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When the Zombie Becomes Critic: Misinterpreting Fela's "Zombie" and the Need to Reexamine His Prevailing Motifs

Philip U. Effiong

Abstract

Although Fela Anikulapo Kuti's musical career began in the 1950s, it was in the 1970s that he emerged as a formidable force on the scene. This was not just because of the multifaceted Afrobeat genre that he generated, or his versatility as an instrumentalist, but because he used his music, incomparably, to expose corruption, confront the excesses of government and slam the acquiescence of the larger populace. Sadly, however, his greatest hit, "Zombie" (1976), has been widely misconstrued as an attack on Nigeria's military, particularly the army. While the zombie theme may, in part, scoff at military regimented traditions, it disseminates a much wider message that condemns complicity and docility in the face of subjugation. This is despite the display of army personnel on the jacket of the original album, and recurring cynical commands that have been erroneously restricted to military parade protocol. To describe "Zombie" as an attack on the military is to relegate Fela's message to a narrow social context. Ironically, the denunciation of robotic compliance, which is the focal point of "Zombie," is a theme that Fela also captures in another song on the Zombie album, "Mr. Follow" (1976). The motif is repeated in other songs by Fela, including but not limited to "Shuffering & Shmiling" (1978) and, in part, "Sorrow, Tears & Blood" (1977). It was not Fela's style to shroud his message in telling images, as he was known to audaciously call the proverbial spade a spade. When he decided to castigate the army, he did so unashamedly in songs like "Army Arrangement" (1984) and "Unknown Soldier" (1979). To analyze Fela's "Zombie" effectively, therefore, it is necessary to do so in relation to other songs he released and within the context of his wider vision as a musician.

Keywords: Fela Kuti, Afrobeat, Nigerian Music, Music, Nigeria, West Africa, Military Rule

When late Nigerian music legend Fela Anikulapo Kuti¹ released “Zombie” in 1976, it took the Nigerian music and social scene by storm, becoming an instant hit. In the tradition of the captivating Afrobeat tempo that Fela had perfected, the song comprised an impressive merger of a jazzy sequence with syncopated beats that preserved a vibrant and electrifying quality. Its popularity soon spread, and the song eventually became an African and, indeed, global music sensation. But, beyond the genius of the singer and the aesthetic richness of the song, there was another spectacular reason for “Zombie’s” widespread appeal: the predominant conclusion that the song was a sardonic attack against Nigerian military rule and the overall military machinery. This was especially fascinating since, at the time, Nigeria was under the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo, a military dictator. Though military regimes were widely hated, they were also widely feared and, by and large, the people hesitated to speak out against them. Fela’s “Zombie” therefore provided an opportunity for people to revel in the condemnation of military rule without confronting the military directly or endangering themselves. Besides being acclaimed as an artist, Fela was praised for doing the unthinkable in openly deriding the military and was subsequently delineated as a fearless hero.

The problem, however, is that while military hegemony and control can be credibly cited as one of the subjects of “Zombie,” the song delivers a much broader theme that recurs, albeit differently, in other songs by Fela, which is that of acquiescence and complacency in the face of subjugation. Restricting the thematic focus of “Zombie” to an attack on the military is therefore a disservice to Fela’s larger thematic vision and creative drive. Even worse, it earned Fela the unmitigated wrath of the military who were already rankled by his regular criticism of high-handedness and corruption in government circles. It was a matter of time before the military would retaliate, and violence was its preferred method of meting out punishment.

This article argues against the prevalent view that Fela’s “Zombie” is entirely a portrayal of the absurdity in military mechanical traditions and, by extension, military autocracy. To accomplish this and fully grasp the message of the song, pertinent information will be provided on Fela’s background and the factors that shaped his style of music, the message of his music, and

his rebellious stance. The condemnation of docility in a variety of exploitative situations, which is the larger theme of “Zombie,” will be recognized as a motif that plays out in different ways in other songs by Fela. These songs will therefore be analyzed alongside “Zombie.”

Finally, this article will demonstrate how the misreading of “Zombie” ultimately limits Fela’s otherwise far-reaching position on several issues as well as his perceived role as an artist. Within the context of Nigeria in the 1970s, this reading would aggravate the relentless effort by the military regime of the time to silence Fela. The effort culminated in a brutal and massive attack unleashed on Fela’s household and music enterprise by soldiers, which had the potential to cripple him permanently—financially, creatively, psychologically and physically. Within a broader context, the implications are all too apparent, which is that the rash and narrow interpretation of serious art within antagonistic settings can have grave consequences.

Birth of an Unlikely Maverick

The entertainment industry frequently produces stars, be they musicians, actors or athletes. Less frequently, mega stars come along, like Sammy Davis Jr., whose exceptional talent was clear from a young age. He played a myriad of instruments and equally excelled in several performance genres, from dance and music to acting. Also from a young age, Michael Jackson introduced unbelievable, even uncanny, skills that manifested in innovative vocal and choreographic styles that are unique and exclusive to him.

But another source for entertainment popularity comes with a merger of talent and selfless activism. Mohammed Ali, formerly Cassius Clay, is well-known for his incredible achievements in the boxing ring. But he is arguably more acclaimed for his civil rights, equal opportunity, and anti-war crusades, which outlived his boxing career and were primary reasons why his death on June 3, 2016, was accompanied by much fanfare, celebration and acclamation that went well beyond his Louisville, Kentucky, hometown and, through the media, reached every corner of the world. While South Africa’s Miriam Makeba is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding singers that Africa has produced, her popularity was greatly boosted by her campaigns against apartheid, which she

accomplished through her music and speeches. She remained active from the 1950s until the system was officially abolished in the early 1990s, resulting in an election that ushered in democracy and crowned Nelson Mandela the first Black president of South Africa.

Like Ali and Makeba, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, whose musical career began in the 1950s, would be redefined in the Nigerian music scene in the 1970s as a singular voice that exposed, accused, challenged, and defied military dictatorships with an unparalleled intensity and impudence. His father, Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, was both a clergyman and grammar school teacher, as well as the first president of the Nigerian Union of teachers.² His mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, also a teacher, was an early women's rights activist and champion for nationalism.³ She is renowned for establishing the highly confrontational Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU),⁴ which organized massive, protracted anti-tax demonstrations during colonial rule, some of which were held outside the palace of the Egba king (*Alake* of Egbaland), Oba Ademola II.⁵ In spite of being challenged by a police force that utilized tear gas among other aggressive methods, the women remained steadfast and, in the end, their demands were met, leading to the abdication of the king in 1949.⁶ It is likely that Fela was motivated by his mother's activism as he increasingly demonstrated concern for the underprivileged and was a fearless critique of unreliable leaders, including threatening military dictators. His music would progressively serve as an instrument in advancing these ideals. Importantly, too, his younger brother, Beko Ransome-Kuti, a medical doctor, was also an exponent of human rights who, as chairman of the Campaign for Democracy that challenged and criticized military dictatorships, was periodically jailed in the 1990s during the Babangida and Abacha regimes.⁷ Fela's cousin and first sub-Saharan African Nobel Literature Prize laureate, Wole Soyinka, is also recognized as an outspoken proponent of justice and outright critic of depravity in government and public office.

From an early age, therefore, Fela was exposed to, surrounded by, and ultimately influenced by advocates for civil rights, self-determination, and egalitarianism. Notwithstanding the elite status of his family, he developed an unbreakable affinity with the marginalized, for whom he would eventually be a loud spokesperson. Along with this role was the matching development of

a mindset that increasingly became independent and radical. So even though Fela was sent to London at age nineteen in 1958 to study medicine, he opted instead for music, which he studied at the Trinity College of Music.⁸ His evolving sense of autonomy and defiance would be heavily impinged on after he formed the Koola Lobitos band in London in 1961, along with J.K. Braimah, his school friend. Margaret Busby explained:

In 1969 he traveled with the group to the United States, where he connected with Black Power militants and became increasingly politicized. Specifically, his meeting with Sandra Smith (currently Sandra Izsadore), a member of the Black Panthers, was a catalyst for everything that was to follow. Turned on to books on black history and politics, particularly Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Fela began to demonstrate a new consciousness in his lyrics.⁹

Trevor Schoonmaker maintained that it wasn't until Fela's 1969 trip to Los Angeles with his group "that his radical Afrobeat concept really gelled."¹⁰ Prior to this time, Afrobeat was already growing in popularity as a reinvigorating and innovative style that combined "James Brown-style funk and American and Afro-Cuban jazz, injected with a good dose of traditional Yoruba and highlife music."¹¹

But Fela would not only be impacted by his introduction to Black Power ideologies. According to Schoonmaker, he was also exposed to "the free-wheeling sex-and-drugs lifestyle of American counter-culture. Empowered and aflame with new ideas, he began his great cross-cultural experimentation, infusing his music with biting sociopolitical critique and mixing it with superfly style sex appeal and spectacle."¹² Following this experience, Fela would be permanently transformed politically and artistically. Busby elaborated on the changes in his social perspectives:

He returned to Nigeria, renamed the band Africa70, offloaded his "slave name" of Ransome, and set to championing the cause of the poor underclass and exposing the hypocrisy of the ruling elites, establishing his commune, the Kalakuta Republic, and his nightclub, the Afrika Shrine.¹³

Fela would replace his alleged "slave name" with "Anikulapo," which metaphorically suggested that he carried death in his pouch and was therefore not subject to its power. Through most of his

public life and even until his death, he would be associated with this symbol of “indestructibility and resilience.”¹⁴ It should be noted that several African American advocates for civil rights, particularly those who adopted a more confrontational approach, would also drop their “slave names” and assume new names to reflect new assertive identities.

Fela’s exposure to Black Power ideals was therefore one of the most influential factors in forging a connection between his musical vision and the struggle for equity and socioeconomic progress. To have a good grasp of this influence, it is important to review some of the tenets of Black Power. Larry Neal, spokesman for the Black Arts Movement, equates Black Arts with the “Black Power concept”:

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. . . . As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The Black Arts and Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics.¹⁵

Three essential issues stand out here: the functionality of art, a reverence for culture and the preservation of nationhood. Through result-oriented art, Black culture would be revitalized and preserved, laying the foundation for the building of an exclusive Black “nation.” Fela would also emerge as a shameless proponent of the use of art to promote and commemorate culture, and he was emphatic in his conviction that colonial values, unless rejected, would obstruct the regeneration of a viable Nigerian (and African) identity. On this subject, dele jegede wrote:

Repeatedly, he would urge Africans and the black diaspora to abandon their debilitating colonial mentality. He would call on Africans to participate in the economic development of the continent and to stop giving credibility to imperialist propaganda that Africans belonged only in the Third World.¹⁶

In all, and like Neal, Fela ultimately subscribed to an inseparable and productive link between the artist and his (or her) community. His evolving belief in the use of music to disseminate practical and life-changing messages was not unique to him; African American musicians were also having a related response to Black Power doctrines. As Joyce Bell stated:

Much of hip-hop culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s reflects an admiration of those black power figures that were willing to risk everything to say “enough is enough” and reframe the movement for black liberation so that white racism became the primary target of action.¹⁷

Blending his unusual musical vision with the message of African American self-determination, counterculture paradigms, his mother’s influence and his Yoruba culture, Fela had embarked on a curious journey that demanded fresh, critical thinking that was antithetical to orthodox thinking—a philosophy common to revolutionary action. Not surprisingly, his image as nonconformist also expanded and was evident in his way of life and the essence of his music. One of his greatest hits, “Zombie,” is not just emblematic of Fela’s individualism, but provokes questions about the implied sacredness of convention and the characteristic submission to this sacredness.

“Zombie” and the Crime of Apathy

It is important to listen to and match the lyrics and message of “Zombie” (and other songs by Fela discussed in this article) with the powerful assortment of musical instruments that sustain the Afrobeat cadence that Fela created and popularized. YouTube is a trusted channel through which to access Fela’s songs. They can also be sourced through websites, though payment is often required to listen to his songs in their entirety on some of these websites.¹⁸

In his book, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon*, Michael Veal describes Fela’s hit song, “Zombie” (1976) as “his most popular and biggest-selling song to date—which mocked soldiers as robotic idiots mindlessly following orders.”¹⁹ Veal is right to a large extent, but there is more to “Zombie” than a mockery of the robotic antics of soldiers. To fully establish this

fact, a review of the core lyrics of this song is necessary. In the characteristic Pidgin English²⁰ that became Fela's trademark for reaching a diverse Nigerian and West African audience (sometimes interspersed with his Yoruba language), his rendition of "Zombie" is still comprehensible to regular speakers of the language. He begins by leading the "zombie" chant that advances into a scornful castigation of thoughtless devotees. The accompanying lines then go on to reiterate that the "zombie" would not "go," "stop," "turn," or "think" unless he is manipulated in that fashion:

Zombie-o, zombie (Zombie-o, zombie)
 Zombie-o, zombie (Zombie-o, zombie)
 Zombie no go go, unless you tell am to go (Zombie)
 Zombie no go stop, unless you tell am to stop (Zombie)
 Zombie no go turn, unless you tell am to turn (Zombie)
 Zombie no go think, unless you tell am to think (Zombie)

The point is recapped as Fela goes on to insist that because the "zombie" has "no [auto] break" he can easily be swayed to "go straight," "go kill" and "go quench" (same as "go and die") without resisting or asking questions. While the reference to him as having "no sense" is less indicative of his machinelike compliance, it still underscores the "zombie's" imperviousness to reasoning, his lack of good judgement and the fact that he is completely regulated and devoid of a sense of direction. In the end, the mechanical zigzagging and mishandling of the "zombie" defines him as utterly lifeless:

Tell am to go straight (a-joro jara joro)
 No brake, no jam,²¹ no sense (a-joro jara joro)
 Tell am to go kill (a-joro jara joro)
 No brake, no jam, no sense (a-joro jara joro)
 Tell am to go quench (a-joro jara joro)
 No brake, no jam, no sense (a-joro jara joro)

The phrase, "a-joro jara joro" (or "joro jara joro") (which appears in the preceding and succeeding lines), besides playing a rhythmic role in its repetitiveness, has no linguistic meaning. It is therefore a sardonic indicator of the directionless life of the "zombie" and amplifies the theme of mechanical acquiescence to puppet-type manipulation and regulation.

Go and kill! (joro jara joro)
 Go and die! (joro jara joro)
 Go and quench! (joro jara joro)
 Put am for reverse! (joro jara joro)
 Joro jara joro, zombie way na one way
 Joro jara joro, zombie way na one way
 Joro jara joro, zombie way na one way
 Joro jara joro

Of all the lines in the song, “Put am for reverse” (put the “zombie” in reverse) is perhaps the foremost depiction of the individual as a brainless machine at the mercy of its operator much like cars and trucks, except that the latter, unlike human beings, are actually motorized vehicles. In this regard, “reverse” also suggests facing the opposite direction while moving backwards. Though a vehicle is normally under the informed control of a driver, the individual moving in reverse is blind to what lies behind and is vulnerable to a range of tragic accidents. This self-destructive image not only portrays a deficiency in self-determination and purpose, but also underlines the tragic possibilities that come with submitting to various manipulative forces.

The line, “zombie way na one way” (the zombie’s life is fixed and predetermined) is a fitting summary of the zombie’s aimless though controlled ramble, after which Fela concludes his masterpiece by using military-type parade commands metaphorically to reemphasize the irrationality in blind obedience and its ensuing stagnation:

Attention! (Zombie)
 Quick march!
 Slow march! (Zombie)
 Left turn!
 Right turn! (Zombie)
 About turn!
 Double up! (Zombie)
 Salute!
 Open your hat! (Zombie)
 Stand at ease!
 Fall in! (Zombie)
 Fall out!
 Fall down! (Zombie)
 Get ready!

Halt!
 Order!
 Dismiss!²²

It should be noted that this is the only section of the song that references standard military parade commands. While they reinforce the overall cynical tone, however, these commands are not exclusively used by the armed forces. They are also used during drills and parades by members of Nigeria's Customs Service, Police Force, Boys' Brigade, Girl Scouts and Immigration Service. I was a member of the Boy Scouts and recall that similar commands were issued during our parades. Among these directives are three that stand out since they are actually not a legitimate part of parade protocol; namely, "Go and kill," "Go and die" and "Put am for reverse." Still, many would argue that "Go and kill" and "Go and die" are proof that the song mocks and vilifies the armed forces, since killing and dying are regular consequences of their participation in warfare. This reasoning is inaccurate, as the demand for human sacrifice is integral to a number of other scenarios, be they the murders carried out by criminal outfits, the execution laws of several countries, or the ritual killings that inform diverse cultural practices. To make the point, I will refer to Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman* and Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. Both well-known literary works document killings that are required by custom but that also engender unease by characters who nonetheless refuse to openly challenge their implementation. The character Elesin in Soyinka's play is designated to play the role of a "horseman" who reluctantly prepares to die so that his spirit would continue to attend to his deceased master, the king. Ikemefuna, a young lad in Achebe's novel, is hacked to death as retribution for murders that he had nothing to do with. Though his killers are conflicted, they carry out the act in obedience to their oracle. Questionable acts of murder purportedly carried out for righteous reasons—whether sociopolitical or religious—are therefore not restricted to military tenets.

In the end, notwithstanding Fela's seeming scathing contempt for Nigeria's military, the artist had no problem with the military in general, or its parade ritual. After all, Fela espoused principles that are essential to the structuring and success of military parades, including his general perception of good leadership

and productive citizenship: discipline, obedience, hard work, precision, and preparedness. But parades, as Fela suggests, can also signify the unrestrained abuse of power within the military establishment, which sums up the degenerate nature and extent of military rule in Nigeria. The possibility of any institution or government to be domineering, however, is not a depravity to which the military alone is disposed. So while he did evoke sarcastic images in “Zombie” that foregrounded outstanding flaws in military rule, Fela’s larger ideology and subsequent songs show that he recognized the manifestation of these flaws within other institutions and segments of society.

Common Reactions to “Zombie”

Though respectable Fela scholars like the aforementioned Michael Veal make the logical claim that “Zombie” lambastes the repressive and controlling mechanisms of the Nigerian armed forces, primarily the army, restricting the song to this thematic focus obscures Fela’s broader nonconformist ideology. Understandably, Veal is not the only scholar that insists on “Zombie’s” derision of an increasingly despotic and overbearing Nigerian military. John Collins, who has also explored Fela’s life and music extensively, maintains that “his 1976 *Zombie* album was an insulting caricature of the Nigerian army mentality that became a battle cry across a continent that was plagued by military regimes at the time.”²³ Along with scholars and critics, Fela fans have also endorsed this analysis wholeheartedly, which, despite its merits, illustrates the downside to embracing popular opinion impulsively. For these scholars, critics and fans, it is something of a paradox that they have refused to rethink and reassess the message of “Zombie” and thus reconsider its other potential themes or, at least, subthemes. They have inadvertently opted to function like zombies, though innocent and reasonable zombies that must be distinguished from the cold-blooded zombies who eventually set out to destroy Fela’s family and business.

The prevalent conclusion that “Zombie” scoffs at a redundant Nigerian military is due to not just the words of the song and the fact that Nigeria was experiencing the decadence of military rule at the time of its release, but also the fact that the original album flaunts unmistakable photos of soldiers on its sleeve. These two

prominent factors—the image of soldiers on the album and the assortment of military parade-type commands that dominate the song—are therefore central to the rigid, even if valid, links established between “Zombie” and Nigeria’s army. As already stated, the ideological straitjacket control of foot soldiers under years of military dominance in Nigeria certainly substantiates the argument that the army qualifies as an institutional segment of society criticized by the song. Despite this fact, the display of pictures of soldiers on the *Zombie* album does not automatically imply that “Zombie” ridicules the army exclusively. The same fallacy would typify the hasty literal reading of the picture or artwork on many other music albums. For instance, the *It’s Time* album (1988) of another popular Nigerian singer, Christy Essien-Igbokwe, features a picture of the artist sitting on a horse. She is adorned with an outfit partially layered with reed while carrying a spear and slinging a bow across her chest and left shoulder. At the forefront of the album is a globe on which a map of the world is stamped. The immediate impression is of the artist going to war on horseback in what seems to be a campaign that would eventually crisscross the world. Yet, none of the songs in the album recounts anything close to the latter narrative.

Beyond music, examples can also be taken from literature. The cover of Wole Soyinka’s play, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (cited earlier), showcases the carved figure of a man riding a horse in one instance and, in another, displays the picture of a horse. Does this mean the play is about a horse or a man riding a horse? Certainly not. Also, one of the reprints of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (also cited earlier) delineates a head sketched upside-down. Does this mean the novel is about an upturned head? Like these representations, the image on the *Zombie* album is symbolic, symbolic of a much broader issue addressed by Fela, one that goes well beyond standardized military life. Another good literary example is *Xala*, a novel by Senegal’s Sembene Ousmane. The story not only focuses on the sexual impotence suffered by a businessman but also shows his picture on the cover of the novel. Yet the book is not about impotence; instead, it addresses the greed and fraudulence that defines the lifestyle of an emerging postcolonial elite class.

In general, therefore, while images superimposed on various artistic works can be literal, they are often symbolic. Pictures on the “Zombie” album reflect such symbolic representation.

In an interview reproduced in 2016, Fela condemned submission to the status quo and called for active resistance. He warned against the dangers of smiling in the face of much struggle and hardship, which is the main subject of his song, “Shuffering and Shmiling.” But by comparing this tendency to the mental conditioning of slaves, Fela made it clear that his passionate concern for the problem cannot be adequately captured in a single song and needs to be acknowledged in a variety of circumstances.²⁴ It therefore comes as no surprise that it became a recurring topic in his music, which will be discussed later in this article.

The *Faces of Africa* documentary about Fela called attention to his criticism of the “blind obedience” exhibited by Nigerian soldiers. But the documentary also mentioned Fela’s attempts to use his music to incite rebellion against the military administration of Olusegun Obasanjo, which, at the time “Zombie” was released, represented the debauchery that Fela associated with military rule. For Fela, therefore, it was not enough to identify and criticize the “blind obedience” of the military; the people had to confront and challenge it. Otherwise, they equally became guilty of “blind obedience” and mindless conformity and were no different from the senseless automatons of the “Zombie” song. This is a subject that Fela explores more rigorously in his later songs.²⁵

So, whereas the robotic acquiescence and brainwashing of Nigerian military personnel can be subsumed within the larger “Zombie” theme, the song is certainly not just about the military. It covers a much broader subject that criticizes docility—the failure to question the information we are fed in a variety of political, economic, industrial, academic, cultural, and religious settings, and the failure to confront and defy repression. To appreciate the significance of this message to Fela’s musical development, it is necessary to establish the pedagogic link between his songs that spoke to this theme, particularly those released in the late 1970s, when Nigeria experienced some of its most severe forms of despotism.

The Recurring Zombie Motif

Fela was passionate about changing attitudes of weak submission, which is why the zombie theme resurfaces in a good number of his songs between 1976 and 1978. This is not just a clear indication that he was preoccupied with this theme at this time in his career but is also further proof that “Zombie” is not a restricted attack on the military. To expound further, three songs will be examined: “Mr. Follow Follow” (1976), “Sorrow Tears and Blood” (1977) and “Shuffering and Shmiling” (1978).

Interestingly, “Mr. Follow Follow” is the other song on the *Zombie* album and, as with “Zombie,” reinforces the consequences of blind compliance devoid of thought, inquiry or defiance where necessary. The follower, “Mr. Follow Follow,” is depicted as consenting impulsively to instructions and conventions, which is signified by the fact that his “eye,” “mouth,” “ear” and “sense” (brain) are closed. In other words, he is another version of the zombie icon:

Mr. Follow Follow
 Follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow (2x)
 Some dey follow follow, dem close dem eye
 Dem close eye, kpin-kpin-kpin
 Some dey follow follow, dem close dem mouth
 Dem close mouth, kpan-kpan-kpan
 Some dey follow follow, dem close dem ear
 Dem close ear, gboin-gboin-gboin
 Some dey follow follow, dem close dem sense
 Dem close sense, gbiri-gbiri

Unless the programmed follower opens his “eye,” “ear,” “mouth,” and “sense,” he is doomed to fall into a “gutter” filled with “darkness,” “rats,” “*ikan*” (termites), and other desolate forces. Within this infernal catacomb, Mr. Follow Follow is bound to “quench” (meet his decisive destruction or death). A warning is even issued to avoid following “book,” a cynical reference to Western education, which Fela and militants in the African diaspora have often associated with institutionalized brainwashing designed to keep the people subservient and rob them of pride in their ancestral values:

If you dey follow follow
 Make you open eye, open ear, open mouth, open sense (2x)

Na dat time
 Na dat time you no go fall (2x)
 If you dey follow follow dem book
 Na inside gutter you go quench (2x)
 Cockroach e-dey, rat e-dey, ikan dey, darkness dey-ee
 Na inside gutter you go quench
 My brother make you no follow book-o
 Look am and go your way²⁶

The next song, “Sorrow Tears and Blood” was released in an album of the same name. Focusing on the violence meted out against civilians by soldiers and the police during military rule, a portion of the song underscores the dangers of succumbing to humiliation and abuse. Essentially, Fela faults “[his] people” as cowards who condone their repression and therefore abandon the patriotic responsibility to fight for their “liberty,” “justice,” and “happiness.” To portray their fears as unfounded, he sarcastically maintains that the people are terrified by things that are nonexistent, including the harmless “air around us.” Their excuses are equally self-centered: they do not want to die or “go” (also referred to as “quench”), they have parents and children to protect, they want to build houses, they have houses to maintain, and they simply want to enjoy life:

My people sef dey fear too much
 We fear for the thing we no see
 We fear for the air around us
 We fear to fight for freedom
 We fear to fight for liberty
 We fear to fight for justice
 We fear to fight for happiness
 We always get reason to fear
 We no wan’ die, we no wan’ wound
 We no want quench, we no wan’ go
 I get one child, mama dey for house
 Papa dey for house, I wan’ build house
 I don build house, I no wan’ quench
 I wan’ enjoy, I no wan’ go, ah
 So policeman go slap your face
 You no go talk
 Army man go whip your nyash
 You go dey look like donkey²⁷

Because the people say nothing and simply stare like “donkeys” when they are slapped in the “face” and flogged in the “nyash” (buttocks) by soldiers and policemen, in their submissiveness they evolve into and become one with the already cited zombie and Mr. Follow Follow characters. They accept the norm, bow to the status quo, and go with the conventional flow regardless of where it takes them and without asking questions.

“Shuffering & Shmiling” is a scathing ridicule of the perversion, deception and fraudulence of established religion. In the brief commentary he runs before singing the song, Fela notes among others that “our minds are in those places,” referring to houses of worship used by Christians and Muslims. That worshippers are subject to a degree of mind control and indoctrination in churches and mosques is therefore signaled early in the song and constantly developed. One of the principal lines, “Suffer suffer for world, enjoyment for heaven,” recaptures this theme by claiming that adherents are compelled to cheerfully endure worldly suffering since enjoyment awaits them in Heaven. Fela’s message is unambiguous; people give up their responsibility to seek justice and stability when they embrace the notion that fulfillment in the afterlife is at the core of what they should aspire for. They subsequently become passive to their suffering and repression, and, thus brainwashed, evolve into the zombie and Mr. Follow Follow prototypes that feature in several songs by Fela. Contrasting the opulent lifestyle of religious leaders—represented by the “Archbishop,” “Pope,” and “Imamu”—with the deprivation of their devotees, Fela identifies the culprits as these devotees who emerge as victims of their own apathy:

Suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer for world
 Na your fault be that
 Me I say, na your fault be that
 Open your eye everywhere
 Archbishop na miliki
 Pope na enjoyment
 Imamu na gbaladun²⁸

Advancing the absurdity that defines the dynamic between religious leader and follower, Fela scoffs at how loyalty is handed to clerics in faraway lands who have no real connection to their idolizers and are clueless about their environments or desires:

Archbishop dey for London
 Pope dey for Rome
 Imamu dey for Mecca

At the end of “Shuffering & Shmiling,” Fela focuses on the type of suffering that the people apparently choose to ignore because they look forward to “enjoyment” in “heaven.” Their hardship is a daily experience and is pervasive because it looms in several scenarios, such as the cramped commercial bus, the home without water or electricity, the fierce traffic jams, the physical abuse suffered at the hands of the police and soldiers, and the stress experienced in poor work environments:

Every day – for house
 Every day – for road
 Every day – for bus
 Every day – for work (2x)
 Every day my people dey inside bus (suffering and smiling) (2x)
 Forty-nine sitting, ninety-nine standing (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go pack themselves in like sardine (suffering and smiling)
 Dem dey faint, dem dey wake like cock (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go reach house, water no dey (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go reach bed, power no dey (suffering and smiling)
 Them go reach road, go-slow go come (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go reach road, police go slap (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go reach road, army go whip (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go look pocket, money no dey (suffering and smiling)
 Dem go reach work, query ready (suffering and smiling)
 Every day na the same thing (suffering and smiling)²⁹

Notwithstanding the intensity of the people’s suffering, they continue to smile and remain docile in anticipation of a better life in heaven. They are ultimately delineated as the oblivious Mr. Follow Follow and malleable zombie.

While many scholars discuss Fela’s music in relation to his overarching pan-Africanist, political, pro-traditional, and pro-justice ideals, a small percentage carry out in-depth analysis of his songs beyond their dominant messages. In the case of “Zombie,” the predominant message is identified as his ridicule of military indoctrination and administrative systems. It is therefore interesting that Tejumola Olaniyan, in his analysis of Fela’s “Shuffering and Shmiling,” underlines the song’s denunciation of world

religions by referring to the album cover where “morose Africans apparently zombified by Christianity and Islam. . . [give away] all their wealth to joyful bishops and imams.”³⁰ It is imperative that Olaniyan defines the Africans of “Shuffering and Shmiling” as being “zombified” by world religions. This is one of the few times that a critic thematically interconnects the “zombie” prototype with another song by Fela and subsequently suggests that a comprehensive appreciation of the song cannot be achieved in isolation but rather in comparison with other songs.

Blatant and Brazen

Jawi Oladipo-Ola insists, rightly, that “[Fela] was an individualist,”³¹ an attribute that was strongly shaped by Black Power doctrines. His vision for Africa’s emancipation and self-rule was therefore one that he linked to individual determination. Being the embodiment of a confrontational free spirit, if he wanted to attack the military or any of its branches in “Zombie,” he would have done so without mincing words. This is in fact what he did when he later released another song, “Army Arrangement” (1984) (also the album title), in which he lashes out at the army and goes on to lambaste two individuals that he identifies as representatives of corrupt military dictatorships: former President Obasanjo and late Shehu Musa Yar’Adua (the older brother of late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua). Relying on metaphors straight from the music industry, Fela describes the latter as “vocalist” and the former as “road manager” in a well-orchestrated scheme that resulted in the theft of 7 billion naira from public coffers. Later in the song, Obasanjo is held directly responsible for recruiting chronic corrupt politicians from the 1960s and using them to establish a new era of brief and decadent civilian rule that commenced in 1979:

Election story nko
 Obasanjo plan am well well
 Him take old politicians
 Wey rule Nigeria before
 The same old politicians
 Wey spoil Nigeria before
 Obasanjo carry all of dem
 All of dem dey there now³²

The reason why Fela blasts the army in “Army Arrangement” is because this is not what he set out to accomplish in “Zombie,” contrary to popular conjecture. Though not about the military, “ITT (International Thief Thief)” (1980), another release by Fela from an album with the same name, is a clear demonstration of his direct approach when it came to slamming crooked military and civilian bigwigs. Here, he is explicit in his accusation of Obasanjo and late business mogul, Moshood Abiola, of being grand global thieves. “ITT” refers not only to the “International Thief” label typically associated with influential business and political crooks, but also, sarcastically, to ITT³³ Corporation, the company that once employed Abiola and that allegedly afforded him the opportunity to deviously make huge amounts of money.

The fact, therefore, is that it was not Fela’s style to conceal his messages in murky images. He never hesitated to point accusatory fingers directly at individuals and establishments, and, in the process, he often mentioned names. In this he was alone, as Nigeria has never witnessed another artist that would be so brazen, especially during military rule when speaking truth to power was something of a masochistic risk. The murder of Dele Giwa in 1986 by a first-time parcel bomb is emblematic of this fact. Giwa was a notoriously outspoken journalist during Ibrahim Babangida’s reign and was even rumored to be investigating possibilities that the general’s wife was involved in drug trafficking. Whether these suspicions were true or false, blowing up Giwa sent an unequivocal reminder to the media, scholars, and social analysts that even the notion of criticizing the military was off-limits in no uncertain terms. Sadly, Fela would also experience the ferocious wrath of a regime that didn’t take kindly to criticism, especially the type that exposed its filth.

The fearlessness and self-assertiveness that eventually defined Fela’s musical persona were reinforced by his decision to think and operate independently of prescribed norms that he believed were regressive. It was a trait that he felt was largely lacking among the people, and, as an artist, he was virtually isolated in his decision to brazenly challenge and defy repressive structures. Beyond music, he remained principled and stood by his personal beliefs, regardless of whose figurative ox was gored. This attitude is captured in Majemite Jaboro’s account of Fela’s disagreement with the Obasanjo military regime over Nigeria’s hosting of the

Second World Black and African Festival (FESTAC) in Lagos, then Nigeria's capital in 1977.

Fela said he agreed initially to take part in the committee overseeing FESTAC 77. He argued that the festival should not be a showcase for traditional dancing, drama and sculpture. Instead authentic books on African history, politics and religion should be made widely available for the masses to read and understand. This would be cheaper than the 144 million naira that was wasted on FESTAC 77. Nobody paid any heed to him and knowing he would be dropped from the committee he quit.³⁴

Fela was therefore a rare and courageous nonconformist and was undeterred in his denunciation of injustice, institutional fraud, and military rule, which he carried out until his passing in 1997. But "Zombie" does not represent this direct denunciation. Besides exemplifying the failure to think responsibly and judiciously, which is part of the thematic focus of "Zombie," the constant flawed conclusion that the song derides the Nigerian army resulted in grave consequences for Fela. Though he was already hated by the military because of his blatant criticism of its highhandedness, power abuse, and mismanagement of resources, he faced its merciless retaliation after "Zombie" went viral and gained international popularity. Until 1977, Fela's family, band members, and recording studio occupied Kalakuta Republic, an elaborate communal compound in Lagos. By February of that year, the compound, for reasons that are ambiguous but that can certainly not be justified, was attacked by hundreds of armed soldiers. During this attack, Fela, members of his family (including his elderly mother), and members of his band were severely assaulted and violated in every physical way imaginable. Kalakuta Republic was eventually burned to the ground and, to date, no one has been held responsible for this barbarity. Michael Veal provided a graphic account of the incident:

On the afternoon of February 18. . .over a thousand armed soldiers surrounded Kalakuta. After barricading the building. . .[they] set fire to the generator that electrified the fence, stormed the compound, and severely brutalized the occupants. Fela later alleged that he was dragged by his genitals from the house, severely beaten, and sexually mutilated

by the soldiers. . . . His mother—then seventy-eight years old—suffered a broken hip when she was thrown through a window, and his brother Beko was so severely beaten that he spent several months in a wheelchair. A number of the men reportedly had their testicles smashed by the soldiers, and the women were beaten, forced to strip, and carried naked through the streets on flatbed trucks to the army barracks, where they were reportedly raped and tortured. Some had their nipples smashed with stones, while others had broken bottles inserted into their vaginas. One female commune member reportedly died in the attack after suffering a fractured skull. Finally, the soldiers set fire to the entire compound, attacked firefighters who arrived to extinguish the blaze, and severely beat several press photographers who attempted to cover the melee. The Kalakuta Republic, including its recording studio, musical instruments, master tapes, and Beko's free health clinic, was completely gutted.³⁵

This gruesome attack on Fela, his family, and outfit remains a prime example of the dangers in drawing hasty conclusions and randomly going along with prevalent conceptions. To add the proverbial insult to injury, Majemite Jaboro explains how “. . .the Obasanjo regime instituted the Justice Anya probe panel on the Kalakuta crisis of February 18, 1977. The probe panel absolved the regime of wrongdoing and put the blame on ‘Unknown Soldiers.’”³⁶ Ignoring the possibility of repercussions, the public expressed their frustration, sarcasm, rage, and anxieties against Obasanjo's regime and the Anya findings, through media outlets such as the *Daily Times* and *Daily Express*.³⁷

Despite the massive emotional, material, and financial damage to Fela's career and family, he eventually bounced back, living up to his indomitable “Anikulapo” image. However, things would not be the same for the musical icon and legendary rebel. As Veal observed, “Although his potency as a political and cultural icon would grow even broader in many ways following the attack, he would never again enjoy the same financial affluence, physical health, or freedom to create.”³⁸

Audacious to the Very End

Two years after the assault on Kalakuta Republic, Fela released “Unknown Soldier,” a derisive and detailed reappraisal of the

incident, and further proof that he was not hesitant about citing the names of individuals, institutions, or governments in his songs. From the beginning, when he recalls the invasion of his commune by soldiers, he makes it clear that they are among the villains of the song:

Look oh, look oh
 (Left, right, left, right, left, right, left)
 One thousand soldiers dem dey come
 (Left, right, left, right, left, right, left)
 People dey wonder, dey wonder, dey wonder
 (Left, right, left, right, left, right, left) . . .
 Where these one thousand soldiers dem dey go?
 (Left, right, left, right, left, right, left)
 Look-o (Left, right, left, right, left, right, left)
 Na Fela house Kalakuta
 (Left, right, left, right, left, right, left)³⁹

As the song proceeds, Fela recounts the atrocities committed against his brother, mother, members of his band and the entire estate. He also cites “Mr. Justice Agwu Anya” and “Mr. Justice Dosunmu” as representatives of a crooked judicial system who were instrumental in exonerating the army by declaring that the violence against Kalakuta was committed by the “Unknown Soldier.”⁴⁰ Fela subsequently delineates “unknown” as a metaphor for absolving criminal behavior, whether they are perpetrated by government, the police, or civilians. It is outrageous, therefore, to conclude that “Zombie” is specifically about a military that is not mentioned in the song, when Fela demonstrates a consistent penchant for bluntly identifying the figures and bodies that his songs scrutinize and condemn.

Even in death, Fela refused to be a “zombie”; his spirit seemed to mobilize a spontaneous insurgence that taunted General Sani Abacha, one of Nigeria’s most ruthless dictators. Busby recalled:

When his life was cut short in 1997, after fifty-eight years lived to the extreme and beyond all predictable convention, countless individuals felt the loss. On the day of his funeral, the streets of Lagos were brought to a standstill, with more than a million people defying the Nigerian government ban on public gatherings that had been imposed

by the military dictator General Sani Abacha. One hundred and fifty thousand mourners are reputed to have queued in Tafawa Balewa Square, in the heart of Lagos, to pay their last respects as they filed past the glass coffin, which was then carried by hearse through the extraordinary throng, the cavalcade taking seven hours to cover a mere twenty kilometers to reach the neighborhood of Ikeja, where Fela was to be laid to rest.⁴¹

In the words of Soyinka, Fela's cousin and famed playwright:

Fela's funeral was thus an occasion that the people exploited to the full, pouring out in a way that defied the regime's ban on public gathering, making the Black President the mouth-piece of their repressed feelings, even in his lifeless form. Neither the police nor the military dared show their face on that day, and the few uniformed exceptions only came to pay tribute. Quite openly, with no attempt whatsoever at disguising their identities, they stopped by his bier and saluted the stilled scourge of corrupt power, mimic culture, and militarism. It was a much-needed act of solidarity for us.⁴²

Schoonmaker reminds us that, "Like all counter-culture leaders, Fela was demonized by the Nigerian elite and middle class as an insidious force, a perverted pied piper leading the youth of the country on a reckless journey to nowhere. Of course, the youth saw things differently; Fela was the ultimate rebel, a liberator who spoke the truth in a country beset with corruption and clinging to a colonial mindset."⁴³ Part of Fela's demonization was sought through the prevalent misrepresentation of his way of life and musical subject matter, with "Zombie," one of his greatest hits, being a prime victim of this distortion.

On the day that Kalakuta Republic was raided, the culpable soldiers were, ironically, acting in the capacity of the unthinking zombies whose idiocy Fela exposes in "Zombie." It was their unconscionable behavior—not the content of the song—that ultimately defined them as the song's subject. Their action not only confirmed Fela's depiction of the dangers in operating like brainless robots, but also highlighted the potentially vile and far-reaching consequences of misconstruing anything.

Conclusion

In an interview, Fela's first son, Femi Kuti, who is also a musician, maintained that if his father were alive today, he would possibly die of high blood pressure in reaction to Nigeria's deplorable economic and political state. He referred in particular to the 1999 elections, in which millions came out to vote ex-military dictator, Olusegun Obasanjo, into power—an example, he said, of Nigerians' shameless hypocrisy. Femi wondered how people who claimed to honor his father, and commended his courage to speak truth to power, could come out in large numbers to support an individual who embodied the political atrocities that he stood against and denounced.⁴⁴ Even worse, this was an individual whose excesses Fela exposed on several occasions and whose administration was responsible for the 1977 violent assault on Fela's family compound and musical outfit. Femi's observation is tantamount to accusing Nigerians of functioning like the figurative zombies that are featured in his father's most popular song. Contrary to common assertion, therefore, the "zombies" in Fela's song are not necessarily just members of the military; they can, in fact, be anyone, civilian or soldier.

Restricting Fela's metaphorical zombies to military figures implies that Fela had a problem with the military. This couldn't be further from the truth. As an avowed traditionalist, Fela understood the importance of and respected the role of armies within indigenous societies. His Yoruba society historically and proudly embraced a vibrant warrior culture that was vital in securing its borders. Fela admired indigenous military practices but despised the emergence of modern, oppressive, corrupt, and abusive military machineries, which he viewed as products of a deeply flawed colonial experience in Nigeria and across the African continent. For this reason, his call for the people to resist authoritarian rule was often an appeal that extended to all Africans, not just Nigerians.⁴⁵ Evidently, therefore, Fela's "Zombie" is not just about the Nigerian army, the military in general, or Nigeria. It is also about tyranny and the hazards of reckless conformity, none of which are sins of the Nigerian military alone.

Regrettably, a significant number of works on Fela make the same error of reducing "Zombie" to a satirical denunciation of the lifestyle of Nigeria's military junta. By restricting his work to a

thematic paradigm that fails to capture the scope of his ideological concerns and the creative boundaries that he was willing to push, this assumption has achieved the opposite of celebrating Fela's ingenuity. While "Zombie" is just one out of many songs written and produced by Fela, it reflects a common thread in his music, which was a decision to fearlessly expose and confront a range of oppressive and exploitative forces, the depravity of military dictatorships being one of them.

Because Fela and the Kuti family were outspoken critics of the abuse of power and mismanagement of resources, there is the possibility that Fela would have eventually faced a catastrophic form of victimization by military rulers. Indeed, he had been arrested, brutally assaulted and jailed many times by the police, facing charges ranging from murder to smuggling foreign exchange. But the constant emphasis on "Zombie" as a mockery of regimented military habits certainly made Fela an even greater enemy than he already was. A more balanced and comprehensive analysis might have curtailed the suddenness and ferocity of the army's retaliation. This is up for debate and speculation. In the end, the repeated playing of the "Zombie" song in homes and nightclubs (not radio stations that were also fearful of retaliation) was perceived by the military rulers at the time as an open taunt that dared them to take action, which they eventually did decisively.

Notes

¹ Henceforth, the first name, Fela, will be used in accordance with the name by which the singer was popularly known.

² Margaret Busby, "Introduction," in *Fela: This Bitch of a Life*, by Carlos Moore (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 11.

³ Trevor Schoonmaker, ed. "Introduction," in *Fela: From West Africa to West Broadway* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

⁴ Estimated to be 20,000 members strong.

⁵ UNESCO, *African Women, Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), 59.

⁶ UNESCO, *African Women, Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance*, 47-50.

⁷ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 68.

- ⁸ Margaret Busby, "Introduction," in *Fela: This Bitch of a Life*, 11.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Trevor Schoonmaker, ed. "Introduction," in *Fela: From West Africa to West Broadway*, 2.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Trevor Schoonmaker, ed. "Introduction," in *Fela: From West Africa to West Broadway*, 2.
- ¹³ Margaret Busby, "Introduction," in *Fela: This Bitch of a Life*, 11.
- ¹⁴ Margaret Busby, "Introduction," in *Fela: This Bitch of a Life*, 9.
- ¹⁵ Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *The Drama Review* 12, no. 4 (1968): 29.
- ¹⁶ dele jegede, "Dis Fela Sef!—Fela in Lagos," in *Fela: From West Africa to West Broadway*, edited by Trevor Schoonmaker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 93.
- ¹⁷ Joyce Marie Bell, *The Black Power Movement and American Social Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 3.
- ¹⁸ These websites include <https://felakuti.com>, <https://www.metrolyrics.com/fela-kuti-lyrics.html> and <https://genius.com/artists/Fela-kuti>.
- ¹⁹ Michael E. Veal, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 154.
- ²⁰ A variation of Standard English that allows speakers of different languages to communicate, and that borrows from local inflections and linguistic patterns. Related forms are spoken in Ghana, Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Equatorial Guinea.
- ²¹ In Pidgin English, to "jam" means to have an accident. The absence of a brake in a car typically causes an accident. But Fela ironically suggests that the "zombie," even without brakes, is incapable of having an accident. This underlines his stupidity and digression from normalcy and basic logic. Or, when he has an accident he is too dim-witted to realize it. Then again, his susceptibility to control may be such that even his "accidents" have to be orchestrated.
- ²² Fela Kuti and Africa 70, "Zombie," *Zombie*, Coconut Records, 1976, phonodisc.
- ²³ John Collins, *Fela: Kalakuta Notes* (Middletown, CT. 06459: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), 2.
- ²⁴ Pride Press, "Interview with the legend Fela Anikulapo Kuti, about music, politics and freedom," YouTube Video, Nov. 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtLJfKDN4x8>.
- ²⁵ CGTN Africa, "Faces of Africa - Fela Kuti: The Father of Afrobeat, Part 1," YouTube Video, Nov. 20, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS_Yd_iMYWo.
- ²⁶ Fela Kuti and Africa 70, "Mr. Follow Follow," *Zombie*, Coconut Records, 1976, phonodisc.
- ²⁷ Fela Kuti and Africa 70, "Sorrow Tears and Blood," *Sorrow Tears and Blood*, Knitting Factory Records, 1977, phonodisc.

- ²⁸ “Miliki” and “Gbaladun” refer to the excessive wealth enjoyed by these religious personages.
- ²⁹ Fela Kuti and Africa 70, “Shuffering & Shmilng,” Knitting Factory Records, 1978, phonodisc.
- ³⁰ Tejumola Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!: Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 79.
- ³¹ Jawi Oladipo-Ola, *Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: the Primary Man of an African Personality: the Narrative & Screenplay* (Osogbo: Frontpage Media, 2011), 12.
- ³² Fela Kuti and Egypt 80, “Army Arrangement,” *Army Arrangement*, Celluloid Records, 1985, cassette tape.
- ³³ International Telephone & Telegraph.
- ³⁴ Majemite Jaboro, *The Ikoyi Prison Narratives: The Spiritualism and Political Philosophy of Fela Kuti* (Lulu.com, 2012), 45-46.
- ³⁵ Michael E. Veal, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon*, 155.
- ³⁶ Majemite Jaboro, *The Ikoyi Prison Narratives: The Spiritualism and Political Philosophy of Fela Kuti*, 53.
- ³⁷ Michael E. Veal, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon*, 157.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Fela Kuti, “Unknown Soldier,” *Unknown Soldier*, Skylark Records, 1979, phonodisc.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Margaret Busby, “Introduction,” in *Fela: This Bitch of a Life*, 9.
- ⁴² Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2006), 29-30.
- ⁴³ Trevor Schoonmaker, ed. “Introduction,” in *Fela: From West Africa to West Broadway*, 2-3.
- ⁴⁴ CGTN, “Faces of Africa - Fela Kuti: The Father of Afrobeat, Part 2,” YouTube Video, Nov. 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ts87oRqdfQ>.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.

