

Yabis: A Phenomenon in the Contemporary Nigerian Music

by

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Abstract

Since the early 1970's when the late Nigerian Afro-beat proponent, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (formerly known as Fela Ransome-Kuti) returned from a tour of the United States of America, his music had witnessed a lot of transformation. First, he discarded with his erstwhile jazz-highlife style and came up with a new style he christened "Afro-beat", a mixture of American jazz and Yoruba folk music. Secondly, the content of his vocal music changed tremendously from abstract themes to day-to-day happenings among the common people (the masses) in Nigerian populace. However, the protracted military rule in Nigeria coupled with the large scale embezzlement and looting of the nation's treasury, undermining democratic processes as well as the promotion of large scale violence among other things, by the nation's military junta provided a new theme for Fela's vocal music from the mid 1970's. Thus the stage was set for a new phenomenon among the Nigerian popular music known as the Yabis music, through which those who governed through coercion were ridiculed and their bad policies subjected to derision in several lyrics of many Nigerian popular music who later joined Fela in the 1980's and after. This paper examines the role and impact of Yabis music on both the contemporary Nigerian music and political scenes.

Introduction

Yabis is the noun of the Pidgin English word "Yab" (which literarily means to make fun of a person or a thing). The etymology of the word "Yab" is almost difficult to trace. But, in terms of its sound, two English words that come to mind are yap and yak. While the former is defined as talking noisily without saying anything very important or serious, the latter means talking continuously about things that are not very serious. However, when closely compared with the word "chatter" (to talk quickly in a friendly way without stopping...about things that are not serious or important), which is a synonym of yak, then, "Yab" may have a closer affinity with yak than yap.

The word Yabis became very popular among residents in Lagos State of Nigeria in the 1970s, when Fela started his musical shows at his “African Shrine” which was located around Moshalashi Bus Stop in Lagos Mainland. Fela had a total of three shows every weekend, with a show per day, starting from Friday to Sunday. On Friday, it was “Yabis Night”, while “Saturday Comprehensive Show” came up the day after. Then on Sunday, Fela staged his “Sunday Afternoon Jump”. Although each of these shows was well attended, many people believed that the Friday’s “Yabis Night” had the largest crowd. During this particular show, Fela would take time to “yab” himself (most often starting from his alleged “big head”), members of his band, the audience, as well as the government officials at all levels (Federal, state and local government); revealing their various corrupt practices and their money wasting programmes.

Yabis, in this study, is defined as a biting satirical song that is deliberately composed with the aim of correcting an atrocity, a misdemeanour or sacrilege committed by either an individual or a corporate body within a particular society. This is in line with what Afolabi (2004: 151) described as “correction of vices”. When viewed in line with some forms of performances in other creative arts disciplines such as theatre arts, film, and dance, one may convincingly assert that Yabis music, like comedies, expose plays and some other forms of satirical song are effective means of correcting vices and misdemeanors in any society.

However, it is very instructive to state that the performance of satirical music is not new among many African societies. For example, among the Egbado people of the Yoruba of Nigeria, the phenomenon is known as *Efe*. *Efe* music, which integrates masks and dance, provides an ample opportunity for its performers to criticize, deride, and ridicule any individual member or an organization (of whatever status) in the community who had contravened the laws and ethics of that particular society. This is done under the auspices of the conventional artistic immunity, which implies that artists cannot be arrested, detained or punished for taking part in a live performance of satirical music or drama. One interesting aspect of *Efe* music is that during its performance, names of the particular culprit(s) or erring member(s) of the society are never mentioned. However, members of the audience are provided with adequate clues to decode the identity of the culprit(s). This vital information is often “transmitted” to the audience through miming, costumes, and dance steps and formations, all of which are expected to vividly depict the mannerism and idiosyncrasies of the culprit(s).

One Nigerian musician who pioneered and saw to the propagation of Yabis music on the Nigerian soil was the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, formerly known as Fela Ransome-Kuti. Fela was the second son of the legendary Kuti family of Rev. and Mrs. Ransome-Kuti in Abeokuta. After he returned from his American tour in 1970, Fela came up with a different idea and concept about African culture and traditions, most especially in the area of African music. In the book written on his life and works by Mabinuori Idowu, titled *Fela: Why Blackman Carry Shit*, Fela agreed that “America gave me the line of thought”, and what thoughts – if we may ask? The author of the book was quick to provide the answer,

...This was the turning point in his (Fela's) life. Fela was lucky however, that despite all his set-backs in America, he met a girl who at that time was a member of the Black Panther Party in the United States of America. The girl was Sandra Smith. Sandra helped him (Fela) financially and also set him on the African line of thought by exposing him to books and facts about pioneers of the African struggle – such names as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, etc. (5).

Consequent upon this experience,

...on his arrival back home, Fela decided that it was time to re-educate and re-direct the thinking of the African man. In order to achieve this, he put his music career at stake. This resulted in constant trials and tribulations from the establishments who are bent on sustaining the status-quo by any means necessary (6).

Among other things, he changed the name of his band from *Koola Lobitos* to *African 70* – to depict the year he was “liberated from his Euro-centric ideas and concepts”. Secondly, his former highlife-jazz style was abandoned for what he called “Afrobeat”. Also, the theme of his songs that used to be based on love and romance was changed to reflections of happenings in the society. Hence, according to Idowu (1986),

Fela's philosophical thoughts were becoming more and more sophisticated...to spread a message that will make the wretched of the earth liberate themselves (41).

Henceforth, all his songs were written and rendered in Pidgin English, which he called “*the language of the common man*” (Olatunji, 2001:42).

Yabis Music and Pidgin English Language – A Synergic Paradigm

For any language to cut across and survive in a heterogeneous nation like Nigeria, it must have a propensity of being easily understood by both the educated populace and the illiterate members of the society. The only language that best qualifies for this purpose in Nigeria is Pidgin English. Pidgin has been defined by The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1987) as:

...an auxiliary language that has come into existence through the attempts by the speakers of two different languages to communicate, and this is primarily a simplified form of one of the languages with a reduced vocabulary and grammatical structure and considerable variation in pronunciation.

We have stated elsewhere that it is generally believed that the majority of people in the south-south geo-political region of Nigeria, the ghettos in Lagos (e.g. Maroko and Ajegunle), Warri and Port Harcourt have all contributed immensely towards the development of Pidgin English as a language in Nigeria (Olatunji, 2001:41). A replica of this habitat of people is also found in other regions throughout the length and breadth of Nigeria. These are the people that form the larger percentage of the Nigerian masses or commoners.

This, perhaps, informed Fela’s decision to reach out to members of this population of Nigerians for them to form the nucleus of his audience. He had a strong believe that for his new brand of music to be acceptable and fulfill its objectives, he had to “pitch his tent” with the oppressed and the underprivileged people in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, this community of people constituted a considerable population of those who were always at the receiving end of any bad governance and draconian laws of the military junta in Nigeria. Fela chose to write and render his songs in Pidgin English in order to communicate his ideals to this set of people; the people at the grassroots. This effort by Fela made his music become more acceptable by the masses and, eventually, by the children of the elite in Nigeria, who could not help but sing along with him at his concerts; in Pidgin English. So, unconsciously, pidgin crept in and maneuvered its way into the domains of the elite. Again quoting Mabinuori Idowu:

...(this) is not merely Fela's artistic creation. It is a mass expression...what makes it more explosive is its appeal to the teenage offspring of the Nigerian elites. For the first time, slum dwellers and the privileged children of the local (V.I.P.) elite have come together in a highly charged and educative cultural experience. (95).

It is very pertinent, at this juncture, to make it crystal clear that this paper is not an appraisal of Afro-beat music; a genre created by Fela. Rather, our focus in the present study is directed towards an identification of Yabis music as a phenomenon in the contemporary Nigerian music. It is also aimed at conducting a thorough investigation on the roles and impact of Yabis music on both the contemporary Nigerian music and political scenes. Therefore, it is not out of place to state that Yabis music, as a phenomenon, does exist in the works of many contemporary Nigerian popular musicians, regardless of their techniques and styles of performance - reggae, soul, rock, rap, afro-beat, and so forth. That is the reason why musicians such as Tunji Oyelana, Edrees Abdulkareem, African China, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Femi Kuti (Fela's son), Seyi Akinlolu (Beautiful Nubia), and a host of others are all having some Yabis songs to their credit.

We have also noted in another study that one big advantage that Pidgin English has over English language (and that is why its speakers "feel more at home" whenever they are conversing in pidgin) is the retention of the sounding qualifiers. African indigenous languages have a different concept for qualifiers. While English adverbs or adjectives would just qualify a noun or verb in abstract, Africans would look for a suitable word both in meaning and in sound for the same. Infact, if it doesn't sound it, it doesn't describe it, and if it doesn't describe it, it doesn't qualify it. In other words, qualifiers must also be descriptive – in the African perspective (Olatunji, 2001: 45). While an English speaker would say: 'He gave her a "dirty" slap', a speaker of Pidgin would say: 'He gi am slap for face, "gbosa". Therefore, if we agree with C.T. Onions' (1973) of "Onomatopoeia" as the formation of a name or word by an imitation of the sound associated with the thing or action designated, then, we can say that for any word to perform well as a qualifier in pidgin English, it must have an onomatopoeic character.

So, the use of Pidgin English language for Yabis music creates ample opportunities for an extensive integration of onomatopoeias. Consequently, there is usually an avalanche of several onomatopoeic that are ingrained in the lyrics of musicians who perform Yabis music. For example, in an effort to vividly describe the barbaric action of the military men who forcefully broke in, entered and plundered his former "Kalakuta Republic" house in his music titled *Unknown Soldier*, Fela sang *inter alia*:

*...Then suddenly, suddenly...
 Jagbajagba, Jagbajagba, jagba
 Jugbujugbu, Jugbujugbu, jugbu,
 Jigbijigbi, Jigbijigbi, jigbi
 Jegbejegbe, Jegbejegbe, jegbe...*

All these are nothing but nonsensical syllables which are adopted as sound qualifiers in an effort to illustrate and portray the moments of looting, plundering, breaking and entry that took place as well as the attendant commotion, wailing, sorrow and brouhaha that ensued afterwards.

In the same vein, Eedris Abdulkareem, a Nigerian Rap music star, employs two onomatopoeic words, “jagajaga” and “gbosa-gbosa” in his music titled *Jagajaga*. Through the former, he depicts the tragic situation similar to Hobbes’ “state of nature” in Nigeria and by the latter he represents the sound of sporadic gunshots of the armed robbery gangs operating in every nooks and crannies of the country. An excerpt of the song goes thus:

*Nigeria jagajaga,
 Everything scatter scatter,
 Poor man dey suffer suffer,
 Gbosa! Gbosa!!
 Gunshot I dey hear...*

Also, in another song titled *Sorrow, Tears and Blood*, Fela gave a description of the pandemonium that usually ensued whenever the agents of military junta in Nigeria bombarded a particular place they had marked as “trouble spot” with a bid to quench the activities of those they referred to as “the enemies of government”. He used the word *Eeah* to depict the sudden and dreadful nature of the sound made by soldiers or policemen as they alighted from their truck and commenced firing of tear gas canisters and bullets at the crowd of people around the area. An excerpt of the music, titled *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* goes thus:

Eeah!
Everybody run, run, run - *Eeah!*
Everybody scatter scatter - *Eeah!*
Some people lost dem breath - *Eeah!*
Someone nearly die - *Eeah!*
Someone just died - *Eeah!*
Police dey come, Army dey come - *Eeah!*
Confusion everywhere - *Eeah!*
Ah, ah, ah, second minute later,
All don cool down, brother,
Police don go away,
Army don disappear,
Dem leave sorrow, tears and blood – dem regular trademark...

The Roles of Yabis Music

In line with its satirical nature, sometimes the performance of Yabis music is preceded or interpolated with either a speech monologue by the band leader or a dialogue by the leader and the rest members of the band. For example, Fela usually begins or interpolates his Yabis songs with a dialogue between him and members of his African 70 during recording sessions, or with the audience joining during his live shows. The dialogue mostly goes thus:

Fela: *Everybody, say ye-ye*

All: *Ye-ye*

Interestingly, when the two syllables in *ye-ye* are joined to form a word and toned-marked with lone and high speech tones (\ and /), it forms the word *Yeye*, which means satire in Yoruba language. Some other times, Fela's dialogue takes this form:

Fela: *Make I yab dem?*

All: *Yab dem.*

In the like manner, Eedris Abdulkareem started his song titled *Letter to Mr. President* with a monologue: “Turn dat microphone on, make I yarn some reality...” However, African China, in his record titled *Mr. President*, started with a cockcrow sound, perhaps to signify an important early morning message from him to his fellow countrymen. Despite being largely satirical in both its concept and content, Yabis music still has some roles which it performs in the nation’s music scene. These include:

Stimulating or Motivating Role

Most importantly, Yabis music plays the role of a stimulant or a motivator to move the people into action against oppressive rule, looting of the nation’s treasury, bribery and corruption, promotion of large scale violence as well as undermining conventional democratic processes. Among other things, most music composed along this line seem to elucidate the tendency to oppress, which is one of the human foibles endemic in various African societies like an enduring tribal mark. According to Oyewo (2003),

Oppression and its odious accomplice, tyranny, do not end with rulers alone. So many individuals are also obsessed with the act, depending on the amount of power one is in the position to wield over his fellow man. (59).

There seems to be a wrong insinuation, mostly in the military (and some para-military) parlance that oppression is the *sine qua non* for measuring superiority. This notion was usually displayed each time the military had taken over government in Nigeria. Therefore, most songs of Yabis music usually revolt against the iniquity unleashed on the Nigerian populace by the ruling power (be it military or civilian), their agencies and agents of oppression.

Be that as it may, one great enemy that must be avoided by any musician who would like to be effective and make a significant impact as far as Yabis music is concerned is fear. Fela said severally that he always had the words of the former President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah at the back of his (Fela’s) heart that “the secret of life is to have no fear”. This, according to Fela was corroborated by a Greek philosopher, George Mangski, who said “the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny”. This corroborates Niyi Osundare’s postulation that

...in the struggle for social justice, inaction on the side of the oppressed is a suicidal sin, for inaction is the harbinger of lethargy, the lethargy that aids the perpetuation of oppression and suffering.

Fela made a concerted effort to reveal the nature of this kind of fear in his song titled: *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* thus:

*...My people sef dey fear too much;
 We fear for the thing we no see...
 We fear for the air around us...
 We fear to fight for freedom, we fear to fight for liberty.
 We fear to fight for justice, we fear to fight for happiness.
 We always get reason to fear;
 We no want die, we no want old, we no want quench...
 I get one child, mama dey for house,
 I don build house, I want enjoy, I no want go...
 So Policeman go slap your face, you no go talk.
 Army man go whip your yansh, you go dey look like donkey...*

Interestingly, Fela had a pedigree of fearless and uncompromising parents. For instance, history was told of how his father, Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kuti (popularly known as Dawodu) refused to obey the order to remove his hat when walking past the British flag at the military settlement in Abeokuta during the colonial period. A soldier in the Quarter Guard wanted to force Dawodu to obey the order as he (the soldier) forced the hat off Dawodu's head with the bayonet of his rifle. It was reported that Dawodu complained bitterly and made a fuss over this incident to the authorities. In the end, the soldiers' barracks was relocated from the heart of the town (where the incident happened) to its present location at Lafenwa, which was then an outskirts of the town.

Also, Fela's mother, Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti (popularly called Bere) was by no less as dynamic as Dawodu. History has it that she was the mother of Nigeria's nationalist struggle and champion of universal adult suffrage. She almost single-handedly won the rights for women to cast votes in Nigeria. Also, Bere made the then Alake of Abeokuta, Sir Ladapo Ademola II to abdicate his throne in Abeokuta, on his way to exile in the northern part of Yorubaland (Idowu, 1986: 19).

Propaganda Role

Perhaps this discussion on the functional role would not be complete without looking at this brand of music as a power regulator. In their own functional role as social critics just as their counterparts from other performing arts disciplines, exponents of Yabis music do criticize the governments, systems and the society with the purpose of forcing them to change anti-societal programmes or moves. This role is what Afolabi (2004) described as “propaganda role”. Vocal music compositions of several Nigerian musicians who later joined Fela in Yabis music production are too numerous to mention.

One interesting aspect is that some songs performed by musicians were originally composed by non-musicians. One prominent example of the latter that comes to mind is *Unlimited Liability Company*, composed by Wole Soyinka (a playwright by training and profession) and performed by Tunji Oyelana and his Benders. In line with the trend of our discussion hitherto, this music was written in Pidgin. The first side of the album satirized the then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, his extravagant spending, corruption, his failed manifestoes, the corrupt practices of his ministers, chairpersons of Boards and Political Advisers; and the agitation of the oppressed to have his own share of the “gari”, the cry which led to “share-de-gari” and satirically interpreted as the etymology of the name of then said president – ‘Shagari’. In the music, concrete historical instances, which are well known to the society, are cited.

Here is the lyric of the song,

Unlimited Liability Company:

*Chairman, wetin you dey find for home?
 We think say you still dey overseas
 Ah, I forget, it’s getting near the time
 For a meeting of all the shareholders.
 Chairman, you sabi waka o
 We look for you from Tokyo to New York
 In Bulgaria, dem say you just commot
 Your executive jet pass us for Argentina
 Chairman, dis meeting go hot o
 Your directors don chop all we money
 While you dey shake hands with kings and presidents
 Your business partners don shake de treasury loose...
 Chairman, what of Iron and Steel
 Wey you tell us big profit go commot?*

*Two point One billion naira na in you spend so far
 E don vanish for inside Kainji dam...
 How many many I do talk o
 How many many I go shout o
 What of that Two point Eight billion
 Wey you take play hide and seek o?
 Make y take yourself commot
 Unless you give me my share of Two point Eight
 Semi jeje, se mi jeje...
 Me too, I want some gari
 Share-de-gari, share-de-gari
 Share-de-gari, share-de-gari...*

On the flip side of the album, which begins with the popular chorus “I Love My Country I no go Lie”, the artiste narrated historically, instances of wasteful spending and worthless projects that were initiated by the government to siphon public funds, the worst of which is the Green Revolution but satirized as “Etika Revolution”. This was ridiculed to total debasement in the album. The lyric of the song goes thus:

Chorous *I love my country, I no go lie
 Na inside am I go live and die
 I know my country I no go lie
 Na im and me go yab till I die*

*I love my country, I no go lie
 Na inside am I go live and die
 When he turn me so, I twist am so
 He push me, I push am, I no go go.*

*I wan begin with history
 That war we fight in recent memory
 When music wey come from barrel of gun was:
 We must keep the nation one.
 Me I tink I get cancer for me eye
 I dey see double, dat's de reason why
 When I look, na two I see
 Make I explain, I think you go gree...
 De day dem bring Green Revolution*

Country seek tink say he get salvation
He give a shout, he tink at last
Green Revolution go end in fast
Education is good for me and you...
But that was nothing but chicken feed
A nation in need is my friend indeed
Summon the Chief Chemical Analyser
To spell out de magic of fertilizer
Country seek, hear me, I no be miser
Millions dey hide for fertilizer...
One morning time I wake for my bed
And the radio say, I sick for my head
No, make I talk true, de thing wey he mention
Na something call Etika Revolution.
Etika Revo Kinni?
Etika Revolution
Etika Revo how much?
Etika Revolution...

Portrayal of Life

Yabis music, just like any other brand of music and indeed any brand of performing arts, portrays life in its base society. This is so because artists create their works from the raw materials supplied by events in the society. As a matter of fact, it is on this concept that the brand of music under consideration in the present study is predicated *ab initio*. For example, Fela's first hit record was titled *Jeun ko o ku* (A Glutton), where he illustrated the wretchedness of people who, in African perspective, use their 'ten fingers' to eat. These are those who squander all their incomes today and do not save some for their tomorrow.

The success of the said album greatly propelled Fela to look inwards and compose his music along the lines of common happenings in the society. For instance, it was reported that one day, Fela arrived at the Afro Spot (formerly known as Surulere Night Club). As he got to the crowded gate, he found one Alhaji who was causing trouble and fighting everyone around. After some interrogation, Fela discovered that the bone of contention was the Alhaji's refusal to pay the gate fee. Fela demanded for a cogent reason from the Alhaji why he would not want to pay for the show, being a man of God who had been to Mecca, widely considered as a Holy Land. But to Fela's amazement, the Alhaji responded by pushing Fela away and shouted on him "Who are You?". Fela had no option but to give the man a dirty slap on his face. The slap was so heavy that the Alhaji must have "seen stars" while the slap lasted.

The Alhaji, on realizing the identity of the person from whom he had just received that slap took to his heels before the situation became worse for him. Some weeks later, Fela came out with a tune titled *Who are You?*, narrating to his audience an account of his fight with the Alhaji at Afro Spot. (Idowu, 1986:41).

Ever since, there has been an avalanche of Yabis songs both by Fela and other Nigerian popular musicians in this direction. Examples include Fela's *Water No Get Enemy*, *Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake am*, *Gentleman*, *Suegbe Na Pako*, *Shakara*, *Lady*, and *Original Suffer Head*; Eedris Abdulkareem's *Mr. Lecturer* and *Chop Life*; African China's *No Condition is Permanent*, *Men Wey Sabi* and *Last Year*; Femi kuti's *Wonder Wonder*, *Victim of Life*, *Sorry Sorry* and *Shotan*, to mention just a few.

Cultural Revival

Many practitioners of Yabis music have turned out to be unrepentant antagonists of the dominance of European cultural values over those of their African counterparts. And, this musicians would go to any length to resist or attack such a "misplacement of priority" anytime they see one. Besides the issue of western democracy which Fela believes is very inferior to traditional African mode of governance, he also takes a stern look at such practices like adopting European, Christian, Arabic and Islamic names, as well any effort to acquire a pseudo physical semblance of the white people through bleaching of skin or wearing of wig, by some African ladies. Examples of compositions that critically satirize these negative practices include Fela's *Colomentality*, *Beast of No Nation*, *Teacher No Teach Me Nonsense*, *Yellow Fever*, and *Suffering and Smiling*.

The Impact of Yabis Music in Nigeria

The impact of Yabis music will be discussed from a double-dimensional point of view. The first discourse is centred on the political scene in Nigeria, while the second one is focused on the effects of performances of this songs on both the musicians of this brand of music and the contemporary Nigerian music scene in generally.

Yabis music has contributed, in no small measure, to some weighty decisions and actions of government with regard to positive and forward-looking reform agenda, entrenchment of constitutional provisions and mandate in Nigeria. However, it must be emphasized that such contributions do not come from musicians alone. Rather, it is usually a combined effort from musicians, theatre and mass media practitioners as well as Non Governmental Organisations. For example, in the early years of this millennium, the Transparent International Organization declared Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation in the world.

This became a very serious issue in both the print and electronic media both within and outside the country. Several plays were written and performed to seriously attack all forms of corrupt practices that had become a hydra-headed monster among many Nigerian citizens. In the same vein, musicians have also come up with several Yabis songs in this regard. Notable among them are Eedris Abdukareem's *Jagajaga* and *Letter to Mr. President*, African China's *Mr. President* and *Our Government Bad*, Seyi Akinlolu's *The People are ready* and *The Small People's Anthem*, Original Stereoman's *Wicked and Wise*, and so forth.

Consequently, all these efforts seem to pay off within the past three years as the Federal Government of Nigerian led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (a retired army general) has been taking some drastic steps to curb all forms of corrupt practices in Nigeria. The government established two anti corruption agencies namely, Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPCP) headed by retired Justice Akanbi who was later replaced by Justice Emmanuel Ayoola, and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), headed by Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, a Commissioner of Police. So far, several people have been indicted and prosecuted. The list includes several prominent Nigerians including a former President of the Senate, some ministers, special advisers to the government, and a former Police Inspectors. Surprisingly, the nation's Vice President has recently been indicted albeit the case is still pending in the court.

It would be recalled that musicians of Yabis music have always been very actively involved in criticizing any military government that either reneges its promise to hand over power to a democratically elected government or hands over to its civilian allies. The almost two decades that spanned through the mid 1970s to early 1990s witnessed a period of incessant military *coup d'etat* in Nigeria. Infact, out of the unprecedented six attempts at overthrow of government recorded during this period, three of them were successful while the other three were aborted. At the inception of the first successful coup led by Murtala and Obasanjo in 1975, there had been a plan to hand over government to a civilian government at a later date. But this was temporarily altered by the Dimka-led coup of 1976. However, the coming of Obasanjo-led Federal military government proclaimed the year 1979 to hand over to a democratically elected government. This promise was finally fulfilled on the 1st of October 1979.

But what could have turned out to be a celebration of the return of true democratic process in Nigeria later became counterproductive, as most Nigerians believed that the election that brought the enthronement of Shagari-led government was largely rigged. In this vein, Fela came out with a Yabis song titled *Overthrow*, where he satirized the entire process as "Soldier go, Soldier come" or "Paddy paddy government". According to him, it was the same military men (whose allies were now in mufti) that were still ruling Nigeria. An excerpt of the song goes thus:

Obasanjo and Yar'adua chop belleful and go
Dem put civilian friends for there.
Dem shout Second Republic
People wey no know dey happy;
People wey know dem dey look.
Dem baptize the civilian government;
Dem name an Federal Government.
Me I know by their name,
Me I call dem Soldier go, Soldier go
Soldier go, Soldier come, Soldier go, Soldier come...

On his own part, when he took over government in August 1985, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida promised to handover power to a civilian government in 1990. It was later shifted to 1991, then to 1992, and finally, 1993. Despite the claim in different quarters that the election that saw M.K.O. Abiola as the winner was perhaps the freest and the best conducted in the history of Nigeria as a nation, Babangida, for whatever reason best known to him, still annulled that election. But amidst a huge pressure from different quarters – musicians, media and theatre arts practitioners, pressure groups, etc., he later handed over power to an Interim National Government (I.N.G.) headed by Chief E.O. Shonekan.

During the incessant military rule in Nigeria, musicians – like their media practitioner counterparts – were arrested, jailed, subjected to several arbitrary and ruthless from the Supreme Military Council of Generals Yakubu Gowon, Obasanjo, and Buhari/Idiagbon governments. The aggression and intimidation was exacerbated with the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) of Gen. Babangida as well as the Armed Forces Provisional Council (AFPC) of late Gen. Sani Abacha. Ironically, at the inception of each of these military governments, Nigerian citizens (usually referred to as “fellow Nigerians”) are always promised a better government, open-door policy, unlimited freedom of speech and association, and so forth. But usually after about a year or two, Nigerians would then realize that they were far from being “fellow Nigerians” which they had called them *ab initio*. These barbaric experiences were encapsulated by Fela in his song titled *Overthrow*, as he sings thus:

When dem want to come in...
When dem want to come,
Nigerian gofument dem give am name
Federal Military Government
Federal Military Government.
For Libya, dem give am name
Liberation Council
Liberation Council
For Liberia, dem give am name,
Redemption Council
Redemption Council
For Zaire, dem give am name;
Revolutionary Council,
Revolutionary Council...

It must be emphasized that, in this regard, Fela seemed to have suffered the greatest amount of brutal treatments in the hands of past military rulers in Nigeria, and also from their agencies and agents of oppression. We shall highlight just two out of these brutal experiences suffered by Fela.

Due to his uncompromising position against the corrupt practices and gross abuse of conventional human rights policy prevalent during the Yakubu Gowon-led Nigerian Military Government, Fela had a bitter experience on Saturday 23rd November 1974. In the wee hours of the said date, some policemen invaded Fela's Kalakuta Republic domain. Fela and several other inhabitants of his Kalakuta Republic home were severely beaten and injured. They were later admitted at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) for about nine days. Fela later released an album titled *Kalakuta Show* through which he narrated the whole incidence. The back cover of the album was highly decorated with photographs and paintings showing Fela's scalp as well as those of the other members of his group.

The musician had a worse experience during the reign of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo as the Nigerian head of state. Some of his alleged offences against the then military government include:

- (i) his resignation as a member of the National Participation Committee on the Festival of the Black People tagged Festac 77, and consequently his refusal to participate in the whole festival.
- (ii) the publication in the Young African Pioneer (YAP) news, where Fela condemned the barbaric introduction of soldiers with horsewhips to direct traffic on Nigerian roads.
- (iii) the sea if clenched-fist “Black Power” salute that surround Fela wherever he went, and
- (iv) his uncompromising views on the “state of nature” being experienced in Nigeria at that time. All these were expressed in the lyrics of songs such as *Army Arrangement*, *Overthrow*, *Zombie*, *International Thief Thief* (his own version of the abbreviation for I.T.T. – an Inter-telecommunication company headed by late M.K.O Abiola), *Authority Stealing*, and so forth.

Consequently on 18th February 1977, about a thousand soldiers of the Nigerian army attacked Fela’s Kalakuta Republic domain. This time, the house was burnt, and all the inhabitants were beaten almost to death. Fela’s leg was fractured in the process, and his mother died as she was thrown out of the window on the first floor of the house. Fela and all the inhabitants of the house were hospitalized but were later locked up in jail for about 27 days.

A tribunal was later set up by the government. Members of the tribunal included Mr. Justice Agu Anyan, who was the chairman, as well as Mr. Justice Dosunmu and an Airforce Officer who were members. Part of the findings of the tribunal was that the fire that burnt the house was started unintentionally by “an exasperated and unknown soldier”. The tribunal then recommended, among other things, that government should ban the use of the word “Republic” to describe his domain. This was seen as defiance to the constitution of the Federal Government of Nigeria - ironically the same constitution that had been banned ab initio of the military take over. To exacerbate his suffering in the hands of the military junta, Fela was not allowed to perform in public for about two years after the incidence albeit he was not officially banned.

After the whole incidence, Fela came out with an album titled “Unknown Soldier” where he sang *inter alia*:

*Dis thing wey happen, happen for my country, na big big thing.
 First time in the whole world,
 If you hear the name, you go know; Government magic...
 Dem go dabaru everything... Dem go turn green to white...
 Dem may turn red into blue... Dem go turn electric to candle..
 Look Oh, Look oh,*

Left, right, left, right, left, right, left.
One thousand soldiers, dem dey come...
You go dey wonder, dey wonder, dey wonder...
Where this one thousand soldiers dem dey go...
Look oh, ye paripa...
Na Fela house, Kalakuta...
Dem don reach the place dem dey wait...
Dem dey wait for Order!...
Dem surround the place kwam kwam kwam em dey wait...
Dem helmet and dem guns and dem petrol and dem matches...
Then again, stand at ease!...
Dem throw my mama out from window,
Dem kill my mama...
Dem carry everybody, dem carry everybody go,
Inside jail – Fall out!...
This government, he bad o,
Wetin this Fela do?
Fela talked about soldiers flogging civilians for street.
Fela talked about government wasting money for Festac.
Wetin this Fela do?
This government he bad o, people start to talk o,
Government start to shake o.
Then suddenly, suddenly...
Government bring instrument of magic,
Dem bring enquiry, dem bring two man,
One soldier, one justice...
Dem seize my house wey dem don burn.
Dem seize my land
Dem drive all the people wey live in the area;
Two thousand citizens, dem make them homeless now.
Dem start magic...
Dem say Unknown Soldier, na im do am
Unknown Soldier, government magic...

Concluding Remarks

This study has revealed a vista on how the phenomenon called Yabis music have been used in diverse ways by its practitioners to sensitize a large percentage of the Nigerian populace on the atrocious behaviours of the members of the ruling class. This music has also serves as a veritable tool in the hands of its practitioners to correct the said vices and to propagate original African cultural revival especially in the area of politics. In order to effectively achieve all these objectives, and many more, Pidgin English has been considered as the best language due to its ability to penetrate ethnic, class, gender and age barriers among Nigerian citizens.

In spite of its humble beginning as a one-man creation, Yabis music has now become a phenomenon in the contemporary Nigerian music scene. And, it has penetrated all stylistic boundaries in the Nigerian popular music. It is also revealed that in spite of its practitioners being subjected to untold torture, humiliation and brutality by some agencies and agents of government (especially during military rule), Yabis music still survives due to the musicians' adamant and resolute nature towards achieving their goals.

Be that as it may, it is however strange and disheartening that today, many Yabis music practitioners are becoming more lethargic and less aggressive in their confrontational attitude against oppressive rule in the country. This is largely due to the fear of annihilation and incarceration.

It is strongly suggested that, in order to surmount this protracted phobia, musicians should collaborate with their counterparts in the two media (electronic and print) and those in other performing arts. By doing so, they will be able to forge a more formidable ally which will be strong enough to challenge any form of undemocratic agenda in our land, and too strong to be taken for granted by any tyranny or dictatorship

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