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**Freedom, Good Governance and Nationalism in Fela Anikulapo’s Music**

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**ABSTRACT**

The use of music to fight for freedom and to call for good governance has been the hallmark of musicians that are nationalism inclined. It becomes expedient for musicians like FelaAnikulapoKuti to communicate through Afro music about many national policies made by national leaders which have put people under another kind of colonisation. A prophetic music such as that of Fela still captures the current situation in this present political dispensation despite the fact the songs have been sung decades from now. Indeed, music plays a huge role in human life and in communicating the wrongs of the governance for correction. This paper examines selected albums of Fela Anikulapo Kuti. It discusses how the songs in his albums have revealed the evil in governance and projected the corrupt practices in government as well as how these have contributed to the downturn of Nigerian’s government overtime. Using the Social Critic Theory as modified by Benson (2013), complemented with the content analysis method, the study investigates how music served as medium of communication on freedom and need for good governance in the past and present political administrationsusing**survey design interpretive hermeneutics approach**. **Findings reveal that Fela’s music was impactful in the areas of political protest, mobilisation and radicalisation of policy formulation. Fela’s music career as observed in this study, evolved through Liberal and the Revolutionary thematic categorisations.** This study concludes that, music served as medium of communication on freedom and need for good governance in the past and present political administrations and that Fela’s music has served as a clarion call to people who are victims of Nigeria’s political maladministration.

**Keywords:**Music, Communication, Freedom, Good Governance

**Introduction**

One of the means of communication in typical African society is music. Music as an art form has been inherent in the African society from inception. Onyebadi (2018, p. 22) observes that music permeates significant aspects of African society, culture, and tradition. Adebayo (2017) cited in Onyebadi (2018, p. 38) also opines that, “to the African, music is not just a pastime, it is a ritual” that describes the true essence and humaneness in being of African origin. Describing the essence of music, Cudjoe (1953) notes that music is African heritage considering its important place in the social life of the people. The submissions above infer that, music permeates the entire social structures and culturesof the African people. It touches all human endeavours such as trade, health, business, education, social life, agriculture and politics.

Consequently, one of the major areas of life that music has been profoundly used to communicate effectively and efficiently in Africa is politics. Even in the primitive African society, music had been used to send proverbial messages to the kings in a situation of unease in the society. Hence, it is difficult to divorce the place of music in the political activities of a contemporary African society. Therefore, using music to communicate to people in order to obtain freedom and good governance is particularly relevant. Supporting the above, Onyebadi (2018) and Grundlingh (2004) opine that African politics and political activities are also impacted by music. Furthermore, they are of the view that, music and songs played important role and were used to mobilise people to agitate for political freedom. In the same vein, Fela Anikulapo Kuti used his Afro beat music to agitate against the military government from 1970s until his death in 1997. Significantly, the agitation of these musicians was for the entrenchment of good governance and democratic system of government in Africa continent. Therefore, this paper examines the role of satirical communicative stance of Fela Anikulapo’s selected music towards the entrenchment of freedom and good governance in Nigeria.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Benson’s (2013) Social Critic Theory. Social criticism is a form of academic or journalistic criticism focusing on cultural or sociological issues relating to matters of concern within contemporary society in particular with respect to perceived injustices. It often refers to a mode of criticism that locates the reasons for such conditions in a society considered to be in a flawed social structure. It may also refer to people adhering to a social critic's aims at practical solutions by way of specific measures either for consensual reform or powerful revolution. **According to**[**Douglass**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Douglass) (1886, p. 121)**, “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organised conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe”. Significantly, this theory examines the criticism of social injustice perpetrated by Nigeria’s politicians since independence and suggest possible solutions to the oppressed. It also captured the lyrics of FelaAnikulapoKuti in his song ‘‘Surulere’’ in the ways of addressing political challenges facing Nigeria since independence.**

**Literature Review**

The fact that music is part of the social process in Africa cannot be overemphasised. Satti (2017), Gakahu (2017), Makwambeni (2017) and so on, have confirmed that a number of African musicians, especially in Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya and Zimbabwe have used music for purposes of nationalism.Uche (2018) examines various literatures on satirical use of music for political messages in Africa. Satti (2017) cited in Uche (2018) submits that, in the 1960s, Sudanese musician, Mohamed Wardi, used his musical platform to arouse nationalistic fervor among his compatriots and was quick to support democracy as much as he condemned authoritarian and despotic leadership in his country. Also, Gakahu (2017) observed that, during Kenya’s independence struggle against colonial Britain, most of the song sung by the Mau Mau (otherwise known freedom fighters) were based on liberation from colonial injustices such as torture, rape, massacre, castration, forced labour, high taxation, and land displacement.

On his own part, Makwambeni (2017) argued that, during the regime of former President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe observed that, Zimdancehall music emerged as an alternative public sphere separate from the state where counter discourse is produced and consumed largely by unemployed urban youths who have been excluded from mainstream communicative spaces.

In Uganda, musician, Bobi Wine’s popularity among his fans due to revolutionary songs, was enough to catapult him from self-styled “Ghetto King” to an elected lawmaker. In 2017, Wine beat out the ruling party and opposition party candidate to win his seat. Moving from stage to parliamentary benches, Wine’s message has remained the same, [speaking out against corruption](https://qz.com/africa/1114472/ugandas-bobi-wine-says-he-was-bribed-to-scrap-museveni-age-limit-law/), social media taxation and the 73-year-old president continued grip on power.

In his view, Sarah (2010) is of the opinion that the role of satire in political affairs has evolved overtime and has continued to attack social vices and also to reveal hidden truths through indignation and laughter. It also has played an essential role in the expansion of free speech rights and the ability to influence the public’s view of political issues by encouraging critical thinking and debate.

Citing the case of South Africa, Louw (2017) asserts that twelve years after Afrikaners lost control of South Africa’s political-system, music became a fulcrum for Afrikaners to begin mouthing discontent about their place within the post-apartheid socio-political order. In Nigeria, Adebayo (2017) observed that the 2015 presidential election in the country was largely peaceful because of the positive role played by Nigerian musicians in urging for peaceful polling and the orderly transfer of power. Craig and Mkhize (2006) opined that the anti-Tutsi lyrics in Simon Bikindi’s songs where he called them “cockroaches,” “vicious hyenas”, and “blood-thirsty murderers” contributed to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

**Methodological Framework**

**The study adopted survey design, using interpretive hermeneutics approach.** Survey design is a design in which data are collected through selected lyrics of music. **The population of the study was six (6) songs of Fela AnikulapoKuti between 1960 and 1992. Stratified sampling technique which** is a type of sampling method in which the total population is divided into smaller groups or strata to complete the sampling process. This technique **was adopted to categoriseFela’s songs into the two phases; these are the Liberal and the Revolutionary. The analyses were done using content analysis, combined with application of Layman’s hermeneutics to analyse and interpret collected data.**

The satirical lyrics of Fela includes: themes regarding religion, politics and sexuality. He was a voice for the downtrodden people. He satirises politicians by speaking on things that concerns the nation and on how the leaders should be responsible for better living of their people. In his selected songs, Fela communicated on varieties of issues regarding bad leadership, corruption, stealing among others.

**Authority Stealing**

[Chorus]  
Authority stealing!  
You be thief (I no be thief)  
You be rogue (I no be rogue)  
You dey steal (I no dey steal)  
You be robber (I no be robber)You be armed robber (No be armed robber)  
I no be thief (You be thief)  
I no be rogue (You be rogue)  
I no dey steal (You dey steal)  
I no be robber (You be robber)  
I no be armed robber (You be armed robber)

[Chorus]  
Yes, yes, yes, yes!  
"Oh yes, of course, contract, have some money back in hand, ha ha"  
Hear the words them dey take deceive the people:  
Misappropriation  
Maladministration  
Nepotism  
Mitigation  
Make I remember another one wey them dey use  
Defraudment  
Forgerylization  
Embezzlement  
Vilification  
Mismanagement  
Public inquiry  
Authority stealing pass armed robbery  
We Africans we must do something about this nonsense  
We say we must do something about this nonsense  
I repeat, we Africans we must do something about this nonsense  
Because now authority stealing pass armed robbery  
Authority man him go dey steal  
Public contribute plenty money...  
[Chorus]  
Authority stealing!

It is worthy of mention that, the basic communication of Fela Anikulapo Kuti in the above song is the words that politicians use to deceive the people words such as; misappropriation, maladministration, nepotism, mitigation and so on. This implies that corruption as associated with the words mentioned in his songs has taken a new form of advancement especially in Nigeria today. Stealing is no longer a thing of shame in our society has Fela revealed. It is now norm and part and parcel of our living and this has put public into a pitiable state.

**Beast of Nation**

Make you hear this one [sax responses]  
War against indiscipline, ee-oh  
  
Na Nigerian government, ee-oh  
Dem dey talk ee-oh  
“My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people lack discipline”  
  
Na Nigerian government, ee-oh  
Dem dey talk be dat  
“My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people lack discipline”  
  
I never hear dat before- oh  
Make Government talk, ee-oh  
“My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people lack discipline”  
  
Na Nigerian government, ee-oh  
Dem dey talk be dat  
Which kind talk be dat- ee-oh?  
Na craze talk be datee-oh  
Na animal talk be datee-oh  
Na animal talk be datee-oh  
  
[chorus] many leaders as you see dem  
[chorus] na different disguise demdey-oh  
[chorus] animal in human skin  
[chorus] animal-i put-u tie-oh  
[chorus] animal-i wear agbada\* \*(robe)  
[chorus] animal-i put-u suit-u  
\*(2x- 2nd time with lead voc)s

In this song, Fela refers to our leaders as animal in human skin. Basically, he’s trying to make the people understand the fact that, we are not being ruled by humans but by animals in human skin. This captured [**Douglass**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Douglass)’s (1886, p. 42) assertion that**, “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organised conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe”. Consequently, Fela observes that the leaders enforced poverty on the people and relate to such leaders as animals in human skin.**

**Coffin for Head of State**

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen

Woh! AhhhhhCh! Ahhhh! Ch! Ch!

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord

\*[CHORUS] AMEN, AMEN, AMEN – [AFTER EACH LINE]

By the Grace of Almighty Lord

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord

By the Grace of Almighty Lord

InspiritusChristus, Mass Christus, Mass Christus, Mass Christus,

Allah, Waku-baru,Hamud, Salem Elekum, Allah \*(Muslim prayers)

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord

By the Grace of Allmighty Lord

So I wakawakawaka\*\* \*\*(walk)

\*[CHORUS] WAKA WAKAWAKA- [AFTER EACH LINE]

I go many places

I see my people

Dem dey cry, cry cry

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

I say I wakawakawaka

I go many places

I see my people

Dem dey cry, cry, cry

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

Amen-i, Amen-i, Amen

The above song is a criticism of arbitrary/artificial religious & ethnic boundaries, and religious hypocrisy- people who invoke god, but then commit atrocities. The poor live in squalour while the pastor lives in luxury. Fela walks (waka), & sees the unhappiness of his people, and the corruption and greed of the colonial-influenced Nigerian government. Colonial culture confuses the African people. In 1978, when Fela’s mother (a government official & activist) dies from injuries inflicted by the Army during an attack on Fela’s compound, Fela and his Movement of the People Carry an effigy of his mother’s coffin to the barracks of two noted Fela enemies, Gen. Obasanjo& Lt.Crnl. Y’aradua. As a protest, Fela& MOP put the coffin down, and force the army to take it (Obasanjo&Yaradua eventually help to carry it). “It remains there.” This in the right manners of Fela’s approach has revealed that democracy is a scam which only invoke people who are pretenders and people who reap where they do not sow. Fela criticize people in power and informs ways and how they impoverish members of the public through corruption and greed.

**Black Man’s Cry**

Nijowo la ma bo ………l’okoeru o (2X)

A o bonjokano,……...l’okoeru o (2X)

REPEAT STANZA

-[VOX FILLS] HEY----- JEH- AH-JEH

Talo so fun mipeawodudumogbesara mi oda o

Emu wakinri o (4X)

\* SAX, KEYS SOLOS

Nijowo la ma bo ………l’okoeru o (2X)

A o bonjokano,……...l’okoeru o (2X)

She-ma Hey, She-ma Hey, She-ma Hey

Talo so fun yin peawodudu m ti e gbes’ara yin oda o

E mu wak’eri o (2x)

Translation:

When will we be free from plantation slavery (2X)

We’ll be free one day from the plantation (2X)

Who says my black skin is not beautiful?Show me the person- I want to see him

When will we be free from plantation slavery (2X)

We’ll be free one day from the plantation (2X)

SAX, KEYS SOLOS

When will we be free from plantation slavery (2X)

We’ll be free one day from the plantation (2X)

Who tells you that your skin is not beautiful

Produce the person so you can see him

Slavery has been order of the day

The above song is Fela’s communication on freedom from the bondage of colonalists. He gave consciousness to the black people who are under slavery and gave them confidence about their skin that is, they are beautiful and adorable. Most importantly, Fela advocated for freedom for people living under snake skin shoe and Mercedes tyres. He is farmiliar with slavery through act of discrimination and skin condemnation. He therefore, encourages the black people to be strong and admire their skins because it is perfected and made beautiful by God.

**International Thief Thief**

(CHORUS) WELL WELL – [AFTER EACH LINE]  
Na true I want talk again o  
If I dey lie o  
Make Osiri punish me  
Make Ifadey punish me o  
Make Edumare punish me o  
Make the land dey punish me o  
Make Edumare punish me o  
I read ‘em for book ee-o  
I see so myself ee-o (2x on the 3rd repetition)  
Well-ee well-ee o

Hear it! (Horn responses)  
One more time  
First thing for early morning  
Na newspaper dem give us read  
First thing for early morning  
Na newspaper dem give us read  
The Oyinbowehdey inside  
Petty trader no fit to know

The Oyinbowehdey inside  
Market woman- na fit to read  
The Oyinbowehdey inside  
Na riddle for- laborer man  
Inside dey paper  
Lambasticaldey  
Inside dey paper  
Ipso facto- deydat one na Latin  
Inside dey paper,  
Jar-gonismdey  
Inside dey paper,  
Youth delinquency dey  
Who be deliquent?  
Na dem be deliquent  
Who be delinquent?  
The Oyinbo talker delinquent  
Who be delinquent?  
Na be me-oh

The above song ridicules the educational system especially in Africa by conceiving it as a ‘poor imitation’ of the Western Education system. The man who speaks better English gets paid more. The school’s grades are rated (better bread as climb). The English use words against us-- first thing in the morning we are given newspapers, they brainwash us with big words. It’s all jargon/nonsense-- irrelevant issues that have no bearing on common men. Then the leaders blame the poor’s problems on ignorance & delinquency, but it’s the (English speaking) leaders who are delinquent.

**Mr. Follow Follow**

Mr. Follow Follow

\*[CHORUS] FOLLOW, FOLLOW, FOLLOW,- FOLLOW, FOLLOW, FOLLOW (2X)

Some dey follow follow, dem close dem eye

\*[CHORUS] DEM CLOSE EYE, PIN- PIN- PIN

Some dey follow follow, dem close dem mouth

\*[CHORUS] DEM CLOSE MOUTH, PAM- PAM- PAM

Some dey follow follow, dem close dem ear

\*[CHORUS] DEM CLOSE EAR, G’BOING- BOING- BOING

Some dey follow follow, dem close dem sense

\*[CHORUS] DEM CLOSE SENSE, BIRI- BIRI

I say dem close sense,

Dem close sense

If you deyfollowfollow

Make you open eye, open ear, open mouth, open sense (2x)

Na dat time

Na dat time you no go fall (2x)

If you deyfollowfollowdem book

\*[CHORUS] NA INSIDE CUPBOARD YOU GO QUENCHES (2x)

From the above, Fela used his music to communicate to masses on the need to voice out and revolt the ruthless domination of the rulers. He advices the people not just to be misdirected but they should also use their senses and talk when necessary to stop being mislead.As part of the advocacy of social criticism which aims at people adhering to a social critic's as practical solutions by way of specific measures either for consensual reform or powerful revolution.Fela gives voice to the masses and made them to understand the fact they should speak whenever they sense injustice in the society.

**Findings and Recommendations**

**Findings in this study reveal that FelaAnikulapo’s music was impactful in the areas of political protest, mobilisation and radicalisation of policy formulation. Fela’s music career as observed in this study, evolved through Liberal and the Revolutionary thematic categorisations. His lyrics and music delivery projected corruption, oppression, intolerance, and brutality from the national government and its security agencies, responsible for radicalising him.**

**It has also come to the fore that, FelaAnikulapo** used his music to project suffering of the people who live in abject poverty and condemns leaders who are responsible for their sufferings. Most of his songs center around criticism of arbitrary/artificial religious & ethnic boundaries, and of religious hypocrisy- people who invoke god, but then commit atrocities.

Importantly as well, it is discovered that Fela also discussed how Nigeria as a country has been going down as a result of corruption by our leaders. Lastly, the study revealed that, politicians have overtime, turned Nigerians to suffer-head. Nigeria’s political system is on the verge of breaking and he challenged Nigerians to get ready to fight this system that is full of corrupt practices among our both political and economic leaders.

In view of the above findings, the study recommends that:

1. There is need to further interrogate the effectiveness of music as a veritable medium of communication on freedom and need for good governance in the political and socio-political structures of our societies;
2. Fela’s music has served as a clarion call to people who are victims of Nigeria’s political maladministration. As a result, already existing and indeed, budding musicians should imbibe and cultivate, the habit of producing morally-effective songs that have the potential to checkmate the political maladies that are characteristic of political players;
3. The effect of music communication to economic growth and economic development in Nigeria remains an obvious site for serious intellectual debate. As a result of this, scholars should pay more attention to this research area.

**Conclusion**

This study has been able to identify the problems with leadership in Nigeria and our leaders’ level of mismanagement and misleadership. Also, the study implores the masses not to remain insensitive tosuch misrule and bad leadership.Fela’s prophetic music lives on and it is more relevant now than in the past. His communication about freedom and need for good governance is delivered in a clear and concise language telling us to be conscious of those leaders whose intention is to plunder the nation’s resources. This study concludes that, music served as medium of communication on freedom and need for good governance in the past and present political administrations and that Fela’s music has served as a clarion call to people who are victims of Nigeria’s political maladministration.

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