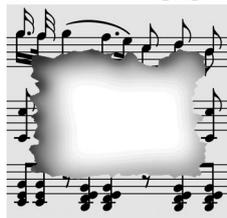


J E A N - C H R I S T O P H E S E R V A N T

# "Which way Nigeria?"

MUSIC UNDER THREAT:  
A QUESTION OF MONEY, MORALITY,  
SELF-CENSORSHIP AND THE SHARIA

**FREEMUSE**



**THE WORLD FORUM ON  
MUSIC & CENSORSHIP**

“WHICH WAY NIGERIA?”

Music under Threat:  
A Question of Money, Morality,  
Self-Censorship and the Sharia

by JEAN-CHRISTOPHE SERVANT

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# PREFACE

*As the saying goes: He who pays the piper dictates the tune.*

Today many Nigerian musicians would agree to this saying as they battle for economic and professional survival. In addition, NTBB (Not To Be Broadcasted), payola and Islamic *Sharia* Laws strongly affect the freedom of musical expression in Nigeria.

Nigeria was once the musical heartbeat of Africa. The renowned FESTAC (*Festival of African Culture*) took place there in 1977, and thousands of musicians from different parts of the world met to enjoy music and initiate cross-frontier co-operation. Nigeria still is seen as a vivid and strong power centre of African popular music with its great artists: the late Fela Kuti, Femi Kuti, King Sunny Ade, Lagbaja! and Tony Allen, to mention a few. The legendary Fela Kuti was imprisoned several times as he was a strong and influential person in politics and music who took advantage of his position to criticize those in power (the government) through his powerful music.

This fourth Freemuse report "WHICH WAY NIGERIA?" - *Music under Threat: A Question of Money, Morality, Self-Censorship and the Sharia*, examines the different aspects and reasons that prevent musicians from expressing themselves freely through performing, recording, broadcasting and making a decent living out of their profession. As politics, money and religion go hand in hand, we get to understand the complexity of the problem.

In the north of the country strict interpretations of Islamic *Sharia* Laws recently sentenced three women to death for adultery. This was widely reported in international media during the last year, as were the tragic killings in connection with the Miss World contest.

Music and musical performances have been strongly affected, restricted and censored by Islamic groups and local governments. In June 2002, the local government of Jigawa State banned public drumming and singing, and in Kano

State a board of censorship was established, not only to censor music but, rather surprisingly, to control music and protect local musicians in danger.

As Femi Kuti states in the report *“A band like mine can't play in the North. The dancers would be stoned to death. I would be prosecuted.”*

Music censorship has been implemented by states, religions, educational systems, families, retailers and lobbying groups – and in most cases they violate international conventions of human rights. Nevertheless very little research and documentation on music censorship has been done.

Why is it important to document and discuss music censorship in a world where wars, hunger, and the negative effects of economic globalization seem so much more relevant? For thousands of years, music has been one of the most essential cultural expressions. Music has been an important part of all cultures in daily life, at celebrations, at ceremonies, for pleasure and serves as food for the soul.

In order to address the ever-present phenomenon of music censorship and to investigate the lack of interest in these violations of freedom of expression, the 1st World Conference on Music Censorship was organized in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1998. As a result of the conference Freemuse (**F**reedom of **M**usical **E**xpression) – *the World Forum on Music and Censorship* was established with a secretariat in 2000. Freemuse receives core funding from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Agency.

This report, *“WHICH WAY NIGERIA?” - Music under Threat: A Question of Money, Morality, Self-Censorship and the Sharia*, is written by Jean-Christophe Servant, who first visited Nigeria in 1998, just over a year after Fela Kuti died. Since then he has been back five times. Freemuse sent Jean-Christophe to Nigeria in May 2002 to investigate the cases and the underlying background for censorship, and to describe the present situation in the country.

The report is published in both English and French.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Daniel Brown for his examination of the report and his translation from the French, and to Mr. Adebayou Olukoshi for his examination of this report.

Marie Korpe

*Executive Director of Freemuse*

*Copenhagen February 17, 2003*

## ABSTRACT

"WHICH WAY NIGERIA?" - *Music under Threat: A Question of Money, Morality, Self-Censorship and the Sharia* is based on an investigation done between May and June 2002 in Nigeria, from Lagos to Kano. The focus is on the relatively recent story of Nigerian music and its intimate links with the country's past. The highs and lows of its musical industry - from the expansion it enjoyed during the golden days of the petrol boom to the downward spiral it has suffered since the end of the Seventies - are a perfect metaphor for the economic abyss the world's sixth petroleum power has fallen into. The constraints on Nigerian musicians and their freedom of expression are emblematic of new fault lines that threaten the future of a country once considered Africa's engine room. What used to be Africa's musical leader now resembles a rudderless tanker caught in a sea storm.

New churches and religious currents have capitalized on political and economic disillusionment, and plunged into fundamentalist interpretations verging on irrationality that now threaten individual freedom. Meanwhile, the freedom of enterprise is promoted by a degree of ultra liberalism and deregulation rarely seen elsewhere in Africa...while over 50% of the population can only dream of the freedom to eat. As one of my interlocutors explained: "*Democracy is a word but we can't eat words*".

This report deals with direct acts of censorship, which have affected such musicians as Femi Kuti (for his song "Bang, Bang, Bang") as well as Hausa artists Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle and Haladji Waba Yarim Asharalle (for disrespect of the *Sharia* Law). Besides these acts, caused by a mix of political and religious reasons, "WHICH WAY NIGERIA?" - *Music under Threat: A Question of Money, Morality, Self-Censorship and the Sharia* reveals the persistence of self-censorship throughout the music industry and the role of payola and other means of economic pressure, which indirectly affect freedom of expression.

For this investigation interviews have been conducted with different Nigerian artists and many figures of the music industry (labels, programmers, president of musician syndicate), civil society (journalists, human rights lawyers), as well as members of a parastatal organization supposed to restrain artistic expression: The Kano Censorship Board.

In these troubled circumstances that, unfortunately, show no signs of letting up, conditions of investigation were often extremely difficult. Many of the interviews took place in no-go zones, and encounters with Hausa musicians in the North were often furtive. The trip to Kano was often broken up by aggressive checkpoints, as were the night-time ventures into Lagos. But these incidents pale into insignificance compared to the daily trials and tribulations endured by most of those met in the course of my journey and I can only express gratitude for the frankness with which they answered questions. Indeed, their words underline that this country, so often described as being on the edge of the precipice, can speak as one when it comes to discussing essential freedoms, freedoms like that of playing music

*“WHICH WAY NIGERIA?” - Music under Threat: A Question of Money, Morality, Self-Censorship and the Sharia* reports, unfortunately, that still too many Nigerian musicians are frustrated, harassed or even endangered for conducting their art: playing music and singing songs. And that the fate of the Nigerian musicians is only a tragic echo of the lives of the Nigerian people who are still waiting for the true benefits of the new democracy in Nigeria since 1999.

#### About the author:

French freelance journalist, Jean-Christophe Servant covered musical issues for ten years before he turned to international politics. For the last four years, he has been making reportages on Anglophone Africa (Nigeria and South Africa mainly) for such magazines and papers as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Liberation*, *Nord Sud Export*, and *Worldpress.org*.



SOURCES: www.worldpress.org, US Dept. of Foreign Affairs, Nord-Sud Export

**AREA:** 923,768 sq km (356,379 sq miles)

**POPULATION:** 126,635,626 (2001 estimate)

**STATUS:** Federal republic of 36 states plus a Capital Territory (Abuja)

**CAPITAL:** Abuja

**MAIN CITIES:** Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Onitsha

**HEAD OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT:** President Olusegun Obasanjo. Elected 1999. Bicameral legislature

**MAIN INDUSTRIES:**

Oil (88% of the GDP derived from the exported crude oil), agriculture (65% of the workforce textile, 36% of GDP), consumer goods, services

**MONEY:** Naira (135 nairas for one US\$, mid 2002)

**RECORDED GDP/CAPITA:** 250 US\$, 70 % of the population live under poverty line

**ETHNIC COMPOSITION:** Nigeria is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups; the following are the most populous and politically influential: Hausa and Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Ibo 18%, Ijaw 10%

**RELIGIONS:** Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, indigenous beliefs 10%

**ADULT LITERACY:** Total population: 57.1%, male: 67.3%, female: 47.3% (1995 est.)

**INFANT MORTALITY:** 73.34 deaths per 1,000 live births (2001 est.)

**LIFE EXPECTANCY:** 51.07 years (2001 est.)



# INTRODUCTION

When FREEMUSE asked me to investigate the cases of censorship against Nigerian musicians I had my moment of doubt. It is not possible to be peremptory, formal and, especially, exhaustive, once you plunge into a country where the destinies of populations, marked by the Islamic, Christian and animist cultures, clash in relationships that are much more complex and less bipolar than the international media would have us think.

This is the fourth investigation financed by FREEMUSE to look into countries affected by music censorship, and it has no claim on being definitive. In the end, it is merely a series of polaroid shots illustrating the status and hardships endured by Nigerian musicians since this nation renewed its experiment with democracy in May 1999, following over sixteen years of military dictatorship. It also seeks to recall how an ebullient musical industry that was the pride of West Africa and allowed us to discover the likes of Fela Kuti and King Sunny Ade, has become a shadow of itself. As you read these lines, musicians are undoubtedly being subjected to further cases of harassment, economic ostracization and self-censorship. As the April 2003 Presidential elections approach, it is likely to worsen both for political reasons and because of the increasing instrumentalisation of religious violence.

A journalistic inquiry in Nigeria remains a major challenge once you step out of the Abuja palaces. For reasons of logistics and security, and because of the cultural vastness of this country (that contains thousands of artists and groups, both modern and traditional), I focused my inquiry on two economic and cultural poles: Lagos, a gigantic and fascinating Yoruba cauldron in the Gulf of Guinea, the biggest metropolis in sub-Saharan Africa with its population of ten million. And Kano: 1,200 kilometres to the north of Lagos, five million people, and the economic bastion of Hausa/Fulani Muslims. Only the most flagrant cases of official censorship committed since the end of the military regime were considered: for example, the ongoing ban by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation of "Bang, Bang, Bang", written and performed by Femi Kuti, the

oldest son of the late singer-composer Fela Kuti which indicates that the process of "demilitarisation" has yet to reach certain Nigerian institutions.

I also looked into human rights abuses resulting from a skewed interpretation of the *Sharia* Law, which has targeted several Hausa musicians. *Sharia* Islamic Law is practised in 12 states in northern Nigeria. The cases of the musician Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle, arrested for practising his art in Katsina State, and those of Sani Dan Indo and Haladji Waba Yarim Asharalle, harassed in Kano State for the same reason, testify to the frightening paradox that preys on this northern region: in the name of Islam certain Muslims who often are the strongest supporters of Islamic Law have been the first victims of this distortion of the *Sharia* Law. As a result, the Nigerian federation is once again threatened by the spectre of secession. As we will see, *shariamania* has gripped the North, and it is replete with paradoxes - no more so than in the case of the Censorship Board in Kano that protects musicians targeted by the *hisbas* - the parties of God.

On top of these more "spectacular" issues, which often fall prey to ethnocentric paradigms, I have studied more pernicious and troubling aspects, which are being battled out in the sidelines. There are, for example, the prejudiced policies of record labels, of private and public radios, of daily and weekly press, as they continue to muzzle the voices of certain Nigerian artists. A large portion of the report is also focused on the way the ultra liberal policies that have accompanied the *International Monetary Fund's* (IMF) structural adjustment programme ever since the Eighties affect the creativity and the very psyche of Nigeria's artists. It helps to imprison the protagonists of the music business who, saddled by an omnipresent corruption and precarity, seek profit at any price, even if they have to "sell their souls", in the words of one of my informants.

Nigeria was once considered the locomotive for Africa as much for its fossil-based resources like petrol, as its cultural wealth. Today, it figures among the world's twenty poorest nations. This fertile ground for socio-economic despair has seen the worrying rise of new neo-Pentecostal and Evangelical sects and, more generally, a notion of *African morale* that unfortunately seems to promote self-censorship in the fields of sex and religion. The conversion by a number of artists to religious careers symbolizes this tendency embodied by Reverend Sonny Okosun, whose hit "Which Way Nigeria?" serves as the title of this report. In conclusion, I will look at the delicate question of *praising* and *money spraying*. These issues reflect in a nutshell the clash between modern and traditional ways of living that continues to haunt Nigeria and, more generally, developing nations. At present, insecurity and poverty are forcing a growing number of musicians to

leave their personal convictions behind them and sing the praises of their often unsavoury hosts. The Nigerian public deserts them for fear of criminal violence that haunts the country's major economic cities and paralyses all forms of social life after 10 pm.

For this report, I crosschecked the points of view of civil society, from Muslim and Christian communities as well as the opinions of the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa (to name but the three major ethno-linguistic groups of this nation). Apart from the established artists of Nigerian music, past and present - Fatai Rolling Dollar, Femi Kuti, Daddy Showkey, Lagbaja!, Charlie Boy and Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle - I focused on the up-and-coming stars, such as rapper Queen Chance or the Afrobeat singer Amala. I also interviewed journalists, music union presidents, censors, diplomats, radio programmers and, of course, the people of the street. The report was also enriched by extracts from one of Africa's most dynamic print media, as well as programmes on the mushrooming number of private TV stations in the country.

One thing is for sure in today's Nigeria: since President Olusegun Obasanjo was voted into office in May 1999, it has become easier for all of our interlocutors to speak freely, even about covered-up subjects like the dark days of the military dictatorships under Babangida and Abacha. Western diplomats insist that President Obasanjo has distributed a sort of blank check on free speech, reflected in his policies of *realpolitik*s and good governance.

But this study also testifies to the unfortunate fact that the democracy promoted by President Obasanjo remains, for many, a dead letter. With their typical black humour, many Nigerian citizens have dubbed it *democracy*. This reality confirms the belief that the political and legislative institutions are still hijacked by an oligarchy that clings to a disastrous vision of the economy and maximises the profit generated by the incredible underground mineral wealth of this country.

The aim of this report is also to mobilize our civil society in support of this country, not just for the future of Nigeria's musical industry, but for its entire well-being. It is not just for simple music lovers. It hopes to inspire action, reflection and involvement for all those who love the African continent, at a moment when its inhabitants have decided to take their future into their own hands with initiatives such as the NEPAD (*New Partnership for Africa's Development*), which encourages the investment of the private sector and projects by civil society.

If there is one African nation where the highs and lows of its music reflect its destiny it is unquestionably the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I believe that by helping the actors of Nigerian music overcome the challenges they face, by making the sounds of the new generation reach the ears of the world, we can participate in the renaissance of this fascinating nation. Just before the most important elections Nigeria has ever had, I hope that no one will now say he/she never knew what was at stake.

Obviously, I cannot conclude without returning, once more, to Fela. Like many music lovers of my generation I was only able to enjoy the concerts that ended the career of the man dubbed *Black President*. He had said that music was the weapon of the future. More than ever, we must support these Nigerian soldiers of peace. Their words are more than ever under threat, and unfortunately worse might still come. As the rappers of the Remedies put it: *Peace Nigeria!*

I wish above all to salute my companion Mbalia and her son Jerome Tidiane. In Lagos, dedications to Chokoto and David Hivet. In Kano, respect to Jean Michel Rousset and Raymond. And for Nigeria, peace to Thomas Dorn and Patrice Monfort.

Jean-Christophe Servant

*Paris, January 2003*

# 1. The years of *democracy*: 1999-2002

*"They have the money, they have oil, they have natural resources. So what is the bloody problem with this country?"*

A foreign diplomat, Abuja, June 2002

Three years after the election of the Yoruba citizen Olusegun Obasanjo to the presidency, Nigerians are referring to his "democratic" tenure as *democracy*. The head of Africa's most populous state still enjoys the support of the international community and was able to persuade the Breton Woods institutions to return to Nigeria; yet the situation at home remains delicate. After years of pillaging by the previous military regimes, Nigeria's economy has not recovered despite a vast liberalization process in the public sector and a promising conjecture in the petrol industry. The positive measures taken by the government (such as the 13% increase in the petrol revenues redistributed to the producer states of the Niger Delta; or the partial recovery of funds stolen by the regime of the late dictator Sani Abacha) have yet to satisfy a pauperised population (70% of whom live under the poverty line established by the United Nations), and a middle class that continues to be thrown into turmoil by the structural adjustment program started in 1986 by the Ibrahim Babangida regime.

With the return to democracy of a country that, according to the NGO *Transparency International*, remains one of the most corrupt in the world, Nigeria has also plunged openly into communal violence that had been previously repressed with severity by the military. Ironically, it is the former leaders and strongmen of the military regimes that have fanned the conflicts between desperate sectors of the population who are confronted by the inexorable rise in prices of all basic commodities. The inter-ethnic and religious riots have provoked the death of around 10,000 Nigerians in the last three years, in cities as far apart as Lagos and Kano, Jos and Kaduna. Some states have descended into total lawlessness. The instauration of *Sharia* Law in twelve northern states - despite being declared anti-constitutional by the federal government in March 2002 - has heightened tensions between the local Hausa-Fulani (Muslim) population and the Ibo (mainly Christian) and the Yoruba (Christian/Muslim) communities which emigrated from the South. The rise in power of ethnic-based militias

(*Odudua People's Congress* (Yoruba), *Bakassi Boys* (Ibo), *Arewa People's Congress* (Hausa)) and the radicalization of the youth belonging to the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta (Ogoni, Ijaw, Itsekiri), have contributed to this phenomenon. The governors of Anambra and Abia States have not hesitated to hire the *Bakassi Boys* to stand in for the police. To counter this violence and other threats that loom over the country's unity, the Obasanjo administration has often resorted to brute force instead of the course of law. Despite the modernization process and the forced retirement of a number of officers from the North, the Army has been involved in two massacres of civilians and the death of several hundred people: Odi in 2000 and Benue-Taraba in the fall of 2001. The Nigeria Federal Police Force has been regularly accused of arbitrary arrests and summary executions of suspected armed insurrectionists. As the feeling of insecurity rose sharply, the police went on strike in the spring of 2002, a first in Nigeria's history. Several Nigerian cities (Kano, Lagos, Jos...) were put under curfew at regular intervals and checkpoints were multiplied. In Lagos some 900 "bandits" were killed in 2002 in the course of operation "Fire for Fire" instigated by the Rapid Response Team and the new state police chief.

Meanwhile, the *Human Rights Violations Investigation Panel*, presided over by Chukwudifu Oputa and commissioned in 1999 by the State to inquire into the crimes and human rights violations committed since 1966 by the successive military dictatorships (some 150 cases were processed), was unable to convene the former strongmen of the country: Generals Ibrahim Babangida, Abdulsalami Abubakar and Mohammed Buhari. The report, signed in June 2002, is currently being blocked by the judiciary in an attempt to prevent its publication.

With the general elections (both Presidential, legislative, and State Assemblies) on April 19, 2003, Nigeria awaits with apprehension this electoral period. Three parties currently share power: the governing PDP (*People's Democratic Party*), the opposition Yoruba AD (*Alliance for Democracy*), and the northern ANPP (*All Nigerian People's Party*).

The campaign has already been marked by violence (the murder of Bola Ige, the Federal Minister for Justice in December 2001, and a score of deaths in May 2002 in Jos, Plateau State, during a local bureau meeting of the PDP), and observers are warning of a high risk period with fallout effects on the economic recovery and the relative freedom Nigerians have known throughout the roller-coaster era since May 29, 1999.

## 2. General background on Nigeria

### 2.1 RELIGION

*"People have lost confidence in the process of democracy today. Therefore, having lost confidence in their leaders, they turn to their gods hoping that their churches, their mosques can solve their problems. And you know it is spreading like wildfire. Finally, an ordinary person will prefer the exhortation of a pastor to that of a politician."*

Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, human rights lawyer

The 1999 constitution guarantees the freedom of religion, as well as the right to change religious affiliation. But Proselytism is now heavily restricted in the states where *Sharia* Law is applied. Nigeria has the highest number of Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa; yet, it is the country of all the gods, the pantheon of voodoo beliefs and syncretism, and an important centre for Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The Muslim currents that cross it go from Saudian Wahhabism to Senegalese Tijanism. The Hausa-Fulani North is mainly Sunni, and is marked by the nineteenth century Jihad by Ousman Dan Fodio that ended with the arrival of the British colonial troops. In the South, the multitude of *born again* congregations have spiralled upward as the economic crisis of the Eighties bit. From Lagos to Onitsha, temples have, by and large, taken over the cinemas and clubs. Despite its insistence on the secular nature of the Nigerian federation, the federal capital Abuja has increasingly been forced to take the cultural pressure exercised by religion into account. This, as we shall see later, is affecting the freedom of musical expression.

Having proclaimed the *Sharia* Law on October 27, 1999, the Governor of Zamfara State, Ahmed Sani Yerima, instigated it in January 2000. Since then, it has been established in 12 states in northern Nigeria. Yet Islamic Law proposes nothing new. It had already been the object of a previous power struggle between the federal Government and the Hausa-Fulani states. In the name of *Indirect Rule*, which promoted the use of local chiefdoms instead of the massive arrival of expatriates, the British colonialists tolerated it in the North. Since independence, these chiefdoms have been ruling the population's daily realities (divorce,

marriage...) de facto, without affecting the lives of the *non-indigenous* people living in reserved enclaves such as Kano's Sabon Gari neighbourhood. It is the transition from civil to penal law, and the first condemnations that ensued, which started to affect inter-communal relations as well as the fragile Nigerian mosaic. While President Obasanjo himself converted to Rosicrucianism, he criticized a "political *Sharia*" that was being orchestrated behind the scenes by the former strongmen from the North seeking to preserve their domains. The institution of Islamic Law provoked a first round of inter-communal conflict between northerners and southerners at the end of 1999. In Kaduna over 3000 people died in February 2000 following a Christian demonstration against the institution of the *Sharia* Law. Since then, Islamic Law in Nigeria has been one of the main catalysts to inter-communal tensions in cities like Jos (around 3000 dead in September 2001) and the Idi Araba neighbourhood in Lagos (over 100 dead in February 2002). In the southern regions, dominated by the Yoruba and Ibo, the rapid increase in Pentecostal churches and fundamentalist pastors, who exploit the same socio-economic despair of the population, has only reinforced the tense report with the North. Yet it would be wrong to only explain the recent crises in the giant nation through the religious prism that is so in vogue since September 11, 2001, and the stated war between the forces of "Good and Evil". Despite governing the daily lives of the Nigerian population and commercially competing with each other, the churches and mosques are only instruments of traditional and political leaders. The Obasanjo administration has more and more difficulty guaranteeing the secular nature of the State despite declaring the *Sharia* anti-constitutional. It is all the more hesitant in tackling the religious issues as the religious institutions are taking advantage of the government's new and vast program of privatisation - which is beginning with the primary and secondary schools' education systems.

Another emblematic example of the worrying confessionalization of Nigeria's daily life is the large place commandeered by religious bodies on public and private television channels. Yet Islam and Christianity are not the only religions that have grown out of the soul-searching of the Nigerian people. Sorcery and pagan beliefs have also swelled up in recent years, fanned by the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia of the early Nineties, where ECOMOG (*the Monitoring Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS)) forces, manned essentially by Nigerian troops, witnessed a number of ritual crimes that mixed animism and black magic. The national print press regularly devotes column space to ritual crimes that fatten its sales figures. Ethnic militia such as the OPC (*Oodua People's Congress*) that harbours the name of Oduduwa, one of

the original gods in the Yoruba pantheon, exploits initiation ceremonies and *grigis* (charms) to mobilize and catalyse activities by their followers.

## 2.2 POLITICS

*"Once they go to Abuja, they don't even know what is happening in the rest of country. Those people up there, they don't realise what we are going through down here. They don't know our problems. They are only looking for re-election."*

Charlie Boy Oputa, singer, TV producer

The Nigerian federation relies on a complex political system that mixes respect for traditional chieftaincy and clientalism. From local government right up to the highest circles of federal power the political world continues to exercise coercion, corruption, unhealthy alliances, even assassination to keep their hands on what they here call the "national cake". The investiture of a Yoruba head of state on May 29, 1999, which allowed Nigeria to officially end a long reign of Hausa-Fulani oligarchy, only encouraged regional demands and fanned ethnic dreams and grudges. The North (that retains control of the vice-presidency and the spokesperson for Parliament) and the Ibo Southwest thus feel marginalized by the policies of the Obasanjo government. But the Yorubas also have their share of resentment. To this day they are traumatized by the cancellation of the elections on June 12, 1993 and the death of the controversial harbinger, Moshood Abiola, a millionaire who died behind bars. The Southwest believes that the present government is still supporting, albeit implicitly, the North, and that it has been dragging its feet in bringing to justice the former dictators. In the context where economic prerogatives gain the upper hand on ethnic or religious considerations, the *People's Democratic Party* (PDP, which rules in 20 states) thus benefited from the tacit support of a part of the northern oligarchy - beginning with that of former dictator Ibrahim Babaginda who financed the campaign of candidate Obasanjo - rather than the Yoruba electorate. The latter disavowed the head of state even in his native bastion Abeokuta and voted for the *Alliance for Democracy*, AD, which controls the governship of six southwestern states. Nigeria's third party is the *All Nigeria People's Party* (ANPP, which holds 10 states). It is closer to the Hausa-Fulani sympathies to such an extent that one of its nicknames is Abacha's People Party.

Tensions have risen a notch in the run-up to the primaries and the national conventions (destined to elect new political bureaus for each party), as well as in the preparations for the postponed August 2002 (local elections) and the spring 2003 votes. These are expressed both inside the parties (dissidents, vendettas that sometimes degenerate into bloodbaths between governors and their aides), and between them. The December 2001 assassination of the federal Justice Minister Bola Ige has yet to be elucidated, and could be the result of a struggle of interests between several high-level local representatives of the AD party in the Osun State.

In summary, it is not with just a communal or religious paradigm that one can explain the bitterness and violence of Nigeria's political life. For this reason, it remains difficult to forecast the outcome of April's presidential elections. Even if, at the time of writing, Olusegun Obasanjo is still enjoying the support of western chancelleries - which remain convinced that a second mandate would allow the country to be more stable and commit itself to major reforms - the role that several former dictators continue to play in Nigeria's political life and the debate over a national conference that is forever postponed, are ill omens for the months to come.

### 2.3 JUSTICE

*"Effectively, the Bakassi Boys have taken over the functions of law enforcement agencies in these states, yet they are completely unaccountable."*

Carina Tertsakian, Nigeria researcher at Human Rights Watch

Nigeria's 1999 constitution guarantees it freedom of justice. Nonetheless, in practice, the application of justice remains subject to pressures from the legislative and executive branches. Furthermore, it is influenced by the political world, be it at federal or state levels. Corruption, slow procedures, undermanning and the disastrous state of most tribunals (95% of which use typewriters that are older than state independence) all complicate the application of the law. According to a general inspector of prisons, 75% of the 45,000 detained Nigerians (most of whom have not had any charges pressed against them) await their trial. Nigerian justice relies on a system of federal and state trial courts, state appeal courts, a Federal Court of Appeal and a Federal Supreme Court. Each state, plus the capital Abuja, has an Islamic and a customary court of appeal.

Paradoxically, the return of Nigeria into the circle of democratic African states has been accompanied by a worrying rise in ethnic militia groups. The development

of these *vigilante* movements is the result of socio-economic tensions (insecurity, police corruption or incompetence, and a slow justice system) and political stakes (increasing regional demands, power struggles). Two main groups have been fingered by international human rights organizations: the OPC (*Oodua People's Congress*) and the Bakassi Boys. (Later on, we will be discussing the case of the *hisbas*, a vigilante group which supervises the implementation of the *Sharia* and the way they affect the social life of the major cities of the North.)

The OPC is a Yoruba group that is mainly active in the Southwest. It is an extremist organization founded in the aftermath of the cancellation of the presidential elections of June 12, 1993, supervised by the Abacha regime. At the time, OPC was one of a number of democratic organizations gravitating around the *National Democratic Coalition*, NADECO, a Pan-Yoruba collective that was demanding a return to democracy, the end of the state of emergency, and the recognition of the electoral result of June 12, i.e. the victory of Yoruba millionaire Moshood Abiola. With the election of Olusegun Obasanjo, the OPC split into two tendencies. One is led by Frederick Fasheun and is relatively sympathetic to Obasanjo. The other, led by Ganiyu Adams is more radical. In contrast to the polite and reconciliatory speeches of the former, the latter exploits a populist phraseology mixing Yoruba mysticism and repressive ideology that is fanned by the insecurity reigning in major Yoruba cities, as well as the corruption and negligence of the police. The rough tactics used by the OPC, whose recruits are mainly *area boys* from the Lagos lumpen proletariat, are supported by the dwellers of the popular quarters in Africa's biggest city. But these operations dubbed *jungle justice* and *necklacing* rapidly degenerate into communal reprisals against the Hausa population that is considered the main cause of the insecurity that envelopes Lagos. In July 1999, in Shagamu, some 50 kilometres from Lagos, a gang fight between the OPC and Hausa youth (around fifty deaths) provoked the first major inter-communal crisis in post-dictator Nigeria. Since then, the OPC has regularly inflamed the popular neighbourhoods and markets of the metropolis where the country's main ethnic groups coexist: violent skirmishes in Mishina Ketu, Mile 2, Ajegunle and, most recently, Ide Araba, have left several hundred people dead. These have provoked retaliatory attacks by Hausas against Yorubas in Kano, and by Ibos against Hausas in Aba. Towards the end of 1999, the federal police embarked on a policy against OPC members called 'Shoot on Sight'. Since then, it has arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned a great number of people in order to dismantle the militia. Ganiyu Adams was himself imprisoned for a few weeks in the fall of 2000, before finally being conditionally discharged. But, up to now, the OPC continues to be active in most Yoruba-dominated cities.

The Ibo version of the OPC, the Bakassi Boys, was born in 1999 in Aba, a southeast city in the state of Abia. It was initially instigated by the Ibo merchants of West Africa's biggest market in order to protect their convoys from attacks by thieves. But, quickly, the Bakassi started meting out their own justice (machete murders, decapitations, torture and arbitrary arrests) and penetrated Anambra State where the Ibo trade also thrives. In August 2000, the violence spiralled out of control: the Anambra State Governor (Mbadinuju) recognized the militia and promulgated a decree transforming the Bakassi Boys into the *Anambra State Vigilante Service* (AVS). Since then, according to on-the-spot reports by *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International*, the AVS has executed over 1,000 people and intimidated or eliminated political opponents to the Anambra Governor. Worryingly, their popularity is on the rise in the southeast of the country, and there is a growing collusion with the Movement for *the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra* (MASSOB, a group that calls for the independence of Biafra and is regularly targeted by the police). Now, the Bakassi have been lauded by the comic singer Julius Agwu, and have starred in several local home video productions, which glorify their acts. They are sold throughout the south of the country.

## 2.4 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

*"Freedom is by far different. Right now, there is no blatant censorship. But there are still some forms, not so apparent as they were under the militaries, but still existing."*

Lagbaja!, singer

As far as freedom of expression is concerned, the 1999 constitutional amendments are unambiguous. After years of abuse under the military regimes, freedom of press is now guaranteed by Article 22: *"The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free"*. Further on, Article 38 of the constitution notes that *"every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief"*, while Article 39 confirms that *"every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and receive and impart ideas and information without interference."*

The Nigerian press is one of the most dynamic and modern on the African continent with national dailies like *The Guardian*, *This Day* and *Punch*, and weekly newsmagazines like *Newswatch* and *Tell*, to name but the best known.

They have not hesitated to criticize the Obasanjo government and have been left relatively untouched by restrictions. Decree N° 60, promulgated in the dying hours of the last military regime (May 26, 1999) limits the freedom of press by instituting the *Nigerian Press Council*, which is financed by the government and attributes the press cards or, conversely, suspends journalists. But, so far, it has instigated no coercive actions.

Yet, once again, the bitter economic context in Nigeria currently limits the financial sources of private advertising. Instead, there is a plethora of institutional editorial profiles trumpeting the progress achieved by the federal state or by such-and-such ministry. It sometimes weighs down on editorial freedom. On top of this, the fact that most editorial offices are in the south of the country (mostly in Lagos), and the communal composition of the editorial staff (mainly Yoruba and Ibo) also affects the way in which news from the North is treated. One example among many is the case of Safya Hussein, who was condemned to be stoned to death by an Islamic court. While it provoked a vast campaign of indignation in the international community last spring, it went virtually unmentioned in Nigeria's press.

*"You cannot be objective in the North when you work as a correspondent for a southern publication. The South has its own political paradigm of events that occur in the North. Take for example the announcement in May 2000 that Sharia Law was to be instigated in Kano: everyone feared that the city was going to burn, that there would be a major crisis. Yet, we saw no problems. When my editor-in-chief in Lagos got in touch with me, he was expecting me to talk about a Kano in flames, closed banks, a mass exodus of the non-indigenous population. But when I drove round Kano, all I saw was business as usual. And that's what I reported to my editor-in-chief. The following day, he called me up and told me that my article was not up to his standards. That it was too positive to be understood. And the piece never came out."*

A journalist in Kano

The profession of journalism in Nigeria remains a dangerous one: the street in Kano, where the offices of most of Nigeria's dailies are found, was burnt down during the rioting of October 2002; and most were still closed when we visited the northern city in May 2002. Meanwhile, the *Oputa Commission* interrogated witnesses over the October 1986 assassination of Dele Giwa, founding editor-in-chief of *Newswatch* magazine. Former strongman Ibrahim Babangida is currently involved in a court battle against the state to stop the report being released: allegedly, he fears that the revelations will link him to the murder.

The country's audiovisual landscape includes a national radio, the *Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria*. It broadcasts programs on FM and AM in English, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo and other languages in current use in Nigeria. 51 state radio stations air in English and whatever vernacular language is spoken locally. Completing the picture are the six private radio stations (including Raypower, Rhythm FM and Kool FM) broadcasting from Lagos. On top of the Federal State's *National Television Station*, there are 30 state television stations and nine private stations (MBI, Minaj TV, Galaxy TV, AIT....) and two other private television stations that broadcast via satellite.

The audiovisual sector is even more vulnerable to the economic realities than the written press because of its enormous infrastructure expenses. It also has a far bigger impact on a country where 57% of the population is illiterate. Private television stations are squeezed between the imperatives of survival (which often includes acts of piracy and the purchase of programs that are entirely sponsored) and the political allegiances of their investors. As we shall see later on, radios continue to be affected by corruption as a result of the precarious nature of their workers' salaries. They prefer to play American hip-hop and R&B (most of which has been pirated) instead of their national music. Thanks to the 1992 code of conduct, the national audiovisual committee, the *National Broadcasting Commission*, has the power to give or withdraw broadcasting licenses. There are two types of sanction (Grade A or B) that can lead to an immediate closure. The commission can also impose a fine of up to 250,000 nairas (around 2,000 US\$) to punish any FM or television station that has flouted with the 'Good Taste and Decency' or the 'Morality and Social Values' bills. As we shall see later, such articles were used by the NBC to forbid the programming of the song "Bang, Bang, Bang" by Femi Kuti in the fall of 1998, as well as severely curtailing the airing of gangsta rap on the radio waves.

## 2.5 WOMEN'S RIGHTS

*"I was married at twelve years old. When I started writing scenarios, I also began meeting many reporters and became something of a public figure. My husband couldn't stand this, so he divorced me. That's the big problem we have up North. The Islam we practise here forces us to stay at home. Even the women we use in our films sometimes have a hard time coming to the shoots: they could acquire a bad reputation and could be*

*mocked, or even threatened by people. And yet they earn money and acquire a status, but the people in the old city don't see it in this light."*

Balaraba Ramat, director of home video movies, Kano

It was the Safya Husseini affair that brought the plight of Hausa women in Nigeria's northern states to international attention. Safya had been condemned to death by stoning for adultery, before an Islamic court in Sokoto state acquitted her on March 21, 2001. At more or less the same time, another woman was condemned to death in similar circumstances by an Islamic court in the neighbouring state of Katsina: Amina Lawal, 30 years old, was judged guilty of giving birth to a child despite being divorced.

According to *Sharia* Law, a divorced woman who has a sexual relationship with a man is guilty of adultery. Her pregnancy is all that is needed to prove her guilt. But, even outside the northern states, the status of Nigerian women is a source of concern throughout the federation. No legal actions have been taken, for example, to prevent practices of sexual mutilation which, according the *World Health Organization*, touch almost 60% of Nigerian women. In some of the communities in the southern states the figure is nearer 100%. Similarly, the announcement by President Obasanjo on April 4, 2001, which launched a nationwide campaign to put a stop to all discrimination against Nigerian women, has done nothing to change the realities on the ground. Nigeria remains Africa's chief supplier of prostitutes and harbours several international prostitution networks to export them, chiefly from southwest Ibo (notably Benin City). According to a local organization for the defence of women's rights, 20% of married women are victims of domestic violence.

Another worrying development is the increase in the number of rapes in Lagos. Wives in the North, meanwhile, continue to be confined to their homes, while polygamy is a common feature throughout the country. And any hope for women's advancement within Nigerian society is slowed down by a number of legal obstacles. Their testimony in a criminal court has less weight than that of their male counterparts, and the law obliges them to request the authorization of a male family member in order to obtain a passport. Finally, discrimination at the work place is an everyday feature, whether it is in the civil service, in private enterprises, or within political circles. The figures speak for themselves: out of a total of 500 seats in federal government (Parliament, the Senate and the Ministries), women are only represented by six ministers, three senators and 12 parliamentarians.

## 3. Nigerian music

*"I think it's worse than under Abacha. See the naira, it was 82 for one dollar and now it's 140. The state of the nation is more depressed, so it's 140 times worse than it was. And for the artists, life is getting more difficult."*

Femi Kuti, singer/musician

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is undoubtedly Africa's most nostalgic country. Almost all the musicians I met in the course of this inquiry remembered with fondness and nostalgia the era when the nation had all the continent dancing, as symbolized by the *highlife* hit "Sweet Mother" by the Cameroon-Nigerian Prince Nico Mbarga which, to this day, remains the best-selling record in Africa's music history: over 16 million albums sold since it was released in 1976. Nigeria is a gigantic reservoir of mixed rhythms, reflecting the internal migrations of its countless ethno-linguistic groups. During the Seventies, the country was an extraordinary matrix of musical syncretism, marrying Afro-American influences, English pop and local traditions that were signed up and recorded by record majors in the midst of a euphoric period.

Its vibrancy was helped on by the petrol boom and the end of the Biafra civil war. In the heated frenzy of Lagos street life, it is impossible not to recall Fela Anikulapo Kuti, who died of AIDS on August 2, 1997. Fela's Afrobeat and his revolutionary preaching helped to initiate post-1968 western ears to modern Nigerian music. In this period Lagos rivalled Kinshasa for the coveted title of Africa's nightlife capital.

Practically nothing remains of these glory years. The only visible traces are the scratched and dusty vinyl records sold in the popular street market at Oshodi, or in the all-too-rare stalls that record them onto cassettes to sell to retired policemen. The economic slide at the end of the Eighties, the self-imposed isolation of the nation during the bleak Nineties, the all-pervasive insecurity that stifles any semblance of nightlife today, the effects of religion, piracy, ultra-liberal capitalism: all these factors have given rise to an anaemic industry, with no legislative structure.

Economic survival affects adversely the creativity and freedom of expression of most artists. In the Sixties, music reflected the insouciance and the cultural vitality of the regional capitals. In the Seventies, it vibrated with Pan-Africanism and revolutionary demands by the people. Music today, however, remains sadly emblematic of the mental and socio-economic crisis this musical subcontinent finds itself in. Due to the sheer wealth and diversity of Nigerian music, where each ethno-linguistic community possesses its own musical tradition, we can only dwell on the history of modern Nigerian music as well as its principle heroes, born into a country that is the cornerstone of contemporary black musical history. In the chapter devoted to the effects of *Sharia* Law, we will also touch on the traditional music practised by the Hausa community in the North.

### 3.2 FROM PALM WINE TO JUJU: 1920-1960

*"Originally, juju evolved from a sound that we called palm wine music and it was played from as far back as 1939 to about 1946. By then, it consisted of the palm wine guitar, a box guitar, Yoruba vocals and the sekere. One of the popular players of this music was Babatunde King. He once had a problem and went back to Freetown, Sierra Leone, from where he picked up another idea for the music. Juju was born."*

Fatai Rolling Dollar, interpreter/musician

In the early part of the 20th century, the Gulf of Guinea was the setting for an intense traffic between the main ports along the seacoast. The hub of the Gulf's economic activity was Lagos: the historic Isale Eko neighbourhood on Victoria Island resonated to an improbable mixture of traditional Yoruba percussions (the *dundun* and the *gudugu*), European tempos (brought over by the sailors from the transatlantic shipping lines), Brazilian and Cuban ingredients (careta and samba drums imported by former Yoruba slaves - the *aguda* and *amaro* - who had been released by the sugar plantations), but also the Irish and Scottish jigs, ragtime, West Indian blues, not to mention the waltz, foxtrot and swing introduced by the Lagos-based *saro* (name given to the Creoles of Sierra Leone).

The first guitars and string instruments landed at the warehouses of the United Trading Company. Music named after the liquor sold at the Marina bars, *palm wine*, became the first modern form of music invented on the former slave coast. It was initially peddled by wandering musicians (such as the mythical Irewole Denge who recorded the first popular Yoruba songs on the Odeon Records labels.)

And out of this hybrid style, two historic currents were born that revolutionized the music of the region: *highlife* that added a brass section to the percussions, and *juju* music.

The first star was Babatunde King, who recorded the mythical song "Eko Akete" in 1936 on the Parlophone label. Accompanied by a banjo, a tambourine (*juju*), the *sekere* and the triangle, the formula developed by this pioneer rapidly attracted an appreciative Lagos public. Undoubtedly influenced by the German sound engineers who worked at the time for Parlophone, Babatunde King daringly added instruments like the violin. He performed everywhere: in bars and hotels or during traditional funerals and baptisms. Swept up by the music's texts, the revamped Lagotian public with its Ghanaians, West Indian sailors, Yoruba Christian civil servants, rich Muslim merchants and "westernised" elite *saro* (nicknamed at the time *Oyinbo Dudu* - black Europeans - from where emerged the first Nigerian nationalists), began to dance to the *juju*, a style that until then had been considered a listening music. The arrival of amplifiers and the electrical guitar at the end of the Forties further catalysed the dancing element of this music. The groups added the *gangan* and *adamo* talking drums. The tempo was slowed down. The Afro-Cuban influences (conga, bongo, bottles, clave) began to make inroads. Until then, formations had relied on only one singer; now they began introducing call-and-response patterns performed by the chorus. After starting at the end of the Thirties, Ayinde Bakare pioneered the use of the guitar and the talking drum in 1949.

During private parties he started up what would become an enduring phenomenon, praise songs. These were strongly influenced by Islam and the griot songs of the Sahara and would praise the talents and strengths of the hosts. The Fifties saw *juju* music adopt new local influences such as the *agidigbo* (a large thumb piano used as a bass instrument). The musician Tunde Nightingale developed a *juju* style nicknamed *owambe* ("this is where it's at") that features long guitar solos and Latino-influenced rhythmic patterns as they were broadcast on radios marked by the rumba wave arriving from Congo Brazzaville.

Meanwhile, musicians Julius Araba and J.O. Oyesiku (both based in Ibadan, the Yoruba intellectual hub) developed a style called "toy motion" *juju*, which relied on small formations that had traded in traditional percussions for the modern drum. At the heart of Julius Araba's band, the Afro Skittles, was one Fatai Rolling Dollar. Dollar, 76 today, has unjustly been forgotten by the Nigerian youth. Yet he was the tutor and indirect inspirer of the stars of modern *juju*, Ebenezer Obey, King Sunny Ade (who can thank him for the classic "Easy Motion

Tourist"). Next to Dollar at the time was a certain young artist then called Fela Ransome Kuti. As Fatai Rolling Dollar explained to me last summer:

*"Fela used to study us and buy our records all the time. He would always ask questions about the music. We had been around each other for a long time, right from the time he was at school."*

Juju's modernization and the subsequent success of King Sunny Ade is to a great extent thanks to the role played by the late IK Dairo between the first years of Nigerian independence and the end of the Seventies. Honoured by an MBE from Queen Elizabeth II, IK Dairo and his Morning Stars and Blue Spots bands westernised this music a little more by introducing instruments like the accordion and upping the guitar input. IK Dairo was the first artist to go beyond the Nigerian frontiers, first to the 1965 Dakar festival then to the 1972 world music festival in Tokyo. He was largely responsible for the regional success of the Decca West Africa label in the Sixties and Seventies. More crucially, he was the first juju musician to embrace religion. As the American manager of King Sunny Ade, Andrew Frankel, noted on one of the records Original Music label brought out in homage to Dairo (1990):

*"In 1975, his career took a sudden downturn. A deeply religious man, IK Dairo increasingly devoted his time to the Cherubim and Seraphim church movement in which he was already a prominent figure. He preached regularly in the church built at his primary residence on Kehinde Dairo Street, one of the several streets named after him in Lagos, and integrated juju music into his services. When the Lord revealed to him that the hotels and nightclubs he had built were dens for thieves and prostitutions, he closed them down, including Kakadu Nightclub, one of Lagos' best know hot spots."*

Since then, musicians ranging from Ebenezer Obey to Sonny Okosuns, via Oliver de Coque, have turned to religion and even become preachers. For better ..... and worse. As we shall later see, this phenomenon today affects the freedom of musical expression and social life in Lagos.

### **3.3 FROM HIGHLIFE TO CIVIL WAR: 1960-1971**

*"The once despised juju became the western Nigerian sound, no doubt aided by the attempted Biafra breakaway. That this was a largely Ibo revolt did not help the career of the Ibo highlife bands."*

John Storm Roberts, liner notes of LP "Heavy on the Highlife"  
(Original Music, 1990)

The transatlantic mixture of music coursing through *juju* music as well as army brass bands from the colonial era helped to inspire Nigerian *highlife*. At the end of the Forties, it hit a popular chord thanks to Bobby Benson. While *juju* music spread throughout the country, the Fifties belonged to Ghanaian groups like E.T. Mensah and his Tempos and Uhurus groups, which toured Nigeria regularly. Out of this effervescent period emerged the major post-independence bands: Victor Olaiya, Eddy Okonta and Chief Bill Friday. Just as Yoruba musicians popularized *juju* music, Ibo artists were behind the success of *highlife*. They came to Lagos to try out their luck in clubs like Caban Bamboo, Liddo Bar or the Empire Hotel. Since the Thirties, the presence of a number of brass bands in the region bordering on Cameroon in the East helps to explain the impact this music had on the Ibo community. This was enhanced by the great number of musicians in the orchestras of the federal army of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a perfect place to learn music without spending a kobo. The social and debonair image associated to this dance music, and the role played by the Ibo marketers from Onitsha in relaying these new musical forms nationwide, made it highly popular to the intelligentsia and the high society of the period. It provides new interpretations to the passion the Biafra people have for *highlife* music.

Unquestionably, however, Nigerian *highlife* and its links with the Ibo made it one of the forgotten victims of the civil war that ravaged the country between 1967 and 1971. On the eve of Africa's first major post-independence war, anti-Ibo riots in Jos led to the destruction of the EMI record-making plant in this high-altitude city on the Nigerian plains. A great number of Ibo musician-soldiers died in the conflict as the federal army bombarded the Phillips record factory in Onitsha as part of its final offensive. At the time, it was considered the country's leading *highlife* record label.

With the end of the war in 1971 a page of Nigeria's music history was turned. The Ibo music scene re-emerges painfully in the Southeast, giving birth to groups which, for economic reasons, traded in their bass instruments for the guitar. The Yoruba youth in Lagos filled the void left by the Ibo musicians to elaborate new Afro-mixtures inspired by traditional music, *highlife*, British rock and American soul and funk. This musical explosion has since been called Nigeria's Golden Age in music. It was accompanied by a thriving socio-economic context, the petrol boom and the reconstruction of the country. Between 1972 and 1977 western musicians like Paul McCartney and Mike Fleetwood were drawn to the Nigerian studios (which included Africa's first 16-track machine), and to the new hotspots of Nigerian nightlife: Fela's Shrine and the Ariya owned by King Sunny Ade.

### 3.4 THE GOLDEN AGE: 1972-1976

*"You can borrow from American and European music without compromising your African roots. It's not the notes you play but how you sing the songs that counts."*

John Amstrong, liner notes of LP "Nigeria 70" (Afrostrut/2001)

Four musical styles came to the fore between 1972 and February 13, 1976, when the only military leader still respected today, General Murtala Mohammed, was assassinated. There was the revolutionary *Afrobeat* invented by Fela Ransome Kuti (who had yet to be called Anikulapo) and his Africa 70 band; westernised *juju* music led by King Sunny Ade and his Green Spots; the *ozzidi music* of Sonny Okosuns; and the *highlife* of Prince Nico Mbarga and the Rocafil Jazz band.

This was the period when Fela, "the man who carried death in his pouch", was to compose his most celebrated songs. Many were monuments to a period when the gulf widened between the military and civil elite, whose fortune was built on the petrol boom, and a Nigerian people, decimated by the all-pervasive corruption of its leaders and a heightened campaign of military harassment. Fela was a high dignitary from the Yoruba lineage. This intellectual was inspired by the "Blackism" he discovered in the Sixties, funk music, the Pan-Africanism of Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah, and the Afro-centric libertarian currents that predominated at the time. Politically charged songs like "Yellow Fever", "Expensive Shit" and "Upside Down" were sung in pidgin English. Their accessibility to all Nigerians made Fela the black sheep of the Nigerian elite. On April 30, 1974, he was arrested and imprisoned for "corruption of minors and possession of cannabis". His first imprisonment was a two-week sojourn in Alagbon Close. It gave birth to the eponymous song "Alagbon Close". On November 23, 1974, just seven days before the verdict of his trial, three trucks filled with men from the special brigade descended on Fela's Republic of Kalakuta (he had re-baptized it in homage to the Alagbon jail), a self-governing land made up of Fela's own house, his brother's clinic and an empty lot.

The raid left the singer with 11 stitches in his head, a broken arm....and a new song that echoed through the country: "Kalakuta Show". The climax of this campaign of police harassment was reached in 1977, during Olusegun Obasanjo's first reign. It followed Fela's decision to boycott the *Festival of African Culture*, FESTAC, and organize a counter-festival in his Shrine club. On February 13, 1977, a thousand Nigerian soldiers attacked the Kalakuta and burned it down. The destruction coincided with the release of "Zombie", Fela's vitriolic song

against the violence of the military junta in place. The singer's mother was thrown out of an upper-floor window and ended up dying of her injuries a year later. Fela was imprisoned for 27 days. The military regime tried to prevent the *Punch* and *Daily Sketch* dailies from hitting the streets with their accounts of the siege. Fela was tried in one of the National Theatre rooms, specially built for the FESTAC. The New York Times correspondent was expelled from Nigeria for attempting to cover the public trial, and the junta closed down the Shrine, simultaneously driving out 5,000 people living in the vicinity of the Kalakuta Republic. Fela was banned from performing live for two years.

At an opposite tangent to Fela's abrasive music was King Sunny Ade. The singer quickly imposed himself as the voice of the new Nigerian elite. At a time when one US dollar was worth 55 kobos, these *nouveaux riches* sprayed nairas around liberally in the economic capital, where the population had leapt from 400,000 people in 1958 to 3.5 million inhabitants in 1978. Sunny Ade galvanized *juju* music by adding Apala rhythms (a traditional Yoruba blues with Muslim roots, popularised by Aruna Ishola), Hawaiian guitars and the synthesizers that had been introduced into Nigeria by his "rival" Ebenezer Obey. He played everywhere: in his Ariya club in Lagos, at private parties and the traditional ceremonies where money-spraying made him Nigeria's richest musician.

Sonny Okosuns was on the same record label as Fela (EMI) but originally came from the eastern city of Enugu. He fled to Lagos during the civil war before becoming back-up guitarist for the *highlife / akwete* band led by the great Sir Victor Uwaifo. Sonny Okosuns was mesmerized by Fela's Afrobeat. But his fascination for the sounds of the Beatles and of reggae allowed him to develop his own sound, dubbed *ozzidi*, replete with the influences from his Bini community (the *oleke* and *ugho*). Okosuns has been considered a politically correct version of Fela. A Pan-African, he was known for his support of the liberation movements on the continent, a militancy that inspired one of his greatest international hits, "Fire in Soweto", as well as the dubious honour of singing for most of the African leaders of the time. In a recent interview, he justified his relation to "big men" in the following terms:

*"I didn't express any harassment because I was clean in my mind. It means that when I have to direct it to you, it would be like a dialogue, I won't say that you are a beast or step on your shoes."*

Such diplomatically couched language reflects a growing tendency amongst musicians that dates back to the periods of the dictatorships. It is also testimony

to the ambiguous relationships between the likes of Sonny Okosuns and those in power, an ambivalence that we treat in the following chapters.

Ironically, the biggest-ever hit in African history is the property of an outsider: the late Prince Nico Mbarga and his Rocafil Jazz band. His release “Sweet Mother” came out at a time that new *highlife* groups (Owerri’s Oriental Brothers, Chief Oliver de Coque, Super Bantous) were licking the wounds left by the Biafra war by developing new sounds. They centred their new sounds on the guitar and the *makossa/assiko/soukouss/rumba* influences that were emerging from equatorial Africa. Meanwhile, the Cameroonian-born Prince Nico launched “Sweet Mother” (on the Roger All Stars label) from his base in Onitsha. Since then, over 16 million copies have been sold on the continent, not counting the countless number of pirated copies that circulate to this day. With this Pan-African hit, Nigeria’s musical industry hit its peak.

The spirit of competition also reached new heights at this time. Behind the mythical names that marked the Seventies in Nigeria hid hundreds of groups fusing Afrobeat, Afrosoul or Afrorock with the traditional influences of their native community. They had their brief moments of glory either at the heart of the major record companies, or with one among a myriad of small Nigerian labels, which churned out the singles and albums. There was The Funkees and the man destined to be a famous home-video producer, Harry Mosco; the Lijadu Sisters, with undoubtedly the most beautiful female voices of the time, who went on tour with British jazz musician Ginger Baker and her Salt band; The Wings; Sweet Breeze; Segun Bucknor and his revolution; Balla Miller; The Clusters...so many names that are today prized by collectors.

### 3.5. THE EIGHTIES: THE END OF THE MAJOR RECORD LABELS

*“The last major record label to pull out from Nigeria was PolyGram. I was signed in 1989. The guy called me to his office and said: Femi, I’m leaving. I said why, I’ve just signed? He said, not because of you, but look: in my company, my accountant steals money. My A&R are stealing. They are even stealing from the video budget, and all the papers they’re showing me, they’re just stealing, stealing. And worst of all, they have the bootleggers just outside there. They have the exact copy, which they printed even better than my own copy, so we are making no money, and I cannot explain to my masters where I’m spending this money. So, I’m leaving next week. So*

*they sold PolyGram to Premier Music. And immediately they left, music went down, right down to the end."*

Femi Kuti, musician, singer

The Nigerian economy began to freefall in the Eighties. The exchange rate plunged from 64 kobos in 1981 to 2.02 naira (at that time one naira was devised into 100 kobos) in 1986 and the price of petrol, which began its upward spiral during the first reign of Olusegun Obasanjo, increased by 120% in the same period.

*"All the record companies left Nigeria and since then we lived in an economic climate which really affected the consumer spending and piracy became very prominent."*

Obafemi Lasode, President of Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN)

The economic crisis was heightened by the military take-over of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida on August 27, 1985. The military regime imposed an emergency economic program giving it full control of the country's economy. The application of an IMF Structural Adjustment Program in July 1986 only added to the crippling of Nigeria's middle-class citizens, who were the country's main consumers of music. In 1988, the annual income per inhabitant fell from \$778 to \$175! As the historian Eghosa E. Osaghae puts it in "Crippled Nigeria" (Hurst and Company, London, 1998):

*"Most urban dwellers then devised various strategies for coping. These included moonlighting and the creation of rent seeking avenues by civil servants, withdrawal of children from school, a drastic reduction in food consumption, increased patronage of herbalists and traditional or spiritual healing rather than hospitals and clinics, increased religiosity and brain-drain."*

Major record companies in Lagos began disengaging from Nigeria at the end of the Seventies. Mike Wells was West Africa regional director for EMI in 1978. He had been in post in Nigeria since 1964:

*"EMI head office instructions were simple; disinvest as fast as possible. The main problem for all of us was the continual lack of royalty remittances. Moreover, the government nigerianization policies were making life hard for foreign business. You'd take on any Nigerian, even an office boy, and before you knew it, you'd be legally obliged to transfer 49% of the company shareholdings to him."*

As a result, EMI transferred its regional seat to Abidjan, capital of the Ivory Coast, while Sony-CBS left for Johannesburg, South Africa.

*"The studios became dilapidated, there were no overseas promotion. And that was that."*

Mike Wells

The pauperisation of Nigeria pushed Fela, Sunny Ade and Sonny Okosuns to look to their international networks for tours abroad. Sunny Ade signed with Island and brought out the internationally acclaimed album "Synchro System". It opened the doors to fledgling world music festivals around the globe. *Black President* Fela, however, saw his international career brutally halted; on November 8, 1984, he was condemned to five years in prison for having contravened Decree No. 7 of the exchange rate control mechanism. Indeed, two months earlier, as Fela was leaving for an American tour, he had been arrested in possession of 1,600 pounds sterling. The singer saw his passport confiscated, was barred from seeing his lawyers and ended up behind bars until April 24, 1986. As a result of this long stay behind bars and the violence he had been a victim of, Fela's health began to deteriorate.

*"Military regimes compelled people to take flight from their oppressive environment. Nightclubs were closed to business. Ban of import of goods also affected musical instruments. Bilateral relationships with other countries were so badly affected that only a privileged few among musicians could promote their music outside Nigeria."*

Orlando Julius, musician

For those not lucky enough to benefit from international networks, there remained few solutions other than leaving for richer pastures abroad. Many musicians ended up being part of the sizable brain drain that sapped Nigeria. The Lijadu Sisters immigrated to Brooklyn, New York, a destination, which formed, along with South Carolina, the two most popular outlets for the Nigerian Diaspora in the USA (the latest count reveals that some three million Nigerians live in the States). They were joined by Orlando Julius, who had composed the seminal soul hit "Jagua Nana" (Phillips 1963), seen as a precursor of Fela's Afrobeat. Julius joined several major Afro-American groups of the time, and brought out his first American hit with Lamon Dozier. It was called "Going Back to my Roots" and included a couplet in Yoruba. He returned to Nigeria in December 1998.

### 3.6 THE NINETIES: FUJI STYLE

*"Fuji is social commentary. It's hip. It's rough. It's sexy. It's armed robbery. It's hip-hop in the original sense. It's a sound system and the art of DJ'ing. But unfortunately, it doesn't transcend its locality and we haven't theorized fuji enough to understand the potential of it."*

Kunle Tejuoso, Glendora Review

In the Nineties, Nigeria closed in on itself. Condemned as a pariah state after the aborted elections on June 12, 1993, it became a paranoid dictatorship under Abacha, and rarely accepted foreign visitors. In this climate the country lived in musical autarky. A musical veneer of activity still shone, however: in Lagos new stars like Shina Peters with his disco *juju* made the rounds of private parties organized by Abuja's *kleptocrats*. Nigerian reggae was more consensual than revolutionary: in a faraway echo of Alpha Blondy's controversial relationship with his Ivorian president Houphouet-Boigny, Majek Fashek would willingly go to sing for General Abacha.

But the Lagos ghettos - Ajegunle, Mushin, Oshodi - were being blasted by sound systems playing a totally different musical style known for its earthy and hermetic rhythms and overwhelming percussions: *fuji*. In a 1997 issue of the review Yoruba Ideas, Sola Oluronyomi and Sanya Osha described it as:

*"This immediate antecedent of fuji emerged as a form of entertainment that accompanied the Islamic Ramadan. It was some kind of vigil music that satisfied the communal aesthetic needs of Muslim youths in the inter-phase of the evening after the fast-day. During such gatherings, passages of the Qur'an were usually woven into songs, with the lead singer trying out his improvisational skills, incorporating the lyrical elements relevant to the context. This was accompanied with sparse drumming. An evident shift, however, occurred in the Seventies. With the advent of the oil boom and a proliferation of the nouveaux riches, with an unabashed passion to celebrate personal wealth and emphasise superior, individual power relations, fuji was already sliding into a form of secular art."*

*Fuji* music also drew inspiration from the music that accompanies the *apala* prayer (as celebrated by the late Aruna Ishola), and the social version of the *sakara*. In the Eighties it becomes both a secular music and music of prayer. In the Eighties, *fuji* touched all citizens of Yoruba origin, be they Christian civil servants or the new Muslim businessmen. But with the rise of the informal sector in the Nineties the tone changed. *Fuji* was transformed into a local *gangsta rap* aiming to glorify

the exploits of those who managed to leave the ghetto. The first superstar in this genre was Sikiru Ayinde Barrister, who claimed to have baptized this music *fuji* after seeing a poster of Mount Fujiyama in Japan. Both he and his rival Kolington Ayila symbolize the mutation of *fuji* in the Abacha years.

The stars of the Nineties, Pasuma Wonder, Adewale Ayube and Wasiu Ayinde remain today's most popular artists in Lagos' popular quarters. They also have the most violent fans. The singers have a coded language, reserved only for certain emancipated Yorubas, and it brings with it the status of spokesmen for the ghettos - neighbourhoods that are highly unstable, ready to explode as soon as one of the representatives is attacked. A factor that probably explains why *fuji* artists were paradoxically spared the military censorship that sterilized so much of Yoruba culture in the Nineties. But, as Olakunle Tejuoso of Glendora magazine recalls:

*"There are so many aspects of Nigerian culture, Yoruba first, where you can criticise society openly. See the Ewi poetry for example. That medium was very strong under Abacha. It was all in codes. And the dissemination of those words was just like that. They were releasing tapes and everybody was buying this. Upper or lower class. It's just to show you how aware people in the streets are."*

### **3.7 2002: FROM GALALA TO AFRO HIP-HOP**

*"In Nigeria of today, it is very difficult to be a musician because, number one, the music market is not straight and, number two, it has a system where, if you release a record and it is popular, the record company is not gonna give you the right figure for your album. Moreover, the Nigerian government does not recognize the musical business. They do not have any laws that guide the job of the musicians and protect our rights. Some go to Singapore, print our CDs, and start selling them without our advice. So, it's hard to be a musician. But we are surviving."*

Daddy Showkey, *galala* star

*"If you can call this an industry at present, then it needs to be totally restructured and be run as a proper industry."*

Jacob Akinyemi-Johnson, Head of Operations, Rhythm FM

Like the country in which it is born, Nigerian music is a wounded culture, battered and anaemic after fifteen years of dictatorship. In the following chapters

I describe the terrible socio-economic situation the country finds itself in, and the ways this affects artistic expression, the music it broadcasts, and the survival instinct that encourages self-censorship.

The economic crisis led to the emergence of piracy and an ultra-liberal marketing drive that entrapped artists. However, this has not stopped the emergence of a new generation of *fuji*, *highlife* and *juju* singer-songwriters, signed up by the Premier Music and Ivory Music labels. This new wave of musicians began in Lagos, either picking up on the heritage of their elders in the Afrobeat style or investing new forms of Afro-Western fusions (from *galala* to Afro hip-hop).

Nigeria's economic capital remains the country's creative Mecca, despite the progressive disappearance of its infrastructure, from the concert halls to the recording studios. It is relayed by Onitsha to the East, which is Nigeria's main broadcasting market for national products.

*"Even the Performing Rights Society in London stopped sending royalties to the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. So, the radio stations prefer to play foreign music because they don't pay royalties."*

Orlando Julius, musician

In the mid-Nineties, businesswoman Comfort Oboh, owner of the Comfort Hotel and mother to local toaster Mighty Mouse, decided to invest in her neighbourhood's best toaster. She lived in one of Lagos' largest ghettos, Ajegunle, a sprawling no-go zone with around one million inhabitants. The Ajegunle Musicmint began to feed the ghetto's sound system, reproducing a method, which took its cue from the American rap scene (Tupac Shakur remains one of the Nigerian youth's most popular icons), and the emerging ragga scene (Blakky, Daniel Wilson, Arthur Pepple, Lt. Shotgun). The ragga/rap sound-dubbed galaga music - by Ajengule's "Ghetto Soldiers" spread like wildfire, thanks to Mighty Mouse and his small Jahooa studio, and the Felin Records label created specifically to commercialise the ghetto's productions: musicians like Daddy Showkey, Daddy Fresh, Mighty Mouse, Father U Turns, Baba Fryo.

Simultaneously, Lagos saw the establishment of the country's first private radio stations: Raypower. Kenny Ogungbe, one of the radio's founders:

*"Raypower first came on air six months into the Abacha regime, but for some reason we were taken off air because of licensing problems. After six months we returned, on August 15, 1994, to be precise. And on September 1, we set up 24-hour-a-day programming. We had established the first ever private radio station in Nigeria."*

Ogungbe is a key figure in the new music business currently trying to resurrect the national industry and to "nigeria-ize" the latest western music styles. At his side is the president of PMAN Obafemi Lasode, the current director of the Even Ezra label. Ogungbe began his career as manager of Daar Communications, which owned the private African Independent Television network as well as Raypower. Every Friday evening he presents the rap programme "AIT Jamz". Ogungbe was one of the first to open Nigeria up to American hip-hop (a particularly cheap operation since no royalties are paid). Simultaneously, he has launched his own label, Kenny's Music.

In the late Nineties, Nigeria's Afro hip-hop scene was born, a conjecture of several elements:

- US R&B and rap spilt into radio music programming;
- businessmen on both sides of the music faucet (the programming and the production);
- rivalry on the *galala* scene;
- and the thirst of a youth eager to westernise and feeling abandoned by Abacha's dictatorship.

Young musicians began by simply aping the American peer models. *"But then"*, explains Guardian journalist Jahman Olajedo Anikulapo, *"the youth picked up the old Nigerian material - apala, fuji, kalangu, highlife, juju - which they set to machine-generated sounds. It created a new style."*

*"When it does become fully evolved, Nigerian hip-hop might just be the future of music around here, contrary to what some critics have observed."*

This Day, June 26, 2002

In 1999, a trio of toasters and rappers calling themselves the Remedies released "Jealousy" on Kenny's Music label. The gospel influences and lyrics calling for Nigerian unity helped impose it on radio airwaves throughout the country. From the North to the South, young Nigerian Christians bought up the group's cassettes.

Building on this success, Kenny's Music today accounts for 80% of the production of what has been dubbed a generation of Afro hip-hop kids. Each of the Remedies rappers (Eddy, Idriss and Tony) have embarked on solo careers capped by Tony Tetuola's huge spring 2002 hit, "My Car", that sold 135,000 units; the Remedies have now been joined by bands with names like Trybesmen,

Plantation Boyz, Azadus or Queen Change. All have become role models for the middle-class Ibo and Yoruba youth.

Their lyrics are generally consensual and marked by Christian rigidity. They sidestep any volatile political and sexual taboos (later on, I discuss the way hardcore rap is censored by FM radio stations). Yet, notwithstanding its fragile nature, this generation of artists undeniably constitutes the first tangible proof of a Nigerian musical renaissance.

And there are other signs of hope: the regeneration of an Afrobeat style many thought had been buried alongside its founder Fela. There are the biological inheritors of the "Black President", of course: young Seun Kutí and especially Femi Kutí, the only Nigerian artist who has been signed up by a major label, Universal (see chapters to follow). And there is one of Nigeria's most daring voices, that of Lagbaja! The articulate musician began his career in the mid-Nineties behind a mask he has never taken off in public. He now owns the Motherland club and composed one the biggest hits of 2002, "Koko Bellow", taken from his third album "We and Me". Lagbaja! admits that last year was the first time he earned anything substantial from his records. I met Lagbaja! as he was preparing for a second major European tour as a follow-up to his 2001 operation. He had set his sights on signing up with a major music label.

This quick overview of Nigeria's contemporary music scene cannot be complete without a mention of the expansion of its gospel music. In the East, the airwaves are filled by gospels mixed with *highlife*, *juju*, and even rap rhythms. Every major church, sect or congregation broadcasts its own cassette recordings immortalizing its local choir, in a policy aimed at commercially exploiting its followers and accompanying them 24 hours a day.

## 4. No money, no voice:

### WHEN CAPITALISM INTRUDES ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN LAGOS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION: THE LIMITS OF DEMOCRACY

*"The economic recession, the attitude of the public and even the advent of the churches, those lead to natural restrictions and censorship on the musicians."*

Jahman Oladejo Anikulapo, The Guardian

One of the biggest gains for Nigeria's newfound democracy has unquestionably been its freedom of expression.

*"Now you can talk about anything you want to talk about,"* claims singer Charlie Boy, who is also the son of the president of the Oputa Commission investigating human rights abuses and the other crimes committed during Nigeria's successive military dictatorships. *"Now you can talk about anything you want to talk about. During the military regime, you couldn't say as much. I was able to say what I wanted to say, but I had to find different ways of saying it. But that didn't stop them harassing you and putting you in jail. I can't even count the times I went to jail. So many times, they locked me up three/four days before releasing me and they kept saying to me, listen, stop talking in this kind of way and pay attention to your music,"* adds the star who remains one of Obasanjo's harshest critics.

At the headquarters of the leading daily newspaper, The Guardian, which was closed down by the Abacha regime between 1994 and 1995, journalists in the Arts Section confirm:

*"At that time, there was a concert in Warri about killing some people in the Delta - the Ogoni people - but we couldn't write about it. And when Ken Saro Wiwa was hanged in 1996, as a literary person, we were supposed to write about it. But we had to be careful, soften the condition the way we wrote. In fact, you couldn't say the whole truth."*

*"There are no policemen in our studios,"* insists Kenny Ogungbe of Raypower radio. *"There used to be one. If you talked too much, they just called the SSS."*

If the fearsome *State Security Service* (SSS) continues to "guarantee" the federation's internal security, it has indeed entered the ranks, and it is now relatively easy for a foreign journalist to visit Nigeria - on condition that you have an invitation letter from a Nigerian citizen. And yet.... in the 36-state federation this relative freedom of expression varies from region to region.

Human rights advocate and lawyer Gani Fawehinmi:

*"Many are still afraid to talk. The militia groups which have be established in some parts of the country, like the Bakassi Boys, are really frightening people. Finally, it depends on who you are talking to and why you are talking."*

*"The democratic experiment has camouflaged itself in different ways,"* adds journalist Kunle Tejuoso of *Glendora* magazine. *"One moment you might be on the high tone, thinking things are ok, but like now, all things are down and you never know what's going to happen tomorrow."* The *Guardian* judges it *"more a socio-economic censorship but there is no political government restriction as seen in the past."*

#### **4.2 ECONOMIC LAISSEZ-FAIRE AND PAYOLA**

*"The talent of an artist is an endowment that has no socio-economic class bias. The poorest recluse in our society can be the most endowed or talented artist. The obvious implication of this common accident of nature is that the talented but poor artist is constrained into expressing his creative ability through the agency of a exploitative music producer, promoter or recording company.*

*The economic philosophy of laissez-faire (free enterprise) impacts negatively on the poor artist and neutralizes any attempt at creating some equitable standard that would, at least to a fair measure, cause the artist to reap a considerably good proportion of his creative effort. The evil incidence of this economic environment or super-structure portrays the artist in the eyes of the general public as a customized under-dog and, in some circles, as an irresponsible dropout from school or, as a weird personality who represents a mild case of insanity. After all, as the saying goes: He who pays the piper dictates the tune."*

Draft bill on the regulation of Nigeria's music industry, presented by the PMAN (Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria) to the federal government, May 2002.

The economic crisis that continues to dog Nigeria's population also hampers hopes of renewal of its music scene both at home and abroad. 70% of Nigerians live under the poverty line and an average wage hovers around the \$250 a year. Outside of a few names of high repute born in the Nineties (Lagbaja!, Daddy Showkey, Femi Kuti), new artists like Afrobeat musician Amala and the young rapper Queen Change remain relatively unknown in their own country, despite the quality of their work and their solid home base. The music industry is sapped by businessmen who are more concerned with making a quick fortune than investing in a policy of development. They have helped to ostracize and destroy an entire generation of young musicians when, according to an expression coined by many artists I spoke to, *"music could become an alternative to the petroleum industry in this country."*

Amala, Afrobeat musician:

*"The average Nigerian investor is the kind of investor who wants money put into a business today and money reaped the next day. They don't like long time debt. They are not really professionals in the music business, they are just local traders who get the opportunity to make some money and they go into the music business."*

Obafemi Lasode, PMAN president:

*"Normally, in Europe, distributors are part of the circle of progress. But here, in Nigeria, the distributors are expecting that the artists mass produce their own works, go to the studio, come out, try to look for a distributor outlet, and the distributor will tell that same artist: look, you go and bring us 10,000 tapes and I will distribute them for you and you'll get your money when the tapes have been sold."*

All the young musicians met in the course of this investigation recognized that the current climate of ultra-liberal and unbridled capitalism stifles or paralyses the development of their careers.

Queen Change, young rapper:

*"Music in Nigeria is tough. Before any young one who has talent comes into a studio to do his thing, he's gonna struggle to look for money. He might end up getting money, but even when he gets his money, he goes back to the studio, and after succeeding in recording his stuff, he still has to go back and cut the CD, and after cutting the CD, he has to face the hazards of radio stations. You have to pay, you have to beg, do a lot of things. I pity the young boys, man, it's hard. I paid*

*some amounts to some radio stations, and they even didn't play my stuff. Can you imagine that? It is really discouraging. Many times I've been discouraged, I wanted to back off, I was tired of everything, people were stressing me."*

Kunle Tejuoso, Glendora magazine:

*"You see a lot of musicians start and after a year, when they don't make it like Lagbaja!, they don't get gigs, they begin to crumble or run from the country."*

Peterson Agun, young *highlife* musician who plays at the O'Jez Club:

*"No matter how wise a poor man is, his voice won't be heard because he's poor."*

Amala, Afrobeat musician:

*"The money they pay for the royalties, when they pay, is so unreasonable, that most artists forget about it. In fact, you spend more in transport to collect it than what you collect. It must be something around 15-20 nairas per airplay on radio. So, maybe if you have 1,000 airplays, it would be just 2,000 nairas."(15 US\$)*

Nigerian artists also insist that the omnipresence of bribery is another factor poisoning the very core of the media. Radios, television stations and newspapers are all stained by the phenomenon called "payola":

PMAN Draft Bill:

*"As commonly used in the music industry, payola is a term describing secret payment to and acceptance by broadcasting station personnel (usually disc jockeys, record librarians, or programme managers and directors) of money, service, or other valuable consideration in return for their broadcast use of a particular record or song. This is a practice that has succeeded in slowing down the growth of the Nigerian music industry over the decades. Constant demand by radio and TV presenters and producers for financial gratification from musicians has been a tremendous barrier to the development of Nigerian music. This is also true with many Nigerian entertainment journalists, who expect payment before stories are written. This issue has to be addressed immediately, because the very survival of the entertainment industry in Nigeria is at stake. The struggling Nigerian musician has to add this financial burden to his or her already excruciating list of expenses, all in the quest of introducing his or her music to the public."*

Obafemi Lasode, PMAN president:

*"Initially, when the private broadcasting station came out, you had a chance to get played. But now, everybody is demanding money, anywhere, so payola is very strong. It has become institutionalised now."*

Femi Kuti, Afrobeat musician:

*"I went through payola with my record "Shoki Shoki". The DJ's wanted money to be paid because if you don't pay, you don't get played. They pretend they are doing us a favour. I've paid too a lot of journalists of the newspapers. I was paying so much money to them and solving their problems. They had children, got married, I would pay for their ceremony. But when I noticed they were now extorting money from me and writing only bad stories about me, I decided to grant no more interviews in Nigeria. Now, when they write about me, they change my sentences as I was talking rubbish."*

The radio programmers I confronted on the payola issue relativized its existence.

Kenny Ogunbe, Raypower and Kenny's Music:

*"I'm not saying it's not happening. You know, in some stations they don't pay salaries on time, so when an artist comes u, giving the DJ something, it is to help the DJ as well. The DJ has a family, he has kids, he has to make sure the family is fine, and the artist also knows he's not being paid. And if the artist is paid enough, he'll say, ok, take these 2,000 or 5,000 nairas to help you better yourself."*

Amala, Afrobeat musician:

*"In fact, here, people pay the TV stations to play their video tapes, instead of the TV stations paying them. That's why you see only artists who have a lot of financial support, who are on the top. They take their work to TV station, put 1,500-2,000 nairas in the hands of the presenter and their work is being played continuously."*

In this survival-of-the-fittest environment, a number of artists admitted to composing commercial songs they believed would be promoted by a record label or a radio station. And they shied away from politically charged compositions.

Daddy Showkey, galala musician:

*"Creative and political consciousness is dying because they promote music which is not creative. Right now, my new style of music is to say what is happening in Nigeria, and how people are suffering now. But my problem is that the record company they might not like to release it because they want a financial favour from the government."*

Kunle Tejuoso, Glendora magazine:

*"You find a lot of people aping afrobeat and not really being authentic in terms of ideas. You don't see too much expression of ideals. It's just the testimony of what the economy has done to the minds of people. You're trying to survive more than anything else."*

### 4.3 PIRACY: THE SILENT WAR

Piracy first appeared in Nigeria in the Eighties. Today, it is ravaging the music industry: an estimated 65% of works sold in the street are pirated products. It is devastating the lives of Nigeria's most celebrated artists, as well as the most "professional" labels. The campaign initiated by the *Nigerian Association of Recording Artists* (NARI) and its president Ebenezer Obey (former *juju* star, today converted to Evangelist preacher) has done nothing to change the realities on the ground. According to the son of IK Dairo, Paul Dairo, Nigerian racketeers are unfortunately being encouraged in their pirating trade by a public: *"They are not really interested in knowing which CD is real or fake."* The racketeers press international and local releases either in Singapore or Nigeria, using the latest state-of-the-art production plants: *"What they do is pick up the cassette, scan the cover, enlarge and transfer music into a PC and duplicate."*

As a result, CDs are sold for 350 nairas (2 US\$), as opposed to the 1,200 nairas needed to purchase an official record. An artist, whose name must remain anonymous, explained:

*"The government is well aware of who is behind the piracy. They know where to find the pressing plants. But no one wants to attack them and run the risk of dying. Because we're talking big business here. Once in a while, a racketeer is arrested, but he's quickly released."*

Kenny Ogungbe, Raypower, Kenny's Music:

*"It's easy when one artist wakes up and says, they are pirating my products, but it is a different game when one has over 24 products that are very popular and pirated. When I say 75% of these products are pirated, please believe me for I am telling you the truth."*

Lagbaja!:

*"My videos have been pirated already, even if I've not yet released them. They recently caught a man at the Murtala Airport with 4,000 pieces of VCD's which I hadn't even released on the market!"*

The losses to Nigeria's music industry are colossal. The PMAN explains it in stark terms in its Draft Bill:

*“Working by a very conservative estimate, the music industry would have been able (but for the evil of music piracy) to produce and market over thirty million (30 million) units of sound recordings (cassettes and compact discs) per annum. Again on the conservative assumption that the thirty million units are sold at N60 per unit, the expected revenue would have been about 1.4 million nairas per annum. The loss of income to the poor artist on the estimated 30 million units of musical works (sound recordings) sold in open market would be about 140 million nairas per annum. The war against music piracy is therefore timely and ESSENTIAL in the redemption of the artist from the pangs of poverty. The artist therefore, needs the backing of Government both morally and financially to combat music piracy in Nigeria.”*

#### **4.4 FEAR AND VIOLENCE: MUSIC UNDER SIEGE**

In this bitter economic context where "death stalks life" the quest for money regularly leads to acts of violence. In a precedent set by Fela with his Fela Boys, several musicians have hired henchmen that they set on road managers, label representatives or sponsors, to "negotiate" their payments. Stories of dud contracts are often published in the scandal columns of Nigeria's tabloid press devoted to the "rich and beautiful jet set".

Charlie Boy is one of the most played singers in the South: his songs are most popular amongst Okada motorcycle taxi drivers, and in the popular neighbourhoods of Lagos. Yet, he remains marked by his bruising brush with agents from the *National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency* (NDLEA) on March 13, 2002:

*“Three years ago, the chairman of NDLEA called me and asked me to do a campaign for them, saying no to drugs: I said Ok, that's good. I have a cousin who died from drugs, I have a son who played around with drugs before, he was 28 years old, I know the evil of drugs, so I said ok, fine. They used my pictures on billboards, TV, radio, everywhere, and then they didn't pay me my endorsement fee. They had agreed to pay me, but the chairman had left and another person came. So for the past two years, I was going back and forth to get my money, but they were always excusing: we don't have money, blah blah blah... So the day in question (March 13, 2002) actually, I didn't wake up to go to NDLEA but what happened, was that there was about 3000 okada people who came to my house. I was in the hospital with my wife, who was not feeling too well, and they called me to say that the Lagos*

*State or something like a local government asked them to buy uniforms, vests for 1,000 nairas, and they said they don't have money. So I say how much do you want to put in your uniform in order that I make a case for you, and they said they didn't even want to hear about the uniforms. So I said ok, and they asked me to come with them to Oshodi, Surulere, the whole town, so people can know we don't support this. I said no problem. I left my sick wife and I come running around with those people. So we go to Falomo and now I told them, listen, I need to go to NDLEA to see what they are doing about my money and everybody said ah, we are coming with you (laughing). You see my people can't take a joke, they are so stupid and frustrated, they are so hungry, they are so uptight, so I went there. The people at the gate were laughing. They opened the gate. I wanted to go by myself but of course, when you are handling that crowd, sometimes you can't control them, about hundreds of them drove with me. I almost drove my bike into the office of the accountant; as I came down he saw me and he went to hide under the table! I said I'm not here for trouble, please, when are you gonna pay me my money. So his colleagues began to make trouble, the accountant felt humiliated and as soon as I left, they now called all the security people and told them I came to kill him and - nobody is asking questions in this country - they began to shoot. They wounded some people; it was terrible, and they beat the shit out of me. I had about thirty people on me kicking me, my whole body. I had scars. They didn't stop and after they beat me, they now stripped me naked and walked me on the road, naked, so everybody could see me. But that didn't make me feel bad, that made me feel angry. But this is the democracy we have. People still believe they are under a military regime and that is not gonna be away for a long time. Even the president is acting as a military person; that will not go away for a long time. Nothing has really changed. Positions have changed but nothing has changed. Our lives have not changed, it is still the same shit. After they did that, they took me to court saying I came to steal some drugs to release detainees and blah blah blah... So nothing has changed, my brother."*

In such a context, with insecurity and piracy so omnipresent, most artists turn to live performances for their living. Kunle Tejuoso of Glendora magazine:

*"All a musician wants to do in Lagos is playing for parties. If you're musician of status, you get 400,000-500,000 nairas a gig. 4,000-5,000 dollars just for a party. It's a lot of money. That's another aspect of Nigerian music. So if you can make that amount of money, you don't need to sell records and you don't care about the market outside. That's another specific thing about this industry. Fela didn't care about the world, because he had his own empire here. Sunny Ade can make a*

*hundred parties in one year, shit, it's a lot of fucking money. First he will charge you before coming, then you will have to spray him. It's a very important aspect of the music culture here. It's heavy money man."*

In the following chapter I describe the ambiguous relations that Nigerian artists are sometimes forced to entertain in order to make a living. Their income is further hampered by the violent atmosphere that hangs over Lagos and the other major cities of the South. Allied to this is the fear of venturing up to the northern states (see the chapter on the *Sharia*). Lagos used to be one of West Africa's nocturnal hotspots. But today 60% of its clubs have disappeared, many victims of the expansion of the churches. Lagbaja! and Femi Kuti are amongst the rare exceptions to this rule: both have opened their own nightclubs, the Motherland and a revamped Shrine, respectively. Lagbaja! recognizes what a major challenge it is to manage his nightspot in the current socio-economic climate:

*"It is definitively very, very difficult to have a venue. But I had no option. I didn't want to praise anybody, so I couldn't depend on playing parties every weekend. I had to have a place to play. So I got a couple of friends together who believed in what I was doing. But then, you must have a good location because of the crime wave. People wouldn't go to somewhere far out because of fear. Even when they come here, you have to be here till morning because they are scared to go back home at night for fear of being attacked by armed robbers and stuff."*

The Guv'nor, owner of the Night Shift Coliseum:

*"Night life has gone on the lower side because of security problems. For instance, if you look at routine invitations for weddings and ceremonies like chieftaincy titles, the organisers always specify that there will be no night party for the guests. And that means a lot. It shows that people are dead scared. Nobody wants to hold night parties any longer because many people don't want to go out. So that is a simple indication that the culture of going out at night is still suffering."*

Having crisscrossed Lagos several times since 1998, it is clear to me that, nowadays, an atmosphere of paranoia settles on the city after 10 pm. At night, the freeways of the city are desperately empty after a day where they are saturated with the monstrous and mythical go-slows described so well by musicians like Fela. The numerous police checkpoints erected at the entrances of the residential neighbourhoods of Lagos are approached with fear and trepidation (cf. article in *The Guardian*, July 3, 2002).

Lagbaja!:

*"The only time we had some harassment we'd just started. The state government had some tax enforcement company, and they came with policemen and insisted they collected the so-called entertainment tax percentage from that day. They had guns, they were shooting in the air and everything. They checked the money at the gate-house and insisted they take 60% away, which they did. The next Monday we traced them to the company in charge. And we went until we saw the boss of the company. If you don't give any revenues, it makes it more difficult for them to disturb what you are doing. But that doesn't mean that you'll be perfect. Every single show that was successful, we give thanks and praise to God because anything can happen. And when something happens it is always an opportunity for them to find ways to squeeze you."*

#### **4.5 PRAISE SINGING: ECONOMIC DEATH OR SPIRITUAL SLAVERY?**

*"The system the political classes have created is a kind of system where people are more and more money worshippers. The economy is so bad that people need money desperately, so people are ready to work for any people, for anything. And if some of them are not hungry, they are greedy. As bad as Abacha was, lots of people were singing for him. And it's the same process today. So many musicians are selling their souls to the big ogas (bosses)."*

Amala, Afrobeat musician

As we saw earlier, praise songs are an integral part of Nigeria's national culture. It was first performed back in the Twenties by street singers. Since then, vocalists sing the praises of the kingpins of society, those who today have money to back their power (from the politician to the businessman). All of the greatest singers in the country have resorted to this practice, from the *juju* musicians of the South, to the maestros of the Hausa North, who have kept faith with their traditional roots and antiquated chieftaincies that dominate daily life there.

*"In the North, when you have people who have money and you are singing and you impress them, well, they can give big money, even cars or houses. It depends on the gathering. If people come from Abuja, Kaduna, all these politicians, and you praise very well, of course you can earn big money."*

Bayo Ohu, former correspondent for The Guardian in Katsina State.

The economic decline of the Eighties, the forced isolation of the country, the growing difficulty in finding gigs outside of private parties and institutional ceremonies all conspired to force "jobbers" to seek the favours of the rich.

*"Those are people who are not really into the craft," explains Guardian reporter Jahman Oladejo Anikulapo. "They just say, there's some money to be made here, so let's go. A lot of fuji musicians, for example, they are jobbers. Even recently, when Obasanjo declared his re-election bid, there were a lot of musicians who went because they wanted to make their own money on the democracy dividends."*

In a country where democracy has become synonymous with violence and vengeance unfortunately remains a common feature, certain musicians who abused the system under the former regimes have been branded for life. Jahman Oladejo Anikulapo of The Guardian: *"Those who went for example to sing for Abacha, there are still suffering because people are becoming more conscious."*

The Evangelist Ebenezer Obey is a case in point: *"He sang about a landowner who used to sell land to so many people and was known to be the patron of some robbers. Ebenezer Obey praised him to high level and made a lot of money. But when later the man was arrested for being involved in some racket, Obey had to come out and apologise profusely. He entered into church and he is still haunted by this particular experience."*

*"Even the musicians who promote the wrong leaders can also suffer," concedes Amala. "One hungry youth or the other will definitively attack them on the way, beat them or collect their car with a gun."*

*"When Bill Clinton came here (in 1999), I was the artist they chose to perform for him. You know, if you play good music, good lyrics, you'll be in good places and high places, you understand? If you play gangsta, dirty songs, then you go to dirty places and gangster areas. It's just an irony of life, so you choose one part."*

Zakki, rapper, Vice President of PMAN

A great number of musicians I met admit they were openly involved in praise singing, saying it was a question of survival or of enrichment. But others are currently facing a cruel dilemma: retain their integrity or go for the money. The most politicised, generally Afrobeat musicians, wonder openly just how far can they go before selling their souls to the devil?

Femi Kuti:

*"I was quite naive at the time my father died. There were so many people saying they were Fela's friends. When we were growing up, I never saw them. When my father had problems, I never saw them. So how is it that they were now all coming after his death? Why do they use his burial as platform for democracy? One of them was even calling my manager to say he was my new father. I never gave anybody authorization to say such things. And I noticed that I was surrounded by a lot of hypocrites and I say 'woaow', if it is a card game, it is what it is all about, so I've just moved myself out of it. These people just wanted to manipulate me and use me to make me look like a moron, a fool, like I don't have my own mind, so I just cut off immediately and totally from everybody. Even a lot of personal friends, I cut off from them, because, I noticed that, we all agree with Fela, but when it is time to put Fela's dreams into action, nobody is ready to compromise their material wealth, or their "big manism" (acting like a big chief) or their way of life, for the truth. So, now, I don't want to be part of that kind of life. Those people who sing for the elite are selling their souls to corruption and evil. And what is going on in this country is evil. People are being brainwashed and their eyes are closed and they are heading totally in the wrong way. I'd rather live a life of honesty, purity, as long as I can. So, I won't compromise for anything."*

Gani Fawehinmi, lawyer:

*"Now, you have some people who want to take advantage of the popularity of Fela. Now he is dead, the aura of his legend still catch on millions of people, and the politicians want to use it and make more votes. But the problems that formed Fela's lyrics are still here. I mean, when Fela sang "no water", we still have no water, when he talked of "teacher don't teach me nonsense", teachers are still disillusioned. Every aspect of Fela's song is relevant to the present day Nigeria."*

Charlie Boy:

*"You see, I can become a juju artist, I can sing anybody's praise, but if you are not into this category, you are always confronting the system."*

Lagbaja!:

*"As a principle, we don't praise anybody. It is the philosophy of our music, of the Afrobeat, and there's a conflict if you have to start performing and praising for patrons. So up to date, we don't have patrons. We've never praised for anybody. It's difficult, sure, because it makes survival in the music industry tougher, economically, but because of my choice and my consciousness, I had decided never*

*to do that. I don't have any blame for those who do it. Absolutely not, I'm just saying it is my choice not to do it. When you do it, there's no way you would eventually have to compromise your position in terms of message, and for me, the message is more important. However, in spite of that, we've had invitations to perform at private parties. We've done a lot, but still at those parties, we don't praise anybody. We get paid to play, we charge our normal fees. We just came back for example on Sunday from a party that was held by the governor of Edo State, in Benin City. So, after playing the first songs, we told the people, yes, we're here for a party, but you know that Lagbaja! will always talk about the problems, especially when we have leaders, people close to us, who don't tell us the whole truth all the times. So an opportunity like this, a party, and the governor is our friend because he invited us, we must still tell him a few things that are happening in town and the basic truth and mostly how we need to be watchful and not let selfish interests lead to destruction of democracy. So, we still get invited despite the fact that we don't get to praise them. That is the power of our music. And we get invited to all sorts of functions, and I use all those opportunities. Because again, as part of the message, I have the belief that if you are able to influence the thoughts of one leader, who has the power over millions of people, you're actually influencing the lives of those people. So, we don't shy those opportunities, whenever they come; it's just a simple procedure like we charge for any function: these are fees, we get paid, we play the function, we say what we can say."*

As far as the masked musician is concerned, one thing is for sure: the presidential election set for April 2003, which is Nigeria's first democratic transition of power, is clearly going to touch musicians:

*"The political process affects music. It always does. On one side, a praise singer will get more money, because the more you can praise, the more money you can get. But on the other side, the masses will be too busy battling with their affairs and they will be less interested in buying music. We don't have a sense of freedom and independence, even in so-called independent or privately owned stations. They still patronize people in power. So each station will program whatever they think will put them in a good state of relationship with whoever is going to be the new government in power. There's a lot to do with lack of independence yet. A lot of things to do with fear of economic death."*

Jahman Oladejo, *The Guardian*

#### 4.6 RELIGION VERSUS MUSIC: SELF-CENSORSHIP, PRESSURE GROUPS AND BANS IN LAGOS

*"This is not America. This is Africa. This is Nigeria. And there are still some very sensitive issues around."*

Kenny Ogungbe, Raypower

*"Come on and get your miracle. The blind would see, the cripple would walk."*

Pastor Reinhold Bonke, advertisement for the Great Millenium Crusade

The period was fall, 1998, just a few short months before the Shrine was bulldozed to the ground. It was around 4 am, and the brass section of Fela's latest band - *Egypt 80* - was blasting the very foundations off the mythical club, when a strange vision tore my eyes off the stage. Above the corrugated iron roof protecting the band, a pastor was trying to restrain one of his followers who were possessed. *"It's a makeshift church,"* my neighbour whispered to me. *"They're taking over the neighbourhood."*

So it came as no surprise to me when I read a few months later that the Shrine had been razed to the ground and a new Pentecostal church was being built there. It was merely following the same path as the cinemas in this game of religious monopoly that is set not only in the popular quarters of Ikeja and Mushin, but also the chic neighbourhood of Ikoyi. Lagos now has the dubious honour of being the city with one of the greatest numbers of religious centres in all Africa.

The weight and number of religious institutions have never been heavier. On any given street in the popular quarters of Lagos, you can find an impressive array of establishments representing Evangelical, Messianic, Ecumenical, Pentecostal, born again or prophetic beliefs. They are housed in anything ranging from simple shacks to huge warehouses with room for tens of thousands of followers. Today, they have become meeting points for socializing and exchanging between the mainly Christian Lagotians only too desperate to escape disease, fear or insecurity linked to the economic crisis.

Many of these institutions are used as shelters by Yoruba families (80% of whom were Muslim in the Twenties) terrified of the armed robbers that roam the Lagos nights. The country's biggest stadium in the Surulere neighbourhood nowadays hosts preacher stars promising transcontinental crusades instead of the erstwhile popular and giant concerts sponsored by Benson & Hedges or Nigerian Breweries.

Western journalists continue to be fascinated by new church ceremonies mixing trance, liberation gospel songs and incantations. But some of these churches today resonate to more worrying sermons. They moralise on public behaviour, watch over daily activities with an iron fist and shatter traditional taboos. The sermons are often accompanied by rappers or *makossa* musicians openly devoted to the Pentecostal churches. Other artists, on the other hand, are subject to indirect or direct lobbying by the most virulent of these sects, who regularly direct pressure on *the National Broadcasting Commission* (NBC). As a result, many musicians admit to self-censorship to escape the religious zeal that is stifling Nigeria today.

## 5. Case study: Femi Kuti

### - THE BANNING OF "BANG, BANG, BANG"

In the fall of 1998 the NBC imposed a blanket ban on "Bang, Bang, Bang" by Fela's eldest son, Femi Kuti. Ironically, it was one of his least political songs and was released only months before the transition government led by General Abubakar organized the first free elections in 16 years. "Bang, Bang, Bang" is a festive metaphor of the sexual act. Its censorship marked the start of a period of moralization that is intensifying year by year.

#### 5.1 BIOGRAPHY OF FEMI KUTI

*"Sometimes I'd like to sing sweet, harmless tunes with lines like "Oh, darling I love you". But how can you write anything but engaged songs when you live in Nigeria? People are suffering all around me. All my music does is reflect this reality."*

Femi Kuti

Femi Kuti did not opt for the easy way out in his life. He could have chosen a comfortable musician's exile in the heart of one of the Diaspora of New York or London. He would have been a sort of musician's equivalent of international soccer player Jay Jay Okocha. He would have been helped along his way by the four international releases that have stamped him a world-class musician. The doors to a cosy expatriate career would have been guaranteed.

But, as the Yoruba proverb goes, "the son of a tiger remains a tiger". The son of the Black President and the spiritual inheritor of one of the Third World's cultural heroes had no choice but to pursue the struggle from his home base.

Femi was born in London in June 1962. Nigeria was on the point of blowing out the candles to its second anniversary as an independent nation and few people would have suspected that its destiny would be so intimately linked to the Kuti family. Least of all the student who would later marry 27 women in one simultaneous Ghanaian ceremony. At the time, the Kutis incarnated the new African model, jet setting between London and Lagos. Africa's future appeared paved in gold.

But the advent of the Biafra war in 1967 slowly turned the dream into a nightmare. Fela returned from his initiation tour with the American Black Panthers and began his musical education as the kingpin of the *highlife* Koola Lobito's group. Soon, Femi's ears and eyes would be impregnated with the pioneering sounds of the Africa 70 band and its Afrobeat.

In the Seventies, the young man witnessed Nigeria's history through his father's revolutionary songs. Following the 1977 attack by soldiers of the Kalakuta Republic in Ikeja, he traded in his smoky nonchalance for an ideological and creative vision forged in the cauldrons of Lagos. Yet, it took years to leave the shadow of one of Africa's strongest personalities. Femi struggled to enter his father's group, as Fela never tolerated any favouritism towards his son. The teenager needed a certain degree of stubbornness to embark on his career as a saxophonist. He overcame his shyness and plunged into the long nights at the Afrika Shrine where his father harangued the public, convinced of his own place in destiny.

In the early Eighties, as Fela's stays behind bars increased in number and length and Nigeria foundered into the hands of a military dictatorship, Femi's reputation grew in stature. Progressively, he took over the mantle of leader of the Kuti clan. And with his talents as a musician consolidated, he became second saxophonist for the Egypt 80 band.

In 1986, Femi fronted his first solo group, Positive Force. Sleepless nights followed sunless days as successive military regimes decimated the country. Femi imposed himself as a consummate showman in front of one of the world's hottest and most demanding publics. His nationwide tours quickly made him a new spokesman of a country starved of stability.

In 1991, Femi Kuti performed at the prestigious Paris jazz club, the New Morning. The world music planet discovered a musician they dubbed the end-of-the-century African artist: a man at ease in the cultures of the North and the South, less interested in the anti-western diatribe so dear to his father, but just as Pan-African as the Afrobeat founder. And someone who was more than ever committed to rid his continent of the evils that continued to sap it: corruption, inter-communal violence, greed, bigotry. The American label Tabu, a subdivision of Motown, signed up the 29-year-old.

In 1995, Femi's single "Wonderful, Wonderful", supervised by Timmy Regisford, marked the revival of Afrobeat and invaded the dance floors. Performing besides the singer were three publicly acclaimed dancers: Femi's wife Funke, and his two sisters Yeni and Sola.

On August 2, 1997, Fela died of AIDS. Over a million people lined the highway that links insular Lagos with its popular suburbs on the mainland, in order to see the catafalque of the Black President pass by. One chapter closed, another one began. Femi released "Shoki Shoki" in 1998. He was now signed up to Barclay-Universal, and had finally imposed his own Christian name, accompanied by a distinctive form of Afrobeat: a slamming verb and music that crossed frontiers, from dub to house. Western nightclubs latched onto an album of dance-floor remixes signed by the best composers in the Afro-revival mode: Joe Claussell, Kerry Chandler, Masters at Work. Femi electrified festivals in Europe while, back home, he exorcized the Indian curse in the fall of 1998 by organizing a festival to mark the first anniversary of the death of his father.

Femi was now far more than a singer. He had become the ambassador of a new Nigeria, a loudspeaker for the new civil society as it prepared to vote freely for the first time in 16 years. The saxophonist created his own association, *the Movement against Second Slavery* (MASS). MASS, and its website, aim to awaken the African peoples to take the continent's destiny into their own hands and is a national successor to Fela's *Movement of the People* (MOP).

After an ultimate Sunday Jump, the Afrika Shrine finally closed its doors on January 31, 1999. The man who had overseen the 1977 attack on Kalakuta was now President of the Nigerian federation. The country was rediscovering its freedom of expression, while demands for greater regional freedom - often backed by violence - were growing.

Femi embarked on a long tour aimed at renewing his family's links with the African-American community. Hip-hop discovered the riches of his father's discography and wooed the son. Rapper Common invited Femi to play in his album "Like Water and Chocolate" and French-Algerian Rachid Taha's "Medina" CD featured the Nigerian's saxophone playing.

On October 13, 2000, between two sessions at Paris's Zarma Studios, Femi unveiled a new facet to his character, that of a businessman: at a press conference, he declared the opening of a new Afrika Shrine, taking up the paternal motto "Music is the Weapon of the Future". The high-risk business operation was to showcase the new musical wave sweeping Lagos: from the *galala* of Daddy Showkey to Afro-hip hop by the Remedies. The revamped Afrika Shrine was seen as the central point for all those fighting to defend Nigeria's newfound democracy. Behind the project, Femi dreamed that his club would one day have the same influence the Apollo Theater had in Harlem.

Yet, at the same time, the country was descending into the inferno of inter-communal clashes. Femi left for Rio de Janeiro to participate in a festival alongside D'Angelo. Shortly after, he returned to France via Lagos to put the finishing touches on the recordings for his latest album.

In October 2001, this man of all latitudes but one attitude was taking initiatives on all fronts: humanitarian, political, creative. London inaugurated clubs with "Shrine" evenings, while the Queen in Paris hosted jam sessions featuring sparring matches between Femi and DJ Derrick Carter. The French Fnac chain store invited him to inaugurate an itinerant exhibition devoted to his father; then the Banlieue Bleues Festival outside of Paris hosted his band.

After a brief spell in Lagos in June, Femi embarked on a new tour of the US. Seizing on his presence, the Red Hot Association invited him to sing next to Macy Gray and the Roots in an album of Fela oldies to mark the struggle against the AIDS pandemic. The next stop was Cuba for the filming of the video clip "Fight to Win", shot by Thierry Le Goues. Unusually, Femi was filmed playing an organ before supervising his son's trumpet lesson.

More than ever, Femi was assuming the position as the head of the new Kuti clan. "The death of a man is the birth of an ancestor" goes an old Yoruba saying. And the birth of an inheritor, one is tempted to add. African journalists requested his opinion at each development in Nigeria. Some also accused him of not devoting enough time to Nigeria, an allegation he fiercely rejected.

At the end of the year, his latest album, "Fight to Win", was released. Produced by Frenchman Sodi, it was the best answer by this grandson of Africa's independence movements to all those who thought he had abandoned the struggle for the Mother Continent. "Fight to Win" redefines the Afrobeat map by creating bridges with the American hip-hop and the electronics scenes.

The fight could now go on:

*"It will probably take all my life to see my dream of a New Africa realized. But if it's not me, it will be the dream of my son. And if it's not him, then he will transmit it to his son. The years to come will be difficult ones for Africa. But what do you want me to do? This is my country. My continent. And it's not by leaving this place that things will start to change."*

Femi Kuti

### 5.1.1 NBC vs. Femi Kuti

*"It's more difficult to talk about sex or religion than politics today in Nigeria. Although they work hand in hand, it has been so embedded in the system that anybody can't do anything without religion, and if you are against any of the bodies, Islam or Christianity, automatically you are an outcast in the society. Since I always talk against both, and my father did as well, I see the major problems I have. At the end of the military regime, there was a church down the road of the Shrine saying the club must burn. That Femi has a bad influence on the youth. And, one day they came to wake me at three in the morning because my room had caught fire. They say it was an electrical failure but I was very paranoid that it was somebody else. I still keep an open mind on that issue."*

Femi Kuti

In the early Nineties, two artists were censured by the Babangida government for attacks against the national morale. Obafemi Lasode is the PMAN president and author of "Television broadcasting, the Nigerian experience, 1952-1992" (Caltop Publications Limited):

*"In 1990, a musical video, "Choices", a joint musical venture between musician King Sunny Ade and vocalist Onyeka Onwenu, was banned by the Nigerian Television Authority for encouraging what it perceived as pre-marital sex. Although the producers attempted to address the issue of family-planning in the video, NTA felt that even though the song was supposed to teach people how to plan their family, the calibre of people used for the video did not reflect responsibility."*

At this same period, the tune "Big Bottom" by Charlie Boy Oputa was censured in an identical manner:

*"It was not an original by me, it was a cover of an artist I don't remember. I heard the song in New York so I decided to remake the song my own way because I liked the song and it had a mass appeal. I didn't make money from it, but when the song was out of course it was obvious that people liked what it was talking about. Africans like big butts, like women well defined, so, but when I began to sing about it, that became a problem: why do you have to sing about it? The papers, the TV, everybody was shouting, saying I was trying to corrupt the youth. I didn't talk about sex, I was just saying African men like women with big boobs and big asses, and I do too."*

In 1998 the "Bang, Bang, Bang" affair caught Femi Kuti by surprise:

*"I was shocked when it was banned. The reason why it was banned by the military government of that time was that it was too sexual for the radio. Although, at that time the radios were playing worse numbers than that. Especially from America, rap music that was even very abusive, with lyrics calling bitch, motherfucker. The TVs too were playing all those videos, coming from Europe and America, with all the women in swimming costumes. I have no problem with all these things, but if you are going to ban "Bang, Bang, Bang" I asked them, why don't you ban all this music? Then the civilian government took over power and they insisted that the ban must stay. The guy of the NBC who did it was a personal friend of mine! And when I asked him why, his only excuse was that charity begins at home. So the ban had to stay. But there were still playing "Let's talk about sex, Baby". It was played everywhere in Nigeria! So I didn't understand why he was insisting on a ban like that. What I felt was that since they couldn't ban a number like "Sorry Sorry" or the other political numbers on the album, they just used that track to victimize me and frustrate me as a musician, saying they just wanted an excuse to ban, maybe to even be seen as doing something. Ever since that, I've just noticed that a lot of things in the country - not just this banning - have changed towards me. For example, the American Embassy when I go for a visa, they say they don't know me. The BBC even asked me while I was abroad if I felt it was not something more political. I am very outspoken, my lyrics are political, and I will continue what Fela fought for us. I'm a threat to any corrupt regime that is not doing what they should do for the people of my country. Or some people don't like my ideas, don't like what I am saying, I'm too frank, too direct, and so I think that's why I'm having a lot of problems. But compared with my father who stood for something much bigger than any African musician, it is nothing."*

Charlie Boy:

*"If Femi was based here 24 hours out of 24 and 365 days out of 365, they will find other ways to frustrate him. So I can understand why some of my colleagues don't want to rock the boat."*

Femi Kuti:

*"There were a lot of bad reports about the new Shrine, armed robbers here, a lot of voodoo going on here. There was a time they even brought some boys trying to hide guns in the Shrine. It was the time when Bola Tinubu, the governor of Lagos, had bought new guns for the police. I was in America, but luckily some of the boys here were wise enough to find them. Nine rifles and a bag of bullets. So they put it*

*outside there, the police came, raided, found nothing, but the next days the papers were saying that weapons had been found at Femi's Shrine."*

It seems only natural that Femi Kuti queries the real reasons for this official campaign of harassment. Yet, during my investigation, I found no overtly political explanation to justify this offensive. Femi, Charlie Boy and Lagbaja! remain the three harshest critics of the federal government of Olusegun Obasanjo and Lagos' state governor Bola Tinubu. Indeed, Femi led a billboard campaign against the latter exhorting Tinubu to provide water and electricity for all the Lagotian population.

Still, the present climate has politicised and instrumentalised religion to such an extent (cf. the chapter on the effects of the *Sharia* on Hausa musicians) that the singer and "Bang, Bang, Bang" could well have been victims of revenge indirectly orchestrated by the Church. The policy of installing new churches in Lagos could also explain the number of "sabotage" attempts against Femi's Shrine.

Obafemi Lasode:

*"Churches are making big money. If you watch all the TV stations in Nigeria, you find out that the main advertisers are religious. They are taking over."*

Jahman Oladejo Anikulapo, The Guardian:

*"The censorship that was placed on Femi's "Bang, Bang, Bang" that's come from NBC's zealousness. Somebody just woke up and said this song is corrupt. I think somebody was just punishing Femi for being the son of Fela. Yes perhaps someone into religion having close relations with the power. You know the churches didn't like Fela and now they are taking so much power in our lives, campaigning against so many things like sex, voodoo or devil dance, it could happen like this. You can't imagine their power. Last Saturday, for example, we published an article about churches that destroy shrines and they loot the artefacts and they sell it abroad, and they pretend they are doing it for God. They say shrines are against the spirit of Christianity, but it is just looting! Another case we wrote last week was about a respected priest of the Anglican Church, a senior of the Anglican Church in Nigeria, and this man was saying that FESTAC (Festival of African Culture) was the beginning of Nigeria's war. That FESTAC had brought evils and demons to Nigeria."*

Whether it's a political or a religious issue, many interlocutors are asking themselves what has got the NBC's goat up. They point out the reticence with which the audiovisual body is applying this decision. Jacob Akinyemi Johnson, Rhythm FM:

*"When the NBC banned "Bang, Bang, Bang", we argued we didn't see anything really wrong. I thought they could ask for it to be edited, but they didn't do just an outright ban (laugh) for whatever reasons. NBC is the regulative body, they have the code of regulation, they write to us regularly about things they think we're doing wrong. And they are empowered by the laws of the land to do so and weave the big stick on any broadcasting station, so we have to, as much as possible, dance with the cases they disagree rather than disagree with their standpoint."*

A foreign observer of Nigeria's audiovisual sector believes that:

*"in the case of "Bang, Bang, Bang" the NBC were not directly responsible for its banning. You have to understand the position they are in. They are being assailed and harassed by religious organizations demanding they censor such and such a song for reasons of moral righteousness. And the Obasanjo administration prefers to cave in to these organizations rather than publicly defend some controversial figures and get embroiled in a new religious crisis. Just look how long it took them to make a public stance on the Sharia!"*

Jahman Oladejo Anikulapo, The Guardian:

*"Africa is a very coded society, in a sense that cultural values are themselves like codes. There are certain things you must not do because it is against the norm of the society. If you do it, they don't even say that you are a rebel, or a non-conformist, you are a renegade. You are going against the values of the society. They fix a stigma on you. So you are guided as an artist by this kind of restriction. But it is not fixed, it is not written. But the case of the National Broadcasting Commission is a case of an organisation which is still caught in between the military psyche and the democratic psyche. It is not particular to the NBC, it is applied too in the NTA (Nigerian Television Authority), the newspaper medium, the broadcast medium. Here, for instance, I can't publish certain pictures because it's against the society, but it is because we are also in a transition, we are still moving from the military era to now. The military psyche is still here. Before I write something myself, I think twice about it. Honestly, I want to get out from that state of mind but it is in me. It will take some time for us to go. So if you look at the society generally, many people are still in that psyche. So the NBC is still caught between what is morally acceptable and what is normally acceptable."*

Jacob Akinyemi-Johnson, Rhythm FM:

*"Basically, in all the meetings I had with the NBC, they always talked about African culture. And they also talk about religion."*

Kenny Ogungbe, Raypower:

*"It's morality. African morality. Deep African morality which is totally different from our American brothers."*

Kunle Tejuoso, Glendora:

*"If there is a real sense of moralisation, good, but is there any sincerity in it? Sometimes, you want a kind of cultural revolution and you are very worried about that topic. But is it sincere in Nigeria? For me, the way it is working here, it is just because you want to extend your domination on the spirit of the people. And in this way, it affects cultural freedom and therefore everyone is on the edge because of this insincerity."*

Charlie Boy Oputa:

*"Religion is a business, that's what it is. It is all about who gets what. The new wave of Pentecostal churches that are sweeping the whole place, they're only playing on hopelessness and helpless people. I can understand why most Nigerians are sucked into that kind of bullshit, I believe in the Supreme Being, but I don't have to carry bibles and attend church every Sunday to convince myself I'm a good Christian. It's all about the relationship we have with fellow human beings and the fact that you try to put other people first before yourself. And most of these people who are creating all these churches and even congregations, from the way I see it, they don't even come close to being good Christians. You have so many churches here and so much evil all around you, people are doing some real evil things in the name of religion, so yes it is a business for those people who want to capitalize on the poverty, the frustration and the hopelessness of the Nigerian."*

## 6. Gangsta rap and makossa

### 6.1 HIGH MORAL GROUNDS VERSUS THE "MUSIC OF THE DEVIL"

*"Gangsta rap will never please you. Gangsta rap will never favour you. Gangsta is of the devil and I want to tell you, as a man of God, that you must be born again, you must free yourself from it, you must free yourself from gangstarism. The devil is trying to take you off, God loves you, so you better change from gangsta and do something for God."*

FFD, Bless Sound Records, gospel-rap producer.

Unquestionably, a pernicious wind of public salubrity has been sweeping through Nigerian culture ever since the "Bang, Bang, Bang" affair. This has not just been affecting music, however. The other major sector of popular culture in the country, home videos, is also being targeted by conservative lobbies. Some 600 local Nigerian video films are produced annually, mixing *juju* or gangster stories, and battles between good and evil. The videocassettes are distributed and sold in the main commercial centres of the federation. During the course of my last visit, several films with scenes featuring skimpily clad actresses ("Outkast", "Night Out") were being openly criticized by certain Pentecostal churches.

Shan George, artist, Outkast:

*"Why should I be banned? I'm an artist! What are they banning me for? Look at Femi Anikulapo Kuti when they banned his "Bang, Bang, Bang", he won a Kora Award for that same track. For God's sake, I think Nigerians should be more broad-minded. They are too biased. They don't want to see you succeed. Is it not the same "Bang, Bang, Bang" that they banned in Nigeria that made Femi an international musician today?"*

For years, Nigeria's private FM stations programmed all currents of American rap - from R Kelly to Tupac Shakur - and R&B, as much for economic reasons (no royalties to pay) as a will to stick close to the tastes of the new urban generation. Since then, however, they have "cleaned up" their programming while state radios have purely and simply banned these musical styles. The South African Press Agency, SAPA, wrote this dispatch on December 5, 2001:

*"BAD NIGERIAN RAP*

*Nigeria's state-run radio has banned its stations nationwide from broadcasting rap music, considered immoral by Muslim and Christian conservatives. A directive from the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) asked all broadcasters to*

*note that "rap music is banned in all FRCN stations", according to a copy sent to AFP on Tuesday. The directive, which was issued in October, violates the rights of young Nigerians to hear music of their choice, said the civil liberties group the Civil Rights Congress which sent the directive, along with a protest letter addressed to the radio station. "With the fact that an overwhelming number of young Nigerians like to listen to rap music and see rap musicians as folk heroes, this ban is tantamount to infringing on their fundamental rights," the group declared. Rap is widely played on private radio stations operating in the southern Nigerian city of Lagos but is rarely heard outside the city, where state-run radios have a near monopoly on broadcasts."*

Paradoxically, the South African television station Channel O (which has overtaken MTV in popularity amongst young Nigerians) broadcasts a number of hot video clips that are enjoyed across the nation, even reaching into the recesses of fast food joints in states where the *Sharia* Law is applied. Yet, FM programmers of rap admit to censoring their play lists for fear of NBC sanctions. Jacob Akinyemi-Johnson, Rhythm FM:

*"We're concerned about swearwords, not so much the message. You can play gangsta rap but as long they don't have swearwords, you just play the radio versions. We are more concerned about the swearwords because the regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Commission, are very sensitive about putting up swearwords on air. So we have radio versions, clean versions. Some records we get don't have clean versions and in some cases where they don't, we go to the production studio and make it clean. There's so many. For instance, some stuff from DMX or Jah Rule, some stuff from Eminem, so many of that sort we had to reedit in Nigerian studios. There are even some newcomers in Nigerian hip-hop, like Coded, we reedit his track. So yes, we could say it's a kind of self-censorship (annoyed)... But the problem is some of them, up there, don't seem to realise that the world has changed..."*

Jahman Oladejo Anikulapo, The Guardian:

*"The NBC is like a watchdog. There is still Not to Be Broadcasted (NTBB) on various songs. If an artist releases a record, he has to send it to their library before it is broadcast. And people listen to it before it is fit for broadcast. And if they find anything which is morally unjustifiable, they will brand it NTBB. These days, with the proliferations of the stations, they don't have time for all that, but, all the same, you find that the station managers still insist on that moral rectitude: because it is one of the things that can work against the image of the station. If a station*

*always comes up with immoral songs and all that, it will come to the point where the radio station itself will be banned, which is bad for business. So the radio stations are compelled to do it in order to survive. They play the same game as the NBC in order to not be banned."*

Makossa music has also been earmarked by its detractors "the Devil's music", immoral music, especially in 2000, the year of "Comment tu t'appelles?" ("What's your name?"), a hit by Cameroonian singer Awilo, whose lyrics were taken up in Nigeria's prostitution circles.

FFD, producer of gospel rap:

*"When Christ appeared to me, he directed me to a church called the Rock Christian Mission. But right now, I am in a bigger church, the Rhythm Gospel Church. And I want the whole world to know this now. Music is good and evil. Why is it good and evil? Because Lucifer was playing music in heaven before God sent him down. And God asked somebody else to play music for him. So you should know that the music you are doing, it is good or evil and there is some music, all this makossa, it is terrible. We should watch out, because the Bible said he comes, steals and destroys. The devil is looking for whom to seek and defy. He is coming through music, because music penetrates more than anything, so all those dancing makossa, opening their legs and other things, they are evil. They are just terribly evil. Music shouldn't be a thing that corrupts us."*

Aj Dagga Tolla, journalist, reggae musician:

*"The impact of Islamic ideas in the music industry is not as strong as the Christian ideas, and this is something which is neglected in the question of who really controls the music industry. It is clear: big business controls that industry and those people have a tendency towards Christianity. The other factor is that the productive aspect of the music is mainly located in the southern part of the country. So, to finally resolve the question of religion, it's something that protest artists should get more involved in. Fela has done a lot of work with the song "Like Shuffling and Smiling" and more things need to be done in that part to help people clarify the role of religion in their lives. I think we have to sit down and think in terms of that. These conservative forces have to be taken up."*

Within the context of growing religious tensions even an artist like Lagbaja! admits he has problems of conscience when he addresses subjects like religion or sex.

Lagbaja:

*"I'm still trying to make up my mind along these lines. Can I be absolutely free in terms of sexual and religious issues? When it comes to religion or spiritual matters, especially here in Africa, people have very strong belief in what they believe. I do not wish to force my beliefs on another man as I want to accept what he believes as his choice. So, I therefore censor myself about some religious things. But also, on a couple of occasions I had to say my mind about the fact that we are being misled by lots of people who are just doing their economic business and deceiving the people who are just following them like fools thinking they are their salvation. Salvation is between you and God, not through any intermediary. Sharia is the same principle, it is manipulation. In spite of the fact that I agree that the artist should be free I'm still confronted with the principles of self-censorship. It is a very difficult mental struggle."*

Daddy Showkey:

*"If you grow up in a neighbourhood like Ajegunle, inside crime, as a real bad boy in the streets, and you see many friends dying, and you are alive, you understand God. I hardly go to church but I am a religious man. I am a Catholic. And I believe in God. I'm no better than those of my friends that died, but maybe God has chosen me for a special purpose, that one day he will use me. And if I do one million albums, there must be one or two tracks where I glorify God."*

Jahman Oladejo:

*"When people begin to look for miracles, you know that the social order is dislocated. That means nobody is no more dreaming, nobody is no more aspiring for a change, nobody is no more planning."*

Femi Kuti:

*"I always ask myself why I'm staying here in Nigeria. When they wrote I was mad, that was the height of it for me. I wanted to get out of here, I was thinking that if the country headed this way, then there was no point in being part of this nation. But my mother said if I write a song about "Blackman Know Yourselves" and believe in my lyrics, why should I want to leave? So she convinced me to come back and, I think, I changed my orientation. If I really think what I sing, I cannot run away from the problems. No matter how bad the problems are."*

## 7. Shariaphrenia

### 7.1 HARASSMENT, CENSORSHIP AND VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

*"Islam has hence forbidden its women to speak in a soft and sweet tone to other men. Our women dare to sing melodious songs which only let loose waves of sexual passion. Jabir reports that the Holy Prophet said "songs generate hypocrisy in the heart as water grows crops". There is no doubt that modern music has a strong tendency to excite sexual passion. Songs with the accompaniment of music are stepping stones to immorality: a man shall obey his wife and disobey his mother; he shall draw his friends near and keep his father away. Singing girls and musical instruments shall appear, wives will be drunk. The frivolity of music casts a spell of hypocrisy over the heart of the listener and transports him or her from the realms of reality to the limbo of dreamland. The Holy Prophet is reported to have further said, with every musical bell is the devil. And again the angels do not enter a home where there is a musical instrument. Some music and indulgence therein have been described as *fisq*: open and naked sin in Islamic terminology. In fact, music and dancing have been proven to be a great stimulant of carnal sex, a stepping-stone to fornication and adultery. It is therefore essential that every Muslim man and woman takes the utmost care to reclaim and preserve himself or herself from this."*

Shun Music, extract of "Who are the Sinful Women, according to the Qur'an and Hadith" Ed. Islamic books, Illorin

On January 1, 2000, the governor of Zamfara State Ahmed Sani Yerima introduced *Sharia* Law into the legislation of his state. Until then, this law was only applied in states where the Hausas and Muslims represented 90% of the population, with the notable exception of Kano and Kaduna, and their sizable Christian minority. Furthermore, post-independent Nigeria had only used it in civil affairs (divorce, inheritance matters...). After Zamfara, however, the other 11 northern states of the country implemented *Sharia* Law, despite the reticence of some of the governors, local politicians and members of the ruling PDP party.

The politicisation of the *Sharia* has ignited serious inter-communal clashes that have spread to the entire country. It has sparked off a showdown between the Obasanjo administration aiming to preserve the secular nature of the federation, and northern leaders linked to former military leaders who are still feared in the capital Abuja.

The two bloodiest incidents centred on Kaduna (spring 2000, over 3,000 dead following a Christian demonstration to protest the implementation of *Sharia* Law) and Jos. In September 2001, the plateau state capital witnessed a terrible series of revenge massacres against Jos' Muslim community. A number of victims were non-Hausas who had fled the North because of the implementation of *Sharia* Law there. The rioting killed over 3,000 people, but passed virtually unnoticed in the international press, too busy covering the September 11 crisis in the United States.

The city of Kano has been plagued by some of the worst violence between Christians and Muslims. It holds the biggest "non-indigenous" community, mainly in the Sabon Gari neighbourhood. This is a centrally located enclave traditionally reserved for the Yoruba and Ibo communities from the South. In the last few years it has witnessed a series of bloody riots. The most recent occurred in the fall of 2002 when a demonstration organized by radical Muslim associations degenerated into fighting that left almost 300 people dead.

There had been an international outcry over the fate reserved for women found guilty of adultery, focusing in particular on the condemnation of Safya Husseini (who was eventually acquitted in March 2002). There are, however, dozens of similar cases that have not enjoyed such international attention. The first decision by the Islamic *alkali* judges in 2001 was to condemn Maniru Abdullahi to 126 lashes for having transported a Muslim woman on the back of his motorbike-taxi. Since then, 34 other people have been subjected to the ire of these tribunals, where punishments vary from amputation to lashes. The punishments are inflicted for 'offences' which vary from the drinking of alcohol, to theft, gambling, sodomy, 'unnatural' acts with an adolescent, or having made love to someone certified as crazy.

These have been serious violations of human rights, and have scaled surrealistic heights of inhumanity. Take, for example, the case of Sule Sale, a citizen of Katsina State. He was condemned in 2001 to 80 lashes for having stolen three packets of cigarettes.

The Christian community is also affected by the *Sharia*, despite promises by the state governors that they would not be touched by a law reserved for Muslims only. There has been only one official case, against Ibo merchant Livinus Obi, condemned in 2001 to 100 lashes for having drunk alcoholic beverages. Yet, 'non-indigenous' inhabitants continue to be harassed by the *hisbas* and claim they are being treated as second-class citizens.

The *hisbas* are recruited among the lumpen proletariat and the *yandaba* hooligans who sell petrol on the black market in a region where most petrol

stations are closed. The Hausa ruling classes recruit these henchmen, officially to supervise the strict application of *Sharia* Law. Many, however, are being instrumentalized by hard-line mosque leaders who are themselves at the service of local mafia figures usually linked to the northern ANPP party in their ongoing showdown against the PDP politicians. This part of my inquiry is based on a stay in the economic and historic capital of north Nigeria, Kano. It studies the cases of several Hausa artists, many of whom are actually in favour of *Sharia* Law. Ironically, they are also being targeted by the *hisbas* of this region.

I also show how *Sharia* Law has eroded social and musical life in the Sabon Gari quarter of Kano, known as one of the high spots of Nigerian nights as recently as in 1999. Paradoxically, I describe how the censor board established in Kano (the only body of its kind in Nigeria) is doing what it can to protect what is left of the artistic life there. Most of the interviews were conducted in Hausa and translated by French-speaking Nigerians studying at the *Alliance Française* in Kano.

## 7.2 MUSIC IN THE NORTH

The population of northern Nigeria continues to enjoy the rhythms of traditional Hausa-Fulani music in an environment that is more averse to western influences than in the South. The *griot* music of the Sahel is often reduced to its simplest common denominator of a lead singer, some back-up percussionists and, on occasion, a player of the one-string *goge*. It has been deeply influenced by Islam (*kalengu, goge, molo, asharalle*) and is rarely heard in western circles. The late singer Mohammed Shata from Katsina State did enjoy a degree of notoriety throughout the Sahelian sub-region. But, for the most part, Hausa artists are only appreciated by their own community. In the past their role was confined to singing for the Emirs and traditional Hausa chiefs. At present, they eke out a living by playing at private parties and marriages, or in official ceremonies. Spraying is even more widespread here than in the South. Artists are often paid by their hosts not in cash but with cattle (for the least fortunate) or houses (for those with wealthy patrons). Most are profoundly respectful of the Qur'an and do not hesitate to quote *surats* (the rows or chapters of the Qur'an) in the course of their oft-improvised recitals praising the social status of their hosts.

Contrary to their southern counterparts, these singers do not benefit from any structured union organization. Obafemi Lasode, PMAN president:

*"PMAN has not really appealed to many northerners, real northerners I mean, Hausa people. We do have state chapters in the North, but the people who rule*

*them are not necessarily northerners. They are not playing in clubs, but in private functions and being more social figures of the Hausa life than real professionals in music, they are not oriented to things like unionism."*

The only non-Nigerian music widely appreciated in the North is the one accompanying Indian films from Bollywood. In the past, these were programmed in the rare cinemas halls in this region until *Sharia* Law was imposed. Nowadays, you only can hear successes from the South in Sabon Gari (the rap of the Remedies or the latest *highlife* hits).

## 8. Case study: Katsina State

### HISBAS VERSUS HAUSA MUSICIANS; ALHAJI SIRAJI MAI ASHARALLE

*"You know, these hisbas, they are like vigilantes. They say this is Sharia, this is our law and we must implement it. Apart from the musicians, they pursue the women in the brothels and the motels. But they don't know really what the Qur'an says. It's just because they feel they have the power to do it. Normally, if you arrest someone violating the Sharia Law, you take him to a Sharia court to follow the process. The alkali (judge) tries you and, if he finds you guilty, he passes judgment, and it will be in accordance with the process. But those hisba boys, they take the law in their own hands, and they don't even follow that process. They are working for some fanatics, Islamic scholars, fanatical about Sharia, and they even antagonize with the state government. For example, here, in Katsina State, or even in Kano State, these governors were so soft for the implementation of the Sharia they harassed them, in order that Sharia should be implemented properly."*

Bayo Ohu, former correspondent in Katsina State for The Guardian

*"Following the gradual return of drumming, dancing, singing and prostitution in Katsina State, Muslims have now resorted to prayers for the protection of the Sharia legal system being implemented in the area against enemies of the divine law. The News Agency of Nigeria reports that a special prayer known as 'Al Kunut' is being said by the faithful in mosques all over the state in supplication to God for the successful implementation of the Sharia. During the prayers, the Muslims recite the 'Al Kunut' several times, asking God to "reverse the disturbing trend and deal with the saboteurs of the religion of Allah."*

The Triumph, Hausa Daily, July 8, 2001

The application of *Sharia* Law has resulted in a sharp increase in human rights abuses in northern Nigeria. A large number of prostitutes have fled to the other side of the Niger border in the North, gone southwards to the Jos plateau, or have reached the Obalende quarter of Lagos.

Hausa musicians have also felt *hisba* pressure. In the spring of 2001, Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle, a Hausa musician specialized in marriage ceremonies, was arrested

by a group of local *hisbas* (Rundunar Aldaci) in the middle of an organized party outside the city. He spent seven days behind bars before his acquittal by the local alkali *Sharia* court. The local correspondent for The Guardian, Bayo Ohu, wrote the following article on the affair:

*“You see this man is a popular local musician in Katsina and not only in Katsina, in the other northern states of Nigeria. The genesis of this problem was the issue of the Sharia. Some fundamentalists believed that Sharia prohibits music and all these praise singers who sang for money. Asharalle had his group so he goes only for ceremonies; wedding ceremonies, installation, singing for people and collecting money and he was even going to brothels in the nights, singing and collecting money too. He went to the rich people, highly placed people, who were asking him to sing for their ceremonies. So, when the Sharia started, some scholars said Sharia forbids singing and music, but this musician didn’t know that Sharia forbids music. So he went ahead and it came to a stage where the man was arrested and ruff handed by the enforcers, the hisba group. He wasn’t even taken to the Sharia court and his group and other musicians, they came to fight and organized as a kind of association to release him from jail and got in touch with us, the reporters. They issued a statement antagonising the state government and the Sharia commission of Katsina State, saying that Sharia does not forbid singing. Even in Saudi Arabia, they sing. Even in other Islamic nations, they sing too. So how come Nigerian Sharia is now forbidding music? The man was detained for some days until some people intervoened and he was released. The governor intervoened too. And there and then he started again to sing. Later, the Sharia commission organised a press conference and said that actually Sharia doesn’t prohibit singing.”*

Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle, singer:

*“To be honest, this situation really hurts me. Why did they do this to me? I think it’s because they were jealous of me and the money I was earning. They must have asked themselves: “Why is it that this simple singer can afford to buy cars and houses?” And yet it’s the singers and griots that move our culture and get it known. Fortunately, the Almighty is behind those who speak the truth: the plot hatched by the hisbas failed miserably. The Katsina hisbas don’t work for the good of the population, they terrorize it. And it is the poor people that suffer the most from this. Can you believe that these people plastered the walls with posters condemning me to death in all the cities of the state for 17 days, but God saved me. The government realized that if the campaign continued things would get out of hand. Because I had my own links in the local government of Katsina, too. The governor of Katsina where I live is fair-handed. He respects me. I respect him. That’s why the hisbas are not even recognized by the Katsina governor.”*

Extract of an article of This Day, June 2002:

*"The biggest issue that will influence votes in 2003 in Katsina State is Sharia. The Ulama are against Governor Yar'adua for his half-hearted commitment to Sharia implementation and his overt support of President Obasanjo."*

Bayo Olu, The Guardian:

*"Those hisba people, until today, they are still fighting the governor of Katsina State. The governor is from PDP, but he was so liberal, he believes in the real process of the law. For him, Sharia doesn't mean we have to victimize the people. But some scholars, they want to implement Sharia rough rough. I mean, if you do anything against them, they intervene. They think the state governor is so soft to or maybe uncommitted for the Sharia issue, so they are victimizing such people as the musicians. So it is not only a question of jealousy. It's political too, you know."*

Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle, singer:

*"Politics has nothing to do with the Sharia. And, if you are a true Muslim, the Sharia should have nothing to do with politics. It's when you try to mix the two that you get trouble. However, as our Head of State Olusegun Obasanjo said, Nigerian Sharia has become politics. That's why there is such tomfoolery. All Muslims use the Sharia as their guide. I was born into this culture. I grew up in it and would never go without it. A Muslim who knows the pillars of Islamic wisdom is unable to give up this way of life. In fact, we even sing surats from the Qur'an in our songs. Even the marabout respects those who are born artists. They know that we have been touched by divine intervention. If these hisbas really wanted to apply a true Sharia, they should attack tougher targets, instead of singers.*

*People were behind me during the trial. But they were a group of friends rather than a true union. The best solution would be to set up a real union if that were possible. It would force the local governors to become aware of our existence. But us Hausas live in mutual suspicion of each other. Without a guide and yet, the Hausa people need a guide to defend their culture.*

*Us Hausas have brought misery down onto ourselves. We don't defend our culture. The Yorubas and Ibos, they defend their culture. They export it. We were never capable of producing our own music in the world. Look at Obasanjo. Everywhere he goes in the world he appears with a Yoruba singer, but never a Hausa singer. In 1996, we were supposed to send a Hausa singer to the Olympic Games in Atlanta, but he never made it because of all the backstabbing and the evil Hausa hearts. In any case, you have to hit while the iron is hot, not when it's cold. A lot of things have to change here."*

## 9. Case study: Kano State

SANI DAN INDO, HALADJI WABA YARIM ASHARALLE

*"I am a Muslim. I want Sharia Law. But Sharia has become so political. It has not been implemented with the faith that was needed. And it's not those who are implementing it that are having problems. It is those who have to face the yandaba (local hoodlums) and the almajirai (Muslim beggars) that have been assigned to monitor the way the law is applied. And, in the name of Sharia Law, these people are molesting other people. That's causing a lot of problems. Because the brotherhoods are also being manipulated politically. Each brotherhood has its own constituency, its own sponsor. When a young person comes to the city, he goes to the malam who teaches him the Qur'an. And the malam, whose mosque is backed by a political patron, brings the boy into his fold. And the boy belongs to him. This boy then becomes a new messenger responsible for the propagation of his philosophy. The boys become a new weapon. And, you have to know, that there are thousands of these boys in the streets of Kano, representing thousands of mosques."*

Yusuf Ozi Usman, correspondent for The Comet, a daily in Kano (interview done in October 2000, two months before the implementation of *Sharia* Law in the state)

Musicians residing in the state next to Katsina, Kano, are no longer spared the repression and harassment their fellow artists have been subjected to. This has been operating in a similar politico-religious context where internal power-struggles have spilled over into the instrumentalization of the *hisbas*.

Haladji Waba Yarim Asharalle, former member of Sirajo Mai Asharalle's group, now solo:

*"I'm related especially to music for women, but at the same time I'm just a normal Hausa singer. I sing in wedding ceremonies but I too was invited for governmental occasions and celebrations and launching of some schools. But now, people are disturbing my profession. So there is not any kind of joy that came with the Sharia."*

*You have three categories of audiences in Kano: the poor people who are the ordinary people; people who have money; and powerful people. The people who have money they can always hire big places and invite the musicians to do it. The powerful people, they can do it, even inside the old city itself and no one can harass them or talk to them. But the poor ones, or the ordinary ones, we can't do it no more. Therefore I lost one third of my customers due to this situation. Their parties, which took place in the city, in front of their houses, are no more existing. Now, it's only if you are powerful and rich. I get too much harassment from the hisbas. I even fight with them in some places whether to do it or not to do it. I have been molested, and even my equipment has been broken down, loudspeakers broken and things like that. The problem is that some of the hisbas they don't even understand the religion. For me, Sharia should stop corruption, prostitution, homosexuality. But those guys, their aim is just to collect and make money by pressure. They just sit there, do nothing and wait for the opportunity. It is a sort of social revenge. They feel that maybe that music should generate so much money, so since Sharia, hate has been rising between those people and the musicians. Therefore, I prefer to play mostly in the South even if there is too much disturbance of peace, lack of stability and insecurity. But I will never stop to sing my songs, whatever they talk about, because all my songs are good for the people."*

Bayo Ohu, The Guardian:

*"You know, here the governor, Kwankwazo, is from PDP. And like in Katsina, he was kind of being forced in Kano to settle Sharia. Or you have some politicians here who are a very funny sort of people. They can capitalize on that issue and use those kinds of hisbas to punish their opponents. It's very easy, especially in Kano. Anything can happen in Kano, it's very volatile. These people they can just grab themselves, organise something, and in no time those guys will have done something. In Kano, you know, you have so many mosques that have their own hisba boys. Here, everybody has his own hisbas as in the Southeast everybody has his own Bakassi boys. It's not supposed to be so, but you know the human being as soon it is a question of power and money."*

Twenty kilometres along the road that joins Kano and Zaria I chanced on a surprising village, Tambarawa. At night, prostitutes and music attracted festive Hausas who partied under the benevolent eyes of the local *hisbas*. People arrived from all directions. A singer of kalengu music, Sani Dan Indo, has settled down there:

*"Here no one bothers you. The Hausas come here from all over Nigeria. It's a village whose name has become linked with good times. We come here to 'relax' with no hassles."*

But Dan Indo has also been harassed by the *hisbas*.

*"My songs talk about life in the countryside. They also have a social ingredient. I send out messages to the youth. I flatter my host. I also compose songs to advertise merchandise. I'm not a politician. I have to sing for the wife of a municipal counsellor because he invited me, but that doesn't mean I'm involved politically. And if ever I have to sing for politicians, people know why I'm doing it. Since Sharia Law was brought to Kano State, my profession is looked down upon. Before, I was able to live as grandly as I wanted. But that's no longer the case now. Today, I realize I have quite a few enemies. In other places like Lagos and Abuja I can earn up to 500,000 nairas (US\$ 385) a party, but I can hardly get 50,000 nairas in Kano. When the Sharia was first implemented, neither the governor nor the Emir told me to stop playing music. Unfortunately, some individuals pushed people to attack me. In July 2001, I was playing at the Central Hotel with 1.7 million nairas worth of instruments. They broke my instruments. Since I have my patrons, I was able to get 500,000 nairas to buy some new stuff. But I was never reimbursed all that I had lost. Now that I have gone through that, I tell myself that I'm going to have to use a little imagination to avoid this happening again. Be on my toes. But everything has been spoilt, and I'm one of the lucky ones, I'm famous! It's probably a lot harder for the young kids. It's going to block their careers. I never went and complained to the authorities. This is the first time I tell my story publicly, because it's a waste of time complaining. Better to shut up, think and be patient. Some people at the top even suggested that I take it up with a lawyer. I told them to forget it. All I want is some peace. I don't want to make more problems. I don't want them to dirty my reputation. If I complain, they'll probably think I'm mixing my music with religion and that I'm not a real believer. And that will only make me more enemies. I just leave it up to the Almighty. But all that's going on right now is just politics. And now all the musicians here are on tenterhooks. There is always a feeling of fear that floats above us as soon as we play music. Nowadays, if you're given a nice car or house, or 1.5 million nairas that gets too many people unhappy. But if we're given gifts it's only because we do our job well, we have the know-how. Even in Arab nations, like Saudi Arabia, I never heard that musicians were as badly treated as they are here in Nigeria. But I tell you, this situation will not go on forever. And, one day, it will all turn against the jealous ones."*

# 10. Kano State Censorship Board

## A PROTECTION FOR HAUSA MUSICIANS?

*"I've not been disturbed by the Kano Censorship Board because they know I've not done something wrong and, in the meantime, it is good because this board supports us and helps us."*

Haladji Waba Yarim Asharalle, musician in Kano

Since the beginning of 2002, Kano State - which has been implementing *Sharia* Law since the end of 2000 - has opened up a Censorship Board.

*"The role of this office", explained Ali Bature of the Kano State Art and Culture Bureau and member of the Kano Censorship Board, "is to maintain and to protect the culture of the people of Kano State. That means we keep people from the moral aspects; they may not like it, in any term, be it in performing arts, whether in films, whether in music, whether in dance, or in writing. To establish this office, it took us a lot of meetings, sittings and interviews to gather points of view of different organisations, religious groups, and security agencies. One member of this committee is a representative of the Ulema Council of Nigeria - the peak Muslim organisation in Nigeria- and we heard one of their big judges in Kano and he ran along with us through all the edict."*

The bureau is the first in Nigeria. Ironically, its presence is a salutary one for the Hausa musicians of Kano. Ali Bature:

*"That is the uniqueness about the Censorship Board of Kano. It came out to protect. Maybe in other countries, it is out to cut many things even if it is political. But here, it's different. We heard of those states that started introducing *Sharia* in Nigeria and where there was molestation of artists or performing artists. In contrast to those states, the introduction of the *Sharia* has helped us to keep things in order. We looked into our own history, found that performing artists are part of the culture, part of the royal system, therefore we cannot just stop it because of a misunderstanding of religion. So we have to make people aware that this thing was accepted even during the Prophet's time: the Prophet attended even some occasions where performing arts, singing, this sort, has taken place, and he never complained. And therefore, our main target is to protect the performing artists, actually, not to*

*harass them or to go after them. You see, some people, they take law into their own hands and especially when they are given a uniform, they feel like they are a paramilitary organisation and therefore we have to call the organisers of these hisbas and we explain to them they should not harass and go into physical contact with any artist. If they have complaints, they should go to the government and write. So far, we only heard about some clashes you know, here and there, but we always asked the police to give protection to these artists wherever they go to perform in any public place."*

Surrealistic? Perhaps, but one thing is certain: all the Hausa musicians I met in my stay in Kano lauded the merits of the Censorship Board. Similarly, the Hausa directors of home videos who, when I last met them in 2000, had feared the implementation of *Sharia* Law would kill their livelihood, admitted that they were faring much better since the Board was created.

Jean Michel Rousset was heading until the summer of 2002, the *Centre Culturel Français*, the only western cultural body in this city of five million people. He believes that *"the Censorship Board is undoubtedly the least of all evils for Kano artists"*, and Rousset underlines:

*"Ali Bature takes a lot of personal risks. Despite the fact that they have few means to protect the region's culture, the Board staff really gets out there to do everything in its power to prevent the arts from disappearing. It might sound unbelievable that such a board would have such an assignment, but we're used to contradictions here. After all, we live under the Sharia, but there are plenty of places to go to drink alcohol!"*

Ali Bature:

*"The only real challenges we had for now was with the traditional dances which accompany the music. You know, since the implementation of the Sharia, some people, they don't appreciate men and women mixed in the dance, but we managed to keep it. We still have mixed performances in Kano. This is the only state in Nigeria under Sharia where this thing is still allowed."*

I went to two marriages in the course of my stay in Kano. 'Official' *hisbas* filtered the entrance, 'officially' to avoid possible sabotage of the ceremonies. Both events hosted a mixed Hausa public who did not hesitate to dance. It reflects the unique nature of Kano, whose ethnic diversity is far greater than that of the rest of northern Nigeria. As a result, the local artists benefit from a relative open-mindedness by the city's authorities. As Ali Bature explained, *"Kano is a*

*commercial city and we have a lot of foreigners and strangers who come around, and we'd like to keep them comfortable. Because, when you have good social life, you encourage the commercial life."*

In the 44 local government bodies of the state outside of Kano, such fine intentions remain difficult to apply or justify. A progressive vision of the *Sharia* does not fit in well with the instrumentalization of the *hisbas* by the local powers. The April 2003 elections are unlikely to attenuate a climate of fear that I felt during many of the interviews I conducted there. Musicians in Katsina and Kano who supported the PDP governors in power are often threatened because of the high profile and the crucial roles they play in everyday life.

This is particularly the case in Kano. The city is known for its sudden explosions of violence and the manipulation of its Muslim proletariat. Behind this is a silent struggle for power and money between local leaders many of whom were linked to former local boy, General Sani Abacha. Kano's cultural interaction appears to be the exception that proves the rule within the North. Elsewhere an insidious campaign against musicians and music censorship appears to be gaining ground. Guardian reporter Bayo Ohu:

*"Such kinds of stories can still happen in the North, maybe while we're talking, it's happening."*

A series of alarming incidents occurred towards the end of my investigation in Nigeria. On June 11, 2002, the daily Hausa newspaper The Triumph published the following:

*"JIGAWA STATE BANS PUBLIC DRUMMING, SINGING*

*Henceforth all forms of drumming bringing men and women together such as kalangu, molo, goge and public singing have been banned in Jigawa State. A communiqué issued at the end of a one day monthly meeting of the state council of ulama responsible for overseeing the full implementation of Sharia in the state and signed by its secretary, Uztaz Yusha'u Abubakar Dutse, said banning such acts became necessary in view of their being a public nuisance and run contrary to the teaching of Islam. He said that the council had noted with disgust the rampant cases of drum beatings especially during wedding and naming ceremonies. It added that the council also banned social activities such as parties, picnics, receptions and all sorts of social gatherings which bring the two sexes together."*

# 11. Sabon Gari:

## THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

I had previously been in Kano in 2000, just a month before *Sharia* Law was implemented. At the time, Sabon Gari, the French Cultural Centre and the Central Hotel were the only places you could see musicians from the South perform. The Saint Peters band known for its *makossa*-reggae blend was the feature band at the Central. Today, they admit to having fled the city "for fear of the *Sharia*". Between times they tried to settle in Jos, but once again fled in September 2002 after the latest spate of rioting. At present, you can find them performing at the Ikoyi Hotel in Lagos.

At the French Cultural Centre you will only be able to enjoy Kano's police orchestra or Hausa musicians who perform when the Centre hosts a marriage. Since the end of 2000, they no longer bring up bands from the South. At the time of writing, Jean Michel Rousset was preparing to leave the city after three years in post.

As for Sabon Gari, erstwhile known for night activity unrivalled in the North, it empties now at 10 pm. The last riots in Kano, in October 2002, ravaged Sabon Gari, and a feeling of terror remains omnipresent. I spoke to the Ibo owner of a bar who had settled here 20 years ago:

*"Before, Sabon Gari was running around the clock. Now, social life has fallen completely because of the fear of the unknown. Once it is 10 o'clock, everybody should be going. And if the venues are still here, the band is no more there. Who wants to risk his investment, coming with his equipment and being vandalized? It's more and more difficult to convince someone from the South to come and play here."*

Lagbaja!:

*"I wouldn't even bother to go to the North. Why would you go and get yourself into unnecessary controversy to go and prove to them that they are fools or what. It's pointless. Most of the time, when it comes to the issue of religion, it is basic manipulation. You've got millions of souls who have been deceived into thinking that it is for their own good, as their salvation, if for example they can kill you*

*because you have come to denigrate, I mean, and they're convinced and they believe in it. Why would you bother?"*

Femi Kuti:

*"A band like my band cannot play in the North. The dancers would be stoned to death. I would be prosecuted."*

The decision by southern musicians not to go north might be understandable, but it has not made life easier for Hausa Muslims seeking to preserve lively cultural exchanges between their country's states. Nor have they been facilitated by the West's ethnocentric vision of the Muslim community. Since the Safya Husseini affair, it tends to brand Nigeria's Muslims "fundamentalist" and retrograde. Admittedly, most Hausa Muslims support the application of *Sharia* Law for historical reasons. Islamic law dates back to the nineteenth century in northern Nigeria, and because they believe it is flushing out corruption and could provide a base to end the endemic underdevelopment plaguing the North. But such a Manichean vision of this population only serves to weaken the northern scene and helps swell anti-western sentiments that have been on the rise since September 11.

## 12. Conclusion and recommendations

As the campaigns for the April 2003 general elections (presidential, parliamentary and state governorships) enter their final phase, tensions have risen in Nigeria. During such periods cultural realities take the backseat, in particular in the music and home video spheres of activity. It is likely that Olusegun Obasanjo is re-elected as the head of the federation and he can count on strong support from most of the western powers. It is to be hoped that the future Minister for Culture and Tourism will begin to engage in profound reforms of the country's culture, something previous ministers never did.

Uppermost on the agenda should be the support and defence of the proposed bill formulated by the PMAN. However, given the lack of public intervention and the feeble attempts to control the private sector's ultra-liberal capitalistic policies, it is hard not to be sceptical about any political will in favour of Nigeria's culture. Under such circumstances, I believe several measures should be taken:

### 1

We must call on our major music labels to contribute to the rebirth of a music industry that many of my interlocutors claimed could be the equivalent of the country's petroleum wealth. This would be in line with the call by the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD) for African states to involve more private operators in development. Admittedly there are risks in the commercial and personnel departments. These could be attenuated, however, with the engagement of some of the continent's major record companies based in South Africa (Sony, EMI-Gallo). They have recording studios and high-level professionals capable of helping the new wave of talents emerging from Nigeria. The increasing impact of South Africa's music station Channel O (which has overtaken MTV in Africa's most populous nation) has only re-enforced a notion of cultural connivance between the continent's two giants.

### 2

Recently, a series of Afro-American rap-ragga concerts in Lagos (Shaggy, Naughty by Nature, Eve) turned out to be simple moneymaking operations.

It underlined, nevertheless, the urgent need for American movers and doers (the rap and reggae music labels, independent artistic directors, African-American journalists) to invest in Nigeria, despite the inherent difficulties a trip here implies. Last spring Eriqah Badu spoiled a golden opportunity to immerse herself in the country's cultural diversity. Taken off guard by the nation's dilapidated state, she hastily completed her music video clip and returned home, reflecting the naivety with which most African-Americans still regard Africa.

Another neglected aspect that needs equal international support is the Hausa musical scene to the North. Despite its popularity in the sub-region of the Sahel, it continues to be ignored by international support networks and should benefit from music institutions based, this time, in Egypt, like EMI-Arabia.

### 3

In this context of international exchange, it is essential to kick-start Nigeria's export of music - and musicians. The contacts, assurance and vision gained by the artists during international tours can only reinforce their economic and mental independence in their homeland where they face the financial and religious pressures I have outlined in this report. During the current hype over Nigeria's Afrobeat it is particularly hard to accept that other original forms of music are totally disregarded. A musician like Orlando Julius is one amongst many who deserves the attention and support of private investors. He is the historic bridge between Nigeria and the United States and, since his return to his homeland, he has invested his finances and energy to better serve his fellow-musicians. Both the old guard like Fatai Rolling Dollar, who has been rediscovered thanks to Julius's efforts, and the youthful talents he trains, have benefited.

On a more personal level I can only hope that the French rap, electro and fusion scenes start venturing into this rich land. Too often, they have focussed on their former French colonies and turned their backs on English-speaking Africa - when they could link up with one of the few remaining oases of creativity in Lagos, the French Cultural Centre. Renowned travellers like Manu Chao or Zebda, rappers such as Passi, IAM and 113, or the deejays Julien Jabre, Frederic Galliano and Gregory could all inspire the new Nigerian wave - and return home with a raw, but more balanced vision of the African continent and its cultural development.

#### 4

In Jamaica, the people have their museum devoted to Bob Marley. It has made the dangerous city of Kingston a must-go stop for all music lovers of this earth. In the same way, we must put pressure on the Lagos governor to persuade him to build a museum in honour of the most mythical of figures in Nigerian music, Fela Kuti. The most suitable place would be the Kalakuti Republic where he ended his days. Such an edifice would undoubtedly contribute to the re-instatement of the country on the international cultural scene. It could also lead to the establishment of a museum devoted to Nigerian music and its astonishing Seventies vinyl collection.

#### 5

To combat piracy, a regional policy must be implemented. Nigerian artists have been bled white by this continental phenomenon. Nigeria, which is at the heart of ECOWAS (*Economic Community of West African States*), must organize a summit meeting devoted to this crucial issue if the region's music industry is to survive.

At the same time, I would strongly urge our western radio stations (along with the quality programmers from South Africa) to establish a series of collaborations with Nigeria's private operators. This would allow Nigerian artists whose music is played to benefit from contractual engagements, as well as creating bridges between media professionals from Nigeria and their peers abroad. These interactive exchanges count more than financial donations. The more international exposure there is to both the qualities and the deficiencies of this giant nation, the healthier will be its development.

#### 6

The ethnocentric image of Nigeria in our media since September 11, 2001, has caused considerable harm. It projects an opposition between northern Muslims and the Yoruba/Ibos of the South, despite the complex interlacing of Nigeria's myriad communities. It is therefore urgent to provide an objective vision of the current situation in Nigeria, and how it touches its national artists. I fear that the political period we are entering will only encourage further disinformation and truncated reports.

The international conjecture is also a source of concern as the United States appears to disengage itself from Saudi Arabia and seeks to reinforce its

presence in the petrol regions of the Niger Delta. Music knows no colour, no ethno-linguistic sympathy, no religion. The case of the Muslim artist who favours *Sharia* Law but who is being persecuted by the *hisba* militia, is just as much source for concern as the Yoruba musician who is against the IMF yet is threatened by Christian fundamentalists. Websites like *www.odili.net* or *www.nigeria-arts.net* with their multiple information sources and analyses helps us to better understand where the evil forces that are currently weighing down on Nigeria's future truly lie.

## 7

The way we listen and answer to this wonderful matrix of modern African music will also determine the future of Nigeria's music industry and its artists' economic and mental freedom. It will also influence the civil society of a nation that resembles a mini-continent and that is so vital to the destiny of Africa.

In Nigeria, music remains more than ever the weapon of the future.

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