

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An examination of the strategic logic of nonviolent resistance in *Fela's* Afrobeat

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Abstract: This study explores Fela Anikulapo Kuti, arguably Africa's most iconic resistant artist of the twentieth century by analysing the strategic logic of Nonviolence in his responses to numerous violent attacks by the repressive and oppressive regimes of the post independent Africa, nay Nigeria. Using the conceptual tool of music as social process and philosophical tool of critical and constructive analysis, the study combines documentary data in Fela's Afrobeat and Key Informant Interview, in order to demonstrate the strategic logic of nonviolence in conflict engagement and transformation in Fela. The study argues that Afrobeat is a musical philosophy shaped by disregard for human rights and gross irresponsibility on the part of government that have manifested in Africa/Nigeria's underdevelopment since the Union Jack was lowered in 1960s. The study avers that chose to be part of politics of revolution by using his music to exude protest and persuasion, non-cooperation and intervention against injustice that has created the many problems of man and social reality. The study concludes that Fela won against the oppressed post-colonial African leaders as he was the public conscience of the oppressed Africans who have continued to win despite being repressed.

Keywords: *Fela's* Afrobeat, nonviolent resistance, nonviolent methods, popular consciousness

1 Introduction

For three decades, Fela was the musical voice of Nigeria's poor, downtrodden, unemployed and marginalised, singing about the abject conditions of existence in one of the richest African countries. He relentlessly criticized government corruption, multi-national corporations, and police brutality in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. He used music as a weapon to promote human rights, good governance, accountability and transparency in Nigeria and the rest of Africa. Afrobeat is the name given to the musical performance and the cultural atmosphere that permeates the saga of the acclaimed musical icon, a griot, a quintessential philosopher and the patron priest of the sacred *Afrika Shrine*. Afrobeat persists due to the insistence of Afrobeat audiences. By 1971, Fela's musical career was redirected and it exploded in terms of quantity and quality of output, notably marks the beginning of his own style of music, Afrobeat.

Fela's biography reflects social reality and social processes in Nigeria. Biographical experience results from a combination of several phenomena, one of the most important of which is the individual consciousness which not only structures his perception and interpretation of the world, but also motivates his specific social action. The first factor is attributable to Fela's family background, which he thought as strict: which can be couched in the proverbial "spear the rod and spoil the child". Fela grew up with her activist mother and father. In 1960, Nigeria gained its independence from England in no small part due to the activism of his mother- Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, a central figure in the life of Fela (Moore, 1982, p. 55). Hence, Fela was moved by the large evolution that pervaded the black world in the 1960s, and he chose to be part of the politics of revolution which was consequent upon that fundamental change. He therefore particularly deployed his arts to contests hierarchical and class stratification in the society and proposes the redistribution of social wealth through ideology in African nationalism, Pan-Africanism among others (Olorunyomi, 2003).

Musical idiom like every cultural production has always evolved from antecedent form. Hence, Fela's music has its root in the traditional dance music of the Yoruba-*Efe Gelede* tradition of the Egba people of Nigeria, and also borrowed from a myriad of other sources, ranging from basic Nigerian traditional rhythms such as Highlife, Jazz, and rapid urbanization characterised

with westernisation. Arguably it was this cultural aura that produces Jazz and highlife music and the *Efe Gelede* that enriched Fela's mind. It is within this thinking that Fela's imaginative and professionalism in music that the history of the evolution of highlife and jazz would be incomplete without an account of Fela's impressive avant-garde labour. The influence of James Brown's protest music and its ideological Pan-Africanist undertone is evident in Fela's allusion to his song "*Black and Proud*" that made him come to a conclusion that "that's what is gonna happen in Nigeria soon o, I saw it clearly. That's why I said to myself, I have to be very original and clear myself from all this shit" (Grass, 1982, p. 32). The instant result of this is his dissatisfaction with Highlife Jazz as a name for his music which he felt does not connote the kind of music and the culture he has sets out to make.

Another strong influence on Fela is Sandra Isadore, whose personal sacrifice for a larger political cause made a big impression on Fela. Given Sandra's gender, Fela retorted "I got jealous. How could a woman do that and a man like me cannot do it, a man like me" (Moore, 1982). Sandra became Fela's mentor; she introduced him to the history, ideas, literature and personalities of the black struggle for civil rights. Fela absorbed all these and in the process learned even more about himself. Sandra can be said to be the midwife of this personal self-rediscovery.

Significant influence on Fela was the mental shift he had after when he read the book *The Autobiography of Malcom X*, that contained a gripping expanse chronicles of the uplifting transformation of Malcom from a life of petty thievery and hustling to that of a spiritual leader and internationally recognised political spokesperson of the American struggle against racism and for equality. This, no doubt, gives birth to Fela's Pan-Africanist agenda that an endless pleas or meekness would never secure blacks' independence determination, cultural self-confidence. This can only be attained through active struggle, and by any means necessary. Worthy of note is that the ideology that was preached here shares strong affinity with Frantz Fanon's philosophical position on pan-Africanism- an untamable, inassimilable Negro who "knocks down the system and breaks the treaties" (Fanon, 1967). Thus, Fela knew that Malcom is in the era of constraint was able to pluck freedom for himself and lived it so his people could borrow his example. His influence on Fela was incalculable. It is on this that Fela retorted "this is a man, I wanted to be like Malcom X, you know . . . I wanted to be Malcom X, I was so unhappy that this man was killed" (Moore, 1982). This is the event that grandly exposed Fela to black consciousness and this largely influenced his Pan-Africanist ideology. Fela discussed the ideological underpinnings in and held at a high esteem the writings and other ideological literature of Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and other radical Pan-Africanist texts as the sacred book that serve as guide for what he would later become.

Moreover, it is in the foregoing connection between black nationalism and black music, in which both the music and the star status of performers were made part of the weapon of struggle, particularly that of James Brown. It is this sweeping socio-political, racial, cultural and musical education of an oppositional character that made Fela rediscovered his blackness and Africanness in a radically new way. The influences and the attendant consequences marked the birth of Afrobeat. Fela retorted to Michael Veal that "one day I sat down at the piano in Sandra's house and I said to Sandra. Do you know I have been fooling around? I have not been playing African music. So, I now want to write African music for the first time, I want to try. Then I started to write and write, I said to myself, how do Africans sing songs? They sing with chants. Now lemme chant into this song: la la la laaa" (Moore, 1982). Thus, at the level of consciousness, Fela knew he had just found the thing. This he knew with audience's reception of his composition when he saw people jumping and dancing with joy to his music.

It was in 1969 when Fela returned to Nigeria that this considerable formative experience triggered him to rename the band Africa 70, as his lyrical themes changed from love to social issues. It was at this time that he changed his name to Anikulapo, meaning: he who has carried death in his pouch, stating that his original name, Ransome, was a slave name. Thus, Afrobeat was not just a new kind of music, but a new way of looking at the world in which repressed, marginal, or tabooed themes, figures, and desires were freely acknowledged, debated and even frequently affirmed in a musically pleasurable manner, with invective and catchy phrases or words such as: *Jeun Ko Ku*, *Shakara*, *Swegbe*, *Na Poi*, *Jen wi Temi* and so on. These phrases soon gained wide spread usage. Fela knew he was blazing a trail, and apparently he thought about surprises he might have around the corner. In a very prescient track, *Jen wi Temi "Don't Gag Me"* released in 1973, he expressed his determination to pursue nonviolent interventionist course without fear.

Fela questioned the body of knowledge about the history of Africa and Africans told by the non-Africans, and embraced the Pan-African ideologically imbued ones. Fela rejected the idea of westernisation and globalisation laced with bribery and corruption which he saw as a ruse,

anesthesia or hypnotism used and sponsored by the European ideological masters to deceive and denigrate Africans. Fela is of the view that colonisation is the fundamental reason for African problem of underdevelopment as much as corruption on the part of post-colonial African leaders. Hence, Fela questioned neo-colonisation and local tyrants; Fela felt that within the context of globalisation, particularisation has its abstruse use. On the other hands, Fela noted that globalisation has some gain and therefore urged that globalisation would only make sense if Africans also make meaningful contributions to the global world. It was questioning these exigencies that formed the basis of Afrobeat's radical but nonviolent ideological outlook that made Fela become "mad" with the status quo of the military and corrupt civilian government in his native country, Nigeria. But we know from the foregoing logics and dynamics in Fela that he was logical and not mad; this lend credence to the assertion that until this country, Nigeria, calls you mad, you are not sane.

Fela has a shrewd understanding of human history and psychology with understanding of government idea of fair play and knew how to engage them in conflict. In many speeches, Fela explain the power of resistance by calling on the masses to boycott the government laws; that if everyone does that, the corrupt rulers would not be able to do anything but listen to them. In explaining why his music primarily took a political trajectory, and not one of love, he disclosed that, "I use politics in my music (Collins, 1999). That is the only way a wider audience will get acquainted with the real issues. It makes sense culturally as well. In Africa we don't really sing about love. We sing about happenings and (comment on societal issues), that is the tradition" (Veal, 2000, p. 81).

Fela deemed his music as a primary tool to communicate educative ideas and informative visions to people of African descent for them to consciously struggle to initiate positive socio-political and cultural changes in their lives to achieve empowerment and self-development (Hawkins, 2011). The clients of the shrine and listeners of Fela included the young and adventurous who, identifying with the suffering of "the sufferheads," i.e., the Black/African masses, wanted to hear the message of social change. Children of Nigerian elites, foreign diplomats, and dignitaries, political leftists, radical intellectuals, and students were also clients (Veal, 2000, p. 126). In his quest to advance his radical views on politics and culture to a larger audience, Fela started to write a column, "Chief Priest Say," in some Nigerian newspapers in the 1970s. He mentored the Young African Pioneers (YAP), a radical Pan-African and political advocacy group, and established a printing press to publish and publicize their ideas and activities. Knowing that his uncompromising stance and popularity among the awakening masses was antagonizing some powerful politicians in the country, Fela built a fence around his family house, called it the Kalakuta "Rascals" Republic, and declared it an independent state as a sign of defiance to his ideological antagonists. Fela then continued to advance his ideas about Blackism. He criticized most of the politically and economically powerful elements in Nigeria, and other African countries, for serving or acting locally in the interests of neocolonisers and multinational companies to acquire their power and deprive the masses of dignity. He criticized foreign powers, especially the U.S. and England, for continuing to undertake neocolonialist activities in Africa. Fela rhetorically asked, "What has America [and Europe] done to Africa that is bad?" He answered, "...Bringing in arms, dividing the people, wrong knowledge, bringing Christianity, bringing Jesus Christ, turning the people's minds upside down, bringing in fertilizers, doing shit, wanting to bring Western civilization here (Africa). America and England (the West) trying to brainwash Africans. You are the colonialists, you are the slave riders!" (Gegauff, 1982).

His rebellious stance antagonised some powerful elements in Nigeria and also most Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, it got him into trouble with the majority of governments in Nigeria, especially the several ruling military juntas, which led to arrests, incarcerations, and beatings by the police and military on a numerous occasions. His first brush with trouble came in 1974 when he was arrested for possession of marijuana, but lack of substantial evidence, after the police failed to find traces of the substance in his excrement, led to his discharge. He recounted his victory over the police and shameful embarrassment of the government in his song "Expensive Shit" (1974/75), which was also when he, with the line "Me I be Fela I be Black Power Man" (I am Fela I support Black Power), categorically stated that he was a proponent of the idea and movement of Black Power. His song "Alagbon Close" (1974) also mocked the criminal investigation division headquarters in Lagos, where he was incarcerated for possessing an illegal narcotic substance. In fact, Fela's charismatic anti-establishment image and lifestyle as a proponent of Black Power grew through the years.

In the 1970s, Fela became the vice-chairman of the Nigerian Association of Playwrights, Writers, and Artists and chairman of the Afro-Youth Movement and encouraged those creative artists to pursue a healthier development and celebration of African and Black creativity and

art. By preaching the need for and how to achieve national and personal development, freedom, cultural awareness, mass mobilisation, and revolution, Fela informed many lives with the militant and Afrocentric message in his music that, according to John Collins, “Everywhere he (Fela) goes, people stop what they are doing, shout his name, and give the black power salute” (Veal, 2000, p. 126). The touting of the idea of Blackism/Africanism, his open articulation of pro-Black Power ideas in his music, as well as his anti-colonial rebel-radical-prophet personae became some of the key factors that inspired a movement among some students, artists, and intellectuals in Nigeria. This movement, called Blackism, was created around 1977 and championed pan-Africanism and Negritude, intellectual and cultural radicalism, physical militancy, research and participation in African indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices, and special rites of passage.

Seeking the progress of Africa and her peoples in the diasporas, the movement aimed to reestablish pride in Black history and prevent all acts that tarnished the image of members of the Black/African nation. It also promoted the notion that Black consciousness and spirituality and an African personality were necessary tools to direct the Black/African mind and body toward Black realism and determinism. Fela suffered other arrests and harassment at the hands of the police and military in 1975. He concluded that the two coercive arms of the state were made up of unintelligent “zombies” who obeyed orders “to move, kill or die.” It was also in 1975 that he changed his name from Ransome to Anikulapo (Olaniyan, 2004, p. 80) to satirise that his persecutors-ruling elites and military could not kill him and, second, to eliminate a non-African name—a slave label from his identity as an African (Gegauff, 1982). He believed that it was wise to get rid of any non-African name he had borne because bearing such a name was antithetical to his African identity and the spirit of the message of Black Power and Blackism/Africanism. Implying that non-African names borne by Africans alienated them from the culture, he mentioned that he was first born in 1935, but his spirit did not stay on earth and he died as a baby because his father, who was a protestant minister, asked a German missionary to name him Hildegart. That act by his parents was a rejection of his spirit, which had come to earth to talk about “Blackism and Africanism, the plight of my people. “His spirit, therefore, “went to the land of spirits” (died) because he did not want to bear the name of conquerors because “I wasn’t Hildegart! ... It wasn’t for a Whiteman to give me a name...” (Moore, 2009, p. 29).

This path of name changing, which persons like Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks similarly travelled when they took the African names of Kwame Ture and Makussa Dada, respectively, definitely was one of Fela’s ways of conveying a Black Power idea to his targeted audience and community, to transcend some unproductive colonial vestiges, to celebrate Black/African cultural values, and to see beauty in themselves and African creations. After clashing with the Nigerian military/police in 1974/75, Fela satirised them, and by extension all repressive military/police establishments in Africa, in his hit song “Zombie” in 1977, just when Nigeria was receiving a lot of international delegates to attend the Festival of Black Arts and Culture in Lagos. This caricature of the mentality of the army and police, again, invited a brutal attack on Fela and residents of the Kalakuta Republic. The police and military invaded the residence, destroyed many items therein, beat the “citizens,” including Fela’s ailing mother who sustained injuries that later killed her, and desecrated the “sacred” ritual objects in the shrine of Fela.

The botched attempt of Fela to become the elected President of Nigeria. Fela, in 1978, reckoned that acquiring political power, in Nigeria, was necessary since this would serve as a catalyst for the growth of Blackism and his quest for a political and cultural revolution in Africa. Indeed, he thought that he could use such political power from the most populous and one of the richest countries in Africa to sacrifice the sovereignty of Nigeria and use its resources to advance the Pan-Africanist agenda of creating a free and powerful United States of Africa. As a proponent of Black Power who had a Pan-African orientation, Fela, like Kwame Nkrumah, believed that sound continental development planning could only be attained in Africa to serve the general interests of Blacks if the whole continent became one federally united democratic country (KII, 2018). He, thus, posited that, as continental Africans, “We should not limit our area of belonging to that small enclave cut out for us at the Berlin Conference 1884–85. Africa has to open her doors to every Black man in the world. White people... (and) European Parliament...take care of their interests... instead of Africans doing it for ourselves, we go about copying foreign values, cultural concepts which permanently endear us to the whole world... as certified slaves” (Moore, 2009, p. 150). He therefore thought that he could rely on his popularity with the masses and the YAP in Nigeria to set up a political party and to contest for the presidency of Nigeria and work for continental integration.

The military junta of the time, under the direction of the head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo, lifted the ban on political activity in Nigeria and Fela formed his party the Movement of the People (MOP) in 1978 and ran for president. Fela inscribed Black Power ideas and

symbols into his party such as patterning the party's flag colors and logo, which consisted of a clenched fist on a background of red, black and green, on those of the BPM. The MOP's four key objectives that exuded some Black Power orientations were (i) to establish cultural pride among people of African descent, (ii) to fight against corruption and remove all forms of oppression, (iii) to establish democratic and civilian rule and government, and (iv) to encourage research into traditional African culture and systems like medicine (Veal, 2000, p. 169).

Moreover, the MOP adopted Nkrumahism and African socialism as supporting ideologies. However, the military junta, which Fela had continued to criticise, and the Federal Electoral Commission, which was overseeing the transition of Nigerian politics from a military regime to a civilian government, claimed that the MOP did not meet the necessary guidelines and, therefore, invalidated Fela's candidacy. Fela believed that whether in the capacity as Nigeria's president, a position he said the corrupt foreign and local elites in Nigeria did not want him to occupy because of their greed, or as a musician, he had the "right knowledge" to give to Black people to achieve true self development (Gegauff, 1982). Although, Fela continued to dream of becoming the president of Nigeria someday, it never became a reality. What did continue, however, was his music and its primary emphasis on the achievement of international Black/African human and cultural dignity and economic and political self-reliance; the restoration of an affirmed Black/African mind, personality, and identity; and the revival of constructive indigenous African worldviews, human values, and communalism to unite the African family and defend its cultural, economic, and political interests from globalisation, privatisation, and all forces of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Appalled by how the various military governments in Nigeria trampled on the human rights of the people and how the military-led Nigerian federal government brutalized and killed Igbos who wanted to secede during the Biafra War (Nigerian Civil War) in the 1960s, Fela also directed his music against all forms of military governments in Africa. He opposed oppressive African governments, whom he said were tyrannical because they were neocolonial representatives. He claimed that he understood that racism was the reason why colonial regimes, foreign companies, and a repressive policy like apartheid exploited and oppressed Blacks/Africans. What he could not understand was why some African leaders and governments oppressed their Black/African relatives and pillaged Africa's resources-plundering he referred to as Authority Stealing (1980) (Gegauff, 1982). Appreciably, Fela's Black Power struggle, which manifested ideas and messages in intellectual responses, arguments by refutation, and rhetoric of defiance, in his songs, writings, and yabis, were therefore directed against both non-Black/-African and Black/African forms of oppression and exploitation of the wider international and continental Black/African family.

Furthermore, "Sorrow, Tears, and Blood" (1977) and "Army Arrangement" (1985) condemned the tradition of military political takeovers in Nigeria and Africa and the brutalisation of the masses and those who opposed such unconstitutional governments. Songs like "Government of Crooks" dishonored the corrupt politicians and soldiers who plundered Nigeria's oil money and by extension the natural resources of Africa, while "M.A.S.S. (Music Against Second Slavery)" and "Colonial Mentality" (1977) exposed and evaluated the negative impact of Islam on Nigerian (African) politics and power relations, the effect of slavery and neocolonialism, the looting of African people's wealth by the neocolonial and neo-slavery African leaders, and their international counterparts and multinational companies.

Finally, Fela, in one of his songs, "Vagabonds In Power" (1979), satirically changed the honorific acronym VIP (Very Important Person), borne by such corrupt African leaders, to "Vagabonds in Power." These compositions by Fela encouraged the masses to be vigilant and, in a revolutionary spirit and movement, to hold their leaders accountable for their sins of corruption, nepotism, cronyism, oppression, and connivance with foreign interests. In "I.T.T. (International Thief Thief)" (1979) Fela charged the Nigerian business mogul cum politician Moshood Abiola and Nigeria's army ruler, General Olusegun Obasanjo, with thievery, calling them "International Thieves of Authority stealing" because they colluded with multinational companies to steal Nigeria's oil money. He fearlessly deprecated the selfish activities of multinational companies in Nigeria and Africa, such as International Telephones and Telecommunications (I.T.T.), an American multinational company, for bribing government officials and civil leaders for national contracts and exporting their commercial profit, obtained from the labor of Africans and resources in Africa. Arguing in the song "Army Arrangement" that, "Few people dey fat with the money, the rest dey hungry" and "Men in foreign companies they carry our money go," Fela, in "I.T.T.," urged Nigerians and all Black/African masses, where and when applicable, to "do something about such nonsense" and to "one day deal with them (corrupt officials and plunders of Africa), well, well."

In a similar vein, “I.T.T.” and “Coffin for Head of State” (aka “Amen, Amen, Amen”) (1981) were also scathing criticisms of all African political or religious leaders who used their high offices in government and religions like Christianity and Islam to facilitate global international capitalism’s exploitation of the continent and Black/African masses of their resources, labor, money, and minds. The songs also cautioned the Black masses to be vigilant and rooted in their African cultural pride and values of spirituality, humanism, communalism, and egalitarianism in order to defeat such exploitations. Fela did not attack capitalism to favor Marxism or communism. He declared “There are many ideologies in Africa that don’t belong there. The capitalist and the communist systems have always regarded Africa as a milking cow and a territory to settle their own conflicts” (Palombit, 1981). He emphasized that all the foreign “isms,” including Marxism and Leninism, could not promote the interest of Blacks/Africans, especially those in Africa (Gegauff, 1982).

The idea of Africanism, directed toward the creation and operationalising of a progressive united international Black/African family and continent, was the key to raising the dignity of Blacks/Africans. On that reminder, he argued that, “Africa has to be united now to have any headway, but how that is going to happen is the great question.... We only need one good government. Straight and progressive clean government that knows what it is doing. No diplomacy, no compromises.... no Marxism...Leninists, no capitalism. Africanism, that is what is needed” (Gegauff, 1982).

The qualities and directions of Black internationalism, militancy, and education in Fela’s music have popularised his image. His unwavering Afrophilia, resilient ability to survive persecution from the different forces he antagonized with his criticisms, his stance as a champion of the rights of the masses (a Vox Populi), and advocacy for Black (people’s) Power have brought him recognition in the eyes of his continental and international admirers and followers. Accordingly, he has earned different monikers of awe, honor, and mystique, such as “Baba” (Father), “Abami Eda” (Strange/Spirit Person), “Omo Iya Aje” (Child of a Powerful Witch), “the King [of Afrobeat],” and the “Black President.” Fela was human and truly a man of the people. He lived, loved, and was loved, faced tribulations and non-recognition, and finally surrendered to death. His admirers and believers are as diverse as his critics and adversaries. Nevertheless, regardless of Fela’s controversial lifestyle, he did two remarkable things in his life. First, he was the main force behind Afrobeat, which has gone international and one of the most influential genre of music in contemporary world. Second, his unsurpassed resolute confidence in efficacy of nonviolence as a suppressive weapon against any repressive regime supported by his catalog/ue of anti-establishment songs dedicated to Black Power or empowerment of Black (African) people, Pan-Africanism, and the down-trodden Nigerian/African/Black sufferheads, took African popular music into the arena of political action (Collins, 2009, p. 149). Whichever perspective one utilizes to examine Fela’s efforts and contribution to the contextualisation of the idea of nonviolence, it is apparent that he and his music conveyed the BPM message of empowerment of peoples in a very forceful yet artistic way. His message was a solace to the oppressed African/Black people.

It spoke to the longings of the victimized African/Black, while challenging satisfaction from the greed of the oppressors and vanity. It was a declaration for a conscious African/Black self-realisation and actualisation in the face of colonialism, victimisation, and alienation. His was not a call for a revolution through arms and violence. It was an intellectually stimulated proclamation for mental liberation. He was a teacher-rebel, whose vision of a rehabilitated African personality and nation, which were empowered, free, and self-driven, moved him to espouse Black Power ideas. He preached that social transformation and true liberty for the African/Black nation starts with the individual’s acknowledgement of and respect for his/her African/Black self, culture, and creative energy. The Black President’s Afrobeat “sound” and its nonviolence Afrocentric messages of protests is as undisputed in the influential “teacher-rebel music” category as those of the legendary James Brown and Bob Marley. His work continues to live on as new and uplifting today and forever.

Politics has been known to have a long history of association with songs and music (Street, 2007; Eesuola, 2012). Dating back to the ancient African-Yoruba civilization, the days of Plato in Greece, and, in fact, irrespective of how far back in history one wishes to go (Conford, 1941), song has always been a formidable instrument of political expression. It has power “to activate emotional intensities” (Olaniyan, 2004, p. 5), and it “inscribes experience with greater potency than any other arts” (Olaniyan, 2004, p. 5). “Orin nii s’ aaju ijo; oun naa nii s’ aaju ote, says a popular Yoruba proverb, meaning, songs prelude dance; they also prelude politics and intrigues too. Ayu (1986) asserts that “Music has the potentiality for developing consciousness” amongst the oppressed class, while, on the other hand, “for the class in dominance, it is an extra tool for concretizing hegemony”.

Of all major aspects of politics, however, none has interacted with songs the way protest has (Lowe, 2008). Craig (1998) asserts that popular musicians “articulate the views of the powerless citizens and provide a critical discourse on national and international affairs,” while playing vital roles in “mass based socio-political movements, seeking change”. Songs have played significant roles in major protests of the world, ranging from the 1980s apartheid resistance in South Africa, to the 2010s Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan Revolts of the Middle East (Eesuola, 2012). Nations world over are saturated with history of utilizing songs and music to challenge status quos.

In Nigeria for instance, students’ activists, labour unions and civil society organizations often use songs whenever they embark on any protest: solidarity forever...we shall always fight for our rights, and their struggles have yielded several positive results. Many of Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s songs are often used by striking unions, demonstrators and protesters, as exemplified in the 2012 protest against removal of fuel subsidy where lyrics of Fela’s Army Arrangement and Shuffling and Shmiling (sic) extensively marked the procession of people around Lagos and Abuja (Arukaino, 2012, cited in Eesuola, 2015). Music–protest relation was also prominent in the United States’ Civil Rights Movements of the 1970s (Lipset, 1970, p. 72; Eesuola, 2012), and in most places where one form of resistance or protest occurs in the world today, people involved are often seen chanting songs and playing music.

2 Fela as a public conscience

Nonviolent protest in Fela brings into the open the central problems of man which escapes the categories of other understanding and calls attention to the crushing force of mass opinion, the dictates of the corporate mind, and the subtle appeal to what the masses else is saying or demanding (Collins, 1969, p. 18). It employs patient descriptive method by drawing from concrete facts of human existence which makes their works dramatic and compelling. Ghandi and others nonviolence historical figures demonstrate how the concrete moral approach is not only readily intelligible to a wide audience but has special affinity with the peace and triumph against oppression. Ghandi himself was a pacifist; while Luther delivered powerful speeches of sensitive nonviolence resistance. This allusion obviously lends credence to our belief that many of Fela’s lyrics and commentaries can be considered for an art that serves the purpose that the nonviolence historical figures did. And, the fact that nonviolence protest is core to Fela’s work, particularly his fight for freedom. Moreover, the nonviolence thoughts no doubt readily lend itself to embodiment under the various struggles which has enabled their message to spread far and beyond professional circles. With them, philosophy becomes a personal activity in which everybody can share. Thus, the artful dialogue of the nonviolence crusaders is the first step toward bringing struggles back from the land of purely formal issues to the common soul of everyday living and thinking for a peaceful negotiation and renegotiation. The nonviolence crusaders not only challenge us to revise our image of struggle but also they accommodate creative dialogue as a form of arts to their own uses: their works widen our horizons concerning the approaches possible in conflict transformation.

Afrobeat is oftentimes defined as primarily a cultural, political and musical practice, or, better still, aesthetics of cultural politics. Its performance is equally characterized by the creation of a liberal, cultural space that is admmissive of a free discussion of the society’s fears, doubts and inhibitions, be it related to governance, sex, or the yearnings of restive youth. Thus, Afrobeat is not simply a musical rhythm but a rhythm of alterity realized largely in song and musical text, and also in cultural and political action. It incorporates the amalgamated ideology of the *Kalakuta Republic/Commune* and the creative excess of the *Afrika Shrine*. In these enclaves, Fela tried to live out some of his dreams as far as the national political authorities would tolerate them. These were channels of communication as well as ways of representing the distance from the homogenising ordering of society. The volatile terrain was Fela’s regular polemic turf where he tried to re-image the continent in relation to itself and others. Fela’s imagined universe in which Africa was its epicenter takes off from an idyllic renaissance Africa with scribal culture. Fela and Afrobeat arrive with an omnibus baggage that testifies against conventional attitude to education, gender, technology, power, life and death, among others, in contemporary Africa (Olorunyomi, 2003).

Fela’s view on the crisis with Africa and Nigeria in particular is largely scattered in his public lectures, media reviews of interviews, private correspondence which engage the spectrum of ideas such as African origin of ancient civilisation, slavery and western technology, religion and *Orisa* worship, colonialism, multiple imperialism and collaborating elites and Fela version of what is to be done if Africa must get of the quagmire of underdevelopment. Fela’s musical composition and

performance are in the main resonance of this ideological outlook, an outlook well thought-out. This outlook has its underpinning in what Fela scholars have tagged *Felasophy*- the body of the ideas of Fela Kuti. Hence, Fela's conception of Afrobeat was one of a cultural praxis through which he expressed a distinct aesthetic and ideological vision of art and life.

Fela was living out and saying something right, and this was the reason he was severally abused and violated. Fela cherishes the ideals of equality, liberty and justice. Thus, in *Zombie*, he criticised Nigeria's military as a bunch of mindless brute that follow orders to shoot, kill and plunder civilians. In *Authority Stealing*, Fela compared the Nigerian leaders to armed robbers for stealing the nation's resources to with what they themselves tagged as their magic pen. In 1979, Fela formed his political party which he called Movement of the People (MOP) and put himself forward for president in Nigeria's election for more than a decade. But his candidature was rejected. Afterwards, Fela created a new band called Egypt 80 and continue to record albums and tour the country. He further infuriated the political establishment by dropping the name of the then International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) Vice President Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola and the then General Olusegun Obasanjo at the end of a hot selling 25 minutes political screed titled *ITT*. In *ITT*, Fela satirized the multinational corporation, International Telephone and Telegraph and condemned foreign companies for sucking dry the Nigerian economy and spreading confusion, corruption and inflation.

After travelling the world, in *Upside Down* (1976), *Original Sufferhead* (1982) and *Confusion Break Bones* (1990), Fela sang that things are organised and planned well everywhere except in Nigeria and Africa where there are villages but no roads, but no food or housing. Fela holds that the problem with Africa is that Africans do not even have knowledge of African culture. He describes the disorganised state of infrastructure and social service in many African countries. The African inferiority complex and debilitating psychological thralldom to European values is addressed in *Yellow Fever* (1976), which ridicules skin bleaching; *Mr. Grammarologylisation Is the Boss* (1976) professes the hegemony of European languages, especially English; and *Colonial Mentality* (1977) and *Shuffling and Shmilling* (1978) deal with mental servitude and religious charlatanism and exploitation of the masses by Christianity and Islam. The poignant *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* (1977) reveals to the world what the true 'trademark' of African dictatorial regimes really is, the main ware they sell to their people. *V.I.P* (1979) is a patient explanation of what disqualifies African leaders from being regarded as "Very Important Persons" and why they really are *Vagabonds in Power*. Economic imperialism and endemic local abuse of office to privately appropriate public wealth are the general themes of *Chop and Clean Mouth* (1979) and *Authority Stealing*. Bureaucratic corruption and nepotism are assailed in *Power Show* (1982), *Custom Check Point* (1984) and *Underground System* (1992). The process of musical chairs in which rogues as leaders are exposed in *Army Arrangement* (1985), *O.D.O.O* (Overtake Don Overtake Overtake; (1989), and in *B.B.C.: Big Blind Country* 1990. And in *Beast of No Nation* Fela criticizes the corrupt leaders in Africa and elsewhere, focuses on how certain governments have helped apartheid in South Africa for so long.

In 'Beasts of No Nation', Fela criticised corrupt leaders in Africa and elsewhere and focuses on how certain governments have helped apartheid thrive in South Africa for so long: 'Many leaders as you see dem/.../Animals in human skin/Animal-I put-U tie-oh/ Animal-I wear agbada (traditional Nigerian robe)/Animal-I put-U suit-u.' In the must-see documentary 'Fela: Music Is the Weapon', Fela said:

the situation here in Nigeria is worse; no food no water no government, the rules are being lost, people's mind is being low, newspapers are crying, armed robbers, thieves, the public think they have to take care of themselves, any thief they see, they kill, they lynch, this is wrong, this is very unAfrican, Africans don't behave like that. But I see a future and that is in the mind of everybody, subconsciously, everybody now they have to be Africans now (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfrNGST9V_E)

In retaliation for his songs, in 1977 one thousand of General Obasanjo's 'zombie' soldiers attacked Kuti's compound (the 'Kalakuta Republic', established to protest military rule), beat him to a pulp, and burned his house and everything in it. The soldiers literally threw out his 78 year-old mother, one of the notable anti-colonial figures in Nigeria, from a second-story window. She died from her injuries a few months later. His confrontational messages always got him on the wrong side of the military dictators who tried to find reasons to put him in jail. However, in all these, Fela never fought back with violence because of his believe that violence is unAfrican.

Fela titled his 1988 album 'Music is the Weapon of the Future'. He believed that African musicians could play a pivotal frontline role in the struggle for human rights, the rule of law, accountability and transparency in the continent with their lyrics and music. He held a belief that

Africans today need new sounds to draw from his inspiration against home grown dictators and tyrants who cling to power like barnacles to a sunken ship. In the mid-1980s, Fela sang about leaders who are 'animals in human skin'. In the second decade of the 21st Century we know the actual physical form of the 'animals' he was talking about. They are hyenas that sip on the blood of Africans like wine and dine on their flesh and bones everyday. Going by the foregoing, if music be the food of life, and if music be the weapon of the future, Africa cannot but sing on until we chase the greedy and corrupt scavengers out of the continent. Hence, Africa needs a new generation of Marleys, Felas and Makebas to give a new message of hope, faith and charity. And Africa's youth need new songs and hymns to fight the hyenas in designer suits and uniforms.

Fela's political views evidently borrowed heavily from Che Guevara's and Bob Marley's. Fela was a supporter of traditional religion and lifestyle as he thought that the most important thing for Africans is to fight European cultural imperialism. Hence, his support for socialism and call for a united democratic African Republic. Fela was a candid supporter of human rights, and many of his songs are direct attack on dictatorship, specifically the militaristic government of Nigeria in the 1970's and 1980's. Fela was a social commentator who criticized his fellow Africans especially the upper class for betraying traditional African culture. The African culture, he believed, is also inclusive of having many wives.

The obvious outcome of the social production of Afrobeat is what result in the uniqueness of Afrobeat lies in the social production embodied in the musical performance lies in the fact that Fela's scene was more than a musical show; it was genuinely an alternative scene where you have an open air club comparable to the communal rock vibe. Hemp was thick in the air, flags from all the African nations ringing the courtyard with the stage with Africa 70 which was just a pretty awesome spectacle, and that would go on for hours till dawn. There were raised platforms with young women gyrating, almost like a go-go platform. There was a real sense of rapport between Fela and his audience. Before performance, there would be a ceremony, a libation to the ancestors and some sort of consecration. He would puff hemp or cigarette and talk for about twenty or thirty minutes about whatever was going on at that time, the police attack or something the government was doing, anything that was on his mind (KII, 2018). It was this showmanship that characterized Fela's concert that made it outlandish and wild. Indeed, it was an underground spiritual groove where performance is followed by saxophone's solo playing and Fela would play keyboard for a while, after which he would take to the mike and go into the main melody of the song with a lot of calls and responds.

Fela left a significant impact that promotes a culture of social criticism that is nonviolent (KII, 2018). However Afrobeat though has considerably changed, it still holds on to certain original ideals and tenet (Olorunyomi, 2003, p. 220). It is a fact that long after Fela's death, he has remained an underground story within and outside Nigeria. This is obvious of the annual musical celebration called *Felabration* which is done in commemoration of the life and times of Fela. More so, within the understanding of Fela; a musical culture that reflect nonviolent struggle to the core, we may conclude this part by holding that pitching tent with the opinion that Fela's music was certainly timeless, it leaves behind much to ponder and few can matter that much to music but to exist, particularly when it comes to discussing freedom and nonviolent protest (Garcia, 1987, p. 40).

Fela's rebellious and anarchical stance can be misunderstood for structural violence especially if the intricacies of the social production of his music that was characterised with weed, sex and women are considered. Such anarchical posture characterised the life of a rebel like the foremost existentialists such as Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche and Frantz Fanon that held out an untamable life of alterity which stood in extreme opposition to what we have in Ghandi- a sheer display of passive resistance to all forms of oppression, and seen as a hero of diplomacy. However, while Fela was a mind shaped in resistance by the torment of both personal and perceived social injustice and inequality and general hardship especially on his music that characterised the post-independent military era in Africa, his anarchism never responded violence with violence. With the military dictatorship, tyranny, favoritism, nepotism, internecine ethnic and civil war in Nigeria and the loss of traditional values and beliefs about the nature of knowledge, man and his place in the universe are factors that tend to impair the destiny of individual existence and provoke the idea that man is adrift in an absurd universe. Such is the climate of thought and feeling inspired, at least in part, by the spirit of radical negation (the obsession with nothingness) that characterises Sartre, Camus and Neitsche, but unlike Fela who felt that we can undo the undoings of authority.

From the foregoing analysis of the conceptual and theoretical praxis of anarchism, we can begin to test its ideological underpinnings against the Afrobeat's worldview. Fela challenged the statute books in the court; in fact, his regular site of struggle was positing alternative ways

of living and actually living in alterity to the norm. Fela created a communal resident named *Kalakuta Republic*, and did partake in sharing and living out the communal values and ideals with brethren and other residents for the Nigerian State and its prebendal elites who occasionally visit the Kalakuta. This practice is in obvious consonance with the anarchist ideals. Another important instance of his anarchism is the sympathy he had for the then Republic of Biafra which he desired to have succeeded in breaking out of the Nigerian state.

Another display of such anarchical non-conformist habit is his indiscriminate open smoking of the Indian Hemp or Marijuana or the NNG; the illicit drug according to the government, and the sheer encouragement given to the society at large to acknowledge it as a medicinal herb as against the government disapproval and ban. This Fela did by confounding the state's counsel who on checking their statute book, could not find any trace of NNG (Nigerian National Grass) as Fela came to rename it. Similarly, Fela related the idea of being African to the idea of the original or early man, who was free, unencumbered by conventions and apparatus of containment-meaning government. We know that in spite of Fela's forays in political groups and organisations, he is essentially a bohemian, but a nonviolent one; not believing in the other's grand narrative, he would always settle to challenge individual instances of oppression, snatching the helmet of a 'rude' policeman, and commissioning a driver to cruise around town with a Mercedes Benz fixed with a carriage to convey fuel in order to rubbish a symbol of elitism (Olaniyan, 2004, p. 24). His interventionist stance is often realised in his lyrical discourse as the troubadour in quest for truth. It usually comes off as "me Fela, I will challenge . . ." as we find in *Army Arrangement*. Apparently having frequently succeeded in a mode of advocacy, he elevated the form into a theory of living.

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