-profile bands, including King Sunny Ade’s African Beats for seven years, and Fela’s Egypt ’80 for nine years. He came to the US in 1991, touring with Egypt ’80 band and has lived in New York City ever since. Around 2000, Kaleta responded to a Craigslist advertisement seeking musicians who had played with Fela. The call had been posted by Lower East Side songwriter Ray Lugo, who had the vision to start an afrobeat band. Along with Kaleta and a multicultural retinue of musicians drawn from all over New York City, Lugo started the band Kokolo in 2001. Due to administrative disagreements, a large chunk of Kokolo’s membership, including Kaleta, broke off to start a separate afrobeat band called Akoya. In addition to his role in Akoya, Kaleta also now directs his own separate band called Zozo Afrobeat. Kokolo, Akoya and Zozo continue to thrive as independent bands.

Within the clamor of New York City's vibrant musical cultures, afrobeat has gained its own unique resonance. From the grungy bars of Williamsburg to the sleek clubs of Manhattan, there's always an afrobeat party in New York City. During the time I lived in the Big Apple, afrobeat bands regularly took residence at performance venues like Williamsburg's Zebulon, Brooklyn's Knitting Factory, and Harlem's Shrine—named in obvious homage to the fabled Lagos club. Tonight, in celebration of their second full-length album, Kaleta's band, Akoya will host a CD release party at S.O.B.'s (Sounds of Brazil), SOHO's premier hub for live music and cuisine.

Like the city itself, New York's afrobeat bands are diverse. Usually consisting of musicians from varied ethnic backgrounds, these bands approach musical style from equally divergent angles. While bands like Antibalas and Akoya are attuned to a rather traditional-sounding afrobeat template, others are more experimental. Chico Mann's streamed down electro-retro-funk style, and Femm Nameless's all-female power punk-dub orientation stands out in the latter category. The dance music scene, too, has not gone untouched by afrobeat's rhythms. D.J. Rich Medina's highly anticipated "Jump N funk" parties take the prime position in celebrating musical cross-pollination between hip-hop, house and afrobeat.

One thing that unites New York's stylistically diverse afrobeat bands is the centrality of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's anti-establishment credo. This is probably what prompted the afrobeat band Kokolo to create the *What Would Fela Do?* sticker that I noticed in Max Fish's basement. Politics is like religion in that both often evoke strong feelings of devotion. Fela was the self-declared afrobeat chief priest, and the correlation between Kokolo's sticker and the popular Christian slogan, *What Would Jesus Do?* is only too obvious.

The musical diversity of New York City's afrobeat scene is propelled by a network of affiliated musicians. Although these musicians often have degrees of contact with one another, sometimes an event will cause their paths to intersect in notable ways. Akoya's CD release party promises to be one

such event. Guest musicians from Brooklyn's afrobeat collective, Antibalas, Staten Island's BUDOS band, and reggae saxophonist Cedric "Im" Brooks of The Skatalites will join the thirteen-piece band on stage.

Kaleta and I arrive at S.O.B's and offload the drums from the taxi. Although my name is not on the guest list, I am allowed in on account of the assistance that I am rendering Kaleta. Inside, members of Akoya are setting up their instruments on stage. To the right of the stage, D.J. Rich Medina is playing a song by Congo-born, Paris/NYC-based afrobeat singer Ruth Tafebe. Opposite the stage, on a raised platform in the back is the bar. The space is large, but only a few patrons have arrived.

I already know some, but not all, the members of Akoya from previous interviews and a rehearsal session that I attended a few weeks earlier. One member whom I have not yet had a chance to interview is Ryan Blotnick. I notice him standing alone a few meters away from the stage, casually observing his bandmates setting up. Since I am early and he doesn't seem occupied, I decide to make his acquaintance.

Ryan was born and raised in Maine, and started playing guitar when he was eight years old. He studied music at William Paterson University in Maine, and at the Rytmisk Musikkonservatorium in Denmark. Ryan's cross continental travels have given him deep exposure to American and European jazz scenes, both of which influence his music greatly. He eventually moved to New York City where he currently leads the Ryan Blotnick Band alongside his involvement with several other musical projects. His day job is teaching movie making to children in an after-school program.

It was in Maine that Ryan first stumbled on afrobeat when a friend gave him a Fela CD. At the time, he found the music very interesting but didn't think that he would someday be playing in an afrobeat band. In New York City, he learnt about Akoya through baritone saxophonist Will Jones, already a member of the band. As we talk, Ryan tries to explain the rhythmic and harmonic

differences between afrobeat and jazz: “The rhythm of afrobeat is all *backwards*, and that makes it all the more interesting. There’s no harmonic rhythm per se, like in jazz, which means musicians can zone out. But I don’t find it monotonous at all. I find it challenging.” After our conversation, Ryan joins the other musicians on stage for sound check. With only a few technical adjustments, they all agree that the balance is perfect, and head down to the basement for refreshments. There, Will Jones takes the opportunity to run through some baritone saxophone parts with Jared Tankel, a member of the Budos band.

After some time has passed, Japanese conguero and Akoya founding member Yoshi Takemasa walks in dressed in a West African shirt. He announces that the show will begin in a few minutes, and everyone starts to attend to final preparatory details. Akoya’s two female vocalists, Mayteana Morales and Kemba Russell, emerge from a separate changing room. Russell is wearing a small red blouse and ultra-short skirt, while Mayteana wears a similar blouse with a longer green skirt. Slightly recalling Fela’s famous queens, their costumes allude to their role as “dancers by default” in the otherwise all-male group. In addition to singing and dancing, Mayteana and Kemba also play two of afrobeat’s most essential instruments: sekere and clave (sticks). Both ladies mostly perform back-up vocals in the band, although they occasionally sing lead vocals. Mayteana is particularly known for her rendition of Fela’s “Trouble Sleep, Nyanga Go Wake ‘Am,” which she performs in perfect pidgin English, even though she is a white Latina from Brooklyn. She is also a vocalist with Chico Mann, and soul/funk/pop group The Pimps of Joytime.

Back in the hall upstairs, an eager audience has filled up the space. Rich Medina is no longer deejaying and a movie is playing on the large screen that forms the backdrop of the stage. Scenes from Africa, Jamaica, and Reggae performances suggest to me that the movie has something to do with music and political struggles in the African Diaspora. In the hall tonight, there is a different type of politics at play. The ethnic diversity of the audience demonstrates a wide appreciation for the

music emanating from the racially circumscribed struggles depicted in the movie. Asians, Latinos, Whites and Blacks all mingle within this space, a microcosm of New York City, and the world at large. Finally, at 9.47pm, Rich Medina introduces the band and 13 musicians walk on stage. Yoshi begins to play a supple rhythm on the congas. To this rhythm, Kaleta, Mayteana and Kemba dance onto the stage, adding their instruments (sekere, clave, drums) to the growing rhythmic palette. Keyboards, two interlocking guitars, winding bass, and a staggered drum-kick infuse more riffs to the multilayered groove. A barrage of trumpet and saxophones joins in, and in this manner, the party begins.

Much of the material performed tonight is from the new CD, named P.D.P, acronym for President Dey Pass. The CD is not named after any of the pieces included on it; rather it is named in mockery of the show of power symbolized by presidential motorcades in military-era African states. At a subversive level, P.D.P. mocks flawed democratic processes in Africa, particularly Nigeria, where the ruling People's Democratic Party has frequently been accused of buying votes and repressing opposition. Akoya's practice of using acronyms with double meanings is clearly adopted from Fela, who had a penchant for naming his songs with titles like "V.I.P" for *Vagabonds In Power*, "B.B.C," for *Big Blind Country*, and "I.T.T," for *International Thief Thief*.

One of the pieces performed during the show that night at S.O.B.'s is the tribute song, "Fela Dey." Like most afrobeat pieces, "Fela Dey" opens with an extended, mostly instrumental introduction. Halfway through the introduction, Kaleta briefly sings a melody which I recognize as the chorus of the Egba⁹⁵ "national" anthem, "*L'ori Oke ati Petele*." Being from Abeokuta myself, I am aware that by singing this well known Yoruba tune, Kaleta is distinctively paying homage to Fela's homeland, Abeokuta. The introduction continues with call-and-response horn chorus sections that

⁹⁵ Nigerian ethnic group into which Fela was born. Presently, most Egba live in the city of Abeokuta in Southwestern Nigeria

alternate with a descending vocal chorus and sinewy organ solos. The introduction ends with the chanting of “abami eda,” (strange being), an appellation by which fans fondly refer to Fela. The body of the song narrates Fela’s relationship to the Nigerian state. Kaleta sings about “one country called Naija,⁹⁶” a country rich in natural resources, whose ebullient citizens desire the good things of life. This idealized “dream” is contrasted with the reality of widespread poverty perpetuated by mismanagement and corrupt leadership. The real tragedy, however, is that the people are afraid to resist their oppressive circumstances for fear of further persecution. Kaleta sings in pidgin English: “... you get big mouth, you better shut am down. If you talk, dem go whip your nyash.” Into this ruthless state of affairs enters Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the fearless, uncensored voice of the people, who takes the establishment to task through his scathing musical arraignments. The piece ends with the ecstatic chanting of “*iye abami*,” abami (Fela: the enigmatic one) lives!

It is in the above described spirit of political commentary and homage that the show takes off. Homage is more directly expressed through Akoya’s renditions of Fela classics, a practice which has become standard in contemporary afrobeat concerts worldwide. Kemba Russell sings the 1976 tune, “Upside Down,” with much conviction. In addition to honoring Fela, the piece pays tribute to Sandra Isidore, the African American social activist who first performed the song with Fela and his Africa ’70.⁹⁷

The party climaxes when Kaleta invites Amayo on stage for a rendition of Fela’s “Army Arrangement.” At this point, some musicians from Antibalas: guitarist Marcos Garcia (who also leads Chico Mann) and trumpeter Eric Biondo, also join the band on stage. With Cedric “Im” Brooks and Jared Tankel of the Budos band already present, the band grows to an impressive 18+ pieces, stretching the capacity of S.O.B’s normally ample stage. Amayo, tall and limber, takes center stage in

⁹⁶“Naija” = Nigeria. Among Nigerians, a popular moniker for the nation

⁹⁷ On Fela’s invitation, Sandra visited Nigeria in 1976. Performing alongside Africa ’70, she would be the only woman to ever sing lead in Fela’s band.

a blue and white sweater, dark shades and a blue head-wrap that conceals his thick dreadlocks. A mid-tempo groove driven by two interlocking bass guitars sets the pace for a polyphonic horn section involving three baritone saxophones, 1 trombone, two trumpets, 1 tenor and 1 alto saxophone. The vocal chorus enters in a declarative chant: “*one day go be one day; one day go be one day; ghost wey dey steal-ee money for govament; one day go be one day.*” The lyrics allude to the Nigerian proverb: “every day for the thief, but one day for the owner of the farm,” and set the thematic pace for a narrative of high powered corruption in 1980s Nigeria. Before he sings, Amayo engages casually with the audience. First, he iterates Fela’s popular banter: “*ju’di, ju’di, ju’di, ju si’le...*” (swing that ass, throw it down!), then, very much in the manner of Fela, he exhorts: “dear brothers and sisters, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, ever so relevant... we are right in the middle of what’s going on in the political arena [referencing New York City’s position as world financial capital and host to the United Nations]. And if you’re not involved in the political arena, sorry, you’re not participating, that means you’re not invited. So, therefore, brothers and sisters, stay connected, participate, speak out, speak your mind.” Amayo speaks these words, perhaps in an effort to somehow contextualize the song for a New York audiences unfamiliar with Nigerian political history. This, however, is a self-motivated audience. With exhilarating abandonment they dance, enthusiastically participating in call-and-response exchanges initiated by Amayo. I, too, shuffle along to the music, momentarily dropping my clinical stance and letting myself embody the music completely.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Afrobeat emerged in the 70s not simply as a musical phenomenon, but as a countercultural movement, a music scene which, while appropriating an array of musical and ideological texts in transnational circulation, reconfigured those texts within the localized contexts of postcolonial Lagos.

During the 1970's, the genre started filtering into Europe and later into the United States. However, while rock, jazz, hip-hop and soul artists appropriated elements of afrobeat, it wouldn't be until the late 1990s that a sustained global following would emerge. Fela's death in 1997 inspired record companies such as MCA/Universal and Wrasse to reissue his vast catalogue, making previously hard to find music widely accessible.

The transnational networks that have driven afrobeat to international prominence are complex and intertwined, featuring an array of widely dispersed individuals from diverse backgrounds and settings. While Fela's sons Femi and Seun Kuti remain the most prominent afrobeat musicians in Lagos, the New York afrobeat scene presents a more complex web of affiliations. Prominent in this network are mostly white, middle-class musicians whose keen devotion to Fela's afrobeat music, and avid awareness of its ideologies has inspired them to form their own afrobeat bands, Antibalas being the most prominent. Constituting a critical but sometimes less visible part of the network are African (predominantly Nigerian) musicians who, working hand in hand with Americans and Europeans, have played a central role in the construction of contemporary afrobeat scenes. Most of these Nigerian musicians were directly involved with Fela during his lifetime, and so function as living claims to authenticity, tokens of validation in the web of human affiliations that informs afrobeat practice today. At the periphery are enthusiastic fans whose primary association with afrobeat exists in the realm of aural perception and physical embodiment. They may have some

knowledge about the history of Afrobeat, they may or may never have heard about Fela, and their apprehending of afrobeat is often entangled in a wider proliferation of other African and African-inspired dance music forms.

3.0 MUSICAL STYLE

I think the results are very dangerous [and] mediocre when you don't know a style and you borrow stuff from it... it seems like having a kitchen full of spices and not knowing enough of each spice well enough to know what you can really mix with what you can't.

Martin Perna of Antibalas⁹⁸

In studying a widely proliferating musical genre such as afrobeat, one must not only address the ways in which social alliances are forged between dispersed musical scenes, but also the processes through which musical identity is articulated within and across such scenes. In the previous chapter I mapped major trajectories in the networks of musicians, producers, fans and other culture brokers who have kept afrobeat circulating locally and internationally throughout the genre's history. In this chapter, I will address the ways in which musicians across time and place articulate afrobeat identity through style.

Leonard B. Meyer famously defines style as “a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints.”⁹⁹ Style is constituted not only in the field of aural perceptions but also in the domains of fashion, art, dance and other gestures. While each of these domains provides valuable contexts for the analysis of afrobeat identities, this chapter focuses on musical style. The

⁹⁸ Jorge Arevalo Mateus, “Antibalas and the lesson of Afrobeat,” *Ugly Planet*, Issue 1, 16-17

⁹⁹ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 3

conventions of sound and structure are, as Fabian Holt states, “often the first we register when we try to locate music generically.”¹⁰⁰ Audiences, critics and researchers are inclined to define musical genres in relation to textual conventions. Musicians, too, “more or less consciously consider their music-making in such terms.”¹⁰¹ As I will show in this chapter, musical style constitutes a fundamental premise upon which contemporary musicians affiliate with the genre and work out their anxieties about authenticity and transgression.

3.1 STYLE, GENRE: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

Distinctions between style and genre aren’t always clear. In popular and academic discourse, both terms are often used interchangeably in vague reference to “categories of music.” This conflation of meanings is usually unconscious, as evident in the response, “What’s the difference?” that I got when I asked one musician whether he would define afrobeat as a style or genre. Yet, there are important distinctions between style and genre; and how we situate “a type of music” within broader ecologies of musical activity carries political implications which are important to understanding processes of diffusion and reception. Moreover, notions of style and genre can vary across time and place, and even overlap within the same geographic setting, reflecting the complexities often involved in the growth and migration of musical traditions.

According to Fabian Holt, “a person can have his or her own style, but not genre.”¹⁰²

Similarly, Brackett states that “musical style refers to a bundle of characteristics that may be linked to a particular musician or recording and that participate in a socially recognized musical

¹⁰⁰ Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*, 23

¹⁰¹ Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 103

¹⁰² Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*, 3

genre... [while] Genres... consist of ways of categorizing popular music so as to create a connection between musical styles, producers, musicians and consumers...”¹⁰³ Sometimes individual styles can venture far from the rules of their generic base. Wide acceptance and replication of such transgressions could lead to codification, marking the birth of new genres.¹⁰⁴ Style, then, is constituent in genre, but genre is born out of the formation of social groups that converge around “transgressive” patterns.

The above formulation proffers a way of understanding the relationship between style and genre. However, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the role of musical style in the construction of genre identity, I will revisit Fabian Holt’s “general framework of genre,” outlined in the introduction chapter of this dissertation, as I discuss the “formative” and “subsequent” stages of afrobeat’s evolutionary trajectory.

3.2 THE FORMATIVE STAGE: EVOLUTION OF STYLE

A new musical genre first begins to emerge within the context of preexisting musical formations. At this early stage, a process of selection takes place during which certain musical texts and performance practices become convention. Codification is facilitated through the agency of “center collectivities:” influential fan communities, critics, record producers, and iconic artists who are connected by shared aesthetic and ideological values, and give direction to the growing heterogeneous network of the genre.¹⁰⁵ With codification emerges a definitive genre canon.

¹⁰³ Brackett, *Musical Meaning*, 65-66

¹⁰⁴ Fabbri, *A Theory of Musical Genres*, 16

¹⁰⁵ Holt, *Genre In Popular Music*, 21

In chapter two, I narrated Fela's transition from highlife music to afrobeat via the experimental form that he called highlife-jazz. Highlife, jazz and African (Yoruba) traditional forms—the latter, a reservoir of resources from which Fela freely drew—constitute the major preexisting musical fields that nurtured the creation of afrobeat. This section traces the stylistic evolution of afrobeat in order to outline how exactly each preexisting field influenced afrobeat in its formative years. While audiences and a host of other mediating agents would collectively construct “afrobeat's canons” at a subsequent stage of the genre's trajectory, the texts and conventions that define afrobeat stylistically were inscribed by Fela. Indeed, subsequent canon construction in afrobeat culture simply came to reify the centrality of Fela's repertoire.

Fela's hegemony over afrobeat during its formative years does not, however, mean that the genre lacked stylistic heterogeneity. Fela constantly reinvented his musical (and ideological) identity, marking each stage of creative evolution by giving his band a new name: Koola Lobitos (1963-1968), Nigeria '70 (1969-1970), Africa '70 (1970-1980), and Egypt '80 (1980-1997). Collectively, these stylistic moments represent a heterogeneous palette worthy of analysis in order to understand the selective processes through which contemporary afrobeat musicians have subsequently engaged with Fela's corpus.

3.2.1 Koola Lobitos:

Fela first formed the Koola Lobitos while he was a student in England from 1958 to 1963, with a handful of other Nigerian students and some West Indian musicians. At Trinity College of Music London, Fela took the standard Western music courses in history, harmony, counterpoint and trumpet, his primary instrument. However, he also immersed himself in London's vibrant jazz scene. Koola Lobitos' main fare was highlife, but the band also played a wide variety of popular forms in

order to cater to an eclectic audience (see p. 36). Upon returning to Nigeria, Fela formed the Fela Ransome-Kuti Quintet, and tried to establish himself as a jazz musician, but met with little success. After his mother told him to “start playing music your people understand, not jazz,”¹⁰⁶ Fela reconstituted a new Koola Lobitos and began experimenting with a blend of highlife, jazz and traditional African forms that he called highlife-jazz. Out of the three songs that I analyze here, “Bonfo” and “Fere” were probably recorded in England, while “Ololufe” was written after Fela’s return to Nigeria.

3.2.1.1 “Bonfo”

Recorded in the early 1960s, “Bonfo” is a lilting highlife song depicting an unnamed woman in a mini-skirt and the resolve of a mesmerized admirer to follow her wherever she goes. Sung in Yoruba, “Bonfo” follows the tradition of much African music in its discharge of commentary on a contemporary event:

<i>Ara ’birin, ese re ga</i>	Lady, your legs are mesmerizing!
<i>Ara ’birin, se bonfo ni</i>	Lady, you look hot in your mini-skirt
<i>Ye o, ma ba e lo</i>	Yes, I’ll go with you
<i>Ye o, ma ba e lo</i>	Yes, I’ll go with you
<i>Ye o, se Jamaica ni</i>	Yes, to Jamaica
<i>Ye o, se Trinidad ni</i>	Yes, to Trinidad
<i>Ye o, s’America ni</i>	Yes, to America
<i>Ye o, se Ghana ni</i>	Yes, to Ghana
<i>Ye o, se Nigeria ni</i>	Yes, to Nigeria

¹⁰⁶ Moore, *Fela*, 73

Ye o, ma ba e lo o

(Wherever you go) I will follow you

Mary Quant's radical fashion innovation, the mini-skirt, attained international popularity in the mid-60s. Among Nigerians, public reactions vacillated between approval and disdain. Adulation came from a youth subculture that aligned itself with Western trends in fashion and music as a means of expressing a perceived progressiveness postured in opposition to the cultural and social norms espoused by their parents. Conversely, denouncement came from an older, more conservative generation of cultural nationalists who sought to protect "African traditions" from the corroding effect of Western value systems. This cultural ambivalence towards the mini-skirt inscribes itself in *bonfo's* double meaning. Literarily rendered, *bonfo* means "if flying," an expression of unreserved devotion to the wearer of the mini-skirt: *I will follow you wherever you may fly*. On the contrary, *bonfo* could be used as an expression of ridicule, particularly by cynics who presume that an unusually short skirt implies that its wearer could not afford to buy enough fabric to make a fitting outfit. Fela's lyrics clearly celebrate the "progressive" woman in the mini-skirt, and by so doing affirm his allegiance to 1960s Nigerian youth subculture.

The piece, in C Major, opens with a horn chorus supported by a rhythm section consisting of piano, guitar, bass and a percussion duo of sticks and shakers. Following the introduction, the horns drop out while Fela sings a brief melody. The first two phrases of the melody are sung solo, while the rest of the melody engages a male chorus (most likely the instrumentalists doubling as vocalists) in call-and-response with Fela. A piano solo follows, after which the horn chorus introduction recurs as an interlude. The piece continues with a saxophone solo; Fela recaps his vocals, and the band fades out.

Structurally "Bonfo" largely conforms to the conventions of dance band highlife: the use of major key tonalities, primary chord progressions, quadruple meter, juxtaposed rhythmic ostinatos,

alternating instrumental and vocal sections and frequent recapitulations of melodic themes. Bass, rhythm and percussion sections collectively create the propulsive groove that undergirds the piece. “Bonfo” also features a few departures from the highlife template. Most notable is the prominence of the piano, an instrument rarely present in highlife arrangements, which supplies both rhythmic support and solo interludes. Unusually absent are the vamping horns and/or guitars that typically provide rhythmic and harmonic support to vocal sections in dance-band highlife arrangements. The most striking feature of “Bonfo” is its harmonic language which alternates primary chords: I and V with a descending circle of fifths, thereby stretching highlife beyond its usual harmonic turf of homophonic thirds. Fela’s harmonic innovation lends itself to a polyphonic horn arrangement, a feature that he would further develop in the course of afrobeat’s stylistic evolution.

Figure 1: Excerpt of Bonfo, showing highlife “styled” arpeggiated bass, piano and circle of 5ths.

BONFO

FELA RANSOME-KUTI

The musical score for "Bonfo" is written for five instruments: Alto Sax, Trumpet in Bb 1, Trumpet in Bb 2, Piano, and Bass Guitar. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The Alto Sax and Trumpets play a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Piano plays a rhythmic arpeggiated pattern. The Bass Guitar plays a steady eighth-note bass line.

2

2/4

3.2.1.2 “Fere”

Another piece from Fela’s early highlife years is “Fere” (Lightly). Following the conventions of dance-band highlife, “Fere,” like “Bonfo,” is set in a major key, uses quadruple meter, and alternates instrumental and vocal sections. Over a lilting groove, the call-and-response lyric iterates a simple supplication to the often invoked *egbe* of Yoruba mythology.

Gbe wa de’le o, *feré*

Take us home, *lightly*

Gbe wa de ’le, *feré*

Take us home, *lightly*

Egbe gbe wa lo ’le o, *feré*

Egbe, take us home, *lightly*

Gbe wa lo ’le o, *feré*

Take us home, *lightly*

Ayunmiyunwa o, *feré*

Gbe wa lo ’le o, *feré*

The Yoruba *egbe* is a phenomenon that approximates the Western idea of telekinesis. Derived from the verb, *gbe*: to carry, *egbe* personifies a psychic force capable of supernaturally commuting entities from one location to another. Given the context of broader Yoruba cosmological beliefs as encapsulated in the saying: “aye l’oja orun ni’le,” the world is a market place (i.e. a transitional place where we go to do business or fulfill your destiny), and heaven is home (i.e. the final resting place), one could take a deep philosophical reading of “Fere” as a prayer for easy fare through the arduous transitional passage of life. However, given that Fela may have written the song while living in England, it is probably more nostalgic than philosophical in intent. Nostalgia would, in fact, become a recurrent theme in Fela’s music, expressed both as a longing for a physical home (“Ajo,” “Witchcraft”), and as yearning for a glorious (precolonial) African past (“Why Blackman dey Suffer”).

As with “Bonfo,” the piano plays an unusually prominent role on “Fere,” featuring in a brief prelude that precedes the standard horn chorus introduction. The use of the piano on both “Bonfo” and “Fere” must be seen, however, as exceptions at this stage in Fela’s creative trajectory, for keyboards virtually disappear from the rest of Fela’s highlife arrangements. The instrument’s appearance on both songs nevertheless prefigures the essential role it would play in Fela’s afrobeat arrangements beginning in the early 1970s.

On “Fere,” Fela once again expands the tonal/harmonic language of highlife by introducing chromatic thirds, ninths, minor 7ths, and added sixths, all of which function within a jazz-derived progression.

Figure 2: Piano reduction of “Fere” showing use of jazz derived harmonies

Fere

Fela Ransome-Kuti

The piano reduction of "Fere" is written in E major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The score consists of three systems of music. The first system contains measures 1 through 3, each featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The second system contains measures 4 through 6. Measure 4 begins with a fourth measure rest. Measures 5 and 6 are grouped by a first ending bracket. The third system contains measures 7 and 8. Measure 7 begins with a seventh measure rest. Measure 8 is grouped by a second ending bracket. The bass line provides a consistent accompaniment throughout, with a steady eighth-note pattern in measures 4-6 and 7-8.

As the 1960s progressed, Fela increasingly adapted jazz conventions to his highlife arrangements. On songs like “Ajo,” “Yabomisa,” “Onidodo,” “Alagbara,” “Lagos Baby,” and “Abiara,” (all very likely recorded before 1967) polyphonic horn sections, hard bop inflected solos, rapid horn chart changes and jazz cadences are so integrally woven into highlife structure that audiences wondered if Fela was playing highlife or jazz. While Fela drew on jazz in expanding the structural boundaries of his music, he was much less adventurous in his song writing. Besides the occasional jazz-derived scat singing

(heard on songs like “Fere,” “Lagos Baby,” and “Egbin”), Fela continued to write songs which were firmly rooted in the highlife idiom. These were lilting pentatonic or diatonic melodies sung in an indigenous language (often Yoruba in Fela’s case), Pidgin English, Standard English or any combination of the three. Such songs were often topical, drawing upon the narrative techniques of indigenous folklore. Similarly, Fela’s bass continued to discharge its fundamental highlife function of providing a cyclical harmonic-rhythmic foundation rooted in primary chord figurations (I IV V/V7).

3.2.1.3 “Ololufe” (Lover)

Sung in Yoruba, “Ololufe” is a slow sentimental song written over a pulsing groove:

<i>Ololufe mi, ti e ni mo fe</i>	Lover, you are the one that I want
<i>Alayanfe mi, ti e ni mo fe</i>	My chosen one, you are the one I want
<i>Ololufe mi, mi o se ti won mo</i>	Lover, I’m done with every other (lover)
<i>Alayanfe mi, ti e ni mo fe</i>	My chosen one, you are the one I desire
<i>Wa f’enu ko mi l’enu</i>	Come touch my lips with yours
<i>Wa fa’ra ran mi l’ara o</i>	Come caress my body with yours

Recorded twice under both Yoruba and English titles, “Ololufe” stands unique among the very few love songs that Fela wrote during his entire career. While it shares with “Bonfo” the same theme of overwhelming infatuation, “Ololufe” is more poetic, and carries a deeper sense of conjugal commitment (*alayanfe mi, ti e ni mo fe*). In contrast, “Yese,” another love song by Fela, is more whimsical, and the other songs in Fela’s repertoire which may qualify as love songs: “Na Poi” and “Mattress,” are nothing more than vivid depictions of the sexual act shorn of any sentimentality.

“Ololufe” bears a distinct feature that separates it from the songs discussed so far.

Harmonically, it is structured on a traditional twelve-bar blues progression: I7-IV7-I7-V7-IV7-I7, The blues have served as the harmonic foundation of many Western music genres including jazz, rock ‘n’ roll, rhythm and blues, and soul, genres which successively influenced Lagosian popular music from the 1940s to the 1970s. Fela’s use of the blues structure therefore signifies his affiliation with international pop music trends.

“Ololufe” belongs to a category of more daringly experimental songs which Fela recorded between 1965 and 1969. Included in this experimental catalogue are songs like “Omuti tide,” “Wa Dele Wa Rohin,” “Mi O Mo” (also recorded as Wayo, 1st Version), “Obinrin Le,” “Omo Ejo,” “Alagbara,” “Ajo” and “Abiara.” Like “Ololufe,” these songs are typified by blues or blues-derived harmonic progressions and characterized by dominant seventh chords. The bass lines have more rhythmic and harmonic freedom, pulling back on Fela’s signature style of arpeggiated chords and featuring, instead, conjunct motion, pedal notes, and syncopation. With these pieces, Fela further developed and formalized his horn writing, which came to feature standard jazz devices like soli writing and shout choruses. The faster arrangements were driven by a new sekere rhythm of running 16th notes, a departure from the quintessential sekere rhythm:



Figure 3: "Ololufe Mi" (Lover) Fela's use of blues progressions. Bass line derived from Mile's Davis'

"Eighty-One"

Ololufe Mi (Lover)

Fela Ransome-Kuti

Alto Sax.

Tenor Sax.

Baritone Sax.

Trumpet in Bb

Electric Guitar

Bass Guitar

Agogo Bells

Sekere

Conga Drums

2

Ololufe mi (Lover)

3

A. Sax.

T. Sax.

B. Sax.

3

B \flat Tpt.

3

E. Gtr.

Bass

3

A.B.

sek.

3

C. Dr.

Detailed description: This musical score is for the piece 'Ololufe mi (Lover)'. It features eight staves. The first three staves (A. Sax., T. Sax., B. Sax.) and the fourth staff (B \flat Tpt.) are in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). They each contain a triplet of whole rests in the first measure and another triplet of whole rests in the second measure. The fifth staff (E. Gtr.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The sixth staff (Bass) is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The seventh staff (A.B.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The eighth staff (sek.) is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The ninth staff (C. Dr.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

Ololufe mi (Lover)

3

5

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

E.Gtr.

Bass

A.B.

sek.

C. Dr.

5

5

5

The musical score is arranged in a system of staves. The top three staves are for Saxophones (A, T, B), the next for B \flat Trumpet, then Electric Guitar and Bass. Below these are the percussion parts: A.B. (Ankle Bells), sek. (Shaker), and C. Dr. (Congas). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line. The first measure contains a complex melodic line for the saxophones and trumpet, with the electric guitar playing a rhythmic accompaniment of chords and single notes. The bass line is a walking bass. The percussion parts provide a steady rhythmic foundation. The second measure continues the melodic development and rhythmic patterns.

Ololufe mi (Lover)

95

Ololufe mi (Lover)

5

9

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

E.Gtr.

Bass

A.B.

sek.

C. Dr.

9

9

9

The musical score is for the piece 'Ololufe mi (Lover)' and is page 5 of a larger work. It features a multi-instrumental arrangement. The top section includes three saxophone parts (A. Sx., T. Sx., B. Sx.) and a B \flat trumpet part, all in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The guitar (E.Gtr.) and bass parts are in standard tuning, with the guitar in treble clef and the bass in bass clef. The bottom section includes an A.B. (Acoustic Bass) part in treble clef, a sek. (Saxophone) part in treble clef, and a C. Dr. (Conga) part in treble clef. The score is divided into two measures, each starting with a measure rest and a '9' indicating a nine-measure phrase. The saxophones and trumpet play a melodic line, while the guitar and bass provide a harmonic and rhythmic foundation. The A.B. and sek. parts provide additional harmonic support, and the C. Dr. part provides a rhythmic accompaniment.

II

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

E.Gtr.

Bass

II

A.B.

sek.

II

C. Dr.

Detailed description: This musical score is for the piece 'Ololufe mi (Lover)'. It is written for a band consisting of three saxophones (Alto, Tenor, Baritone), a B-flat Trumpet, Electric Guitar, Bass, and Percussion. The score is divided into three systems, each beginning with a double bar line (II). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (measures 1-4) features a melodic line in the saxophones and trumpet, with the electric guitar providing harmonic support using barre chords. The bass line is a walking bass. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melodic development. The third system (measures 9-12) includes a section for the A.B. (Alto Saxophone) and sek. (Saxophone) parts, with the electric guitar and bass continuing their patterns. The percussion part (C. Dr.) provides a steady rhythmic accompaniment throughout.

Ololufe mi (Lover)

7

13

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

13

B \flat Tpt.

13

E.Gtr.

Bass

13

A.B.

sek.

13

C. Dr.

15

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

E.Gtr.

Bass

A.B.

sek.

C. Dr.

15

15

Detailed description: This page contains a musical score for the piece 'Ololufe mi (Lover)', starting at measure 15. The score is arranged for a band and includes the following parts: Alto Saxophone (A. Sx.), Tenor Saxophone (T. Sx.), Baritone Saxophone (B. Sx.), B-flat Trumpet (B \flat Tpt.), Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.), Bass, Alto Horn (A.B.), Keyboard (sek.), and Conga Drums (C. Dr.). The key signature is D major (two sharps). The Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, and B-flat Trumpet parts have a melodic line starting on a half note D5, followed by eighth notes E5, F#5, G5, A5, and B5. The Baritone Saxophone part starts with a whole rest, then enters with a half note D4, followed by eighth notes E4, F#4, G4, A4, and B4. The Electric Guitar part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5. The Bass part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4. The Alto Horn part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5. The Keyboard part plays a continuous eighth-note pattern: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5. The Conga Drums part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5.

Of particular note in this category of songs is the absence of a vocal chorus, replaced instead by the shout chorus. To understand the significance of this development and its impact on Fela's musical career, one must consider the nature of African musical traditions where the philosophical ideal of communality is often expressed musically through the use of techniques such as call-and-response, hocketing and ensemble stratification. This homological relationship between social structure and musical practice is encapsulated in the Yoruba proverb: *Won ni won o fe e n'ilu, o n da'rin; t'o ba da'rin b'awon ara ilu o ba ba e gbe nko?* (You have been told you are not wanted in the town, yet you raise a song; what will you do when the town's-people do not chorus a response?). The emergence of urban popular musics in Africa did not obliterate these traditional philosophies; rather, what took place was a recontextualization of tradition within the new urban settings out of which contemporary African popular culture emerged. Thus, in Nigeria, the vocal call-and-response between lead singer and the male chorus—usually consisting of a band's instrumentalists—became a hallmark of popular music genres like juju, apala, fuji and highlife music. In a live context, audiences participate in music performances not only through dance, but often also by freely singing the response section of the call-and-response structure. Occasionally a highlife song would lack a call-and-response section, for example, Victor Olaiya's "Omo Pupa" or E.T. Mensah's "All For You," and even Fela's earlier "Fere;" however, such songs were catchy enough to engender the same communal aesthetic through dance. Conversely, a solo performance in a strange stylistic idiom such as the blues or jazz, was bound to generate feelings of alienation among listeners. By dropping the call-and-response section which often came at the end of his songs, especially within the context of an unfamiliar idiom, Fela successfully isolated his music from potential audiences. It is quite feasibly this sense of estrangement that caused some observers to comment that Fela "lacked the ability to compose a song fully."¹⁰⁷ Considering the trajectory he was towing, it was quite inevitable that Fela would

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, *History of Juju Music*, 119

abandon the call-and-response section, for his instrumentalists—who often doubled as back-up vocalists—were so busy alternating between three or more polyphonic horn arrangements within the space of four and five minute songs that there would have been literally no breathing space for chorus singing even if Fela wanted to include it. To an audience cultivated on the less congested sonic palette of highlife, Fela’s music sounded “noisy, heavy, and hard to decipher.”¹⁰⁸

With highlife-jazz, Fela introduced new harmonic idioms, a very busy horn section, and rapid hard bop-styled horn solos, all of which were difficult for local audiences to understand. While the highlife-rooted melodies of songs like “Fere” and “Bonfo” provided some kind of musical familiarity for potential audiences, other songs like “Ololufe” departed much further from the norm. It should be pointed out that in spite of the general “foreignness” of the highlife-jazz sound, Fela managed to retain certain fundamental traits that continued to link his music to traditional highlife. These were specifically in the dimensions of language, theme and rhythm. As was the tradition in Nigerian highlife music, most of Fela’s songs from 1963 to 1965 were sung in an indigenous language: Yoruba, with a few in Standard and Pidgin English. Thematically, also, Fela continued to write lyrics that were steeped in the social ethos and folklore of his Yoruba heritage on the one hand, and which, on the other, mirrored the vagaries of the urban Lagos. In this regard his music addressed the same basic issues which provided thematic material for a range of popular music genres, including highlife, palmwine and even juju. For example, “Araba’s Delight,” first recorded by veteran juju musician Julius Araba, addresses the moral concerns surrounding abortion from the perspective of Yoruba cosmology in which children are considered a heritage of wealth. “Yabomisa,” a reinterpretation of the canonical Ghanaian (Akan) palmwine tune via Dr. Victor Olaiya’s version, is iconic of the transcultural streams of influence which were crucial to the birthing of urban West Africa’s popular music traditions during the early twentieth Century. In his own original compositions, Fela addressed

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

themes as diverse as the modern city girl's preference for the civil servant over the artisan ("Oyejo"); the inscrutable deviousness of women ("Obirin Le"); the degeneration of societal order that urban competitiveness generates ("Oni Dodo"); and the culture shock experienced by new urban migrants (Wadele Wa Rohin). There were also songs which were largely philosophical: "Ironu" (Worry), "Igba L'Aiye" ("Life is Time"), "Witchcraft" (addressing nostalgia) "Ajo" and "Awo." Of particular interest are his character-portrait songs in which Fela denounces social vices using stock characters reminiscent of those found in traditional theatrical forms such as the alarinjo (itinerant) theater.

Given the importance of text in West African musical traditions, Fela's songs should have resonated with popular music audiences. However, although the themes he addressed in his songs were popular, his musical arrangements were not. An aspect of musical structure that did remain familiar was his percussion rhythms. Like he did with thematic material, Fela retained a distinctly urban popular African identity in his music by consistently using the 3:2/2:3 timeline which not only connects popular music styles across West Africa, but also supplies a crucial link between the music of West Africa and its diaspora. The centrality of the timeline as a structuring device in Fela's music is reflected in the fact that a great percentage of his guitar lines reflect the asymmetry inherent in the indigenous prototypes. Additionally, Fela conga patterns were derived from recreational West African dance music such as panlogo, a neotraditional dance style which became popular in Nigeria in the 1960s. Nevertheless, one of the most common complaints of popular music audiences of the time was that they did not know how to dance to Fela's music. This means that in spite of Fela's affiliation with rhythmic material crucial to the generation of a groove, highlife-jazz remained accessible to only a limited fan base. In 1968, Fela did one more thing to try to connect to a wider audience; he added a female dancer, Dele, to his act, and created a side show. The addition of Dele did not change Fela's musical fortunes overnight—in fact, one reporter stated that when she first began performing with Fela, people did not know what she was doing. However, Fela continued

innovating until he gained enough audiences to hold an afrobeat dancing competition. His creative breakthrough came as a result of ideological transformations that occurred in his music between 1968 and 1971, which I subsequently examine.

3.2.2 Nigeria '70:

In 1969, while on tour in the United States, Fela changed the name of his band from Koola Lobitos to Nigeria '70. The new appellation reflected Fela's growing nationalism, radically influenced by the "Black Power" movement as he encountered it during an extended sojourn in Los Angeles. While in Los Angeles, Fela took up a regular gig at a struggling Sunset Boulevard club called "Citadel de Haiti," and made a series of new recordings with Nigeria '70. These recordings—recently anthologized on an MCA/Universal reissue tagged *The '69 Los Angeles Sessions*—straddle the late era experimental style of the Koola Lobitos and the maturing afrobeat sound of the 1970s. While retaining his frequent horn chart changes, vamping guitars and rhythmically independent bass lines, the Los Angeles recordings feature notable changes in harmonic language, arrangement, instrumentation, rhythm, songwriting and vocal style. These changes are showcased on "My Lady Frustration." The piece, described by Fela as his "first African tune," exemplifies a crucial transitional moment in Fela's creative evolution

3.2.2.1 "My Lady Frustration"

"My Lady Frustration" begins with an ascending bass motive that begins on G lands on E-flat, followed by a guitar vamping dominant ninth chords against the drawn out E-flat in the bass. Over this recurrent call-and-response figure, unison horns play a melodic theme in modified binary form. This is followed by a second, harmonized, horn theme. Immediately striking is the modal quality of

the piece, an area of tonality hitherto unexplored by Fela. The two contrasting horn themes, alternating between E-flat seventh and B-flat seventh chords supply the principal melodic materials of the first section of an unfolding three-part structure.

The B section is an extended E-flat seventh vamp. An extended saxophone solo, followed by a shorter trumpet solo, features in this section. Horn riffs punctuate the latter end of each solo. Section C, a reiteration of A, follows, closing out the piece.

In addition to the structural innovations described above, drummer Tony Allen executes a polyrhythmic drumming style in which kick, snare and hi-hat collectively accentuate the resultant rhythm of the interlocking melodic parts while simultaneously filling gaps resulting from the absence of the sekere and sticks. Allen's display of versatility marks a critical moment in the stylistic evolution of afrobeat as it foregrounds the "staggered" sixteenth note motive central to afrobeat rhythm. The figure, frequently refracted from Fela's bass lines, would form the kernel of Allen's unique drumming style which, in turn, came to represent one the most salient features of afrobeat. As with the blues-inflected Koola Lobitos songs, the guitar vamp is based on the conventional highlife timelines normally executed by sticks.

The stylistic developments discussed so far reveal major transformations in Fela's approach to instrumental writing and arrangement. However, composing "My Lady Frustration" also inspired Fela to reassess his approach to songwriting and vocal style. In spite of the steady stream of innovation occurring in Fela's music since his student days in London, his song melodies, for the most part, remained stubbornly within the stylistic boundaries of conventional highlife. While audiences were not averse to conceding Fela's skills as a musician and arranger (even if they didn't often understand his style) they tended to consider his singing in opposite terms. With "My Lady Frustration" Fela began to explore new approaches to vocal technique and song structure, moving

him closer towards imbuing his music with an “African personality” as promised in 1968. Regarding his creative experience while composing “My Lady Frustration,” Fela recalls,

... one day, I sat down at the piano in Sandra’s house. I said to Sandra: ‘Do you know what? I’ve been fooling around. I haven’t been playing AFRICAN music. So now I want to write African music... for the first time. I want to try. Then I started to write and write. In my mind I put a bass here... a piano there.... Then I started humming, then singing. I said to myself, ‘How do Africans sing songs? They sing with chants. Now let me chant into this song: *la-la-la-laaa...*’ ...At that time I only sang short songs. Things like, ‘Why did you take our wife from us? Now we’ve come to take our wife back.’ Finish. Another one went: ‘You rich woman, you will go home and you will bring back what you saw.’ But on this day, I didn’t want to sing any song. I knew I wasn’t going to sing any song in that tune I wrote. I was going to chant.”¹⁰⁹

Despite his stated intention to “Africanize” his singing style, the guttural *hooos*, *yays*, *ungghs*, and *heeeys* that Fela ends up declaiming on “My Lady Frustration” can hardly be described as chanting. Similar grunts can be heard on recordings of “Obe,” “Ako,” “Witchcraft,” and “Wayo,” all recorded in Los Angeles in 1969. Even when these songs feature intelligible lyrics in Yoruba, they are short, fragmentary and interspersed with grating exclamations. Indeed, vast instrumental sections void of vocalization of any sort typify the ’69 *Sessions* pieces, suggesting that although Fela was now aware of his vocal shortcomings, he was yet unsure what to sing about and how. The grunts showcased a new aggressive attitude that would henceforth characterize his music, but as yet, Fela had not found

¹⁰⁹ Moore, *Fela*, 87.

suitable ways of channeling that aggression. Once again, Fela was in that inchoate space between musical epiphany and concrete realization.

Figure 4: My Lady Frustration

My Lady's Frustration

Fela Ransome-Kuti

The musical score for "My Lady's Frustration" is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Guitar, Bass Guitar, Drum Set, and Conga Drums. The second system includes staves for Gtr., Horns, Bass, D. S., and C. Dr. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is common time (C). The score includes various musical notations such as chords, triplets, and specific drum patterns. The Horns part features a "1st Theme" marked with a bracket. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system containing the first four staves and the second system containing the remaining five staves.

6

Gtr.

6

6

Bass

6

D. S.

6

C. Dr.

9

Gtr.

B

2nd theme

9

Bass

9

D. S.

9

C. Dr.

11

Gtr.

11

Bass

11

D. S.

11

C. Dr.

13

Gtr.

13

Bass

13

D. S.

13

C. Dr.

This musical score is for a four-piece band consisting of guitar (Gtr.), bass, double bass (D. S.), and drums (C. Dr.). The score is divided into two systems, each containing five staves. The first system covers measures 11 and 12, while the second system covers measures 13 and 14. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The guitar part (Gtr.) is written in treble clef and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes with ties. The bass part is written in bass clef and follows a similar rhythmic pattern. The double bass part (D. S.) is written in bass clef and uses a simplified notation with 'x' marks to indicate specific notes. The drums part (C. Dr.) is written in bass clef and uses a simplified notation with 'x' marks to indicate specific notes. The second system (measures 13-14) introduces a new guitar part (Gtr.) with a different rhythmic pattern, while the other instruments continue with their respective parts.

15

Gtr.

15

Bass

15

D. S.

15

C. Dr.

17

Gtr.

17

Bass

17

D. S.

17

C. Dr.

The image displays a musical score for four instruments: Guitar (Gtr.), Bass, Double Bass (D. S.), and Drums (C. Dr.). The score is organized into two systems, each containing four staves. The first system covers measures 15 to 16, and the second system covers measures 17 to 18. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The guitar part (Gtr.) is written in treble clef and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with ties. The bass part (Bass) is written in bass clef and follows a similar rhythmic pattern. The double bass part (D. S.) is written in a high register on a five-line staff, using a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The drums part (C. Dr.) is written on a single-line staff with a key signature of one flat, using a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is marked with measure numbers 15, 17, and 18 at the beginning of each system.

3.2.2.2 London Scene

Locating the verbal-thematic component of his developing creative vision would remain an elusive quest until after Fela and his band returned to Nigeria on 25 March, 1970. “As soon as I got back home I started to preach” Fela recalls, “I had decided to change my music. And my music did start changing according to how I experienced the life and culture of my people.”¹¹⁰ Back in Lagos, Fela and Nigeria ’70 released a steady stream of vinyl singles, including “Jehin Jehin” (Chop teeth, Chop teeth), “Egbe Mi O” (Carry me), “Who’re you,” “Buy Africa” and “Fight to Finish;” all of which are anthologized on the 1970 LP *Fela’s London Scene*, recorded in London for EMI. A new emphasis on vocal delivery is immediately noticed on these recordings. Though retaining his newfangled stock of guttural exclamations, Fela also uses intelligible lyrics as he renews his exploration of themes reflecting everyday life in Lagos. In a series of autobiographical songs (“Jehin Jehin,” “Who’re you,” “Fight to Finish”), Fela casts mocking aspersions at personal antagonists who, in a sense, may be considered sounding boxes for the grating aggression newly present in his voice—ultimately to be directed at the Nigerian establishment. In “Buy Africa,” Fela employs didactic lyrics in exploring the broader nationalist theme of self-determination within the African context. “Egbe Mi O” is a musician’s tongue-in-cheek account of an out-of-control dancer. Each of these songs explores themes which, though mundane, recast Fela within the norms of traditional African cultures in which artists function as social observers and critics. Lyrics, however, remained brief and song forms weak. It was perhaps in an attempt to make up for this lingering shortcoming that Fela’s singing took on a conspicuously new centrality, often integrated into hitherto purely instrumental introductions, and featuring almost non-stop through the pieces. In obvious pursuit of an indigenous songwriting template, Fela begins to introduce folk songs into otherwise original compositions, a move which also affirmed his professed cultural nationalism. Further, the *London Scene* recordings herald the

¹¹⁰ Moore, *Fela*, 89

reintroduction of call-and-response passages (completely absent on '69 *Sessions*) between Fela and his bandmen, made possible by scaling down busy horn themes into fragmentary riffs. Fela's extended trumpet solos are replaced with improvised keyboard solos that highlight the rhythmic-percussive qualities of the instrument.

3.2.3 Africa '70

In December 1970, Fela yet again changed the name of his band to Africa '70, reflecting the Pan-Africanist orientation that his nationalism was taking, as well as in anticipation of the continued success of his new "sound" in the new decade. Nigeria '70 records, featuring his most recent musical innovations, had already brought him some ovation. But the phenomenal acclaim that he garnered with the release of "Jeun ko ku" (Chop and Die) in early 1971 was unprecedented. Looking back with a sense of accomplishment, Fela would declare, "Jeun ko ku" was "my first African record."¹¹¹ Indeed the new decade boded well for Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Africa '70.

3.2.3.1 "Jeun ko ku" (Chop and Die)

"Jeun ko ku" was not radically different from the previous post-Los Angeles Nigeria '70 releases. Its significant transformation was in Fela's song writing. With "Jeun ko ku," Fela now developed a song style which, on the one hand, captured convincingly his desire to emulate African chanting styles, yet on the other hand, articulated clear melodic lines far removed from his precursory grunts. Furthermore, Fela's revisiting of the call-and-response structure took on a new dimension. On "Jeun ko ku," Fela did more than just exploit call-and-response at the end of song; he used the technique throughout the entire vocal section of the piece, a move that was more congruent with the

¹¹¹ Moore, *Fela*, 110.

indigenous recreational vocal styles out of which much West African popular musics grew. This shift in focus from growling soloist to vocal ensemble also meant that the horns played even less frequently (since Fela's male instrumentalists doubled as the chorus). However, Fela's master stroke on "Jeun ko ko," was his unprecedented use of humor. "Jeun ko ku" was a comical sketch much in the mould of traditional Yoruba theatrical forms such as the alarinjo theater, in which folkloric characters such as "Gossip," "Glutton," "Eavesdropper," and "Lush," are depicted through masks that exaggerate defining personality traits. Although Fela had used this sort of stock characterization in the past on songs like "Omuti," (drunk), and "Wayo" (Deceit), those songs came off more didactic and preachy in tone, a perception that could only have been reinforced by the emphasis on the solo voice and lack of chorus involvement of any sort. On the contrary, "Jeun ko ku," a song narrating the tactless antics of a glutton towards a generous protagonist, calls on the listening audience to collectively denounce antisocial behavior.

Jeun ko ku o, o de!

"Eat-and-die," he comes!

Waki and die, o de!

"Gobble-and-die" is here!

Chop and quench, o de!

"Chomp-and-expire" has come

Waki and quench, o de!

"Eat-and-die" is here!

Mo gb'amala 'le o fa'tan o

I served *amala*, he ate it all

Mo gb'eba sile o je'tan o

I served *eba*, he gobbled it down

Mo gbe'su sile o je'tan o

I cut up some yams, he gorged

Mo gb'obe sile o laa tan o

I made stew, he gobbled it down

Mo gb'e ja sile o jee tan o

I filleted some fish, he splurged

Mo gb'emu sile o ba mi muu tan o

I poured out some palmwine, he drained it

Mo gb'obirin le o ba mi je mbe

I brought a girl home, he took care of himself

E ba mi le kuro n'ile me o o

Help me drive him away from my home

Onigbese, e ba mi le lo o

He's a waster, join me in chasing him out!

Ole! e ba mi le lo

Thief! Let's hound him off!

It was an adept use of the resources of folklore, and expectedly audiences responded enthusiastically. Finally Fela understood the Yoruba aesthetic captured in the proverb: *Won ni won o fe e n'ilu, o n da'rin; t'o ba da'rin b'awon ara ilu o ba ba e gbe nko?* (You have been told you are not wanted in the town, yet you raise a song; what will you do when the towns-people do not chorus a response?)

Throughout the 1970's Fela built on the success of "Jeun Ko Ku," retaining basic structural details while adding innovations here and there. On "Swegbe and Pako" he introduced a third guitar to his ensemble (see fig. 5). This addition complimented his standard bass and rhythm guitars by adding a contrapuntal tenor line to the ostinato groove, thus calling more attention to the play of interlocking rhythms, a move that augured well for dance-oriented audiences.

With "Jenwi Temi" Fela added several chorus girls to enact the kinetic dimensions of his music in live performances, while supplying a compelling new vocal layer to complement the male chorus. In 1972, Fela decided to check the exclusive use of the Yoruba language in his songs. He also dropped English completely, turning instead to the language of Anglophone West Africa's urban masses: Pidgin English, thus gaining a regional audience beyond Nigeria. With the emphases now on call-and-response singing and the groove, Fela's songs took on a new binary format: a lengthy groove-driven instrumental introduction with alternating horn chorus riffs and interspersed with saxophone, trumpet and keyboard solos; followed by a vocal section. With this new format, Fela's composition grew lengthier, lasting 15 minutes and more. African audiences accustomed to long-

forms didn't mind this; however, record labels, fixated on the 3-minute pop song format felt differently. There was also the technological limitation of the 45 rpm to consider. Fela adjusted his music to fit this limitation by recording the opening instrumental section of his songs on one side of the vinyl and the vocal section on the other side; yet another master stroke that allowed his music to cater to lovers of instrumental and vocal music alike.

The piece, “Water no Get Enemy,” (figure 6) illustrates many of the features that came to define the Africa '70 sound. The piece has become an afrobeat cult anthem, performed in diverse local scenes, by various bands.

Figure 5: “Swegbe and Pako:” Interlocking guitars, featuring a newly added tenor line

SWEGBE AND PAKO

The musical score for "Swegbe and Pako" is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- ELECTRIC GUITAR:** The top staff, in G major (one sharp) and common time (C), features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- ELECTRIC GUITAR 2:** The second staff, in G major and common time, provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes.
- BASS GUITAR:** The third staff, in G major and common time, plays a steady eighth-note bass line.
- DRUM SET:** The fourth staff, in common time, shows a rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- MARACAS:** The fifth staff, in common time, features a continuous eighth-note pattern.
- WOOD BLOCKS:** The sixth staff, in common time, plays a rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- CONGA DRUMS:** The seventh staff, in common time, features a pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

2 SWEGDE AND FARKU

E. Gtr. 1

E. Gtr. 2

BASS

D. S.

MCS.

W. BL.

C. Dr.

Figure 6: Water no Get Enemy

WATER NO GET ENEMY

FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI

ALTO SAX.

TENOR SAX.

BARITONE SAX.

TRUMPET IN B \flat

ELECTRIC GUITAR 1

ELECTRIC GUITAR 2

BASS GUITAR

DRUM SET

WOOD BLOCKS

MARACAS

CONGA DRUMS

The musical score is written for a large ensemble. It includes the following parts:

- A. SX.** (Alto Saxophone): Melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- T. SX.** (Tenor Saxophone): Melodic line, often in harmony with the Alto Saxophone.
- B. SX.** (Baritone Saxophone): Melodic line, providing a lower register.
- B. TPT.** (Baritone Trumpet): Melodic line, similar to the Baritone Saxophone.
- E. GTR. 1** (Electric Guitar 1): Rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes.
- E. GTR. 2** (Electric Guitar 2): Rhythmic accompaniment, often playing a complementary pattern to Guitar 1.
- BASS**: Bass line in the lower register, providing harmonic support.
- D. S.** (Drum Set): Complex rhythmic pattern with snare, hi-hat, and kick drum.
- W. BL.** (Wood Block): Rhythmic accompaniment.
- MRES.** (Maracas): Rhythmic accompaniment.
- C. DR.** (Conga): Rhythmic accompaniment.

The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is characterized by a strong rhythmic foundation and melodic lines that often move in parallel motion.

3.2.4 Egypt '80:

During the 1970s, Nigeria witnessed a bewildering combination of Oil wealth and escalating poverty.

An ongoing ban on politics and military brutality meant that there were no sanctioned avenues for

public protest. When the 12-year ban on politics was lifted in 1978, Nigerians renewed their hopes and began looking forward to a new era of civilian rule. Fela, still reverberating from the shock of his mother's death, joined the throng of hopefuls who formed fifty new political parties, each hoping to usher in the long awaited change. Fela's Movement of the People party (MOP), along with several others, were disallowed from registering for the 1979 elections. He tried to contest again in 1983 and was similarly disqualified. Meanwhile, Africa '70 band members were become increasingly disenchanted with Fela's increasing political involvement. During a 1979 Berlin tour, most of the musicians in Africa '70 jumped ship. This meant that Fela had to build a new band almost from scratch. The new band was named Egypt '80, reflecting Fela's growing immersion in Egyptian mysticism and other indigenous animist practices. Egypt '80 was far bigger than Fela's previous bands, featuring some thirty-plus musicians and singers, including up to 2 bass guitars, 4 rhythm/tenor guitars, "rhythm" piano, the Yoruba *gbedu* ritual drum, and a large retinue of horns, dancers, and singers.

The music of the Egypt '80 reflected not only this expansion of instruments, but also the prevalent dark mood that presently engulfed Nigeria. In addition to key changes in tempo, timelines and the introduction of new drumset templates, Fela switched from piano to the Hammond organ which colored Egypt '80's sound with a dour stridency. In addition to the usual call-and-response, Fela introduced mixed choral parts that ran in counterpoint to blaring horns, an interlocking rhythm section and Fela's billowing organ playing, all of which he explored within polytonal and chromatic contexts. The resulting music grew longer and dissonant, yet simultaneously drew closer to Yoruba traditional forms. Many of the musical features here are evident on the piece, "Teacher don't Teach Me Nonsense,"¹¹² composed by Fela in 1986.

¹¹² This piece is analyzed in Chapter 4

Figure 7: Egypt '80 Excerpt from "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense"

TEACHER DON'T TEACH ME NONSENSE

FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI

The musical score is arranged in a system with multiple staves. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Voice I**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Voice C**: Bass clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F3) followed by a rest.
- Alto Sax I**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Tenor Sax I**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Soprano Sax I**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Trumpet in C**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Alto Sax C**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Tenor Sax C**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Soprano Sax C**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Trumpet in Bb**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Electric Quinte I**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Electric Quinte II**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Electric Quinte C**: Bass clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F3) followed by a rest.
- Bass Quinte**: Bass clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F3) followed by a rest.
- Drums**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Congas**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Gueza**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Snare**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Conga Drums**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.
- Organ**: Treble clef, key of F major, 4/4 time. The part consists of a single note (F4) followed by a rest.

TEACHER DON'T TEACH ME NONSENSE

This musical score is for the song "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense". It is written for a large ensemble, including vocalists and various instruments. The score is organized into three systems of staves.

System 1 (Vocalists):

- RA. SX. 1:** Soprano 1
- TA. SX. 1:** Alto 1
- BA. SX. 1:** Bass 1
- STP. 1:** Soprano Tenor Part 1
- RA. SX. 2:** Soprano 2
- TA. SX. 2:** Alto 2
- BA. SX. 2:** Bass 2
- STP. 2:** Soprano Tenor Part 2

System 2 (Percussion and Bass):

- CL. G. 1:** Clarinet 1
- CL. G. 2:** Clarinet 2
- CL. G. 3:** Clarinet 3
- DRUM:** Drums

System 3 (Piano and Keyboard):

- P. 1:** Piano 1
- P. 2:** Piano 2
- P. 3:** Piano 3
- P. 4:** Piano 4
- P. 5:** Piano 5
- P. 6:** Piano 6
- P. 7:** Piano 7
- P. 8:** Piano 8
- P. 9:** Piano 9
- P. 10:** Piano 10
- P. 11:** Piano 11
- P. 12:** Piano 12
- P. 13:** Piano 13
- P. 14:** Piano 14
- P. 15:** Piano 15
- P. 16:** Piano 16
- P. 17:** Piano 17
- P. 18:** Piano 18
- P. 19:** Piano 19
- P. 20:** Piano 20
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- P. 39:** Piano 39
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- P. 41:** Piano 41
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- P. 93:** Piano 93
- P. 94:** Piano 94
- P. 95:** Piano 95
- P. 96:** Piano 96
- P. 97:** Piano 97
- P. 98:** Piano 98
- P. 99:** Piano 99
- P. 100:** Piano 100

This page of musical notation is divided into three systems. The first system contains woodwind parts for Flute 1 (Fl. 1), Flute 2 (Fl. 2), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Fg.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. Bb.), and Clarinet in A (Cl. A). The second system contains string parts for Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vcllo.), and Double Bass (Kontrabass). The third system contains percussion parts for Snare Drum (Sn.), Cymbal (Cym.), and a large drum (Grosbois). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Musical score for a choral and instrumental ensemble, page 4. The score includes vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and instrumental parts (Flute, Clarinet, Saxophone, Trombone, Trumpet, Percussion, and Strings). The music is in 4/4 time and features a mix of melodic and rhythmic patterns.

The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) are written in treble clef. The instrumental parts include:

- Flute (Fl.)
- Clarinet (Cl.)
- Saxophone (Sax.)
- Trombone (Tbn.)
- Trumpet (Tpt.)
- Percussion (Perc.)
- Strings (Strs.)

The score is divided into systems. The first system shows the vocal parts and the instrumental parts. The second system continues the vocal parts and the instrumental parts. The third system shows the vocal parts and the instrumental parts. The fourth system shows the vocal parts and the instrumental parts.

The lyrics for the vocal parts are:

Ti - sta - ti -

sha - q - ta - bi ra le - tu - rer_ be your name! Ti - sha_ ti - sha - o_ and - i le - tu - rer_ be de same make you no teach me_ I go know_ per-son you fi-nish teach-i -

A. Sax. I
 T. Sax. I
 B. Sax. I
 Dr. I
 A. Sax. C
 T. Sax. C
 B. Sax. C
 Dr. C
 E. G. I
 E. G. II
 E. G. C
 S. G.
 D. S.
 C. H.
 S. H.
 S. H.

yet na so e don die - e to-day o Per-son you fi-nish teach-i - yet na so e don die - e to-day o Per-son you fi-nish teach-i yet na so e do die - e

A. Sax. I
 T. Sax. I
 B. Sax. I
 Dr. M. S.
 A. Sax. S.
 T. Sax. S.
 B. Sax. S.
 Dr. M. I.
 E. Gtr. I
 E. Gtr. S.
 E. Gtr. S.
 B. Gtr.
 D. S.
 D. M.
 B. S.
 G. M.

Me and you no dey for de same-u ca-te-go - ry, me and you no dey for de same-u ca-te-go - ry. Me and you no dey for de same-u ca-te-go - ry.

A. Sax. I
 T. Sax. I
 B. Sax. I
 Bb. Tr. I
 A. Sax. II
 T. Sax. II
 B. Sax. II
 Bb. Tr. II
 Euph. I
 Euph. II
 Euph. III
 Tuba
 O. S.
 O. A.
 O. B.
 O. C.

Me and you no dey - for de same - u - ca - te - go - ry. No dey same ca - te - go - ry o no dey same ca - te - go - ry o no dey same

A. Sax. I
 T. Sax. I
 B. Sax. I
 Eb Tpt. I
 A. Sax. II
 T. Sax. II
 B. Sax. II
 Eb Tpt. II
 Euph. I
 Euph. II
 Euph. III
 Bass
 D. S.
 Dm.
 Gtr.
 Sns.

Musical score for a vocal and instrumental ensemble. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The vocal part (Soprano) has the lyrics "a - to - po - ry a". The instrumental parts include:

- Violin I (Vcln I):** Treble clef, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Violin II (Vcln II):** Treble clef, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Viola (Vla):** Alto clef, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Cello (Vcl):** Bass clef, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Double Bass (Cb):** Bass clef, playing a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Drum (Dr):** Treble clef, playing a rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Other instruments (O. S., Cym, Gtr, Strs):** Treble clef, playing a rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.

The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the vocal part and the instrumental parts. The second system contains the instrumental parts. The score ends with a double bar line.

3.3 SUBSEQUENT STAGE: CONTEMPORARY NEGOTIATIONS

Boundaries of stylistic convention are established during the formative stage of a genre's evolution. These boundaries, however, remain permeable, subjecting genre identity to negotiation and change. Holt positions such post-formative negotiations in relation to the disseminative mechanisms of the popular music market. Fabian Holt's concept of *mainstream dialectics* addresses contradictions inherent in the relationship between a genre, media, and the corporate music industry. Having been established as specialized fields, genres gain widespread circulation through records, cds, live events, music discourse and other media technologies largely controlled by the corporate music industry.¹¹³ Popularization broadens a genre's cultural space, bringing it into contact with new, potentially transformative, aesthetic values. At the same time, popularization engenders resistance in existing core collectivities to which departures in style may signal an unwelcome compromise of genre identity. The dialectic at play here is that of authenticity and transgression, framed in popular discourse with binary formulations like "real" vs. "fake;" "honest" vs. "contrived" "roots" vs. "pop;" "raw" vs. "watered down." Notions of authenticity and transgression may vary according to time and place, and within a single setting, conceptual paradoxes may exist.

3.3.1 Constructing afrobeat's canon

It was with some measure of skepticism that I attended my first live afrobeat show on 3 May 2007. Antibalas was performing in the open air parking lot of the Andy Warhol museum in Pittsburgh, and I went with a group of friends to witness the event. Prior to the concert, I had listened to Antibalas on

¹¹³ This formulation presupposes the idea that genres are formed in contexts somewhat immune from the mainstream. It can be argued, however, that there exists, even in a genre's formative stage, some type of relationship to dominant discourse, even if that relationship is oppositional.

CD and concluded that the band, while displaying impeccable instrumental and arranging skills, fell short in vocal production. Amid all of the musical innovation that Fela brought to music, it was in the grain of the voice that he stood out most distinctively to me. Compared to Fela's gruff declamations, Antibalas' Duke Amayo sounded mild and restrained. Not that it was at all reasonable to expect Amayo to sound like Fela. The stridency in Fela's voice was moored in a history of political, social and cultural events which may never confluence in quite the same way again. Even if an artist like Amayo tried to replicate Fela's voice from a purely aesthetic standpoint, specifics of place and time may predispose us to hearing the two artists differently. The fact is that all music is heard and valued in relation to others. This is even more so when an iconic figure like Fela wields creative hegemony over the range of musical activities under consideration. Not only did Fela create afrobeat, he is also till date it's most prolific composer, and it is his vast body of work that has become the referential canon by which contemporary afrobeat is defined.

The centrality of Fela's musical corpus to the shaping of contemporary afrobeat's musical identity was made clear to me at multiple levels during my fieldwork. Whether in the US or in Nigeria, musicians, fans, producers and other culture brokers constantly referenced Fela's music as pivotal to their valuations of contemporary afrobeat. I found this to be true on that spring night in 2007, when I first watched Antibalas play. After the performance, I spoke with several members of the band, including founder Martin Perna. After hearing about my research and my plan to interview several afrobeat musicians within and outside the US, Perna said, "You will find as you travel around that there are many bands now claiming to be playing afrobeat, but they're not really playing afrobeat, they haven't really studied the music, they're not getting it." Roughly one year later, in New York City, I had another conversation with Perna during which he elaborated on what he meant by "getting it:"

Well, afrobeat, there's a syntax to it, there's a grammar, there's a whole structure to it, and there's a couple different sort of templates... looking over the whole arc of Fela's career from Koola Lobitos to the last recordings he was making with Egypt '80, there's commonalities within there, and I think a lot of bands don't study the music deeply enough"¹¹⁴

If, as Perna stated, some musicians don't pay enough attention to Fela's corpus, there are doubtless others who strive intensely to emulate his musical blueprint. This was impressed on me during a conversation I had with San Francisco-based drummer Gabe Turow. Turow plays in a Bay Area band called Afrobeat Connexion led by Baba Ken Okulolo, a veteran of Nigerian popular music, who played on and off with Fela, relocated to the United States in the 1980s, and from whom Turow took several lessons on afrobeat drumming. Like Perna, Turow passionately expressed how important he thought it was that contemporary afrobeat musicians adhere to Fela's stylistic conventions. To him, American bands that do not adhere to those conventions, at least at a basic level, were not playing "good afrobeat." When I asked Turow to elaborate on what he felt was "good afrobeat," he handed me a sheet on which he had transcribed several drumming patterns from Fela's body of work. "That sheet is good afrobeat," he said, "seriously, I'm not kidding. At least some of the songs in your set should have these sort of like three classes of beats... it's like in house music, if it's not going [here, Turow beatboxes a common house music beat]... it's not House music."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Personal communication, 10 June, 2008

¹¹⁵ Personal communication, 2009

Figure 8: "Good afrobeat:" Gabe Turow's extraction of Africa '70 afrobeat drum patterns.

Afrobeat On Paper

1) A. 2-3 African Message (Tony Allen)

2) A. 3)

4) A. B.

5) C.

Mukulu:

Marches:

Expensive Shift 5) A. B.

Who No Know Go (Bina) 6) A. B. Na Poi

Lady 7) A. B. Water No Get Enemy

Other Group: 8) A. B. Iboyi Blindness

9) A. B.

Inverted:

10) A. B.

Transcription By: Gabe Turow

Printed at www.blanksheetmusic.net

Not every musician or fan feels that the beat is the most defining musical element of afrobeat. For others it is the interaction between sekere and woodblock, the interlocking of rhythm and tenor guitars, the brash slightly dissonant horns, the percussive keyboard style, the harmonic language, the polyrhythmic groove, etc. Often, it is a combination of any or all of these, but always in reference to Fela's corpus. It was simple: *good afrobeat emulates Fela's blueprint, and bad afrobeat does not.*

The journalistic discourse on contemporary afrobeat is also full of references to Fela's canonic hegemony. Reviewing Antibalas' first CD, Ben Werner writes in *The Record* magazine:

“‘Liberation Afrobeat Vol. 1,’ is a heady collection of shockingly authentic Kutiesque songs... [a]nd there's nothing quite like Antibalas. To be blunt, these guys sound so good it's as if they came of age in Fela's Kalakuta Republic, not up and down the East Coast...”¹¹⁶

Even when culture brokers do not make specific references to stylistic traits, they appear to be unwavering in their assertion of Fela's centrality to afrobeat's identity as a whole. When I explained to a librarian at the archives of a national newspaper in Nigeria that I was looking for articles that deal with afrobeat musicians other than Fela, she responded with a puzzled look: “What other musicians? Afrobeat IS Fela... an entity by itself.”

Over the course of several months in the field, I discovered that when people speak of Fela's corpus, they are usually referring to the body of work that came out during the period roughly between 1970 and 1980 when his band was known as Africa '70. This, for many on both sides of the Atlantic, was Fela's musical apogee. It was the period that produced well known hits like *Water No Get Enemy*, *Zombie*, *Gentleman*, *Lady*, *Shakara* and *Shuffering and Shmiling*. These songs are characterized by what Martin Perna of Antibalas called a “visceral” quality, and a ribald humor which

¹¹⁶ “Afrobeat band is making its mark” May 22, 2001

softened the edge in Fela's vitriolic social commentary. It is therefore the Africa '70 repertoire that most contemporary afrobeat bands have chosen to emulate, as a journalist once noted:

“...Antibalas' full-length *Liberation Afro Beat Vol. 1* (released last year on Afrosound Records) was a note- and beat-perfect tribute to the ecstatic, incendiary '70s Afrobeat records of the late Nigerian bandleader and political provocateur Fela Anikulapo Kuti and his Afrika 70 group.”¹¹⁷

Ironically, these were not the songs in widest circulation in the late 1990's when contemporary afrobeat bands began to spring up in the US and Europe. Rather, it was the more recent Egypt '80 recordings which were in circulation. However, Egypt '80 songs, often lasting 25 to 30 minutes, have a brooding quality about them, and are generally considered to be more experimental than Fela's earlier repertoire. While songs such as *Beasts of No Nation* and *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense*, are acknowledged for their abstract complexity, they also tend to leave the uninitiated—particularly American and European first time listeners—a little befuddled. Not surprisingly, when British independent label Wrasse in collaboration with America's Universal records began posthumously reissuing Fela's back catalogue, young American musicians gravitated to the more accessible Africa '70 recordings. Nevertheless, the periods before and after the Africa '70 era are just as important, for they represent crucial developmental nodes along the evolutionary trajectory of afrobeat; they speak to the heterogeneity of style in Fela's corpus, which, in turn, bears on the discourse on authenticity and transgression in contemporary afrobeat discourse, a subject that I presently address.

¹¹⁷ Jay Babcock, “Liberation Afrobeat,” *LA Weekly*, Feb. 16-22, 2001.

3.3.2 Authenticity and transgression

When Jon Pareles wrote in the New York Times that afrobeat had “leaped across borders,”¹¹⁸ it was more than a commentary on the genre’s emergent transnational networks; it was also an acknowledgment of the growing heterogeneity of style across afrobeat scenes. Comparing Brooklyn’s Antibalas and Paris-based Psyco on da Bus, Pareles described Antibalas as holding on to “vintage Afrobeat,” while “Psyco on da Bus extrapolated from it.” Writing further, he explains that the “vintage” quality of Antibalas’ afrobeat derives from the band’s “revival” of “Fela’s old density.” Conversely, Psyco on da Bus’s dealings with the spacey aesthetics of dub and electronica makes its music an “extrapolation” of afrobeat. Here, perceived relationships between musical style and critical value come to the fore. The words *vintage* and *extrapolated* embody the contrasting notions of authenticity and transgression which I find to be crucial in the contemporary afrobeat discourse. Notions of authenticity and transgression are constantly being negotiated as fans, musicians, and writers like Pareles struggle to locate afrobeat’s identity within a vast field of contemporary styles that claim affiliation to the genre.

During the course of my fieldwork in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Lagos, I asked each musician that I interviewed to tell me what they felt were afrobeat’s defining musical traits. While they all referenced Fela’s corpus, individual musicians also had different ideas about how they could “authentically” engage with this corpus. For Martin Perna of Antibalas, commitment to the “original roots” is critical to the perpetuation of afrobeat’s identity.¹¹⁹ However, not all musicians feel that afrobeat’s legacy should be constrained by such a conservative approach. In San

¹¹⁸ John Pareles, “Part Parade, Part Strut, Part Funk,” Pop Review, *New York Times*, January 22, 2002

¹¹⁹ L. Kent Wolgamott “Band aims to spread the Afrobeat culture as well as its sound” *Lincoln Journal Star*, October 11, 2002

Francisco, Ezra Gale, founding member of a band called Aphrodesia expressed a view contrasting Perna's:

one thing I noticed about a lot of these [afrobeat] bands is that a lot of them really sound pretty much just like Fela. I think that's the blueprint everybody is working from. And, you know, with our band, we're kind of trying to move a little bit beyond that, you know, just kind of taking it in some other directions. We mix in some other styles that I don't normally see these other bands doing, you know, stuff from like Ghana and Zimbabwe and some other American funk and jazz styles¹²⁰

As evident from Pareles' comments on *Psyco on da Bus*, Aphrodesia is not alone in their effort to move beyond Fela's blueprint. Femi Kuti has long been at the forefront of expanding afrobeat's stylistic boundaries. Femi has forged a distinctly urban sound that melds afrobeat with elements of hip-hop, house and techno music. Widely endorsed by the international media as afrobeat's new mantle bearer, Femi's contemporary reinterpretations of the musical ideas he first encountered as a saxophonist in his father's Egypt '80 band has earned him audiences in Europe and America, as well as a Grammy Award nomination in the Best World Music category for his 2001 album, *Fight to Win*.

The Tribute album, *Red Hot+Riot*, released on MCA/Universal in 2001, further demonstrates the attempt by some musicians to capture the spirit behind afrobeat while engaging with contemporary forms of musical expression. A tribute to Fela, *Red Hot+Riot* was used to generate awareness about AIDS victims in Africa and raise funds for the same cause. The album boasts an elite line up of international hip hop and dance artists including Dead Prez, D'angelo, Macy Gray, Common, Bugz in the Attic, Baaba Maal, Les Nubians, Manu Dibango, Tony Allen and Femi Kuti with his Positive Force

¹²⁰ Personal communication, March 28, 2008

band. Rendered on the album are contemporary versions of Fela classics like “Water no Get Enemy,” “Shuffering and Shmiling” and “Zombie.” Often these contemporary interpretations have little resemblance to the originals, raising the question: “is this afrobeat?” *Red Hot+Riot*’s producer, Paul Heck, conceded to me that stylistically, the album pushes the boundaries of afrobeat as played by Fela. However, he also maintains that experimentation is crucial to the vitality of any musical genre:

...I think the Riot record... showed the [varied] ways in which you can take [afrobeat]... I mean, our thing is, the only way to pay homage to someone is to do it in your own style, and I think we achieved that... For me, any genre that lives, people have to do stuff to it, you know, they have to tear it apart and put it back together again... so, I don’t know, if afrobeat’s gonna live... you know, you have to be able to take liberties with things.¹²¹

The crucial question then is when does experimentation become transgression? As what point does the pushing of stylistic boundaries alter a genre’s identity? Or put differently, how innovative can a musician be before he or she is considered to have radically transgressed a genre’s established boundaries? My discussions with musicians suggest that there are no easy answers to this question. Ezra Gale, acknowledging that extreme forays beyond the conventions of Fela’s style blur Aphrodesia’s musical identity, was hesitant to embrace a strict afrobeat label. Paul Heck went even further, calling into question the label afrobeat:

“I don’t even think it’s afrobeat anymore, I think that’s like a lazy label, you know, I think what Fela did in the 70s and the 80s and the 90s was all afrobeat... there’s the clave pattern, there’s

¹²¹ Personal communication 14 Sept, 2007

the sekere, there's maybe a certain way of playing the drums and things interacting; afrobeat is like machine, everything interlocks... but you can't expect different musicians to play the same way, you know, you can't replace Tony Allen with the Tony Allen robot... afrobeat changed when Fela played it, it's changing now"¹²²

The discussion so far not only points out different ways that musicians and producers think about authenticity and transgression, but also suggests that what is generally referred to as afrobeat is actually a wide range of musical expressions whose relationships are sometimes hard to decipher and which vary widely in proximity to afrobeat's established canons, i.e. Fela's corpus. Media discourse on afrobeat further illustrates this point.

In its diffusion into American and European soundscapes, afrobeat has been subsumed under umbrella categories like "world music" and "world beat." Further complicating matters, the notion of afrobeat as a type of "third world" funk—Fela Kuti's answer to James Brown—has gained wide popularity, endorsed by writers like Pareless' who describes afrobeat as "Nigerian funk." In this discourse, the term afrobeat is literally interpreted as any type of "African-beat," whether it is King Sunny Ade's juju music or Manu Dibango's Soul Makossa. It is interesting to note how this notion of afrobeat as a catch-all label is reified in the jet age of internet technology. On MySpace music, for example, the only real African music genre listed is "Afro-beat." The absence of more specific genre categories compels a wide range of artists, from Angelique Kidjo to Thomas Mapfumo, to describe their music as afrobeat. Similarly, an itunes sampler titled "World Funk," collapses a dizzy array of widely disparate world music genres:

¹²² Personal communication, Sept. 14, 2007

Our 45-song world funk primer presents a broad canvas, taking in a host of styles including the Afrobeat of Nigeria's multi-instrumentalist Fela Kuti and the infectious "crazy samba" of Brazilian trio Azymuth. However disparate these sounds, they all share mesmerizing dance rhythms and an elevated feel-fantastic factor. Get down!

While the narrative of afrobeat as funk has become entrenched in Western media discourse, historical events tell us that it is in fact a myth. It is true that when Fela decided to create his own "sound" in the late 1960s, James Brown soul was popular in Africa. However, Fela's reaction to the soul craze, as shown in chapter two, was not that of blind acceptance, but measured resistance.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Given genre's basis in musical and social collectivities, afrobeat presents us with an analytical dilemma. Not only did Fela create afrobeat; even in death, he remains its most prolific exponent, outweighing protégés by inconceivable margins. With Fela wielding such an all-encompassing influence on afrobeat, its formation in musical and social collectives, that is, its genre status, comes into question. Should afrobeat be considered a style or genre?

I would argue that the sheer volume of Fela's repertoire and its heterogeneity validate its genre status. However, even if such an argument is rejected, afrobeat still qualifies as a genre because of the diversity of stylistic interpretations that individual musicians bring to Fela's templates. Despite differences in style, the common thread that links Antibalas, Psycho on da Bus, Aphrodesia, Femi Kuti, the *Red Hot+Riot* project, and other afrobeat acts, is that musicians and producers on all sides are invested in carrying on Fela's afrobeat legacy. What differs is how they individually choose

engage with Fela's corpus. Herein lies the fluidity of stylistic boundaries. While traditionalists view adherence to conventions of style as a marker of authenticity, more experimental musicians feel that genre authenticity comes from adding one's own unique voice to an ever growing, ever permeable sonic palette.

4.0 IDEOLOGY

*Everyone dey hear
Dey hear for ideology*

*Ah, now, but look am
E don show himself: opposite people
I say look am, e don show himself
Opposite people,
I say look de tin...*

*He go dey shakara, he go dey katakata, he go dey shakara
Opposite people*

Fela, “Opposite People”

From 1974, with “Alagbon Close,” Fela increasingly imbued his songs with the autobiographical details of his oppositional and violent relationship with the Nigerian state. His hegemony over afrobeat’s evolutionary trajectory meant that the genre, like his life, came to be synonymous with revolutionary struggle, encapsulated in his now well rehearsed ideological dictum: “Music is the Weapon of the Future.”

It is in the above light that I examine in this chapter the role of ideology in afrobeat discourse. Insofar as ideology can be understood as a “set of ideas, values, or assumptions”¹²³ shared by members of a group inhabiting a socially defined space, its role in the formation and life of a genre must be deemed crucial. Just as Fela used his music as a tool for apprehending, mediating and critiquing the realities of the postcolonial African state, afrobeat is in itself a product of those realities expressed through specific ideological channels. In a similar vein, ideology continues to play a fundamental role in how afrobeat is received, valued and reconfigured in contemporary settings. This chapter aims, firstly, to understand the work of ideology in the formative stages of afrobeat identity, and secondly, to examine contemporary transformations in ideological discourse. In the latter analysis, I give particular focus to Femi Kuti and Antibalas, representatives of “post-Fela” Lagos and New York City scenes respectively.

4.1 IDEOLOGY AND GENRE FORMATION

The ideological conventions that define a genre come into being through processes that are similar to those that generate its stylistic conventions, discussed in the previous chapter. During a genre’s formative stage, influential groups of musicians, fans, producers, writers etc., converge around “a set of shared ideas about the music and its values and origins.”¹²⁴ At the core of these social formations or scenes are a set of individuals whom Simon Frith identifies as “ideologues.”¹²⁵ Ideologues could be journalists, writers, marketing personnel, iconic musicians, or anyone who features crucially in the discursive processes that define a genre’s values, giving “direction to the

¹²³ Green, *Ideology*, 5

¹²⁴ Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*, 20.

¹²⁵ Frith, *Performing Rites*, 88

larger network.” Just as the stylistic traits that converge in a musical genre emerge out of preexisting musical formations, so also a genre’s ideology emerges out of various philosophies and ideas already present. Genre ideology is located at the confluence of broader cultural, social, historical and political streams of discourse; that is, in an ecology of ideologies, the boundaries of which, as mentioned above, are defined by ideologues.

4.1.1 Fela as afrobeat’s chief ideologue

I have discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation how, at every stage in the creation of afrobeat, musical innovation was triggered by moments of profound ideological transformation in Fela’s personal life. Invariably, afrobeat ideology came to be Fela’s ideology; a reality encapsulated in the term “Felasophy” that is applied by core disciples to Fela’s philosophical teachings. What Sola Olorunyomi aptly describes as the “Fela-Afrobeat vision”¹²⁶ addresses a broad range of social, political, historical and cultural issues, and was disseminated not only through music, but in a variety of other media, including publications, lectures, interviews, and other formal and informal discursive outlets. Even with afrobeat’s current global diffusion, contemporary narratives remain profoundly indebted to the foundational vision, making Fela the genre’s chief ideologue.

A chronology of the evolution of ideological discourse in afrobeat has been undertaken by Tejumola Olaniyan,¹²⁷ who recognizes three progressive stages that I presently outline. The first stage spans the decade beginning in 1958, during which Olaniyan describes Fela as an “apolitical hustler.” 1958 is significant as the year that Fela embarked on a five-year trip to London where he studied music at Trinity College, and immersed himself in the city’s vibrant jazz scene. Out of this

¹²⁶ Olorunyomi, *Afrobeat*, 33

¹²⁷ See Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!*

experience came the idea of highlife-jazz, an appellation which, far beyond the musical hybridity that it connotes, reflected Fela's keen engagement with the broader conundrum of post-independence African modernity. Fela's second ideological phase began in 1969, the year he embarked on a now famous ten-month sojourn of the United States. Fela's encounter with Black Panther activism while in Los Angeles became the catalyst for profound changes in afrobeat's musical and ideological trajectories. Returning to Nigeria, Fela would assume the role of an "afrobeat moralist," a phrase coined by Olaniyan to reflect a heightened emphasis on social activism and cultural nationalism that permeated Fela's music during this second ideological phase. The third and final phase of ideological evolution in afrobeat begins in 1974, the year in which Fela, along with some sixty habitués of his Surulere residence, were arrested by the Nigerian police and sent to jail on the charge of possessing Indian hemp, the first of many incarcerations to follow. Fela would later in the same year memorialize the experience in the song "Alagbon Close." A biting critique of the Nigerian penal system, "Alagbon Close" marked the permanent entry of charged anti-establishment rhetoric into Fela's musical practice. It is for this reason that Olaniyan recognizes 1974 as the year denoting Fela's transformation into an "afrobeat political activist," an ideological posture that he maintained until his death in 1997.

4.1.2 Ecology of ideologies

Afrobeat scholar Tejumola Olaniyan identifies three broad streams of thought in what he describes as afrobeat's "catalytic ideological matrix."¹²⁸ Afrobeat is foremost rooted in Black Nationalism, particularly, the African American "Black Power" variant that Fela is famously known to have encountered during his 1969/70 sojourn in the United States. A more universal view of Black

¹²⁸ Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!* 76

Nationalism includes Pan-Africanism (preceding “Black Power”) and Afrocentrism (post “Black Power”). These were related movements, which, though historically distinct, nonetheless subscribe to the principles of political self-determination and racial pride that lie at the core of Black Nationalist movements worldwide. As Olaniyan shows, both Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism are critically central in afrobeat’s complex ideological matrix.

Second, Olaniyan discusses the socialist oriented lower class partisanship with which afrobeat would emphatically align itself from the 1970s on. The third ideological stream is an unswerving libertarianism¹²⁹ which, according to Olaniyan, “frequently tries to be the anchor and articulator of the other two [earlier mentioned ideologies].”¹³⁰ To better understand the system of ideas and values at the formative core of afrobeat identity, I examine in more detail each of the ideological streams mentioned above.

4.1.2.1 Black Nationalism

Broadly described, Black Nationalism embraces a complex set of social, political and cultural ideas articulated by people of African descent in their collective pursuits of enfranchisement, cultural identity and racial pride beginning in the nineteenth century. Although often used in the context of African American discourse, the term “Black Nationalism” is, in fact, widely applicable, encompassing the abolitionist activities of Paul Cuffee (1759-1817), the Haitian Revolution, Emancipation in the United States, and African Independence movements. Similarly, activists who have contributed to Black Nationalist discourse represent diverse nationalities, including Marcus Garvey (Jamaica), W.E.B. DuBois (United States), Franz Fanon (Martinique), Walter Rodney (Guyana), Malcolm X (United States) and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana). Fundamentally, Black Nationalism is a reaction against the

¹²⁹ What Olaniyan defines as libertarianism I subsequently discuss as “libertinism.”

¹³⁰ Ibid.

experiences of dispossession, oppression and rejection fostered by Euro-American enslavement and colonization of Africans. Black Nationalist ideas, therefore, thrive on sentiments of fraternal solidarity shared by Africans and a widely dispersed diaspora.

Fela's parents were prominent nationalists. His father, Rev. Israel Oludotun Kuti, was a foremost educationist and pioneer chairman of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, founded in July 1931. Fela's mother, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was a staunch women's rights activist who led a series of landmark protests against British colonial policies that discriminated against women in Abeokuta, leading to the abdication of the Egba King Ademola in 1949. She was also a member of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a political party that was very active during the Nigerian struggle for Independence. Both Reverend and Mrs. Kuti were staunch Pan-Africanists. Mrs. Kuti was a good friend of Kwame Nkrumah and it was she who first introduced Fela to the Pan Africanist icon.¹³¹

Despite the activism of his parents, Fela would remain aloof to political issues until his encounter with African American activist and friend to the Black Panther party, Sandra Smith, in 1968. "Sandra gave me the education I wanted to know," Fela would recall, "She was the one who opened my eyes. I swear man! She's the one who spoke to me about... Africa! She talked to me about politics, history."¹³² Fela became conversant with the works of leading Pan-Africanist thinkers including W.E.B. DuBois, Kwame Nkrumah (*Africa Must Unite*, 1963), Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* 1963; *Toward the African Revolution* 1969) and Walter Rodney (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* 1972). The ideas expressed by these authors came to fundamentally impact Fela's musical practice as evident in songs like "Who no Know go Know" (1975), "Why Blackman dey Suffer" (1971), and "Movement of the People" (1984).

¹³¹ Moore, *Fela*, 6

¹³² Moore, *Fela*, 85.

Another strand of Black Nationalism into which Fela immersed himself was Afrocentrism. While Pan-Africanist ideas have tended to find expression through political action, Afrocentrism is “a movement for the reformation of the consciousness of both blacks and whites—but particularly blacks—perceived to be hamstrung by centuries of racist European thinking, teaching, and general ideas.”¹³³ Afrocentrism calls for an “Africa-centered” approach to knowledge and the restoration of a glorious African past through the valorization of Egypt and other ancient African civilizations. As such, Afrocentrism is primarily a cultural nationalist movement. Afrocentric authors that influenced Fela include George G.M. James (*The Stolen Legacy*, 1954), Y. Ben-Johchannan (*The Black Man of the Nile*, 1972), and Cheikh Anta Diop (*Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 1987). Afrocentric ideas can be heard on songs like “Africa Centre of the World” (1980) and “Don’t Worry about my Mouth O” (“African Message”). On the latter song, Fela affirms his indebtedness to Afrocentric literature when he instructs listeners in doubt of his words to consult *The Black Man of the Nile*.

4.1.2.2 Lower Class Partisanship

From discussions in previous chapters of this dissertation, it is evident how afrobeat, at different stages of its evolution, reflected Fela’s relationship with audiences. Having devoted most of the 1960s to the pursuit of what amounted to an elitist musical discourse, it was Fela’s renewed populist aesthetic that enabled him to finally create a musical form that became widely successful during the 1970s. Not only did Fela transform the structure of his music to meet the aesthetic and communal needs of the listening masses, he also sang about the day to day experiences of the ordinary man on the street, echoing his pain, frustrations, aspirations and joys. Fela’s populist aesthetic carried over into his daily life. Born into a nationally prominent middle class family, Fela

¹³³ Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!*, 79

walked away from the comforts of his pedigree to live in the slummy areas of Lagos in an unwavering display of grassroots allegiance that has been described as class-suicide.¹³⁴ Fela was a champion of the underdog who, in his songs, addresses his listeners as “my people,” or “brothers and sisters.” In 1972, Fela decided to no longer sing in Yoruba exclusively and not at all in Standard English, languages which in West Africa reflect ethnic and class barriers and therefore restrict communication. Instead, he made Pidgin English—language of Anglophone West Africa’s wage-earning urban masses—the official language of his afrobeat music.

4.1.2.3 Libertinism

Fela once said, “Life is eat, drink and enjoy yourself because tomorrow you may die.”¹³⁵ Political activism, particularly of the non-conformist and confrontational sort, may seem incompatible with the love of life and freedom that lies at the core of libertinism. When Fela’s incessant incarcerations are taken into account, one might wonder why he continued to put himself in harm’s way if he really loved life as much as he claimed. Fela is, however, remembered as much by his oppositional politics as he is by his insatiable love of life and the spectacular. I realized this during a conversation I had with a motorcycle driver as he taxied me to the New Afrika Shrine during the early weeks of my field research in Lagos. Narrating his experiences at Fela’s Afrika Shrine prior to the government shutting it down, the *okada* driver said, “I used to go there to relax and enjoy myself... Fela was an actor, his acting too much!” Chuckling, he continued, “...the *igbo*... the sexual play with the dancers on stage, *na from back-ee o!* [I’m giving it to you from behind].”¹³⁶ Indeed, erotic humor and cannabis are two things that came to define the afrobeat counterculture that converged around Fela in Lagos. Fela symbolized his aversion to authority when he established

¹³⁴ Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!* 80

¹³⁵ Moore, *Fela*, 265

¹³⁶ Personal communication, October 12, 2007

Kalakuta Republic, a communal space autonomous of the Nigerian State and its jurisdictions. For Fela, however, there were no paradoxes inherent in the conflation of political struggle and hedonistic pleasure: “why has sex been made into something shameful? Sex is clean. But by bringing human laws into it, it’s made ‘dirty.’ To fuck! That’s one of the most important things in my life, man.”¹³⁷ Relating sexual pleasure with “law” in this way was representative of the antinomies inherent in Fela’s practice. Olaniyan defines antinomy as “the condition of incommensurability between judgments that each seem to be just as valid, coherent, or essential as that other.”¹³⁸ There is a subversive essence inherent in antinomy, for it is only through subjective transformation that opposing binaries can be made to converge without each one cancelling out the other.

4.1.3 “Teacher Don’t Teach Me Nonsense:” Fela, Pedagogy, Partisan Politics and Democracy

In so far as afrobeat may be viewed as a repository of social and political commentaries on events in the history of colonial and postcolonial Africa, and particularly Nigeria, it can be said that the piece, “Teacher don’t Teach Me Nonsense,” stands as one of the most penetrating of such commentaries. The piece also serves as a particularly instructive model for understanding the ways in which the three broad ideological streams outlined above interact with Fela’s practice.

“Teacher don’t Teach Me Nonsense” (“TDTMN”) is a close narrative of events that occurred in Nigeria between 1978 and 1986, specifically, the chaotic democratic elections staged in both years, and their collective reprehensive aftermath. However, as in many of Fela’s songs, “TDTMN,” situates current events within historical contexts. Thus, “TDTMN” equally presents Fela’s exposé on the

¹³⁷ Moore, *Fela*, 266

¹³⁸ Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music*, 158

Western colonial agenda in Africa and its continued reverberations in the postcolonial era. The major points of the 25-minute piece are as follows: colonization has undermined indigenous African value systems and replaced them with subverted versions of Western political systems deliberately designed to lead Africa down the path of underdevelopment. Independence did not really usher in the promised freedom from oppressive colonial systems; rather, it merely marked a changing of the guard. In the postcolonial era, the new oppressors are the African elite and dictators who, in connivance with their Western teachers, perpetuate the reign of oppression. Africans will only achieve true liberation when they realize the inefficiency of the Western models into which they were indoctrinated during the colonial era and return to their indigenous systems.

From the mid-70s and on, historically situated linear narratives such as those presented in “TDTMN” became the norm in Fela’s afrobeat practice. If such narratives come across as didactic, it is because Fela constructed them to be so. It comes as no surprise that Fela, scion of two highly influential teachers, would assume a pedagogical posture in his practice of music and political activism. As earlier mentioned, Fela’s father, Rev. I.O. Kuti, was a principal of Abeokuta Grammar School, and founding chairman of the NUT, a highly influential trade union. However, Fela’s biggest pedagogical model was his mother, who in a subversive gesture, used Western Education to rally Abeokuta’s illiterate and therefore oppressed market women against Colonial Britain’s policy (mediated through “native” rulers) of unequal taxation against women. Fela, who in two separate and rare moments of emotive anguish, described Mrs. Kuti as “influential mama, ideological mama... the only mother of Africa,”¹³⁹ aspired to be just as influential as his internationally acclaimed mother. As Olaniyan notes, Fela “wanted above all to be regarded as a teacher, an educator, the one who lifts the veil of ignorance from the faces of oppressed black people worldwide and thereby

¹³⁹ I am here referencing the pieces, “Coffin for Head of State” and “Unknown Soldier” in which Fela memorialized his mother

empowers them to fight their oppressors.”¹⁴⁰ In enacting the role of a revolutionary pedagogue, Fela, as already mentioned published newspaper articles, delivered university lectures and held “ideological sessions,” which engaged core disciples in prolonged intellectual discourse on a range of subjects, from African history to world politics and philosophy.

Fela’s central pedagogical tool was, however, his music. As noted in chapter three of this dissertation, Fela, from the early years of his music career, drew on various indigenous narrative techniques, including the stock characterization of Yoruba Theater, to criticize social vices. Even as afrobeat became more overtly political, Fela continued to ground his pedagogical methods in Yoruba communal aesthetics in which audience participation is highly valued. Thus, as his political afrobeat became lyrically pedantic and structurally complicated, Fela introduced what he called the “on-the-ground spiritual-game,” and variously explained it as “a game of togetherness,” and “musical participation.” The “on-the-ground spiritual game,” featured at the beginning of Fela’s songs, involved call-and-response exchanges between Fela and his audiences that encapsulated the dialogical method that he adapted as a pedagogue. Fela’s description of this conversational approach as a “spiritual game” references Yoruba conceptions of performance of all types as “play.” “On-the-ground” conjures the leveling of space in African performance practices wherein performer-audience roles blur and fuse. In its dialogical capacity, “call-and-response” is a pedagogical tool that is universally employed across Africa. However, “call-and-response” is applied in multiple contexts that transcend the didactic. Within the context of “performance as play,” which Fela references, call-and-response is a complex everyday ritual that is simultaneously dialogical, exploratory, subversive and ultimately transformative. Margaret Drewal expounds: “The object is to turn one condition into

¹⁴⁰ Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music*, 149

another through a series of exchanges that bring revelations, altered perceptions, or even a reorientation of the participants.”¹⁴¹

It is in alignment with this multilayered pedagogical method that Fela structures his political afrobeat songs. In “Teacher Don’t Teach Me Nonsense,” Fela characterizes Western colonialists as self-acclaimed teachers of Africa whose pedagogies have proven fatal. In a transformative gesture, Fela postures himself as a teacher who, in assuming the antagonist’s role, is able to articulate his/her flaws, i.e. colonialism’s faulty pedagogies. Below, I outline three main colonial pedagogies that Fela exposed in “TDTMN.” In the piece, these pedagogies aren’t necessarily expressed in explicit verbal terms; indeed, much of the subversiveness of Fela’s practice is articulated semiotically through sound. The interpretations that I present below have partly been derived from intertextual analysis of Fela’s repertoire (which, to some degree, I attempt to demonstrate further on in this section) and fleshed out with a general knowledge of history. Most importantly, these colonial pedagogies represent my attempt to map the historical events upon which Fela bases the narrative of “TDTMN.”

4.1.3.1 Colonial pedagogies

1. *The use of military force to attain economic dominance is justified, even if it results in the erosion of indigenous institutions.*

Prior to British colonial rule, there had been no such polity as Nigeria. The diverse empires, states and peoples, each with their own distinct institutions and cultural identities, existed independently, having no collective ambitions of unification. British Colonization was imposed progressively on these individual groups. Enforcing colonial domination meant that local resistance was frequently subdued using British military force. Beginning in 1898, the British government pursued the policy of

¹⁴¹ Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 19

gradually amalgamating its different administrative units.¹⁴² Amalgamation reached its completion in 1914 when the Northern and Southern regions as well as the Egba United Government were merged into a single polity by Lord Frederick Lugard, a British soldier who became the first governor-general of Nigeria.

2. Divide and Rule. In government, the allegiance of rulers is to their “political godfathers.” The interest of “the people” comes last.

During the colonial era, the British employed a system of “indirect rule” in which administrative districts were allowed to retain their traditional chiefs or “Natural Rulers,” whom, while appearing to direct local affairs were, in reality, answerable to British Residents. “Indirect rule,” came to be detested by Nigerians in general, for while in the past, the obligation of traditional chiefs had been to their constituents, with “indirect rule” allegiances shifted. It became common knowledge that, “so long as a Natural Ruler was amenable to official guidance and restraint, and remained indubitably loyal to the British Government, he was given the fullest backing for all his actions by the Resident to whom alone he was responsible in the discharge of his civil and public duties.”¹⁴³ This conflict of allegiances was particularly evident in the area of taxation, a frequent source of disagreement between Nigerians and the British government. Contradicting indirect rule’s profession of non-interference with local matters, taxes were directly levied on grassroots communities by colonial officers, and often unjustly so. However, Nigerians protesting such unfair taxation practices often met with indifference and sometimes violent suppression by their traditional rulers. This was not surprising, for many of the indigenous custodians of power were in connivance with the colonial

¹⁴² By 1901, four such administrative units had emerged: (1) The Colony and Protectorate of Lagos; (2) The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria; (3) The Protectorate of Northern Nigeria; (4) The Egba United Government. In 1906, The Colony and Protectorate of Lagos was merged with The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, to form the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

¹⁴³ Awolowo, *The People’s Republic*, 19-20

administration. Indirect rule, then, while appearing to preserve traditional institutions, undermined those very institutions, entrenching, instead, a pattern of exploitation and corruption.

3. If “the people” protest, ignore and subdue them anyway.

The institutionalization of British civil administration was more overtly pursued at the provincial and state levels. Between 1922 and 1951, successive British governors launched four different Nigerian constitutions. As with “indirect rule,” each of these blueprints of British governance was rejected by the Nigerian people. The British civil administration was most vocally opposed by nationalists from an emergent middleclass based mostly in Lagos. These were highly educated Nigerians, many of whom had attended academic institutions abroad and assimilated, to significant degrees, Western social and cultural norms. A principal reason cited by the British for colonial rule had been the education of Nigerians in the practice of civilized government, which would eventually lead to the withdrawal of British control. However, it became increasingly clear to these “educated” Africans that such a promise would not be fulfilled. The British unilaterally made all decisions pertaining to governance in Nigeria, excluding even the educated class of Nigerians. The nationalists, therefore, contended that “if the British Government was sincere in its professed aim of training the people for self-government, the Governor-General should, from the very start, have incorporated educated Nigerians into the business of Government at all levels...”¹⁴⁴ Although ignored at first, and denounced as “agitators,” “political adventurers,” and “self-styled leaders from coastal areas,” the persistence of the nationalists eventually spawned the Independence Movement. Finally, on October 1, 1960, Nigeria gained its political autonomy from British Colonial rule.

¹⁴⁴ Awolowo, *The People's Republic*, 26

4.1.3.2 The chaotic new guard

The euphoria and optimism that came with Nigerian independence quickly gave way to a simmering rash of political turbulence. Made up of some 250 ethnic groups, the newly sovereign polity was fracture-prone from the start. The amalgamation policy pursued throughout the colonial era proved to have served only the exploitative economic goals of the British. Culturally, socially, and politically, Nigerians were far from united. While the goal of forging a national identity based on democratic ideals appeared noble, it became all too evident that the models of governance and national cohesion left by the British were far from adequate. Built into the British introduced Federal System was an overwhelming tendency to consolidate power at the regional level. Historians Falola and Heaton note that “Since regional identities were strong and national identity weak, the greatest fear of most Nigerians in the 1960s was that their region would become dominated’ by another.”¹⁴⁵ In the playing field of party politics, the provincial system encouraged a scenario in which ethnic sentiments ran deeper than national solidarity. As a result, “Official corruption, rigged elections, ethnic baiting, bullying, and thuggery dominated the conduct of politics in the First Republic, which existed from 1960 to 1966.”¹⁴⁶

The political intrigues of the First Republic caused many Nigerians to question the viability of the nation’s inherited democratic system, and it was within this context of disillusionment that Nigeria’s first military coup was staged. On January 15, 1966, the “five majors”—officers of the Nigerian military, four of whom were Igbo, from Eastern Nigeria—ousted the civilian democratic regime of northerner Ahmadu Tafawa Balewa, ushering in the regime of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo. Some six months later, on July 29, 1966, Northern officers carried out a counter coup that ultimately positioned Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as Head of State and Supreme Commander

¹⁴⁵ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 159

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

of the Nigerian Armed Forces. The political unrest and ethnic rivalry that characterized the First Republic and the military coups that followed climaxed in a brutal Civil War (1967 to 1970). Federal forces fought and succeeded in stopping the largely Igbo Eastern region from seceding. Although, with the end of hostilities, the Igbo were reabsorbed into the Nigerian polity, the Civil War nevertheless deepened pre-existing ethnic rifts.

In view of the violent political climate of the 1960s, a ban on political activities came into effect in 1966. It was eagerly hoped that with the military now in control, government would be sanitized and order restored to the polity. The regime of Yakubu Gowon heralded the oil boom of the 1970s, but failed to capitalize fully on the windfall revenue. Instead of charting the country towards the path of real economic and infrastructural development, corruption and large scale mismanagement of revenue became rife, leading to economic instability. On July 30, 1975, a bloodless coup ousted Gowon from power and ushered in General Murtala Mohammed, a northerner, as Head of State. Following General Mohammed's assassination on February 13, 1976, his second in command, Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba from the South, took over as Head of State. On September 21, 1978, General Obasanjo lifted the 12-year ban on politics, setting the stage for democratic elections the following year. Over fifty new parties were formed, but only five were approved and registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). In the end, Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria emerged winner of the controversial presidential elections, ushering in the Second Republic on October 1, 1979.

In 1978, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti formed the party Movement of the People (MOP), with the full intent of contesting in the 1979 democratic elections. Aims and objectives listed in the party's manifesto include:

- (a) To fight relentlessly to achieve and maintain the second Independence of the People of Nigeria
- (b) To serve as the positive political vanguard for removing all forms of oppression and for the establishment of a democratic government
- (c) To secure and maintain the complete unity of all the 19 federal states as one people
- (d) To undertake and encourage cultural research into our traditional heritage, and build up in the people of Nigeria the pride of being African
- (e) To propagate as much as possible in Nigeria the principles of Nkrumahism which are all necessary and relevant to speedy and pragmatic national development
- (f) To support the demand for a West African Economic System and an African Central Monetary system and of pan Africanism by promoting unity of action among the peoples of African and of African descent
- (g) To fight continuously to establish the pride of African personality and the pride of all people of African descent.

The Movement of the People declared that the objectives set forth in its manifesto would be implemented into a four-year developmental plan for economic, cultural, social, political and ideological reconstruction of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Declaring that the MOP had investigated the factors responsible for Africa's underdevelopment, Nkrumahism, "an African socialist system in which Africans shall have equal opportunity" and maintain freedom from economic exploitation by Europeans and the minority African elite, was proffered as the party's guiding ideology. Economic and social policy would be further grounded in W.E.B DuBois' theory of "Africa for Africans" only. Under the MOP, government will be "ruled by the people." Interestingly, however, institutions dedicated to Social Welfare would also be set up in each local government

area, representing a variety of skilled workers' unions. These Social Welfare unions would be responsible for communicating the people's grievances and recommending measures by which such grievances would be addressed.

From all accounts, what Fela intended to introduce through the MOP was a system of governance that was both democratic and socialist, and which would draw upon the principles of Pan-Africanism for ideological direction. In such a pursuit, Fela was not alone. With the attainment of political autonomy in Africa, beginning with Ghana's independence in 1957, several African statesmen, including Leopold Senghor (Senegal), Sekou Toure (Guinea), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), and not least, Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) had pursued the political philosophy of African Socialism as a tool for stimulating rapid infrastructural and economic growth without replicating the inequalities and injustices generated by capitalism during colonial rule. African Socialist systems attempted to build upon the foundations of precolonial traditional social systems such lineage, clan and extended families which were, in essence, "socialist collectives" in which land and the burdens of basic and economic welfare were shared by all.¹⁴⁷

Fela's political ambition was not courted by the Nigerian establishment. This was not surprising, for by 1978, Fela's reputation as a rabble-rousing radical frequently engaged in charged confrontation with the government was well established. Both in 1979 and 1983, Fela's Movement of the People party was disallowed from registering with the Federal Electoral Commission, effectively muffling his political aspirations. The Second Republic was, however, not much different from the First Republic. With the ban on politics lifted, most of the First Republic politicians simply recycled their campaign platforms, renewed old allegiances and continued with business as usual. Both the 1979 and 1983 elections were highly controversial and marred by widespread irregularities, and the government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari was characterized by high powered corruption, economic

¹⁴⁷ See Appiah and Gates, *Africana*, 35

regression and infrastructural decay. The Second Republic was aborted on December 31, 1983, when a military coup ushered General Muhammadu Buhari into executive power, marking the beginning of 15 long years of successive military regimes. On August 27, 1985, Buhari was ousted in yet another coup staged by Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. Both Buhari and Babangida's regimes led the country further down the path of economic decline. While those in power enriched themselves by stealing from the polity, dictatorial programs such as War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), an IMF induced currency devaluation and other austerity measures were foisted on the masses with the claim of pursuing social and economic reforms. It was against this backdrop of political chaos, military brutality, corruption, and social decay that Fela composed "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense."

4.1.3.3 Musical analysis¹⁴⁸

"Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense" ("TDTMN") is a 25-minute piece that unfolds in three broad sections. An extended instrumental/vocal introduction opens the piece, lasting about 13 minutes. This is followed by 8 minutes of declaimed vocals alternating between through-composed passages sung solo by Fela, and call-and-response exchanges between Fela and the Egypt '80 chorus. The final section, lasting roughly four minutes, is a condensed recapitulation of the opening introduction.

The introduction begins with percussion instruments: sekere, clef, kick, snare and hi-hat. In typical Egypt '80 style, the sekere and sticks play off one another as both instruments collectively articulate the piece's quadruple meter. In contrast, the hi-hat supplies an evenly spaced three-stroke rhythm that commences on beats two and four, and lands on adjacent beats three and one

¹⁴⁸ A score of significant portions of "TDTMN" referenced in this analysis appears in chapter three, under "Egypt 80"

respectively. The kick almost matches the hi-hat, except that it alternates three-stroke and two-stroke rhythms in succession, while the snare plays two pairs of sixteenth notes articulated on the upbeat of one and three. With afrobeat, much of the motion that propels a piece is generated by the interplay of syncopated figures in the percussion. However, on “Teacher Don’t Teach Me Nonsense,” Fela departs from the set of distinctive off-beat templates that characterized most of his repertoire. Instead, accent shifting is achieved solely by eliminating beats that would otherwise fall within the basic divisive framework of “TDTMN’s” meter. As a result, rhythmic tension is significantly undermined; the percussion section of the piece does not quite attain the “dance inducing” quality that is widely recognized to be a hallmark of Fela’s music. While rhythmic kinesis is a core structuring force in Fela’s entire corpus, “TDTMN” transcends the dance aesthetic.” The piece is going somewhere, but in so doing eschews the fluidity of a carnival parade for what could be construed as the stark angularity of a martial brigade.

As far as I know, only two other pieces: “M.O.P (Movement of the People) Political Statement No. 1” and “Overtake Don Overtake Overtake” (“O.D.O.O”) from Fela’s entire repertoire use percussive templates that are similar to the one featured in “TDTMN” (see figure 9). Like many of Fela’s songs, “M.O.P,” and “O.D.O.O” are scalding exposés on how African military institutions connive with “figurehead” civilian rulers in weakening the continent’s political, economic, cultural and social institutions. However, what sets these songs apart is their martial-sounding percussion. The symbolism of the percussions used in “O.D.O.O” and “M.O.P” is double-sided. On the one hand, Fela employs such “rigid” rhythmic figures to signify military force, the subject of his criticism. On the other hand, he infuses those same rhythmic figures with significant doses of his own afrobeat style, thereby signifying the oppositional discourse that he simultaneously delivers in both songs. The intertextual relationship that “TDTMN” shares with “O.D.O.O” and “M.O.P” allows for the

postulation that the rhythmic configurations in the percussion section of the former piece signifies in a similarly double-sided manner.

Once the percussive backdrop has been established, the remaining members of the rhythmic section—three interlocking guitars and bass guitar—enter. Each of these instruments supplies two-measure ostinato themes with varying degrees of syncopation. While rhythm and tenor guitars collectively weave a tightly interlocking texture, the bass guitar takes on a notably subdued character. In sharp contrast to the often extended and profusely syncopated bass writing for which Fela came to be known, “TDTMN” features an austere bass figure developed from a minimalist tonal palette. The bass line starts out by playing what, yet again, sounds like a thumping march-like figure: f – c; g – c, matched evenly to quarter notes except for the last c, which is articulated by two eighth notes. This is then followed with a syncopated variation of the same figure. Like the percussion section, this bass line signifies ambiguously. Invoking at first a marital quality, it undergoes rhythmic variations that offset the severity inherent, conjuring, instead, less rigid forms of kinesis, such as a dance.

Figure 9: Intertextuality related percussion rhythms of "TDTMN," "O.D.O.O" and "M.O.P," compared with other "standard" afrobeat percussion templates

TEACHER DON'T TEACH ME NONSENSE

DRUM SET

HI-HAT

SEKERE

STICKS

MOVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE (M.O.P) POLITICAL STATEMENT NO. 1

DRUM SET

HI-HAT

SEKERE

STICKS

OVERTAKE DON OVERTAKE OVERTAKE (O.D.O.O)

DRUM SET

4

HI-HAT

4

SEKERE

STICKS

This musical score is for a drum set performance. It consists of four staves: Drum Set, Hi-Hat, Sekere, and Sticks. The Drum Set staff has a 4-measure rest at the beginning. The Hi-Hat staff has a 4-measure rest at the beginning. The Sekere staff has a 4-measure rest at the beginning. The Sticks staff has a 4-measure rest at the beginning. The notation includes various drum symbols and rests.

ARMY ARRANGEMENT

DRUM SET

13

HI-HAT

13

SEKERE

STICKS

This musical score is for an army arrangement. It consists of four staves: Drum Set, Hi-Hat, Sekere, and Sticks. The Drum Set staff has a 13-measure rest at the beginning. The Hi-Hat staff has a 13-measure rest at the beginning. The Sekere staff has a 13-measure rest at the beginning. The Sticks staff has a 13-measure rest at the beginning. The notation includes various drum symbols and rests.

SHUFFERING AND SMILING

DRUM SET

10

HI-HAT

10

SEKERE

STICKS

This musical score is for a performance titled 'Shuffering and Smiling'. It consists of four staves: Drum Set, Hi-Hat, Sekere, and Sticks. The Drum Set staff has a 10-measure rest at the beginning. The Hi-Hat staff has a 10-measure rest at the beginning. The Sekere staff has a 10-measure rest at the beginning. The Sticks staff has a 10-measure rest at the beginning. The notation includes various drum symbols and rests.

ROFOROFO FIGHT

This musical score for 'ROFOROFO FIGHT' is written for four percussion instruments: Drum Set, Hi-Hat, Sekere, and Sticks. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The Drum Set part (top staff) features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Hi-Hat part (second staff) has a simpler pattern of eighth notes. The Sekere part (third staff) consists of a series of eighth notes. The Sticks part (bottom staff) has a pattern of eighth notes. A rehearsal mark '16' is placed at the beginning of the Hi-Hat and Sekere parts.

COLONIAL MENTALITY

This musical score for 'COLONIAL MENTALITY' is written for the same four percussion instruments: Drum Set, Hi-Hat, Sekere, and Sticks. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The Drum Set part (top staff) features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Hi-Hat part (second staff) has a pattern of eighth notes. The Sekere part (third staff) consists of a series of eighth notes. The Sticks part (bottom staff) has a pattern of eighth notes. A rehearsal mark '19' is placed at the beginning of the Hi-Hat and Sekere parts.

The overriding structural trait uncovered so far is the juxtaposing of opposing binaries which, while retaining their distinct identities undergo transformation through subversion. Thus two-stroke and three-stroke rhythms complement one another; evenly matched quarters simultaneously contradict and generate syncopated variations, and so on. Any doubts about the emphasis on opposing binaries are laid to rest when the horns enter. The horn chorus introduction consists of two themes. The first theme, in the aeolian mode built on G, is articulated in unison. This theme contrasts with the second polyphonic and dissonant theme set in the mixolydian mode built on G. Guitars and bass patterns

follow suit, playing completely different riffs along with the second horn chorus theme. It is with the entry of the vocal chorus that Fela's intention in juxtaposing binaries becomes starkly clear. The text is sung by female and male singers pitched an octave apart until the last repeated phrase in which the interval between the female and male choruses closes into fourth and then cadences on a second. The point behind the contrast of consonance and dissonance in the vocal part is illuminated by the matching text. In the style of school yard taunts, "Student," the protagonist of the piece, mocks "Teacher," denouncing the latter's claim to knowledge as fatally fraudulent. This portion of the lyric is accompanied by the second, dissonant horn theme, which within the context of the lyric suddenly takes on a jeering quality. The lyric then continues with a declaration from Student to Teacher: "me and you no dey for de same-u category," a pidginized way of saying, we operate within two incompatible systems of knowledge. It is on the last word, "category," that the vocal dissonances enter, underlining the textual content. It is as though Fela, by ending on a dissonant note, is saying there is simply no resolution to the impasse on hand.

The piece continues in this way, narrating the events surrounding the failed elections, detailed above, and attributing Africa's failure to establish solid democratic systems to a deliberately flawed pedagogical foundation laid by colonial Britain. Democracy, he muses, seems more like a demonstration of craziness—referring to the hooliganisms displayed by politicians during Nigeria's failed elections. *Why haven't the European observers, Africa's "self acclaimed" teachers, condemned this behavior? What does the silence mean? Teachers, after all, correct students when they go astray. Indeed, the version of democracy inherited by Africans is nothing more than a subversion, a demonstration of craziness.*

*Tisha, tisha tabi na lecturer be your name?*¹⁴⁹

Tisha, tisha and and-i lecturer be de same

Make you no teach me I go know

Person you finish teach-i yet, na so e don die-i today o

Person you finish teach-i yet, na so e don die-i today o

Person you finish teach-i yet, na so e don die-i

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

No de same category o

No de same category o

No de same category o

Teacher, Teacher, or is it lecturer they call you?

Teacher, lecturer, it's all one and the same

Don't teach me, I'll learn my own way

The person you taught the other day happens to be dead today

The person you taught the other day happens to be dead today

The person you taught the other day happens to be dead today

Me and you are not in the same category

Me and you are not in the same category

Me and you are not in the same category

¹⁴⁹ See complete lyrics in Appendix

Me and you are not in the same category

It's NOT the same category!

It's NOT the same category!

It's Not the same category!

4.2 IDEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY AFROBEAT SCENES

After the boundaries of a genre have been established, its identity continues to be negotiated as it continues to interact with various individuals in diverse settings. During this process, a genre's ideology is contested; its values reconfigured in relation to other discourses. Musical genres, thus, become sites of ideological tensions between conflicting identities and aesthetics.

4.2.1 *In the field*: Encounter with a “Felasopher”

On a trip to the New Afrika Shrine, I witnessed ritual veneration performed by a group of traditional priests whom, I would later learn, arrived unannounced. They came with an ensemble of drums, dancing and singing in Yoruba, and chanting as they poured libation at an altar erected in honor of Fela in the right wing of the Shrine. Camera in hand, I joined the crowd of onlookers who gathered around the spiritual entourage. Everyone observed keenly as the priests and their acolytes took turns to dance and pour libations of Gordon's Dry Gin in the space between the altar and the arc that we had all formed. About halfway through the ritual, Femi Kuti emerged from private quarters behind the stage area. He was cheered by everyone as he entered the ritual space and danced to the music of the priests. After the priests said blessings on him, Femi thanked them with words and gifts of cash, and then retreated. In the crowd, I struggled to capture the moment, and as I did, I noticed

that a young man was assisting me. Wherever I pointed my camera, he instructed people to make way so that I could get clear shots. Later on, he would introduce himself to me as Malaika, an Ifa priest and frequent visitor to the Shrine. Dressed in jeans and a dress shirt, with a fluent command of English, he didn't seem like a traditional priest to me.

A few days later, on another visit to the Shrine, I noticed Malaika sitting at one of the several white plastic tables that littered the space between the bar and the stage, drinking Don Simon wine and smoking a joint. I joined him at his table and we got into an unexpectedly intellectual, if lopsided, conversation. Malaika was raised in Ajegunle, a notorious Lagos slum popularly called "Jungle City" by residents. He studied philosophy at the prestigious University of Ibadan, and liberally made references to Descartes and Lionel Ruby's "The Art of Making Sense." Born into a family of diviners, he learnt his spiritual vocation from his father, who also introduced him to Fela's music. To Malaika, Fela was a prophet, political philosopher and social crusader whose sharp criticism of the establishment and defiant persona was a constant source of consternation to the Nigerian government. Copiously drawing on Fela's lyrics, he railed at Christianity, Islam, slavery, the government, the West. It was evident from our conversation that Malaika had imbibed something of Fela's rhetoric, something that he, in fact, acknowledged and credited to the "spiritually liberating power of *igbo*" (marijuana). "Smoking *igbo* is progressive," he declared, "it is very good to the cause of humanitarianism. When I smoke, I get more spiritual, I can philosophize, unravel mysteries. *Igbo* is mysterious. When you see that thick smoke, *that* is the spirit of Fela, as natural as the air we breathe. *Igbo* makes people more conscious and reactive, that's why government is clamping down on it. The major industry guns are Christians and Muslims; they despise *igbo*, and because *igbo* is linked to afrobeat, they don't promote afrobeat. But *igbo* has no negative effects, because it is all natural, it is

my culture, my roots, and that is why the government tries to ban it. They only promote foreign things, nothing that is our own culture, and that is why things are getting worse.”¹⁵⁰

To me, Malaika’s views sounded like the sort of ideological concatenation of politics, religion and culture that you would hear Fela theorize about; like a Felasophy. By now, Femi was already performing on stage with his band. Trying to sort out the tangled strands of factuality and fiction, I took a cue from the musical performance. “Surely, not every influence from the West is negative,” I said, “How about all those Western instruments that are used in afrobeat, is that bad also?” Malaika responded, “Technology is ok because it is neutral, not ideological, and can’t distort the psyche, culture or tradition. There is room for interchange of ideas, but not to the point of forgetting our roots.” And then he quoted a Yoruba proverb to support his assertion: “*Odo t’o ba gbagbe orisun e, aa gbe*” (a river that forgets its source will dry up).

4.2.2 “Post-Fela” Lagos

My encounter with Malaika in the New Afrika Shrine suggests that contemporary afrobeat practice in post-Fela Lagos retains much of the values imbued on the genre by its chief ideologue: Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. This, at least was what I inferred from my conversation with Malaika. However, as I interviewed other afrobeat musicians and members of the Lagos public, I gained a more nuanced understanding of the contemporary situation. I discovered that while Fela’s reputation as a marijuana smoking libertine at odds with the establishment is indelibly imprinted on afrobeat’s identity, musicians nevertheless negotiate to what extent Felasophy should define contemporary afrobeat’s practice.

¹⁵⁰ Personal communication, October 16, 2007

The idea that, even in post-Fela Lagos, afrobeat's values remain inextricably Fela-authored is an assumption bolstered by the Nigerian polity and its constituents, and demonstrates the role of audiences in the construction of genre identity. In spite of Fela's populist appeal, he was not a hero to everyone. To the Nigerian state, Fela was the arch-antagonist, a hedonistic pied piper who stoked rebellion in Nigerian youth. Most outrageously, he publicly exposed the moral failings of those in power, using a particularly effervescent art form: popular song. To the political elite that he criticized, afrobeat became the sonic representation of its creator.

Accounts of the Nigerian government's retributive attempts to silence Fela have been well rehearsed. One such account, described by Tejumola Olaniyan, illustrates the imagined synergy between Fela and his music as it plays out in the minds and actions of an antagonistic military force. The scene begins with scores of Nigerian soldiers armed with Ak-47s swooping on a venue where Fela was performing. Thundering over the confusion ensuing, the head army officer orders, "Arrest the music!" At first, the soldiers pause, unsure how to interpret the commander's unusual order. However, a second unequivocal repeat of the same words puts all doubt to rest, and the charging soldiers apprehend Fela's musical instruments.¹⁵¹ Although, Olaniyan ascribes the commanding officer's awkward conjugation of words to his being half-literate—which very well may have been the case—this, to me, does not explain the seeming incongruity of his utterance. Assuming that the officer was indeed half-literate, the fact remains that he could have expressed himself in a variety of ways commonly understood by Nigerians across all levels of society. There is no shortage of idioms that successfully collapse class distinctions in postcolonial Nigeria. The officer could have said, "Arrest him!" "Arrest them!" or, in Pidgin English, "Arrest am!" "Arrest dem!" He could also have given the more direct command, "Arrest Fela!" But perhaps, "Arrest Fela!" in its specificity, would have understated the officers' overall intention. It is not farfetched to suggest that in that moment

¹⁵¹ Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music*, 1-6

of confrontation, the officer's order to arrest "the music," expressed a deeply resolute quest to silence, not just the man, Fela, but also the disembodied imprint of his voice transcending space and time. The officer knew instinctively that the only way to effectively and permanently arrest *the man* was to arrest *the music*. Fela's declaration that "Music is the Weapon" bears more than symbolic meaning, for without the music, Fela's oppositional identity as we understand it today would not exist. Carting away Fela's musical instruments was not merely a means of censorship, but a literal act of disarmament. What seems like a grammatical absurdity, then, is an eloquent articulation of the undifferentiated associations between Fela and afrobeat at play in the public subconscious.

Beyond the sphere of the political elite, a significant demographic of the Nigerian middle-class, particularly those born in the colonial era, dismiss the musician and his music as boorish. By the mid-1970s, many belonging to this generation had become parents and even though they would probably have agreed with Fela's lyrics if they listened, their disagreement with his lifestyle was so strong that they flippantly proscribed afrobeat in their homes altogether. The following event, narrated to me by veteran Nigerian music connoisseur, Elder Steve Rhodes, illustrates the tendency of some Nigerian parents to censor Fela's music without having any knowledge of its message.

I was visiting Port Harcourt, and I was in the home of a senior police officer. When we arrived—two of us went to visit him—his children were in the living room, and they had Fela's Berlin concert on the video player. When he came in to receive us, he said to the children: '... take that nonsense off!' So, after they'd gone out, I said to him, 'Do you really think that that is nonsense, I mean, have you ever listened to it?' ... I said, 'could you put it on, please, let's just listen for a few minutes...' and there was that Ojuelegba thing, you know. And he sat down there: '*na true the man dey talk o,*' you know. But you see, what was happening was, the message was clouded

by this whole image that had been created you know: 36 wives, hemp, what not and all this rubbish, you know. So it [Fela's message] ...didn't really get through, which I think was a great pity.¹⁵²

So entwined are the didactic and the libertine in Fela's musical practice, that many parents fear that afrobeat would cultivate in their children the same negative values that Fela publicly celebrated: promiscuity, drug-use, and social anarchy. Such conservative attitudes also led to the view, widely held across Nigerian society, that Fela and all those connected to him were antisocial miscreants best avoided. Yeni Kutí, Fela's eldest child, recalls the impact of her father's wild reputation on his immediate family:

Those were the very early days. Yeni says later she and her siblings—her brother Femi and younger sister Sola—met with rejection from their society. 'We were not really accepted by people in society because Fela was what they called a rebel. I didn't think he was rebellious; I just feel that he was someone who was speaking the truths about our society. But, in those days, because he was smoking hemp and was a flirt, a lot of parents didn't want us, as Fela's kids, associating with their children.'¹⁵³

The much publicized violent confrontations that Fela had with the Nigerian State did not help matters. Raids such as the one described by Olaniyan, were frequent and unannounced. Since these clashes were impromptu, many reasoned that in order to avoid being caught in the fray, it was best to completely avoid being in the vicinity of Fela and his people. Fela's lifestyle and the negative

¹⁵² Personal communication, November 21, 2007

¹⁵³ Bola Atta and Weyinmi Dede, "Keeping the Legend Alive," *True Love, West Africa*, March 2005, 41.

attention it attracted from the Nigerian State adversely affected the perpetuation of the musical tradition he had begun. On the one hand, Fela successfully cultivated a sizable community of Nigerian fans, including a high percentage of University students who, buoyed by that sense of revolutionary zeal characteristic of youth movements worldwide, shared with Fela his discontent with the status quo. What the older population of parents considered to be moral decadence, many youth saw as confrontational and therefore progressive. For this liberal cross-section of young people, Fela was the quintessential rebel voice with a larger-than-life persona that compelled even oppressive regimes to take notice. On the other hand, those very traits that attracted liberal enthusiasts to Fela's practice discouraged conservative observers. As Elder Rhodes observed, "young people felt that to be a part of that movement was wrong... because of the commune, every kind of negative connotation went with it." In the final analysis, it was this conservative group, and not the liberals who represented standards of social decorum in Nigerian society. And it is perhaps for this reason that Elder Rhodes concludes that due to Fela's libertine reputation, afrobeat "didn't quite permeate the social structure here [Nigeria], which is a pity."¹⁵⁴ Within Nigeria, Fela's controversial identity remains inviolably inscribed on afrobeat's sonic template even more than a decade after his death. It is no wonder, then, that beyond its progenitor, only a handful of Nigerian musicians have taken up afrobeat. To take up the genre is to be saddled, willy-nilly, with Fela's ideological vision and its brutal consequences. Dede Mabioku, a prominent protégé of Fela, told me that to play afrobeat in Nigeria is to be "looked upon as antigovernment,"¹⁵⁵ a label that potentially attracts vicious harassment and censorship.

In spite of the odds described above, a few musicians continue to boldly carry the afrobeat torch in Nigeria. Significantly, most of these musicians are direct protégés of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti,

¹⁵⁴ Personal communication, November 21, 2007

¹⁵⁵ Personal communication, November 27, 2007

having spent many years under his tutelage either as band members or habitués of his household. They have eagerly participated in what Fela called “Ideological Education” sessions at Kalakuta Republic, listened to Fela “preach” multiple times at public lectures, and heard him deliver with caustic humor, countless hours of “yabeez”. Those I refer to as Fela’s protégés are deeply informed about afrobeat’s ideological matrix, being conversant with the canonical texts of Felasophy. In the forefront of perpetuating Fela’s afrobeat legacy are two of his sons, Femi and Seun Kuti, both of whom have appreciable fan bases in Nigeria and abroad. A third Nigerian based afrobeat musician deserving mention is Dede Mabioku, who, though having no biological connection to Fela is well known to have shared with him a deep father-son relationship. For these three musicians, Fela’s ideologies provide the blueprint of contemporary afrobeat practice. Yet, in spite of the common ideological backcloth, each musician brings to his practice a set of personal values, resulting in subtle though important departures from Fela’s practice.

4.2.2.1 Femi Kuti

“To make social changes with my music; Africa has to unite. Things like this, I pursue in my music.” This was Femi Kuti’s response to a question I asked him regarding the ideology behind his music.¹⁵⁶ We were inside Yeni Kuti’s “office,” a square room located in the backstage area of the New Afrika Shrine. Yeni, the eldest of Fela’s children, manages the Shrine. Evident from the vanity on one side of the office, she is also responsible for the costumes, make-up and choreography of the dancers in Femi’s band. I had met Yeni on earlier visits to the Shrine, and amid the busyness of the month-long FELABRATION in progress, she had been remarkably instrumental in arranging my interview with Femi. However on that balmy Saturday afternoon in late October 2007, only Femi and I sat in the office, my tape recorder propped on the table that stood between us. Wearing a green

¹⁵⁶ This interview with Femi Kuti occurred on October 20, 2007

and grey t-shirt with the inscription, “Mustang Valley Athletic League 33,” and blue “guinea” pants, Femi exuded an air of laidback calm that could easily be misconstrued as aloofness. Nevertheless, I rephrased my initial question, “How about African ideas, tradition...?”

He responded:

All that I pursue in my music. Every day we want a complete overhaul of the African system, we want our free education, we want to be taught about African things in school, we want our children to be able speak our languages, as many as possible. Emphasis on Africa... Hopefully, this century, if everything works out well, Africa will be the envy of the world. So I pursue that with my music, I fight injustice, corruption, and all these bad things we see around the world; the way Africans are being misled or misleading themselves.¹⁵⁷

If I had missed it in his initial, clipped response, Femi had just clarified the Pan-Africanist foundation of his musical practice. In this, he is directly in line with Fela’s ideological vision. He explained that his adherence to Pan-Africanism is inspired by his firsthand experience of the sociopolitical realities of contemporary Africa, which, in his assessment, hasn’t changed much in the last several centuries. However, he also acknowledged that his activism is just as much a response to the political legacy bequeathed to him by his family, something for which he feels accountable to the next generation of Kutis.

... the emphases are on pan-Africanism for me because of the plight of the African man right now. There is hardly any African country you can say is well off today. You cannot say there’s a future for the black race. We’re in a saddened position right now. And when you remember

¹⁵⁷ Personal communication, October 20, 2007

the slave trade, when you read books on all these things and you find where we are right now... you see the War in Ruanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia... look at Nigeria after 47 years we can't even provide nothing for the people, see the way they're all stealing the money, traveling, behaving like nuisance [sic] outside Nigeria..ehn? So all these things have to change, and when you're concerned, you love your culture and your people, and you love your children, you cannot sit down and let these things go by. Your children will ask you, "So daddy, what were you doing? What did you do about the changes?" So I don't want to be the kind of father that will be ashamed at my old age. I'd rather be dead than my children asking me, "so daddy when you saw all this, what did you do?" Especially when my father, and not just him, my grandmother, even my grandfather have set standards for the family, this is the kind of family I come from. We are in the front where we can always give the people encouragement... give them hope, with our lives or with our music or whatever we're doing, so that's the way I see my life with my music.¹⁵⁸

While Fela's cultural nationalism has been described as nondiscriminatory in its positive validation of everything "African," Femi takes a more pragmatic approach. Although conscious of the cultural value of African religious traditions, Femi does not profess the "Afrocentric" mysticism that Fela embraced in the 1980s. Like Fela, however, Femi remains a critic of foreign religions: Christianity and Islam, on the African psyche. For example, in the hit song "Wonder Wonder," he attributes Africa's passive response to oppression and social injustice to the Christian ethic of ultimate redemption in the afterlife. Unlike Fela, however, Femi stops short of prescribing a return to traditional beliefs. While the Afrika Shrine retains its symbolism as a place of "worship," spiritual uplift comes primarily through the music performed at the venue. Animistic practices such as animal sacrifice and the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

offering of libations performed by Fela are absent from Femi's practice. When I brought up his dancing to the drums of traditional priest at Fela's altar, he told me that he had done it out of respect and to honor their visit.

The influence of Afrocentric discourse of Femi's musical practice comes through in songs like "Alkebu Lan," and "Black Man Know Yourself," in which Femi glorifies ancient African civilizations and encourages racial pride and cultural consciousness. Like Fela, Femi expresses distrust in Western political systems. Echoing Fela's "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense," Femi contends that Western democracy, styled "Demo Crazy," has fostered a perversion of civil order in the Nigerian polity.

While only marginal divergencies distinguish the forms of Pan-African nationalism practiced by Femi and Fela Kuti, a similar ideological congruence does not emerge in the area of social values. In 1986, when Femi left Fela's band to pursue an independent music career, he projected himself as a poised, clean cut young man. It was an image fully intended to contrast with Fela's unbridled libertinism. Not only did Femi give up marijuana and cigarettes, he also recorded an anti-drug abuse song on his first album, *No Cause for Alarm* (1989). Femi's practice of monogamy stands in stark contrast to Fela's celebrated polygamy. Admittedly, Femi has, over the years, occasionally taken up marijuana. However, while Fela flaunted his drug use, imbibing to jaw-dropping excesses, Femi's motto has been near total restraint.

4.2.3 New York City and other scenes in the US

Westward migration has brought afrobeat into new settings with diverse cultural histories and political systems, often vastly different from those that shaped Fela's practice and which continue to profoundly impact the contemporary Lagos scene. Fela's controversial lifestyle, his radical politics and the brutal retributions dealt him by the establishment have not generated the same negative

reactions from societies overseas that it has in Nigeria. Geographically and chronologically removed from the hostile political contexts in which Fela operated and the stigma ensuing from his libertine lifestyle, musicians resident in the United States and Europe have been less hesitant to take up afrobeat. Erstwhile Antibalas drummer Phil Ballman put it this way in a Montreal newspaper:

Obviously, this is not Lagos, Nigeria in the 1970s. We're not facing the same kind of direct crises that Fela faced. We're not dealing with a military dictatorship and out-of-control police force. Some people might argue with that to a degree, but this is not Africa in '75, its New York City in 2001...we're not trying to ape that [Fela's experiences] or gain cred from it. It's more about being inspired by a man who was so rare in this modern world, who had the courage and tenacity to really speak the truth.¹⁵⁹

Even so, Fela's ideological praxis remains central to the construction of afrobeat identity in translocal scenes worldwide. Beyond Lagos, however, contemporary afrobeat musicians are confronted with a different set of predicaments: how to situate the values espoused by Fela within new local settings without forfeiting allegiance to broader afrobeat culture. The musicians and fans that I encountered in New York, San Francisco, and other US cities employed various "reconfiguring mechanisms" in constructing local afrobeat identities. These mechanisms of identity formation were played out in live performances such as the one described below.

¹⁵⁹ Rupert Bottenberg, "Battle cries not Booty calls: Brooklyn-based Antibalas Orchestra stoke the fires of Fela Kuti," *Montreal Mirror*, March 1, 2001.

4.2.3.1 In the field: Antibalas at the “Black Cat”

It is October 9, 2008 and I am inside the main concert room of the Black Cat, a prominent performance venue on the historic U Street Corridor of Washington DC. The hall is fairly large, a perfect square flanked on the left and right by two long bars where drinks are served to individuals from the crowd that is steadily packing the floor. Before the audience, a sizable, bare stage. Like everyone else inside the concert room, I have come to witness Antibalas in live performance. The New York-based band has just embarked on its first US tour in over a year, and so collective anticipation inside the venue is understandably palpable. Having witnessed the New York City show that kicked off the tour, I can say that the excitement is justifiable.

In due course, twelve musicians walk unceremoniously onto the dimly lit stage. A loud and protracted consort of applause, hollers and ululation emanates from the audience. When the noise subsides, band leader Aaron Johnson begins a brief trombone solo, a plaintive call that is answered by an even starker trio of bass, guitar and cymbal. The pattern is repeated three times, after which a clave rhythm propels the entire ensemble into an elegiac anthem of sinuous guitar, supple bass, staggered rhythms, moody organ and resolute horns. Each instrument contributes a short recurrent motif, layers that run counterpoint one to another and culminate in a polyrhythmic wall of sound. Once the groove has been established, the horn chorus drops out momentarily, giving Aaron a chance to return with a longer solo: measured, stuttering notes that swell with intensity until taken over by Jordan McLean, whose trumpet soars with brilliant cool over the ensemble. Towards the end of each solo, the horn chorus supplies an accompanying riff to the final improvised flourishes of the soloists. Each solo garners ovations from the audience. The mood of this opening piece is subdued, dopey even. The crowd, lightly swaying, embodies the piece’s polyglot title: “Go Je Je”¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Go Je Je is a concatenation of English: “Go” and Yoruba: “Jeje”(gentle/gently)

Nigerian vocalist Duke Amayo makes his entrance on the next piece: a trippy, hard-driving, organ-drenched number titled “Government Magic Alternating English, Pidgin English and Yoruba, Amayo engages the audience in lively call-and-response diatribes: raving against Wall Street, against the Iraq War, against the system. “They try to make us borrow money, live in debt,” he declaims, “then turn our fear to color: from yellow to orange then red.” If the purely instrumental opener, “Go Je Je” could be construed as some sort of political tabula rasa, “Government Magic” leaves no doubts about Antibalas’s political leanings. The piece, which lends its title to Antibalas’s fourth full-length studio album, also signifies with Fela’s “Unknown Soldier,” from which the phrase “government magic” has been appropriated.

Following “Government Magic,” guitarist and vocalist Marcos Garcia steps up to lead “War Hero,” a tune from the band’s 2007 album, *Security*. A bouncy indictment of US president George W. Bush’s recourse to warfare as a tool for spreading democracy around the world, Marcos delivers “War Hero” in a fluent pidgin English that belies his white Cuban-American heritage. As the song ends, baritone saxophonist, Martin Perna addresses the audience between intermittent cheers: “What’s up Washington D.C? Thanks for coming out! Do we still believe in Democracy?” Marcos, hanging up his microphone responds, “I don’t know.”

The political rhetoric becomes even more charged as Amayo returns to lead the Fela original, “Opposite People.” Fela recorded “Opposite People” in Lagos in 1977 as a mocking jab at persons antithetical to Fela’s revolutionary practice. Amayo nevertheless improvises words that allow him to situate the song within the immediate context of ongoing partisan politics in the United States. “A big example of *opposite people* starts with a big M... for McCain,” Amayo announces, then, quickly teaching the audience a few Yoruba words, he launches them into a call-and-response ditty:

O f’ori ya

(he) lost his head

<i>Sokoto ya</i>	<i>... ripped his pants</i>
<i>O f'aso ya</i>	<i>... tore his clothes</i>
<i>lhoho ni o</i>	<i>(he's) stark naked.</i>

By now, I am standing in a corner near the back of the hall from where I observe with interest a couple doing the Charleston to Antibalas' rendition of Fela's "Opposite People." A girl standing next to me seems just as amused as I am. "I'm visiting from Luxembourg," she tells me, "there are no afrobeat bands in Luxemburg, but I love Antibalas and I'm happy that I am able to catch them here."

Standing close to the stage are two young men whom I recognize from a brief encounter at the gate. They appeared enthusiastic as they waited to gain entry into the venue. Judging from their fervent cheering, it is safe to assume that their excitement hasn't diminished. In between songs, I approach them and we strike up a brief conversation about favorite bands and genres. Their musical tastes span a broad, even if odd, spectrum: one, a fan of White Stripes and Johnny Cash, and the other, a Reggae and R&B buff. The only apparent musical common ground they seem to share is Antibalas. One of them likes the beat, the seamlessness of their music. "It sounds genuine." He says. The other likes "how they are able to keep up a beat and build it up, start slowly and become fast." He also doesn't mind their left leaning political rhetoric: "I don't care if they blatantly endorse Obama. I don't care if they say *fuck* Bush." Nevertheless he is careful to point out that he is a conservative and would love more room for "free thought."

As the event progresses, Antibalas' set becomes even more diverse, including a cover of Bob Marley's "Rat Race" arranged afrobeat-style, and an unrecorded Antibalas original, "Se Chiflo," a proscription of Wall Street delivered in Spanish. Political rhetoric also continues apace without much concealment of partisan affiliation. At one point, trumpeter Jordin McLean declares, "I'm pretty sure everyone on stage will be voting for Barack Obama. Some members of the crew still haven't decided

to vote for Obama... if you know them, send them to me.” Whether or not such blatant campaigning violates “freedom of thought” is a matter of contention. What is certain, however, is that Antibalas lays down a hard groove, and not one politically drenched beat is lost on its pulsating audience.

After a highly frenzied set, Antibalas announces their last number, another Fela cover, “Alagbon Close,” to be performed in honor of the afrobeat progenitor’s October 15 birthday. From the crowd, an enthusiastic fan begins to demand loudly, “N.E.S.T.A!” “N.E.S.T.A!” N.E.S.T.A!” “Never Ever Submit to Authority” is a song from Antibalas’ first album, *Liberation Afrobeat*, released on Afrosound records in 2000, and reissued the following year by Ninja Tune, so I imagine that the young man who made the request is a longstanding Antibalas fan. The band, however, sticks to the Fela classic. For their encore, Antibalas does revisit their first album. However, it is not “N.E.S.T.A.” that they perform. Instead, they play “Si Si Puerde,” in obvious reference to Barack Obama’s campaign slogan, “Yes we can!” At the end of the show, I approach the demanding fan. Although he is American, I learn that he lives in Germany where he first heard Antibalas during one of their overseas tours. He has been a fan of their music ever since but surprisingly seems to have no idea who Fela is, or that the genre of music that Antibalas plays is called afrobeat.

“It’s weird,” he says. “The music I like are on two extremes, you know, blue grass, and funk. I guess what ties them together is the raw emotion. With blue grass, it’s just a singer and his guitar, there’s just something vulnerable about that, and funk has that downright dirty quality that just gets you dancing, and these guys [Antibalas] are so good at it.”

“Would you describe their music as funk?” I ask.

“Well, I don’t know actually, I just know it’s in that category of booty shaking music, you know, and I love it.”

4.2.3.2 Politics of the groove

The “Black Cat” event narrated above demonstrates that afrobeat, during the course of its global migrations, has crossed not only physical boundaries of state, but also of race, ethnicity and language. Within this context of widening cultural space, Antibalas signifies affiliation with transnational afrobeat culture through a range of intertextual codes such as, the use of Pidgin English and Yoruba, appropriated song lyrics (“Government Magic”), Fela covers (“Opposite People,” “Alagbon Close”), and the commemoration of Fela’s birthday. Moreover, the “Black Cat” performance, like all Antibalas shows, was permeated by a strong political thrust which, in its use of name-calling indictment, perpetuates, in a broad sense, Fela’s brand of political activism through music. However, specific details of Antibalas’s musical-political activism, as expressed at the “Black Cat,” suggest an explicitly partisan discourse embedded in US politics. This was evident in the band’s repudiation of erstwhile Republican presidential candidate John McCain and concurrent endorsement of his Democratic counterpart, Barack Obama. While this form of partisan support is clearly indicative of Antibalas’s leftist views and their political bearings at a particular historical moment—in this case, October 2008, an election year—it reveals little about the band’s broader ideological values. Indeed, as Martin Perna is noted to have once said, “Party ideology is just ideology, no matter the party.”¹⁶¹ Overt political rhetoric and appropriated texts do not, therefore, completely locate Antibalas within Fela’s ideological vision, and more nuanced readings are required. Does Antibalas subscribe to the ideals of Black Nationalism, lower class partisanship, and libertinism? If so, does the band’s enactment of these philosophies converge or depart from Fela’s practice? And if not, on what values does Antibalas hinge its politics and musical practice?

¹⁶¹ Kent Wolgamott, “Antibalas. Band aim to spread Afrobeat culture as well as its sound,” *Lincoln Star Journal*, October 11, 2002.

Determining the overarching creed(s) that propel Antibalas's sense of mission is a complicated matter. A perusal through early CD liner notes, press archives, interviews and other paraphernalia reveals an array of mission statements and ideological pronouncements including anarchism, pacifism, humanist philosophy, anti-capitalism, anti-commercialism, anti-globalization, anti-materialism. My interviews with individual musicians did not do much to clarify things. When I asked band leader Aaron Johnson about Antibalas's mission/vision, he gave a vague response: "You know, it's a tough thing to say, but I don't feel that I can answer for anyone else in the band... I think politically we're all on very similar pages. We disagree on some things, but we all believe in the free will of man, and more than anything, you know, in nature."¹⁶² When I asked more generalized questions such as: *what is the ideology of afrobeat as Fela played it? Should afrobeat always be political?*, answers varied. Aaron Johnson, while careful to state that he was speaking only for himself, responded thus: "The music is political... I do think that any person, given a platform, should try and use that... to open peoples' eyes... [but] I personally wouldn't go as far as saying that afrobeat can only be used in a political way." In contrast, Antibalas's founder, Martin Perna is known to hold the more streamlined view that "[T]aking politics out of afrobeat is like taking Jesus out of gospel music."¹⁶³

The problem with locating Antibalas's ideological views is rooted in the fact that the band was set up as an egalitarian collective in which decision making is based on group consensus; a model of what they would like to see in larger society.¹⁶⁴ For a while Antibalas shared a communal space in Brooklyn's Bushwick neighborhood, described by *The New Yorker* as "the club-house-frat house-recording studio-political hub of the fourteen members of Afrobeat band Antibalas,

¹⁶² Personal communication, September 24, 2007

¹⁶³ Martin Perna, quoted by Matt Sakakeeny, "Disciples of the Beat," *Wax Poetics*,

¹⁶⁴ Antibalas Press Kit.

passionate disciples of Fela... ”¹⁶⁵ But the collective setup has not been without its challenges, as Aaron Johnson later conceded: “it’s [being a collective] been our greatest strength and out Achilles heel. You know it’s a pain in the ass man, you can’t make a freaking decision without you know, worrying... there’s never gonna be a time when everybody is a hundred percent in agreement”¹⁶⁶ Confronted with the practical challenges of enacting their egalitarian values, Antibalas finds in “afrobeat” a sonic metaphor of communality that is interpreted by the band as a central arbitrating tool.

Antibalas believes that Afrobeat’s jigsaw of polyrhythmic complexity lends itself to alternative community building. Each member adds a sonic puzzle piece that makes sense only when interlocked with the others... ‘If it’s played right, the ego is dissolved and everybody is one,’ says Perna. ‘Afrobeat is bigger than all of us, and learning how to surrender to that is a very exciting thing.’¹⁶⁷

More than an idealized symbol for the philosophy of collectivism that they espouse, however, Antibalas situates afrobeat’s polyrhythmic dance-oriented structure as a model for mediating their sharp politics to audiences. “Any message that’s bitter you have to take with a little bit of sweetness to swallow it—otherwise it’s just rhetoric,” Perna once told New York journalist Mark Wolf, “The music balances the message, so people can feel it—it enters through their butt and goes up to their brain.”¹⁶⁸ The potential efficacy of this approach to musical-political activism was demonstrated at the “Black Cat” event that I described earlier. The audience members at the event represented not

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Personal communication, September 24, 2007

¹⁶⁷ Jeff Chang, “Democracy on the Downbeat,” *motherjones.com*, August 2002. Accessed October 8, 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Martin Perna, quoted by Mike Wolf in “Politics of Dance,” *Timeout*, New York, July 13-20, 2000.

only a diversity of nationalities, ethnicities and cultures, but also a range of incongruent political alliances. However, those that I spoke to did not seem too bothered by the band's overt partisanship, even when it contradicted personal opinions. Instead, fans from diverse backgrounds seemed to be united by their common appreciation of Antibalas' ability to supply an invigorating *beat*. When the young republican constituent that I spoke to said that he was drawn to Antibalas because of "how they are able to keep up a beat and build it up..." and that he didn't care if the band blatantly endorsed Obama, or discredited Bush, he was in essence affirming Perna's sentiments that an intoxicating groove softens a sharp message. Journalist, Mark Wolf, in a *Time Out, New York* article titled "*Politics of Dance*," encapsulated the same idea in the blurb, "Afrobeat collective Antibalas will free your ass; your mind will follow."¹⁶⁹ It is this latent synergy between kinesthetic embodiment and political rhetoric—with particular reference to Wolf's title—that I here adapt as a *politics of the groove*.

While it is hard to distill a concise ideological creed to which the 11 to 15 members of Antibalas unequivocally subscribe, their *politics of the groove* constitutes an overarching framework that loosely unites individual philosophical values and propels the band's overall practice: from logistical organization to remuneration, composition to language-use, message and mode of delivery. In an article that was published on *motherjones.com*, music critic, journalist and author Jeff Chang delineates several ways in which politics and musical collectivity intersect in Antibalas' practice. These include advocacy of democracy: "What does democracy sound like? The Brooklyn-based Antibalas—a 'cooperative entity' of 14-plus band members—makes it sound a lot like Afrobeat;" an anti-commercialization stance: "Antibalas' approach, says Mexican Italian bandleader Martin Perna, 'is the difference between a Happy Meal and a home-cooked meal.' In an era of multimillion-

¹⁶⁹ Mike Wolf, "Politics of Dance," *Timeout, New York*, July 13-20, 2000.

dollar videos for two-man rap acts, the very idea of a [large live] band can start to seem outdated;” and overall approach to administration: “Antibalas remains a thriving collective, relying on a communal decision-making process akin to their street-activist counterparts. ‘Sometimes there’s so much voting I can’t even remember if I voted or not,’” laughs keyboardist Victor Axelrod.’ ”¹⁷⁰

Antibalas’s approach to composition provides a window into the social and performative dynamics that play out as the band strives to enact its *politics of the groove*. While individual songwriting is open to all band members, often, an individual will introduce a musical fragment which is then developed during rehearsals. Discussing the pre-production stage of Antibalas’s third full-length studio album, Martin Perna stated, “we spent the whole day, eight hours, six or seven of us, writing a tune...We went through all these different approaches as to how to write the lyrics. I think that’s the hardest thing...How to do it so that fourteen people collectively are speaking with one voice.”¹⁷¹ Over time, the collectivist ideal has profoundly impacted the band’s approach to live performance:

In the past, long extended numbers quieted down and broke open, allowing Perna and vocalist Duke Amayo... a chance to give impassioned speeches about the causes and injustices that moved them. This form of activism was troubling to some members of the Antibalas collective, who found that sometimes the sentiments spoken on stage were not held by all members.

The band has all but removed these discourses from their live performance. ‘Right now,’ explained Perna, ‘we are developing a more coherent political stance that is

¹⁷⁰ Jeff Chang, “Democracy on the Downbeat,” *motherjones.com*, August 2002, accessed October 8, 2009.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Jorge Arevalo Mateus, “Antibalas and the lesson of Afrobeat,” *Ugly Planet*, Issue 1, 16-17

expressed lyrically.’ It is one thing to lecture to an audience about the ills of the world, it is another to write songs that provoke the audience to think for themselves and to organize along the lines of what they believe. This new approach frees the audience to make their own conclusions and allows the band to play music that incorporates a political tone without it becoming a sermon.¹⁷²

Antibalas’s *politics of the groove* is a metaphor for the band’s multiracial identity, and factors into the band’s language choices. When I asked Martin Perna why Antibalas chooses to sing in languages like Yoruba, Pidgin English and to a much less degree, Spanish, that most of their fans do not understand, he replied: “... cause we’ve found it’s more about the music rather than the audience... I think that the development of the language [??] has kinda happened organically, you know, whether it’s Yoruba or Pidgin or Spanish, er, I think rather than trying to force English lyrics, like just standard American English lyrics on to the music, like grafted on, it kinda has to come organically, otherwise it’s a disservice to the music, I’d rather just have it be an instrumental rather than a song with good music and kind of uncomfortable lyrics, you know, lyrics that sound like they don’t really fit...”¹⁷³

In what ways, if any, does Antibalas’s *politics of the groove* correspond with or depart from Fela’s ideological practice? A cursory glance would suggest that the ideal of collectivity paramount to Antibalas’ overall practice aligns with the often cited African aesthetic of musical communality. Fela himself touted such an aesthetic when he told New York Times journalist Peter Watrous that “The music of Africa is a big sound: it’s the sound of a community... It’s the music of the people. It’s the music of togetherness.”¹⁷⁴ However, Fela’s musical practice contradicts such notions of musical

¹⁷² Scott Medvin, “Music is the Weapon of the future,” *The McGill Tribune*, September 17, 2002.

¹⁷³ Personal communication, October 6, 2003

¹⁷⁴ Fela, quoted by Peter Watrous, “*Fela Offers a Mosaic of Music and Politics*,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 1989

communality. Although Fela established a commune, he was known to rule over Kalakuta Republic with a hand so authoritarian that it often mirrored the style of the military dictators that he venomously criticized. Furthermore, the collaborative creative process to which Antibalas subscribes stands in direct opposition to Fela's highly individual approach to composition. Repeatedly, the Africa '70 and Egypt '80 musicians that I interviewed affirmed the already well known fact that Fela composed all of his music to the minutest structural detail, leaving no room for embellishment in individual parts besides the improvised solos that were played over a static groove. Fela's reputation as a severe musical director who had no qualms with publicly haranguing musicians gone astray is widely known, and attested to in available video recordings of his live performances. In Fela's creative-ideological vision, communality, or what he called the "on-the-ground spiritual game" enacted, instead, a call-and-response pedagogical model that allowed Fela to actively engage audiences in extended and, again, highly personalized arguments. The "on-the-ground spiritual game" might seem somewhat similar to Antibalas' politics of the groove, but a closer analysis reveals significant distinctions. Although Antibalas engages audiences in call-and-response, the band's primary mode of generating audience participation is dance. Indeed, over time, verbal rhetoric outside the context of sung melodies has remarkably diminished due to a lack of consensus over the ideological views expressed. The practice of creating a highly charged kinetic space where fans from diverse backgrounds briefly experience communal euphoria, but ultimately go their separate ways with the hope that individuals will later reflect on the political issues broached is, on the whole, passive. In contrast, Fela, as his music became more politically charged, attempted to undermine audience participation through dance. He would frequently instruct his fans to sit down, listen, and register their alertness to his messages through the verbal responses that he worked into songs.

Although Fela, by laying increasing emphasis on the didactic, risked eroding the mass appeal of his music, he never lost sight of his populist values. He retained popular interest in his music

through the use of urban grassroots imagery, humor and especially Pidgin English. Though inaccessible to most American audiences, Antibalas has retained Pidgin English as a principal language of choice, citing its musical affinities to the afrobeat. Pidgin English does imbibe the rhythmic and tonal inflections of African languages which, in turn, profoundly impact Africa's language-centric musical traditions, both traditional and popular. However, such linguistic bearings are not necessarily evident, nor relevant to audiences in the United States. In fact, Pidgin English tends to carry pejorative connotations in the United States. It is noted that, worldwide, similar prejudices are sometimes expressed towards various "pidgin" and "standard" languages depending on local contexts. Indeed, Pidgin English carries negative connotations in Nigeria as well; however, Fela did not choose to sing in this medium simply because of the controversy surrounding it, but principally because of its widespread use across West Africa and beyond. The same populist appeal is lost on predominantly English-speaking American audiences. Afrobeat as a whole, does not, in fact, have much populist appeal (in the sense of a grassroots following) of any sort in the United States where it generally falls under such broad categories as "experimental," or "world," which reflect, to varying degrees, bourgeois values that tend to exclude rather than include the uninitiated.

At no point during my formal interviews and informal interactions with the musicians in Antibalas did any of them cite Black Nationalism or lower class partisanship as overarching creeds that inform Antibalas's musical-political activism in overarching ways. Indeed, so far, my analysis of ideological discourse in Antibalas's practice points up major divergencies from Fela's practice. A micro-level analysis of the thematic content of individual songs from Antibalas' repertoire would reveal far more convergencies with Fela's ideas. Ideologies are not themes or causes, however; and identical themes may stem from contrasting ideological perspectives. A striking example of thematic unity that nevertheless stems from differing ideologies comes to the fore in a comparison of Fela's "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense" and Antibalas's "War Hero," the latter of which was performed

at the “Black Cat” event. Both pieces criticize the worldwide institutionalization of democracy through Western military interventions. Even more, the two songs subvert the word democracy (demo-crazy in “TDTMN,” and “democrisy” War Hero) as a way of caricaturing the political pedagogies of the colonial and neocolonial powers that initiate global “democratic crusades” as subversions of true democracy. However, while Fela points to fundamental incongruities between African and Western political systems and encourages a reassessment of indigenous African values, Antibalas guitarist Marcus Garcia revealed to me a set of motives that informed his composition of “War Hero:”

...the poor country kid thinks he’s going to war for love of country but he’s off to serve Bush’s agenda...and goes off wearing the mantle of saving democracy...to serve corporate interests...he’s conditioned to believe that the corporate agenda is connected to democracy and freedom...¹⁷⁵

Garcia’s anti-corporate stance goes back to Antibalas’s overarching vision of an egalitarian world nurtured on collectivist principles. However, Fela, in “TDTMN,” is informed by Black Nationalist philosophies that advocate the [re]centering of African systems of knowledge and the return to a glorious African past. Such overarching ideological divergencies are critical to understanding how local cultural histories and broader genre identity are negotiated in transnational genres. The contrasts between Fela’s ideological creeds and Antibalas’s world view do not necessarily cancel out one another, or signify fractured affiliations; rather, they enrich and complement one another. Whereas Fela wrote from the perspective of a postcolonial subject, Antibalas presents a view from

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the global domain of power, thereby bringing a critical balance to ideological discourse in transnational afrobeat culture, and reflecting the fluidity of genre identity.

4.3 CONCLUSION

In creating afrobeat, Fela drew from several preexisting philosophies and creeds, including Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism, political and cultural dimensions of broader Black Nationalist discourse. He also subscribed to a libertarian worldview, which, in turn, came to define not only his lifestyle, but also his musical practice. Fela's seemingly incongruous embodiment of radical politics and hedonism made him even more enigmatic. Such opposing binaries nevertheless came to define his music to the extent that even today, many consider the man and the music, one. To many musicians in contemporary Lagos, Fela's shoes might seem too big to fill. Nevertheless, a few stalwarts have taken up the afrobeat mantle, notably Fela's sons, Femi and Seun Kuti, Dede Mabioku and a few others. In the United States, Fela's hedonistic lifestyle does not carry the same stigma and as a result of this, musicians resident in the US have more readily embraced afrobeat. While contemporary afrobeat proponents agree with some of Fela's ideas, they also bring their own experiences and perspectives to the palette of afrobeat ideologies. Fela's philosophy is rarely embraced dogmatically. Ideology, then, while crucial to the emergence and subsequent growth of a genre is, like other dimensions of genre, fluid, permeable and subject to contestation.

5.0 CONCLUSION: WORLDWIDE AFROBEAT MOVEMENT, NO.2

From the earliest moments of his professional music career, Fela had his sights set on international acclaim. As a student-musician in London, his ability to straddle multiple contemporary genres in order to cater to diverse audiences was noted.¹⁷⁶ Determined to create “a sound of the world in general,”¹⁷⁷ Fela returned to Nigeria in 1963 where he continued experimenting—highlife with jazz, blues borrowings, forays into soul—and failing to clinch his goal. Nevertheless he did not relent. He coined the term “afrobeat” in 1968 with a pledge to create a new “trend” worthy of acclaim in Nigeria, and the world beyond¹⁷⁸ His eureka moment seemed to arrive in 1969 when he was invited to tour the United States. Convinced that he would finally achieve “RECOGNITION,” Fela along with his band members went on the road, playing US cities coast to coast until dwindling resources forced them to pause in Los Angeles. Despite meeting celebrities, courting record company executives, and receiving multiple endorsements, Fela’s ten-month adventure in the “Mecca of Entertainment” left him completely broke and quite unknown.¹⁷⁹ The real reward of his Los Angeles experience was an encounter with African American activist Sandra Smith, which ushered him to a new threshold of creativity and ideological growth. Subsequently, Fela would consolidate his decade-long genre-bending experiments and in 1970, unleash an upbeat new sound that Nigerian critics unanimously hailed as the most original innovation to hit the local soundscape. At last, Fela had conquered

¹⁷⁶ Oliver, *Black Music in Britain*, 96

¹⁷⁷ Fela Ransome-Kuti, “Fela drops highlife” *Sunday Times*, August 18, 1968, p. 6

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

¹⁷⁹ Victor Dorgu, “..To hell and back” *Sunday Times*, April 5, 1970, pp. 8 & 13

Nigerian audiences and was well on his way to becoming Africa's most popular musician. Another overseas trip was scheduled in 1971, this time to London, where Fela and Africa '70 would record *Fela's London Scene* at EMI's Abbey Road Studios. In London, Fela observed the phenomenal mainstream success of the West African Afro-rock band, Osibissa, and confidently predicted that "in about three years from now, Afro-beat music would be the hottest thing going on the European music scene."¹⁸⁰ Like all musical fads, the Afro-rock movement petered out, and though Fela would eventually gain some measure of European recognition it was fleeting and far more modest than he had expected.

From 1969 until his death in 1997, Fela remained unknown to mainstream Europe and America, with acclaim least forthcoming in the United States. Nevertheless, afrobeat managed to filter into global circulation during those years through various social and discursive networks, discussed in Chapter 1. Just as Fela drew influences from diverse musical sources during the 1960s, so would rock musicians, jazz artists, rappers and DJs tap inspiration from afrobeat in the 80s and 90s. Although none of these musicians became exclusive protégés of afrobeat, their musical borrowings helped set the stage for the worldwide explosion of local afrobeat scenes, beginning in the late 1990s. The most influential of these local scenes emerged in New York City, where musicians, artists, audiences, entrepreneurs and media agents from diverse backgrounds, sharing a common love for afrobeat, started propagating the genre through performances, publications and other activities. Out of the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg emerged Antibalas, perhaps the single most influential American afrobeat band in the history of the genre. Concurrent with the emergence of the New York Scene, Femi Kuti, and ex-Africa '70 drummer Tony Allen, based out of Lagos and Paris respectively, also rose to international prominence through extensive touring. Thus, New York City, alongside Paris, Lagos San Francisco and London, became the epicenters from which other local

¹⁸⁰ Critic, "Getting the Message to Fans" Daily Times, Wed. April 28, 1971, p. 7

afrobeat scenes would emerge, marking the formation of what may be termed a transnational afrobeat movement.

In subsequent years, the movement gained momentum, and then slowed down to a decline around 2007 as some of the enthusiastic young musicians who drove the movement grew older, moved to different cities, settled down to make families, developed new priorities, and took on new projects. It was during this moment of decline that I entered the field. However, far from being a disadvantage, my late entry into the field proved favorable on two counts. First, it afforded the musicians that I interviewed the chance to reflect on my questions from a vantage position that comes with the passage of time. Secondly, it allowed me to witness the nascent stages of yet another global afrobeat resurgence which is presently in full drive.

The second global afrobeat movement features pivotal new players as well as a core of veterans from the earlier movement. Afrobeat's ongoing revival centers around the decision by Stephen Hendel, a wealthy New York entrepreneur, to produce a Broadway musical based on Fela's life. An "outsider" to the first afrobeat movement, Hendel enlisted fellow "newcomers:" celebrated choreographer Bill T. Jones (*Spring Awakening*) and writer Jim Lewis to help create and direct the show. However, things might have worked differently without the pivotal role played by New York City's "first wave" afrobeat community. Antibalas's bandleader, Aaron Johnson, is the musical director of the show, and Antibalas features as the house band. Reflecting the interconnected networks of the New York afrobeat scene, Antibalas has, in turn, enlisted musicians from Akoya, Budos Band, and other New York City afrobeat/afrobeat-related bands. *Fela*, the musical, started life with several years of trial and error workshops that eventually led to a massively successful off-Broadway stint. Subsequently, Hollywood superstars Will and Jada Pinket-Smith, hip-hop mogul Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, and Sony Entertainment have come on board as producers alongside Hendel. *Fela* moved to Broadway in November 2009, and is currently playing at the Eugene O'Neil Theater on

W 49th Street. Since moving to Broadway, *Fela* has soared tremendously, garnering a plethora of prestigious award nominations and wins, including 1 OBIE, 2 Fred and Adele Astaire Awards, 5 Lucille Lortel awards, 3 Drama Desk nominations, and an outstanding 11 Tony award nominations, out of which it won three. The show features seasoned Sierra Leonean actor Sahr Ngaujah in the lead role of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, and the legendary Patti Labelle as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (his mother). Celebrities from Madonna to Denzel Washington have been in regular attendance throughout the musical's arrival on Broadway. Cast members have performed on major daytime and nightly shows including *The View* and *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*. *Fela's* phenomenal success is set to continue as the show heads to Olivier Theater in London's West End later this year. A Steve McQueen-directed Hollywood movie is also currently in production, featuring Nigerian actor Biyi Bandele playing the lead role of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti.

Stephen Hendel bought the Knitting Factory, moved it to Brooklyn, and for a time hired Antibalas to play a regular gig there. He also bought Fela's back-catalogue from Universal USA, and he is currently reissuing all 45 titles via Knitting Factory Records. Meanwhile, new afrobeat bands continue to converge in established afrobeat hubs and frontier regions such as Australia. Although mainstream global popularity eluded Fela during his lifetime, he always insisted that at the appointed time of the gods afrobeat would eventually flourish worldwide. The proliferation of afrobeat bands around the world seems, finally, to validate the Chief Priest's oracular gifts. But could he have envisaged a Broadway show or Hollywood movie? How would he feel about the repackaging of his music? What does corporate embrace portend for afrobeat?

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's inability to rise beyond international folk-hero status during his lifetime was as much due to his skepticism of the corporate media industry as it was a result of the industry's insistence that he tone down his political vitriol, sing in English, shorten his infinitely lengthy songs—in other words, compromise his ideological and musical vision. In this regard, comparisons have been

made with Bob Marley, another antiestablishment folk-hero whose rise to mainstream international popularity began in the 1980s after he signed up—many would say “sold out”—with world music label Island Records. Fela’s dominance over afrobeat means that the genre has been able to retain ideological and aesthetic values imbued by its chief auteur.

Afrobeat came to mean many different things to Fela as he passed through various experiences in life: in the early 70s, it was a progressive urban dance craze, with a dash of nationalist rhetoric and benign satire much within the ordinary realm of social observation and commentary traditionally expected of musicians in Africa. From the mid-1970s to late ’80s, it became a caustic oppositional tool against Nigeria’s successive military regimes. In the ’80s and ’90s it became a brooding art form shrouded in a miasma of cannabis and Egyptian mysticism. However, as I have also shown throughout this dissertation, Fela’s hegemony is not completely infallible. Ideological differences caused Tony Allen and most of the Africa ’70 band members to break off with Fela, beginning in 1979. Similarly, Femi Kuti, having apprenticed under Fela, left the Egypt ’80 band in 1989 after a prolonged father-son rift and went on to form his Positive Force band. Where Fela rained vituperations against “foreign” religions Christianity and Islam for allegedly brainwashing Africans, turning to traditional African religions instead, his son Seun Kuti told me that he does not believe in what he cannot see. Father and son may find it ironic, however, that afrobeat’s signature rhythm, like highlife’s before it, has become a steady feature in Christian churches in Nigeria. The fact is, regardless of how intricate the connection between an artist and his music, once disseminated into public space, the music becomes subject to the whims of its recipients. However, when the recipient in question is the corporate media, then the issues at stake go from personal differences in ideological or aesthetic vision to market driven factors. The pattern seems to be that musics originally imbued with political rhetoric, once picked up by the corporate industry, become reduced

to commercial fluff. Aesthetic values, too, are subject to watering down at the cost of generating widespread circulation.

Herein lay potential anxieties about the Second Global Afrobeat Movement. The First Afrobeat Movement featured the emergence of local bands whose associations with independent labels allowed them to retain afrobeat's political thrust. However, the ongoing afrobeat revival appears to be driven by corporate entities, thereby generating fears about control, cooptation and a loss of the musical and ideological integrity. However, it should be noted that the corporate media also played a critical role in fostering the First Global Afrobeat Movement. Many of the musicians that I interviewed attested to the fact that the MCA/UNIVERSAL/WRASSE reissues of the late 1990s made Fela's previously unavailable albums widely available, allowing musicians to better absorb his musical repertoire and master the genre. In 1995, Femi released his watershed album, *Femi Kuti*, with Motown records—a label once turned down by his father—and has continued to retain associations with big labels such as Universal and Wrasse. But afrobeat's romance with the corporate world did not begin with Femi Kuti. Fela, greatly ambitious in his youth, was signed to EMI in the 1970s and only went independent after the label censoring the release of his records abroad on account of their overtly political content. Nevertheless, Fela continued to negotiate the international corporate industry, signing with Arista in the 1980s. Fela was not averse to corporate distribution of his music, as long as it was done on his own terms.

There is no way to predict the future of afrobeat. As evident from afrobeat's history and global migrations, discussed in this dissertation, genre boundaries are fluid, determined by the specifics of social space and cultural practice. Fela's hegemonic relationship to afrobeat suggests that as long as Fela remains the main reference point for future afrobeat protégés, the genre is bound to retain at least some of its political thrust. This much, at least, can be said about the Broadway musical *Fela*.

Finally, the uniqueness of New York City as a pivotal epicenter in both the First and Second Global Afrobeat Movements must not go unmentioned. Just as the history of the emergence of afrobeat is innately linked to Lagos, New York City has become the principal epicenter of the contemporary life of the genre. Genre, as Fabian Holt states, is “embodied in people, places and objects,”¹⁸¹ and *Fela* the musical is one of many way in which New York City is make its imprint on the genre.

¹⁸¹ Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*, 18

APPENDIX A

TEACHER DON'T TEACH ME NONSENSE

Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti

Tisha, tisha tabi na lecturer be your name?

Tisha, tisha and and-i lecturer be de same

Make you no teach me I go know

Person you finish teach-i yet, na so e don die-i today o

Person you finish teach-i yet, na so e don die-i today o

Person you finish teach-i yet, na so e don die-i

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

No de same category o

No de same category o

No de same category o

Let's get down to the "on-the-ground" spiritual game

We all sing together, play music together in happiness

All you have to do is to sing what I play on my horn

Now let's go now, ooo

La la la la la la

La la la la la la la la la

La la la la la la la la la

La laaaa la la la la

La laaaa la la la la

etc

Akujugba Akujugba

Eeeee

Akujugba akujugba etc.

Eeeee

Kereke kereke kereke kereke kerekekerejikeke

Yaaa

Kerekeji keke

Yaaa

Kejikeke

Yaa

Kerekekeji keke

Yaa

Kerekeji keke

Yaa

Kereke

All de wahala, all de problems

All de things wey we tink say ee goodu for this world e dey start

When-e tisha, school boy and school girl, ja-am together

Who be tisha?

I go let you know

When we be for pickin

Baba, mama be tisha

When we dey for school

Tisha be tisha

When dey university

Lecturer be tisha

When we start to work

Gov'ment be tisha

Who be gov'ment tisha?

Colusho and tradition

Colusho and tradition

Colusho and tradition

Na the problem side of tisha and student-ee I go sing about.

I don pass pickin, I don pass school, university sef I pass

As I don start to work, na gov'ment I must turn face to

You go for France, *yes sir*

Engiland, *yes ma*

Italy, *yes sir*

Jamany, *yes ma*

Na dem culsho, *yes sir*

for dere, *yes ma*

be tisha, *yes sir*

for them, *yes ma*

You China, *yes sir*

Russia, *yes ma*

Korea, *yes sir*

Vietnam, *yes ma*

Na dem culsho, *yes sir*

For dere, *yes ma*

be tisha, *yes sir*

for them, yes *ma*

You go Syria, yes *sir*

Jordan, yes *ma*

Iran, yes *sir*

Iraq, yes *ma*

Na dem culsho, yes *sir*

for dere, yes *sir*

be tisha, ye *ma*

for them

Let us face ourselves for Africa

Na de matter of Africa be dis part-ee of-u my song

Na all de problem of this world, na him we dey carry for Africa

You no go ask-ee me

Which one?

You no go ask-ee me

Which one?

Problems of inflation

Which one?

Problems of corruption

Which one?

Of mismanagement

Which one?

Stealing by govament

Which one?

Na him we dey carry all over Africa

Which one?

Na de latest one

Which one?

Na him dey make me laugh

Which one?

Austeri—

Austerity

Austeri—

Austerity

Na him dey latest one

Austerity

Na him dey make me laugh

Austerity

Why I dey laugh

Austerity

Man no fit cry

Austerity

Who be our tisha? Na oyinbo

Who be our tisha? Na oyinbo

All of us dey de first election

And de second election all in Nigeria

Na de second election na in worse pass

Babanla nonsense

Babanla nonsense

E pass rigimo

Babanla nonsense

E pass corruption

Babanla nonsense

Wish kind election be dis

Babanla nonsense

People no go vote

Babanla nonsense

Dem come get big big numbers

Babanla nonsense

Thousands to thousands

Babanla nonsense

Million to millions

Babanla nonsense

Which kin' election be dis

Babanla nonsense

Na demociracy be that e o
Who tish us-ee demociracy
Pon-po ji, na oyinbo tishi us-ee
Eee...unngh, na oyinbo for Europe-u (ungh)
Oyinbo tish us many many tins-ee
Many of dem tins I don sing about-ee
Me I no 'gree to copy oyinbo style-ee

Let us think-i say oyinbo know pass me
When Shagari finish him elections
Why dem no tell am say e make mistake-ee
Say this-ee o, no be democracy
Oyinbo dem no tell army sef
that for England-ee army no fit take over

I come tink about dis democracy
Demo-cracy
Democracy
Cracy-demo
Democracy
Demonstration of craze
Democracy
Crazy demonstration
Democracy

If e no be craze

Democracy

why for Africa

Democracy

As time dey go

tins just de bad

Democracy

dey bad more and more

Democracy

poor man dey cry

Democracy

rich man dey mess

Democracy

Demo-crazy

Democracy

Crazy-demo

Democracy

Demonstration of craze

Democracy

Crazy demonstration

Democracy

If good-u tisha teash-ee something

And-i student make mistake

Tisha must talk-u so

But oyinbo no talk-u so

Na support dem dey support that means to say dem teasing get meaning

Diff'rent diff'rent meaning

Diff'rent diff'rent kinds of meaning

That is why I say, that is the reason of my song

That is the conclude, the concluding of my song

I say, I sing, I beg everyone to join my song

I say, I sing, I beg everyone to join my song

I say, I sing, I beg everyone to join my song

Tisha, tisha tabi na lecturer be your name?

Tisha, tisha and and-ee lecturer be de same

Make you no teach me I go know

Person you finish teach-ee yet, na so e don die-i today o

Person you finish teach-ee yet, na so e don die-i today o

Person you finish teach-ee yet, na so e don die-i

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

Me and you no dey for de same-u category

No de same category o

No de same category o

No de same category o

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