

**Riffing on Resistance:
Music in Chris Abani's *Graceland***
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*I am black: I am the incarnation of a complete fusion with the world, an intuitive understanding of the earth, an abandonment of my ego in the heart of the cosmos, and no white man, no matter how intelligent he may be, can ever understand Louis Armstrong and the music of the Congo. (Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks* 45)*

*That is what the road did—ate away at the edges of your resolve until you were nothing but frayed soul fabric. From then on there was only the music—and the sacrifices it demanded of you. (Abani *Graceland* 275)*

I. Introduction: Music is the Weapon of the Future

While addressing the issue of cultural violence against African nations in *The Wretched of the Earth*, colonized subject-turned-First-World academic Frantz Fanon argues that for the Black nationalist,

it is not enough to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. (227)

Fanon advocates that African nationalists understand their respective nations' preceding cultural and political activity to engage in current struggles against colonial oppression. Nigerian musician-turned-political leader Fela Anikulapo Kuti extends Fanon's argument with his statement, "music is the weapon of the future" (*Music is the Weapon*). The *afrobeat* revolutionary's vision of Nigeria's cultural prospects, and Fanon's insistence on momentary action through a knowledge of the na-

tion's artistic history, bear similarity to the ideas that author Chris Abani riffs on in his Hemingway/Pen Award-winning 2004 novel, *Graceland*.

Chris Abani's *Graceland* belongs to "the third-generation" of Nigerian authors, also termed "the children of the postcolony" (Waberi 8),¹ whose writing has recently exploded in the United States and United Kingdom publishing marketplace.² Novels such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for An Angel* or Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, as well as Abani's *Graceland* and *Becoming Abigail*, all interpolate Western and Nigerian themes to convey their perspective on Nigerian culture in the context of neocolonialism, multiculturalism and globalization. All of these novels integrate intercultural themes in a form of ethno-cultural hybridity that "[incarnates] a complete fusion with the world" as Fanon suggests (*Black Skin* 45). In *Graceland*, Abani offers a complex, multi-dimensional perspective on Nigeria, which is similarly reflected in other third-generation texts set in Nigeria (such as Adichie, Atta, Azuah or Habila). *Graceland* juxtaposes Lagos of the early 1980s, a place "so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time" (7), with his quiet hometown of Afikpo. Yet, the traditional maternal culture represented by Afikpo, the mothers' cryptic recipes and Igbo proverbs, is fluidly fused with Lagos *buka* food, Nigerian *juju* and American pop culture by the teenage protagonist Elvis, an Elvis impersonator and avid Western movie fan. Just as Abani smoothly moves through English, Nigerian pidgin, Scottish dialect or cowboy lingo in his text, Elvis effortlessly navigates from the Moroko slums to highlife clubs, or reads Rilke, Ellison or the Koran just as readily as Onitsha Market pamphlets. Throughout the novel, however, Elvis must contend with global concerns, such as poverty, prostitution and human trafficking. The plot follows Elvis on his quest to escape Lagos as a dancer. His widowed, alcoholic father Sunday, a military colonel who dabbles in narcotics and organ harvesting, further complicates Elvis's flight. Encouraging Elvis to pursue his dream and escape neocolonial oppression are his friend, Redemption, and his mentor, the King of Beggars. As the novel's eponymous title implies, music is an overriding theme in *Graceland*.³

Set in Lagos from 1972 to 1983, *Graceland* demonstrates how music can be used as a cultural product to resist Euro-American neocolonial practices as well as the hegemonic discourses oppressing citizens in militarily governed nations, as Nigeria was in the early 1980s. The novel hybridizes Nigerian *juju* and *asiko* musical structures with the Western novel form as a defense against cultural violence and globalization. By appropriating Western pop music through intertextual references, Abani also critiques neocolonial Nigerian and American essentialism. In particular, the novel questions the West's economic exploitation of those living in Lagos and the government's reliance on military control when the West will not provide aid. Furthermore, in the novel music provides a space for women in the Igbo patriarchal society, as well as an escape from the violent definitions of masculinity. Allusions to Nigerian and American musicians also create a dialectic that exposes the oppression of the Nigerian people. In *Graceland*, music proves to be a cultural element of resistance instead of a mere avenue of superficial escape from a neocolonial setting.

II. Limited Horizons: The West's Domination of Nigeria's Government and Culture

The novel's setting finds Nigeria teetering between corrupt democratic rule and oppressive military dictatorships. Though it gained independence from British rule in 1960, a series of coups and counter-coups found Nigeria back under the yoke of military dictatorships and the influence of Western governments when Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon was installed as the head of state until 1975. The military regime's aim during this period was initially to have the North secede from the South, but once Nigeria entered into a three-year civil war with the region now known as Biafra in 1967, British and American ambassadors convinced Gowon to maintain good relations with the Igbo. In return, the United Kingdom supported the Nigerian war effort against Biafra, beginning a history of Western involvement in the nation's military politics.⁴

Although Gowon was overthrown by Brigadier Murtala Ramat Mohammed in 1975, the new administration lasted less than six months.

The United States Central Intelligence Agency was believed to have been involved in the operation, which provoked strong anti-American sentiment in Lagos. Lieutenant-General Obasanjo, who governed until 1979, rekindled Nigeria's relationship with the United States, and the Western nation greatly influenced its economic growth in this period. Furthermore, 1979 also saw the introduction of a presidential constitution modeled after that of the United States and Alhaji Shehu Shagari was elected. Still, this four-year "civilian interregnum" (Abegunrin 99) resulted in mismanagement by the ruling class and the selling of many major Nigerian industries to foreign investors. In addition, the dependence on American investment in the oil sector found Nigeria's economy crumbling when the Reagan Administration called for the deregulation of oil prices. The country's economic downturn required the Shagari government to seek further loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In 1983, the year in which most of Abani's novel takes place, Shagari's September reelection was disputed and another military coup expelled him from power in December.

Despite the "military disengagement from active participation in politics" achieved through a five-point program in 1979 (Falola et al. 86), the civilian interregnum still relied on military control to placate the ruling classes. Both the Maitatsine Riots of 1980 and the 1981 Bakolori protests were quelled through the use of military coercion; the latter resulted in massacre. Historical scholars and social critics Toyin Falola, A. Ajayi, A. Alao and B. Babawale argue that "in the absence of progressive and nationalistic politics geared towards the emancipation of the people and the uplifting of the society, the ruling class resorts to violence" (42), and they blame the upper class's self-interests and the government's poor management skills for such coercion (42).

Repressive militaristic governments and the Westernization of Nigerian culture left the country's chances for unification in disarray. Regarding Nigeria's mass media, Falola, Ajayi, Alao and Babawale write: "its pristine nature vis-à-vis the Western media has severely limited its horizon in terms of the propagation of Nigeria's culture" (143). Furthermore, the authors contend that "the colonial experience had bastardized the Nigerian culture(s) through adulteration and acculturation

along Western lines" (131). Still today, they argue that Nigerians lack an appreciation of the country's many diverse cultures, as Western ideas and values continue to dominate the country's educational system (132). In addition, internal strife persists between the Hausa and Yoruban people since "there is nothing to show concretely that Nigeria's successive governments have been genuinely interested in entrenching equality at home" (202). Nigeria's middle-class has followed Fanon's predictions, they also suggest, refusing "to put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technical capital it has snatched when going through colonial universities" (150). In *Graceland*, I argue, Abani puts Nigerian intellectual and technical capital at the people's disposal by drawing attention to, and deploying, its rich cultural assets, most notably its music. Furthermore, by incorporating diverse Nigerian musical styles within *Graceland*, Abani promotes both Igbo and Yoruban cultures as united yet dissenting voices which together resist the West's destructive, hegemonic influence over Nigeria's corrupt military and political figureheads.

III. "Perpetually Indebted": Dialogic Musical Exchanges Between Africa and the West

Graceland's aural environment reflects the bastardization of Nigerian culture by Western influences through its incessant repetition of American pop music references. Still, it is important to remember that Western pop also contains an amalgam of influences stemming from West Africa. As made manifest in *Konkombe: Nigerian Music*, Western popular music derives from West African rhythms brought to North America during the slave trade. These rhythms became essential to the samba form, as well as jazz and blues (*Konkombe: Nigerian Music*) which further shaped gospel, soul, rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, funk, dance and hip-hop. In addition to rhythms, Western pop and African music share a repetitive structure through the riff: a musical theme or idea that recurs throughout a piece. Western pop arranges the riff into chorus-verse patterns, a typical pop song such as James Brown's "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" presenting an idea, then introducing a contradictory idea and repeating them both in a pattern resembling A-B-A-B-A-B. Often, a "bridge" section (C) will occur after the chorus and verse have each been repeated.

African-style music threatened white American society for centuries. For example, in an effort to strip Africans of their culture as well as any subversive communication devices, West African drums were outlawed in the United States during the slave trade. Writing from a Eurocentric stance favouring classical music in 1941, culture critic Theodor Adorno argued that repetition in jazz music represented “industrial standardization, loss of individuality, military marching, and hence fascism” (qtd. in Monson 31). White America eventually came to accept black music by degrees. Michael T. Bertrand, in his study of rock ‘n’ roll’s function in desegregation in the American South *Race, Rock, and Elvis*, points to Elvis Presley as a figure who hybridized black and white culture at a historical moment when the two races were becoming more integrated (23). According to Bertrand, rock ‘n’ roll “brought the races ‘together’ under similar circumstances for similar purposes: the performance and consumption of songs whose topics and themes applied equally and without bias to each group” (55). Still, Presley’s success was dependent on the appropriation of rhythm and blues by a white artist, which Sun Records producer Sam Phillips understood before he began his search for a white artist who could sing in a black style (Bertrand 27). Since Presley, black music has been exploited for major profits in the United States despite its often subversive lyrical content. In *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, Naomi Klein provides several examples: the BMG record label “hire[s] “street crews” of urban black youth to talk up hip-hop albums in their communities” (75), while major designers such as Nike and Tommy Hilfinger practice “black-culture hunting” as a way of marketing the hip-hop identity (73–74). While artists such as Run DMC may profit from a brand’s sponsorship (Klein 74), the brand is able to exploit the musicians’ authenticity to sell their products to black youth.

Similar exploitation of artists in the interests of globalization occurs in Nigeria, where record companies adopt local musicians to sell music back to the Nigerian people. The Lijadu Sisters, for example, complain that Decca, a British record company, wants to keep the musicians signed to the label “perpetually indebted . . . they want you to keep owing them” (*Konkombe: Nigerian Music*). While the Lijadu Sisters complain that Decca does little to support its artists, Kuti barricaded himself in

the Decca office for several weeks out of protest (*Konkombe: Nigerian Music*). Decca also expects its musicians to learn English, the colonizer's language, to appeal across ethnic lines in and outside of Nigeria (*Konkombe: Nigerian Music*). Decca's presence in the country has further "bastardized" the *afrobeat* and *juju* scenes in Lagos: Nigerian musicians are expected to compromise their language while supplying the label with the elements of their culture that are marketable to their countrymen. Furthermore, the 1970s oil boom resulted in many *konkombe* musicians switching from singing the praises of Nigerian heroes to glorifying their rich patrons, compromising personal expression for material interests (Alaja-Browne 236–37).

Utilizing the *juju* structure in conjunction with the *asiko* song form and the riff, *Graceland* hybridizes the novel to offer proverbs against Nigeria's Westernization and to elevate African musical aesthetics. Yoruban *juju* music employs the riff in the "Johnnie Walker" style, an A-A-B-A pattern where "the core idea is often stated first, then repeated for emphasis and clarity. A contrastive phrase follows, and the initial phrase is repeated to close the sequence" (Waterman 58). Ethnomusicologist Alan Waterman notes that this pattern "may be related to the rhetorical structure of Yoruba proverbs" (58), as well. According to Afolabi Alaja-Browne, the *juju* structure compliments the *asiko* song text, wherein "call-and-response forms predominated, the leader's phrases being composed of loosely-fitted poetic texts ... strung together to make a meaningful whole ... punctuated by intermittent refrains by both the leader and chorus" (qtd. in Waterman 41). Even before the Western pop influence penetrated Nigeria, *juju* had developed characteristics such as "urban-centredness, professionalism, mass appeal, [and] the combination of features from diverse sources" (Waterman 27). *Afrobeat* artists such as Fela Kuti insist that Nigerian music comes from a country that is "underdeveloped" due to the imposition of an "alien system" and therefore must reflect a "struggle for existence," whereas Westerners "can sing about love and who you are going to bed with next" (*Konkome: Nigerian Music*).

While Kuti's dichotomy is oversimplified, Abani riffs on the saxophonist's idea of art reflecting the neocolonial nation's political and social injustices. Ingrid Monson observes that musical riffs can be mul-

tilayered into grooves, contributing different unequal elements to a dialogue (33). The ethnomusicologist sees in the “layered overlapping combination of riffs and repetitions into grooves ... a field of action, symbols, and interrelationships that offer possibilities for reclaiming agency in postfoundationalist discussions of culture and for moving beyond a strictly binary conception of dialectics” (33). For Monson and Abani, multilayered riffs provide an opportunity to get “beyond the relation of two” (33), as Homi Bhabha suggests is necessary for postcolonial dialogues. According to Bhabha, escaping a Self/Other perception of cultural relations depends on a multiplicity of diasporic voices entering into a conversation based on hybridity “to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity” (“DissemiNation” 320). Abani uses the riff itself in a hybrid fashion, employing ideas that repeat throughout his novel to provide a structure, but also “riffing” on these themes. Pop culture critic Chris Turner defines the transitive verb *to riff* as “to begin from a basic—premise—from the riff—and to build it out and up through wild new tangents into something unique and compelling. To riff on something is to do the opposite of what the jazz riff does” (29).

IV. “Reaching for a Pure Lyric Moment”: *Graceland*’s Subversive Musical Landscape

While music is often constructed as a way to escape harsh Nigerian realities in *Graceland*, a *juju*-inspired riff structure is used to escape the novel’s traditional aesthetics, thereby appropriating the form and denying its monolithic status as a Western genre. Abani’s subversion of the novel also allows him to elevate Nigerian music to the same level as the novel, defending *juju* from decades of cultural violence. Each chapter has a Johnnie Walker layout: a comment is made about the traditional Igbo kola nut ritual from a Nigerian perspective (A), followed by an explanation from an outside observer of the ritual to clarify the first passage. The author then engages in improvisation for the narrative “B” theme before each chapter returns to traditional ideas with the presentation of Elvis’s mother’s journal (*Graceland* 3, 16). This juxtaposition of the *juju* form with the novel’s structure reemphasizes *juju*’s aesthetic value while

simultaneously dislocating the novel from its Western origins. Abani's synthesis of the two art forms creates a dialogue that equalizes the values of Nigerian and Western cultural products.

Graceland somewhat redeems the *juju* musicians required to take up English and forsake their native language for profit. Unlike those artists, Abani does not merely put *juju* across in English, thereby affirming the West's cultural superiority, but adopts and experiments with the novel form to expand its potential. Discussing what makes good art, Abani himself states, "locating yourself within an aesthetic tradition is important. I think even more important is finding a way to subvert the expectations of that aesthetic tradition, which is where all innovation comes from" ("An Interview with Chris Abani"). The innovation achieved through Abani's hybridized subversion of the novel transcends "not quite/not white" mimicry (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry" 132), in that the author understands both the Western and Nigerian aesthetic traditions and can do something inventive with both. In this sense, *Graceland's* form revisits the bastardization of Nigerian culture onto the West to remove the limits placed on his homeland's intellectual development.

If each chapter has a Johnnie Walker style, however, then the novel can also be read as an *asiko* proverb that criticizes Nigeria's oppressive governments as well as the West's interference in the country. Similar to *asiko* song texts, philosophical wisdom and social commentary emerge in *Graceland's* narrative (Alaja-Browne 23), while the refrains that bookend each chapter punctuate these loose ideas and string them together to make a 'meaningful whole.' This meaningful whole is made up of riffs that target globalization, the rigid gender roles defined by Igbo patriarchy, America's interest in exploiting Nigerians for personal gain rather than helping improve the neocolonial situation, and the country's association with political corruption and military coercion. These riffs take on a fluidity that resists American and neocolonial domination through ephemeral pop music references, primarily Western songs redirected by the author to challenge American foreign policy. The second refrain in chapter 28 elaborates the instability of existence, as the kola nut ritual's bystander observes,

for the Igbo, tradition is fluid, growing. It is an event, like the sunset, or rain, changing with every occurrence ... its fluid aspects resist the empiricism that is the Western way, where life is supposed to be a system of codes ... the Igbo are not reducible to a system of codes, and of meaning; this culture is always reaching for a pure lyric moment. (291)

The Igbo search for the lyric moment that defines their growing tradition and defies Western paradigms reflects Abani's own beliefs about individuality: "you're fluid and fluidity is ambiguous and ambiguity is something, particularly America, can't deal with" ("An Interview with Chris Abani"). *Graceland* uses fluctuating, postfoundationalist riffs to return agency to the oppressed and render the world unstable.

Three specific pop music references shape the world presented in *Graceland*, beginning with Bob Marley's "Natural Mystic." Elvis, who is 16 years old and music-obsessed, sings along with the first two lines: "There's a natural mystic blowing through the air / If you listen carefully now you will hear ..." before he realized "he did not know all the words" (4). Elvis is unfamiliar with existence's natural fluidity, which Marley's lyrics describe further:

This could be the first trumpet
Might as well be the last
Many more will have to suffer
Many more will have to die
Don't ask me why
Things are not the way they used to be
I won't tell no lie
One and all got to face reality now. (3–10)

This verse that Elvis cannot yet grasp foreshadows the rest of the novel, which reaches its climax in mass suffering and the deaths of his father, the King of Beggars (Elvis's friend and a resistance fighter), and the villainous Colonel. Furthermore, the line "things are not the way they used to be" highlights the present moment, while "one and all got to face reality now" insists on the importance of understanding one's situation rather than escaping it.

At the end of the novel, Elvis indeed flies away to America. However, before he can escape Nigeria to the United States, Elvis must gain an understanding of fluidity and neocolonial oppression. To do this, I suggest, Abani elaborates on the moment when Elvis is tortured by the Colonel's men (293–96). Elvis is flogged with a whip that, according to his torturer, the Fulanis use “to test who be man enough to marry” (295). The moment that transforms Elvis's person is a moment of extreme suffering at the hands of the military regime; it seems that he must confront these horrors in order to learn that “nothing is ever resolved . . . it just changes” (320). Although the Colonel calls Elvis “just a child” after the torture (296), Elvis's lyric moment brings him face to face with a violent masculinity that he manages to escape.

Two further references draw attention to recognizable political and social conditions in Lagos. Elvis whistles the theme song from *Casablanca*, a 1942 Hollywood film allegory that constructed America as a nation of refugees hoped to escape to and encouraged the country's involvement in World War II (*Graceland* 124). The reference to “As Time Goes By” in Elvis's childhood questions American involvement in the country. In 1979 Elvis is seemingly waiting for his own escape from Africa or for America to step in and relieve the strife in Nigeria. The American government, whose economic interest in the country affected its politics, could have used its influence to improve the Nigerian situation. While 1979 was the year that Nigeria received a constitution, the rest of the novel clearly indicates that this year did not mark the end of military control in Lagos. Elvis has to continue searching for the lyric moment in this earlier period, as neither Americans nor Nigerians had resolved the nation's problems.

While the reference to the theme from *Casablanca* calls attention to the West's interest in Nigeria, an allusion to a 1966 James Brown hit questions Igbo patriarchy. When Elvis dances to “It's a Man's Man's World” performed by a singer who “sounded nothing like James Brown with his high-pitched falsetto” (92), the narrative undermines Brown's lyric. The singer's pitch feminizes his voice, mocking the notion of a “man's world” and riffing on the masculine ideals presented by Elvis' father throughout the novel. Indeed, music, which Sunday reveals he

has lost touch with when he calls Elvis a “useless dancer” (80), is often used to connect and sympathize with women and give them a space in the culture. In the late 1970s, the Lijadu Sisters predicted that the number of female artists who were given an opportunity to exit the domestic sphere through music would soon outnumber the men in the industry (*Konkombe: Nigerian Music*). Elvis’s mother Beatrice reflects with her mother, Oye that “dirges” are sung by families when a daughter is born (37). The implication here stresses the family’s disappointment and metaphorically suggests all girls are stillborn in this society. Since music is not regarded as masculine, women are able to contribute to society through song. For example, Sunday allows women to join in the protest against bulldozing Maroko by singing (256). When the bulldozer prepares to crush the barricade the Maroko inhabitants built, the women begin “humming gently, swelling the men’s courage” (268). As Brown wails, “this is a man’s world / but it would mean nothing—nothing—without a woman or a girl” (2–3). Although the women remain unequal, singing does allow them to display agency and engage in political protest.

If Nigeria is a patriarchal world that places undue importance on the name as passed down from father to son, Elvis’s name and persona contradict definitions of masculinity. After Sunday tells Elvis he killed Elvis’s cousin Godfrey to defend the family name he says, “all I have to give you is my name, your name, Elvis Oke. And when I die, it will continue to help you build something for your children. Dat’s why I don’t want you to be a dancer” (188). Ironically, Elvis’s name alludes to an American musician, given to him by his mother from whom he also inherits a record player and some records (80). Elvis’s name and his interest in music distinguish his identity from the Igbo patriarchal tradition and thereby the essentialist expectations of responsibility and violence associated with it. If music is constructed as an escape from Lagos, it is a positive one that frees Elvis from being consumed by the cycle of hostility threatening the neocolonial experience.

Specific song references often speak to a particular moment in the novel, but the riffs that allude to figures in music critique Western capitalism’s connection to the Nigerian government’s over-reliance on mil-

itary coercion. *Graceland's* Colonel is a figure who embodies armed domination, the law's arbitrary and unequal application and globalization. The Colonel profits from the neocolonial situation through illegal organ harvesting. In the Redemption's words, "people like de Colonel use their position to get human parts as you see and den freeze it" (242). Through illegally exploiting fellow Nigerians, the Colonel profits in the global marketplace. The Colonel's rank and the abuse of power it allows connote an American historical figure: Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis Presley's manager. Upon meeting the Colonel in *Graceland*, Elvis wonders how the Colonel "had earned so many medals, considering the military saw so little action" (118). This suggestion of an undeserved rank also registers with Tom Parker, who received the honorary title of Colonel from his friend, Louisiana Governor Jimmie Davis (Nettles). Just as the Colonel exploited his people for profit, so Parker exploits Presley: in 1955, Parker signed Presley to an exclusive contract guaranteeing the Colonel 25 percent of the star's performance royalties as well as a percentage of Elvis' merchandising income (Szatmary 45). By the end of Presley's career, "three-quarters of Elvis' income went into Parker's pocket" (Nettles). The resemblance of the Colonel in *Graceland* to Parker accentuates him as a figure of neocolonial economic exploitation, while also connecting him to the larger trend of Western misconduct in Nigeria evident in Mohammed's assassination, the oil boom and bust, as well as contemporary slave trafficking and organ harvesting. The association between the Colonel and a ruthless capitalist from the American music scene associates the West's arbitrary behaviour with the failure of Nigeria's economy and the country's subsequent reliance on military oppression. If Abani appropriates the figure of Parker through the Colonel, his suggestion of American mismanagement is furthered in the Colonel's attempt to manage the King of the Beggars. While Parker persisted in selling Elvis to the media (Szatmary 44), the Colonel does not have the same control over the King of the Beggars.

The novel's politically rebellious King of the Beggars opposes the Colonel. The King is another hybrid figure: his name riffs on Elvis Presley's status as the "King of Rock 'n' Roll," but he is also Nigerian, anti-capitalist and missing an eye, recalling the impoverished and blind

konkombe musician, Benjamin Kokuru. Often considered the biggest influence on Lagos's contemporary musicians (*Konkombe: Nigerian Music*), Kokuru enjoys a status similar to Presley, but refuses the wealth. Both musical influences are brought together in the King of the Beggars, who represents the biggest threat to the Colonel. Much like *juju*, the King is a figure in which *konkombe* and rock 'n' roll converge, allowing him to break through boundaries of class, race, and culture just like Presley. When the King makes his final stand against the Colonel, his manipulation of the media allows him to spread anti-hegemonic ideas across cultures to white Westerners as well as his countrymen. The King leads the protest "singing in a deep baritone" (299). The protest takes a call-and-response form when the King insists "we want democracy!" and the mob echoes "Yes, democracy, no more army" (300). The anti-militaristic dialogue only continues because the Colonel feels "it would not do to have an assassination taped, especially by the BBC. It would affect foreign investments, and his bosses wouldn't take kindly to that" (300), although the Colonel would prefer to "blow the bastard's head right off" (302). In calling the King a bastard and wanting to kill him, the Colonel recognizes the hybrid threat he presents: the King currently has the Nigerian people on his side and could easily attract foreign sympathy if the media were to film his slaying. The Colonel fears such coverage, especially by the internationally broadcast BBC, will result in additional financial withdrawals by foreign investors and in turn retribution from his superiors. The fear that the King instills in the Colonel is a reminder of the repression that occurs in Nigeria as a result of ruling-class inefficiency and Western economic abandonment. Abani's Beggar King, therefore, is able to desegregate Nigeria and the advantaged West through a multi-layering of cultural icons and voices to spread awareness regarding his people's oppression. In stabbing the Colonel in the throat, the King becomes an agent who silences this military figure's hegemonic voice.

Graceland's assortment of musical references form an amalgamation of Western pop and *konkombe* into a hybrid soundscape that challenges the interaction between Nigeria and its people as well as Nigeria and the United States. Allusions to figures in the American and Lagos music scenes generate a dialogical protest against Western capitalism's encour-

agement of Nigeria's oppressive government, reminiscent of the antimonies found in *afrobeat* music (see Olaniyan). The Western music that pervades Nigeria is also reflected back on the United States to accuse Americans of imposing themselves economically on other cultures while refusing to come to their aid economically in times of crisis. Abani also utilizes the customary Igbo search for a lyric moment to shape his post-foundationalist novel and challenge the bastardization of his nation through Western influence with its own traditional beliefs. The book's fusion of the Western novel's aesthetic with a Yoruban *juju* structure equalizes the two art forms and thereby African and American culture. The hybridity in *Graceland* blends *asiko* song, Igbo tradition, and pieces from America, Nigeria, and Jamaica within a novel shaped by Yoruban *juju* to surpass binary dialectics and combat the oppression visited on neo-colonial subjects through globalization and abusive governments. By riffing on Nigeria's neo-colonial situation *Graceland* constructs music as a weapon of the future for resisting globalization, political corruption, and cultural violence. Considering Abani's own desire to subvert aesthetic traditions, one of the novel's contributions to postcolonial literature is its incarnation of a bastardized form to contest the ills of a bastardized world.

Notes

- 1 Waberi, a well-known Djibouti writer, suggested that novelists born after 1960, the emblematic year of Africa's political independence from Europe, be called "*les enfants de la postcolonie*" (8). Adesanmi has drawn further attention to Waberi's comments in his work (967).
- 2 For more information, see the special issue on third-generation Nigerian writing in *Research in African Literatures* (2007).
- 3 This is the case in other third-generation Nigerian texts; Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, for instance, refers to Fela Kuti's revolutionary hit of the same name.
- 4 For a more detailed historical summary of this period, see, for example, Abegunrin and Falola et al.

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