

No Agreement Today, No Agreement Tomorrow: Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Human Rights Activism in Nigeria

by

Shina Alimi and Iroju Opeyemi Anthony
Department of History
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife

Abstract

Post-colonial states in Africa have faced myriad of problems from cultural identity confusion to socio-political and economic inequality. Besides, the mass media and few civil societies organizations including few concerned individuals decried the anomaly. Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a popular Nigerian musician and political activist was among the few Nigerians who reprobated the tyranny of the ruling class and socio-economic inequality in the country in particular and Africa in general. His socio-political activism rooted in his upbringing, personal experience and societal influence were reverberated in his numerous musical lyrics. His ability to use his songs to capture the realities of African societies and confront the dictatorial governments distinguished him from all his contemporaries. This article explores the role of Fela Anikulapo Kuti in human rights activism in Nigeria. It adopts “critical socio-biography” theory as the conceptual framework for the analysis using a few of his songs for the content analysis of this argument.

Key words: Colonial rule, corruption, Fela, human rights, military rule and Nigeria



Fela: The Black President

Introduction

Even after his death, Fela Anikulapo Kuti's fame ranks higher than many Nigerian musicians, not just because of his entertaining adeptness or his dramatic performance on stage but primarily for his tough, inflammatory and uncompromising denunciation of the tyranny of the Nigerian ruling class, as well as the hypocrisy of the affluence (Olaniyan 2001, 76-89). Interestingly, the aura of mystery surrounding Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the Afro-beat maestro, obscured his true picture and created for him an exploding myth which lives till today. Although named Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, Fela dropped "Ransome" as his family name claiming it was a slave name, replaced it with an unconventional appellation "Anikulapo" (someone who has death in his quiver) and adopted a shocking nickname, "Abami Eda" (supernatural being) (Moore 2009, 131-132). His celebrated marriage of twenty seven wives (who constituted large part of his band) in a single day and his belief in unrestricted access to and smoking of marijuana, what he preferred to call Nigerian Natural Grass (NNG.) were well known (Moore 2009, 156-160).

Despite his unconventional and sometimes weird behaviour, Fela towered over his contemporaries in one major respect. He was the most fearless vocal human rights activist-*basketmouth* that Nigerian music industry has ever produced. His ability to condemn the larceny, arrogance as well as perpetuation of the hegemony of oppression, slave culture, exploitation of the weak by African governments, European imperialists and the affluent elite cannot be overemphasized. The place of Fela among the tiny group of people with revolutionary tendency in Nigerian history cannot be ignored. Fela's greatness was rooted in his indefatigable interactions with the ordinary person in society and untiring effort to revolutionize it. Thus, like Reggae King Bob Marley, Fela Anikulapo Kuti is well qualified to be called a revolutionary African musical genius.

Conceptual Clarification

Every society is made of individuals and groups whose conscious and unconscious actions form and mould events at different historical epochs. Within societies and groups are great men who either identified or created prevalent ideas that shaped the course of historical events. Who were the Great Men? Carlyle (2001:5) answers this question with this observes that:

Great Men were the leaders of men;... the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense the creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material results, the practical realization and embodiment of Thought that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history.

Similarly, Carr notes that 'a great man is an individual, and, being an outstanding individual, is also social phenomenon of outstanding importance' (Carr 1961, 53). He further notes that a great man in history is 'an outstanding individual who is at once a product and agent of the historical process, at once the representative and the creator of social forces which change the shape of the world and thoughts of men' (Carr 1961, 55).

The place of great men in history has always caused dichotomy among historians and generated serious and complex problems in the process of historical reconstruction. These problems have divided scholars into two mutually-exclusive positions namely the individualist and the collectivist schools. While scholars in the former group postulate outstanding or great 'individual genius as creative force in history,' the latter group posits that individuals are parts of the organic whole and that the actions of individuals cannot be treated in isolation of the society (Carr 1961, 45).

In this case, the individualist position is underpinned by the idealist conception of history which holds that thoughts, ideas or consciousness by individuals are the major force and determinant in history. Hence, the ideas and deeds of outstanding great men constitute decisive factor in the historical reality (Ibid). Significantly, historical reconstruction from the individualist perspective, particularly biography, often results in eulogizing historical actors and their deeds, mortalizing history and embarking on forlorn journey into the investigation of conscious or unconscious motives behind the behaviour of great men (Ibid).

The collectivist school on the other hand argues that individuals are the product of the societal culture, language, values, beliefs and mores. Although individuals do initiate independent great ideas, these ideas often derive motivation from the society. Thus, individuals whether clothed in common or great man's image are social beings whose actions and achievements are not outside of history.

Whereas an attempt to draw a dichotomy between the behaviour and actions of man as autonomous or isolated individual apart from the society or group he belongs can result in misleading interpretation of historical facts, yet individuals define and actualize the will and essence of their age (Carr, 1961). This study adopts as its framework, "critical socio-biography theory." Critical socio-biography theory approaches the study of historical actors neither as isolated great men whose achievements and greatness interrupt the course of history like the individualist would want us to believe, nor as anonymous insignificant figures. It, rather, examines the historical figures "within the context of the socio-cultural relationships [with] other groups and individuals within their immediate and remote environments" (Arifalo and Ogen, 2006: 4).

Fela Anikolapo Kuti's Background

Fela was born to a middle-class family in Abeokuta on the 15th October 1938. His father, Reverend I.O. Ransome-Kuti (Daodu), was a former Principal of the Abeokuta Grammar School and later, Grammar School of Ijebu Ode (Moore 2009, 36). His Mother, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (Beere) was a famous politician, an activist, women leader and educator who established "Mrs. Kuti class" one of the first kindergarten schools in Nigeria (Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997, 38). Both parents were disciplinarians, who strictly adhered to the Christian doctrine to govern their home. Significantly, the moralist and stern tendency of his parents was not unconnected with their work as teachers and religious figures. As teachers, they probably wanted to develop their children into role models for other students to emulate. Similarly, their religion, Christianity, strictly forbade insolence of children, as illustrated in a biblical verse: *spare the rod, spoil the child*. More importantly, the socio-political atmosphere of Nigeria at the time, the colonial period, was also a decisive factor that shaped their orientations and behaviour. Both Rev. Ransome-Kuti and Mrs. Kuti belonged to a small group of the anglicized educated elite in Nigeria enchanted by Western Civilization. Despite their Christian attitude to life and living, both did display attitude that underscored their disapproval of the colonial rule in Nigeria. For instance, Rev. Ransome-Kuti was reported to have once flogged a white education inspector and confronted a colonial authority over the overbearing behaviour of colonial soldiers in Abeokuta (Moore 2009, 38). Similarly, Mrs. Kuti was a fearless Amazon who confronted both white colonial officers and their African lackeys. She led many women at different periods in protest against colonial policies and corrupt traditional chiefs (Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997, 63-94).



Fela and his mother, Funmilayo Kuti

Three factors would seem to account for Fela's radicalism. First, it was rooted in his family background; second, personal experience both at childhood and adulthood were also factors; third, interactions with both individuals and societies were other decisive factors. His parents were rare breed of Anglicized educated elite that confronted the anomaly of the British colonial administration in Nigeria. It would appear that their stern principles and uncompromising attitudes were also decisive factors that later shaped Fela's personality. His love, closeness to and place as the favorite child of Mrs. Kuti exposed him earlier to the revolutionary movements and political activities of his mother. Fela was a great admirer of his mother's political discussion and analysis. While following his mother around, he met revolutionary leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah (Moore 2009, 41-47). Significantly, Fela's experience during his childhood and adulthood cannot be divorced from his revolutionary life-style.

While in secondary school, Fela formed the 'Planless Society' with his friends such as Shiji Sowetan, Dapo Teju-Osho, Bunmi Sowetan, Beekersteth Shogbamu and Beko Ransome-Kuti (his brother). The society was based on the principle of disobedience to teachers' instructions. The society also had a newspaper called *The Planless Times*. (Moore 2009, 48-50). With *The Planless Times*, the idea of the club was diffused to teachers and other students. Significantly, the idea of the Planless Society represented the root of Fela's confrontational principle, radicalism and unconventional attitude.

Another important factor that shaped Fela's philosophical and political orientation was his experience outside Nigeria. His encounter with Sandra Isidore in the United States of America marked the beginning of new vista in his life. She educated him on legacies and history of Africa. He was also exposed to nationalist literature such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. But more significantly, Fela visited the United States at the height of racial discrimination and social prejudice against the black by the white (Moore 2009).

Loosing Colonial Umbilical-cord: Fela and Colonial Mentality

Fela identified and traced the root of socio-economic and political problems facing African people to the colonial period. Like Dr Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, in his book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, Fela believed that although colonial rule in Africa had formally ended, the Western imperial domination of Africa continued through “the invisible government” and subtle monopoly of African economy (Nkrumah, 1966; Wise and Ross 1964). The nostalgic feeling of *colonial mentality* by Africans in the post-colonial period was not unusual. The ‘deluded hybrids’ of educated elite in the colonial period were preoccupied not only with how to obtain their fair share of plums of colonial administration but also found it difficult to drop their eulogies of *Pax Britannica*. (Ayandele, 1974, 58-59).

Despite their cumulative resentment of the British domination of Nigeria, the educated elite could not sincerely detach themselves from European culture and idiosyncrasy. For example, Sir Herbert Samuel Heleas Macaulay, despite the venomous protests by his newspaper, *Lagos Daily News* against the racist tendency of the colonial officers in Nigeria, could neither drop his alliterative name nor relinquish his English clothes (Coleman, 1986, 197; Ayandele, 1974, 84-85). Hence, some African people view the colonial period as a watershed in their history. The ridiculous state of the deluded Anglicized educated elite was aptly described by Ayandele (1974:29) thus:

They were a colourful group of individual, markedly varied in their character in ways that added humour and liveliness to Nigerian history. Thus there was G. W. Johnson, a tailor turned flute-player in a British ship, who settled in Abeokuta in 1865 and spent the remaining thirty-five years in political buffoonery. Or take King George Pepple who was happiest whenever he was in London, denouncing with relish the customs and institutions of the Ijo...Or imagine Isaac Oluwole, taciturn, vivaciously proud that his wife was trained in England (a “been to”) and who went on worshipping the white man’s dress as suitable to Nigerians as he was to worship the Anglican Prayer Book for the rest of his life...Or “Half Bishop” Charles Philips, a sincere believer in the magical superiority of the white man (Ayandele 1974, 29).

Significantly, the post-colonial nostalgic attachment to the colonial legacies could not be divorced from the colonial period. Hence, most African societies came out of the colonial period with cultural hybridization and confusion. Considerable parts of Fela’s songs respond to ‘culture alienation’ and hybridization that left African people confused (Olorunyomi 2005, 49). In his song *Colonial Mentality*, Fela describes African people who refuse to break away from the colonial apron string as a “colonial man”:

*He be say you be colonial man/ It seems you are a colonial man
You don be slave man before/You were a slave before
Them don release you now/You have been released
But you never release yourself/But you refused to liberate yourself.*

Thus, Fela regards such nostalgic attachment to the Western culture as a form of colonial mentality. Similarly, Fela satirically depicted the effect of Western culture on African women in his hit song, *Lady*, he draws a vast contrast between typical African women and deluded hybrids, 'ladies'. African women, according to Fela, are characteristically submissive while ladies are arrogant.

*She go say him equal to man/She will say she is equal to man
She go say him get power like man/She will say she has power like man
She go say anything man do himself fit do.../She will say anything man can do, she too can do*

He also identifies the reversal of African customs through the Western culture.

*She go wan take cigar before anybody/She will want to take cigar before anybody
She go wan make you open door for am/She will want man to open door for her
She go wan make man wash plate for am for kitchen.../She will want man to wash plate for her
in the kitchen*

*She wan salute man she go sit down for chair 2ce/If she wants to greet man, she sits down on
chair2ce*

*She wan sit down for table before anybody 2ce/She will want to sit down before anybody
She wan take a piece of meat before anybody 2ce.../She will want to take a piece of meat before
anybody*

Significantly, it would appear that Fela's position on characters of African women was ambiguous. For instance, Fela not only appreciated his mother's political and human rights activism but also admired Sandra's agitation for racial and political equality in the US. In his song *Yellow Fever*, Fela portrays psychological attachment and inferiority complex of African people to the glorified Western race and culture. In an attempt to ape the white, some African people distorted and deconstructed their personalities through skin bleaching, hair wigs, vocal accent and dressing. Azibo describes the phenomenon of skin bleaching or lightening as psychological mis-orientation mental disorder (Azibo 2011). *Yellow Fever* is used here metaphorically to depict the phenomenon of skin bleaching in Africa not the common yellow fever disease.

Fela clarifies this possible misinterpretation thus:

Malaria fever nko? (He dey!)/What about malaria fever? (it exists)
Jaundice fever nko? (He dey!)/What about Jaundice fever? (it exists)
Hay fever nko? (He dey!)/What about hay fever? (it exists)
Influenza fever nko? (He dey!)/ What about influenza fever? (it exists)
Inflation fever nko? (He dey!)/What about inflation fever? (it exists)
Freedom fever nko? (He dey!)/What about freedom fever? (it exists)
Yellow fever nko? (He dey!)/What about yellow fever? (it exists)
Na him dey bring the matter now he dey!/That is the major issue now (it exists)

Beyond natural diseases such as jaundice, influenza and malaria fever, Fela recognized inflation and lack of freedom as other forms of original sickness facing Africa. *Yellow fever* was described as “original and artificial.” Fela used the two words to paradoxically emphasize the dual effects of skin bleaching. Originally, skin bleaching will lead to:

Original catch you/When natural yellow fever smite you
Your eye go yellow/Your eye will become yellow
Your yansh go yellow/Your buttocks will become yellow
Your face go yellow/ Your face will become yellow
Your body go weak/Your body will become weak
I say but later if you no die inside/I say but later if you do not die inside
The yellow go fade away/The yellow will fade away

Artificially, skin bleaching will cause:

Artificial catch you/When artificial yellow fever smite you
You be man or woman/Either you are a man or woman
Na you go catch am yourself/You will attract it to yourself
Na your money go do am for you/Your money will do it for you
You go yellow pass yellow/You will yellow beyond yellow
You go catch mustache for face/You will grow mustache on your face
You go get your double colour/You will get your double colour
Your yansh go black like coal/Your buttocks will be black like coal
You self go think say you dey fine/You will assume you are beautiful
Who say you fine?/Who claims you are fine?

While *Yellow* is used to depict skin pigmentation, *Fever* is used to depict the effect of bleaching. Skin bleaching, lightening or whitening is the use of dermatological chemical, creams, cosmetic cream or any home-made products to decrease melanin in the skin (Charles 2011). Beyond the phenotypic appearance, skin bleaching represented 'attempt to approximate the white ideal and consequently gain access to both the humanity and social status historically reserved for the Whites' (Blay 2011). Dormans views skin bleaching as 'part of seemingly contradictory ideas of progress, racial advancement and civilization' (Dorman 2011). It is 'a form of self-fashioning, an autobiographical revision of race performed on the surface of one's own skin' (Dorman). The phenomenon represents the peak of identity crisis and social contest instigated by the construction of the White supremacy through colonial rule in Africa and manipulation of the media technology. The inspiration to discuss this phenomenon by Fela cannot be divorced from the preponderance of the phenomenon in Africa during the 70s and 80s.

Authority Stealing: Fela's and Anti-Corruption Crusade

Perhaps the worst root of socio-economic inequality in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is corruption. Corruption is any 'anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the authorities' capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens' (Osoba1996, 371-386). It is also viewed as abuse of power for private gains or a perversion or change from general accepted rules or laws for selfish gains (Waziri 2010). Glasser and Goldin (2005) view corruption as 'the process by which a well-functioning system of government decays into one that fails to deliver and maltreats its citizen'. The flags of corruption include embezzlement, bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, ethnicity, falsification of documents, favoritism, forgery, misappropriation of funds and elections rigging. Corruption can be categorized into economic, political, bureaucratic and judicial perspectives (Aderonmu 2011). The socio-economic effects of corruption in Nigeria had been alarming and disturbing. It has been the root of poverty, economic inequality, unemployment, election rigging, political instability, coup *d'etat*, political godfatherism, hooliganism and thuggery and social insecurity. Since 1960 when Nigeria obtained her independence from the British, the afore-mentioned features characterized Nigeria socio-economic and political landscape. Hence, Fela's songs were principally inspired by the social anomaly in Nigeria.

Thematically, a few of Fela songs were based on realities of corruption and socio-economic inequality in Nigeria and Africa. In *Authority Stealing*, Fela identifies different categories of theft in Nigeria: petty thievery, armed robbery and authority stealing. While petty thief includes pickpocket, armed robbery involves the use of dangerous weapon to forcefully acquire another man's property. Authority stealing or pen robbery involves the use of power or office to steal from the public or government coffers.

*Authority people them go dey steal/People in authority are stealing
 Public contribute plenty money/When common people contribute money (e.g. tax)
 Na authority people dey steal/People in authority steal
 Authority man no dey pickpocket/A man in authority does not pickpocket
 Na plenty cash him go dey pick/He is interested in plenty cash
 Armed robber him need gun/An armed robber needs gun
 Authority man him need pen/A man in authority needs pen
 Authority man in charge of money/Authority man in charge of money
 Him no need gun, him need pen/He does not need gun, but he needs pen
 Pen got power gun no get/Pen has power but gun does not
 If gun steal eighty thousand naira/If gun steals eighty thousand naira
 Pen go steal two billion naira/Pen will steal two billion naira*

Fela identified social inequality in the form and administration of punishments in Nigeria. Ironically, the weight and magnitude of the punishment is not always proportional to the crime committed. Rather, socio-economic class of the offenders determined the weight of punishment received. Any unfortunate petty thieves that fall into the hands of angry and frustrated mob can be lynched or severely punished by the law:

*Them go beat am well-well/They will beat him very well
 Them go lynch am well-well/They will lynch him very well
 Police go come well-well/Police will come
 Them go carry am go court/They will take him to court
 Them go put am for jail/They will put him in jail*

*Them fit put am six months/They may jail him for six months
 (Them go put am for one year)/They will jail him for one year
 Them fit put am two years/They may jail him for two years
 (Them go put am for five years)/They will jail him for five years
 Them fit put am seven years/They may jail him for seven years
 (Them go put am for ten years)/They will jail him for ten years
 If not them go shoot am well/Or they will shoot him
 Them go shoot am for armed robbery/They will shoot him for armed robbery*

Apart from class difference, two other factors make the “Authority” class less vulnerable to attack and severe punishment of law. First, the accessibility to power and instruments of punishment such as the police and judiciary provide members of this class the opportunity to manipulate justice and insulate themselves. The instrument adopted by this privileged class (which in most cases is pen) is not only civilized but also effective:

*Na different way be them way/Their way is different
Na civilize style be them style/Their style is different*

Rather than being subjected to punishment according to laws, the Authority class obnubilated the situation through enquiry committees or panels and thus concludes the enquiry with obscured grammar:

*Misappropriation
Maladministration
Nepotism
Mitigation*

*Make I remember another one wey them dey use/Let me remember another one they are using
Defraudment
Forgerylization
Embezzlement
Vilification
Mismanagement
Public inquiry*

Fela however warned Nigerian people that Authority stealing is worse than armed robbery as its effects are more encompassing than petty theft and armed robbery.

*Authority stealing pass armed robbery/Official Corruption is worse than armed robbery
We Africans we must do something about this nonsense/ We Africans must do something about
this nonsense*

*We say 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 /I repeat, we Africans we must
do something about this nonsense*

*Because now authority stealing pass armed robbery/Because official corruption is worse than
armed robbery*

In *Shuffling and Shmiling*, the poor condition of African people are portrayed:

Suffering and smiling!

*Every day my people dey inside bus/Every day in the bus
Every day my people dey inside bus/Every day in the bus
Forty-nine sitting, ninety-nine standing/Forty-nine sitting, ninety-nine standing
Them go pack themselves in like sardine/They get suffocated
Them dey faint, them dey wake like cock/
Them go reach house, water no dey/Upon arriving home, taps do not run
Them go reach bed, power no dey/At bed time, power goes off
Them go reach road, go-slow go come/When they get to the road, traffic jam greets them
Them go reach road, police go slap/ When they get to the road, policemen slap them
Them go reach road, army go whip/When they get o the road, army officers assault them
Them go look pocket, money no dey/When they check their pockets, they cant find money
Them go reach work, query ready/ When they get to their workplace, they are served queries*

*Every day na the same thing/Every day is the same thing
Every day na the same thing/Every day is the same thing
Every day na the same thing/Every day is the same thing
Every day na the same thing/Every day is the same thing*

Similarly, in *Army Arrangement*, Fela painted the image of suffering in Africa and located its roots in corruption:

*Suffer dey Africa, pa para pa/There is suffering in Africa pa para pa
I suffer dey, pa para pa/ I survived suffering, pa para pa
Condition dey e, pa para pa/ There are harsh conditions, pa para pa
Me I no say you be African man/I know you are an African man
And we dey suffer, pa para pa/ And we are suffering pa para pa
Which condition you dey I don't know/ In which condition are you, I don't know
The condition me I dey me I know/ I know my condition
My condition don reach make I act/My condition is so deplorable as to make me act*

He, however, used Nigeria as a paradigm of a corrupt state and events in the country as ready examples of debauch government. He cited examples of two situations where the government money was reportedly lost. The first case was the seven billion naira while the second one was two billion, eight million naira oil money scandal. Although the Federal government made cosmetic efforts to publicize both cases, the ways the enquiries were handled testify to the complicity of the government itself. In the two billion and eight million naira oil money scandal, the principal actors in the case, General Olusegun Obasanjo was treated like sacred cows. This showed that certain members of the society were above the laws.

*Nigeria get the money/Nigeria has the wealth
Foreign money for oversea/Foreign reserves in foreign lands
Nigeria get the money/ Nigeria has the wealth
Foreign money for oversea/Foreign reserves in foreign lands
Announcement start to happen/Announcements start
Newspaper carry them paper/ Newspapers cover them
Radio dey shout for studio/Radios expose them
Obasanjo turn vocalist/ Obasanjo truns to a vocalist
Yar'Adua road manager/ Yar'Adua, a road contractor
Every government statement/ Every government statement
Seven billion naira missing/ Seven billion naira missing
Missing from oversea/Missing from overseas account
Foreign currency scandal/ Foreign currency scandal
Them start to arrest everybody o/ They started to arrest everyone
E no finish, e no finish.../ Its not over, its not over...
Two-point-eight-billion naira /Two-point-eight-billion naira
Oil money is missing/ Oil money is missing
Two-point-eight-billion naira/ Two-point-eight-billion naira
Oil money is missing/ Oil money is missing
Them set up inquiry/ They set up commission of enquiry
Them say money no lost o/ They say no money is missing
Them dabaru everybody/ They shatter everybody's hopes
Supervisor Obasanjo/ Supervisor Obasanjo
Them say make him no talk o/They say he should not talk
"Money no lost," them shout again/ "Money is not missing", they re-echo
Inquiry come close o/Inquiry is concluded
E no finish, e no finish.../ Its not over, its not over...*

The response from the society particularly protests by students and organized labour unions forced the Shagari-led Administration in 1980 to set up the Crude Oil Tribunal of Inquiry chaired by Justice Irikefe. The composition of the Tribunal created the aura of suspicion. Although professionally qualified, most members of the Tribunal were those who directly or indirectly had had long relationship with General Obasanjo in the past. The decision of the Chairman of the Tribunal to withdraw the subpoena serfdom 25 May, 1980 to General Obasanjo aroused another atmosphere of distrust. The Chairman withdrew the subpoena on the ground that the Tribunal would be 'setting a bad precedent if it calls General Olusegun Obasanjo to the witness box to testify on what he knew about transactions in the country during his regime.'(Ibid). Significantly, the compromise of justice by the panel defeated its original purpose and capacity as a trustworthy panel. Worst still, the suspension and maltreatment of the Nigerian Television Authority's reporter, Vera Ifudu, who offered to testify in the case despite the promise of protection by President Shagari attested to the prevalence of injustice in the country (Alimi 2012, 141-157; *Nigerian Tribune*, 18 April 1980, 1; *Nigerian Tribune*, 28 April 1980, 3). Other anti-corruption songs by Fela include ITT. (International Thief Thief), Upside-down and Ikoyi Mentality.

No Agreement Today, No Agreement Tomorrow

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Fela Anikulapo to human rights agitation was his bold confrontation of the Military administrations in Nigeria. Between 1960 and 1999, Nigeria was ruled by seven different military regimes with two incomplete civilian administrations. The military coup *d'état* of January 15 1966 that amputated the First Republic in Nigeria, according to Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, the putative leader of the putsch, was intended to suppress the ethnic rivalries, regionalism and corruption in Nigeria. In the opinion of Ademoyega, military intervention in Nigeria was precipitated by the tri-partition of Nigeria in which the North was deliberately isolated and treated as a monolithic unit by the British, corruption, ethnic and political rivalries (Ademoyega 1981, 1-22). Like Ademoyega, Ben Gbulie argued that the plot to overthrow Balewa's Government was a necessary outcome of 'that deepening conflict for which our former colonial masters as well as our country's political leaders must be held altogether responsible' (Gbulie 1981, 49). He further argued that the coup *d'état* was meant to deal with politicians guilty of gross betrayal of public trusts.

However, the stated motives of the coup plotters could not be taken at face value. It is plausible to argue that the idea of coup *d'état* (or "revolution" as the coup plotters want us to believe) was already burning in the minds of most of these adventurous officers before they were enlisted. To them, military might be the only solution to plethora of Nigerian problems (Ademoyega 1981, 23-24). The need to radically effect changes in the Nigerian political terrain was also precipitated by a number of events. The AG crisis of 1962 in the Western region, the 1963 population census crisis, the federal election crisis of December 1964 and the 1965 rigged elections in Western region were among excuses for the military coup of January 1966 (Ogbondah 1994, 38).

The revolutionary ideology of these crops of officers was also rooted in both extant and contemporary events in other countries of the world. Other factors that contributed to the first coup of 1966 include corrupt practices of politicians and administrative officers of the First Republic, politicization of the army, and psychological indoctrination of Nigerian army officers in the western countries and secrete involvement of foreign agencies in the coup (Falola et al 1994, 3-4). Whatever the explanation for the first putsch in Nigeria, this singular event sets in motion, a chain of events which the country is yet to recover from. The subsequent military coups in Nigeria were not dissimilar from the first one in that the plotters often claimed the title of liberators of the masses from oppression by the ruling class. The Second Republic in Nigeria headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari came to an abrupt end on 31 December 1983. The poor economic policies and mismanagement, social insecurity, political godfatherism and hooliganism, election rigging by the ruling party National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and poor performance were among excuses alleged by the military to return to power (Adesoji 2007, 265-266; Dare 1991, 22).

Surprisingly, the Military failed to rise above the factors that brought them into power. The culture of corruption and maladministration increased during the military era. Added to this was the atmosphere of oppression and human rights stifling. In *Sorrow, Tears and Blood*, Fela described the military era in Nigeria as the period of confusion and fear; their trademarks he described sorrow, tears and blood:

*Everybody run run run/ Everybody run run run
 Everybody scatter scatter/Everybody in disarray
 Some people lost some bread/Some people lost some bread
 Someone nearly die/ Someone nearly died
 Someone just die/ Someone just died
 Police dey come, army dey come/ Policemen come, Army officers come
 Confusion everywhere/ Confusion everywhere
 Hey yeah!/ Hey yeah!*

*Seven minutes later/ Seven minutes later
 All don cool down, brother/Normalcy returns, brother
 Police don go away/ Police leaves
 Army don disappear/ The army disappears
 Them leave Sorrow, Tears, and Blood/ They leave behind Sorrow, Tears, and Blood
 [Chorus]
 Them regular trademark!/Their regular trademark!
 Them leave Sorrow, Tears, and Blood /They leave behind Sorrow, Tears, and Blood
 Them regular trademark/Their regular trademark!
 That is why.../ That is why...*

In the Unknown Soldier, Fela, himself the victim of military oppression, portrayed the use of extreme naked force by the Military administration against the civilian. The circumstances that led to the invasion of Fela's Kalakuta Republic have been addressed in different literature. Similarly, in the *Coffin for Head of State* Fela depicted that the twin problems crippling the growth of Nigeria which were corruption and oppression:

*So I waka waka waka/ So i walked all day
I go many places/ I have been to many places
I go government places/ I have been to government places*

*I see see see/ I see
All the bad bad bad things/ All the bad things
Them they do dodo/ They do*

*Them steal all the money/ They embezzle all the resources
Them kill many students/ They kill many students
Them burn many houses/ They burn many houses
Them burn my house too/ They burnt my house too
Them kill my mama/ They killed my mum*

Shuffering and Shmiling

While Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was brooding over the behaviour and response of African people towards the putrid state of things and oppression in Africa, he came to the conclusion that the major problem of African people was fear. According to this fear was rooted in the importance African people attached to their lives and properties. He clearly demonstrated this in his song,

*Sorrow, Tears and Blood:/ Sorrow, Tears and Blood:
My people self dey fear too much/ My people fear too much
We fear for the thing we no see/ We fear for the unseen things
We fear for the air around us/ We fear for the air around us
We fear to fight for freedom/ We fear to fight for freedom
We fear to fight for liberty/ We fear to fight for liberty
We fear to fight for justice/ We fear to fight for justice
We fear to fight for happiness/ We fear to fight for happiness
We always get reason to fear/ We always have reason to fear
We no want die/ We don't want to die
We no want wound/ We don't want to get injured
We no want quench/ We don't want to die*

*We no want go/ We don't want to go
I get one child/ I have a child
Mama dey for house/ Mummy is at home
Papa dey for house/ Daddy is at home
I want build house/ I want to build a house
I don build house/ I have built a house
I no want quench/ I don't want to die
I want enjoy/ I want to enjoy
I no want go/ I don't want to die
Ah!/ Ah!*

Another problem he perceived was the dominant influence of alien religions on African society. Thus, if the use of force by the oppressive African governments was to create the atmosphere of fear, religions would ensure unreasonable submission. He felt that the assumption of Christianity and Islam that pious people who suffered on earth would receive great rewards in heaven had beclouded the sense of judgment of many African people. Fela captured this situation clearly in *Shuffling and Shmiling* thus:

*Suffer, suffer for world/ Suffer in the world
Enjoy for Heaven/ Enjoy in Heaven
Christians go deyyab/ Christians recite
"In SpiritumHeavinus"/ "In SpiritumHeavinus"
Muslims go dey call/ Muslims recite
"Allahu Akbar"/ "Allahu Akbar"s*

*Open you eye everywhere/ Be Wise
Archbishop namiliki/ Archibishop is enjoyment
Pope na enjoyment/ Pope is enjoyment
Imam nagbaladun/ Imam is enjoyment*

Thus, Fela's idea of revolution was one where man should exercise no fear, where man should act naturally but rationally without slavish devotion to religion.

Conclusion

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was a Nigerian musical legend and human rights activist. His views and efforts on human rights were admixture of personal principles and societal influence. A man of complex character, Fela exhibited these through his songs; the conflict between tradition and modernism, indigenous and foreign cultures and the resultant effect of identity crisis in African society. The tyranny of the masses by the ruling class and the affluent were the major themes of his songs. As a courageous epitome, Fela used his songs to educate and encourage oppressed African people to fight for their rights.

This article has discussed the life and human right activism of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti by adopting the critical socio-biography theory as the conceptual framework. Hence, the background and the influence of individuals and groups played major roles on Fela's carrier and in charting ideological bearing with his image clearly displayed. The article has also discussed the effects of colonial rule in Africa, economic and socio-political oppression in Nigeria and the response of Fela's songs to these.

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About the Authors:

Shina Alimi teaches History at the Department of History at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, and he has contributed to several edited books and international journals such as the *African Study Monograph* and *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. His recent (co-authored) article, 'The Nigerian Newspaper Press and the Challenges of Ownership' was published by the *Journal of African Media Studies*. He has participated in different national and international conferences. He is a member of Network of Nigerian Historian (NNH) and the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN). He is currently working on 'State, Media and Terrorism in Nigeria' and 'The press and Labour Agitation in Nigeria, 1945-1966' for his Ph. D.

Iroju Opeyemi is an assistant Lecturer at the Department of History at Obafemi Awolowo University, and a member of Historical Society of Nigeria. He has contributed to several edited books.