

## Introduction

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<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast;
- two optional vocabulary activities based on the article;
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (Nigeria).

## Read the article

### The Nigerian Sound of Afrobeat

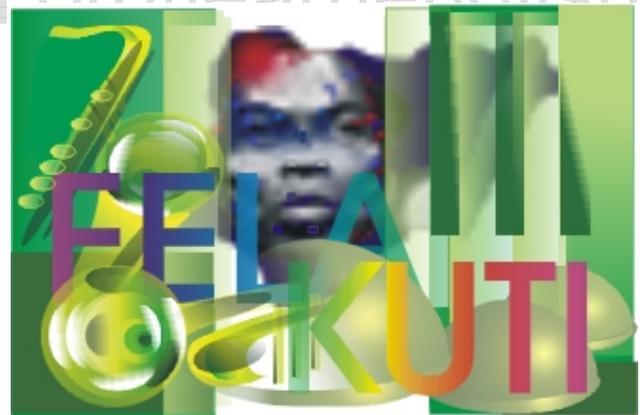
by John Kuti

My surname "Kuti" is a normal Hungarian surname – it means something like "Wells" ... as in the places where you get water out of the ground. By a strange coincidence "Kuti" is also a name in Nigerian. In the Yoruba language it means "death cannot be caused by any human being". Now I don't think that coincidences have any special meaning most of the time – but in this case it is an example of the power of music to tell you things that are impossible to find out any other way.

I know this because of a musician – Fela Kuti. He was born in Abeokuta about 60 miles north of Lagos (which was then the capital of Nigeria) in 1938. When he was 20, his parents sent him to London to study medicine. But instead he joined Trinity College of Music, and he formed a band called "Koola Lobitos". I have no idea where they got that name, but they became quite popular around 1961 in London clubs. They probably played some "r'n'b" which means "rhythm and blues" an American style which, at that time, was being adopted by British groups like the Rolling Stones. They must have played West African styles as well like "high-life" because another member of the band was a singer from Lagos called Jimo Kombi Braimah.

I think the first recordings of Fela Kuti were made under the name "Koola Lobitos"; but by then he had already returned to Nigeria and invented his own style which was called "afrobeat" a mixture of American funk rhythms and jazz improvisation with African percussion and vocals. His first hit was sung in the Yoruba language and recorded by his group "Afrika 70" - Jeun Ko'ku (which means 'eat and die')

During the 1970s and 1980s Fela was a leader not only in music but in politics. They were complicated times in Africa when many countries in the region had recently become independent. People often found being freed from an empire was not the solution to all their problems. Nigeria had become independent in 1960. In 1968 the terrible Biafran war began, with the short-lived country of Biafra which was in the southern part of Nigeria. Up to a million people died – many of them from starvation. The country has had various periods of military government since then.



Fela was never afraid to express his opinions in his songs, and that often got him into trouble. For example his 1977 song "Zombie" about the military mentality ...

*"Zombie - no go talk unless you tell him to talk  
 Zombie - no go think unless you tell them to think"*

They are very serious songs but they sound happy, with lots of groovy rhythms and energetic trumpet and saxophone playing. The words are really a special variety of Nigerian Pidgin English,

which is the best way to communicate with his audience— there are hundreds of different languages in Nigeria.

Fela was always serious about his identity as an African. In his song “Gentleman” he made fun of Africans who wear clothes from cold countries in the tropical heat. In “Colonial Mentality” he also explains why he adopted the African name

Anikulapo instead of the English “Ransome” (which he called a “slave-name”.)

From the point of view of the government, maybe the worst thing he did was to try to make young Nigerians more interested and more active in the political life of their country. His music is a source of information and an introduction to new ways of thinking.

## After reading

### Exercise 1

In the table are some names and other words from the text. Below the table are explanations of the names and other words. Can you match the names and other words to the explanations?

a. Afrika 70	b. Afrobeat	c. Anikulapo
d. Biafra	e. High-life	f. Lagos
g. R'n'b	h. wells	i. Zombie

1. Places where you get water out of the ground
2. The former capital of Nigeria
3. Rhythm and blues
4. A west-African style of music popular in the 1960s and 70s
5. The style of music invented by Fela Kuti
6. The group which recorded Fela's first hit
7. A country which was created from a part of Nigeria in the 1960s
8. A song by Fela about how soldiers think
9. The variety of English you can hear in many of Fela's songs
10. The name Fela took instead of “Ransome”

### Exercise 2

Choose the correct answer to each of the 10 questions below.

1. When two things happen that seem connected but are not, we say it's:
  - a. a coincidence
  - b. a mentality
  - c. starvation
  
2. When you understand something you know its:
  - a. vocals
  - b. mentality
  - c. meaning
  
3. If you start to follow or use a certain style you:
  - a. adopt it.
  - b. find it out
  - c. express it

4. If you play the drums, and other instruments which you hit, you play:
  - a. improvisation
  - b. percussion
  - c. region
  
5. If you are the singer in a group you do the:
  - a. funk
  - b. solution
  - c. vocals
  
6. If something is “complicated” it means that it:
  - a. is difficult to understand
  - b. has lots of people trying to be number one
  - c. feels sure that everything is OK
  
7. The problem of people not having food to eat is:
  - a. starvation
  - b. trouble
  - c. trumpet
  
8. Fela’s political songs often “got him into trouble” because:
  - a. they made fun of people
  - b. they were fun
  - c. they were funny
  
9. A good word for music that makes you want to dance is:
  - a. serious
  - b. groovy
  - c. active
  
10. Fela’s song “Colonial Mentality” explains:
  - a. why he changed his name
  - b. how soldiers think
  - c. the hot weather in Africa

**More activities on this topic**

You’ll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of Nigeria at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-nigeria.htm>

- **Word game:** West African English. Discover differences between British English and West African (and also Jamaican) English.
- **Story: A Visitor to the Star.** Anna Winter pulled on her Gucci sunglasses and sprayed herself with the extra-strength mosquito repellent she had bought in the airport. Anna thought her job was very difficult, and she told everybody about this. How could she be a front-line, award-winning, adventurous journalist if she had to stay in bad hotels and eat bad food?
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about Nigeria.
- There is also a Nigeria-related cartoon and some carefully selected external links.

**Answers**

**Exercise 1:** 1. h; 2. f; 3. g; 4. e; 5. b; 6. a; 7. d; 8. i; 9. c

**Exercise 2:** 1. a; 2. c; 3. a; 4. b; 5. c; 6. a; 7. a; 8. a; 9. b; 10. a