

# **The Construction of a Nigerian Nationalist and Feminist, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti**

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## INTRODUCTION

Although Funmilayo Ransome Kuti (1900-1978) was one of the most important nationalist and feminist figures of Nigeria, it was not until 1997 that a biography of her was published. In this paper, I will examine how she is constructed in the biography *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* by Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba. I will also look at her construction in *Fela Fela, This bitch of a life*, edited by Carlos Moore in 1982. The Yorubas - one of the three biggest ethnic groups of Nigeria - have been divided into a number of groups including the Egbas, to which Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti belonged. Yorubas have been essentially town dwellers (Fadipe 1991: 113), and she was not an exception. To define her local identity even more precisely: she was born in Abeokuta, lived in Abeokuta most of her life and even died there. In this paper I am interested in the construction of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti through her negotiation of various values in general and deeds of resistance in particular. I will also have a look at the world view of her son Fela Kuti (1938-1987), wishing through comparisons to better characterize the world view of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti.

## 1. THE CONSTRUCTORS

Carlos Moore, the editor of *Fela, Fela*, born in Cuba in 1942, has previously written both as a journalist and an ethnologist.<sup>1</sup> The book consists of 23 chapters, the main narrator of which is Fela Kuti.<sup>2</sup> The biggest chapter in the book - *My Queens* - is about Fela Kuti's several wives and their relationship to him, as told to Carlos Moore in interviews. The book is framed by two un-numbered chapters which are printed as white text on a black background. These sections represent the

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<sup>1</sup> He has successively worked as journalist for the French news agency *Agence France-Presse* in Paris (1970-74); for FESTAC (2nd World Black Festival of Arts and Culture) in Lagos, Nigeria (1974-75); for *Afriscopes*, Lagos (1975-80); and for *Jeune Afrique*, Paris (1980-82). In the very beginning of the book.

<sup>2</sup> The book's text seems to derive mainly from transcripts of taped interviews.

voice of late Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti as a spirit. They are both titled, *Afa Ojo, She Who Commands Rain*.

The traditional spiritual world is part of Fela Kuti's world view. Already in the first chapter of the book, *Abiku: The Twice-Born*, Fela - as he has often been called - reveals his strong roots in one of the traditional belief systems of the Yorubas. Abikus are children who torment their parents with constant deaths and rebirths. Since Fela Kuti's senior brother died as a two-week-old baby, Fela believes himself to have been that abiku child. As he tells it: "Two weeks after my first birth, my soul left my body for the world of spirits." (29-30) Thus, on 15 October 1938 he was born a second time. Fela Kuti's connections to the traditional spirit world are 'seen' on several occasions, mainly after his mother's death. His mother, being physically far from her son, not only reveals to him her exact time of death but after having died manifests herself to him as a spirit.

Fela Kuti's visit to Los Angeles in 1969 marks an important point in his political awakening. In his own words, at that time he just wanted to play music "to make bread, to make myself a great artist" (83). An African American there, named Sandra Smith, talked to him about Africa and introduced him to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* which has a great impact on Fela Kuti: "I had never read a book like that before in my life." And thereafter, "[e]verything about Africa started coming back to me." (85) It was the African American Sandra who gave important impulses to the politization and Africanization of the African Fela Kuti.

Besides visiting America and meeting Sandra Smith at the end of the Sixties, another big impact on Fela Kuti's world view seems to have been his experiences in Nigeria's prison, and the first imprisonment in 1974 in particular. The expression 'law and order' turns upside down in his mind. "[A]fter they put me in that cell with the people they call 'criminals', I started thinking: 'Who the fuck is Society? Who jails Society when it does horrors to people? Why Society does nothing to help beggars; to provide jobs and keep people from having to steal just to chop [eat]? Why don't Society fight against corruption, punish the powerful...?' " (119) Fela, who is "just preaching revolution to Africa" and "just smoking grass", is together with his people, about sixty all in all, rudely attacked by fifty policemen and taken to prison. Because of the harassment of the girls of his group *Africa 70*, Fela Kuti wedded 27 of those girls in 1978, in addition to his first wife Remi.

Fela Kuti, loved by many women, is openly chauvinist towards them. He strongly denies any beating of his wives or children. "Never! Not that brutal ting, man." However, at once he continues: "But sometimes it's necessary to give my wives some *paf-paf-paf-paf-paf-paf*...I slap 'em.[--]A woman has to respect her husband. If she don't, I feel sorry for you. They need you to show authority, man." (162) For Fela, it is necessary to show his authority to the women whom he calls "my queens" (163). Another chapter, "What Woman is to Me", is subtitled "Mattress", "Lady" - two of Fela's big hits. The function of woman in the former expression does not need clarification. "Lady" is a satirical attack on 'modern' African woman who refuses to cook and insists on eating at the same table as men, and it praises the virtues of the passivity, submissiveness, obedience etc. of the

'traditional' African woman. "It's part of the natural order for women to be submissive to man. Yeah." (235) Fela is against any limits in sexual behaviour, since sex is "natural" - with one exception: "The only kind of sexuality that's against nature is homosexuality." (237)

In *Fela, Fela*, as both the main narrator as well as the main character is the musician, while *For Women and the Nation. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* is a scholarly work based on many sources. Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, whom I will refer to, for the sake of convenience, as "the biographers", are female Nigerians born some ten years later than Fela Kuti. At the time the book's publication appears, the former is an associate professor of history at Loyola University in Chicago and the latter is a senior lecturer in history at the University of Lagos. The women met at the University of Ibadan while doing their doctoral dissertations. Nina Emma Mba's dissertation was on the political history of women in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965, and Cheryl Johnson-Odim's on Nigerian women and British colonialism. "Though Funmilayo' Ransome-Kuti's 'story' formed only a portion of our focuses at the time, we remained intensely interested in her remarkable life." (ix) The dissertations were completed in 1978, the same year that Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti died. The writers got several personal interviews at her home in Abeokuta between 1974 and 1976. Among the most valuable of the primary written sources for the biography, the writers mention the private papers of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and those of her husband, Rev. Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, which provided them with a wealth of material on her personal, professional, and public life. Because of other competing priorities, the research for the biography on Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti spanned, off and on, twenty years (1974-94). A look at the bibliography shows a variety of sources: Archives, Official Publications, Personal and Organizational Papers, Newspapers and Magazines, Interviews, Books and Articles, and Unpublished Sources. The biography consists of seven chapters, and its overall structure is chronological.<sup>3</sup>

A problem Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba faced almost immediately was how to refer to Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti throughout the text. Before her marriage she was Frances Abigail Olufunmilayo Thomas and then just Funmilayo Thomas. But thereafter she is referred to in letters, documents, newspapers, and other written sources and interviews as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (from the early 1970s), Mrs. Kuti, Iya Egbe, *Iyalode*, *Bèère*, and Funmi - among other names. The writers use several of these names as well as her initials, FRK. (xi-xii) - For the sake of convenience, those initials are also often used in this paper.

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<sup>3</sup> 1. Historical Background; 2. "We Two Form a Multitude": The Ancestors; 3. "When Love Whispers": Early Marriage and Family Life; 4. "Lioness of Lisabi": The Fall of a Ruler; 5. "A True Citizen": The National Arena; 6. "For Their Freedoms": The International Sphere; 7. "Virtue Is Better than Wealth": Death and Legacy. - The structure of this paper does not follow that of the biography, as can be seen from the titles of the chapters.

## 2. A MOTHER AND A SPIRIT

The second chapter of Moore's *Fela, Fela* is titled *Three Thousand Strokes*, suggesting that discipline was the main trait of Fela's parents. Following the death of his father, Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kuti (1891-1955) Fela Kuti counts all the beatings he received. "And I counted...*three thousand!* Three thousand, I'm telling you. Between my mother and father combined I got three thousand strokes between the ages of nine and seventeen." (37) Although the number of strokes sounds fictitious rather than exact, the message is clear: the parents seem to have been strict educators using lots of physical punishment. Further, while he "wanted to be free, go out with my friends", the parents "wouldn't let me". The explanation follows at once: "They had this English colonized mentality, you see." Fela felt that his parents treated their children more like boarding-school students than their own children. "Only when I was very small, my father would stroke my hair every morning but he would never hold me in his arms. For our parents, the rule was 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'. In Africa, colonial parents are never close to their children." (39) The strictness of his parents was in Fela Kuti's view caused by foreign - British colonial - influence. We may compare: the biographers of FRK write that the two older Ransome-Kuti children felt that their parents had been far more strict with them than with the younger Fela and Beko. (Fnl 51) Fela Kuti's memories of his mother in her political role are more pleasant. She starts taking him on her political campaign tours and is less disciplinarian. One can imagine that it was not of minor importance to the little Fela that his mother was driving a car. However, while in Fela's memory his mother was the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria (Fela 42), the biographers are a little bit more modest: according to them, FRK became the first woman to drive a car in Abeokuta (Fnl 48).

While the chapter *Three Thousand Strokes* tells about Fela Kuti's parents as strict educators, there are two full chapters devoted to Fela's mother. The former, "Funmilayo. 'Give Me Happiness'" tells about FRK as a social and political figure, which side will be treated in the following chapters of this paper. Here I would like to discuss the chapter *My Mother's Death* in some detail. In Fela's view, his mother never recovered from wounds and shock she suffered from a police raid in 1977 at Fela's home called Kalakuta - the last of a series that had taken place.<sup>4</sup> The chapter has three high points which tell of events following her death. The first tells how Fela woke early on 13 April, 1978, because of a big blast which was followed by "a

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<sup>4</sup> The biographers write that those present at the raid insisted - against the army's explanation, 'explosion of the residence's generator' - that the army had deliberately set the fire. The raid, popularly known as the 'Kalakuta War', received tremendous publicity in two major newspapers, and a tribunal was set to investigate the incident. After some undemocratic incidents around the hearings, blame was apportioned both to 'overzealous' unknown soldiers and to Fela. The Kalakuta Republic and surrounding land occupied by uninvolved citizens were destroyed. Neither these citizens nor the Ransome-Kuti family were compensated for their property loss. Family and other close observers concur that Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was never the same after the raid. (Fnl 169)

bright, yellowish light near the wall” (241), which was a sign from his mother who died in the hospital that moment. The second highpoint is the burial: an abnormally heavy rain broke the coffin, and Fela reasons: “Rain is normal, true. But what happened that day was not normal, man. I knew then my mother was going to use rain to communicate with me in some way. Since then rain has become a *sign* in my life.” (243) And the third highpoint occurs on 30 September 1979, one day before the Nigerian Independence Day when Obasanjo should give power to Shehu Shagari ending thus thirteen years of military rule. Fela did not, however, want to let Obasanjo go just like that since “*Obasanjo’s soldiers had killed my mother. This wonderful, good and peaceful woman!*” (243) And Fela, followed by his wives, takes his mother’s coffin in broad daylight to lay it at the front gate of President Olusegun Obasanjo’s residence, defying the armed soldiers. While turning round, “[a]t that moment it began to rain. Heavily! Oh, that rain-o!” (244)

After his mother’s death, Fela ‘communicated’ with her for the first time in Italy in 1980. The instruction to Fela reads: “Fela, never give up the struggle!” (246) Later Fela’s son Femi tells of having seen his grandmother’s image, after which Femi’s friends “were getting the spirit in their bodies”, and then Fela himself again. (247) “What did the spirit say? It said that the dead people of Africa weren’t being taken care of. And that I was supposed to start teaching others to care for their dead. It said that there is no Africa left. That only Kalakuta was Africa.” (248) Later, “the spirit” comes to Fela’s body “for about two hours”. That ritual took him to Egypt and Ife. Fela Kuti is told that “that’s where man started. That’s where humanity started.” And it was after this experience that Fela changed the name of his organization from *Africa 70* to *Egypt 80* (249). Fela, who has ‘seen’ the spirits enter his wives, his son Femi, his close friends and has experienced it himself, cannot help believing in the spirits. He finds, or is found by, a spiritual leader, a so-called magician, from Ghana. From him Fela learns that he was a twice-born, that he had rejected the white man’s name and died; that one should put white spiritual powder on the face to communicate with spirits; that the Age of Good was at hand and the times of Evil were about to end; and that Africa was the *center* of the world. Fela’s mother, as a spirit, warns her son not to travel, and discloses that she died from poisoning. The spirit is really important to Fela Kuti’s identity construction: because of it, he says, “I know exactly who I am and what I am here to do.” (255)

As mentioned earlier, the framing stories of the book - both at the beginning and at the end - are as if told by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti as a spirit. In the beginning she tells about her spiritual existence and some traits in her past human existence, but mainly about her son Fela, the abiku-child and her concern for him. The Ifá oracle<sup>5</sup> tells her: “The child will be stubborn, impetuous, unbridled...His path will be strewn with pitfalls...turbulence and violence...His wives will be numerous...He will live in poverty alongside beggars and thieves. His friends will be

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<sup>5</sup> Ifa oracle was of a great importance to the traditional Yorubas, especially to the males. Nearly every important event in life was referred to it in order to ensure the peace of mind of its adherents in regard to future. (Fadipe 1991: 117)

fugitives...and he will be branded an 'outlaw'. For he will flout laws, go counter to the taboos of men and the god of the *oyinbo*...And he will perish by their hand.” (26) The first monologue ends with the words “What does he, my son, have to say?”, and the numbered chapters, which are mainly narrated by her son, follow. After the 23rd and last chapter, the book concludes with a final monologue from FRK. It is a sample of traditional Yoruba wisdom rich with symbols. She advises her son to avoid evil, to “guard Hope preciously” and to hear “the voice which nourishes the Soul” ending her speech with the exclamation, “*Life!* For that, my son, is what it is all about!” (281-2)

### 3. DIRECT RESISTANCE AGAINST COLONIALISM

In the precolonial times in Yoruba land, active legislative, executive, and judicial functions were performed by the civil chiefs, the *Ogboni*. Within the *Ogboni* was the *Oro*, a secret ancestral organization. Women were eligible to be members of the *Ogboni* but not the *Oro*. Further, they were not admitted into the society of trade chiefs, the *Parakoyi* - even though women were the majority of traders - neither were they allowed in the society of hunters, the *Ode*, nor into the society of military chiefs, the *Olorogun* (or later, *Ologun*). This comprehensive exclusion of women from three of the four orders of government was countered to a degree by the exclusively female *Iyalode* society (literally, “mother of the town”), the *Iyalode* enabled women to be represented in decision making and administration. Among the Yoruba generally, there was a gender division of labour in which men specialized in agriculture, hunting, and warfare and women specialised in cloth production, marketing, and trading, both local and long distance. (Fnl 3,5)

During the colonial times, life in many ways became more difficult. In 1918 a direct taxation started in the Yoruba areas of the protectorate. After the taxes were collected, the Egba people rose in protest. They rose not only against taxation but against all the incursions of the British-controlled Egba Native Administration. The Adubi War of June 1918 was a massive uprising in which hundreds were killed. One of the witnesses was Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's father-in-law, the Reverend J.J. Ransome-Kuti who confirmed that the excessive enforcement of sanitary regulations was one of the main grievances that led to the uprising. (Fnl 9-10)

The new role of Sole Native Authority (SNA) had been devised as a means of indirect rule in the south-western provinces, and Ademola the Alake was appointed to it. Though the chiefs were members of the native authority councils, the SNAs were responsible for the chiefs' appointments to the councils. Further, the councils were only advisory. The loss of the traditional powers of chiefs, king makers, *Ogboni*, and priests also meant the loss of the powers of the female chiefs (*Iyalode* and *Erelu*) and priestesses. But where the male chiefs were able, if they chose, to enter the new centers of power, such as native authority councils and courts, the women were never granted such access. The female titles rapidly became vacant and meaningless. (Fnl 10-11)

In November 1947 the women began organizing mass demonstrations in which up to ten thousand of them participated. The protests were always led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. (Fnl 81) Fela Kuti recounts that it was around 1946 or 1947 that he started to understand what his mother was fighting for: she was organizing a big protest demonstration with the women of Abeokuta. These women went straight to see the District Officer of Abeokuta who was a young white boy. “The District Officer must have said something in a disdainful voice, like: ‘Go on back home.’ To which my mother exploded: ‘You bastard, rude little rat...!’ [--] Imagine insulting the highest motherfucking representative of the British imperial crown in Abeokuta, Ohhhhhhhh, man! I was proud. People in Abeokuta talked about nothing else but that incident and ‘Bere’. ‘Bere’ was my mother’s nickname. And I would just beam with pride.” (Fela 42) It is the same incident Wole Soyinka describes in his book *Aké, the Years of Childhood*. Both of them emphasize the courage of Funmilayo. In Soyinka’s writing, the incident becomes even more dramatic. FRK’s biographers use Soyinka’s book as their source: While the British Officer yelled at FRK: “Shut up your women!”, she allegedly retorted: “You may have been born but you were not bred! Would you speak to your mother like that?” Thereafter, women around her threatened to take the District Officer and “cut off his genitals and post them to his mother.” (Soyinka 1989: 211, quoted in Fnl 84)

Another incident in Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti’s life which Fela Kuti regards as powerful and influential was the dethroning of Alake, the pseudo-king. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti at the head, a crowd of 50 000 women marched to his house, made him flee out of Abeokuta and chased him into exile. “My mother was against the Alake because he was working for the white District Officer. He was a lackey of the colonial system.” In Fela Kuti’s eyes, his mother is “tireless” and “amazing”. (Fela 45-6) This incident is described in Soyinka’s *Aké, the Years of Childhood* as well. The biographers then state that Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the organization she led, the Abeokuta Women’s Union, were credited with being the primary force behind the abdication of the traditional ruler of the Egba, Alake (King) Ademola II, in January 1949. The women’s role in the Alake’s abdication became not only a matter of history but of legend. FRK was compared to the historical Madam Tinubu, who had defended the Egba against invasion, to Lisabi, a legendary hero of the Egba, and to Moses. (Fnl 63)

There is a story of FRK snatching “Oro”, a fearless and forbidden thing for a woman to do. Oro is part of the power of the Ogboni society, the secret society of king makers. Only men can parade during Oro. Oro is said to have supernatural powers; those who do not obey its directives are punished. Several informants reported that Oro “came out” to stop women from demonstrating and that FRK approached, snatched the Oro stick, and later displayed it in her home. The tenacity displayed in the story is testament to both FRK’s fearlessness and the way in which she was perceived as nearly invincible by many of her followers. (Fnl 81) While the two above-mentioned incidents of protests are clearly against colonial power, the Oro-incident is an attack against the neo-traditional powers of the patriarchy.

Particularly when it came to women, the British imported their own views and thus were often blinded to women's activities in precolonial Nigeria. They failed to take due note of women's dissatisfaction with government interference in areas where the women had previously controlled themselves, such as choosing market sites and setting prices. And certainly it did not make things better as corruption at the top spread, and members of governmental bodies and committees, even policemen, often demanded their "cut", negotiating bribes. Alake, against whom there was ample evidence of engaging in corrupt practices, confessed the strength of women while attacking them: he referred to them as "vipers that could not be tamed" (Fnl 72, 85). It may be emphasised that both of the above-mentioned, famous direct attacks against the colonial power, District Officer and Alake, were organized by women; and the famous Oro-episode was organized by FRK alone.

Though certainly a remarkable figure by her courage, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was not, however, without models from Yoruba history. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the Egbas were threatened by incursions from the imperialistic Oyo Empire. Their successful resistance was spearheaded by the warrior leader Lisabi, who has been regarded ever since as a kind of saviour and hero of the Egbas, such that 'Lisabi land' is synonymous with Abeokuta. During her public life, FRK was hailed as the 'Lioness of Lisabi' and the 'daughter of Lisabi'. Further, one of the most famous traders was the Egba woman, Madam Tinubu. She traded in cotton, palm oil, salt, tobacco, arms, and slaves and was a leading trader in the hinterlands of Lagos. According to Cheryl-Johnson and Mba, Tinubu's symbolic value to Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was nothing but great. Tinubu was an Egba woman who possessed economic and political power. She had opposed both British, Lagos, and Abeokuta rulers. She was a proud Egba nationalist who rejected Christianity and the missionaries and upheld indigenous values and culture. Thus, for FRK, Tinubu was both a feminist and nationalist heroine, an inspiring role model and an emotive rallying cry that FRK used to good effect in mobilizing Egba women in the 1940s. (Fnl 3-6)

#### 4. INDIRECT RESISTANCE AGAINST COLONIALISM

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and her son Fela Kuti shared a general anticolonial - and anti-neocolonial - attitude. Fela Kuti's reasoning about politics is told with big generalizing strokes. For example, he talks about the world leaders who are not 'builders' nor 'creators' but 'destroyers'. The Africans should not limit their purview to the small enclave cut out for them at the Berlin Conference of 1884-5. While the Europeans take care of their interests, the Africans just "go about copying foreign values, cultural concepts which permanently endear us to the whole world at large as certified slaves." (Fela 150) To Fela Kuti, the South African white leaders are in a way more straightforward towards the blacks than the black leaders of other African states, since the former openly hate the blacks but the latter ones pretend to 'protect' their fellow Africans. "It's these neo-colonial and reactionary



African states that carry out genocide against their own Black people indiscriminately. Emperor Bokassa, isn't he Black? General Olusegun Obasanjo, aren't they Blacks? So how can they go around condemning apartheid South Africa when they're doing exactly the same thing against their own innocent citizens in the countries where they hold power?" (Fela 155) Fela Kuti does mention '*class struggle*' but, characteristically, does not elaborate it. The use of '*change*' is illuminative as well. "Do I want to leave an imprint on the world? No. Not at all. You know what I want? *I want the world to change*. I don't want to be remembered. I just want to do my part and leave." While Fela Kuti does criticize the corrupt leaders of Africa, his ultimate mission in life, however, is to make people 'happy'. (Fela 256-8)

Unlike her son, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti worked much with concrete problems at grassroots levels. In fact both Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and her husband, I.O. Ransome-Kuti, were active in several organizations and unions, of which they were also often the founding members. For example, Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kuti was one of the founders of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in the 1930s and of the Nigerian Union of Students (NUS). This student union, particularly its King's College branch, initiated a mass meeting to protest the colonial government's educational policies in August 1944. The demonstration then led to the formation of a new political organization (and later, party): the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). Both of the Ransome-Kutis were founding members of the NCNC. One target of the criticism was the Richard's Constitution which was held as an example of Britain's divide-and-rule policy. In 1949, when the new governor, Sir John MacPherson, called for regional and all-Nigeria constitutional conferences to discuss a new constitution, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was the only woman representative at the Western Regional Conference in Ibadan. The Ransome-Kutis were also the founding members of the West African Students Union (WASU) in Nigeria. WASU had been formed in London in 1925 by the close friend of the Ransome-Kutis, Lapidio Solanke. The organization was nationalist and anticolonialist in orientation and sought support from West Africans in Africa as well as in London. The Ransome-Kutis were very active in raising funds for WASU both in their home-areas Ijebu-Ode and later in Abeokuta. (Fnl 12-13, 45)

Fela Kuti admires the way his mother "took on those old politicians, all those dishonest rogues. She wouldn't have anything to do with them. None of them. Except Nnamdi Azikiwe". According to him, everybody loved Azikiwe because he was a nationalist. In 1949 NCNC, Zik's party, was a national party: even many Yorubas voted for the Igbo Azikiwe and not the Yoruba Awolowo, since Awolowo's party AG, Action Group, was not a national party. In addition to nationalist Nnamdi Azikiwe, FRK greatly admired the other nationalist, Kwame Nkrumah. (Fela 42-47) FRK's biographers show a nuance of FRK's relationship to Azikiwe: it did not remain the same, as Moore's Fela Kuti lets the readers understand. In fact, FRK presented such a "frank, bold" criticism of Azikiwe's

leadership and of the organization of the delegation sent to England in 1947, that she believed that Azikiwe was never again comfortable with her. (Fnl 134-5)

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was not only a strong national character but an exceptionally international woman as well: as Fela Kuti says, in the early 1950s “she became the only Nigerian woman - and perhaps the first African woman ever - to travel to the USSR, China, Poland, Yugoslavia and East Berlin. In China, she met with Mao Tse-tung.” In those times it was considered a crime to travel to the so-called ‘iron-curtain’ countries. “So, in 1955, upon returning from her trip to China, her passport was seized. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was then Prime Minister.” A little later, however, she was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize. (Fela 45-6)

The biographers note that one feature that makes FRK a unique woman in the Nigerian context is the extent and diversity of her international connections: No other Nigerian woman of her period had the same international exposure. In West Africa, only Adelaide Caseley-Hayford and Constance Cummings John, both from Sierra Leone, and Mabel Dove of Ghana had any comparable international links. (Fnl 125)

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti worked not only for the nation but also for women - as the title of the biography by Johnson-Odim and Mba indicates. In 1923 FRK organized a group of young girls and women in Abeokuta into a ladies’ club, which focused on learning handicrafts and social etiquette. In the late 1920s she founded a similar ladies’ club in Ijebu-Ode. In 1932 after returning to Abeokuta, she again founded a ladies’ club (it had broken up when she left). Similarly to the Ijebu-Ode-based ladies’ club, these women undertook civic projects with community youth in Abeokuta. They organized teenagers of both sexes and held picnics, athletic games, and lectures for their entertainment and education. In early 1944, FRK was approached by an old friend and former student who introduced her to a market woman who told FRK of her great desire to learn to read, leading FRK to start teaching reading to market women. Thus, in March 1944, a revitalized Abeokuta Ladies Club (ALC) expanded its ranks to include market women, who most often were neither Christian nor Western educated, and were generally poor. In 1946 ALC became the Abeokuta Women’s Union (AWU). The name change signaled a new commitment to avowedly political purposes and an activist orientation. Thousands of market women joined the organization’s ranks. In *Aké*, Soyinka refers to these women as “wrapper wearers”. (Fnl 64, 72)

The market women’s stories of woe, injustice, and ill-treatment at the hands of the Alake and other representatives of the colonial hierarchy could not help influencing FRK’s political consciousness and ideology: she became more radical. As FRK’s reputation as a woman of integrity and strength grew among the market women, she became a focal point of the leadership in politicizing their struggles. Under her leadership and utilizing both indigenous and imported means of protest, the AWU began to articulate not only an anticolonial position but one that sought to democratize government and establish women’s equality (especially giving women the franchise). (Fnl 65, 73)

The Abeokuta Women's Union focused first on the issue of taxation but early on developed a comprehensive list of demands that included complete abolition of the flat-rate taxation of women, the Alake's abdication because he was corrupt, elimination of the Sole Native Authority system, and institution of a more representative system of government (including, of course, the representation of women). In place of the flat-rate tax on women, the organization proposed increasing taxes on expatriate companies, and the increase of government investments in other local industries. The crux of the AWU's argument against the flat-rate tax on women was that there should be "no taxation without representation". The women documented in detail what they felt were, for example, the Alake's abuses of power and his corruption. They also complained that sanitation, medical, and educational facilities were woefully inadequate. (Fnl 73-4) FRK served as president from the AWU's inception until her death in 1978. In *Daily Service* 8.8.1946 she wrote: "Inasmuch as Egba women pay taxes, we too desire to have a say in the management of the country, because a taxpayer should also have a voice in the spending of the taxes. We...request you please to give consideration to our being represented in this (SNA) council by our own representatives at the next general election." (Fnl 78) In addition to writing in newspapers, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's strategies include writing letters and sending telegrams.<sup>6</sup> Further, when needed, she appealed to courts to obtain redress for injustice either to others or to herself. Like Gandhi in India, she criticized the British colonial administration by referring to British legal principles: she attacked the authoritarianism of colonialism by contrasting it with British democratic ideals. She used the law to attack actions that were deemed 'legal' by the colonial code but that she considered unjust, such as the payment of an arbitrarily administered tax levied on a population without political representation. Clearly, although FRK shared her general anticolonial and anti-neocolonial attitude with her son Fela, she greatly differed from him in her everyday political activities. She greatly differed from him in her indirect resistance to (neo)colonialism.

## 5. RESISTANCE AGAINST TRADITIONAL VALUES

Much of the resistance against traditional values was channelled through Christianity. And of course, part of the lure of Christianity was that nearly all available Western education occurred in mission-centered schools. Thus, Western education was the other channel of resistance against traditional values.

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<sup>6</sup> After the Sharpeville incident in South Africa in 1960, FRK received a letter from Leah of Mafeking, Basutoland, asking for her help. In April 1960, FRK sent a telegram to Queen Elizabeth in which she appealed to the queen's maternal feelings to guide her in helping to "relieve South Africans from inhumanity." In 1949, she also wrote to Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association's women corps, proposing contact between it and the Nigerian Women's Union. (Fnl 150-1)

FRK's parents believed in the power of education; they felt girls were entitled to its benefits as much as boys were. This was an uncommon attitude in both Nigeria and Britain at the time, though it would have been less uncommon within Funmilayo's socioeconomic class. Nonetheless, her father had to defend to relatives his decision to invest in the education of a daughter. Thus, in 1919, with the help of family and friends, Funmilayo went to England to continue her education. (Fnl 28, 30)

Both the Ransome-Kutis objected on principle to the Yoruba custom of kneeling or prostrating to an elder or titled person. They refused to do so themselves and taught their children not to do so, nor would they allow anyone to curtsy or kneel to them. This was equally true, however, of a number of Christian, Western-educated, elite families. It was an example of attempting to reject those African customs perceived as conflicting with an egalitarian world view while preserving those that were not. (Fnl 42) In Wole Soyinka's *Aké* there is also an episode where the little Wole refuses to prostrate before an elder Yoruba man. Wole Soyinka's family belonged to the same class of Christian, Western-educated, elite families as the Ransome-Kutis. The families have even blood connections: Wole is the grandnephew of FRK.

FRK acknowledged that women were victimized by their social conditioning, which led them to internalize a negative self-image and to be passive and apathetic. She believed that certain traditional marriage customs, such as polygyny and 'bride price', worsened the situation for women. The system by which a man paid a bride price to the family of his wife, entitled him to sole custody of the couple's children. Although the bride price did not signal that the man actually 'bought' or 'owned' his wife, in practice, it often reinforced male domination in the marriage. Since the bride price would have to be returned in case of the divorce, it also often functioned to discourage women from leaving unsatisfactory marriages. (Fnl 102)

According to Johnson-Odim and Mba, FRK was always described as "'aggressive', a common appellation for women whose forceful personalities lay outside the bounds of acceptable 'female' behavior". (Fnl 39). Sandra Smith, Fela Kuti's female friend, also attaches to her the attribute 'aggressive'. However, she continues: "When you would meet her or if you had known her, she seemed to be very mild-mannered. But she was very strong too when she had a point to get across." (Fela 105) Nevertheless, what is called 'aggressiveness' from patriarchal point of view, might be called, from a feminist point of view, as 'resolution' or 'strong mind'.

While FRK's father was polygamous, FRK's marriage was not. And it was not a typical male-dominated marriage of the time either. On the contrary: there is evidence that the partners operated from a sense of equality and were highly supportive of each other's public activities. In fact, the Reverend had the reputation of being - as FRK put it - "the most democratic man I have ever known". (Fnl 42)

From the 1940s on, FRK's perspective on gender relations in the indigenous as well as colonial context radicalized. Further, she appreciated class analysis as a tool

for demystifying the impact of colonialism, and felt deep concern of the racism inherent in imperialist ideology. (Fnl 38)

## 6. AFFIRMATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

By the 1890s, many missionaries viewed monogamy as a precondition for adult conversion. In consequence, they considered polygyny as grounds for excommunication, even to the extent that they asked a convert to ‘give up’ all but one of the wives he had married before conversion. In reaction to such requirements many Africans began to form separatist African Christian churches. These churches disagreed with those churches’ negative attitude toward polygyny and with the marginalization of Africans from the hierarchy of European-run churches. The movement that spawned the formation of separatist churches also spurred an increasing interest in promoting the Yoruba language, the use of Yoruba names, and the wearing of African dress as opposed to European apparel. (Fnl 25-6)

FRK’s childhood home was, despite its grounding in both Western education and Christianity, still very much rooted in its Yoruba cultural heritage. Though FRK’s parents both wore Western clothing, were churchgoing Anglicans, and spoke fluent English, they also spoke and taught their children their own Yoruba language, ate many traditional foods, and were in a polygynous marriage. As Johnson-Odim and Mba state, they were a generation of the interplay and overlap of African and European cultures. From all indications, they were as proud of their Africanness as of the privileged status that Western education accorded them in a colonial setting. (Fnl 27)

The names are a battlefield and an important signifier of traditional and Christian/Western values. The first name of FRK’s father-in-law, J.J. Ransome-Kuti, was Josiah Jesse which is a Christian name, but he was always called by his Yoruba name, Likoye. It is believed that he took the family name Ransome from a British missionary who had some profound influence on him, which was a common habit and even fashionable practice among nineteenth-century converts. The first name of FRK’s husband was Israel Olodotun (Dotun). Though FRK never changed her name legally, in the early 1970s she had dropped Ransome and substituted Anikulapo, a Yoruba word meaning “warrior who carries strong protection” or alternatively “hunter who carries death in a pouch”. Many identified her Pan-Africanist son Fela as the cause. As early as the 1920s she had dropped her European given names, Frances Abigail, and used only Funmilayo, which means “give me happiness”. She also insisted that pupils at her schools use their African rather than European names. All of Rev. I.O. and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti’s children have only Yoruba names.<sup>7</sup> (Fnl 31-2, 41, 168; Fela 41)

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<sup>7</sup> Dolupo or Dolu (b. 1926), Olikoye or Koye (b. 1927); Olufela or Fela (b. 1938), and the youngest, Bekolari or Beko. (see Fnl 47 and 175-7)

Fela Kuti also was sensitive to names. “[M]y father asked this German missionary to ...name me. Can you imagine that, man? A white man naming an African child! In Africa, man, where names are taken so seriously.” And he almost accuses his parents of having killed his older brother - or, him as an abiku-child - by giving the child a Western name: who would have liked to live with a name like Hildegart! (Fela 29) Fela Kuti’s communal compound in Surulere, Lagos, was given the name ‘Kalakuta’ in 1974. “Then I added...Republic! Why Kalakuta? You see, when I was first put in jail, the name of my prison cell was “Kalakuta”. And “Republic”? Well, ’cause I wanted to identify the ways of myself or someone who didn’t agree with that your Federal Republic of Nigeria created by Britishman.” (110) Around 1971 Fela Kuti changed the name of his club from ‘Afro-Spot’ to ‘Shrine’. This change of name because “I wanted some place meaningful, progressive, mindful background with roots. I didn’t believe playing any more in nightclubs.” (110) He also changed the name of his group from ‘Koola Lobitos’ to ‘Africa 70’. “To my knowledge, ’Koola Lobitos’ meant nothing. It was a foolish name, a stupid name, you see.[--]’Africa 70’ had a meaning. It was looking to the future, to the coming decade.” (110) His music he wanted to give “a real African name that is catchy” and came to “Afro-beat”. (75) Clearly, both to FRK and Fela Kuti, names and naming were an important way of affirming their African and Yoruba roots and heritage. In this they are not alone, on the contrary: to many African and African American writers naming is part of identity politics.

Blood loyalty was one reason for affirmation of traditional values. The lineage, the telling of the tale of “who begot whom” and how they passed through the world, is important in establishing the connectedness, sense of duty, and legacy. (Fnl 19) FRK’s loyalty to her father is disclosed in the next excerpt. Her father planned her future “...and for one year after your arrival [home to Nigeria] you will teach in the Abeokuta Girls’ School, not for Reverend Cole’s sake, but for your country’s sake”, and FRK’s reaction as told to her fiancé: “I cannot and must not change Papa’s plans; I must do whatever he tells me, so that I may have his blessings.” (Fnl 30) We may compare: Fela Kuti was a rebellious youth rather than the obedient son of his parents. In secondary school he formed a club known as the ‘Planless Society’: “The rule of the club was simple: we had no plans. [--] Disobedience was our ’law’.” (Fnl 55) However, in music he in a way proved his ‘blood loyalty’: it was his grandfather and father who showed him the way, being very much interested in traditional African music.

The political reasons were an important reason for affirmation of traditional values. FRK began to believe that the educated women were living outside the daily life of the people. She decided to abandon Western clothing, wearing instead the traditional Yoruba wrapped cloth in order to “make women feel and know I was one with them.” There is no photograph of her after the late 1940s, even those taken on her international trips, that shows her in anything other than Yoruba dress. We may compare: in previous years there are pictures of her in Victorian clothing; in one she even sports a pith helmet. Since her philosophy and activities turned more radical, it is tempting to interpret that this was as much a statement of class

allegiance as of cultural pride and unity with the market women. In addition, she began using Yoruba rather than English in public speeches, which often meant that British officials required a translation. (Fnl 40, 66-7)<sup>8</sup> In her role as a leader, she was able to capitalize on being simultaneously Western educated and grounded in tradition. The women looked up to her because of her education; the fact that she had been to England lent status and credibility to her role as their 'representative' to the colonial government. (Fnl 76)

As is shown in the beginning of this paper, traditional Yoruba world view was not alien to Fela Kuti; in fact, in *Fela, Fela*, it is presented even as an important part of his world view. It is manifested especially in the spiritual 'presence' of his mother, or the space and importance given to her talks as a spirit, and in Fela Kuti's belief in his *abiku*-existence. Further, in several connections Fela Kuti praises what he holds as traditional African values. He claims that in an African extended family, loneliness is absent. On the contrary, loneliness is inevitable in European culture. "So human beings brought on loneliness for themselves by making the wrong cultures. That's why I think Africa is the pacesetter for culture." (Fela 266) In Fela's view, the Africans need industrialization only if it is industrialization the African way. Technology is killing the spiritual things; the white man is leading the Africans astray. "The right way is the one of our ancestors: traditional technology, or *naturalology*. That's the only viable way." For Fela, 'real' knowledge is not technology but "power in the cosmic sense; it's rhythm, you know. Once you start to have rhythm you start having knowledge." "Science means complications. Look at pollution!" And Fela's credo reads: "What we need is to rest more, talk more, walk more, fuck more and enjoy things in life more. There's limit to what Europeans call technological and industrial development. When that limit is achieved society just crumbles. That's why I see the day Europe, America and Russia will come to a standstill." (Fela 150-1) One may hear in Fela Kuti's apology of the traditional African culture echoes from *négritude*.

The use of songs is a Yoruba tradition of great longevity. People compose songs of praise or derision to raise morale and lighten workloads. Song is a way of circulating news and expressing political opinion. The Abeokuta Women's Union composed over two hundred songs in Yoruba to use in their protests. FRK's husband was very interested in researching traditional African music, much like his father. He, for example, wrote an anthem to Abeokuta. He and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti coauthored a song exhorting the African people to prepare themselves for the work that lay ahead. (Fnl 82, 44-5) The women ridiculed the Alake and threatened the British by singing: "Ademola/ Big man with an ulcer/ Your behavior is deplorable/ Alake is a thief/ Council members are thieves/ Anyone who does not know Kuti will get in trouble// White man, you will not get to your

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<sup>8</sup> We may compare: the Yoruba scholar Fadipe wrote in his dissertation, which was published originally in 1939: "Within these groups which constitute a model to those below, we find, for the most part, imitation and affectation of superficial aspects of Western culture rather than of essentials. The Englishman is imitated in his dress, food, music, speech and customs." (Fadipe 1991: 326)

country safely/ You and Alake will not die an honourable death...// You pale-faced one keep off/ That we may have a chance/ To chat with father [Alake]" (Fnl 83)

In another example, when some protesting women were arrested and put into jail, hundreds of their supporters went to the British residency to maintain a vigil. Women supporters sang to those in the nearby jail who then responded with their song. The women stayed until the next afternoon when those arrested were released on bail. (Fnl 93) The singing of the women and the words of the above-mentioned song, for example, strongly contradict the Western stereotype of passive and submissive African women. On the contrary: The singing is both an expression of women's protest skills and an affirmation of the traditional sense of female connectedness.

## 7. FRK'S WORLD VIEW OF EGALITARIANISM

Issues of race, class and gender by and large comprise Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's world view of egalitarianism. According to her biographers, although FRK successfully argued against a purely racial analysis of colonialism, she saw race as a critical factor, for instance, when she dropped her one European name while in England. The biographers then elucidate FRK's sensitivity on race, referring to Soyinka's *Aké*. Soyinka, as a child knew the Ransome-Kutis well, for example often visiting in their home in Abeokuta. He writes that FRK was appalled by the dropping of the atomic bomb on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. In a heated conversation with a British District Officer of Abeokuta after the bombing, she insisted that it was a racist act. She argued that they would never have dropped it on Germany, because "Germany is a white race, the Germans are your kinsmen. While the Japanese are just a dirty yellow people. I know you, the white mentality: Japanese, Chinese, Africans, we are all subhuman. You would drop an atom bomb on Abeokuta or any of your colonies if it suited you!" (Fnl 40-1; Soyinka 1989: 224)

While the travel to the United States in the end of the Sixties radicalized Fela Kuti, there is no evidence, according to the biographers, that FRK made any political contacts during her study years in England from 1919-22 that shaped her later radicalism (Fnl 125). It is mainly in the 1940s that her world view radicalized. In 1944 the Abeokuta Ladies Club (ALC) expanded its ranks to include market women, and in 1946 ALC became the Abeokuta Women's Union, signaling its new emphasis on poor women's issues. And it was in 1949 that the abdication of the traditional ruler occurred, which even then became a legend. In Nigeria, regionalization and ethnicity has often more or less characterized politics. The biographers in several occasions emphasize that FKR was not an ethnicist. While nationalism was a fundamental tenet of the anticolonial struggle and was sometimes obscured or fractured by ethnic alliances, FRK "never fell prey" to that "false premise" (Fnl 40). Although 'class' is for the biographers a general category



without need for more rigorous elaboration, they clearly state that FRK was a democratic socialist on the side of the poor people.

The Nigerian Civil War or Biafran War (1967-1970) divided people into opposing camps. Had FRK been loyal to the majority of the Yorubas, she would have backed the Federal Government's attack on Biafra. While the biographers don't make it clear whether FRK held the Biafrans' decision to secede as justified, they do tell that on behalf of the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies, FRK made speeches and sent telegrams calling for an end to the war. When the Nigerian and Biafran negotiating teams met in Kampala in 1968, she sent an identical telegram to each side: "Nigerian women implore you find solution to our country's problems, may peace and love reign again." (Fn1 122) Since the Federal Government started the war, we may conclude that FRK's biggest criticism is dedicated to it. Fela Kuti shares his attitude with his mother in condemning the war. But in addition to that, he is outspoken in his view of the Biafrans' secession as justified.<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to religion, Fela Kuti tends to defy Christianity and speak for the traditional Yoruba religion. On the contrary, the Ransome-Kutis, according to the biographers, in the early years of their marriage "ran a pious Christian home" (Fn1 51), although some change may have happened during the years. The year FRK died she stated: "I believe in my God. You could be a pagan and be godly. As far as I can see, if you don't think of cheating people you are godly and I think if there is any paradise you will get there. Many pastors as I see them will end up in hell. I will see God in the sort of life I lead, not because I go to church every Sunday." Thus, in FRK's statement, religion is linked with her world view of egalitarianism (Fn1 171)

The biographers do not give us evidence of FRK's calling herself as "feminist". However, they talk about FRK's "feminism", without connecting it to wider discussions of the term. We may listen here to some African feminists who have addressed the concept. In an interview, the writer Tsitsi Dangarembga states: "Female writing comes from the consciousness of being a woman and the problems that arise as a result of that [--] but then again, good female writing can put it in a wider context, realizing that, what is particular to me or to us as a group, stems from the general problem of our society." (Veit-Wild 1989: 105) Ogundipe-Leslie talks about the reasons of avoiding the term by the female African writers: "[M]any of [them] like to declare that they are not feminists, as if it were a crime to be a feminist. These denials come from unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, even Mariama Bâ, I would put this down to the successful intimidation of African women by men over the issues of women's liberation and feminism.

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<sup>9</sup> "I was in Lagos, playing music. I didn't like the Biafran war though. I thought the Nigerian government was wrong. I thought the Biafrans were right. The Yoruba are not Ibo. I thought the Ibos were right. I said to myself, "This whole thing is a cheap, big hustle to put the Ibos in a bad light in the world." And, in fact, what was happening was the beginning of corruption in Nigeria. That's evident now. - The Biafrans were fucking right to secede, man. [--] From secession we could come together again. But by not seceding, we're put together *by force*." (Fela 76-7)

Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term 'feminist' a bad name. Yet nothing could be more feminist than the writings of these women writers, in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women in society." (Ogundipe-Leslie 1987) Filomina Steady argues that "[f]or the majority of black women, liberation from sexual oppression has always been fused with liberation from other forms of oppression; namely slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, poverty, illiteracy and disease. - Consequently, her feminism has relevance in human terms rather than narrow sexist terms." (Steady 1981: 34-5). Suffice it to note that the discussion has been about the term, on one hand, and about its content, on the other. When the term 'feminism' has been seen as having a strong connotations of 'white feminism', the term 'womanism' may have been used. Nevertheless, until now, African feminism/womanism has tended to put emphasis more on the various questions of everyday livelihood than, for example, on sexual issues, which have been an issue more typical of Western, white feminism. In this tradition of two branches, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti is clearly part of African and not European feminism.

## 8. CONCLUSION

It is illuminating that while the book on Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was published 19 years after her death, the book on Fela Kuti - who was born in 1938 - was published when he was still alive; further, while the biography by Johnson-Odim and Mba is by far the only full length book on her, there are at least two full length books on Fela Kuti<sup>10</sup>.

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a nationalist and a Pan-Africanist and a feminist. She was one of the most widely traveled female Nigerians of her time. Crossroads of world views were her lot: the choice of values became inevitable. FRK formed an explicitly anticolonial position. On one hand, one can see clear resistance against both traditional and colonial values in her behaviour, while on the other, she actively promoted particular traditional values.

The image that Fela Kuti, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's son, conveys in the biography written by Carlos Moore, is in several respects different from the image Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, the biographers of FRK, convey. Not surprisingly, the position of son makes Fela emphasize FRK as an educator. Strictness is the most prominent trait of his parents as educators; physical punishment was their most common technique. The other trait Fela emphasizes in his mother is her spiritual character, or better: his relationship with the spirit-mother. He shares the traditional Yoruba world view in other respects as well; above all, he believes that he is a twice born abiku child. According to him, as a spirit his mother is deeply involved in the old Yoruba tradition, which, in the epilogue of the book, is manifested in the didactic story she tells. And according to

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<sup>10</sup> See Idowu (1986).

Fela, the spirit even made him to realize his identity; thus, the world of the dead is quite alive to him. Indeed, he is greatly rooted in the old Yoruba traditions.

For Fela Kuti, it is the dramatic side of FRK's public life that fascinates him: FRK as the leader of the protest marches of women against the colonial rulers. The two attacks, the direct resistance against the District Officer and Alake, brought much attention to FRK: her legendary fame is among her people. But while FRK certainly has a political dimension in Fela's remembrance, too, here we also find a contrast with the biography of FRK. Fela pays attention on dramatic events mainly; for Johnson-Odim and Mba, FRK is a founding member of several national and women's unions. Fela deals with politics in big strokes, uttering his general opinions about it; Johnson-Odim and Mba tell of FRK's political activities in a more detailed way. (We may note that while Wole Soyinka in *Aké, the Years of Childhood* tells about the same dramatic events as Fela Kuti, he also tells about grassroots politics - how, for example, the middle class and elite women start to teach reading to the illiterate, poor women.) Further: Johnson-Odim and Mba make it clear that during colonial times, life in many ways became more difficult, especially to women. For them, FRK was a remarkable woman among female paragons like the warrior leader Lisabi, and Madam Tinubu. Further, in Nigeria there had been several anticolonial and nationalist movements and organizations since 1922, when the first political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) had been founded by the Lagosian Herbert Macaulay. All in all, Johnson-Odim and Mba see Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti as part of historical lineage more clearly than does Fela Kuti/ Carlos Moore.

Much of the resistance against traditional values was channelled through Christianity. And while Christianity was by and large connected with Western education, the latter was the other channel of resistance against traditional values. The Ransome-Kutis objected to the Yoruba custom of kneeling or prostrating to an elder titled person, since it conflicted with their egalitarian world view. From all the evidence we get from both Fela Kuti and the biographers, resistance against traditional values was evident in the marriage of the Ransome-Kutis which was not the typical male-dominated marriage of the time. While neither Fela nor the biographers emphasize the resistance against traditional values in detailed cases, the biographers make a clear general statement that from the 1940s on, FRK's perspective on gender relations in the indigenous as well as colonial context became radicalized. We may conclude that, by changing the point of view, the attribute 'aggressive' attached to FRK could be transformed to the word 'progressive' or 'radical'.

Affirmation of traditional values was one of the ways to resist colonial values. For example, the African Christian churches separated from the European-run churches and started promoting the Yoruba language, the use of Yoruba names and wearing African dresses. Also, the FRK's childhood family, despite its grounding in Western education and Christianity, was still very much rooted in its Yoruba cultural heritage. The names are an important signifier of traditional Yoruba and Western values, which both FRK and Fela were much aware of. The older they

became, the more they wanted to use Yoruba names. Further, FRK started to use more consciously Yoruba language and dress. Since her philosophy and activities turned more radical, it is tempting - as her biographers note - to interpret this as much a statement of class allegiance as of cultural pride with the market women. Both FRK and Fela saw in Yoruba tradition much to celebrate.

While FRK and her son shared many of their opinions about colonialism and neocolonialism in general, they greatly differed at their attitudes towards everyday politics. The son did not put his time in it. Further, their attitudes towards gender issues differed. Fela Kuti, who married 27 women at the same time and preached a kind of limitless sexuality, did not, however, accept homosexuality nor active and egalitarian wives. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti lived in a monogamous and egalitarian marriage and put all her energy - according to her biographers - in practical problems of women, working e.g. as president of the Abeokuta Women's Union from its inception up to her death. Indeed, according to the image the biographers convey, she was not particularly interested in discussing sexual issues; instead, she was deeply involved in issues on women's political and social rights and their overall economical situation. Thus, she was an African feminist or 'womanist'. I have paid some attention to Fela Kuti's world view not only to make through comparisons Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's world view more 'visible' but since it greatly influences the way he sees his mother. It explains why the words put in the mouth of FRK in *Fela, Fela* sound rather more like words of Fela - for example, the claim that "there is no Africa left. That only Kalakuta was Africa", or "Life! [--] is what it is all about!" - or why the womanist role of FRK is in the book by and large absent. Further, the emphasis of FRK as a spirit may be understood against Fela Kuti's interest in traditional Yoruba world view in general and his patriarchal dualistic view of women in particular: his late mother is a 'Maria' whom her son needs, perhaps more after her death than in life, in addition to his 27 plus submissive 'Eves'.

I started this paper by marveling at that it is only recently (1997) that a whole scholarly book has been written about one of the most important nationalist and feminist figures of Nigeria. Ifi Amadiume (1987) and Christine Obbo (1980) have observed that generally African women have been portrayed as victims and powerless human beings. The biography on Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti certainly does not fit to this category; its dangers loom - if anywhere - at the opposite side. Although Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was an exceptionally talented and courageous female for her time, she was not a lonely heroine but one of the many in the nationalist and womanist movements and one in the long line of Nigerian history giving voice to political views shared by so many. Although this could have been better emphasised in *For Women and the Nation*, there is no doubt that the biography by Johnson-Odim and Mba is a most welcome reading of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a Nigerian nationalist and feminist.

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