

“HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO SING AND DANCE:” MOBUTU, FRANCO, AND
THE STRUGGLE FOR ZAIRIAN IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

“HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO SING AND DANCE:” MOBUTU, FRANCO, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ZAIRIAN IDENTITY

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In this thesis, I examine the public rhetoric of two very big men of post-colonial Zaire: master musician Franco Luambo Makiadi, and military dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, whose careers were roughly contemporary. The rhetoric employed by these men held great sway over a newly independent African country and populace seeking to enter the modern world. This rhetoric breaks down along the lines drawn by postcolonial theorists such as Paulo Freire, who analyzed colonialism in terms of a dehumanization/humanization binary perpetuated by a subjective/objective disconnect between postcolonial “revolutionary” leaders and their subjects. Mobutu was such a leader whose rhetoric revealed a pathological separation from his subject audience and a drastic divergence between his “action” and “agenda,” which deliberately obfuscated his neocolonial kleptocracy.

Franco, in contrast, held deep identification with his audience, the subjects of Mobutu, and his action and agenda, as delivered in hundreds if not thousands of popular songs, converged in terms of this audience. Audience identification and the convergence of stated and ulterior purpose in his rhetoric defined him as a spokesperson for a cultural movement that postcolonial history has largely ignored. Yet this movement, defined through the most beautiful of African

popular musics, sustained a population sliding into ever-increasing poverty and voicelessness by inviting them to construct meaning from the coded semantics of Lingala, the creole tongue favored by Franco and the people of Kinshasa. Within these coded semantics, Franco fostered a critical spirit of inquiry in his audience by offering veiled, consistent criticism of the despotic governance of Mobutu wrapped in sublime *rumba*, a music as hybrid in construction as its Lingala lyrics. Franco was not a political activist, but a cultural revolutionary of tremendous popularity operating under the thumb of a dictator. Over a three decade career, he dedicated himself to the construction of an “authentic” Zairian identity with his audience, an identity based on a genuine synthesis of the poles of identification that defined postcolonialism in Zaire, and throughout Africa: the tribe and the colony. History states that Mobutu defined postcolonial Zaire, and he did, unfortunately. But Franco’s music has outlived that history and has assumed a preeminent space in postcolonial African culture. In fact, his music continues, long after his death, to define the liminal space between history and culture.

INTRODUCTION

And you can be sure that this birth of a nation out of the ashes of colonialism, out of the ruins of tribal separatism and fratricidal wars, in spite of the long and sad series of divisions and grievances, this building stone by stone of the great edifice of nationalism in Zaire, is the work of which I shall always remain most proud.

(Mobutu *Dignity* 75)

Listening to my music, it's dreams and reality. Because you live the dream, and it controls your reality... For me, music is the accompaniment to mental imagery, but the listener has to interpret it correctly. That is to say that the song is only half composed, and the listener himself has to take responsibility for the rest of the composition to reap the impact. The listener has to add the meaning. (Franco as qtd. in Stewart *Rumba* 231)

Franco and Mobutu are birds of the same feather. They have the same techniques, the same leadership style...that's why I never listened to Franco because I just kept seeing Mobutu.

(unnamed source qtd. in White 241)

How appropriate it seems to reexamine the postcolonial landscape of the African continent when Northern African countries such as Egypt and Libya are in the process of removing dictators who have ruled for decades. Both Hosni Mubarak and Moammar Gadhafi succeeded far more democratically-minded heads of state; in Mubarak's case Anwar Sadat, who was assassinated in 1981, in Gadhafi's case King Idris, overthrown in a military coup in 1969. Gadhafi, in particular, is emblematic of an unfortunately recurrent theme in the politics of postcolonial Africa: the rise and entrenchment of military despots whose methods and rhetoric ironically mimic the authoritarian paternalism of the former colonial rulers. In his essay "African Politics," Donald Gordon states that "the real political inheritances of African states at independence were the authoritarian structures of the colonial state, an accompanying political culture, and an environment of politically relevant circumstances tied heavily to the nature of colonial rule" (57). While Gadhafi ruled Libya for forty-two years with such an inheritance, the apogee of the African military dictatorship is arguably the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo/Zaire from 1965 to 1997, whose numerous appellations included *Papa* and *Guide*.

Mobutu acceded through military coup in late 1965, bringing an end to a five year civil war that erupted shortly after the Congo was granted independence by Belgium on June 30, 1960. This conflict was the direct result of the vacuum created by decolonization. "On departure, colonial administrations left Africa with weak, malintegrated, distorted economies...African countries entered independence ill-equipped to staff either the agencies of government or private

business and development organizations” (Gordon 58). Nowhere on the continent were the sucking noises of the departing colonizer more apparent than in the Belgian Congo. When “independence came in 1960, in the entire territory there were fewer than thirty African university graduates, no Congolese army officers, engineers, agronomists, or physicians, and of some five thousand management level positions in the civil service, only three were filled by Africans” (Hochschild 301). The ensuing civil war was fraught with the complexities of nation-building in a large country rich in natural resources but poor in governmental infrastructure. The struggle to construct a national Congolese identity for a far-flung predominantly tribal populace along with the newly urbanized populations of Kinshasa, Kisangani, and Lubumbashi proved fractious and polarizing. That this struggle played out on an international stage dominated by Cold War politics further contributed to its failure to produce a government representative of the diversity of voices in the Congo: rural, urban, Catholic, Kibangist, Muslim, *evolue* (evolved), *sous-evolue* (under-evolved). Instead it produced Mobutu and his single party autocracy, which deftly exploited both audiences, indigenous and international, through rhetoric willfully, often gleefully, ignorant of its action/agenda disconnect, rhetoric designed to obfuscate that Mobutu identified with neither audience and to elevate his slogans, platitudes and vague philosophy into an identity vortex known as *Mobutuism*. The quote at the chapter heading nails this disconnect, as Mobutu takes credit for something that never really happened, indeed something that Mobutu did not desire to happen.

If Mobutu was the apogee of the African military dictator, then Franco Luambo Makiadi was certainly the apogee of an African popular music that strove to generate an authentic, postcolonial identity in its audience, one that accepted colonization as an historical reality to be synthesized rather than an evil to be defined against. After all, Congolese pop music (known as rumba or *soukous*) evolved through just such a synthesis, its main melodic instruments, the guitar and the horns, having been introduced to the country through Portuguese exploration and trade in the 1700s (Ewens *Congo* 53). In addition, Ngoma and Loningisa, the first recording studios in Kinshasa to record Congolese rumba in the late 1940s, were Greek-owned, and Franco's principle biographer, Graeme Ewens, traces Franco's brilliant guitar playing back to an expatriate Belgian named Bill Alexandre, who introduced the electric guitar to Kinshasa in the late 1940s (*Congo* 62-64). And while the rhythms of Franco and OK Jazz's music were fully homegrown, their commercial popularity had already been established with the introduction of thick vinyl 78s of Cuban music, brought by sailors and merchants, who docked at Matadi, the coastal port of the Congo, in the pre-WWII years of the twentieth century (Ewens *Africa* 129, Stewart *Rumba* 20-21). As a result many Western listeners identify Latin elements in Congolese rumba, but it was simply indigenous African rhythms returning via the same Atlantic passage by which slaves from Central Africa initially brought the rhythms to Cuba. Franco himself speaks to this misapprehension:

Many people think they hear a Latin sound in our music. Maybe they are thinking of the horns. Yet the horns are only playing vocal

parts in our singing style. The melody follows the tonality of Lingala, the guitar parts are African and so is the *rumba rhythm* (emphasis mine). Where is the Latin? (qtd in Ewens *Africa* 131).

Clearly a man who understood the African diaspora, Franco also understood that colonialism brought to Africa, along with its obvious horrors, tools and music that might be synthesized with the rich musical traditions that still defined tribal life in Congo. Thusly did a popular music evolve in Congo, not in spite of colonialism but because of it, and Franco was its primary catalyst, alchemist really, with the most fervent and diverse homegrown audience. This audience would provide the battleground for “the mind of Black Africa,” in Dickson Mungazi’s phrase, as Franco sought to engage it and Mobutu to elide it.

Who comprised this audience for Franco’s music? Ken Braun, author of the liner notes to *Francophonie I*, states that

The people who went out to see them [Franco and OK Jazz] at places like the OK Bar included entrepreneurs, artists, intellectuals, and political activists as well as shop clerks, market women, dock workers, hustlers and prostitutes. They were among the first Congolese to come of age in the city instead of small towns and villages in tribal regions. They thought of themselves as Balipopo—people of Lipopo (slang for Leopoldville [soon to be Kinshasa])—as much as and maybe more than Bakongo, Bamongo, Baluba or any other traditional tribe. (13)

Franco identified strictly with this melting pot of the *Kinois* (people of Kinshasa), and as his audience expanded via the pan-African popularity of his music, Franco's identification with the *Kinois* never faltered. It was largely founded on Franco's preference for writing his lyrics in Lingala rather than colonial French. Ewens describes Lingala as "a non-tribal trading language, which evolved out of Lobobangi, the language of a riverine people from the Equatorial region, mixed with words from Kikongo of lower Zaire and others taken from Swahili, Portuguese, French and even English" (*Congo* 54). This oral, creole tongue was the parlance of choice in Kinshasa, uniting the diversity of Franco's audience. It was also easy enough to comprehend for many non-*Kinois*, due to its very limited vocabulary and its historical use as a tongue between various tribal and colonial tongues (Akowuah 69). Lingala was a vital ingredient in Franco's art, cementing the identification of his audience with his music while also mirroring the hybrid nature of that music, an hybridity essential to Franco's pan-African popularity.

Mobutu addressed his indigenous audience in Lingala as well but preferred French for the audience of Western powers, which had begun funneling massive aid to Congo in the mid to late 1960s to prevent the fall of another ideological domino to communism. This linguistic shift patronized both audiences, ensuring the *Zairois* (people of Zaire) that he was one of them while demonstrating to Europe and the U.S. that he was educated in the Western tradition. To his own people he would say: "Roll up your sleeves" (*Mobutu Dignity* 65) as if the responsibility for modernization rested solely with them. To the West he would claim that "what upsets you is the notion of a single party [the

MPR, or Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution]. Do you know the remark that Krushchev made to Kennedy?: ‘You criticize us for having only one party. In your country, America, it’s true there are two. But I have never understood the difference between them...’ Obviously, I am not going to defend the Soviet concept of the single party...” (79). How deftly Mobutu reminds the West that Congo might fall either way, that too much international recalcitrance against the single party system of Mobutu might engender the single party system of socialism. Thusly could he defer the protestations of his own people, who apparently were not willing to work hard enough, while simultaneously exploiting the Western fears of Soviet infiltration in Congo.

In such a rhetorical environment, Franco the artist was compelled to inhabit the liminal space between Mobutu and the indigenous audience of Congo/Zaire in order to speak his highly critical mind in song. He deliberately filled the vacuum created by Mobutu’s drift from the *Zairois* to the audience of the Western political powers and did so knowing full well that he would have to choose his moments and methods of criticism carefully. He would have to be a better rhetorician than Mobutu, a formidable task. He would have to construct an artist/advocate role that embodied what Paulo Freire terms praxis, “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire 126). For Franco the structure most in need of transformation was the liminality of an audience operating under the psychological imprints of both the tribe and the colony and facing an uncertain future under Mobutu. Homi K. Bhabha describes the “liminal space” as an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications [which] opens up

the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). This “cultural hybridity” was the action of Franco’s music, what it extolled, whereas the “imposed hierarchy” of “fixed identifications” was Mobutu’s agenda. Franco, intuitively grasping that any modernity for his audience resided on the future side of the colonial divide, sought the successful navigation of liminal space for the *Kinois*, through their critical agency. Mobutu preferred that his indigenous audience remain embroiled in this space between the tribe and the colony so that he might project his subjective vision of nationhood onto his subjects, in essence objectifying them.

While Franco was never the political activist that Fela Kuti and Miriam Makeba were in Nigeria and South Africa, as the primary progenitor of the most thrillingly voiced popular music of the African continent, he advocated tirelessly for the indigenous voices neglected by Mobutu’s agenda. He literally overloaded his songs with a plurality of voices, as if OK Jazz were a functioning microcosm of Kinshasa society itself, and whether solo or in chorus, these voices constituted Franco’s thematics. In other words, his primary subject matter was his audience, their becoming, one might say. If audience liberation was a conscious goal of his art, and I believe it was, then Franco certainly realized that “one of the greatest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness” (Freire 51). Of course, Mobutu apprehended this also, which made Franco’s prolific musical output all the more fascinating since it refused to be wholly absorbed by or submerged in Mobutu’s relentless subjectivism, which he (Mobutu) sought to

impose on his subjects. Ultimately, despite Franco's three-plus decade reign as "the Balzac of Africa" (White 105; Ewens *Congo* 29), Mobutu not only outlived him but at important points in their parallel careers, co-opted him as a spokesperson for the MPR, the only politically sanctioned party in Congo/Zaire, which every citizen was mandated to join and which quickly became the central apparatus for Mobutu's cult of personality.

These two big men of Congo/Zaire resided on opposite sides of the lines drawn by Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, and Paulo Freire, postcolonial theorists who defined the separation between ruler and ruled as a dehumanization/humanization binary. Of course, Congolese postcolonial history does not break down so easily, as the third quote at the chapter heading makes plain. No doubt many *Kinois* saw disturbing similarities between Franco and Mobutu, who finally were each ambitious and powerful enough to directly or indirectly influence the actions of the other consistently, which is why this study assumes a call and response structure, as so much of Franco's music does. Franco's greatest songs seem to correspond and answer to Mobutu's most noteworthy acts as dictator. There was a dialectical relationship as often as a relationship of pure power dynamics, and these nuances are not the sort of angle found in the historical sources accessed for this thesis. Nor are the implications of a complex relationship between political ruler and dedicated artist fully explored in the musical sources accessed. Nevertheless, the distinction is there, often blurred, sometimes blunt: Mobutu was, according to Ewens, Franco's biggest fan, yet Franco's primary audience, which should have been Mobutu's

too, remained in the same vicious cycle of economic subsistence and identity nullification that colonialism had subjugated it to. Franco was the critical, artistic voice who assumed the obligation of awakening this politically neglected audience to the problems of self-determination in such a shape shifting rhetorical environment, one where colonial stereotypes of Africans as “beasts of burden or brutish heathens” (Kelley 22) still held sway. “A large part of Franco’s attractiveness was the sense he gave people that he and they understood each other...[that] in relation to his band as well as to his public, Franco was a democrat” (Braun *Franco II* 21).

As the defining artist of a vibrant, often volatile, musical landscape, Franco was able to navigate between Mobutu and the *Kinois* with an authentic¹ voice and a sequence of rhetorical strategies that demonstrated real praxis in their goal to awaken and/or facilitate the generation of the critical consciousness of his audience. While Mobutu preferred to lead his largely illiterate populace through communiqués, slogans, and paternal condescension (“Happy are those...” is his greatest slogan, to be examined later) Franco opted for a “problem-posing” (Freire 83) approach in his songwriting, one that demanded critical thinking from the audience in order to transform the dehumanization/humanization binary, created by colonization and maintained by the subsequent totalitarianism of Mobutu, into a dialectic. The Franco quote at the heading bears revisiting. It echoes Freire’s statement:

¹ Franco’s authenticity was founded on the idea that to be authentic, one had to have a critical, historical sense that accurately included all influences operating on the post-colonial African, be they traditional or modern, tribal or Western, beneficial or negative. Franco’s sense of authenticity is contrasted throughout this thesis with Mobutu’s *Authenticity* policy, to be discussed in chapter two.

Only in this interdependence (between subjectivity and objectivity) is an authentic praxis possible, without which it is impossible to resolve the oppressor-oppressed contradiction. To achieve this goal, the oppressed must confront reality critically...a mere perception of reality not followed by this critical intervention will not lead to a transformation of objective reality...[but remains] a purely subjectivist perception by someone who forsakes objective reality and creates a false substitute. (51-52)

By relying on the critical potential of his audience to make meaning from his songs, Franco invited said audience to apply the same critical spirit to the nature of its reality, which he so assiduously examined in song. The goal of Franco's art was not the mere perception of oppressive reality by his audience. The *Kinois* were not benighted to their oppression, only to the means by which it might be transformed. That Franco's songs did not offer particular solutions, whether economic, political, or social, but rather sought to cultivate a spirit of inquiry in the *Kinois*, which he no doubt hoped would conflate with their critical intervention in objective reality, demonstrates a profound affinity with Freire's pedagogy. Solutions to oppression must be determined by the oppressed; otherwise the solutions are simply someone else's imposed subjectivity, no matter how revolutionary. The last line of Freire's quote, defining the distance between "mere perception" and "critical intervention" on the part of the oppressed, paradoxically defines Mobutu, whose "purely subjectivist perception" not only

denied the “objective reality” of his subjects but led him to construct a “false substitute,” which he imposed on them.

By contrast, Franco viewed and believed in the *Kinois* as the ultimate representatives of the desires and dreams of an emerging nation. His 1000 + compositions, of which I’ve heard a third, ostensibly unveil a revolutionary personality able to create at will under the panoptical paranoia of Mobutu and his faux revolutionary kleptocracy.

Like all historical and cultural figures of importance to Africa, Mobutu and Franco were constructed by the vicissitudes of life under colonial rule. By the late 1950s, both men were already careerists with undeniable credibility. But their upbringings vary widely and not simply because of an eight year age difference (Mobutu was elder). While Franco was strumming homemade guitars next to his Bakongo mother’s stall in the market of Matonge (Ewens *Congo* 52), an indigenous quarter of Kinshasa, Mobutu was serving seven years as a soldier in the Force Publique, the Belgian colonial army. By the time Franco became lead guitarist for O.K. Jazz in 1956, Mobutu was a journalist writing under a pseudonym for *L’Avenir* in its “African News” section, a job which eventually sent him to Belgium where he became involved with Infor-Congo, the Office of Information and Public Relations for the Belgian Congo, in April 1959 (Mobutu *Dignity* 26-28). In Belgium, he apparently also received training by the C.I.A. in the person of Larry Devlin, described by Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja as “the man who had recruited Mobutu for Uncle Sam between 1958 and 1960 in Brussels” (*The Congo* 107), and became exposed to the rhetoric of Patrice Lumumba, an

emerging revolutionary whom Mobutu interviewed for *L'Avenir* (Mobutu *Dignity* 30). While Franco was assuming sole leadership of OK Jazz in 1959-60, Mobutu was writing speeches for an imprisoned Lumumba (30), whose release to attend the RoundTable conference on Congo independence in Brussels sparked the hope that he would become President of the new nation. Upon independence, Lumumba, as Prime Minister (KasaVubu was named President to appease potential tribal conflict), made now-Colonel Mobutu, Secretary of State. At this juncture in Congolese socio-political modernization, both Franco and Mobutu stood in the shadows of taller men. The idealistic, antagonistically anti-colonial Lumumba was the primary political voice in the newly independent Congo, while Grand Kalle and his African Jazz, whose "Independance Cha Cha Cha" was the "soundtrack of independence," (Malambu 4) were the undisputed leaders of the rapidly evolving rumba of Kinshasa (then Leopoldville). Very soon those taller men would be eclipsed by their shadows. By late 1965, when Mobutu acceded through coup, Lumumba had been assassinated, and Grand Kalle was fading as a bandleader, his musicians defecting to younger bands like OK Jazz, his decidedly apolitical ("Independance" notwithstanding) music passé and incapable of moving the emerging consciousness of the urban *Kinois* (Stewart *Rumba* 121).

This complex historical moment is the starting point for the current study of two of the most influential men in the modern history of Africa, one who strove to dictate a postcolonial identity to his people, the other to transform a postcolonial reality with his people. This study will examine the rhetoric created by these men: how it appealed to, what it assumed about, and the action and agenda it

prescribed for or suggested to the respective, but frequently overlapping, audiences of Franco and Mobutu. I am not particularly interested in the hundreds of love songs Franco wrote unless they also speak to the politics of postcolonial identity construction, which they often do. Nor am I interested in the various surface semantics of Mobutu's repetitious rhetoric of *Authenticity* unless they limn the distinction between his indigenous audience and the audience of the Western powers. Both men created huge amounts of language; both applied language to the reality construction of their audiences; both were extolled as men of the people, but just as often vilified as egomaniacal despots. Yet Franco's words and music survive the historical circumstances of their making, while Mobutu has been swallowed by the same history. Audience identification and the convergence of action and agenda in Franco's rhetoric were the keys to his historical transcendence. Obversely, Mobutu's lack of audience identification and the ever-steepening divergence of action and agenda in his public language ensured that he would be historically rendered as simply another strong-arm boss in another third world country, the brilliance of his rhetoric notwithstanding.

Chapter One will examine the "Pentecost Hanging" and Franco's response in song, "Luvumbu Ndoki." Chapter two will argue for Franco's well-known "AZDA" as a *signifyin(g)* (Henry Louis Gates Jr.) response to Mobutu's cultural policy of *Authenticity*. Chapter three will discuss Franco's last great song, "Attention Na Sida," in the context of the AIDS crisis of the late 1980s in Congo. Each will draw conclusions about the ultimate effectiveness of Franco's rhetorical

methods, whether they were revolutionary or radically anti-revolutionary compared to the rhetoric of the self-proclaimed revolutionary *Papa* Mobutu.

CHAPTER ONE: "LUVUMBU NDOKI" AND THE PENTECOST HANGING

The discursive reimagining of 'chieftaincy' and the invention of Mobutu as chief among chiefs produced a context within which Mobutu practiced a distinctly nondemocratic form of personal rule that included the banning of all parties but the MPR [Mouvement Populaire de Revolution] and the incarceration of political opponents. An important symbolic gesture was made less than a year after he came to power, when his regime publicly hung four political leaders, including Evariste Kimba, who had been appointed prime minister by the previous president [Kasavubu]. (Dunn 116)

I asked Cesaire if she remembers the Pentecost Hangings. No images exist of this hanging, they are all in my nightmares. That evening many wept in the People's City: tears of shame, tears of helplessness. (Filmmaker Raoul Peck qtd. in Reddy para 10)

The greedy man, the coward, the thief, the scamp who disregards the feelings of others and rides rough-shod over the social and communal customs, the man who is accused of witchcraft... [is] put into the songs which are sung at the village dances. (Weeks 120)

Like Mubarak in Egypt, Mobutu Sese Seko also succeeded a more democratically minded leader. The man's name was Patrice Lumumba, and his assassination in January 1961 robbed Congo/Zaire of perhaps its best chance at a modern African democracy. Lumumba was already a revolutionary figure by the time independence was granted the Congo. He was imprisoned for political reasons by the colonial Belgians, and then released under intense pressure from the coterie of Congolese who were to guide the new country in its modernization (Zeilig 18-20). He attended the RoundTable conference on independence held in Brussels, and the consensus was that he would be named (by the Belgians, naturally) President of the Republic. Mobutu was in Lumumba's camp by this point (24), but Belgium and the U.N. decided that to defray tribal animosity, Lumumba would be Prime Minister and Joseph Kasavubu President (32). These men were quickly overwhelmed with an unfamiliar bureaucracy, a subsistent and widespread rural population, and the internal migration to the urban opportunities of Kisangani, Lubumbashi, and especially Kinshasa (Close 45). Immediately, the Katanga province, under the leadership of Moise Tshombe, threatened secession. The ever-watchful U.S. floundered in response, as did the U.N., and Lumumba, to quell the fracture of his country, appealed to the Soviets for aid against the secessionists. Even though "Lumumba was no communist, rather a nationalist who sought meaningful independence in a world that refused it" (Zeilig 127), his fate was sealed by bucking the ideological stakes of the Cold War.

My historical sources all agree that Mobutu, though nominally only the head of the military at this time (1960-61), was instrumental in enacting the wishes of the Cold

War West to remove Lumumba. According to Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, the preeminent Zairian scholar, Mobutu's claims that he was in no way involved in Lumumba's assassination are

total nonsense...Mobutu was a key player in all of the major decisions. He was not a lowly officer simply carrying out orders. No one, including President Kasavubu, was free to make decisions without Mobutu's approval...he collaborated with Lumumba's enemies throughout the entire affair. (*Voices* 152)

Kevin Dunn states that "The C.I.A. decided the Congo crisis could only be resolved if Lumumba was permanently removed—something Kasavubu and Mobutu had failed to accomplish" (94). Nzongola-Ntalaja further describes Mobutu as "having [...] taken part in the country's 'original sin', Lumumba's assassination" (*The Congo* 171). And Michela Wrong, in her fascinating *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, states that "Mobutu always bore moral responsibility for Lumumba's murder, with the Western powers playing the part of Iago, whispering their instructions from behind the scene" (81).

Patrice Lumumba's killing in January 1961 by the Katangan military, only seven months after Congolese independence, assured his (future) martyrdom, but the civil war raged for another four years. Although the first politician assassinated in newly independent Africa, Lumumba was seemingly forgotten in the years between his death and the bloodless coup of Mobutu in late November 1965. This neglect indubitably reflected the dominant ideology, largely constructed for the ruling echelon of newly-independent Congo by the Cold War-obsessed West, that Lumumba was a communist. Franco Luambo Makiadi, however, composed the beautiful lament "Liwa

ya Lumumba” (Death of Lumumba) and released it as a single in 1961. Curiously, it wasn’t banned, perhaps because the parties responsible for the assassination feared incrimination by censoring Franco (Stewart *Rumba* 89). While the song pointed no fingers, it did establish an emerging distance between Franco and those in power, along with a startling ability to predict government policy by years. It was not until 1966 when Mobutu rehabilitated Lumumba with a statue and “National Hero” appellation, at which point Franco responded with “Lumumba, Heros National,” that Lumumba received his historical due. Of course, Mobutu’s agenda was completely different than his action in this belated rehabilitation. Mobutu sought authentication by coronating Lumumba: “For me, he was a model: one of the few to think simultaneously of real independence and total unity of the Congo, despite its ethnic differences” (Mobutu *Dignity* 40). He also sought to absolve himself of the rumors, indeed the reporting of Western newspapers, that he was personally responsible for the killing: “I held no position in power, either politically in Kinshasa or militarily in Katanga, to be held accountable for anything” (Mobutu *Voices* 39). This statement contrasts tellingly with Nzongola-Ntalaja’s assertion above that Mobutu, well before his coup in November 1965, was already a powerful actor in the complex politics of post-independence Congo/Zaire.

The assassination of Lumumba was the crucial episode in the civil war because it revealed an insidious neocolonialism at work in the construction of independent Congo/Zaire. As Leo Zeilig explains, “the act of Lumumba’s murder was carried out by Belgian and Katangan forces, [but] an unholy alliance of Western interests lay behind his demise...Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States” (126). As

defined by Kwame Nkrumah, then leader of Ghana, one of the first African countries to be granted independence, “the essence of neocolonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty...in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (OED “neocolonialism”). Considering his recruitment by the C.I.A. through the efforts of Larry Devlin, Chief of Station, Congo (Devlin 105), and his subsequent involvement in Lumumba’s assassination, Mobutu was emerging as an agent of neocolonialism in Congo/Zaire. After his coup, Mobutu’s consistent rebuttal of Western criticism of his totalitarian rule over the new nation was a smokescreen intended to separate him from neocolonial interests, so as to appear to be on the side of his people. On the other hand, the criticism by the West, centered on human rights abuses, a single party political system, and the continued pauperization of the Congolese populace, was also a smokescreen intended to hide that the Western powers had their preferred despot in place in Congo/Zaire. Thusly do we see the emergence of the rhetorical complexities of the relationship between a dictator and his favored audience, not the people of Zaire but the audience of Western neocolonial interests. Consider the following exchange between Mobutu and French interviewer Jean-Louis Remilleux:

Q) The Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR) is the only political party; you are its ‘guide’ and yet you talk of democracy. Is this entirely logical?

A) Here we go...Decidedly for you Westerners the triad ‘power, democracy, one party’ is an equation with three unknowns. I am going

to show you how to solve it and that the answer we in Zaire have chosen is the only reasonable one...They [the Zairois] are proud of having got rid of imported culture and of having found again their soul and their dignity. They have no complexes and they are reconciled with each other. There you have the basis of democracy! (*Dignity* 79-81)

While it is an acceptable claim that *they* are “proud of having got rid of imported culture,” in terms of governance *they* were still colonized by a system that aped the authoritarianism of the departing colonizers. Membership in Mobutu’s MPR was mandatory and all other parties were outlawed. Mobutu states in another interview that:

They (emphasis mine) elected to unite under the banner of a single national party—namely, the Popular Movement of the Revolution...the MPR is not a party but a movement...[reflecting] the people’s desire to speak with one voice...a revolutionary force that represents a complete break from foreign ideas and practices. (*Voices* 43)

This is a typical Mobutu fabrication designed to demonstrate that he and they (the *Zairois*) were on the same page, that he facilitated what they wanted all along, not apparently the freedom to self-determine but the conscription in a ruling party that would determine for them. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja gives Mobutu’s bald-faced lie its due:

Were Mobutu a patriot who loved his country and a dignified ruler who respected himself, he would have resigned. The problem is that we are dealing here not with a normal type of political regime,

but with a kleptocracy based on state-sponsored banditry and bent on promoting its narrow group interests to the detriment of the general welfare. (*The Congo*186)

Franco Luambo Makiadi also recognized the duplicity of such a nakedly subjective reality as Mobutu's being imposed on his audience. In "Bato ya mabe batondi mboka," he delivers a bold, prescient take on the Congo's immediate political future: "Bad people fill this country/Schemers fill this country/They lay traps for their allies/Only later will we (emphasis mine) ask how they succeeded" (trans. Braun *FPI* 17). This song predates Mobutu's coup by a year and again demonstrates Franco's identification with his audience ("we") as well as his ability to parse the future consequences of such duplicitous leadership. The "we" contrasts tellingly with Mobutu's consistent "they." The "only later will we ask" portends that later is too late, something that Mobutu counted on from the oppressed masses of Congo/Zaire. As Paulo Freire states, "The presence of the people in the historical process, no longer as mere spectators, but with the first signs of aggressivity, is sufficiently disquieting to frighten the dominant elite into doubling the tactics of manipulation" (148). In Mobutu's case, the tactic favored was the subsumption of the people's voices by the "one voice" of Mobutu, antialogical and wholly imposed. While Franco was often accused of silencing competitive musical voices through appropriation of talent, and control of instruments and recording technology, no one in the Second Republic (which lasted until 1991, when Mobutu was forced to abandon the single party system) silenced voices like *Papa*.

The “Pentecost Hanging” was Mobutu’s inaugural rhetoric to the country he had assumed responsibility for. There were the preliminary and familiar postcolonial acts of suspending parliament, sacking and incarcerating the supposed ineffective elected leaders like Kasavubu, and proclaiming sole power for a limited time period (in Mobutu’s case, five years) until calm could be restored. But nothing could prepare the still celebratory *Kinois* for the visual rhetoric that Mobutu enacted in late May/early June 1966 (Depelchin cites May 30, Ikambana June 2), only six months after his coup, when he publicly executed in Kinshasa four politicians from the civil war years. Like the assassination of Lumumba, this act sent a shockwave through newly independent Congo, and marked Mobutu as a leader unconcerned with the increasing blood on his hands, as long as his authoritarian message was properly apprehended. According to the *New York Times*, “the government declared a holiday for the executions and more than 100,000 jammed the square and watched silently” (AP June 3, 1966). Franco was one of the witnesses.

On the morning of May 30, 1966, Mobutu announced over the radio in his most emphatic and angry tones that irresponsible politicians had been caught in a plot against him and his regime and that they would be tried for treason. (Close 192)

The plotters were “four former ministers who, as if by coincidence, had all been in Patrice Lumumba’s first government: Evariste Kimba [prime minister at the time of Mobutu’s coup], Jerome Anany [defense minister at time of coup], Emmanuel Bamba and Alexandre Mahamba” (Depelchin 86). According to William Close, Mobutu’s personal physician, all four had been members of the parliament Mobutu suspended

after his takeover, but only Bamba, a Bakongo like Franco and Kasavubu, had protested Mobutu's "power grab" openly (192-3). Peta Ikambana states that "they were found guilty of high treason by governmental decree 66-338 of May 30, 1966...in a court martial led by five high ranking military officers close to Mobutu" (56). This of course meant that the trial occurred on the day that Mobutu announced the discovery of the plot. Interestingly, the *New York Times* quotes Information Minister Jean-Jacques Kande, in a government statement issued May 30: "the plotters will be tried for high treason and probably hanged in a public square" (AP May 31, 1966). Not only does this statement reveal a foretold outcome, it begs the question of why these men were tried at all, rather than summarily executed. According to Ikambana, the trial was public and lasted an hour and a half, with the jury deliberating all of five minutes before pronouncing capital punishment by hanging, set for June 2, 1966 (56).

William Close provides the vital back story that a certain "Colonel Bangala, loyal to Mobutu, [had] pretended to be sympathetic to the concerns of the four plotters...[who] were arrested by paratroopers hiding in Colonel Bangala's garden" (192-3). This constituted entrapment at least—more likely a set-up on the part of the new leader of the Congo. The speed with which the horrible spectacle unfolded had its own rhetorical implication: Mobutu seized the opportunity to deter future dissenting voices by inventing, squashing, and punishing an *actual* treason in the space of just three days. The four plotters were chosen for or lead to treason because they were Lumumbists, and that *tribe* represented to Mobutu the primary threat to his own autocracy because it vociferously denounced neocolonialism in all its guises. In 1968, Mobutu would further marginalize the Lumumbists with the execution of Pierre Mulele

under circumstances drastically similar to the “Pentecost Hanging” (Ikambana 57). In an interview reported on by the *New York Times*, Mobutu, in response to Western pressure to grant leniency to the plotters, retorted “I have no lessons to receive from humanity” (UPI June 5, 1966). He certainly had a lesson to give however, and Franco responded courageously with the song “Luvumbu Ndoki,” which I will attempt to parse through anthropological source material as no English translation is accessible.

The hangings took place at Pont Kasavubu, an “open space close to Matonge, considered sacred to the memories of the independence movement” (Ewens *Congo* 102). Matonge, an indigenous quarter of Kinshasa, was “an important site in the historical imagination of popular music in Kinshasa, primarily because during the heyday of the music industry, Matonge was home to an important number of bars, concert venues, and record stores” (White 66). This was a telling location for a public execution, as if Mobutu were deliberately targeting an audience who had left behind tribal traditions for the economic and discursive opportunities of the city. He recognized that Kinshasa was the epicenter of potential modernity for Congo and that if he could shock the urban populace of the capital into silent submission then the far flung tribal populations would support, or at least not oppose, his regime.

Interestingly, Mobutu was Catholic, while Bamba, the most outspoken of the plotters, was Kibangist, an indigenous religious sect (Close 192). Perhaps not a further motive for the hangings, it certainly explains the name by which they are known. In 1966, Pentecost fell on May 30, the day the plotters were found guilty. In the Christian liturgical calendar, Pentecost celebrates the purging rain of Holy Spirit upon the

Disciples of Christ after his resurrection (OED “Pentecost”). What purging rain did Mobutu intend with the “Pentecost Hanging”?

Like most citizens of Matonge, [Franco] witnessed the public executions of the Kimba group of alleged coup plotters at the Pont Kasavubu, and following the event...had his first serious run-in with the new regime...His song “Luvumbu Ndoki” (Luvumbu the Sorcerer), believed to be a commentary on the executions, was banned as soon as it hit the streets, and all copies of the record were hunted down on the morning of its release, not only in Kinshasa but also by agents of the regime in Europe. The song was a Kikongo folklore number frequently heard at family palavers when it was used as a vehicle of accusation. (Ewens *Congo* 103)

“Luvumbu Ndoki” (c. 1966) is arguably the most radical song Franco ever recorded, possibly the most radical song in all of Congolese rumba/*soukous*. Dates of recording and release are approximations at best, and an accurate translation of the lyrics has eluded me. But considering that the music sources accessed for this thesis, if they mention it, all attribute “Luvumbu Ndoki” to Mobutu’s public execution (Braun *FPII* 13; Stewart *Breakout* 30), it was probably recorded in Kinshasa soon after the event, released locally, banned, and then rereleased by EMI Pathe in 1967, which is the imprint and date on the only copy of the single I have seen. The claims I make for its radical nature are based on “Luvumbu Ndoki”’s overt suite construction, which assumes an ABCA format not usually employed by rumba, which formalized an AB(AB) format, its authentic recreation of pre-colonial rhythms and vocals, as well as

it's ability to signify regardless of a literal understanding of the lyrics on the part of the listener. The construction and sound of "Luvumbu Ndoki" are finally, with some contextual assistance, sufficient for exegesis.

The song begins with a rough electric guitar, vocal, and saxophone driven pop section pushing a catchy chant, but then the music drops out, leaving Franco's naked utterances of what sound like accusations, each more desperate than the last, while trills and cries rise up in seeming comment. This B section gives way to a very funky log-drum, wood-block, and bass syncopation underneath call and response vocals between Franco and what sounds like a massed chorus of male and female voices. The B and the C together offer distinctly traditional (folkloric as opposed to popular) sounds, and comparison to certain French Ocora Lps, documenting studio recreations and field recordings of Central African tribal music (courtesy of Harvest Records, Asheville), reveals enough similarities in vocal presence and rhythmic atmosphere for me to assume that Franco was consciously, in the middle sections of "Luvumbu Ndoki," recreating a tribal experience musically.

The construction of the suite is telling: by sandwiching two very traditional sounding episodes between a rough pop statement and its reprise, Franco was assuredly commenting on the distance that existed between tradition and the more modern world of Kinshasa in 1966, the post-colonial world. Yet the B and C sections are the ones that contain the action, as opposed to the agenda, of "Luvumbu Ndoki" and so are the ones most in need of explication, which I will attempt through the application of anthropological sources addressing the nature of pre-colonial tribal life in Congo.

Ewens, in the quote above, translates “Luvumbu Ndoki” as “Luvumbu the Sorcerer” and relates that the song’s origin is Kikongo folklore. Franco’s mother was Bakongo, spoke Kikongo to Franco as he grew up (Ewens *Congo* 37), and Franco sings the song in Kikongo. In the folklore of the tribes of Lower Congo/Zaire, the Bakongo included, a *luvumbu* “sculpts the objects (masks, initiation panels, statues, poles) used in the nkanda [collective initiation ritual], but he is primarily a healer (nganga buka) of fertility problems, circumcising boys who are unable to have an erection. The nganga luvumbu is also a dreaded sorcerer who employs his power to harm people” (Van Damme-Linseele para 9). *Nganga*, according to Janzen and MacGaffey in their excellent *An Anthology of Kongo Religion*, denotes “priest” but connotes “strong associations with the role of magician, herbalist, or witchdoctor” (14). *Ndoki*, “from the root loka, which means ‘to bewitch, to practice black magic, to attack, to kill by magical means’” (42), translates as “witch.” *Kindoki*, however, is a neutral power, good or bad according

to the use made of it. As used selfishly, by a witch, to procure his own advantage, or to attack his victims, it is unequivocally bad. As used for the good of the community by chiefs (mfumu) and elders (bambuta), it is a necessary protection against the destructive activity of witches. (42)

According to Jan Knappert, in *Myths and Legends of the Congo*, “witchcraft occupies the minds of many people in Africa more than any other single subject” (61). The allegations of sorcery that surrounded Mobutu and Franco throughout their roughly contemporaneous careers testify to this preoccupation. It is important to note

that belief in sorcery for the Bakongo and other Central African tribes was not demonstrably different than belief in God for early Christians. Each belief system fulfilled an evolutionary function, ensuring the adaptation of an open system to constant challenges posed by objective reality. Like the invocation of God and his inscrutable actions for the Christian, *kindoki* was essentially the Bakongo's false positive response to environmental phenomena: they believed that when clan members transgressed, there must be an agent behind the agent. In its malevolent form sorcery, *kindoki* becomes *kundu*, which "the people believed brought death to their country; so they set themselves to finding out who in the clan had the *kundu*" because "whoever had *kundu* was a man-eater, that is, one who caused inward harm to others" (Janzen 44). Clearly, once detected, *kundu* had to be eradicated. So, in a communal setting, the *ndoki* (witch) would be made to drink *nkasa*, "a secret potion...that burns the bowels of witches so that they die" (Knappert 61), thereby releasing the *kundu* and its hold on the clan. It is very tempting to conclude that "Luvumbu Ndoki" documents, in its B and C sections, just such a communal ritual of detection and eradication. This ritual clearly operated on the democratic ideal that the good of the community must always take precedence over individual self-interest, and that the community itself bore the responsibility for ferreting out such insidious selfishness.

Against the ubiquitous, pejorative constructions by the West of pre-colonial African tribes, Aime Cesaire exclaims passionately in *Discourse on Colonialism* that "they were communal societies, never societies of the many for the few. They were societies that were not only ante-capitalist...but also anti-capitalist. They were

democratic societies, always” (44). Peta Ikambana carefully explains the system of checks and balances in the traditional hierarchy by breaking down the pre-colonial African government into four entities: chief, inner council, council of elders, and the village assembly (16-19). He states that “the chief represented the direct link between the group and ancestral guardian spirits believed to protect the tribe against enemies, natural dangers and any destructive spirits” (16); that, assisting the chief, the inner council “was generally comprised of the chief’s relatives, friends, and influential members of the village” (16); that the council of elders “voiced its dissatisfaction, criticized the chief, and kept him under necessary control” (17); and finally that the village assembly was the pulpit for the commoners whose consensus the chief was expected to adopt (18-19). The glue to this democratic structure was the practice of material offerings to the chief: “A chief who became a despot would lose the respect of the people, who would then refuse to pay tributes” (19).

[If] it became evident that the tribe was discontented and unlikely to tolerate oppression much longer, the fathers of the tribe would hold a great *pitso* (gathering or meeting) and, in the presence of the tribe, denounce the chief for his wrongdoings and announce that some other member of the royal household had been elected in his stead. (19)

“Luvumbu Ndoki,” specifically the B and C sections, seems to be a musical recreation of the process described above. After repetition of a chanted vocal line functioning as a pop hook with raw guitar and braying saxophone interjections, the music drops out with a tongue trill and collective *DA* while a distraught lead vocal

(Franco's) arises and cajoles with conjoining, collective animation in the form of oddly pitched wails and wordless plaints. The cajoler pronounces "Luvumb" and "Ndoki" often in a series of outbursts that, after another trill and collective *DA*, syncopate with a folkloric dance rhythm, perhaps the *agbwaya*, which Ewens describes as a ceremonial dance with rhythm and vocal animation in the form of shouts, cries, and ululations (Ewens *Congo* 54-9). That the B section has no music is as telling as the folkloric funk of the C section: in the B Franco declaims as a wronged individual, his hectoring voice filling the space the pop music of the A section has vacated with cries of outrage and injustice. Music in the B section would have diluted the agonizing rhetoric. Breaking this section down further is unnecessary. The rising cadence of distress is palpable; the vocal intensity entirely convincing. The voices that occasionally provide comment in this B section seem to function as an audience reacting to Franco's accusations (Ewens calls "Luvumbu Ndoki" a "vehicle of accusation" above). This audience might be the family of the wronged individual or the assembled tribe to which the individual belonged. Regardless, the individual clearly has a platform from which to complain and an audience willing to listen. This audience comes to the fore in the C section.

The call and response voicing is central to the C section of "Luvumbu Ndoki." The community answers the accuser's allegations with empathic cries that quickly cohere into communal spirit made all the more infectious by the heavy folklore syncopation underneath. Franco's lead voice is mimicked and encouraged by layered choral vocals (male and female), sounding nothing like American Soul Music, which was built on the commercial aspects of this authentically African voicing technique.

Intense, rhythmic repetition, drop-outs and ululations, and hot-stepping upswings all suggest purgation, if not celebration. The ping-pong cadence in which the moniker “Luvumbu Ndoki” is thrown by Franco to the communal chorus, which throws it back to Franco, suggests dialectic constructed on the back of the convincing rhetoric of the B section, where Franco stakes his claims to injustice at the hands of “Luvumbu.” The A section is then reprised, a celebratory recourse to the only conceivably “pop” aspect of this song, Franco’s sharply plectrummed guitar, and Vercky’s bawling saxophone, beginning again.

Considering that Ewens and others attribute the Franco song “Luvumbu Ndoki” to the “Pentecost Hanging” and attest that it was immediately banned by Mobutu’s henchmen; considering that Ewens describes it as a folklore piece used to accuse in the presence of a community (“family palavers”); considering that Janzen and MacGaffey, Knappert, and Ikambana reconstruct pre-colonial Central African tribal life as a democratic response to the ubiquitous belief in and vigilance against sorcery; considering the translation of “ndoki” as “witch” or “sorcerer,” and the ritual connotations surrounding a “luvumbu”; and finally considering the musical details of the song itself, I firmly believe that “Luvumbu Ndoki” functions as rhetoric of disclosure, the unveiling of a chieftain possessed by the *kundu*, and that the metaphor of such chiefly transgression was meant by Franco to apply to Mobutu and his “Pentecost Hanging.” Further evidence is provided by Ewens:

“Although Kikongo [was] not one of President Mobutu’s languages, his secret police understood the message [of “Luvumbu Ndoki”], and Franco

was briefly detained for questioning” [after which he] “fled to Brazzaville with the band where they stayed for six months” (*Congo* 103-4).

As represented by Knappert and Janzen and Ikambana, Central African tribal society exhibited a democratic personality imbued with optimism and deep identification with a shared heritage and language. The detections and accusations of sorcery within such societies were not delivered or undertaken lightly. Yet they were essential in returning an open, dialogic system in deep disturbance to homeostasis, restoring to it a collective vision of the future and the promise that the limen was *now*. A figure such as “Luvumbu” constituted the greatest threat to a tribe’s becoming because a sorcerer or witch necessarily placed self-interest above communal evolution and thereby nullified the threshold existence that offered eternal hope to the community. If the branding or unveiling of treachery and sorcery in a public setting was endemic to pre-colonial tribes throughout Africa, then it belied the Western *save them from themselves* perspective that viewed African natives as simply cannibals. The pre-colonial tribes were apparently perfectly capable of dealing with transgressions no matter where they occurred in the hierarchy described by Ikambana. And this is one of the many points to “Luvumbu Ndoki.” Franco seemed to be reminding the *Kinois* that they already possessed the tools to identify and punish transgressors; that these tools were already validated by the shared heritage of the clans from which most *Kinois* came; and that the acceptance of responsibility for the health of the community was tantamount to preserving, and progressing, its democratic culture. The brute authoritarianism of Mobutu’s “Pentecost Hanging” represented a direct threat to Franco’s audience in much the same way that a

powerful *ndoki*, such as “Luvumbu,” threatened tribal homeostasis. Both Mobutu and “Luvumbu” acted from self-interest, bypassing the checks and balances system of tribal democracy in order to impose their *kundu* on their respective clans. The clan in Franco’s “Luvumbu Ndoki” acts accordingly by allowing a member to state his claims of injustice at the hands of the *ndoki*, by listening and responding to these claims, and by joining the complainer in a celebration of the clan’s apparent eradication of the sorcerer and his *kundu*. Indeed, the C section of “Luvumbu Ndoki,” resembling the *agbwaya* that Ewens discusses, seems to be a bloodless, communal exorcism of chief Luvumbu’s sorcerer spirit.

Franco, with these two folkloric musical sections, seems to offer a history lesson to those of his audience who may have understandably forgotten where they came from. Since colonialism worked so hard to erase this history of democratic response to transgressions against the clan, the *Kinois* needed the lesson of “Luvumbu Ndoki.” It was a reminder that self-determination was a historically sanctioned aspect of the tribe. It was a further reminder that the “Pentecost Hanging” was not a sanctioned act in the context of the *Zairois*, now Mobutu’s “village assembly.” As horrific as the prolonged civil war had been for the people, the politicians executed by Mobutu were men attempting to negotiate a democratic process of nation building, just as Lumumba had been. There is no substantive evidence that the executed were attempting anything other than voicing dissent, a practice sanctioned by tribal politics and musically represented in “Luvumbu Ndoki.” The quote at the chapter heading by anthropologist Weeks makes clear that music was an apt vehicle for reporting on the transgressions of a pathological leader. That

the executed were framed and hung in front of, but without the caucus of, the “village assembly” constituted a transgression commensurate with “Luvumbu”’s, whatever that actually was.

“Luvumbu Ndoki” has far outlived the circumstances of its making, and, in light of Mobutu’s long, oppressive rule of Congo/Zaire, it is positively prophetic on two counts. The first concerns its communal condemnation of the treachery of a chief, the act that seemingly doomed the “Pentecost” plotters, the second its critical prescience of Mobutu’s *Authenticity* policy of the 1970’s, to be discussed in chapter two. Franco’s ability to render tribal rites musically, not by parodying the rhythms and vocals of tribal music but by revitalizing them via the A section and its reprise, demonstrated an artist who looked backward and forward simultaneously. After all, the best music in “Luvumbu Ndoki” is the A sections, where Franco’s guitar riff and Vercky’s saxophone, along with the catchiest of chants, present a pop music on the cusp of cultural significance. The B and C sections remonstrate that political significance was attained in the past through the individual complaint, voiced in the presence of the community, the “village assembly,” which, depending on rhetorical effectiveness, might unite the audience against a malfeasance.

What sounds like a smash-up is actually a piece of music to stack against anything the Beatles did with *Revolver*, also recorded in 1966, which in my estimation is as experimental as great pop music gets. “Luvumbu Ndoki” is radical pop because few songs anywhere have ever attempted such a blunt fusion of folklore and modernity, much less made it sound so seamlessly new. It is also radical rumba. Ken Braun states that “when General Mobutu made a gruesome public display of

executing his opponents, Franco reacted with horror and outrage in “Luvumbu Ndoki” (*FP II* 9). “Horror” and “outrage” are simply not components in any other Congolese rumba I’ve encountered, at least not on the musical surface, which tends to undulate and ripple against all disruptions. In “Luvumbu Ndoki,” this swelling palette is nowhere to be heard. The normally pretty intermingling of vocals that characterizes so many rumbas is replaced by aggressive call and response in discordant cadences. The easy flow of the rumba rhythm is discarded in favor of choppy riffs, blunt transitions, and folkloric beats that presumably predate the colonial period proper. “Luvumbu Ndoki” is finally radical rhetoric because it seeks drastic reforms, specifically the detection and removal of a corrupt chief. Not only does the song dig deep into Kikongo folklore for a suitable paradigm for Mobutu, bypassing the more current, equally relevant model of Leopold II (Belgian king responsible for the colonization of Congo), it also hauls authentic, democratic African tradition into a modern pop framework that revitalizes the tradition, rather than painting it on. This *fusion* was not the sort of authenticity that Mobutu aimed for with his *Authenticity* push in the 1970’s, but rather one which sought to transform perceptions of current social reality through the application of deeply traditional tribal custom. “Luvumbu Ndoki” predates *Authenticity* proper by at least four years and stands in stark contrast to the renaming and writing-over that came to define Mobutu’s cultural movement.

Written in the Kikongo language of Franco’s mother’s tribe, the Bakongo, “Luvumba Ndoki”’s lack of translation does not impede understanding of this song, just as language does not impede the understanding of the “Pentecost Hanging.” “Luvumbu Ndoki” is rhetoric of disclosure, the communal unveiling of a sorcerer, and

this gist is readily obtainable from the tone of the music and vocals. The first time I heard it, my immediate reaction was that it was a condemnation. It is much more. It suggests a tribal covenant betrayed by a powerful chief, it accuses the betrayer, and in judging him, it restores the promise of the future by returning the tribe to homeostasis. In this song, Franco seems to identify and convoke the checks and balances inherent in a tribal society, and then challenges these organic democratic tools with the tale of a treacherous chief who must be ousted by a community. While too metaphoric to be considered an outright call to arms against Mobutu, “Luvumbu Ndoki” suggests that what Mobutu represented to the *Zairois* with the “Pentecost Hanging” was atavism and that modes of tribal detection and punishment were wholly appropriate to his transgression.

What a prophetic artist who could brand such behavior as Mobutu’s public executions with the folk tale of a chief who has exceeded the dutiful bounds of the tribe. Franco’s innovative and progressive response to the “Pentecost Hanging” works so well as rhetoric because it looks backwards and forwards simultaneously, and asks of his tribe (the *Kinois*) that they endorse the same critical perspective. This perspective is startlingly similar to the Hopi Indians’ ideas about time as examined by Benjamin Lee Whorf, the father of the notion that language influences reality at least as much as the obverse, who believed that “the essence of Hopi life...is preparing in the present so that those things that are capable of becoming can in fact come to pass...the past is not a series of events, separated and completed, but is present in the present” (Thomson 76-77). In this fashion is the potential insurgence against a corrupt chief, as dramatized by “Luvumbu Ndoki,” based on consistent adaptation

rather than revolution. As Homi K. Bhabha states in the introduction to *The Location of Culture*:

Political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multi-culturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective. Social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project—at once a vision and a construction—that takes you ‘beyond’ yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present. (4)

Franco posed problems of political and cultural identity to an audience caught in this interstitial space, bound at one end by a fixed identification with tribal lore, bound at the other by an equally fixed identification with the former colonizers, whose methods of control through enforced internalization of wretched Western stereotypes of the African were appropriated by Mobutu. Franco realized, as did Mobutu, that merely traversing this space between fixed identities was counterproductive to the emergence of the *Kinois* as agents in the transformation of their dire reality. Mobutu desired that his *subjects* remain in this space since self-determination was impossible in this space. Franco, on the other hand, attempted to bridge this space by suggesting to his audience that the fixed identities at either end were not as diametrically opposed as they seemed to those captured in this space, that indeed these fixed identities might, and should, constitute a cultural dialectic wherein real emergence from, and transformation of, oppressive reality was not only possible but historically predicated.

In other words, the lessons of adaptation, dramatized in “Luvumbu Ndoki,” were not the tools of a fixed identity recapturing its lost preeminence, but rather the tools of a fluid identity bent on moving beyond the interstitial space in search of new thresholds of becoming. The history of the colonization of Congo/Zaire by Belgium, and its subsequent colonization by the relentlessly subjective Mobutu, offered a choice of either/or to the people in the interstitial space. Franco transmogrified this choice to both/and and through the framing device of “Luvumbu Ndoki,” the A section and its reprise, demonstrated that the emergence of postcolonial identity for the *Kinois* was necessarily predicated on the merger of the fixed identities defining their interstitial space. The “Pentecost Hanging” was designed to squash such a merger, and it succeeded. Had “Luvumbu Ndoki” not been banned for public consumption by the Mobutu regime, it might have had the impact that Franco no doubt hoped it would: not necessarily the overthrow of *ndoki* Mobutu but certainly the emergence of dissenting voices from Franco’s socially variegated audience.

Mobutu’s act of domestic terrorism deserved vilification. It says much about Franco’s praxis that “Luvumbu Ndoki” deliberately dramatizes a bygone system for the disclosure of chieftain treachery, reveres this system as a means for restoring tribal homeostasis, and offers this system to the future as a paradigm of political utility and identity. Simple vilification is beneath the level of “Luvumbu Ndoki.” Besides, Franco had to be conscious of his own freedom. Decrying an emergent despot like Mobutu portended indubitably severe consequences. Franco accomplished it with the distancing technique of folkloric reference and in the process not only called out

Mobutu metaphorically but provided a much needed traditional resource of democratic identity for the reeling Kinshasa populace.

“Luvumbu Ndoki” is musically evolved and open-ended, meaning that its potential applications were not bound to the history it recreates so authentically. It is a folk song, a traditional reenactment of a democratic process of tribal adaptation, yet it offers a popular refrain, with acerbic guitar, syncopated bass, passionate saxophone, and a collective vocal line that hooks through intense repetition. Franco was absorbing Western pop techniques in the service of rendering a democratic tribal rite relevant to the now. Mobutu was absorbing Western techniques of devoicing and marginalization as keys to power and capital consolidation. In terms of a reality-based evolution of modern identity for the *Zairois*, Mobutu’s “reality tunnel” (Robert Anton Wilson “2012” youtube.com) was constructed and constricted by a colonial myopia based on the inferiority of the African populace, whereas Franco’s was open to and inclusive of all those who would rise above the fear instilled by the “Pentecost Hanging” by not allowing such brute visual rhetoric to dampen the voices so crucial to their past, present, and future, such as the voice of the complainer in “Luvumbu Ndoki.”

“Luvumbu Ndoki” is a suite of four short parts (total time 4:40) that shouldn’t work due to disparity, but works because of disparity, the mirroring of an emerging culture of African identity that recognized the need to explore both the oppressively imposed cultures of the former colonizers and the buried, indigenous cultures of the naturally glorified pre-colonial past. “Luvumbu Ndoki” is nothing less than a brilliant synthesis of traditional content and modern context, not just via musical technology,

which was negligible, compared to what the Beatles had at their disposal, but through a burgeoning rhetorical technique of criticism veiled in metaphor, or *mbwakela* in Lingala parlance. According to Ken Braun in the liner to *Francophonic I*, “Using allegory, satire, metaphor or idiomatic phrases that had hidden meanings, with *mbwakela* one could say something plainly and something else sub-rosa” (19). In other words, *mbwakela* was a rhetorical technique that exploited the action/agenda ambiguity found in most speech. “Action” is defined in the field of rhetoric as the stated purpose of a speech instance, “agenda” as the real purpose. Rarely are they one and the same; sometimes they merge effectively or diverge dangerously. In “Luvumbu Ndoki” they merge. In the “Pentecost Hanging” they diverge.

Mbwakela anticipates Henry Louis Gates’ concept of *signifyin(g)* in African-American speech. As a rhetorical technique, it served Franco well in disclosing Mobutu’s relentless action/agenda disconnect. *Mbwakela* and *signifyin(g)* will be dealt with at length in chapter two.

The “Pentecost Hanging” portended a problem for Mobutu in that as a technique for quelling dissent, it had its limitations, chief of which was the inverse relationship between effectiveness and frequency of use. Prone to paranoia, and realizing that he could not exterminate all presumed opposition, Mobutu began to co-opt potential antagonists into his tribe, the ubiquitous MPR.

A third but lesser figure of the pre-Mobutu era was Cleophas Kamitatu Massamba, who had gone into exile after having been named as a minor conspirator in the so-called ‘Pentecostal Plot,’ a trap set by Mobutu to consolidate his power. Released from jail

after the first year of a five year prison sentence, Kamitatu lived and studied in France for ten years. He made a name for himself by publishing a scathing attack against Mobutu, *La grande mystification du Congo/Kinshasa: les crimes de Mobutu*.

Curiously, within a year of a second book in which he proclaimed that power was now within the Congolese people's reach, he returned home in 1977, where he eventually joined Mobutu's cabinet as agriculture minister. (Nzongola-Ntalaja 180)

Mobutu's sense of loyalty was predicated on constant fealty and not always even then. His autocratic rule was punctuated by seemingly whimsical responses to suspected treason, perhaps because when he needed to cleanse certain segments of his populace or certain individuals in that populace, his choice of means was contingent on whether the segment or individual had anything to offer in terms of Mobutu's perpetuation of power. His authoritarian personality simply precluded an accurate appraisal of human motivation. Unlike the false positive response to phenomena of the democratic Bakongo, Mobutu chose to view his subjects as potential traitors always already. What he often referred to as the "Zairean sickness" (*Voices* 23) was nothing more than the projection of his own deeply flawed personality onto his subjects. His efforts to co-opt Franco as a propaganda mouthpiece will be addressed in chapter two.

This proclivity to absorb rather than eradicate opposition, a more familiar practice in the regime after the "Pentecost Hanging," was not a praxis of loyalty or unity but a means by which to ensure it with economic and political favor, even in

those who once expressed disloyalty. By luring opposition into the “inner council,” Mobutu could be assured of its acquiescence to his world view. Rhetorically, Mobutu could then claim that the opposition had seen the light, that indeed he alone was the paterfamilias of Congo/Zaire, the chief who quelled, then appropriated all the various voices of his new nation into a cult of personality soon to be known as *Mobutuism*.

Mobutu explains it thus:

Mobutuism is the sum total of the nationalist ideas embodied in our institutions, the whole forming a coherent philosophy which *imposes* (emphasis mine) itself as a doctrine...legitimate nationalism *drummed* (emphasis mine) into every Zairese, starting with the civil servants. (*Dignity* 95-97)

“Luvumbu Ndoki” was the most astute response to Mobutu’s authoritarian takeover of Congo/Zaire because it posed to its modern audience a problem to be solved through the reaffirmation of democratic rites from the tribal past. Mobutu did not pose problems to his indigenous audience, as the above quote attests, but rather superimposed a subjectively constructed reality, in a classic example of Freire’s “banking concept” of education, onto a populace reeling from the objective reality of oppression. *Mobutuism*, with its attendant policy of *Authenticity*, constituted the relentless linguistic manipulation of objective reality in Congo/Zaire by a dehumanized and dehumanizing dictator. Freire states that “through manipulation, the dominant elites can lead the people into an unauthentic type of ‘organization’ and can thus avoid the threatening alternative: the true organization of the emerged and emerging people” (148). Mobutu was not concerned with the emergence of his people from oppressive

reality; he was not interested in their humanization, but rather their “massification” (Freire 148 fn 24). When he addressed the *Kinois*, Mobutu did not treat them as the subjects of their own transformation, but rather as objects to be transformed in his own image. Mick Jagger nails this alienating view of the masses in the Rolling Stones’ deeply ironic “Salt of the Earth”: “when I search a faceless crowd/a swirling mass of grays and black and whites/they don’t look real to me/in fact they look so strange” (Beggars Banquet, Abkco 1968). By contrast, Franco, with “Luvumbu Ndoki,” constructed an authentic crucible for the transformation of oppressive reality.

“Luvumbu Ndoki” metaphorically defined its historical present by conflating it with the pre-colonial tribal past. In doing so, it historicized the entire autocratic rule of Mobutu, who definitely possessed the *kundu*. With this timeless song, Franco demonstrated that he understood Mobutu, whose motivations were always couched in layers of paternalistic rhetoric, much more than the obverse. Franco had the *kindoki*, and “Luvumbu Ndoki”’s synthesis of disparate but inescapable cultural prerogatives in the context of Kinshasa in late 1966 is the song’s most innovative quality. Franco and OK Jazz were integrating an array of modern influences from Western pop, from Cuba, from West and South Africa, with firm artistic commitment to the validity of the traditions of pre-colonial Congo/Zaire, its rhythms, its transformative vocalizing, and its assurance of identification. Franco’s guitar assumed the role of whisk in this alchemy. It too was a tool of liberating praxis, which will be discussed in chapters two and three.

Hopefully, the purposes and agency behind the “Pentecost Hanging” and “Luvumbu Ndoki” are clear. Mobutu invented, arranged, and finished an act of pure political terrorism that was geared to cast a pall upon the *Kinois*. “The psychological

shock suffered by the huge crowd of witnesses was immense, and many of those who saw the executions believe the event transfixed the Zairean people into a state of submission” (Ewens *Congo* 102). Freire speaks of this submission as the inevitable internalization by the oppressed of the oppressor’s inhuman view of them. He states that “cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invader... [and] become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority” (153). By contrast, Franco’s purpose, with “Luvumbu Ndoki,” seemed to be the awakening of cultural consciousness in the *Kinois* and the emergence of their “critical intervention in reality” (Freire 81), so that “the oppressed become aware of the fact that as dual beings, ‘housing’ the oppressors within themselves, they cannot be truly human” (Freire 95). As Frantz Fanon states in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

The more the people understand, the more watchful they become, and the more they come to realize that finally everything depends on them and their salvation lies in their own cohesion, in the true understanding of their interests, and in knowing who their enemies are. (191)

Mobutu invented enemies by branding individuals who dared to criticize as traitors. Franco branded the real traitor, unveiled him using the folklore of his (Mobutu’s) own country, if not his own tribe. Singing in his mother’s tongue offered Franco no protection from Mobutu’s henchmen, however. The six months he spent across the river in Brazzaville, after “Luvumbu Ndoki” was banned, no doubt offered

time for reflection on the nature of his art and the precarious position he found himself in as the primary spokesperson for the *Kinois*. It would not be his last exile.

This historical moment, the “Pentecost Hanging,” and its attendant musical commentary, Franco’s “Luvumbu Ndoki,” offers to the student of postcolonial history a rare opportunity to examine the deontological and teleological ramifications of an act of domestic terror, which would soon enough take place across the continent. The means by which Mobutu sought to consolidate his new power were anomalously mirrored (not duplicated) by Franco’s brutal musical invective towards singer Kwamy Muni (“Chicotte” 1967), who had defected from OK Jazz taking prime musicians with him at the pivotal moment when Franco and OK Jazz were assuming control of the Kinshasa popular music scene (Ewens *Congo* 109-11). Yet the ends tell the real tale: Mobutu’s sudden, violent, visual rhetoric with the “Pentecost Hanging” effectively cast a veil of political silence over the vast new nation; Franco’s unwillingness to remain silent and courage to create an authentic, paradoxically synthetic, cultural statement in which a treacherous chief is called out and exorcised constitutes a radical act against political silence. “Luvumbu Ndoki” is indeed a revolutionary Congolese pop song. Unfortunately, the political revolution it so faithfully dramatizes failed to materialize in any immediate sense. For now and a long time to come, Mobutu remained the self-proclaimed political revolution.

As always with Franco’s rhetoric, the emphasis is on awareness, watchfulness, and adaptation. The suite-like structure flexes a European influence, the exclamatory guitar and sax of the first and last segments are “pop” in delivery and intent, and the middle two sections evoke and mimic deep folkloric traditions of sorcery detection and

purging and communal spirit. If that sounds like less than the sum of parts, I can only advise to revisit the artifact itself (youtube.com). For it represents a most brilliantly synthesized instance of folk becoming pop, of tradition becoming modernity, of democratic spirit commenting on despotic ego, both atavistic traits of Bakongo folklore revisited on a fractious moment in the evolution of Congolese identity.

“I couldn’t rely on the government: torn apart, victim of internal quarrels, ideological conflict, personal or tribal jealousy, rife with intrigues set up from outside, it was totally powerless” (Mobutu *Dignity* 46-7). Thus begins the clampdown of the Mobutu regime. What exactly did he want for Congo/Zaire? “We have seen, from 1960-1965, what it cost us to have a Western system imposed on a radically different culture” (*Dignity* 94). So, he resorted to tribalism. He was the chief and the *Zairois* were his tribe. His “inner council” was his yea-Sayers, his “council of elders” the U.S. and Belgium, and other entities interested in the political and economic clout Congo/Zaire offered, and his “village assembly” was ostensibly the *Kinois*, whose voices were elided in favor of *Papa’s* self-interest outside the geographic boundaries of the country. By contrast, Franco was only interested in the marginalized *Kinois* as his primary audience. They were the benighted. As an artist, he perceived that his role was to assist their emergence from the darkness of the interstice by doing his best to murder the stereotypes that colonization had fed and that Mobutu was feeding to them. These pejorative stereotypes constituted “secret murder,” as anthropologist John Weeks opines:

Open fights and murder were not at all infrequent, but I suppose that there must have been cases of secret murder, or they would

not have [had] a ceremony for detecting the murderer...who [would] go to the trouble of bewitching one of his own family unless he [was] to benefit by the death of the bewitched person? (310-11)

The “Pentecost Hanging” was rhetoric of psychological repression. Mobutu’s aim was far more than simply the elimination of political opponents. The set-up, the government announcement of a probable hanging in a public square, and Mobutu’s telling response to international calls for leniency all indicated a desire to crush not only dissidence but collective spirit in general. Franco apprehended this spirit as the authentic praxis of Congolese/Zairian identity, and sought, with “Luvumbu Ndoki,” to awaken it to its potential for transforming reality. As Freire states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “to achieve this goal, the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality” (52). But bewitched by the chief, whose demand for obeisance subsumed the struggle for democratic voice, the *Kinois* remained complacent in the face of their objective oppression, subjectively constructed and imposed by *Papa*. They remained restlessly traversing the interstitial space defined by Bhabha as the post-modern historical situation. This complacency was wholly beneficial to Mobutu who used it to compress his “village assembly” into a faceless entity of conformity, thus freeing him to consort with the West. This inability on the part of the *Kinois* to act on traditional modes of tribal detection of corruption, as laid out in “Luvumbu Ndoki,” was due to the insecurity that naturally accompanied a deeply fractured identity, and to an oppressive reality that served “to anesthetize the people so they will not think” (Freire 149). At this historical moment, Mobutu Sese

Seko remained the author of identity for the *Kinois* because the “Pentecost Hanging” effectively forced the dehumanizing internalization of his emergent neocolonialism.

CHAPTER TWO: FRANCOIS L'OKANGA LANDJU PENE LUAMBO MAKIADI
VS. MOBUTU SESE SEKO KUKU NGBENDU WA ZA BANGA: THE
REAL RUMBLE

You incorrigible Europeans. When I used to tell my children that my first name was Joseph-Desire, it meant strictly nothing to them. On the other hand, telling them that their father is called Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, *fixes* (emphasis mine) them firmly in a line of succession and *marks* (emphasis mine) their membership in a warrior Ngbandi tribe. (Mobutu *Dignity* 110)

I will not adapt the music, or the language, for new audiences in the West...it is what we play, what we sing and dance to—what we understand. It is our music and people must accept it for what it is. (Franco as qtd. in Ewens *Congo* 17)

In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter's 'submerged' state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to 'fill' that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom. This practice is incompatible with a truly liberating course of action, which, by

presenting the oppressors' slogans as a problem, helps the oppressed to 'eject' those slogans from within themselves. (Freire 95)

The Pentecost Hanging established Mobutu's authoritarian credentials beyond doubt. Through this ugly spectacle, Mobutu accomplished two things simultaneously. First, he succeeded in squelching dissent among the politicians and *evolues* who filled his "inner council." Those executed had been high ranking government officials, not rebel leaders from the bush. The politicians who witnessed the executions alongside Franco and the *Kinois* could not have failed to apprehend the agenda behind such a display of brute power: ideological hegemony. Second, Mobutu succeeded in casting a veil of silence over his "subjects," his "village assembly," who internalized the visual rhetoric of the public executions as a sign of the omnipotence of their new leader, who, as Franco prophesied in "Luvumbu Ndoki," was widely viewed as a sorcerer (Stewart *Breakout* 95). Some context concerning *evolues* is in order, not least because they were Mobutu's preferred audience much more than Franco's, though there was certainly overlap. In his penetrating study of Lumumba, Leo Zeilig explains that "the term *evolue* was used to designate an urbanized and educated layer of Africans...evolues were identified by the white authorities as being 'more like us' and superior to the mass of colonized society" (34). Many *evolues* contributed mightily to Africa's struggle against hundreds of years of pejorative Western constructions of the African (Leopold Senghor, for example).

Many, however, used their evolved status to enrich themselves at the expense of national political and economic progress. Frantz Fanon, in *Wretched of the Earth*, writes of the degeneration of this newly emergent “national bourgeoisie,” which “follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention” (153). Ultimately, it was this subsection of the Zairian populace that Mobutu sought to control and co-opt through political favoritism, cronyism, and sheer bribery (Depelchin 182-87).

It was that class that Franco spent most of his glorified career criticizing. Unlike Mobutu, he recognized foremost that it was not his class. Like Mobutu, he also recognized that the *Kinois* were largely dependent on the *evolues* for any improvement to their lot. So, he felt compelled to address them in song as both the potential instigators of and obstacles to a modern Congolese identity. This ambivalent approach prompted most *evolues* to prefer the romantic rumba of Tabu Ley Rochereau, another giant of Congolese music (Stewart *Rumba* 180-81). Yet, if Franco criticized them, he also matriculated economically to them. The irony is reversed concerning Mobutu, who was not technically an *evolue* either, having come from the Ngbandi tribe, “regarded as ‘sous-evolue’—under-evolved” (Wrong 71). However, the *evolues* became the primary parrots for and benefactors of Mobutu’s burgeoning *Authenticity*, a cultural and economic policy with shallow connections to Negritude and Pan-Africanism. Unfortunately, so did Franco.

With the Pentecost Hanging, Mobutu presented himself to his “inner council” and “village assembly” as a Leviathan, a necessary antidote to the duplicitous nature of his own people. In turn, they internalized Mobutu’s idea of them so that inevitably a panopticon was established, with Mobutu as watcher over a submissive population supposedly incapable of policing itself. Paulo Freire captures the irony: “if the people cannot be trusted, there is no reason for [their] liberation” (129). In addition to the “trauma,” “weariness,” “demoralization,” “widespread apathy,” and “malaise” attributed to the *Zairois* by Nzongola-Ntalaja (*Voices* 133), there was a paradoxical upswing in what had been a spiraling economy. Nzongola-Ntalaja sources this economic improvement to the Vietnam War, which increased demand in the West for copper and rubber, two of Congo/Zaire’s richest natural resources (*The Congo* 148). Mobutu took credit naturally. In 1966 he renamed Leopoldville as Kinshasa, and sought to manipulate history with Lumumba’s coronation. He then nationalized the biggest mine in Zaire (Union Miniere) and skillfully balanced the predictable criticism from the West (Belgium especially) with the approbation of other independent African countries (Depelchin 175-180). By the early 1970s, with *Authenticity*, Mobutu was presenting himself to the world as a philosopher of Africanness to be held in the same regard as Senghor of Senegal and Nkrumah of Ghana, though he appears to have been most influenced by Chairman Mao (Dunn 149), who, like Mobutu, plastered his picture onto every conceivable cultural artifact.

Authenticity followed the Pentecost Hanging, the massacre of university students in Lubumbashi, and the assassination of rebel leader and staunch

Lumumbist Pierre Mulele, a series of violent clampdowns designed to marginalize the elements of the Zairian population most likely to organize against Mobutu. Elliot and Dymally claim that “following independence, opposition to Mobutu’s rule came from the tribal groups that had played a dominant role in previous governments, from disgruntled farmers who profited little from the short-term economic revival, and from university students who opposed his one man rule and attempts to impose Mobutuism on the country” (*Voices* 20). Curiously, once Mobutu had constructed and actualized his policy of *Authenticity*, which was welcomed wholeheartedly by a populace cued to believe that he alone had stabilized the post-civil war economy, the killings did not cease, but were conjoined with and covered up by an insidious method of co-optation that marked Mobutu’s reign until he was forced by international pressure to abandon his single party system in 1991 (Nzongola-Ntalaja *The Congo* 141-143). He would brook little dissent, but once liquidated, the authors of such dissent would be co-opted, dead or alive, as symbols of the postcolonial history of Zaire, as ideological steps to the plateau of Mobutu. By contrast, Franco, who “for all the competition...could outplay and outsell anybody” (Ewens *Congo* 133), watched members of OK Jazz, singers and instrumentalists, come and go. As the preeminent bandleader in Kinshasa, a city with at least sixty professional rumba bands (Tenaille 83), Franco took musician defections in stride. Those that returned to the fold were welcomed if their voices were committed and contributory. By contrast when Mobutu reabsorbed naysayers into his “inner council,” they were expected to parrot not contribute. Consider the following

quotes, the first from Mobutu, the second from Nguz a Karl-i-Bond, a one-time vociferous critic of Mobutu's regime (like Kamitatu, from chapter one, he was sentenced to death) who was reabsorbed into the "inner council": "We have achieved in thirty years what it took European nations three centuries to accomplish" (Mobutu *Dignity* 96); "We have only had twenty-seven years to do what it has taken you 200 years to accomplish" (*Voices* 64). Both quotes are responses to interview questions about "democracy" under the single party rule of the MPR. Each man goes on to state that the MPR was an absolute necessity in uniting the disparate tribes and clans of such a large country. How ironic that *Authenticity* was designed to revive pre-colonial roots, the customs and traditions of tribal life, when the MPR was supposedly modernizing the nation.

Authenticity was a tripartite construction, one part cultural (authenticity), one part economic (Zairianization), one part kleptocratic (Radicalization). Each part appeared to be targeted at different levels of Mobutu's hierarchy of audiences. The cultural policy of renaming everything that had been named by the departing colonizers was his gift to his "village assembly." The economic policy of transferring ownership of Zairian businesses from foreigners to members of Mobutu's "inner council" was designed to legitimize him to the burgeoning pan-African movement, which sought to expunge the vestiges of colonialism by redistributing its spoils. The kleptocratic policy of nationalizing all major industries and other profit-making businesses was designed to demonstrate to the West Mobutu's supreme control over the infrastructure of his new country, a purpose undergirded by an agenda that had Mobutu raiding the

coffers of these nationalized businesses for his and his cadre's enrichment. All three phases of this "revolutionary" policy were founded on a "banking concept" (Freire 72) of national identity, meaning that Mobutu not only constructed an identity for his subjects but also deposited this identity in the minds of his subjects without their critical input. The quote from Mobutu at the chapter heading is instructive. The fixedness and markedness italicized in the quote testify to the complete absence of self-actualization on the part of the *Zairois* in the policy of *Authenticity*. As Freire states, "in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human" (72). Mobutu's relentless top-down method of national identity building was specifically designed to dehumanize his subjects while humanizing himself not only in the eyes of the African continent, but in the minds of the neocolonial West, his true audience. Franco, as in his quote at the chapter heading, eschewed the potential Western audience for his music in favor of the audience at home, the embattled *Kinois*, who alone could construct the meaning that allowed his music to flourish. The "language" he alludes to is Lingala, a primary source of the intense identification Franco had with his audience.

I play typically African rhythms. Consequently, I prefer to play in front of the African public who understand and appreciate what I do. I don't think Europeans understand my music enough to realize its true value...I have no desire to play for an audience of one

thousand people of whom there would be 700 Europeans and only 300 Africans. (Franco as qtd in Ewens *Congo* 129)

It was precisely this dedication to a grassroots audience that Mobutu recognized in Franco and sought to turn to his advantage. One meaning of *Papa's* ubiquitous "Happy are those who sing and dance," was his personal indebtedness to those who kept the *Zairois* dancing and singing. Franco had the best band, wrote songs that challenged his audience to think for themselves, and cultivated an ambiguous relationship with the *evolues* and politicians clamoring for Mobutu's ear. He was already known as the "Congo Colossus" and "Sorcerer of the Guitar." He was already a wealthy man, but Mobutu would make him rich. It was widely believed that "he was either in cahoots with President Mobutu or plotting against him" (Braun *FPI* 21), which only demonstrates how conflicted Franco's relationship with Mobutu was. Ultimately, Franco bent to Mobutu's patronage as much as he had to in order to protect the interests of OK Jazz and the buried voices of the *Kinois*.

In 1972, Mobutu ramped up his efforts at "mental decolonization" (Young and Turner 68) by requiring that all subjects of Zaire renounce Christian names and adopt authentic African names from the pre-colonial, tribal past. The full authentic names taken by Franco and Mobutu provide the title for this chapter. The policy extended to city names, street names, and business names and caused a bureaucratic nightmare, not to mention intensely negative reaction from the predominant Catholic Church, which Catholic Mobutu quickly denounced as "counter-revolutionary" (68). In addition, Western dress styles were banned in

favor of the *abacost* (“off with the suit”): collarless, colorful, short-sleeved shirts for the men, bright sarapes and head scarves for the women (Stewart *Rumba* 185). Of course, the country itself did not escape renaming: the Congo became Zaire, as did the river, and the currency, a word based on the Portuguese transliteration of *nzadi*, a native term for river (*Rumba* 170-71). This tiny detail itself undermined Mobutu’s back-to-tradition philosophy in that he settled on a name for his country that did not extrapolate directly from tribal traditions but rather from the linguistic lens of the first Western explorers to reach the Congo. In any event, the renaming mandate amounted to a palimpsest with no clear purpose for the *Zairois*, who embraced it nonetheless.

By overwriting the historical actuality of colonization with an idealized recourse to the traditional values that themselves had been overwritten by the colonial process, Mobutu sought to erase the pernicious influence of the West on his subjects while simultaneously embracing that influence at the level of his “inner council.” This enabled him to assume the mantle of the primary author of modernization in Zaire, modernization that ultimately favored him and his cadre, in the sense that it was denied to his subjects, whose socio-economic conditions remained static.

In order to perfect it [Authenticity], we undertook an in-depth analysis of the particularities of the Zairese spirit. Thenceforth we rejected all foreign systems in which we could not recognize ourselves and which had proved harmful to us in the past. We had

to go back to our own traditions in order to introduce a real democracy. (Mobutu *Dignity* 93)

Despite the “we,” the *Zairois* had no actual critical contribution to Mobutu’s policy, and while Mobutu may have understood the “particularities of the Zairese spirit,” his *Authenticity* was designed to do nothing more than free him from the responsibility of making his people’s lives better than they were under colonialism: “Roll up *your* sleeves” indeed.

Once established by Mobutu, this culture of silence became a vacuum similar to the vacuum created by the departing Belgian colonizers in 1960. However, the current vacuum was designed to accommodate only one voice, that of Mobutu and the ruling elite of his MPR, or Popular Movement of the Revolution, the single state party in which membership was coerced. Freire describes this vacuum as the “absolutizing of ignorance.”

This myth [of oppressor ideology] implies the existence of someone who decrees the ignorance of someone else. The one who is doing the decreeing defines himself and the class to which he belongs as those who know or were born to know; he thereby defines others as alien entities. The words of his own class come to be the ‘true’ words, which he imposes on the others: the oppressed, whose words have been stolen from them. Those who steal the words of others develop a deep doubt in the abilities of the others and consider them incompetent. (133-134)

By convincing this specific class (*evolues*) of his efforts on behalf of his own people, Mobutu was ensuring the survival of the vertical relationship he preferred to have with his subjects, a relationship based on silencing and othering on one hand and persuasive paternalism on the other. Franco, as the most popular musician in Kinshasa, was not only part of this othered population but also its primary spokesperson. In fact, the trials and tribulations of the *Kinois* were his great subject, and he expected this audience to be critically involved in how his music signified. The quote at the chapter heading testifies to Franco's identification with and faith in the ability of his audience to make meaning. The *Kinois* were an absolutely necessary component in any significance Franco's music might have, which explains why he did not care to court the audiences of Europe and beyond. However, audience identification did not grant Franco immunity from Mobutu's condescending paternalism. In fact, it may have ensured Franco's ongoing ambivalence towards *Papa*, rather than his righteous indignation.

The thrust of *Authenticity* was to legitimize Mobutu's regime along the lines of the cultural policies of Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Chairman Mao of China. Each of these leaders constructed national policies based on the philosophical nature of their personalities. Senghor was a primary author of Negritude, which sought to establish the primacy of the African intellect in contradiction to the condescending constructions of the African by the West. Nkrumah espoused pan-Africanism, which envisioned a continental movement to expunge the remnants of colonialism, especially in its postcolonial

guise, neocolonialism. Mao, of course, pursued a form of communism in which his personality (face, clothes, speech, ideology, and authority) was the most conspicuous symbol of an imposed national movement. Despite Mobutu's claim that "the negritude [Senghor] has preached and the authenticity that I defend are one and the same" (*Dignity* 34), he actually preferred to mimic Mao, whose cult of personality appealed to his egocentrism and his "banking concept." In any event *Authenticity* was a radically conservative series of policies designed to construct Mobutu as paterfamilias of Zaire in the eyes of both Africa and the West, by projecting onto his subjects his own image. This defines the cult of personality known as *Mobutuism*. It began with the nation-wide campaign of renaming.

Franco, conversely, adopted an historical perspective that allowed that not all values associated with colonialism were pernicious, that some of these values might be synthesized with traditional African values in order to determine a way forward. The rapid evolution of his music demonstrated that Franco was sensitive to all of the influences operating in the identity crucible of Kinshasa, be they Western, Latin, pan-African, or indigenous. For Franco, authenticity was a synthetic process that instead of denying or overwriting the historical and cultural influences of colonization, sought to inculcate them to a modern expression of Zairian identity through music. Mobutu, despite his constant pronouncements to the West that he alone dragged Zaire from the conflicts of tribalism, seemed to prefer that his subjects remain embroiled in the space between tradition and modernization. Thusly could he co-opt them collectively, facelessly, voicelessly

into his cult of personality, which as much as Mao's resembled the event horizon of a massive black hole. Franco's ability to operate on such a threshold, challenging the critical intelligence of his expanding audience while appeasing, or dodging, a dictator who could silence him at any time, defined a democratic personality at the forefront of an adaptive social movement that sought progressive reform: not renaming or revivalism, but remaking from the ground up and the top down simultaneously. The idea that the *Zairois* must throw off the yokes of colonialism in order to modernize was Mobutu's, and it suggested a static agenda for his subjects. Franco always adopted a broader, more fluid view that colonialism defined his audience at least as much as tradition.

It is sensible to think about Franco, his music, and its audience as a social movement because frankly there was so little identification between Mobutu and the *Kinois*. Mobutu's relentless paternalism ("Papa"), which justified the sublimation of all voices to his own, created an unbridgeable distance that precluded the identification that defined Franco's relationship with the same audience. While Mobutu spoke Lingala when addressing his subjects, his primary language was French. Lingala was simply a necessary tool in order to communicate his top-down directives to his populace. For Franco, Lingala, "the language of his people, and in particular the vernacular street language of the argot-loving *Kinois*" (Ewens *Congo* 223), was the essential element of meaning-making with his audience. It allowed his democratic "we" to speak critically about the vicissitudes of collective existence in Kinshasa. Franco used Lingala to address "how to deal with, and understand, civilized concepts like money,

property, individualism, ambition and citizenship, which confused many who came, and still come, into the city fresh from a village existence where every aspect of life was a communal experience” (*Congo* 107). This was not the “banking concept” of education that Mobutu preferred but rather “problem-posing” education (Freire 79) that by “responding to the essence of consciousness—intentionality—rejects communiqués and embodies communication” (79). The irony behind this dichotomy of methods is that the supposed revolutionary Mobutu, for all his speech about lifting Zaire out of tribal chaos, actually preferred that his subjects revive the tribal past instead of facing the modern future. Yet Mobutu’s idea of the nature of tribal society, and the role of chief, was not democratic, but (re)constructed through the lens of Western, survival-of-the-fittest capitalism. After all, he read Machiavelli each night before bed (Close 193).

Mobutu’s reversive worldview allowed him to retain control over all political and cultural exchange, to dole out the means of modernization as he saw fit. Franco, by contrast, was innovative and progressive in that he desired for his audience a direct hand not only in determining their norms and values but also in responding critically to an establishment that refused to acknowledge that modernization meant deep change and adaptation, not hegemony. Franco’s performances with OK Jazz (many available on youtube.com) were much closer to Césaire’s claims for traditional African societies. Franco took the hope, health, and happiness of his audience very seriously. As Ewens states, “although Mobutu eventually claimed the title of ‘Guide’ for himself, it is a name that would

have better suited Franco, and would have sat well alongside the many credits and honorary titles he acquired” (*Congo* 107).

Himself a beneficiary of Mobutu’s co-optation, Franco was called upon to extol the virtues of *Authenticity* and was rewarded handsomely by the regime. Yet unlike many politicians who put away their recalcitrance to Mobutu when he began handing out favoritism, Franco was never comfortable with the quid pro quo because it directly challenged his firm allegiance with the faceless, voiceless *Kinois*. Consequently, his songs championing *Authenticity* were not so easy to parse. Some were folkloric explorations, some straightforward avowals of allegiance to Mobutu. Yet the best of his songs from the *Authenticity* period of the early 1970s were neither folkloric nor praise-oriented, but rather delivered with a modern big band sound (OK Jazz was forty members strong in the mid 1970s) and a keen lyrical method known as *mbwakela* which worked the grey area between action and agenda as deftly as Mobutu did in his more frequent addresses to the West. *Mbwakela*, its effectiveness in communicating/confusing action and agenda simultaneously, even if one negated the other, was a function of Franco’s preferred language Lingala, an oral tongue that evolved among the various ethnicities trading along the expansive Congo River since the gestation of the slave trade (Akowuah 3). Lingala has only several hundred defined words, according to the *Hippocrene Dictionary*, and many words appear to carry numerous connotations, often antithetical. For instance, “nyama” means “meat” or “animal” according to *Hippocrene*, but according to Graeme Ewens in *Congo Colossus*, “nyama” refers to a woman’s sexual organs (224). “Boma l’heure”, the

title of an excellent folklore piece by Franco, means “killing the hour” (boma: to kill; l’heure: French for “time”), but according to Ewens the phrase also signifies “prostitute” (224). As it evolved, Lingala incorporated Spanish, French, and occasional English verbiage reflecting the linguistic and cultural influences at work in Congo/Zaire (Akowuah 32). This oral language was especially significant to Franco’s democratic praxis in that, because fixed meaning was utterly dependent on contextual usage, it prioritized audience participation in meaning-making. *Mbwakela* is, simply put, the ironic manipulation of the already lubricious semantics of Lingala in order to communicate at numerous levels simultaneously. “The Kinois are particularly keen on twisting the meanings of words and inventing or adapting others from different languages...Mbwakela allows that things are often not what they seem at first sight” (Ewens *Congo* 223). Ambiguity and the deferral of fixed meaning were functions of this rhetorical technique. Ken Braun, in the liner to *Francophonic I*, refers to *mbwakela* as “the art of surreptitious criticism” (17). As such it resembles Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s concept of *signifyin(g)* which also prioritizes audience response in determining the action/agenda hierarchy of meaning. As Gates states in *The Signifying Monkey*, “to revise the received sign literally accounted for in the relation represented by signified/signifier at its most apparently denotative level is to critique the nature of meaning itself, to challenge through a literal critique of the sign the meaning of meaning” (47).

Franco was an acknowledged master of *mbwakela*. Throughout his career his lyrics garnered intense scrutiny at all levels of Kinshasa society,

Mobutu's included (Ewens *Africa* 134). *Mbwakela* allowed Franco to speak the contents of his highly critical mind through a critique of the signified/signifier relationship already unstable in the context of Lingala. For example, in 1971 Franco recorded a superb folkloric song called "Likambo ya Nganga" (problem of the priest, trans. mine). Its accordion and acoustic guitar based arrangement is dominated by the call and response between Franco's lead vocal and a female-dominated chorus. Curiously, Franco did not usually favor female vocalists yet employed them on many of his more folkloric excursions, as if the female voice were authentic to such an approach. The song's subject matter is thoroughly modern: the moral ambiguity of post-independence Zairian women whose "idle hearsay and malicious gossip" were threatening Franco's culturally ingrained patriarchy (Braun *FPI* 28). Franco's relationship with the women of Kinshasa society was complex. He has often been accused of outright misogyny in his lyrics, yet women "were themselves the most critical and loyal members of his audience" (Ewens *Congo* 190). As musical chronicler of Kinshasa society, Franco clearly recognized a new class of upwardly mobile women, a class comprised of "middle-class women [who] claimed their own emancipation and formed a loose alliance with the 'free women,' which blurred the edges of their own moral certainties" (160). This class, which like the *evolues*, grew out of the vacuum created by decolonization, posed a problem for the traditional patriarchy of the Congo, for Mobutu's neocolonial paternalism, and no doubt for the priest in Franco's song. Franco himself was evolving into a moralist who used this new class of women as a symbol with which to criticize the emergent kleptocratic

bourgeoisie under Mobutu. This choice of critical symbol is not difficult to unravel. Franco clearly understood that in a patriarchal society, a most effective mode of criticism came by comparing the male-dominated *evolue* class to a simultaneously generated female class of “free women” who wanted to wear pants, be sexually active, and define themselves politically and economically. Herein could he best get the goat of the policy makers who were using Kinshasa as their ideological crucible. In other words, he played on the ingrained misogyny of a male-dominated society in order to criticize its motives. In the *mbwakela* sense, the priest in the song might indeed be a priest, or he might be a symbol for Mobutu and his regime, committed to reverse (return to the past) stagnation in the face of the inevitable social changes connected to modernization. The priest might even be a stand-in for Franco, whose difficult relationship with women, and “woman” as a symbol of deep change in traditional mores, will be discussed in chapter three.

“Boma L’heure,” mentioned above, is a stunning meditation from 1970 with a laid back Franco vocal, acoustic guitar, solitary saxophone, a rhythm of resonant bass and indigenous percussion, and a glorious female-dominated chorus that echoes and answers Franco fervently. There is no *sebene*² to jump start the contemplative mood. As stated above the song title refers to a prostitute, but judging from the chorus, there are several prostitutes and Franco seems neither pimp nor john, but sympathetic chronicler of their numbing

² Crucial to soukous, the *sebene* occurs after the lyrics of a song have been repeated enough to signify. Three guitars expand and embellish the melodic content of the song through an upward spiral of intertwined riffs over an accelerated rhythm. Complementary in arrangement, the guitars signal the frenetic dance of the audience. The effect on the listener often borders on the sublime.

profession, which indubitably began with colonization. Is Franco judging these women, or celebrating their self-determination? Is he moralizing about their profession, or accepting it as a symptom of the modernization of Kinshasa? Only a *Kinois* could say definitively. “Boma L’ heure” is a modern response to a modern (for Zaire) malaise delivered in authentic folkloric style. As such it reminded its primary audience of the continued relevance of pre-colonial modes of expression, without requiring a return to them. Because tradition still spoke to Franco, he assumed rightly that it still spoke to his ever-expanding audience, the *Kinois* and beyond. As quoted in Gary Stewart’s *Breakout*, Franco states,

In my music I put all my soul, all my spirit, and my soul is a traditional one, because I was born in a family that respected tradition. My mother was always singing traditional songs. The traditional music lacks some sounds, while the modern music has the guitars and saxophones and many other things. But the spirit of the music is the same. (30)

This statement connecting tradition with modernity defines an authentic synthesis that was Franco’s alone. While Mobutu mandated *recourse a l’authenticite* for his subjects, Franco preferred that authenticity be born of a Zairian cultural continuum wherein the colonial identification that Mobutu sought to erase in his subjects actually animated traditional values and vice-versa.

Mbwakela put the onus on the audience to read over, underneath, and around the signifiers employed in Franco’s lyrics to arrive at unfixed but applicable to the now meaning. Mobutu, with his ubiquitous slogan “roll up your

sleeves,” also placed the onus on his bottom-dwelling audience but, unlike Franco, offered nothing substantive for them to operate on, nothing to generate meaning from. They remained at the same subsistence level that colonization had indentured. Mobutu enjoyed reminding his audiences that “we (emphasis mine) gave back to the people of Zaire their ancestral pride” (*Dignity* 108) and that, “authenticity is not a fixation on the past, but a program that allows innovation and creation, using our own cultural reserves” (111), but he offered few clues as to how to turn ancestral pride and cultural reserves into food, shelter, and clothing.

Franco’s most famous song from the period of *Authenticity* was surely “AZDA,” an excellent example of the mature big band sound of OK Jazz. This song was a runaway pan-African smash hit, the biggest of Franco’s career to that point, but, according to Ewens, it did not garner the same popularity in Kinshasa (*Congo* 148). Potential reasons for this difference in popularity seem connected to the use of Lingala for the lyrics and to the liminality of Franco’s primary audience, the *Kinois*, a condition that became most obvious under the dictates of *Authenticity*. Liminality is an anthropological term that signifies “a transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person’s life, specifically the space occupied during a ritual or rite of passage, characterized by a sense of solidarity between participants” (OED “Liminality”). *Authenticity*, regardless of what it accomplished for the *Kinois*, was a rallying concept for a populace trapped between the fixed identifications of the tribe and the colony, struggling to discover *who we are*. Despite its shallow parody of the significance

of pre-colonial names and dress, *Authenticity* constituted the first and only time that Mobutu offered something to his people that they might operate on, might bring creativity to. They embraced it fervently as a demonstration of Zairian solidarity and identity, which Mobutu counted on. That *Authenticity* did not actually contribute to a larger, more significant narrative of becoming for Mobutu's subjects, a narrative approximating to a cultural continuum that denied neither tribalism nor colonization nor what lay after, was of little consequence in the moment, except to an artist like Franco, who arguably inferred that *Authenticity* was simply another projection of Mobutu's subjective reality, another bank deposit into the minds of the *Zairois*. Consider the following statement from Bhabha:

Projection may compel the native to address the master, but it can never produce those effects of 'love' or 'truth' that would centre the confessional demand. If, through projection, the native is partially aligned or reformed in discourse, the fixed hate which refuses to circulate or reconjugate, produces the repeated fantasy of the native as in-between legality and illegality, endangering the boundaries of truth itself. (142)

Mobutu, through the constant projection of *his* subjective reality onto his subjects, specifically with his *Authenticity* policy, sought their alignment and reformation via his discourse, but his "fixed hate" consigned them to a truthless, loveless space anyway. In this sense, *Authenticity* was a sham designed to perpetuate the liminal space of the *Zairois*, to exclude them from whatever modernization

Mobutu had in mind for Zaire, meaning for his “inner council.” The *Zairois* were rhetorically tricked by *Papa* into believing *Authenticity* was their own projection of newfound identity onto postcolonial history, thus enacting the binding ritual where “both colonizer and colonized are in a process of miscognition where each point of identification is always a partial and double repetition of the *otherness* of the self—democrat and despot, individual and servant, native and child” (Bhabha 138-39). Franco was both colonizer (in the sense that he created a musical empire) and colonized (by Mobutu) and so apprehended the “miscognition” from both points of identification. As unshakeable as his identification with the *Kinois* was, Franco identified deeply with Mobutu, right alongside them.

If *Authenticity* provided a sense of solidarity among the populace, all the better for Mobutu’s agenda, which had nothing to do with a viable, historical narrative for the *Zairois*, and everything to do with “endangering the boundaries of truth itself.” Nevertheless the people of the newly named Zaire considered *Authenticity* a gift from Mobutu. They were unable, from their undefined and anonymous space, to grasp that its essential parody of traditional values rested on a pejorative construction of them as *sous-evolue*, under-evolved, precisely the sort of construction that Franco worked so hard in his music to dispel. “AZDA” was no different in this respect, except that it applied *mbwakela* to a policy that was heartily embraced by his audience.

Outside of Zaire, “AZDA” was widely considered to be a love song, which attests not only to the sumptuous, repetitive rumba but also to the cantorial nature of Lingala. As Ewens states in *Congo Colossus*, “Lingala is a tonal,

primal-sounding language, which is melodious and easy to sing along with without knowing the sense; the language sings itself” (223). The music moves effortlessly with Franco’s guitar, sounding like velvet covered razor blades, up front of an arrangement that leaves plenty of space around the layered vocals. The *sebene* arrives quickly and joins in lockstep with a call and communal response that repeats to the end. Yet as spellbinding as “AZDA” is musically, the lyrics are the most simplistic of Franco’s career, which perhaps irritated a local audience used to heavy wordplay. Translated, they read: “We can say, we can sing, we can buy VW from AZDA, AZDA, the new name—given by the Zairois.” In Lingala, they read: “Tokoki koloba, tokoki koyemba, tokoki kosemba, Vayway na Azda, Azda kombo ya sika—ba Zairois bapesi” (Sinnock 5).

A song about the renaming of the German “Difco” Volkswagen dealership in Kinshasa might have been easy to dismiss by the *Kinois* as shallow, but, given Franco’s penchant for making everything count in his art plus the anomalous throwaway nature of the lyric, I conclude that “there’s something happening here, and [I] don’t know what it is” (Dylan “Ballad of a Thin Man”). Yet I notice the way Franco’s seemingly silly lyrics begin to echo Mobutu’s slogans, the most famous of which are “Happy are those who sing and dance” and “serve others, not yourself” (*Dignity* 97). These platitudes were designed as revolutionary propaganda, but as Freire reminds, “Manipulation, sloganizing, ‘depositing,’ regimentation, and prescription cannot be components of revolutionary praxis, precisely because they are the components of the praxis of domination” (126). Franco no doubt understood this as well as anyone at ground zero Kinshasa,

because Mobutu tried all these tactics on him, especially during the *Authenticity* years of the early 1970's (Ewens *Congo* 110-13). Franco and OK Jazz were often compelled to accompany Mobutu on his numerous speaking tours of Africa where Mobutu would exemplify *Authenticity* as the great philosophy of African culture. Mobutu would give his standard self-aggrandizing speech (the rhetoric of *Authenticity* never evolved), wearing his leopard-skin fez and *abacost*, or his military dress uniform, then OK Jazz, dressed in fatigues as if they were Mobutu's army, would play a set of authentic Zairian music. The color, animation, and communal spectacle of a typical Franco show in front of a Kinshasa audience were erased in favor of conformist propaganda.

Both Graeme Ewens and Gary Stewart suggest that "AZDA" was commissioned by Mobutu as *Authenticity* propaganda. If so, the song fails to deliver any more surface substance than Mobutu was able to milk from his palimpsest policy. Instead, "AZDA" seems to equate its own shallowness with the policy itself. Franco could not have meant by the first line "we can say" anything other than the irony of making such a statement in the Zairian milieu of crushed voices. "We can sing" echoes Mobutu's claim that "happy are those who sing and dance," itself a despicable piece of propaganda considering that large swaths of the Zairian populace lived in dire poverty without the benefit of government infrastructure and the services it would bring. I don't doubt that even the most impoverished could find momentary happiness in singing and dancing. But the real thrust of the slogan is that that was all the people needed to be happy, a massive justification for Mobutu's continued negligence of the living

conditions of his subjects. “We can buy VW from AZDA” seems again shrouded in irony, since Franco knew well that very few in his audience could or would ever be able to afford a car. In fact it harkens back to a song from the early 1960s called “Nani Apedalaki Te” (He who doesn’t pedal; translation mine) in which Franco criticizes the new President Kasavubu for trading in his bike for a limousine. Finally, the last line of “AZDA” makes it sound as if the people themselves renamed Difco. Difco/AZDA was simply another nationalized business in the Zairianization/Radicalization policy of Mobutu. As such it became part of his personal piggy bank. Franco deliberately holds AZDA (sign not song) aloft as some sort of cultural symbol with real communal resonance. This constitutes his action in the song. In doing so, he calls into question the meaninglessness of such a capitalist entity as a symbol for anything authentic in Zaire. This constitutes his agenda in the song. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. states in *The Signifying Monkey*, “we are witnessing here a profound disruption at the level of the signifier, precisely because of the relationship of identity that obtains between the two apparently equivalent terms” (47). AZDA, as a name, as a signifier, apparently signified very little for Franco. If he was called upon to write a paean to *Authenticity*, if the subject matter was pre-determined, Franco apparently did not have his authentic heart in it. The lyrics instead create an atmosphere of idealized community where members can say, sing, and buy. This idealized community had nothing to do with audience reality in Kinshasa/Zaire but had plenty to do with the image of Zaire that Mobutu wanted to project to the world, and with the reality of his “inner council.” As in “Luvumbu

Ndoki,” when he calls out the sorcerer, Franco with “AZDA” appears to call out the sham of *Authenticity*. His wordplay resembles *signifyin(g)*, which Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes thus:

The Afro-American rhetorical strategy of Signifyin(g) is a practice that is not engaged in the game of information-giving...Signifyin(g) turns on the play and chain of signifiers, and not on some supposedly transcendent signified. (52)

In terms of the above quote, Franco is *signifyin(g)* in “AZDA.” He uses the song to completely undercut the “transcendent signified,” the *Authenticity* that “AZDA” symbolized for Mobutu. If this exegesis is valid, then Franco delivers with “AZDA” a thorough criticism of *Authenticity*, as he apprehended it, dressed up as a celebration of *Authenticity*, as Mobutu constructed it. The simplistic Lingala lyrics of “AZDA” are “the free play of language itself upon the displacement of meanings” (Gates 48). In this sense, Franco skewered Mobutu’s action/agenda disconnect with the policy of *Authenticity* by writing a great, silly song the action of which was celebration, the agenda of which was a severe criticism of the “displacement of meaning” that such a shallow symbol for *Authenticity* as the renamed VW dealership provided. Indeed by treating such a symbol transcendently (and “AZDA” is by any measure a transcendent song), Franco calls into question the meaning, or meaninglessness, of *Authenticity* itself. In a passage that seems to speak directly to the *signifyin(g)* relationship Franco assumed with his audience, Gates proclaims:

Meaning...is not proffered; it is deferred, and it is deferred because the relationship between intent and meaning, between the speech act and its comprehension, is skewed by the figures of rhetoric... [It] creates a measure of undecidability within the discourse, such that it must be interpreted or decoded by careful attention...Never can this interpretation be definitive, given the ambiguity at work in its rhetorical structures. (Gates 53)

This statement absolutely defines *mbwakela* as Franco used it. And he used it always to demonstrate that the deferral of meaning was the best way to remain fluid and adaptive in such a volatile force field as Kinshasa. How else was he to give voice to his deepest concerns about his audience while under the thumb of Mobutu? How else could his audience, itself under the boot of Mobutu, bring critical consciousness to bear on the transformation of their pitiful reality except through an apprehension that meaning must be made, since it could not be found. The ambiguity at the center of both *signifyin(g)* and *mbwakela* was absolutely essential to the awakening of “conscientizacao” (Freire 67) in the oppressed, be they African-Americans fighting their way out of slavery, or *Zairois* struggling to construct a postcolonial identity. Ambiguity, as a rhetorical strategy, was so effective in Franco’s lyrics because it not only captured something real about the condition of oppression but also provided a dialogic crucible in which the oppressed might begin to construct their own meaning, simply by becoming critically aware of the centrality of language to this construction. Needless to say, ambiguity also applies to Mobutu’s paternalistic rhetoric and allows my particular

interpretation of “AZDA,” though I realize that it can not be definitive.

A wave crested over Kinshasa/Zaire in 1974 with the multi-million dollar “Rumble in the Jungle” prizefight between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman. Mobutu expertly used this occasion to present the new Zaire to the world. The music festival, which seemingly went on for weeks, brought together on African soil musicians from all quarters of the African diaspora. Franco and OK Jazz played, naturally. So did James Brown. There were huge animation spectacles where hundreds of dark women would shake and cavort and cry out in front of Mobutu and invited world leaders. Underneath all this activity, under the floor of the “20 May” Stadium, were dungeons where Mobutu housed the ne’er do wells of Kinshasa for the duration of the event. This underground incarceration was an entirely apt metaphor for Mobutu’s conception of his indigenous audience and the rhetorical method by which he sublimated their needs and desires to his own. Mobutu Sese Seko had indeed arrived on the global stage, but the spotlight would dim very quickly.

A SARTORIAL MODERNIZATION

In Africa, power and authority mean one and the same thing; the person in power must exercise it to the fullest. Throughout history, African leaders have been viewed as demagogues who spend their time expressing good will and clear-sightedness while forcing their people to live in a permanent state of uncertainty. We have been depicted as bloodthirsty, violent, and cruel despots, as hard as tempered steel, driven by Machiavellian impulses, haunted by zeal to dominate, and surrounded either by a secret police or a private militia composed of spies, informers, or sycophants.

(Mobutu *Voices* 45)

The fundamental reality that...the 1973 'Zairianization' of foreign-owned commercial and agricultural enterprises was to confirm, is that the basic goal of the Mobutu regime was simply to reinforce its bargaining power vis-à-vis foreign capital in order to provide the new ruling class with a relatively solid economic base...the state bourgeoisie constitutes its own capital collectively through the output of state enterprises. royalties, taxes, and so on, as well as individually...through savings from exorbitant salaries, corruption, and the use of state resources for personal ends.

(Nzongola-Ntalaja *The Congo* 148)

How did Franco really feel about Mobutu? Aside from his concerns that as a social critic, Mobutu could silence him as the whim struck; aside from the patronage Mobutu doled to him in the form of money and business opportunities; aside from the cold fact that after the excitement of *Authenticity* waned, the living conditions of the *Kinois/Zairois* remained static; aside from Mobutu's ever-increasing wealth consolidation and his ever-disconnected paternalistic rhetoric; aside from the massacres, the forced exiles, the executions and imprisonment of MPR dissenters, and the insidious co-optation of political critics who proved more malleable than committed, Franco apparently believed that Mobutu was still the rightful leader of Zaire. This delusional thinking on Franco's part demonstrates that in terms of his primary audience, the *Kinois*, he and they had truly merged as "one voice," that he shared their inundation in *Mobutuism*, that he shared their deep traditional faith in the chief, and finally that he shared their belief that the Congolese rumba was the healing force of their universe. I will state that none of my research indicates that Mobutu was a particularly feelingful person. Such was his overriding commitment to his agenda of self-enrichment that he could not afford to be. Franco however was a deeply emotional man, whose action and agenda merged into a care ethic for his audience even as they diverged in terms of the audience of Mobutu. This care ethic, founded on intense audience identification, defined Franco's authentic praxis. Yet as a man he was simply another subject in Mobutu's "village assembly," despite the patronage that Mobutu offered him. In other words, Franco was not an active political revolutionary, attempting to bring down a system from the outside, but neither

was he a cog in that system, despite the efforts of Mobutu. Franco was a free-thinker whose vision of *Papa* was founded on the same audience identification as his praxis. Franco, as a man, may have been wise to Mobutu throughout their relationship; as an *everyman*, he could not afford to do more than dole this sagacity out surreptitiously to his audience, for fear of his own silencing and their increased marginalization.

The grand optimism and celebratory spirit inspired by *Authenticity* did not sustain. By the late 1970s, Mobutu was worth five billion dollars and his people were discovering that “one voice” meant just that, and it was not theirs.

According to Zairian scholar Nzongola-Ntalaja:

In Zaire, Mobutu has successfully used his powers of patronage to incorporate his potential opponents in what has been termed the Zairian kleptocracy, a corrupt and degenerate ruling group which blocks economic growth and development by depriving the state of those essential means and resources required for satisfying the basic needs of the population. (*Voices* 82)

Elliot and Dymally specify what those needs were: “Most Zairians lack adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, transportation, or a job that pays a living wage (average Zairian earns less than \$170 a year), and their access to these necessities is diminishing” (*Voices* 83). In the face of such facts, Mobutu’s rhetoric did not adapt because it did not need to. It was as static as the economic conditions of his indigenous audience. Facts meant nothing to him and he consistently questioned the bias of Western news organizations that

reported such facts. In a typical response to a question about the lack of accessible health care in Zaire, Mobutu exclaims: "I must take strong exception to the statistics you've cited. They're simply not accurate. I suspect you obtained them from the Washington Post, which simply parrots the Belgian press" (*Voices* 29-30). Such conscious manipulation and deflection of agreed upon measurements of objective reality, statistics, suggests a deeply pathological personality who believed that his claims for what he had done for his people should be accepted without criticism, without the authority of objective evidence.

Millions of dollars of aid and investment were flowing into his country from the West. His indigenous audience, the *Zairois*, remained mired in economic subsistence which wholly precluded the construction of an organized opposing voice to Mobutu and his regime. Certainly he had to continue to deflect ongoing criticism of his regime's civil rights abuses and failure to do anything about the poverty of the general populace. Yet he had become fully entrenched in his kleptocracy, which was still successfully hidden by *Mobutuism*, the all-encompassing ideology he sold his populace that he alone was and would continue to be the architect of Zairian modernization. That this modernization did not extend to the lower reaches of his people was a problem solved rhetorically through blame directed at the West, specifically the IMF (International Monetary Fund) which was attempting to reign in the debt accumulated by Zaire since Mobutu's takeover (Nzongola-Ntalaja *The Congo* 184). A typical justification from a Mobutu henchman reads:

How much do you think Zaire receives from selling its cobalt,

copper, industrial diamonds, and lumber? After selling these resources, we are left with practically nothing. The vast majority of the profits go to repay our debt obligations...If the Western world were truly concerned about the welfare of our people, it would write off the debts. (Gerengbo *Voices* 87)

Mobutu's vaunted policy of *Authenticity*, and his deeply subjective ideas of its importance to the *Zairois* were completely undercut by the bald economic conditions of his populace. No amount of shallow revivalism such as name-changes and dress style could paint over the fact that the *Zairois* were dying the slow death of poverty while Mobutu and his "inner council" were becoming obscenely rich. "Look at my clothes," Mobutu states in an interview with Remilleux, "they show that authenticity is not a fixation on the past, but a program that allows innovation and creation... [a] sartorial modernization" (*Dignity* 111). Who is Mobutu addressing with such gloss? Certainly not the *Zairois* whose thrall to the chief was becoming as entrenched as Mobutu's own kleptocracy. Once again, Mobutu elides the home audience for the Western audience of France, England, Belgium, and the U.S. These were the entities that needed convincing in order to keep the money flow open. Unfortunately for the *Zairois* and eventually Mobutu, the cronies put in charge of the businesses that underwent Zairianization were largely incompetent and just as greedy as *Papa*. The subsequent Radicalization policy actually reinstalled some of the former colonial CEOs in an attempt to boost production, the proceeds of which now went directly into Mobutu's piggy bank as did large chunks of Western aid and

investment. “This [authenticity] was the indispensable condition for us to be able to open ourselves fruitfully to the gifts of foreign civilizations” (111). The “us” is deceptive. Mobutu connotes the *Zairois* but denotes his ever-morphing “inner council.” For all his paternalism, the *gifts* of foreign civilizations did nothing to ameliorate the indefensible living conditions of the Zairian populace. What did, for the *Kinois* anyway, was the music of Congolese rumba, a synthetic construction as indebted to the former colonizers as it was to the tradition that Mobutu so glamorized with *Authenticity*. This music was frankly the only clue to modernization for Zaire, and its pan-African sweep obscured the uglier facts of life for Zairians, the primary one being that no amount of revivalism and restoration of traditional modes of being could combat rampant impoverishment and governmental neglect. Hunger trumps culture inevitably, which is a self-evidence that Mobutu’s slogan “Happy are those who sing and dance” sought desperately to demolish. And it did, if not demolish, then certainly occlude the pathological split between what he said and what he did, between his subjective reality, constructed and *imposed* on his people, and the measurable objective reality of life for his people. Revisit the Freire quote at the chapter two heading. “Happy are those who sing and dance,” “Serve others not yourself,” and “Roll up your sleeves” were all slogans intended to put the onus of modernization and nation-building on the *Zairois* themselves while allowing Mobutu to take rhetorical credit even though it never actually happened. Again the action/agenda split of such sloganeering perfectly illustrates Freire’s idea that the subjective/objective

binary, and its manipulation through rhetoric, underlies all oppressor/oppressed power dynamics.

Franco's music sought to explode that binary through an alternative praxis, described by Freire as "subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship" (50). By treating the condition of human consciousness as already being in a state of emergence from the subjective/objective binary, and its real life correlate the oppressor/oppressed binary, Franco's "program content of [problem-posing] education [was] neither a *gift* nor an *imposition* (emphases mine)...but rather the organized, systematized, and developed 're-presentation' to individuals of the things about which they want to know more" (93). In the case of the *Zairois*, the thing they wanted to know more about was *who are we*-how to establish and maintain identity in a postcolonial landscape. Yet through the relentless propaganda of Mobutu they were seemingly incapable of grasping their oppressive reality in any objective sense, as something that might be transformed. Franco, in his best songs, posed problems to his audience that resonated in their now. He mirrored their put-upon society back onto them, and in doing so, offered not only identification and empathy and judgment but a most fluid, individual postcolonial consciousness, manifested in a thousand *sebenes*, which consistently served up "endless variety in a supposedly formulaic style and non-stop melody in a supposedly rhythm-bound one" (Christgau "Franco de mi Amor").

Favoritism was now Mobutu's primary technique for quelling dissent. By successfully reintegrating former critics into his ruling apparatus he insured that

they would tow the MPR line which was that *things are improving now that I have given the people their identity back*. This favoritism extended to the Belle Epoque of Congolese rumba. By 1978, the Congolese press “published a census: there were 1,200 bands in Zaire, one for every 20,000 inhabitants” (Tenaille 63 fn 6). This vital cultural wellspring was still dominated by Franco and OK Jazz, who had played a major role in proselytizing for Mobutu’s *Authenticity* and had been rewarded handsomely by the regime. Franco was now ensconced in Un Deux Trois, his entertainment and recording complex located in Matonge, where the core of his audience resided. Unlike African leaders like Sekou Toure and Leopold Senghor and Kwame Nkrumah who actively subsidized their respective countries’ professional music scenes, Mobutu chose to pursue the same nepotism with Franco that he enacted with his “inner council.” This was sharp practice intended to control the message of the Congolese pop music then sweeping the African continent. Certain bands were denied recording opportunities, denied instruments of their own, regularly exiled to Brazzaville or forced apart through top-down innuendo and gossip. Mobutu always sought to compress his multilayered home audience into a manageable form, one without rhetorical pluralism. It was not that the bands competing with Franco offered more social criticism or harsher condemnation of the way things were in Zaire. No Congolese bandleaders or songwriters complained as consistently and passionately as Franco. None used *mbwakela* more effectively than Franco. Rather, such voicedness in the realm of Congolese rumba rubbed Mobutu the wrong way as his “one voice” became diluted. Franco’s chief competitor, Tabu

Ley Rochereau, incidentally *Mama Mobutu's* favorite, had actively courted the Western audience with a series of appearances at the Paris Olympia theatre. He was looking to escape reliance on an audience so under Mobutu's thumb. This upward mobility was not Franco's way as previous quotes have made clear. What he courted in the West was not an audience so much as a template for how popular music might aspire to cultural transformation, might aspire to actually effect his audience's critical thinking. Contemporaneous Western analogues to Franco's vision for popular music were Bob Dylan and James Brown. Dylan was a problem-posing lyricist if there ever was one, and James Brown was a musician for whom repetition almost invariably led to the sublime space where singing and dancing nullified, if only ephemerally, oppressive reality. Franco incorporated both influences seamlessly, not as Western models for his own music, but as corroboration that his music had meaning beyond its undeniable entertainment value.

Franco, like his audience, wanted to believe in Mobutu, in his self-professed powers of making his subjects' lives richly and authentically African. But Mobutu required that his subjects engage in a process of revivalism, a return to pre-colonial tribal traditions as Mobutu understood them. As previous chapters make clear though, Mobutu had ideas about chieftaincy that did not correspond to historical reality. Not only did he require fealty and consistent admiration, but he demanded commitment to a vision that refused to adapt to or even acknowledge the panoply of influences Zaire was operating under. By keeping the populace focused on tribal traditions of an idealized past, Mobutu could claim

cultural preeminence while simultaneously divesting the responsibility for modernization. This was quite a ruse from the man who took credit for hauling Zaire out of tribalism and into the modern world. It was a ruse that Franco criticized so cunningly in “AZDA.” But four years on from “Rumble in the Jungle” and the apex of Zairian support for *Authenticity*, even more distance had grown between Mobutu and the *Zairois*. As roads became overgrown with jungle, as hospitals became decrepit, as schools closed, as government bureaucracy precluded any ground-up ideation or ground-level voice, Zaire began to rot from the head. The late seventies were a time when Mobutu’s agenda became intolerable to free-thinkers such as Franco. How else is one to explain his maddening descent into seeming incomprehensibility when he recorded three pornographic songs that ultimately led to a one month plus stay in jail followed by self-imposed exile to Brussels? Gary Stewart captures the moment well:

Listeners could scarcely believe their ears. Three of Franco’s songs, ‘Helene,’ ‘Jacky,’ and ‘Sous-Alimentation Sexuelle’ (sexual malnourishment), left little room for interpretation. The three were part of a salacious four-song recording released on cassette tape in an effort to avoid the censors. It didn’t work...headlines exploded... (*Rumba* 231)

Ken Braun in *Francophonie I* furthers the narrative: “He [Franco] hadn’t intended to release them to the public, but they got out on bootleg cassettes” (38). Graeme Ewens provides more details: “The topics ranged from oral and anal sex to Jacky’s disgusting habit of feeding excrement to one of her

boyfriends" (*Congo* 166). Franco, of course, complained after the fact that "where the shoe pinches is that the official existence of the censor restrains creativity in general and forces the artist into self-censorship" (166). Moreover he attempted to absolve his band: "I am to blame; it's me who sang the song, me who composed the offensive words. So don't blame the group. I have been doing this since 1956, and that is what has made me" (167). Why would Franco draw no qualitative distinction between such offensive songs and his prior voluminous output? The answer, I believe, rests with Franco's increasing impatience that the rhetorical techniques applied thus far in his career had not effectively awakened the critical consciousness of his audience. The ambivalence of his relationship with Mobutu was always central to his dilemma as an artist. Mobutu was still ostensibly his *Papa*, and everyone else's in the largest sub-Saharan country, but post-*Authenticity* revealed sham aspects of *Papa's* paternalism that simply could not be denied, and perhaps only suitably commented on through recourse to the coarsest rhetorical technique that Franco ever employed. In other words, perhaps "Jacky" was Mobutu, feeding human waste to his people, willfully oblivious to their malnourishment. An impediment to this reading, though perfectly acceptable in *mbwakela* terms, is Franco's much commented upon misogyny. I insist that his woman-baiting ran no deeper than most Western pop music misogyny, Dylan's and Brown's included, and was rendered ironic by his habit of writing songs in women's voices ("Princess Kikou" 1981), sometimes as dialogues between two women, and statements such as "I don't insult them but I offer critiques, so that they might listen to me. I'm not

against women. It is just that women have so many problems. Women everywhere” (*Congo* 245). A further challenge to the charge of misogyny against Franco, as evidenced by “Jacky” and the others, were his epic early 1980s critiques of men, “Tres Impoli,” “Mario,” and “La Vie des Hommes,” all of which favor women as the victims of outrageous masculine behavior. Ultimately, Franco’s views on women were likely not dissimilar to Mobutu’s: women were the “mothers” of the new Zaire, and like all mothers caused as many problems as they solved. In light of this evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that Franco, in his pornographic rants, used certain female characterizations as metaphors for Mobutu’s own treatment of his people, negligent, perverted, and exploitative.

Mobutuism had done so little to ameliorate the living conditions of his audience, that Franco felt compelled to resort to a culturally ingrained and popularly attributed misogyny to erect another metaphor for *Papa*, not the chieftain exceeding his tribal bounds nor the author of a shallow *Authenticity*, but the lover who cannot climax unless she exercises her power through sexual denial and pathology. No doubt the blunt feminine analogue to Mobutu increased and intensified the blowback Franco received on this occasion.

In any case, the official responsible for Franco and certain OK Jazz members’ incarceration for obscenity was one Kengo wa Dondo, then Attorney General and future Prime Minister. Franco, upon release from jail, composed a song called “Tailleur,” a prime piece of political *mbwake* that appropriates the phallic metaphor of the needle that cannot sew anymore. “Many Zairians

identified the tailor as the Attorney General who had ordered Franco's imprisonment in 1978 and had since been removed from office" (Braun *FPII* 20). After splitting his band in two, leaving half at Un Deux Trois, and taking the others on a tour of West Africa then Europe, Franco settled briefly in Brussels, where he recorded a stunning solo track called "Nalingaka Yo Yo Te." A new metaphor for Mobutu was found ostensibly in the people of Brussels. As Braun states, "Nearly alone in the studio, [Franco] multi-tracked most of the instruments and the vocals, singing 'I've come to a place where I don't know what people want... This relationship is driving me mad... I don't like you!'" (*FPI* 40).

Franco's self-imposed exile to the "mother" country seemed to represent the final break between him and Mobutu. No longer would he sign on for *Authenticity* tours of Africa, no longer would he record praise songs to the chief (the album long "Candidat na biso Mobutu" was a complete anomaly in the 1980s and probably compelled) or propaganda folklore songs extolling the cultural preeminence of *Mobutuism*. Franco had had it with the reality manipulations of Mobutu: I don't like you, indeed.

No one claims knowledge of when Franco became infected with the HIV virus. Franco himself consistently denied that he suffered from AIDS. Nevertheless, by the mid 1980s, his health began to decline precipitously, evidenced by increasing weight loss, and an inability to stand on stage. Yet, even sitting, Franco continued to orchestrate his band through an intense schedule of live performance. His guitar playing suffered perhaps. It certainly

was not as dominant in the mix. But he had at least three other guitarists to pick up the slack. His lead vocals were less frequent, but again he had a coterie of the best vocalists Kinshasa and Brazzaville could offer. While the decreasingly effective favoritism of Mobutu probably still contributed to the relative stability of OK Jazz during these truly dark days of Mobutu's rule and Franco's deteriorating health, "for every story of a contract breached, money lost or stolen, a band decimated or a career ruined by Franco, there are ten about the man's loyalty and generosity to his fellow musicians" (Braun *FPII* 24). As always, the best musicians wanted to be in OK Jazz because OK Jazz was the most authentic orchestra that Kinshasa had to offer to Africa. Franco largely refused to update his music through technology. Synth drums, disco beats, and all manner of slick production techniques were infusing a new "fast-food" rumba product from the expatriate European scene, but Franco abjured mostly, preferring the natural evolution of his music over the enforced changes that an international audience would mandate. Thusly did his music retain the intense identification with the local audience, more than any other.

Francophonie II proves there were few dead spaces in the quality of output for OK Jazz in Franco's final decade. Ken Braun states in the liner, "their best music in the mid-1980s balanced innovation with classicism" (29). "Pesa position na yo" (State your position, trans. Braun), and "Kimpa kisangameni" (Witches' coven, trans. Braun), a folkloric piece similar in theme to "Luvumbu Ndoki," were long, hypnotic pieces wherein the *sebene* was no longer distinguishable from the song itself, as it had been in "AZDA." Franco's synthesis

of disparate musical and cultural influences had matured into a unique expression of sublime repetition, subtler than James Brown's, less clipped and funky, but more fluid and nuanced. This musical approach reached its zenith in "Attention na Sida," probably Franco's most famous song besides "Mario" and "AZDA," and a piece of programmatic music to rival any created anywhere. Recorded in 1987, "Attention na Sida," which translates as "Beware of AIDS" (Akowuah 100-01) was Franco's last rallying cry to his audience, a thoroughly straightforward, yet poetic lyric about the ecumenical dimensions of incurable disease. As usual with Franco, it concentrates on raising the critical awareness of a new problem facing the *Zairois*. Yet, unlike most of his great songs, it does more than suggest praxis. "Attention na Sida" specifies immediate action against the spread of AIDS without denying the reflective opportunity that such a scourge offered to the oppressed. It accurately relates that hierarchies of power and control meant nothing in the face of such an insidious, infectious malfeasance. While tempting to connect such rhetoric to further criticism of Mobutu, "Attention na Sida" so passionately embraces a global, humanist perspective, something Franco usually approximated and Mobutu always ignored, that it functions instead as a particularly brilliant instance of the birth of "one" world music, an entity of the African diaspora that never matured but has as its parents artists like Franco, James Brown, Bob Marley, and few others. Rhetorically, this distinction is tricky in that my argument for Franco's adhesion to his local audience, and Mobutu's elision of that audience in favor of an extra-national Cold War-defined audience of former African colonizers, is challenged. But Franco's reach was

always defined by quality of artistic output, Mobutu's always by nepotism.

"Mobutu understood that Franco was a genuine man of the people—the same people he was determined to rule—and that if he couldn't extinguish the pop star he would have to co-opt him" (Braun *FPII* 9). Mobutu's tactics would have severely limited even the best rhetorician's praxis, yet Franco had already made a career of dancing through, around, and above such artificially imposed yet physically dangerous boundaries. In the case of "Attention na Sida" and the AIDS crisis, both men for once seemed to share both action and agenda.

"Attention na Sida" is one long, sly *sebene* pilfered from the melodic substance of the aforementioned "Jacky." Irony, or a Picasso-like preference for recycling is arguable, but the result is purely sublime, the sort of song a listener can truly get lost in, an empathic vision of a most disastrous objective reality that is not only not disconnected from that reality but manages to present it as a challenge to his audience, again reinforcing Franco's primary generative theme: *be aware and adapt*. He sings the lead as if his health problems were all gossip, meticulously pronouncing the predominantly French and Lingala lyrics with confidence and passion. The chorus is massed and layered with voices, as usual with Franco's arrangements, but here they blend anonymously, as if distinctly individual vocal sounds would undermine the ecumenical message. A brief survey of the first lines of stanzas thick with words frames the song very effectively:

This terrible sickness

Look after your body

AIDS is ravaging all peoples
 AIDS has made us forget
 You can carry the virus
 You are the life force of society
 Think before you make love
 You have an obligation to society
 It is for you to fight against AIDS
 Do not show the disease your fear
 Governments of rich countries help the poor
 We must all be mobilized against AIDS
 (excerpted from trans. by Ewens *Congo* 266-69)

Certain stanzas bear closer scrutiny, testifying to Franco's knowledge of Western medicine, as well as to his idea of a punishing God (he was Catholic, then Muslim, but neither religion seemed to compel him). But the lines chosen capture the inclusive nature of the problem that AIDS posed for Africa and the world. In one stanza, Franco exclaims "Europe and the USA accuse Africa of being the source of AIDS" (*Congo* 266). He was correct in this claim as early rhetoric concerning the disease attributed it to heathenish African societies incapable of modernizing, as if modernization were a panacea against infection. This blame game would certainly have continued had not the insidious disease rendered borders and ideologies moot. As much as certain rhetorical entities of the West sought to connect the disease to pejorative stereotypes of the African, ultimately these voices could not deny that AIDS was a threat to the global

human condition regardless of its origin. Franco could just as well have played this blame game. He might have pointed out that colonization left indigenous African populations ill-equipped to deal with such a “modern” disease. Instead his verses move from general assessments of the disease’s impact to poignant and personal reflections such as his confession, buried deep in an extended verse: “All my family have run away from me because I have AIDS. I am left with only my mother, who has to suffer again all the sickness of my childhood” (*Congo* 268). Does Franco reference himself, or has he assumed the mantle of “everyman” in his rhetoric? According to Ewens, Franco’s middle name “Makiadi” was “a Kikongo word meaning a ‘subscriber to misfortune,’ or one who is born to suffer” (*Congo* 47). Bestowed by his mother, “Makiadi” was a prescient appellation for a man who was to suffer dearly for the seeming inability of his music to transform the lives of his audience. Yet there is never a hint in his lyrics that Franco pitied himself. He left this sort of facile subjectivity to Mobutu whose method was usually to blame the West for his own negligence of his people’s basic needs. A true revolutionary cannot afford to feel self-pity; there are others to serve:

I interpret the revolutionary process as dialogical cultural action which is prolonged in ‘cultural revolution’ once power is taken.

In both stages a serious and profound effort at conscientizacao—by means of which the people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical Subjects—is necessary. (Freire 160)

By these standards, and there are none better, Mobutu and the MPR were certainly not revolutionary, while Franco and OK Jazz arguably were.

As Nzongola-Ntalaja states in an interview with Dymally, “They [Mobutu and his cohorts] are not willing to spend money for government purposes. They’d rather spend it on themselves and allow the outside world to support basic government programs” (*Voices* 128). Ultimately Mobutu was the one who internalized the pejorative connotations that colonialism had constructed for the African, not Franco. “Attention na Sida” is further evidence that Franco believed in his audience’s potential for rising above even the fear and paranoia that such a disease inculcated. True as always to the spirit of Congolese rumba, “Attention na Sida” sounds like nothing less than a celebration of a fresh opportunity for the people to determine their destiny. By contrast, Mobutu’s rhetoric concerning the AIDS virus lays blame and suggests conspiracy: “Under the pretense that Black Africa was [AIDS’] first victim, some Westerners want to make us responsible for it. Where was the virus born...Maybe in Africa, maybe America, maybe in Europe. And why not in a Western research lab?” (*Dignity* 121). In his answer to a question posed by Dymally, Mobutu actually takes credit for Franco’s “Attention na Sida,” describing it as one of a series of proactive government responses to the crisis (*Voices* 30-31). In all fairness though, even Nzongola-Ntalaja gives credit to the Mobutu regime for its efforts to control the spread of the disease. Yet “Attention na Sida” deserved more credit for the education of a largely illiterate population about the dangers of AIDS. Ewens describes the song’s impact succinctly:

Against a heavy folklore rhythm...Franco spoke out in thunderous preacher-like tones about the disease itself, the moral background and ways of avoiding HIV, which in Africa is mostly spread by hetero-sexual contact and non-sterile injections. He warned against the use of unclean needles and the dangers of injecting drugs, exhorting all sections of the community to protect themselves and subsequent generations from infection. He sang in clear French as well as in Lingala in order to reach the widest audience, and even in Anglophone countries the song's success was matched with some understanding of the subject's gravity.

(Congo 199)

This disease, and Franco's response in song, might be viewed respectively as a non-human form of colonization and a vital cultural reminder that authentic identity, and the praxis that naturally accompanies it, must be founded on an inclusive historical sense. In other words, the elision or erasure of historical actualities, such as the colonization of the African continent by Western powers, in favor of what those actualities overwrote was counter-productive to identity generation as Franco apprehended it. Mobutu prided himself on erasing the horrors of colonialism from his subjects' minds, yet embraced the ways and means of colonialism with his preferred audiences, the West and his "inner council." He was fantastically successful at constructing a rhetorical space wherein shifting blame for his people's oppression came as naturally to him as taking credit for their non-existent modernization. Mobutu's maddeningly

subjective rhetoric kept the *Zairois* in an identity vacuum. Franco and his prodigious musical output with OK Jazz attempted to fill that vacuum, to assist in the generation of an actual authenticity, one that denied none of the influences of colonialism but rather strove to weave those influences with the rich traditions of adaptive, pre-colonial African tribalism into a mosaic of evolving identity, not static or deposited, but fluid, always already in a state of becoming.

This divergence rested on the extent to which colonial stereotypes of the African had been internalized by the thinkers. Ironically, Mobutu, despite a thoroughly tribal background precluding *evolue* status, was a construction of the West, was trained by the West, and was co-opted by the West as a strongman who would gladly wear the mantle of savior for his country as long as the money flowed. Franco was a wholly distinct construction: a self-made man and committed artist from a mixed tribal background who bowed to the favoritism of Mobutu as long as it served the vital interests of his audience, the urban *Kinois*, the *Zairois*, and finally the African populace at large.

Mobutu fulfilled his thoroughly Machiavellian agenda by consistently lying about his action. His paternalistic rhetoric was a sop to all of his audiences, the West, his “inner council,” and the *Zairois*, but only this last audience suffered the objective consequences of such rhetorical schizophrenia. Just as ironically did Franco merge his action with his agenda through the rhetorical techniques outlined in this thesis. “Attention na Sida” aside, he was not an overtly literal or didactic lyricist. He could not afford to be, considering his naturally critical nature and the panopticon that sought to control it. But in his self-proclaimed role as

social satirist and cultural chronicler, Franco managed something that Mobutu would not even consider: the humanization of his audience. He accomplished this by an open invite to create meaning from his songs. He was not interested in authoritarian deposits of identity. He recognized that any authentic identity for the *Zairois* would proceed only from their own efforts at meaning-making. So he wrote songs that required the application of critical consciousness on the part of his audience in order to construct significance. He never seemed to consider the possibility that the *Kinois* were not up to the task, precisely the consideration Mobutu relied on from this same audience, because without confidence in his audience, Franco knew he was nothing but a minor league Mobutu. "Attention na Sida," in its successful convocation of the personal horrors of the disease and its global ramifications, spoke directly, truthfully, and unaffectedly to Franco's audience, something Mobutu never dared to do.

CONCLUSION

I interpret the revolutionary process as dialogical cultural action which is prolonged in 'cultural revolution' once power is taken... a serious and profound effort at conscientizacao—by means of which the people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical Subjects—is necessary. (Freire 160)

The sebene arrives when the singers have completed their vocal contribution and the band gets down to the serious business of animating the audience into dancing...when the fabled Congo guitars spiral off towards higher levels of ecstasy. The moment when the sebene kicks in can be pure bliss. (Ewens *Rough* 5)

As the ironies of this all-important relationship in post-colonial Zaire began to stack like so many bricks, the question is posed: what did Franco and Mobutu seek to construct through their respective praxes? Simplistically, it was walls for Mobutu, and bridges and tunnels for Franco. Mobutu as a rhetorician loved to segment his various audiences, the *Zairois*, his "inner council," and the neo-colonial Western powers, and then to compress those segmented audiences into manageable forms, by rendering them faceless and voiceless. He had a tale to tell to each of them. It proved to be a myth for all of them, as eventually every

party in this shape-shifting rhetorical situation, with the possible exception of his “inner council,” regretted throwing their lot in with *Papa*. Certainly the *Zairois* got little from Mobutu, the MPR, *Authenticity*, and the other self-proclaimed panaceas of *Mobutuism*. Elliot and Dymally claim that at the height of Zairian support for Mobutu, the average person earned less than he/she did during the civil war years (*Voices* 27). The West ultimately got, through its maddening support for Mobutu’s regime, corroboration for the colonial stereotypes it always already clutched to its paternalistic breast. Yet this corroboration was not enough pay-off for a political myopia that expected fealty from its preferred and propped up despot, not the sort of transparent *signifyin(g)* Mobutu offered wherein he would blame the West for the condition of his people while telling his people how much he had done for them.

Franco had only one audience, the *Kinois*, and he wrote for them literally hundreds of love songs. Rarely were they straightforward avowals of romance or desire, like so much Western pop. “Even his love songs could be unraveled to reveal layers of double meaning and allegory that usually combined family advice with social commentary and satire” (Ewens *Rough* 5). The best of these songs posed problems to a society caught between tradition and modernity and presented those problems through vocal pluralism. “Sandoka” (1981) for instance, “involves six voices in chorus and in antiphonal duos and trios...the vocal parts take roles: a girl named Sandoka, the boy with whom she’s smitten, her parents, and their neighbors” (Braun *FPII* 19), and dramatizes a family debate about the boyfriend before concluding with a mutual endorsement that

“Love cannot be forbidden” (19). Even when targeting Mobutu and his “inner council” through the different applications of political *mbwakela* discussed in this thesis, Franco did so through the lens of his audience, who were no slouches when it came to decoding his layered messages. Lingala and the *sebene* allowed the intense identification that undergirded this collaborative process of meaning making: a hybrid language couched in a hybrid musical construction made seamless by the plangent guitaristics of an artist committed to rendering the hybrid authentic. In Franco’s music, the lyrics promised truth that must be hard-won by the audience, the music promised a sublime representation of “Liberte” (Franco, 1975) apprehended through the creative motion of dance. Ken Braun describes the special bond between Franco and the *Kinois*:

First and second-generation urbanites from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the *Kinois* were negotiating new social structures and mores without the guidance of village elders, extended families and tribal traditions. In the absence of wise old men and women with long memories, Kinshasa songwriters like Franco had become this emergent society’s storytellers, soothsayers and counselors. (*FPII* 20)

Mobutu clearly intended that *Authenticity* and the MPR replace the absent “village elders, extended families and tribal traditions” in the minds of this emerging urban society. Yet the policy and the party did not offer to the *Kinois* what these lost or abandoned things did, the opportunity to take part in the actualization and evolution of the community. For all the paternalistic rhetoric

concerning what *Authenticity* had done for his people, Mobutu lacked or ignored a proper understanding of the democratic nature of the tribal community as examined in chapter one. Certainly there was hierarchy, but, as my anthropological sources indicate, this hierarchy in no way prevented the “village assembly” from voicing dissent, criticism, or alternative visions for the health of the tribe. The tribe however was now the MPR, with its mind-numbing bureaucracy designed to sequester chief Mobutu from all who would challenge his vision. His misapprehension of the role of chief in tribal society was deliberate, allowing him to redefine his chieftaincy by cunningly adopting the ways and means of neocolonialism. In other words, he constructed a chieftaincy based on the model of King Leopold II, rather than the models that *Authenticity* was seemingly meant to extol. The Western audience, still attached to outmoded conceptions of the heathenish African, supported this construction even though evidence clearly existed that the Zairian populace was suffering mightily. The economic interests of the West in the natural resource-rich Zaire were founded upon the same neocolonialism: how best to serve Western concerns in a developing nation, which had done its part in the Cold War by choosing “democracy” over “socialism.” Thusly did Mobutu spend so much rhetorical space justifying his idea of a single party democracy as emblematic of how traditional African societies actually functioned. They did not, as the research in chapter one demonstrates. Each subset in the hierarchy of tribal society was a party, an identifiable group of members whose interests were subject to debate and approval by the other subsets before they could be actualized. But what did

the West know or care about traditional African societies? Mobutu told them all they needed to know in order to accept his rule over Zaire as “democratic.” Criticisms from the West, about human rights, political prisoners, and rampant poverty, were always deflected by Mobutu, who used the historical actuality of the horrors of colonialism to guilt the Western powers into backing off on criticism and instead investing more money in his regime. He used an adaptation of the same guilt tactic with the *Zairois*, always focusing on what he had done so far for the country, always attributing homegrown dissent and criticism to the pernicious influence of the West, always promoting harder work and less corruption (“Zairian sickness”) in a large populace operating at the subsistence level, always proclaiming himself as the chief who trumped all the other chiefs, themselves also blamed for the excruciatingly slow modernization of the country, always reminding that he alone unified Zaire, gave it an identity, and staunchly resisted the insidious neocolonialism that had robbed the resources of the Congo since independence. With such brilliant though insidious rhetoric was Mobutu able to keep the Western audience wholly separate from the indigenous audience, yet somehow pacify and/or satisfy both.

Franco, through his adhesion to his chosen audience, did not have to resort to the same rhetorical sleight of hand as Mobutu. Instead he utilized *mbwakela*, a function of the slippery semantics of Lingala, which allowed him to sidestep the panoptical apparatus of the MPR in order to reach directly to the *Kinois* with meaning that was ironically indirect and coded, that had to be critically constructed. This deferral of meaning on the part of Franco had a

purpose: to induce the critical awareness of his audience, to involve them in the construction of meaning. It had another purpose: self-preservation. Franco received favoritism from Mobutu because he was the most brilliant practitioner of the Congolese rumba, and because his audience was broad enough to function as a microcosm for emerging Zaire. Mobutu needed this audience desperately and sought successfully to co-opt Franco as a spokesperson for *Authenticity* and the MPR. Yet Franco was also punished by the ruling apparatus, jailed, forced to exile, forced to self-censor. Unlike so many of Mobutu's former critics, Franco agreed to proselytize for *Authenticity* not for money or fame. He had those already, though Mobutu certainly increased his coffers. He did it because he believed in Mobutu and what Mobutu said. In a sense, Franco became one of his own audience members in that he placed faith in an African leader whose agenda had nothing to do with the betterment of the *Zairois*. This agenda was so deeply hidden by Mobutu's relentless rhetorical action and his violent clampdowns that it went largely unchecked for twenty-five years. I believe the identification that Franco shared with his audience kept him in denial about who *Papa* was for too long. I believe the adhesion that the *Kinois* felt towards Mobutu, as they internalized his dominant "one voice," kept them in the dark for too long. In this sense did Franco and the *Kinois* fully merge into one movement, the inclusive, consistently creative adaption of an *everypeople* to life under a "revolutionary" single voice. As Freire states, "Cultural invasion...always involves a parochial view of reality, a static perception of the world, and the imposition of one world view upon another" (160). This is as apt a description of *Authenticity*

as I have read. Freire continues, “For socio-economic development to occur it is necessary: a) that there be a movement of search and creativity having its seat of decision in the searcher; b) that this movement occur not only in space, but in the existential time of the conscious searcher” (160-61). Franco did not write songs in the single voice of one man; he wrote songs in the pluralistic voices of everyman, and actively wove past and future into an art totally dedicated to the now reality of, and its potential transformation by, the *Kinois*.

There is no doubt that Mobutu was a brutal totalitarian. He was also a brilliant emblem of the pathology of the African leader whose mind had been so thoroughly colonized by the colonial process that he could not see his own people as humans. As Dickson Mungazi states, “the tragedy of the colonial systems in Africa [was] not merely that they operated under the myth of the inferiority of the African mind, but that they refused to engage the Africans in dialogue in order to establish bridges of human understanding” (163). He might as well be describing Mobutu, who so thoroughly internalized the colonial model of empire that he replicated it. Franco, though not even mentioned in the historical sources accessed for this thesis, presented to the people of Kinshasa and Zaire and ultimately Africa herself the only antidote to the faux, dehumanizing “revolution” of Mobutu. That he did not actually “lead” a counter-revolution himself simply points out that revolution is primarily defined in historical and political terms, not in cultural terms. Nzongola-Ntalaja, in particular, writes astutely of how Mobutu came to represent the model of the African dictator. But Mobutu is largely forgotten now, as his model was usurped by men like Gadhafi

and Idi Amin, men who did not have an iota of the rhetorical skill Mobutu had. Such is history. Culture however is not measured in historical time. It exists existentially as a compression of past accomplishments and future potentials into an ever-evolving human now. In this sense, Franco was a cultural revolutionary in the tradition of Paulo Freire, one for whom authenticity was a fluid state of becoming that required every tool and voice that history could offer to an oppressed people seeking to transform their objectification.

“Franco was unique. Like Shakespeare or Mozart, combined with Pele or Muhammad Ali...the sort of man who appears once every hundred years”

(Sam Mangwana as qtd in Ewens *Rough 2*).

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