

On February 18th, 1977, over a thousand soldiers forcibly entered the compound of the Nigerian multi-instrumentalist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. While Fela was beat and mutilated outside, soldiers threw his 78 year old mother, Funmilayo, out of a second story window, before burning his compound to the ground. In the following year, Funmilayo died from sustained injuries, a casualty of Fela's revolutionary lyrics. On September 30th, Fela and members of his activist group, Africa 70, drove a van to the entrance of Nigeria's military barracks where they deposited a coffin to protest the death of Fela's mother.

In "Coffin For Head of State," Fela mocks monotheistic religious authority for its defense of morally corrupt political institutions. After a ten minute long, melancholy, yet not downbeat, saxophone solo, Fela spares neither Christian nor Muslim doctrines which have, in Fela's mind, proliferated through all walks of African life and aided in the violent abuse of power.

Before anything at all, him go dey shout: "Oh lord, oh lord, oh lord, Almighty Lord!" ... And them do bad bad bad bad bad bad things.... So I carry the coffin.

Fela blends these socio-political grievances, with a personal mourning for the death of his own mother, and this impresses a sense of frustration and anger on the piece. Retaliation, however, ultimately comes in the form of Fela's influence on listeners. Forty years later, his music is still played regularly in Nigeria and abroad.

Justice Simonetti