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# NONVIOLENT PROTEST IN AFRICA: ECHOES AND LESSONS FROM FELA ANIKULAPO KUTI[1]

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**Abstract:** This study examines the intersection of popular music, social movement and protest by analysing the numerous protest music produced and performed by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Africa's most iconic resistant artist of the twentieth century. It engages the core questions of right, injustice and inequality that have manifested in Nigeria's underdevelopment since the Union Jack was lowered in 1960. It argues that Fela's music did have an obvious impact on Nigerian masses who attempted to revise or renegotiate their relationship with the Nigerian state. Yet, it posed hitherto unanswered questions of the changing meaning of social movement in relation to artistic production - an aspect of peace studies

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that scholars have completely overlooked. It concludes that as people reconfigure social relations from one stage to another in their life, their engagement with the State and the social meaning attributed to social justice, which Fela's music emphasised, also change. Thus, popular consciousness shaped by resistant music is not immutable to nonviolent social protest. Rather, it continued to change as individuals and groups reconstitute their relationship with the society, and as their social status was transformed in accordance with the acquisition of better education, wealth/resources, among other significant elements that shape human's consciousness.

**Keywords:** *Nonviolence, Protest, Consciousness, Fela, Afrobeat*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING NONVIOLENCE

Nonviolence is a powerful philosophy and strategy for protest that rejects the use of physical violence. The basic principle of nonviolence not only encompasses an abstinence from using physical force to achieve an aim, but also a full engagement in resisting opposition, domination and any other form of injustice. This points to the fact that nonviolent protests downgrade the use of physical force. It is a personal practice of being harmless to oneself and to others under every condition which comes from the belief that hurting people, animals or the environment is unnecessary to achieve a goal. It also refers to a philosophy of abstinence from violence based on moral, religious or spiritual principles.

Nonviolent action is a set of techniques of struggle, blend together into campaign. Nonviolence is taken to be the most powerful means available to those struggling for freedom, not only from the grips of dictatorship, but also from the grips of governance characterised by corruption and greed, marginalisation, obnoxious policies, economic inequalities, human insecurities and above all violence. One can arguably say that achieving a society with both freedom and peace is not a simple task, it requires great strategy and skill, organisation and planning, and above all, it requires power. Strategic and peaceful planning of a nonviolent struggle is vital in defining the trajectory to freedom. It is on record that nonviolent struggles have been waged on behalf of myriads of causes and groups, and even for objectives many people rejects.

There are two approaches to nonviolence, the principled and pragmatic approaches. The principled approach emphasises human harmony and a moral rejection of violence and force or coercion; while the pragmatic approach views conflicts as normal and sees the rejection of violence as an efficient means or way of confronting or challenging power. Principled nonviolence underscores human harmony, moral rejection of violence and coercion, while pragmatic nonviolence views the rejection of violence as an effective way of challenging power. Nonviolence strategies have emerged in confronting unfair treatment and injustice, through the actions and thought of people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama and others, where some methods and approach have become obvious. Practitioners of nonviolent protest have an entire arsenal of nonviolent weapons at their disposal. There are about 198 nonviolent methods, classified into three broad categories: i. nonviolent protest and persuasion, ii. noncooperation (social, economic and political), and iii. nonviolent intervention.

Nonviolent protest and persuasion involves the use of symbolic gestures and actions that are intended to show peaceful opposition to a policy or a law, while at the same time persuading others (among the opponents or the grievance group) into particular views or action. Here we have: formal statements that include public speeches and petitions, communication that include slogans, posters, pamphlets, radio, television, and symbolic acts that include display of flags and colours, the mounting of pressure on individuals including: fraternization, vigil, and public assemblies and processions under the form form of marches and protest meetings.

Noncooperation involves denial actions that deliberately aim to restrict, discontinue, withhold or defy certain existing relationships. It may occur in the social realms in which case we have noncooperation with social events and institutions, withdrawal from social institutions and stay-at-home protest. The noncooperation may also target economic relations through labour strikes. Another form of noncooperation involves rejection of authority, political boycott, civil disobedience of legitimate laws, mutiny and severance of diplomatic relations.

Nonviolent intervention shares the attributes of direct physical obstructions aimed at changing a given situation. This may be done negatively through disruption of normal or established social relations, or positively through creative actions that seek to forge new autonomous social relations. When employed, this set of methods can bring about a

more rapid change, but they are also harder for a resister to sustain and can provoke a more severe repression. In this category, we have: psychological intervention, for example: self inflicted suffering such as fasting; physical intervention which may involve sit-ins, nonviolent invasion, obstruction and occupation, and "constructive programmes which have to do with establishing alternative practices, social relations and institutions, for example underground education system, alternative markets and parallel governments.

In this work we are attempting to examine the connections between the music and performance of Fela Anikulapo Kuti and his nonviolent political intervention, relating them to the controversies generated by his use of music and performance for radical political protest. It tries to give account of the profound but paradoxical affinities Fela has felt about the significance of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, thereby exploring Fela's artistic sensibilities of the pervasiveness of representational ambiguity and exuberance within a prevailing political context. The analyses and evaluations of this study are presented in the context of Fela's sustained nonviolent engagement with the violence of collective experience in post-independence, postcolonial Nigeria and the developing world. This would be achieved through locating Fela and his music within the discourse on nonviolent protest especially in relation to the distinctive idea and practice of alterity, counterculture, freedom, public speeches, communication, noncooperation and nonviolent intervention, characteristic of some level of anarchism that characterizes Fela. We affirm that Fela was not a hippie that merely led an anarchical movement with a baseless and non-ideological political interest, but one with nonviolent philosophy like Gandhi and Martin Luther King. We argue that some ideological struggle influences on Fela such as black consciousness and awareness, black movement/negritude are resistant pacifist movements such as those of Gandhi and King, but not violent like Frantz Fanon would admonish. We therefore take seriously a discussion of Fela's emancipator nonviolent protests' contribution to human wellbeing, a core ingredient of positive peace that Galtung posited. We conclude that Fela quintessentially symbolises nonviolence, a philosophy that demands that we "fight" for justice but rejects the use of violence, and instead seeks to bring about change through peaceful responses even to violent acts.

Fela Anikulapo Kuti (born Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti; 15 October 1938 - 2 August 1997), also known as Abami Eda, was a Nigerian musician, bandleader, composer, political activist, and Pan-Af-

ricanist. He is regarded as the King of Afrobeat, a Nigerian music genre that combines West African music with American funk and jazz. At the height of his popularity, he was referred to as one of Africa's most "challenging and charismatic music performers". He is often described as "a musical and socio-political voice" of international significance (Balogun & Ademowo, 2023). Kuti was the son of Nigerian women's rights activist Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. After early experiences abroad, he and his band Africa 70 (featuring drummer and musical director Tony Allen) shot to stardom in Nigeria during the 1970s, during which he was an outspoken critic and target of Nigeria's military juntas. In 1970, he founded the Kalakuta Republic commune, which declared itself independent from military rule. The commune was destroyed in a 1978 raid that injured Kuti and his mother. He was jailed by the government of Muhammadu Buhari in 1984, but released after 20 months. He continued to record and perform through the 1980s and 1990s. Since his death in 1997, a compilation of his music have been overseen by his son, Femi Kuti.

Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti was born into the upper-middle-class Nigerian Ransome-Kuti family, on 15 October 1938 in Abeokuta (the modern-day capital of Ogun State, which at the time was a city in the British Colony of Nigeria). His mother, Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was an anti-colonial feminist, and his father, Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, was an Anglican minister, school principal, and the first president of the Nigeria Union of Teachers. Kuti's parents both played active roles in the anti-colonial movement in Nigeria, most notably the Abeokuta Women's Riots which was led by his mother in 1946. His brothers Beko Ransome-Kuti and Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, both medical doctors, were well known nationally. Kuti is a cousin to the writer and laureate Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Prize for Literature winner. They are both descendants of Josiah Ransome-Kuti, who is Kuti's paternal grandfather and Soyinka's maternal great-grandfather.

Kuti attended Abeokuta Grammar School. In 1958, he was sent to London to study medicine but decided to study music instead at the Trinity College of Music, the trumpet being his preferred instrument. While there, he formed the band Koola Lobitos and played a fusion of jazz and highlife. In 1960, Kuti married his first wife, Remilekun (Remi) Taylor, with whom he had three children (Femi, Yeni, and Sola). In 1963, Kuti moved back to the newly independent Federation of Nigeria, re-formed Koola Lobitos, and trained as a radio producer for the Nige-

rian Broadcasting Corporation. He played for some time with Victor Olaiya and his All-Stars.

He called his style Afrobeat, a combination of Fuji music, funk, jazz, highlife, salsa, calypso, and traditional Yoruba music. In 1969, Kuti took the band to the United States and spent ten months in Los Angeles. While there, he discovered the Black Power movement through Sandra Smith (now known as Sandra Izsadore or Sandra Akanke Isidore), a partisan of the Black Panther Party. This experience heavily influenced his music and political views. He renamed the band Nigeria 70. Soon after, the immigration and naturalization Service was tipped off by a promoter that Kuti and his band were in the US without work permits. The band performed a quick recording session in Los Angeles that would later be released as The '69 Los Angeles Sessions.

## 2. LOCATING FELA IN THE TRADITION OF NONVIOLENCE STRUGGLE IN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

Nigerian songwriter, singer and musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti was a talented and inspiring musical innovator and political advocate. He was inspired by the protest songs and political upheavals in the US in the 1960s (Ayobade, 2017; Awuni, 2014). For three decades, Kuti became the musical voice of Nigeria's poor, downtrodden, unemployed and marginalised. He sang about the abject conditions of existence in one of the richest African countries. He relentlessly criticised 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 (Balogun, 2018; Coker, 2014). 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* (Balogun, 2012). 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, and notably marks the beginning of his own style of music, Afrobeat (Olorunyomi, 2002).

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 (Alimi & Anthony, 2013; Adewumi, 2000). 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 (Carlos, 1982). 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 regarding that fundamental change. He therefore particularly deployed his arts to contest hierarchical and class stratification in the society and proposed the redistribution of social wealth through ideology in African nationalism, Pan-Africanism among others (Olorunyomi, 2005).

Like every cultural production, the musical language has always evolved from antecedent forms. Hence, Fela's music has its roots 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 by westernization (Olorunyomi, 2005). Arguably it was this cultural aura that produced jazz and highlife music and the *Efe Gelede* that enriched Fela's mind. It is within this thinking that Fela's imagination and professionalism in music developed, and 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 obvious 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" (Olaniyan, 2004). The instant result of this is his dissatisfaction with Highlife Jazz as a name for his music which he feels 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" (Olorunyomi, 2002). Sandra became Fela's mentor; she introduced him to the history, ideas, literature and personalities of the black struggle for civil rights. Fela ab-

sorbed all these and in the process learned even more about himself (Mabinuori, 1986). Sandra can be said to be the midwife of this personal self rediscovery.

Significant influence on Fela was the mental shift he had after reading the book *The Autobiography of Malcom X*, that contained gripping and extended chronicles of the uplifting transformation of Malcom from a life of petty thievery and hustling to that of a spiritual leader and internationally recognized political spokesperson of the American struggle against racism and for equality (Sithole, 2012; Schoonmaker, 2003; Collins, 2009). This, no doubt, gives birth to Fela's Pan-Africanist agenda that endless pleas or meekness would never secure blacks' independence determination, and 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 (Afolayan & Falola, 2022; Jaboro, 2009; Grass, 1986). Thus, Fela knew that in the era of constraint Malcom 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" (Hawkin, 2011). This is the event that grandly exposed Fela to black consciousness and largely influenced his Pan-Africanist ideology. Fela discussed the ideological underpinnings of this. and held at high esteem the writings and other ideological literature of Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and other radical Pan-Africanist texts as the sacred books that serve as guide for what he would later become (Afolayan & Falola, 2022; Labinoh, 2012).

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 rediscover his blackness and Africanness in a radically new way (Labinoh, 2012). These 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" (Olorunyomi, 2002). Thus, at the level of consciousness, Fela knew he had just found the thing. This was confirmed by the audience 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 the surprises he might find 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 entwined 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 considered that colonisation has contributed to the African problem of underdevelopment as much as corruption at the level of selecting the leaders is the bane of all the social ills. Hence, Fela questioned neo-colonisation and local tyrants; Fela felt that within the context of globalisation, particularisation has its abstruse use (Tenaille, 2002; Tchal-Gadjieff &Flori, 1982). Fela therefore urged that globalisation and westernisation only make sense if Africans also make meaningful contributions to the global world. It was these questioning exigencies that formed the basis of Afrobeat's radical but nonviolent ideological outlook what made him 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.

In Afrobeat the will to articulate, to name the incredibility of violence perpetuated by the postcolonial authority, and thereby inscribe its vulnerability is obvious (Veal, 2000; Veal, 1996). This Fela did as he expressed his objective opinion on the overthrow or at least the amelioration of the reign of the military governments and all forms of oppression. It is for this reason that Fela remains Africa's most controversial popular musician. Fela was a political musician who devoted his musical resources to evoking, interrogating, and pronouncing judgments on the partisan political arrangement and attendant social relations of his times. In doing the historiography of Fela and Afrobeat, one can see the multidimensionality of Fela's career by recognising distinct, yet related, phases of his career at the levels of style and ideology. These are mutually embedded, note that it does not mean they are collapsible for it is possible for a particular style to support a variety of ideological positions. We consider this by showing the distinctive sonic and extra sonic features and the different social and historical circumstances that were produced and given depth. Worthy of consideration is the instance of the dramatic nature of Fela's life- the chameleonic, roller-coster stylistic and ideological changes, coupled with the politically charged lyrics and the antiestablishment politics, the many encounters with the law, the twenty-seven wives, the open marijuana-use culture, and the general flamboyantly nonconformist lifestyle explained in tandem with the social production of Afrobeat (Olaniyan, 2004; Eesuola, 2018; 2015; 2012).

Fela tackles the nature of the postcolonial state and the character of its bureaucracy, the relationship between arts, especially oppositional arts and the state: sex, gender, class, and oppositional politic; cities and citizenship; democracy and (dis)empowerment; music, pedagogy, and cultural identity; history, memory, and the fashioning of new subjectivities; the complex interaction of racial and cultural identities; authenticity and hybridity; popular culture and the possibility of radical politics; the sociology and psychology of counterculture; language, cultural imperialism, and postcolonial modernity; and nationalism, afrocentricism, and cosmopolitanism (Olaniyan, 2004). To listen to Fela's music is to listen to the biography of the postcolonial African state; an account of the state's crisis-ridden life so far as seen by an oppositional music, for it is entirely a product of his cultural milieu (Street &Savign, 2007). This is in consonance with Labinoh's position that Fela's biography reflects something of the underlining nature of social reality and social processes in Nigeria. Biographical experience results from a combination of several phenome-

na, one of which is the individual consciousness which not only structured his perception and interpretation of the social world, but also motivated his specific social action (Labinoh, 2012). It is noteworthy that Fela was moved by the large evolution of social consciousness that pervaded the black world in the 1960's. And he chose to be part of the politics of evolution which brought about that fundamental change. It became obvious that the immediate setting for that revolution (and for shaping Fela's consciousness) was the United States and the immediate revolution was that of black Americans. Since Fela was not an American, he felt it more relevant to transfer his own revolutionary struggles to his own society where the conditions were different from those of the United States. Fela had to devise his own type of revolutionary, but non violent, struggle suitable to his own environment, as well as the possibilities of his own existential condition. It is for this reason that Braimoh Lasisi argued that Fela is a poet, although a misunderstood one (Lasisi, 2003). Poets in this sense are some form of musicians with liberty of thought and action. If this is the case, we consider poets to have social relevance that has resistance (violent and nonviolent) as one of its ideological underpinnings. We believe that poets understand what is happening and what is at stake even more clearly, perhaps, than historians and anthropologists, as they have been found to provide practical insight and solutions to societal problems become imperative to note. Evidence of this is the active involvement of protest songs of the 1960s against social oppression (Fechlin, 2003; Grass, 1986).

Thus, it is worthy of note that a dedicated poet does not exist in a vacuum; he must be grounded on knowledge – i.e. classics, travel abroad, be at ease among all sorts and conditions of men, and experience not only the horrors of thwarted passion but, if he is fortunate, the tranquil love of an honest woman. Robert Graves was right to affirm that:

> dedicated poets are vates; meaning a good deal more than a poet. A vate is a prophet, one divinely possessed: one who must speak the truth, however strange or distasteful, and sometimes granted vision both of the future and the past. A dedicated poet would limit his loyalties to those reconcilable with his worship of Goddess "whose service is perfect freedom". However, he noted that poets, who decided to live by poetry and remain otherwise uncommitted, should not understand "live by" in a funeral sense. Apollo would make them rich and fame would secure them an honorable place in the curriculum- even name ages after them (Craig, 2009, p. 28).

These are true about Fela's music. Qualities such as fervency, broad-mindedness, stubbornness, imaginative freedom, originality, courage and humour characterised Fela.

Nonviolent protest in Fela brings into the open the central problems of man which escape the categories of other understanding and call attention to the crushing force of mass opinion, the dictates of the corporate mind, and the subtle appeal to what the masses are saying or demanding (Collins, 1969). It employs patient descriptive method by drawing from concrete facts of human existence which makes their works dramatic and compelling. Gandhi and other nonviolent 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. Gandhi himself was a pacifist; while Luther King 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 as an art that serves the purpose that the nonviolent historical figures did (Afolayan and Falola, 2022; Olaniyan, 2004). And the fact that nonviolent protest is core to Fela's work, particularly his fight for freedom. Moreover, the nonviolence thoughts no doubt readily lend themselves to embodiment under the various struggles which have enabled their message to spread far and beyond professional circles. With them, philosophy becomes a personal activity 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 art for their own purposes: their works widen our horizons concerning the possible approaches 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 admissive 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 a scribal culture. Fela and Afrobeat arrive with an omnibus baggage that testifies against the conventional attitude towards education, gender, technology, power, life and death, among others, in contemporary Africa (Olorunyomi, 2002).

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's version of what is to be done if Africa must rise from the quagmire of underdevelopment. Fela's musical composition and performance are in the main resonance of this ideological outlook, a well thought-out outlook. This outlook has its underpinning in what Fela scholars have tagged *Felasophy, i.e.* 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 why he was abused and violated many times. Fela cherishes the ideals of equality, liberty and justice. Thus, in *Zombie*, he criticized Nigeria's military as a bunch of mindless brutes 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; what they themselves tagged as their magic pen. In 1979, Fela formed his political party that he named 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 continued 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 Tele-

phone and Telegraph and condemned foreign companies for sucking dry the Nigerian economy and spreading confusion, corruption and inflation (Olatunji 2009).

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, 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 services 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 *Shuffering 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. In *Beast of No Nation* Fela criticizes the corrupt leaders in Africa and elsewhere, and focuses on how certain governments have helped apartheid in South Africa for so long (Olrunyomi, 2002).

'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 (Olatunji, 2009, p. 9).

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 (Aderinto, 2013). 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 belief 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 (Balogun, 2012; Aderinto, 2013). 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 protest against European cultural imperialism. Hence his support for socialism and a call for a united democratic African Republic. Fela was a candid supporter of human rights, and many of his songs are direct attacks 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 results in the uniqueness of Afrobeat — 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 do 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. 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. However Afrobeat thought has considerably changed, it still holds on to certain original ideals and tenet (Olorunyomi, 2002, p. 212). It is a fact that long after Fela's death, he has remained an underground story within and outside Nigeria. This is obvious due to 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 reflects 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 things can matter that much to music but to exist, particularly when it comes to discussing freedom and nonviolent protest.

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 by marijuana, sex and women, are considered. Such anarchical stand 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 Gandhi — 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, internal 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 Nietzsche, 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 residence 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 could have succeeded in obtaining independence from the Nigerian state.

Another display of such anarchical non-comformist habit is his indiscriminate open smoking of the Indian Hemp or Marijuanna 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 found 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 was 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.

Fela's own kind of nonviolent protest in noncooperation and intervention is simply a commitment to freedom in a nonviolent manner that was not going to make compromise because intervention required him to do so. However, the contradiction lies in the fact that Fela himself was a man who used authority: people respect and deferred him and that gave him the freedom to act outside the code he created for his followers. We see that the primary and general fans followed him but Fela and Afrobeat's charisma hardly had a leader, at least not an immediate visible authority. We can rarely discuss anarchism within the confines of liberty and other paraphernalia without a mention of social justice and human right anchored on the ideals of nonviolence. Hence, what is social justice, and in what way was Afrobeat a song advocating for social justice and human rights?

## 3. POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS AND NONVIOLENCE IN FELA

Exigent interpretations and understanding of Afrobeat vis a vis popular consciousness and nonviolence can be understood from the spectacles of the ideals of existentialisism. It was Sartre who saw human freedom in terms of negation, nihilation and nothingness. Hence Sartre wrote that

> freedom is the capacity of negation, nihilation which is characteristic of the being for itself. The foundation of freedom is nothingness. If the will is to be free then it is of necessity. Negation provides the possibility of imagination, especially the possibility of imagining a situation differently from the existing one, and thus power of negation and imagination is identical with human freedom (Sartre, 1956).

This means that man is outside of the universal causal order since he has the possibility of negating it. This power of negation (which is identical with freedom) is rooted in the nothingness which man carries within him. Within this confine, Sartre does not see freedom as a faculty of the soul or a property of the will, it is not something that man has but something that he is. Thus, man does not simply have freedom as a quality; he is freedom, for freedom is identical with his being. Thus, Sartre writes that *Freedom,- I sought it far away: it was so near that I could not touch it, that I can't touch it- it is in fact myself, I am my freedom* (Sartre, 1956, p. 516).

Sartre also informs us that man's freedom is accompanied by a heavy and inestimable responsibility and a disturbing anguish. Thus, *responsibility and choice* inevitably go with freedom, for to be free is to be responsible since human or individuals' reaction to each situation count whether or not he knows the cause. It makes it possible for a free being to refuse to choose since refusal to choose is itself a choice already made. Therefore, freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing, not to choose is in fact to choose not to choose (Sartre, 1956, p. 548; Agulana, 2001, p. 147). This freedom consists in confronting the situation into which one had deliberately entered, and accepting all one's responsibilities. Thus, nothingness also is identical with freedom since it is at the heart of the human being and his entire life's endeavour to fill this gap is futile. In this regard, Sartre writes that we are condemned to freedom. We do not choose to be free. We are thrown into freedom (Sartre, 1956).

However, it is worthy of note that despite this uncanny aura of untamable propensity to freedom associated to Sartre's philosophy, he would latter modify his radical position on the extent of human freedom by recognizing, more fully than before, the effect of historical and material conditions on individual and collective choice. He takes as his own the famous slogan of Engel that:

> men make history on the basis of what history has made of them: we are not pawns or cog in a machine, nor do we simply participate in processes of internalization and externalization: we are free agents, but agents who are profoundly and inescapably situated in specific social and material conditions (Craig, 2009, p. 10).

He would hold that material conditions set up the environment in which we operate. Though they do not causally determine our behaviour,

but they do prescribe the range of options to us. Thus we know that in the 1960s, Sartre is as concerned with the restrictions imposed on freedom by the material world as with human liberty itself.

It is this preoccupation with the absolute and yet circumscribed nature of human freedom that underpinned Sartre's last two major works: his autobiography, *Les Mots* (Words) (1968) and a brief and finely wrought literary masterpiece: *l'idiot de la Famille* (The Idiot of the Family) (1972), a biography of Gustave Flaubert: a compendium of existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, sociology, and aesthetics where Sartre demonstrates that the gap between choice and destiny is very small, but it has not closed.

Finally however, Sartre maintains the framework he set up thirty years earlier: freedom with situation, even when the situation may leave little or no room for maneuver. It is a situation in which subjectivity is defined as the difference between the process of internalization and externalization. Thus, if we situate Afrobeat and protest music after Fela in this purview, we would but realize that Afrobeat and other works mirror philosophical existentialist ideals. The works are concerned with issues generated out of the essential terms of our living and existence, but was self-consciously committed to creating a work of art whose very character expressed the urgency of his quest as its political activism was being sharpened by the availability of funds, particularly the effect of capital on the band Africa 70, which later on dissolved and evolved into Egypt 80 (Randall, 1986).

The activities of Afrobeat and protest music in Nigeria after Fela and its engagement with the Nigerian state falls in line with Maurice Natanson opinion that:

> such work is about itself, it is a meta literary performance which reveals the triple bond that compels author, characters and the audience to come to terms with themselves and each other. The bond is existential commitment to self justification, to engaging impossible questions and to the despair of an enterprise that is destined to perpetual renewal (Maurice, 1968, p. 144).

Summing this up, we argue that Fela is a prime example of the involution of art and life: an artist whose nonviolent intervention connotes freedom and social justice's display a systematic exposition and sequential moral rectitude.

Relating the foregoing to existentialist theory of commitment, the interesting thing about Fela is that even though he sees the Nigerian and

other African states as *perambulator*, the one that has failed us and thus makes life absurd and meaningless, he admonished that we respond to the absurd situation by coming together as human beings (commoners) to fight back the system so as to reduce suffering and thus transform life into a positive incentive to live and create. Afrobeat demonstrates that indifference to the problem of life is dangerous and wrong. It believed and insisted that an authentic revolution against the human condition had to be executed in the name of solidarity of man with man and against all forms of oppression from the state. This, he holds, we do against violence from government, injustice, tyranny and cruelty of man against man. Like Camus, Sartre and Fanon, Fela held that it is revolution that can restore the cherished human value. Thus, Afrobeat maintained an anti-establishment attitude to the distressing evils of human life. This involves sheer disobedience to law and order which are tending to make man less human, that is, to turn them into *Zombies*. Thus, the anti-establishment and anarchical politics in Fela could be used to denote a mood of despair over the emptiness or triviality of human existence, society and state.

To Fela, aloofness in the midst of suffering cannot be justified, but to effectively tackle the problem by confrontation is okay. Fela holds that man should first perceive their situation, recognize that their life has been rendered meaningless by the state apparatus and defy the absurdity in the world by choosing to live consciously in it and doing everything to unseat the state apparatus. Fela further holds that men should not submit to fate: they should keep a nonviolent rebellious spirit for even at death, our deeds are remembered (Carter, 2012). Thus Fela held that we can be more effective by choosing to join others in a corporate action. Like Camus and Sartre, Fela believed that injustice can be fought and any wrong can be corrected; but to do this there must be a common fate and a group consciousness.

Moreover there is an extant moral worldview to understanding Afrobeat for its strong affinity to non-cooperation with commitment. Fela held that men should nonviolently rebel against injustice and refuse to accept poverty and hardship by putting up a struggle; holding that in a world whose absurdity appears to be impenetrable, we simply must reach a greater degree of understanding amongst men, a greater sincerity, accountability and open-mindedness and knowledge of history for we must keep abreast of how we have come to be, with particular reference to the classical history of how Egypt happened to be the origin of civilization (James, 1969). To do this, certain conditions must be fulfilled: men must

be frank (falsehood confuses things) and freer (it is impossible with slaves). Finally, they must be ready to protest against all injustice and those that perpetuate it. This is a moral worldview with stubborn moral integrity and a deep sympathy with fellowmen. For Fela, men need freedom in order to grasp whatever happiness they can. But when in the struggle for happiness some men impose on others a brutish existence and even deprive others of the only life they know, as a result of the injustice that looms these abusive form freedoms are mandatory. Thus, we know that any act by which men are deprived of their lives are repugnant. Thus, Afrobeat harped on the idea of justice and freedom for men. To the victims of injustice, Afrobeat was committed to highlighting their plight for it believes that it is possible, in giving back his dignity to a single man, to bring a little more truth into a world where hatred shall not always be able to triumph.

We like to reiterate that the whole of existentialist philosophy is a moral theory. Thus Fela is a reaction against the de-personalization of the individual and group. It is a revolt against oppression, injustice, tyranny and corruption. It advocates that philosophy be made relevant to the needs of man. It is obvious that Fela was committed to fighting and correcting the abuses in which we found ourselves as he brings into discursive light; the issues of life, human freedom, human suffering, justice, right and death. The understanding of Fela would reveal that, even at the point of death, Fela's enormous appetite for life was both an essential part of his genius and a direct contributor to his decline. Thus, Fela's view of violence done unto his mother and the consequent death of his mother itself was among his defining characteristics. Fela told Carlos Moore (1982, p. 17) that:

> death does not worry me man, when my mother died it was because she finished her time on earth, I know when I die I'll see her again, so how can I fear death? So, what is the motherfucking world about? I believe there is a plan... I believe there is no accident in our lives... what I am facing today completely vindicates the African religion.... I'll do my part.... then I ll just go man... just go.

If analysed against the theme of death as exposed in the existentialist philosophy of Camus and Sartre, this view makes it obvious that Fela led a nonviolent life even at the point of death. To this end, Fela's memorable existence remains a phenomenon: to whatever history he will ultimately belong, for those who touched him, either personally or through

the intangible intimate contact of his greatest recordings, Fela will never be forgotten. Fela was a very complex man, he was a visionary who really believed in his cause, he lived and died for the cause he believed in. Hence, Randall was right to note that there are few African artists who are overtly political as Fela (Randall, 1986).

Fela's Afrobeat mirrors everything in the society and in fact it was the platform for discoursing freely the society's hopes, aspirations and fear. This array of discourse covers sex and porn, politics, social institutions; marriage, health, legal, education, environment; both social and physical et al. It is in this sense that his musical practice is said to embody and symbolizes freedom and authenticity. Example of this is what we have in *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense* where Fela intensifies the theme of non-physical, ideological tool of coercion by identifying the school system as an outpost for mind positioning. Also, Fela finds a position of resignation incompatible with his Afrobeat vision as explicated in *Fear Not for Man*, and *No Agreement* when he continued to strike the ember of civil resistance against dominant powers. For this he advocates the evolution for a grass root and inclusive framework for genuine democracy as opposed to dictatorships that African tyrants bestow on the agents to brutalise the public psyche. Thus, Fela was one of the few who spoke against violence. He raised his voice in music for the violated and oppressed and demanded that his right must not be taken away from him. He would oftentimes retort that "human right na my property, so therefore you can't dash me my property" in one of his popular tracks *Basket Mouth*.

## 4. CONCLUSION

We conclude that Fela's originality as showcased in his dramatically authentic and action packed lifestyle makes nonviolent philosophy relevant to the practical human existence as it is grounded on the very nexus of man's psychology and existential problems. Fela demonstrated the ideals and praxis of nonviolence and lessons that can be learnt from it. A study and analysis of Afrobeat shows that it is a musical practice that fundamentally explores all areas of nonviolence. We have argued that nonviolence is important for peace and justice and development, and that Afrobeat musical practice foreshadows the various perception of nonviolence even in the face of violence by exploring the exigent paradigm shift in Fela's music as it bores on various critical happenings of his time. We

also sought a nexus of the public consciousness; the reason that existentialism serves as foundation for a review of public consciousness which has played out in how the Nigerian masses have handled when Fela has transcended to the greater beyond. We come to a conclusion that Fela's Afrobeat musical practice passes for a life that is condemned to freedom, but one dedicated to nonviolent struggle for the improvement of the condition of the generality of man.

Little wonder that Fela has remained quintessential in Nigeria and Africa as a whole whenever it comes to nonviolent protest. This explains why Fela should remain a source of inspiration to generation of artists who are demanding for rights. It also explains why *Afrika Shrine* in Ikeja Lagos has become a home where population of protesters find solace and succor because they can still exercise their freedom, at least in the Fela's imagined continent. This event reiterated the obvious vacuum that is yet to be filled by anyone, as his role in several other protests is being sadly missed because of the contemporary artists in his tradition have decided to yield to the ember of contemporary social reconstructions.

That the public reconfigure social relations from one stage to another in their life, their engagement with the state and the social meaning attributed to social justice, which Fela's music emphasised, also change, is an understatement. This is obvious of what musical arena that Fela quitted for other musicians who would normally want to do protest in their music. Sadly they would not be able to achieve the feat because social relations have changed so much that artists now see themselves as part of government. They therefore engage the government in a different manner. Hence, violence on protest artists has come to its lowest ebb when compared to Fela. In fact what characterises protest music in Nigeria since the inception of democratic rule in 1999 is obvious of this, as seen in how Fela's African Shrine is now being conducted. While protest music has continued to dominate every place, it has changed considerably from confrontational to advisory, and in many cases muddled with song praises of elites because they have considered themselves as benefactors of the largesse from the government. Example of this is seen in how popular artists also negotiate positions in government for themselves and offspring. Those who have dared to do otherwise are terrible bribed with elephant projects to execute or threatened to ban their show.

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