

**THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN SHAPING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FELA
ANIKULAPO KUTI'S MUSICAL LEGACY (1960s-1990s)**

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FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,

BENIN CITY

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **QUEEN UGHEGBE IRIBHOGBE** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

MR. F.O OSARIEMEN
(Project supervisor)

DATE

PROF. JACINTA NWAKA
(Head of department)

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project first to Almighty God, whose grace, wisdom, strength and blessings have guided me, through every stage of this work and throughout the course of my academic journey in the University of Benin. Also, this project is dedicated to my parents, especially to my dearest Dad, whose love, sacrifices and unwavering support have been my greatest strength. Your prayers, advice and encouragement have carried me this far and I owe this achievement to you.

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I would like to express sincere gratitude to God, for his mercies, kindness and guidance, throughout my academic journey.

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Also to my lecturers I gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support and guidance of my lecturers, as they served as pillar in the building of my academic edifice. I am grateful to my H.O.D, Prof. J.C Nwaka, for his guidance. I am also grateful to my course advisor, Mr Victor.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The term “National” is believed to be understood in two ways; either as relating to a State or referring to a Citizen of a particular Country. The term “Consciousness” can be understood as a state or awareness in a perception of something a way in which something is understood or regarded. National Consciousness to my understanding is the awareness of a Citizen belonging to a particular nation or State either by birth, registration or through marriage.

It also implies a person’s awareness or understanding that he or she identify with a particular nation or State. There are various definition by Scholars of person on what national Consciousness means and what it implies. During learning times in primary and secondary Schools, pupils were taught on what National Consciousness entails, they would recall that it is a strong feeling of love, loyalty, Commitment to the growth of a nation by a Citizen, or the level of awareness of Individuals towards the issues relating to the overall growth of the nation.

As we grow more in understanding what national consciousness may imply we found out that it is a shared sense of national identity but what makes it shared? The term “Shared” can be understood as something distributed among people, used and enjoyed with others

or possessed in common with another or others. What makes national consciousness a shared national identity is because “national” as we explained before related to a State and in a State are Citizens from different background. Under a legitimate Sovereign government occupying a particular territory free from external control and because these groups of people are under a particular government there is a shared sense of identity they possess, even if they come from different ethnic background.

For example, they are lot of ethnicity and cultural background in Nigeria and within Nigeria are 36 States but everyone are Nigerians, “National Consciousness or nationalism is the strong feeling of pride, belongingness, attachment and national awareness that an individual has toward his nation. It involves being devoted to one’s nation and advocating for its unity as well as struggle against depression and for equality, nationalism also includes political participation and self rule (political independence)”¹.

“Music: the idea behind or beyond the Sound”². We all have listened to music growing up, the beats, sound, tone of every music played, as one way or the other, had a strong influence on us. “Music starts in the mind”³. Music as we know it in every genre, has an effect in the human mind or our feelings, it can make you sad, happy, tired, excited, upset, kind, motivated, encouraged, heart broken. It can make you think or reason in a particular way.

“To be aware of Sound is to be aware of oneself, to be aware of sound as music is to experience something capable of being shared”⁴. Sound in particular or sound voices has been scientifically proven to alter the mind in a particular direction.

“Music is therefore arguably language-like. It also transcend language. It communicate across natural and Cultural boundaries”⁵. It is believed that the fastest way to pass a message is through music. Music in musical instruments are very expressive in nature and can be used to pass a message, signal, sign, code, you name it. In ancient times, a horn blown can be interpreted as the coming or end of war or the arrival of the enemy or the beginning of war.

People nowadays use music to express their feelings whether good or bad to another. Some sing songs to people welcoming them to a new age or beginning, like the “Happy Birthday Song”. But what then is music? “Music is an art concerned with combining vocal or instrumental sounds for beauty or form or emotional expression in usually according to cultural standards of rhythm, melody and, in most western music, harmony”⁶. Listening to music is a common means of entertainment, will either relieve one’s depressed mood and place it in reverse and listen to the music, “for most listeners what distinguishes music from other sound or noise is that the pleasure to listen to it. Pleasure is hard to define but expresses itself as a preference for certain pattern or form of stimulation”⁷.

“It is rightly said that when words and letters fail, the best option is music. You will be able to express the intent of your heart through music which originally may not be possible in print, either do a words or letters. Some times in life, people grieve, feel all kinds of emotions, music is almost in itself and emo-tion, it is a way of life, of human beings. Music seems have the advantage of touching people with their type of music and many people swell affected or touched by the musician work”⁸.

The gift of sound and music extended into people’s academic, therapy, journalism, philosophy, etc so much technology has made it easier for recording and producing music, including digital audio workstation, synthesized, microphones, sheet music, Smart phones, etc.

Various singers here in one way or another, has effected people’s lives examples, “Lagbaja”, “2pac”, “vip”, “African China”, “Awilo longomba”, and “Fela Kuti,” some have passed away, while some still exist, but their music still rings up to this day, but one focus would be on the well known, global renowned musician and activist, “Fela Anulapo Kuti”. “Afrobeat legend, one of a Nigeria’s frontline activist and legendary musician,the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti”⁹

“Fela Kuti (born October 15, 1938, Abeokuta, Nigeria died August 2, 1997, Lagos) was a Nigerian musician and activist who created a modern style of music called Afro beat, which blends American blues, jazz, and funk with traditional Yoruba music.

Kuti was the son of Feminist and labour activist Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. As a youth he took lessons in piano and percussion before studying (1958) classical music at Trinity College London. While in London, he encountered various musical styles by playing piano in jazz and rock bands. Returning to Nigeria in the mid-1960s, he reconstituted Koola Lobitos, a band with brass, which he had played in London. The Afro beat sound emerged from their subsequent experiments.

Following his 1969 tour of the United States, where he was influenced by the politics of Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and other militants, Kuti's music became increasingly politicized. He combined social change in such songs as "Zombie," "Monkey Banana, "Beasts of No Nation", and "Upside Down". Fela (so he was popularly known) and his band, which was known formally as the Africa 70, Afro 70, and later the Egypt 80, performed for packed houses of the early morning crowd that they staged at Fela's often raided nightclub in Lagos.

The firebrand singer, who gyrated over the keyboard as he sang in English and Yoruba, struck a chord among the unemployed, disenfranchised, and oppressed. The politically charged songs, which he proclaimed the independent Kalakuta Republic. As head of the Commune, he often provoked controversy and attracted attention by promoting indulgence in sex, polygamy (he married 27 women), and drugs; especially marijuana. A 1977 raid in the Complex by Nigerian authorities resulted in his brief incarceration and

the death of his mother the following year due to complications from a fall. In exile in Ghana in 1978, he changed his name from Ransome to the tribal Anikulapo.

In 1979, Fela formed a political party, the movement of the people and ran unsuccessfully for the presidency of Nigeria. Two years later, he was jailed for 20 months on charges of currency smuggling; upon his release, he formed a new band, some political protest and left his son Femi to carry the torch of Afrobeat music. Fela was jailed again in 1983 for murder, but the charge was eventually dropped. He died as a result of complications from AIDS.”¹⁰

Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this project is to explore and analyze the function of music and how it affects and supernatural identity in Nigeria. Specifically the figure "Fela Anikulapo Kuti" how his music had an impact in the lives of Nigerians and how his music affected their consciousness on what was happening at that time.

This project seeks to understand how Fela’s music had influenced the social, political and cultural awareness among Nigerians and contributed to the wide discussion on national identity.

Objectives

- Provide a short history of Nigeria’s social and political situation during Fela Kuti’s career, paying attention to the challenges and events that shaped his music

- Examine Fela Kuti's songs, underlining their reflection and critique of social, issues and national identity.
- Investigate Fela's music and how it shaped the citizens awareness of the happenings in Nigeria.
- Evaluating how Fela's music promotes African identity and pride, and inspired future generations.
- To judge how Fela's music received during his life and after and its ongoing influence on modern Nigerian music and activism.

By achieving these objectives, the project aims to contribute a deeper understanding of the transformative power in music in shaping social values and national identity.

Scope of Study

This project will lay emphases on the impact of Fela, but's music bridges a national identity. It will give historical background from 1960s to the 1980s, which was a period marked by social political disruptions to better understand how the situations and problems influenced Fela's themes.

There would be a musical analysis of Fela kuti's Afrobeat style on the sound messages like social justice embedded in his lyrics. Also an evaluation of the cultural impact, his music had on promoting African identity and stimulating public awareness of resistance

and activism. The public acceptance of Fela's masterpiece both during his lifetime and in modern society would be examined to know the ongoing influence.

Methodology

This project will employ an historical approach, looking at the past particularly the era of Fela Kuti's musical career. There would be historical information from the 1960s to 1970s, a time filled with chaos, corruption and several hardships and how such situations affected Fela but's music.

Primary sources like Fela kuti's music and lyrics would be analyzed and secondary sources like books, articles and others that shed light on Fela kuti's life, Afrobeat and legacy. This methodology would provide an understanding of Fela Anikulapo kuti musical legacy, and its role in shaping national consciousness.

Literature Review

"Fela Anikulapo buth: Afrobeat Rebellion and Philosophy"¹¹ (1999) by Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola is offers a comprehensive investigation of Fela's life, music and the socio-political conditioning that framed his music. The authors dives into the Study of Fela's works bringing out his role as a Cultural icon and activist. This book also gives a biographical overview of Fela, describing his early life, education and what impacted his music career and also his Nigerian roots.

They also examine his music and explores how he blends traditional African people. The author also proclaimed that his music was a form of political expression that challenges the status quo and addresses issues such as corruption and social injustices. They also point out Fela's belief in the power of music as a tool for social change and his commitment to pan Africanism. This book also discusses how his lyrics criticized the Nigerian government making him a target for state subjugation.

“Study of music and Social Criticism of African musician Fela Anikulapo kuti”¹² by Niyi Coker examined one of Africa's most influential musician and cultural icon, Fela kuti, his life, music and his role as a Social critic providing us means of understanding how his art served as a vehicle of political expression and Social Commentary.

This book traced Fela's journey from his early years and figures to his time studying in the United States, where he was exposed to various musical genres and political movements. The book examines the nature of his Afrobeat and the message it conveyed.

“Fela Anikulapo Kuti: An honest man”¹³ by John Howe is a fascinating biography that reaches into the life and legacy of Fela kuti, the Nigerian musician, activist and Cultural icon known for his developed work in Afrobeat and powerful Criticism of political Corruption and social injustice. This book looks into his musical genius and Complex personality.

It also traces Kuti's life from his early years in Nigeria to his rise as a global musician and political figure. It takes in his childhood, Family background, education, and also the evolution of his music, showcasing how he used his art to address pressing social issues.

The literature titled "music as political activism: a Case Study of Fela Anikulapo kuti's Afrobeat"¹⁴ by Ogidan P. Damilola looks into the huge effect Fela Kuti's music had in Nigeria and acted as a powerful weapon for mobilization against political Corruption and oppression. It shows how Fela kuti utilized his music addressing pressing political issues in Nigeria making Afrobeat a form of resistance against authoritarian government.

The article "Rhythm and Rebellion"¹⁵ explores Fela kuti's profound influence as a musical activist, how he used his music to challenge corruption and encourage social Justice; Kuti's lyrics often criticized corrupt leaders and societal issues, making his music a cry for those seeking change. Songs like "Teacher Don't Teach me nonsense" and "Sorrow, tears and blood" are very good examples.

"Fela: Fela vida puta"¹⁶ by Carlos Moore, is an authorized biography of Nigerian musician and activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. The book traces Fela's life from his youth and musical training to his rise as the creator of Afrobeat and a fierce critic of political corruption in Nigeria. It highlights his music as a tool of protest, his clashes with the military regime and his uncompromising fight for African identity and freedom.

More also explores Fela's personal life, his beliefs in traditional African religion, and his controversial lifestyle. The biography portrays Fela as a complex figure a musical genius, political rebel, and cultural icon whose life combined art, politics, and resistance.

"Fela's Kalakuta Notes"¹⁷ by John Collins, is an intimate personal and historical account of the legendary Nigerian musician and activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti, focusing especially on his Commune-studio known as the "Kalakuta Republic" and the mid-1970s period of his life. The author, John Collins, a Ghana-based musician, producer and scholar who labored with or around Fela in Ghana/Nigeria, draws on his own diary entries (notably from January 1977) during a stay at kalakuta as well as interviews with band members, associates, archival material, photographs and a discography.

"Music Theory in Concept and Practice"¹⁸ by James M. Baker, David Beach, and Jonathan W. Bernard, is a collection of nineteen essays by leading scholars in the field of music theory. The essays are grouped into thematic parts that survey the discipline: historical/theoretical perspectives, tonal repertoire analysis, twentieth-century music, and analytical/empirical studies.

"Music as Concept and practice in the late middle ages"¹⁹ by Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn explains how music is understood and performed from the 13th to early 16th Centuries. It examines both theoretical ideas such as notation and Composition and practical aspects.

“Music: A Very Short Introduction”²⁰ by Nicholas Cook does not just tell the history of music or analyse musical forms, instead it explores how we think about music - what it is, how it works and how social, cultural, and technological factors shape both music and our experience of it. The book focuses on music as a human idea and activity, rather than a technical theory or history.

In Conclusion, this project intends to shed light on the power of music and how it shaped national consciousness, focusing on the well known figure, Fela Kuti and how musical effect on the people of Nigeria at that time. This project would also shed some light on how his legacy still influenced present day musicians and schools.

This research would be contributed to the thoughts on the prose of music on the people and how music can have a profound effect in their behaviour, mindset, and response e.t.c.

Chapterization

Project Topic: The role of music in shaping national consciousness: Fela Anikulapo Kuti's musical legacy: 1960s to the 1990s.

Chapter one: Background to the study

- Introduction
- Aims and Objective
- Scope of the study
- Methodology
- Literature review

Chapter two: Fela Kuti's musical journey and Afrobeat

- The origin of Afrobeat
- Key works and themes of Fela Kuti's music

Chapter three: Music as a tool for political activism

- Assessment of Governance
- Impact on Nigerian youth and society

Chapter four: Fela Kuti's legacy and influence on national identity

- Cultural impact
- Fela Kuti's legacy

Chapter five: Conclusion

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CHAPTER TWO

FELA KUTI'S MUSICAL JOURNEY AND AFROBEAT

The Origin of Afrobeat

The word “Afrobeat,” is understood as “a west African music genre, fusing influences from highlife music and Ghana’s music (such as highlife) with American funk, jazz, and soul influences.”¹ It is also referred to as “Afro Funk”. In my analyses of the word “Afrobeat”, it can be separated into two, “Afro” meaning anything associated with Africa and “beat” meaning “the basic rhythmic unit of a measure or bar, not to be confused with “rhythm”.² So in my interpretation, “Afrobeat” can also be seen as Africabeat”.

The term “Afrobeats” is derived from “Afrobeat”. “Afrobeats, which is not to be confused with Afrobeat or Afroswing, is an umbrella term to describe popular music from West Africa and the spread that initially developed in Nigeria, Ghana, and the UK in the 2000s and 2010s. Afrobeats, to it’s style per se, and more of description for the fusion of sounds flowing out of Nigeria and Ghana. Genres such as highlife, Fuji music, highlife, azonto music, and hiplife based around others have formed under the “Afrobeats” umbrella”.³

Afrobeats catchy beats and lively energy have attracted people all over the world. It has led to expansion both in global world and made African music and culture more popular and widely known. It often talks about social and political problems; it is used to inspire young people and push for change, making it a tool for reform. It has created many jobs and but since opportunities on music, Fashion, tourism and more.

“Many Jazz musicians have been attracted to the syncretic genre of Afrobeat. From Roy Ayers in the 1970s to Randy Weston in the 1990s. It also profoundly influenced various important modern producers and musicians, such as Brian Eno and David Byrne, John Creed. Fela built an essential influence”.⁴

“Afrobeat originated in 1960s and 1970s as a blend of traditional Yoruba music with Jazz, West African music and Funk. It was created by the Nigerian legend Fela Kuti, who rose achieved acclaim for his musical talent and involvement in post-Colonial African politics. Fela’s recordings from the 1970s made a significant impact in the Nigerian music scene and rapidly gained popularity around the globe. He is now considered one of the most influential musicians in the world.

Afrobeat percussive began in Ghana in the early 1920, during that time, Ghanaian music have incorporated Foreign influences like Foxtrot and Calypso with Ghanaian rhythm like highlife. Highlife was associated with African aristocracy and was played by numerous bands including the Jazz Kings, Cape Coast Sugar babies and Accra Orchestra.

But it was the electrifying music of Fela in the 1970s that catapulted Afrobeat across Africa. Fela was inspired by the black power movement and the black panther party. His lyrics filled with social Commentary, political critique and Nigerian power be. He criticised the military dictatorship in Nigeria. He supported the newly gained independence from Colonial rule across Africa, Fela encouraged self-reliance and self-pride.

In 1969, Fela met Sandra Smith on a trip to the U.S. Sandra Smith was a singer and former black panther. Sandra introduced Fela to writings of many activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., Angela Davies, Jesse Jackson and Malcolm X. It was during this period that Fela Kuti changed from playing African music and incorporated Funk and Soul. Fela was quickly joined by Afrobeat pioneers such as Tony Allen and many dibango.

Many African American Jazz musicians have been attracted to Afrobeat. There have been many collaborations from Roy Ayers in the 1970s to Randy Weston in the 1980s. Fela believed in telling “Itself” highly acclaimed 1980 album remains a light, which brought Afrobeat influence to western musicians.⁵

“Lagos is AfroBeat’s birthplace: the city of Kalakuta, the Afrika Shrine, and the streets that forged Fela’s sound and stance”.⁶

The origin of Afrobeat is incomplete in discussion without speaking on the biography of Afrobeat, “Fela Anikulapo Kuti”. Born as “Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome Kuti”

but later changed his name to “Anikulapo Kuti.” The “Anikulapo” is a Yoruba name meaning “the one who carries death in his pouch.” He reflected the name “Ransome” calling it a slave name that had been passed down from his Grandfather. Fela believed that dropping such foreign names was a way for Africans to reclaim their identity and freedom from colonial influence.

He came from a well known Nigerian family. His father “Rev. I. O. Ransome-Kuti” was a famous feminist and political activist. Even though his Fela’s family wanted him to become a lawyer⁷, his family was strict, especially in the early years, “he showed strong interest in music and performance, it was witty, energetic and full of idea. He also went to London to study music, even though his parent might not have expected him to become a musician”⁸. Singing mostly in pidgin English so everyone could understand he attacked government corruption, military rule, and the balmy effects of colonial exploitation. His activism was closely tied to Nigeria’s political and economic situation after independence in the 1960s and 1970s. Soon after independence, Nigeria faced sevier political, social, and developmental problems. The 1914 Amalgamation, which joined the Northern and Southern protectorates into one Country, began to show the harmful effect of, building a nation that had existed even before independence.

Growing up, Fela witnessed these issues through his politically active family, his father, Rev. Ransome but, sometimes challenged the colonial authorities and fought for better working conditions for Nigerian teachers. However, it was his mother, Funmilayo

Ransome-Kuti, who first exposed him to Nigeria pre-independence politics and shaped his early understanding of it.

“The 1940s and 1950s were already a turbulent period of political movements, interactions and negotiations due to the amalgamation and the politics of ownership which had made ethnic mobilisation a potent instrument on the power politics that was already fermenting during the build up to independence in 1960. The three major political parties of Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the Southwest, the Northern people’s Congress (NPC) of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe” were motivated by ethnic Considerations in the pursuit of independence”⁹ .

The NCNC was the only party that matched Mrs. Ransome Kuti’s goal of promote women’s rights. “ The results of the 1951 general election put both the NCNC and the Action Group to pre-eminence political position. The NCNC won the majority of votes in the eastern region, while the NPC Capture the majority in the North. The western region then became the final test over who would produce the outright winner to form the western regional government.

The NCNC could not count on the support of the Ibadan people’s party and the AG could not win a majority vote itself. Charges of Bribery and corruption were everything to explain the unexpected results of the election rendering Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his party into the ethnic and enclave of the Eastern region. Dr. (Mrs.) Ransome Kuti was

nationalist, credentialed and the NCNC lost of reputation as a national party. Mrs. Ransome Kuti was one of those who suffered as a fallout of the politics, however expelled from the NCNC because she was liable to run a seat in the western region, hunger of a seeming by small bid for a second constitution was released in 1959”¹⁰.

Nigeria’s move from Colonial rule to Independence, still limited people’s freedom like the Colonial government did. Little changed for her. Free Citizens really rose during these times. By Independence in 1960, Fela was already influenced by these events, leading him to create Afro Beat with strong political message, “The search for self realization was much more demanding to him at that time than any political interest in national problems, and even if he were to be political, there was nothing about him, no status or platform that could even give him a voice”¹¹.

In 1969, Fela composed a pro-government song called “Viva Nigeria” using the instrumentals of his band ‘Koola Lobitos’ track “wakawaka. “The song did not succeed in making a blip on anybody, and, it shows that not only had Fela not yet arrived at foresight and political radicalization but the song’s simplistic lyrics betrayed political ignorance about the complex dynamics of a post-Colonial state like Nigeria”¹² . He regretted the release of ‘Viva Nigeria’ .

In the 1970s, oil discovery and sales boosted Nigeria’s economy but also increased corruption, widened inequality, and strengthened a ruling elite that lived off oil wealth. The country became dependent on unstable global oil markets. Fela returned to Nigeria in

1970 during the time of military government. Fela and opposition the rough authoritarian rule; he renamed his group “Africa 70,” and his entertainment site “ Afrikan Shrine,” the trade “Jeun ko ku” made Fela (known and Afrobeat) a success. Fela’s music became both a cultural resistance movement and a form of political education.

The most important part of Fela Kuti’s life was how he created and popularized Afrobeat. He used this musical style to make a totally new sound that people could derive meaning from and not just the elites alone. His performances were energetic and powerful; his band was so large, usually made up of horn players, guitarists, drummers and female dancers and singers. He led the band singing and playing saxophones. He made his music out of political rallies, spreading strong messages through music than entertainment.

Through his fearless songs and energetic shows, Fela made Afrobeat popular not only in Nigeria but around the world. Though arrested and attacked for speaking against the government, he continued using his songs to fight for truth, justice and freedom, making it a powerful voice for the people. Instead of the life of escapism or cowardice, he chose his voice to challenge the system and speak truth about those in power.

His songs often told stories of suffering, oppression and failures of leaders to care for their citizens. Through some powerful songs like “Zombie”, “Sorrow Tears and Blood” and “Coffin Head of State” etc, Fela remained committed to giving a voice to the voiceless giving hope and strength to the people during difficult times and encouraging them to stand up for justice.

He proved that music can do more than entertain but challenge the system and lead movement of a better society. “He projected himself as the incarnation of the youth cultural values.”¹³

Key Works and Themes of Fela Kuti’s Music

Fela Anikulapo Kuti born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, was the pioneer of Afrobeat, a fusion of traditional African styles like Juju and Highlife with American funk. He was more than a musician, he was a prophet, activist, and revolutionary who used his songs in the 1960s and 1970s to challenge military dictatorship, corruption, imperialism, neo-colonialism, religions dogma, injustice and apartheid. This section would examine some of Fela Kuti’s rover popular songs: *Zombie*, *Sorrow tears and blood*, “Teacher don’t teach me nonsense,” “Gentleman,” “Authority Stealing,” etc.

Zombie

It is a 1976 Afrobeat album by Nigerian musician Fela Kuti. Released in Nigeria by Coconut Records and in the U.K. by Creole Records in 1977, it criticized the Nigerian Government. The album is believed to have led to the military attacking Kuti’s commune, killing his mother, Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti. “Sick of the government’s repressive rule, he declared himself free from the Nigerian state and his commune, the Kalakuta Republic, independent.

It was a large house hosting roughly 100 of Kuti's friends, family and band mates and a recording studio, that saw open fires with commodes, smoke, though he preferred a headache for the Nigerian government. Kuti's skirmishes with the state at this point were fairly limited until 1976 and the release of "Zombie".

The song begins with a pulsating guitar riff, followed by percussion, bass, brassy, athletic funk, polyrhythmic drumming and horns, and then we hear and hoot, until beat begins. Around three minutes into the 12-minute track, his bumpy refrain English takes the song to another level, scathingly critical of the Nigerian military. The voice dances over the instruments, taunting and mockery, the soldiers whom he called "Zombies," unable to 'no go unless you tell am to go 'or, no go think, unless you tell am to think.' Kuti. Final word instructs listeners. Simply, dismiss."¹⁴

Sorrow Tears and Blood

It is a 1977 album by Nigerian Afrobeat composer, bandleader, and multi-instrumentalist Fela Kuti. First released in the Nigerian Kalakuta label, "It dwells on the theme of police and military brutality and the perceived complacent amongst the common people, like most of Fela Kuti's songs that deal with the bad governance, corruption, police brutality and the confusion of African identity as result of colonization; Sorrow tears and blood still carries great contemporary relevance in the public sphere.

In October 2020, Nigerian youths in different cities around the country took to the streets in what became known as the #EndSars protest, which were against police brutality meted out by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which gained notoriety by trapping and brutalizing innocent Nigerian youth.

In their song, Fela Kuti calls out citizens to become active in demanding justice and an end to dehumanization by entities of the state. Fela Kuti's also then alluded to the complexity of being involved in dissenting, especially within a country still run by a brutal military regime. While condemning the complacency of Nigerian people in accepting to be maltreated, Fela Kuti reminded the listener of how other Africans have taken up agency and poured into the streets to protest against the apartheid regime in Southern Africa.

As Olaniyan (2004) explains, this song was meant to be a commentary on the apartheid regime, but events that happened during a police raid in Fela's home led to the song having a strong emphasis on police brutality in Nigeria and a complacency of Nigerian complicity and Southern African rebellion. As a whole, this song represents the tension between the common people and the state in repressive government"¹⁵.

Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense

This is a 1986 studio album by Fela Kuti and the Egypt 80. "The song is Fela's commentary on the 1985 demise and the transfer of power to Shehu shagari's self-style of military rule, "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense" the corrupt culture as the ultimate teacher and encourages Africans to enhance their cultures. The singer's song that transplanting of democracy and Euro-political ideology cannot be used in one size fits all method.

In the lyrics we see Fela refer to the fact that Europeans and Africans are not in the same category. With this he means that our socio-cultural contexts are different and thus, our political ideologies have to be considered within the realities of post-colonial nations and in the process of building its own national identity. Fela Kuti made reference to the fact that seeing, imitating Western style of democracy in the Nigerian process has marred with electoral rigging inherited from colonial government. It had interfered with and thus, enabling a skewed version of democracy that institutionalized corruption.

In popular Nigerian parlance the English word madness is referred to as "Craze" from the word "Crazy". Fela plays in this term by stating that democracy in Nigeria is a mere demonstration of madness so he puts it, a demonstration of Craze, another Central point Fela makes in the song is that there is no monolithic interpretation of democracy, he emphasis this as he says that there are multiple understanding of what entails democracy.

Teacher don't teach me nonsense is a Critique of western value and political systems that promote the idea that western political doctrine is the ideal form of governance in spite of the socio - cultural reality of societies.”¹⁶.

Gentlemen

It is a 1973 studio album by Nigerian Afrobeat musician Fela Kuti. “In the thrilling song, an obviously frustrated Fela discusses cultural Imperialism lamenting how post-Colonial Africans are being brainwashed into accepting that traditional African values are inferior to European values. Fela mockingly insists that he is not a “gentleman” because it appears being a gentleman at the time required trading traditional African values for European values. Fela sees the rapid erosion of African Cultural values as imperialistic and refuses to Join in the band wagon, even if it will require him standing alone.

To express his views, Fela humorously opens his epic song by telling us in Pidgin English that he is no gentleman under whatever guise. Afterward, Fela tells us who he is, he says he is an African man, he sees being African as being original true to one's innermost self. Fela then contrasts being a gentleman, that is, trying to embrace European cultural values and being an African man and finds, delightfully, that the latter is better and more convenient. He then mocks Africans who have adopted the cultural specifications of Europeans at the expense of their own satisfaction.

In the third and last verse of the song, Fela mocks Africans who ritually imitate the European way of dressing, even though the dresses do not, in reality, fit into the hot African climate. Conditions Fela believes, and consequently so, that dressing should be dictated by environmental and cultural conditions, not by the influence of imperialist powers, not by the peddlers of Eurocentrism.

Fela refuses to wear the badge of gentlemanliness if it will require him to do things which are by nature inconvenient. Fela's Gentleman is a clarion call to Africans and other people who were colonized all over the world to never bury their traditional cultural values beneath the sand of cultural imperialism. Fela stands tall and aggressively proud, fierce and rebellious for those who betray their cultural identity as a qualification for becoming a gentleman."¹⁷ .

Authority (Stealing 1980)

“Fela describes how those in authority, that is, government officials, corruptly enrich themselves at the very expense of their constituents. He ironically laments the fate of the average thief who earns excessive punishment, whereas those who are in Authority steal as much larger scale and go scot-free. He begins the track with the imagery of a mob, and chasing the amateur or local-small-time thief by singing their typical chants in such a robbery incident. In the second stanza of the song, Fela draws attention to the fate of those in authority (Government officials) who steal humungous amounts of public money but go unpunished.

The irony of the whole thing being that those in authority do not necessarily need gun; they only need pen to accomplish a lot more than the armed robbers could accomplish. He further draws attention to another irony where in spite of the massive looting of public treasury by government officials nobody ever shouts thief, rogue or robber. Presumably because those who are supposed to speak out are also directly or indirectly involved in the dirty deal. Fela notes however, that instead of those in authority and their allies to speak out against the menace of treasury looting, they would ingeniously invent some words to paint an innocuous picture of the pillage.

He finally submits that within “Stealing” has become worse than armed robbery and then charged all Africans to challenge the abnormality. In “Authority Stealing” Fela framed African leaders as unreasonable looters of other nations’ common wealth. According to him A government official does not pilfer. He rather steals a humongous amount of money. A government official entrusted with public fund does not need a gun; all he needs is a pen. That is because if gun (armed robber) steals eighty thousand Naira; the man with pen (Government official) will steal 2 billion Naira.

Having noticed the government’s deftness in the use of words to water down the effects of their large-scale looting of public funds, Fela declared that “Authority Stealing” has assumed a leap alarming proportion. He therefore earnestly requested all hands to be on deck (all Africans) to revolt against it. Because now authority stealing pass Armed robbery, we Africans we must do something about this nonsense”.¹⁸ .

Conclusion

Fela Kuti's music goes beyond rhythm, blues, and entertainment. It is a strong voice of truth and change. Through his songs, he strongly challenged political corruption, praised African pride, fought for the rights of the oppressed, and inspired people to stand for freedom and what is right. His themes of political protest, African identity, social justice and resistance reflect the deep struggles, problems and issues of Africa and his deep commitment to using music as a weapon for awareness and transformation. Fela's messages still remain relevant today, reminding us that music is a strong powerful tool and strong force for justice and progress.

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CHAPTER THREE

MUSIC AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Introduction

“Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct or intervene in social, political, economic or environmental reform with desire to make changes in society toward a perceived common good. Forms of activism range from mandate building in a community, petitioning elected officials running or contributing to a political campaign. Preferential patronage of businesses and demonstrative forms of activism like rallies, street marches, strike”.¹

The term political activism “refers to the range of non-professional and voluntary activities performed by citizens that are primarily aimed at influencing decisions and outcomes at any level of the political system. These definition precludes paid political work as well as activities that merely imply attentiveness to political issues in the expression of a political stance”.²

In simple term, political activism is when people get involved changing or improving how their state or country is governed. It means voicing or standing or doing something when government is doing wrong or when people are being treated unfairly. Activist try to fix the problems and fight for justice, fairness and good leadership – this is done

through protests, writing articles to educate others, campaigning for fairness elections, speaking to leaders to demand justice, using music or poetry to pass a political message (Just like Fela Kuti did).

Music has always served as a powerful means of expression, capable of conveying deep emotions, fostering unity and driving social change. Across different eras and cultures, musicians have harnessed their art to participate in political activism using songs to spotlight injustice, challenge authority and push for reform. Whether through protest anthems, awareness campaigns or benefit concerts, music has consistently played a vital role in shaping public opinion and encouraging movements.

Its true strength in activism lies in its emotional impact. Music can stir strong feelings and when paired with meaningful lyrics and a resonant message it can motivate people to act. The communal intensity of a live performance, the shared experience at a rally or the lyrics of a politically charged song can create deep sense of connection and shared purpose among listeners.

Moreover, music transcends borders, language and cultural differences. Its universal nature allows it to reach diverse audiences, making it an ideal tool for spreading awareness and mobilizing support for social causes. It can unite people from different backgrounds around common values and inspired collective action. Beyond its reach and emotional power, music also provides physical spaces for activism.

Events like benefit concerts, political marches, festivals and protest performances offer more than just entertainment. They serve as gathering points for advocacy, education and fundraising. These musical spaces help build community, amplify voices and spark change, reinforcing music's enduring role as a vehicle for political and social transformation.

Nigerian musician with Fela Kuti as a key figure who consistently used music as a means to confront social and political challenges. As the originator of Afrobeat, Fela built blended vibrant rhythms with bold, thought provoking lyrics to expose corruption, military rule, police violence and widespread injustice in Nigeria and beyond. "He extorted social change in songs such as "Zombie", "Monkey Banana" "Beast of no Nation" and "Upside down".³

In tracks like "Zombie", he reduced the unquestioning nature of soldiers, sorrow, tears, blood highlighted the brutal repression of citizens and "Coffin for Head of State" denounced the complicity of religious leaders and the government's oppressive tactics. His music became a weapon of resistance, giving voice to the voiceless and stirring political consciousness among the masses. Fela Kuti believed in reverse, a sense of strong black pride, African unity, and love for the poor. Even though he came from a rich family, he chose to live with the poor, fight for their rights and speak out against injustice. Fela's way of thinking called "Felasphy" was built on two main ideas Pan Africanism and Afrocentrism.

Pan Africanism means that all Africans should unite together, be proud of their culture and fight against Colonialism. Leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney inspired Fela. Rodney's book "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" helped Fela understand how Europe used Africa's resources and people during slavery and Colonization.

Fela stood for freedom and believed people should live how they wanted. That's why he smoked marijuana and lived with many women, saying it was his personal choice. Some people didn't agree with this and said it was a weakness in his beliefs. Also, in his song "Lady", he said women should act in traditional African ways, which many saw as unfair to women. "Fela's political activism cannot be overlooked. Fela's Afrobeat was at bottom a protest music with low class language and tough and best Fitted for the need of the lower class language."⁴

Still, Fela's music and message had a big impact on Nigerian youth, "his history and activism were inseparable and he inspired a generation of African musicians and satirists to use their voice for a greater purpose."⁵ He helped them see the government as corrupt and violent. He especially spoke out against military leaders like Obasanjo, Babangida, and Abacha. "Fela's music is tied with a political code".⁶

The Role of Music in the Assessment of Governance

In many societies, musicians have used their music to criticise government policies, exposed corruption and speak out against social injustice. Their lyrics often reflect the frustration of the people, challenge those in power, and call for change. One well known example of this is Fela Kuti, a Nigerian musician and pioneer of Afrobeat, who used his music as a strong voice against political oppression and bad governance in Nigeria. “one of the distinguishing features of Fela’s Afrobeat was its socially conscious lyrics. Fela used his music as a powerful tool for addressing pressing issues, such as government corruption, social injustice, and human rights abuses in Nigeria.”⁷

Fela’s music was known for its bold and direct criticism of Nigerian leaders. He used songs to highlight issues such as corruption, police brutality and government failure. For instance, in his song “Authority Stealing” he accused politicians of stealing public funds, while pretending to be honourable leaders. He pointed out that ordinary thieves are punished by the law, but politicians who steal on a bigger scale are often praised or protected. The song exposed the unfairness and corruption that plagued the system and government.

Another example is the song “International Thief Thief (ITT)” where Fela criticised both Nigerian leaders and foreign companies. He mentioned names like former president Obasanjo, businessmen Moshood Abiola, accusing them of working with multinational

companies to exploit Nigeria's resources. The song talked about how these leaders made secret deals that benefited only a few, while the rest of the country suffered.

In "Zombie", Fela mocked Nigerian soldiers as brainless followers who obeyed orders without thinking. By doing this, he was exposing the military's blind loyalty to leaders, even when it meant harming ordinary citizens. The song exposed how the armed forces were used as tools of oppression rather than protection of the people.

In "Sorrow, Tears and Blood", the song was Fela's reaction to the violent suppression of protests by the police and military. In it, he painted a picture of how African governments frequently relied on armed forces to intimidate and silence the people. The result, he said, was a cycle of pain, grief, and bloodshed. Through this track, Fela made it clear that those in authority only cared more about holding onto power than promoting justice or improving citizens' lives. In "Coffin for head of state," Fela addressed both religious and political hypocrisy. After his own mother died during a military raid on his home, he placed her coffin in front of a military barrack as a form of protest. This act was reflected in the song, which criticized the government's violence and lack of accountability. Through songs like these, Fela built used music not just for entertainment but as a form of political resistance. His lyrics educated people, challenged the government and gave hope to those who felt powerless.

Today, many artists in Nigeria and across the world raise awareness and demand better leadership. Fela's work shows that music can be a powerful tool for social and political

change. “Fela uncovered the issues in Nigerian economy and government through his protest music; he inspired communication between in Nigeria.”⁸.

“The connection between music and politics can be seen in many climes and speeches. Music influences political movements and rallies as recent events have shown to what extent general audiences relate to message and apply its message to political situation and contexts. Songs have been used to portray specific political messages. The nuances of these messages rely according to contexts and the targeted goal. These range from mere observation not political phenomenon and tendencies to achieve and pattern genuine and designed events co-ordinated and specific proactive goals like advocacy and regime change. The numerous works of Fela Kuti, Bob Marley, and Sunny Okosun are lucid examples which have remained relevant till date.

If we look at the role of music in politics, we will see that it is used to unify or breed causes; it either serves a rebel’s spirit against dominant institutions or freely. Due to music’s universality and ability to shape moral ideas, it has an integral part in the life of every society, hence it is used by various societies and political order to promote their beliefs; national anthems are highly respected by their citizens and boost nationalism.

Music is also used as a sound of movements. Many movements have thrived due to great choice of melodies. Music is used successfully to promote a belief, stand, it is therefore easier to influence from the foregoing that music plays a big role in determining and

directing new political techniques. Music is a great way to create and reform bonds between people and make them act as one.

It is also the unofficial voice of resistance. A clear example is the legend of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the founding father of Afrobeat genre; his life and death were punctuated by series of revolutionary hit tracks against a dictatorial regime which used every conceivable plan in the bid to silence him; he was jailed and molested, his family was not left out. For many times, music was used to inform the society about various issues.”⁹.

Music remains a strong and influential tool for addressing and challenging government actions. All over the world and throughout history, music has been used to reflect people’s feelings, question authority and speak out against bad leadership. Musicians like Fela Kuti, his music go beyond entertainment to become a platform for political resistance and a voice for the oppressed.

Music has the power to connect with people emotionally. This makes it a very effective way to express dissatisfaction with government. It is a universal language that reaches different types of people, regardless of class, background or education. Through powerful lyrics and performances, musicians can shape public opinion and influence politics thinking.

Today, music continues to play an important role in political activism. For example, during the #EndSars protest in Nigeria, many artists used their music to support the

movement and raise awareness. Globally, songs have also been used to call for justice, peace, equality. These examples show how music can inspire people, unite them and encourage them to take action for positive change.

Music is more than just a form of art. It is a tool for social and political change. It helps to inform the public, strengthen diplomacy and promote accountability in leadership. As such, music continues to be a vital part of the struggle for good governance and a better society.

The Impact of Music on African Youth and Society

Music has always played an important role in human life. It affects how we feel, helps shape different cultures and can even lead to social change. Music has a strong influence on people and communities making it a universal language that connects everyone, no matter their background, one of the main ways music affects us is through our emotions. It can make us feel happy, excited, sad or even bring back old memories.

“Music possesses a unique power to communicate and influence others in ways that not firm other forms of communication. Often as humans, we may feel misunderstood or unable to express our true feelings. Many turn to music in search of connection with others, needing to express themselves or find a sense of understanding.”¹⁰.

Scientists have found that listening to music can increase the brain’s release of dopamine, a chemical that makes us feel good. Brain scans show that listening to or making music

engages almost every region of the brain at once, meaning music can literally influence how our brains work. “Music also stimulates the synthesis of immunoglobulin, which is key to our health”.¹¹ .This is why music is often part of movements like parties, marches or quiet time alone, because it helps us express and heal with our feelings. Music brings people together, it helps build strong communities and creates a sense of belonging. In many cultures, music is used in special events like weddings, festivals and religious ceremonies. For example, in Africa, as in communities, traditional music is an important part of celebrations and helps keep cultural traditions alive while bringing people closer.

“Music is an essential aspect of all human civilizations and has the power to emotionally affect society, unites people, forming culture, exchange music with each other, they gain valuable insight into another way of life. More as a cultural rights, may aid in the promotion and protection of other human rights. It can help in the healing process, dismantling walls and boundaries, re- conciliation and education. Around the world, music is being used as a vehicle for social change and bringing communities together.

At the core of our everyday experience with music, lies we used it to relax, express ourselves, come to term with our emotions and generally improve our well-being. It has evolved into a tool for healing and self expression often describing this use, so individuals take steps to impact society. Music has the ability to deeply affect our mental state and raise our mood when we need it, music gives us energy and motivation. When we're married, it can soothe us.

The effect is far-reaching, tapping into memories, influencing thought, emotion and interests, thanks to music artists who have put their heart and soul into creating, we feel connected with other people and their difficulties, challenges and emotions. Another essential factor to consider is how strongly music influences society and true human behaviour.

Music's impact on human rights movements and its role as for change is clear in the history books. One example is the impact of the 'Freedom Songs' of the Civil rights movement, such as 'We Shall Overcome' and 'Strange Fruit'; these songs both informed, educated people, built empathy across the divide and had a hand in mending Segregation.”¹².

People have used Songs to Speak out against Unfair treatment and to bring attention to serious issues. For example, during the Civil rights movement, Singers like Dylan and Nina Simone used their music to fight against racism and inequality. In the Same way, during the Vietnam War, artists like Peel, Jung and John Lennon made Songs Calling for peace and protesting war.

Music can also shape and reflect the wishes of a Society. “Fela’s music Created on the average Nigerian in the consciousness of what political activism is all about the power of Mind.” ¹³ .Fela was a unique musician whose Songs spoke about both the present and the future. Because of this, many people today regard him as a prophet and some even view

him as a messiah. It became a way for people to express themselves and share cultural identity.

Music also had a Long effect on the economy; the music industry makes billions of dollars every year. This includes money from Selling albums, Concert tickets, and using Songs in movies or ads. Music created many jobs and supports businesses all over the world.

However, music is not always seen in a positive light, Some Songs have been criticized for encouraging bad behaviour, like violence, Drug use, or disrespecting women. “Listening to music can potentially worsen your mental health as previously stated, although you can listen to an artist’s Songs about the same emotion and Situation you are currently in and see that as a beacon of hope. Yet it can also drive you further into those feelings.

It's important to be careful when listening to songs whilst feeling intense emotions, and even more important to recognize that staying with those negative emotions. People how comfortable and hostility. Music with aggressive or harmful lyrical content can influence listener’s behaviour and perception, particularly among adolescents and young adults”¹⁴.

In general, music has a powerful influence on people, culture and society. It brings people together, supports social change, and helps us express our feelings. As long as

people keep making and enjoying music, it will continue to play an important role in our lives and in history.

“Fela Kuti’s pioneering work in the realm of music introduced a vibrant and dynamic genre that became synonymous with expression and resistance. The cultural impact of Afrobeat extends far beyond music; it served as an anthem for social change and a voice for the marginalized”¹⁵. Fela Anikulapo Kuti not only created Afrobeat, rose more than just a singer; music he was a strong powerful voice for the poor and oppressed, a bold critic of bad leaders and a culture of hero whose influence still lives on today. His music advise and lifestyle made a big deference in Nigeria, across Africa and around the world.

In the Nigeria of the 1970s and 1980s, life under military rule was difficult and dangerous. The country was controlled by military leaders, who governed through force instead of democratic principles, Corruption was widespread, public funds were constantly misused, and basic freedom especially the right to speak openly were heavily restricted. Anyone bold enough to criticize the government risked intimidation, arrest, or even losing their life. This climate of fear left many young people feeling powerless and invisible; their opinions earned no weight, and their dreams for a better future were repeatedly crushed under the weight of oppression.

Fela Kuti shattered the silence through his music. He fearlessly confronted the government, the military, and other structures of power in his songs. By directly addressing the challenges young people faced such as police brutality, poverty, and

unemployment he became the voice of their frustration and hope. His music was more than just entertainment; it was a source of strength, encouragement, and a reminder that their struggles were real and worthy of attention. For many, listening to Fela was like hearing their own thoughts and feelings echoed back to them with courage.

A striking example of this is his 1976 hit “Zombie.” In the song, Fela described Nigerian soldiers as “zombies”—“faceless automatons who have sold their soul for orders,”¹⁶ , without question even when those orders meant harming innocent people. Speaking this way about the military was extremely risky, as they were feared and untouchable at the time; yet Fela delivered the message openly, blending sharp humour with irresistible grooves, rhythm, making the criticism impossible to ignore.

Young people embraced “Zombie” because it expressed the truth they had been too scared to say themselves; it gave them the courage even if indirect to challenge authority. The song quickly spread through homes, markets, schools and street corners, becoming a rallying cry for resistance. The government’s violent response, including raids on Fela’s home, only strengthened his image as a fearless truth-teller.

By proving that one could stand up to power and still survive, Fela encouraged young Nigerians to think more critically about truth, justice, and their own role in shaping the nation’s future. His music convinced them that change was possible and that their voices mattered. “Fela’s music was intrinsically tied to his political beliefs. He emerged as one of the most vocal critics of the Nigerian government, using his platform to address issues

such as corruption, military rule and social injustice. His songs contained biting commentary on the political landscape of Nigeria, making him not just a musician but a political activist of the truest sense.

Fela's activism extended beyond his music. He founded the Kalakuta Republic a commune that served as a base for his musical and political endeavours. This republic was a symbol of resistance against government oppression"¹⁷.

Conclusion

To sum up, Fela Kuti made music a strong weapon against injustice, bad leadership and social inequality in Nigeria. His songs were not just for dancing or celebration, but they carried powerful messages that opened people's eyes to the problems of society and inspired them toward a better livelihood for themselves. For many Nigerian youths, Fela became such a role model that showed that it was okay to speak out against wrong doings. His music brought awareness, encouraging resistance, building within people boldness and courage to struggle for change. Even thus pre- sent day, his influence is still projected and felt in Nigerian Society, proving that music, which is Universal in nature can truly make a difference.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FELA KUTI'S LEGACY AND INFLUENCE ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

Introduction

Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a Nigerian musician, a bold and creative singer, who is still an important figure of the 20th century, “African most controversial musician”.¹ “The birth of Afrobeat can be traced back to Fela's desire to address the socio-political issues affecting Nigeria. He used music as a form of protest, incorporating elements of storytelling and satire into his songs. The genre quickly gained popularity, not only in Nigeria but across the globe, influencing countless musicians and artists.”² . The style of music blended traditional African sounds with jazz, funk, and highlife. His music was not just for entertainment. An icon, he was, but what truly challenge authority and fight for justice.

"In the eyes of the world, Fela rose to be a charismatic face of Afrobeat, a kind of music and an attitude he invented in response to a context he articulated in his own unique way",³ he was a fearless man, his songs emphasized the religion, government, military rule, and the corruption that affected everyday people. His songs reflected crimes faced and political voices, such as speed, oppression, poor leadership, police brutality. Songs like "Zombie," "Sorrow Tears and Blood" and "Water no get enemy" were not

only catchy and using but also communicated messages that made people reason and question the system.

Fela Kuti's rage in activism, he formed the Kalakuta Republic. "My communal Compound came about naturally, right there in Surulere. Later on in '74, it was given the name "Kalakuta" then I added 'Republic', why kalakuta? You see, when I first put in jail the name of the prison was called "Kalakuta!" And 'Republic!' well cause I wanted to identify the way of myself or someone who doesn't agree with that Federal Republic of Nigeria created by Britishmen"⁴. A community which he loved, with his band and followers, which was a figure/symbol of resistance to the Nigerian government. It also built the "Afrika Shrine", a place where he performed and freely spoke about politics, African pride and unity. These actions made him a constant target of government attacks, leading to great harassment and even violence, but he never backed down.

Fela's legacy is one of strength, courage, rebellion and cultural pride. He encouraged Nigerians to become aware of their rights and be proud of their African roots and to speak out against injustice. His strong power full lyrics, energetic performances and sound messages helped shape a sense of national identity and pride among the people, especially the youth.

Fela Kuti did more than create music. He helped redefine what it meant to be proudly African in a post-colonial Nigeria by blending African rhythms with global sounds like jazz and funk. He pioneered Afrobeat, a genre that uplifted Nigerian identity and restored

pride in African heritage. "To listen to Fela more than to listen to a blend of culture, specifically musical biography of the post-colonial African state; an account of the state's cross-roads and life of its seen by an operational music whose potency as approach more depends on the continued turmoil time life of the state".⁵ His songs highlighted African spirituality, tribal richness and cultural values, making his performances both musical and cultural expression.

Beyond the music itself, Fela's image carried a strong message; through his vibrant traditional inspired clothing and bold stage presence, he challenged western standards and encouraged Africans to embrace their own culture. In doing so, he became a cultural trailblazer whose influence extended well beyond the stage, "his bold style and unapologetic embrace of African identity"⁶ . inspired generations to reconnect with and celebrate their African roots. "Rikki stein recalls his first encounters with fela kuti in the 1970s with a laugh"⁷

Cultural Impact

One of Fela Kuti's most significant and enduring contributions to Nigeria's cultural development was the creation of Afrobeat. This was not simply a new musical style but a powerful cultural innovation that gave expression to the experiences of the post-Colonial era. Afrobeat drew inspiration from multiple sources: it combined Fusions of Jump: Ghanaian Highlife, Jazz improvisation and American soul into a sound that was both deeply rooted in African traditions and modern in its global appeal. "This fusion gave

birth to a unique, groovy and highly danceable sound that was both reflective and thought provoking. The Afrobeat groove was embodied by hit songs like “Shakara.”⁸ In doing so, Fela created a genre that could not easily be dismissed as a mere imitation of western music; rather, it stood as something uniquely African and proudly Nigerian.

His years at the Trinity College of Music in London “where he studied trumpet and played Jazz for clubs on the weekend”⁹, exposed him to western classical music and jazz theory, giving him technical skills and discipline. “Fela Anikulapo Kuti was a God sent messiah to deliver Nigerians and Africans from our leaders brutality, so he settled upon a career in music over medicine while studying in London”.¹⁰

However, his artistic and political direction changed profoundly after his encounter with the black power movement during a visit to the United States in 1969. In Los Angeles, Fela met Sandra Smith, a member of the empowered black pride, racial consciousness, and resistance to systems of oppression and later, he often recalled that it was in America that he realized the political potential of music that songs could go beyond entertainment and function as instruments of social transformation.

Afrobeat was more than an aesthetic experiment, it was a cultural manifesto, “It serves as an anthem for social change and a voice for the marginalized.”¹¹ Through it, Fela declared independence from colonial and neo-colonial forms of cultural domination. One of the ways he did this was through language. While many elite Nigerians misaligned and

preferred the privileged English, the language of colonial rule, Fela chose to sing primarily in Pidgin English, and Yoruba. This decision was highly significant.

By using Pidgin, he could communicate across Nigeria's many ethnic groups and reach ordinary people who might otherwise be excluded from political discourse. At the same time, by performing in Yoruba, he affirmed the value of indigenous language and cultural expression, signaling that Nigerian identity did not need to be mediated through colonial categories, the muse thus become accessible to both the educated and uneducated, bridging the social gap and strengthening a sense of collective identity.

The theme of Feels must reinforced this feeling of independence. For example, in the song "Colonial Mentality," the cultured Africans who rejected their heritage and blindly imitated western lifestyle, the signs that such attitude represented a confirmation of Colonial Dominating, even after formal independence. In this sense, Fela need more to call for mental and cultural decolonizing, noting that Nigerian should define themselves on their own terms rather than things western standards; this message was not abstract, it was embodied in the everyday choices from his stage performances to his lifestyle, dress and outspoken interviews.

Fela's cultural philosophy also grew heavily in pan-Africanist thought. "The notion of an African nation state was the main thrust of Fela's pan African ideology expressed in his music, physical engagement and lifestyle"¹² . He was influenced by leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Marcus Garvey and others figures who believed in African unity and

the rejection of imperial control. For Fela, the liberation of Nigeria was tied to the liberation of the entire African continent. His music, therefore, did not only address Nigerian issues but also touched on the shared struggles of black people world-wide. Africa must become a sonic platform for pan-Africanism, bringing together rhythms, languages, and messages that resonated across national borders.

Equally important was the way Fela integrated African spirituality and aesthetics into his art. His performances often included primal moves, traditional dress, and symbolic gestures that reinforced African pride and identity. These choices challenged the ideas that modernity had to be western in appearance. Instead, Fela presented an alternative version of modern African culture: vibrant, spiritual and deeply connected to the roots. For many Nigerians, this provided a sense of cultural pride and reaffirmation, especially at a time when Westernization was often seen as the mark of progress.

Fela Kuti social influence was equally profound, shaping not only how Nigerians thought about power, but also how they viewed and defined themselves and their everyday choices. Unlike many artists who separated their music from their personal lives, Fela deliberately merged the two, turning his lifestyle, his music, and even his body into sites of resistance. In doing so, he modeled alternative ways of being, of governing, that challenged both state power and inherited colonial values.

A striking example of the negative creation of the Kalakuta Republic, a communal compound he established in Lagos in the 1970s. For more than a residence, Kalakuta

operated as a symbol and physical declaration of independence from the state control. Fela described it as a sovereign entity, even drafting a constitution that outlined the principles of self-rule. In Kalakuta, he lived with his band members, lovers, family, and a wide circle of followers. It functioned as a micro-society built on ideals of freedom, solidarity and cultural sufficiency. For ordinary Nigerians, the Kalakuta Republic became living metaphor of resistance, proof that it was possible to imagine and practice autonomy outside the oppressive structure of military dictatorship. At times when most citizens felt powerless against the state but embraced, Fela's lessons of self-determination.

Equally significant was the way Fela used his body image and lifestyle as tools of protest. He dressed confidently in Africa-inspired clothing, rejecting western stuff and free that were often associated with elite respectability. He openly smoked marijuana, an act that was both personal and political given the state prohibition laws. Perhaps most famously, he engaged in polygamy, marrying twenty-seven women in a single public ceremony in 1978. Too many observers, these acts appeared eccentric and scandalous, but for Fela they were deliberate acts of resistance. They represented his rejection of western moral codes and Nigerian elite conservatism, both of which he viewed as extensions of colonial domination by living in ways that directly contradicted official respectability. Fela embodied a radical African-centered identity that defied conformity.

This refusal to conform resonated powerfully with ordinary Nigerians. Many people, especially the youth, saw in Fela's defiance a form of resistance that they themselves lacked the freedom to exercise. His choice signaled that resistance was possible, even in the face of violent repression. In this sense, Fela's life itself became a political performance, one that blurred the line between art and activism. He showed that social protest did not only occur in speeches or marches, but could also be enacted through everyday choices about clothing, family life, consumption, and public behaviour.

Moreover, this open rebellion against societal norms encouraged Nigerians to rethink their own cultural identities, instead of aspiring to modern standards of beauty, life, respectability in Western ideals, or foreign lifestyles. Fela urged people to embrace African models of self-expression and community living. This was especially important in the 1970s and 1980s, when Nigeria's urban middle class often posted protests with westernized identity, positioning himself as a counter-to-simplify, Fela challenged their approval and inspired a generation to take pride in their African heritage.

Ultimately, Fela's social influence extended far beyond his music. By turning his lifestyle into a platform of protest, he expanded the very meaning of resistance in Nigeria, with his bold defense of authenticity and tradition reminded people that political power was not absolute and that personal choices could themselves become revolutionary acts. For ordinary Nigerians who felt alienated and marginalized, Fela's example meant both

empowerment and inspiring, proving that resistance was not only possible but could be woven into the fabric of daily life.

Fela's Kuti Legacy

Fela Kuti legacy cannot be confined within the borders of Nigeria; his innovations in music, culture, and political activism reverberated across continents, making him not only a Nigerian icon but also a global symbol of resistance and creativity. Through Afrobeat, Fela exported both the rhythms of Africa and the struggles of the people, ensuring that African voices were heard on the international stage.

One of the most important aspects of this global influence was Fela's international touring career. From the 1970s onward, he performed in Europe and the United States, captivating audiences who were drawn to his powerful blend of music and politics. To western listeners, Fela was not only a remarkable innovator who fused African drumming with Jazz improvisation and Funk grooves but also a political figure who gave voice to African resistance against dictatorship, corruption, and neo-colonialism.

His concerts became immersive experiences, combining high-energy rhythms, extended improvisations and provocative political messages that challenged not only Nigerian leaders but also Western power. Committed to African representation in the pride, Fela transformed the concert stage into a site of political education and solidarity, introducing global audiences to Nigeria's internal struggles.

The reach of Afrobeat also ensured that Fela's influence did not end with his lifetime. "The legacy of Fela Kuti's music can be felt throughout contemporary African music. By pioneering Afrobeat, Fela laid the groundwork for numerous genres and artists that followed"¹³ . In contemporary music, his legacy can be seen in both direct and indirect ways. The rise of "Afrobeats," a modern, more commercial genre that emerged from Nigeria and spread globally, owes much to Fela's pioneering work. While today's Afrobeats popularized by stars such as Wizkid, Burna Boy, Davido and Tiwa Savage often emphasize themes of celebration, romance, and lifestyle rather than direct political critique, its global acceptance is rooted in the foundation Fela laid.

Burna Boy, in particular, has explicitly acknowledged Fela as a major influence, sampling his music and adopting his Afrocentric ethos on songs like 'Ye' and 'Anybody.' Also, "Burna Boy's "African Giant" and "Twice as Tall" albums tackle themes of identity and voice, as well as the African experience, reflecting the same spirit of activism that Fela espoused in his music"¹⁴ . By bridging African sounds with global pop markets, these artists show how Fela's musical groundwork continues to yield fruit, even if expressed in new (less overtly political) forms.

In today's Lagos, Fela Kuti is not just remembered, he is actively celebrated as part of the city's living culture. One of the strongest examples of this is "The annual Fela Festival, held every October, brings together Afrobeat enthusiasts, artists and fans from around the world"¹⁵ . The week-long event transforms Lagos into a hub of music, art, and debate.

Crowds of fans ranging from ordinary Nigerians to international visitors come together to celebrate Afrobeat and reflect on Fela's bold messages about justice and freedom. Far from being just a music festival, Felabration functions as both a cultural gathering and a platform for critical conversations about society.

Alongside the festival, the New Afrika Shrine stands as a permanent space dedicated to Fela's legacy. Built by his children, the shrine operates not only as a performance venue, but also as a cultural tradition that nurtures activism and Community. Stepping into the shrine is more than attending a Concert it is entering into a space where music, speeches, and identity Converge. Afro best here is experienced so a philosophy that emphasizes Freedom reaching as an African pride.

Through these institutions legacy has turned feels legacy into a vibrant, ongoing presence. The combination of Felabration and the New Afrika Shrine ensures that his ideas remain relevant to young generations while also drawing global audiences/positioning logo as the heart of Afro beats past, present and future.

If "Fela would look at Nigeria's current and train to the people that suffer and strike, feel is uncomfortable and the move is spiralling and he'd beat the drum harder. During the 2020 #EndSars protests, his voice blared from speakers across Nigeria. His shrine became shrine for resistance once again, so his Fela Seun and Femi took to the Stage, reminding a new generation that advocacy was cultural before it was political.

What Fela offers today is a blueprint for modern resistance. His politics were unapologetic and rooted in the Community. He believed in strict roles role was to reflect the times.”¹⁶ .Fela’s music has also taken on significance as part of the global black consciousness. “Fela’s stylist vision and musical artistry also constitute a significant addition to the understanding of the revolutionary music in the continent of African diaspora and more generally. In Black ideology.”¹⁷ . His message, resistance against oppression and his critiques of corrupt leadership resonate strongly with struggles faced by African descended populations worldwide. In the United States, for example, Fela’s music has been involved in conversations about social justice, particularly during the Black Lives matter movement, themes of police brutality and state violence echoed in the classic songs such as ‘Sorrow, tears and blood’.

In the Caribbean, his emphasis on Pan-African unity found common ground with reggae and restoration traditions, particularly in the work of artist like ‘Bob maley’. In Europe, his concerts and recording inspired solidarity movements that saw parallels between Nigerian struggles and global campaigns for human rights. Afrobeat, therefore, has become more than a genre, it has become a diaspora bridge, linking protestors on the continent with African descended communities abroad in shared struggles for dignity and liberation.

Moreover, Fela’s international cultural footprint extended into theater and scholarship. The broad royal music Fela which circulated 2000, brought his life, story and music to

new audiences further centering his place in global cultural memory. Academics and Cultural Critics have studied Fela as a case of how music can function as a vehicle of political resistance, stretching him alongside global icons such as Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela and Bob Marley. His image has thus become a part of the symbol's representation of global protest, invoked wherever marginalized groups seek inspiration for cultural rebellion.

Ultimately, Fela built global legacy due to the ability to make bigger struggles resonate universally. He demonstrated that music could transcend borders while remaining deeply rooted in local experience. By exporting Afrobeat, he is not the only one that introduced the world to Nigeria rhythms but also forged connections across the African diaspora. "Fela's invention of Afrobeat as a process of assimilation and synthesis"¹⁸.

Conclusion

Fela develops built a legacy as setting himself as the Founder of Afrobeat he created a cultural form that gave Africans pride in their heritage. Politically, he challenged the autocratic government and gave voice to the oppressed, he modeled resistance through his lifestyle and community, he reshaped Nigeria's national identity into one of resistance, pride, and resilience.

The impact continues in one way or the other in Nigeria presently, from modern music to political protests, Fela's voice echoes in the struggles of new generations. His life

demonstrates the power to redefine identity, challenge authority, and inspire transformation. Fela built in this reason remaining not only a cultural icon but also a permanent figure to Nigeria's national identity.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Afrobeat is not just a style of music, but it was a social movement that carried the heart and struggle of Africa, learning about Fela Anikulapo Kuti and how he created Afrobeat in the 1960s and 1970s. Fela's music became so much more than entertainment, by combining African rhythms with jazz, funk and soul, Fela built something unique, but what stood out was how he used it to fight against oppression, corruption, and the preserve of cultural imperialism. Songs like "Zombie" and "Sorrow Tears and Blood" are powerful messages which express the resistance of injustice and push people to think and inspire to see how Fela used his art to speak the truth to power, and to remind people to embrace their identity.

Music, more than just a form of art, but also one of the strongest weapons people can use to confront injustice. Fela built his life and message in the songs that reflect his powerful music. Music can be when it goes beyond entertainment. Fela showed that music can give voice to the voiceless, challenge corrupt governments, and push people to reflect on its values. Fela proved, even when his lyrics and that of the music, each when his deeply and most of into familiar people's dangers, but to ensure that the truth be told, and freed of that level of binary voices. Fela built to be more than a musician but a revolutionary leader that fought for change in society.

This study changed the way one would think about music in general, rather than something to dance to or a way to relax/meditate. Music carried history of people and society, identities and power. A language that cuts across culture, age and class, and has the power to bring people together around a common cause. The same way music was used in Fela's time to bring forth change and address corrupt government or leaders and inspire many people, it also plays the same role today. For example, during the #EndSars protest, Nigerian artists used music to call on industries, mobilize the truth and people, and demand for accountability. This reveals that the way in tradition of using music as a tool for resistance and a room to shine and continue to empower new generations.

It is often said that effort is never neutral it either supports the system or challenges it. Fela chose to challenge the system and his choice has left a legacy that is still influencing the world today. Music can bring change and such change can't only feel on fathers, but also create it can also craft and offer the messages we share and offer courage to speak up.

Music is also a memory and movement. It preserves the struggles of the past while also pushing people toward the future. Fela also pushing people toward the future, Fela Kuti proceed that one person art could shake government and give hope to billions.

Fela's Kuti's legacy is much more than just Afrobeat, but it centered on his life, identity, change and resistance. The music was used to educate and to fight for truth. His songs were not just rhythms and melodies but history lessons and perfect speeches disguised in

sound. Listening to songs like “Zombie” or “Sorrow Tears and Blood,” today, gives the understanding of how music can challenge leaders, spoken people and give hope to those who feel powerless. Artists today can be important voices in society because they reach people’s hearts in different ways.

The idea of national identity and what it means to be African, Fela refused to imitate the west or conform to colonial values. Instead, he proudly celebrated African languages, traditions, and spirituality. He showed that being Nigerian meant more than just holding a passport but embracing culture. Speaking the truth and rejecting oppression, Fela redefined Nigerian identity by proving that pride in one’s roots is not backward but powerful. Fela’s example teaches us that real progress begins with self-acceptance and cultural pride.

Fela’s influence still lives on, not only in Nigeria but all over the world. From Burna Boy sampling his sound to protests like #EndSars playing his songs to international movements like ‘Black Lives Matter’ echoing his themes his music continues to give voice to struggles for freedom and justice. Fela’s work is not stuck in the past but alive and evolving with every new generation. His Kalakuta Republic and the ‘Afrika Shrine’ were more than just spaces but symbols of resistance and unity.

Fela’s lasting legacy is about the power of art to shape identity and inspire change not just in Africa or Afrobeat. Fela brought the understanding that music can be a weapon,

culture can be a shield and identity a source of strength. Fela lived boldly, spoke fearlessly and left behind a message that continues to empower people.

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