



## Full Length Review Article

### ARTISTIC VISION, PIDGIN AND YABIS IN FELA'S AFROBEAT

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#### ABSTRACT

One major concern of Fela's Afrobeat music is to authenticate, entrench and amplify the collective dream of Nigerian people. The thrust of Afrobeat manifests in glaring confrontational and militant lyrics and tones of the songs. It is obvious that various indigenous governments in Africa have betrayed their fellow kinsmen at the turn of independence. As a result, there exists an immeasurable gap between the rulers and the ruled. More so, the rulers have continued to oppress the masses but displayed insalubrious indifference to caulk the gap between themselves and the masses. This paper is a passionate attempt to explore and expose those indelible artistic imprints in Fela's Afrobeat. Through in-depth Marxist analysis of three songs – "Suffering and Smiling", "Zombie" and "Sorrows, Tears and Blood", - Fela's use of Pidgin English and yabis, the fiendish ingenuity of oppressive leaders and the hypocrisy of the clergy are exposed. The paper concludes that Fela's Afrobeat strikes an elusive synthesis between artistic vision and social reality, and thus very apt in mirroring the society.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The musical life of Fela Anikulapo-kuti traverses a period of about four decades; that is, from the 1960s through the 1990s. At the outset, Fela played the popular "Highlife" brand of music, of which he performed with other artists in many night clubs in Lagos, the then Nigerian capital city. His sojourn from the late 1960s to the early 1970s in the USA brought him into contact with the Black Panthers and the ideas of Malcolm X. Consequently, on his return to Nigeria, the content of his music had started displaying Pan Africanist and Marxist rhythms. In addition, the revolutionary vision and content of Fela's music is attributed to the political activities of his parents. His father, the late Rev. Ransome-kuti was the first president of the Nigerian Union of Teachers while his mother, popularly known as Mama Fela was a renowned women's rights activist, who at one time led the protest of Egba women against excessive taxation of the British colonial government. These influences coalesced to form Fela's artistic vision that is copiously entrenched in his songs. It is a vision that goes beyond simply delineating an essentially dystopian society to an interrogation of it. The artistic vision first of all analyses the society laying bare the objects of the artist's objectives and displeasure.

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Wole Soyinka agrees to this. He argues that "part of the essential purpose of an African writer is to write with a very definite vision by exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present" (Goddard 18). This type of artistic vision runs throughout Fela's songs under study. According to Olaniyan, this motif serves as the "key to approaching the music of Fela and the contexts of its production, circulation and consumption. It reveals, for example, the peculiar character of the relations between art, specially oppositional to music, and a postcolonial African state. It is also an inadvertent to that part of Fela's image as a musician that is most familiar to the world: the "political". Above all, the unvarnished crudity, unhidden ill-bred megalomania, killjoy morbidity, and sheer incredibility of the unusual command speak volumes about the political order – and those who manage and profit from it – on behalf of which it is uttered" (1-2). Fela's artistic vision aptly resonates in his unique Afrobeat music. According to Oke Ogunde, Afrobeat "is a modern form of danceable African classical music with an urgent message ... created out of a cross-breeding of juju, highlife and African percussive patterns". Ogunde maintains that Afrobeat "serves to awaken a sensibility in people to appreciate authenticity and substance". Though the earlier reception of Afrobeat, like any other novelty creation was lukewarm, it nonetheless proved itself a useful artistic tool in the society, influencing many artists in Nigeria and even beyond.

Adegoke explains further that “his genre of music was tagged apolitical and avant-garde because it is distinct from existing forms and styles. It is also pedagogic as it informs and enlightens the masses who might lack access to sources of information such as television, radio, national or international news (152). Indeed, Fela’s style of music serves as a form of information dissemination in a snail-speed developing country such as Nigeria. It is a display of artistic fidelity, eloquence and vigour in strengthening the fibre of society. It is an artistic vision that correlates John F Kennedy’s famous statement: “we must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth.... In free society art is not a weapon, and it does not belong to the sphere of polemics and ideology. Artists are not engineers of the soul. It may be different elsewhere. But in a democratic society, the highest duty of the writer, the composer, the artist, is to remain true to himself and to let the chips fall where they may. In serving his vision of the truth, the artist best serves his nation. And the nation which disdains the mission of art invites the fate of [the artist] – the fate of having ‘nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing to look forward to with hope’”. Obviously, Fela’s artistic vision vindicates and recreates the reality of the above supposition. Through his songs, Fela diagnoses the ills of society. His artistic mission exposes the evils of brutality, senseless obedience and visionless leadership. He bequeaths the society with a legacy of values to look back to in hopeful sustenance of the future.

The influence of Afrobeat on popular music in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Adegoju holds that Fela used his style of music “to revolutionise musical structure as well as the political context in Nigeria. Through his music, Fela became critical of the successive military governments that ruled Nigeria between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s” (7). Olorunyomi explains that during these military eras “the human rights situation regressed as the political public sphere shrank. Evidence of military pressure on the public sphere could be seen as wanton violation of rights through arbitrary arrests and detention, detention without trial, torture, indiscriminate killing, abduction, kidnapping and military attack. Fanning of ethnic and religious embers and general brutality against public psyche became commonplace. The language of hegemonic discourse was further entrenched through the sole control of the electronic media by the state, and even when by the mid-nineties, licences were approved for private broadcast; allocation was largely to perceived client figures under a very strict regime of censorship” (82). Also, Hixson avers that “the musical form in Lagbaja’s works bears the imprint of Afrobeat, the musical style created by Nigerian superstar Fela Anikulapo-kuti decades ago ....” (1). In addition, Adewumi opines that “with the passage of Fela comes Lagbaja as a historian in a form of magical realism; creating a dialogue on African culture with the Abami Eda himself, a feat made possible through the proficient use of modern technology” (2). Furthermore, Adegoju has carried out a study on Fela’s Afrobeat style of music. Thus, commenting on the influence of Fela’s style of music on contemporary Nigerian musicians like Edris Abdulkareem, Chinagorom Onuoha popularly known as African China, Augustine Ahmadu (Black Face), Femi Anikulapo-kuti (the son of Fela kuti), Tony Tetuila and Lagbaja observes that “they have in their ways used the medium of music to reflect on the socio-economic conditions

of Nigeria. However, it should be pointed out that the current relevance of their music is tied to the history of popular music in Nigeria where Fela Anikulapo-kuti’s Afrobeat holds sway” (7). Obviously, Fela’s style of music and its socio-political and cultural content have continued to affect and influence generations of musicians and music lovers till today. Fela preached the gospel of autonomy, fearlessness, self-determination, transparency in trans-national business and governance, and the might of the masses. Fela has to his credit more than fifty (50) music albums. However, not all his songs will be considered in the study. His songs to be considered for critical evaluation in the study are “Suffering and Smiling”, “Zombie” and “Sorrows, Tears and Blood”. These songs are selected and considered relevant to the study because they are found to be in streamline with the artistic vision of the artist.

### Suffering and Brutality in Fela’s Songs

Fela’s artistic vision manifests in his songs in the exposure of extreme suffering and brutality meted out to masses by oppressive leaders and their allies. In the song, “Shuffling and Shmilling”, Fela presents a glaring case of unwholesome and senseless fear that permeates the psyche of Africans especially the suffering masses in the Nigerian nation. Fela makes it obvious in the first stanza of the song that he is precisely addressing Africans:

You Africans, please listen to me as Africans/ you  
Africans, please listen to me as Africans And you non-  
Africans, listen to me with open mind/ and you non-  
Africans, listen to me with open minds

In the second stanza, he arouses the consciousness of the suffering masses to the existentialist nature of their sufferings against the unrealistic consciousness that has blurred and blinded their senses to the awareness of acute pain and suffering they are undergoing. He tells the masses thus:

Suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer/ suffer, suffer, suffer,  
suffer, suffer Suffer for world/suffering in this world Na  
your fault be that/ is your fault Me I say: na your fault be  
that/I say: it is your fault

Fela piques the masses to confront the suffering that is pervasive and prevalent in the society. The song, like most of his songs brings out the close relationship between the artist and his audience in popular art. Artists of popular art strive to create and maintain a non-dichotomised mindset between the art and the target audience. Olorunyomi expatiates that

Mass art, as it were, presumably ponders to the whims of its clients and does not engage them in problematizing their social situations in a manner that popular art does. By refusing to act the commercial art superstar or what Michael Veal refers to as “substituting the myth of art as a commercial enterprise in place of the western myth of the concert hall, or the artiste as separate, other-wordly sphere”, Fela was invariably re-enacting the superstructure griot of ancient times with the burden of delivering his art uncorrupted by material lure (36).

In addressing the social, political and economic problems of the oppressed masses in the Nigerian society, Fela identifies excessive fear as the root-cause of these lachrymal conditions. His consistent questioning of alien and received religions through his “strident political commentaries, rude jokes, parodies and acerbic sense of humour and satire” attest to his inelastic pan-Africanist perspective and posture (Adegoju, 8). This is obvious in the following lines:

Christians go dey yab/Christians will be mouthing  
 “In spiritum Heavinus”/“in spiritum heavinus”  
 Muslims go dey call/muslims will be reciting  
 “Allahu Akbar”/“allahu akbar”

Open you eye everywhere/open your eyes everywhere  
 Archbishop na miliki/archbishop is merriment  
 Pope na enjoyment/pope is enjoyment  
 Imam na gbaladum/imam is pleasure

The above lines testify to Fela’s belief in the traditional African religion. It is a belief that espouses sincerity and honesty of intentions and actions between the custodians of the faith and the followers. Fela wants the masses to be wise to all forms of religious hypocrisy as seen in the lyrics of the song. The leaders of various received faiths – the pope, the archbishop, the imam – make it a point of duty to instil perpetual fear in the minds of the suffering masses in order to douse the temper of any form of agitation. The masses are lured into believing that suffering is their lot in this world and the only place and time for enjoyment is when they die and go to heaven. Suffering unto death thus becomes a parameter for the prophesied heavenly bliss. However, Fela like other Marxists has seen that this euphemistic deceit is meant to achieve one aim - to unceasingly cow the masses into unending fear, accepting their deprived and depressed lot, and clubbing them into senseless utopian existence that is bereaved of any iota of comfort. The sustained religious fear instilled in the masses serves to forestall any political, social and economic protest from the masses against the government which inexorably enslaves the majority of Africans while only a few enjoy life, including the pope, the archbishop and the imam. Explaining further, Shina and Opeyemi aver that “another problem he [Fela] perceives 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 judgement of many African people” (90). In addition, the persona recounts vividly, the dimensions of the daily sufferings of the people:

Every day my people dey inside bus/everyday my people are inside bus [2x] Forty-nine sitting, ninety-nine standing/forty-nine sitting, ninety-nine standing Dem go pack themselves in like sardines/they packed themselves like sardines Dem dey faint, dem dey wake like cock/they are fainting, sleeping and waking like cocks Dem go reach house, water no dey/at the house, there is no water Dem go reach bed, power no dey/at the bed, there is no power

Dem go reach road, go-slow go come/on the road, there is traffic jam Dem go reach road, police go slap/on the road, there is police brutality Dem go reach road, army go whip/on the road, there is army brutality Dem go look pocket, money no dey/there is no money inside their pockets Dem go reach work, query ready/there is query waiting for them at work place

Everyday na the same thing/everyday it is the same story  
 How many, many a many you go make?/how many, many a many will you make?[4x]

Fela’s musical ideology reflects a quintessential paradigm of a predominant persona who according to Olorunyomi “is a troubadour in quest of justice and fair play, trenchant and uncompromising in exploring the nuances of everyday life and depicting the subject as victim of authoritarian constructions” (78). The indomitable persona makes an obvious synthesis of the masses and their sufferings in order to strike a revolutionary consciousness of the psyche and body. The deplorable state of basic amenities like water, power, road, coupled with mindless police and military brutality become a recurring decimal in the lives of the people. These are sufferings and smilings. While African neo-colonial governments make Africans suffer, the alien religions teach them to smile amidst suffering in faithful reassurance and hope of heavenly bliss. Nevertheless, Fela’s fearless exposition of this height of religious and socio-political hypocrisy is meant to exorcise any form of apathy, deceitful hope and projected enjoyment already imprinted on the minds of the masses, to help them throw off the yoke of oppression placed on them. Fela’s idea of artistic vision according to Shina and Opeyemi is thus “one where man should exercise no fear, where man should act naturally but rationally without slavish devotion to religion” (90). The repeated rhetorical questions at the last stanza of the song serve not only as an emphatic outcry against the perceived sufferings and perpetual enslavement of the masses, but it is equally a visionary appeal and gesture for them to rise up in confrontation of their brutalised life.

“Zombie” is another song that shows the brutality of the military government on the governed. The reality of the song underscores a typical case whereby a particular set of humans willingly depreciate themselves into zombies or are coerced into behaving like zombies to the detriment of the collective harmony and existence of the society. In African mythology, zombies are fictional (undead) creatures created through the reanimation of human corpses. In the social sphere, zombie is a person who moves very slowly and is not aware of what is happening around him or her. Also, computer scientists refer to zombie as a computer that a remote attacker has accessed and set up to forward transmissions (including spam and viruses) to other computers on the internet. The purpose is usually either for financial gain or malice. A zombie is subject to the manipulation of the person or persons who control its animation. Specifically, Fela uses the song to address two issues. First is the unwholesome murder of Mrs Kuti (Mama Fela), and second, the concomitant destruction of Kalakuta Republic by the Obasanjo-led military government. In the first stanza of the song, Fela describes who a zombie is:

Zombie O Zombie x2/Zombie O Zombie  
 Zombie no go go unless you tell am to go/Zombie will not  
 move unless you tell him to move  
 Zombie no go stop unless you tell am to stop/Zombie will  
 not stop unless you tell him to stop  
 Zombie no go turn unless you tell am to turn/Zombie will  
 not turn unless you tell him to turn  
 Zombie no go think unless you tell am to think/Zombie  
 will not think unless you tell him to think  
 Zombie O Zombie/Zombie O Zombie (x2)

In the context of the song, zombie therefore is an apt metaphor for soldiers who must obey the orders of their commanders no matter how senseless or brutal. Military discipline is anchored on "obey the last order!", a slogan used to enforce blind obedience. Hence, the zombie image employed by Fela. It is an allusive reference to the soldiers in the army or the African votaries who follow their leaders without reasoning. Zombie refers to the soldiers who were sent by their commanders to kill Mrs Kutu and demolish the Kalakuta "Republic" which serves as home to the Felas. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The Felas had taken a recalcitrant stand and had been on the forefront of vehement criticism against corruption and brutality of the Obasanjo government. Like oppressive governments globally, the government took this step in order to shut up any opposition. But Fela, like other Marxists has seen as Ngugi rightly explains: "the workings of justice in a social system whose base is capitalism ... they have witnessed mercenaries, coups and they know that Macbeth's bloody dagger is not a figment of imagination from the heated brains of starry-eyed idealists" (480). Fela expresses repulsion on the display of senseless obedience by soldiers. The next lines of the song describe the extent that a zombie can go in unleashing terror on the society:

tell am to go straight - a joro jara joro/tell him to go  
 straight  
 no break no jah no sense/no break no jah no sense  
 tell am to go kill - a joro jara joro/tell him to kill - a joro  
 jara joro  
 tell am to go quench - a joro jara joro/tell him to die  
 go and kill (joro jara joro)/go and kill  
 go and die (joro jara joro)/go and die  
 go and quench (joro jara joro)/go and die  
 put am for reverse (joro jara joro)/reverse him  
 Zombie way na one way/Zombie way is one way  
 joro jara joro oooooo oohh!/joro jara joro oooooo oohh!  
 attention! (Zombie)/attention  
 quick march (Zombie)/quick march  
 slow march (Zombie)/slow march  
 left turn (Zombie)/left turn  
 right turn (Zombie)/right turn  
 about turn (Zombie)/about turn  
 double turn (Zombie)/double turn  
 salute! (Zombie)/salute!  
 open your hat (Zombie)/open your hat  
 stand at ease (Zombie)/stand at ease  
 fall in (Zombie)/fall in  
 fall out (Zombie)/fall out  
 fall down (Zombie)/fall down  
 get ready (Zombie) (the above x2)/get ready

Fela's honest and satirical exposition of zombie becomes a serious comment on the socio-political well-being of the society. The above lines depict zombie as capable of doing anything even killing himself. This foregrounds a high level of socio-political and economic risk for the society. The song mocks the soldiers and at the same time piques the conscience of the leaders to refrain from wanton destruction of lives and property, basically because of selfish profits. "Zombie" imprints a passionate admonition on military officers to desist from using junior officers in crushing the will of the masses. In the military, it is considered as a mutiny for a junior officer to refuse to carry out the order(s) of a superior officer. However, senior officers should not be passionately lured into creating zombies out of sensible human beings. Fela wants soldiers to see the reality of the fiendish ingenuity of superiors and those in power. It is an appeal to soldiers to resist being used in any form as zombie, because remaining complacent like zombie increases the practice of the oppressors in using them to achieve their evil purposes.

In the song, "Sorrows, Tears and Blood", Fela specifically addresses the issues of police and army brutality which as it seems, help to create and perpetuate the culture of violence and recklessness even as the nation struggles to acculturate democratic norms into the fabric of national life. In the song, Fela makes obvious the confusion and fear that is the imprint of the military era in Nigerian politics. It is a period characterised by sorrows, tears and blood. This can be seen in the following lines:

Everybody run, run, run/everybody run,run,run  
 Everybody scatter scatter/everybody scatter scatter  
 Some people lost some bread/some people lost some food

Someone nearly die/someone nearly died  
 Someone just die/ someone just died  
 Police dey come, army dey come/police is coming, army is  
 coming  
 Confusion everywhere/there is confusion everywhere

Seven minutes later/seven minutes later  
 All don cool down, brother/everything is calm, brother  
 Police don go away, army don disappear/police has gone  
 away, army has disappeared  
 Dem leave sorrows, tears and blood/they left sorrows, tears  
 and blood  
 Dem regular trademark/their regular trademark

Trademark is generally used to describe a formally registered symbol identifying the manufacturer or distributor of a product. The symbolic use of the word by the artist delineates distinctiveness and appropriateness of purpose in the message. The epithets in the above lines of the song bring out the ironical consciousness existing between security agents and the people. Ordinarily, the people are expected to manifest maximal sense of safety amidst the police and the army but because of acute brutality, senselessly meted out to the masses on regular basis, the people can no longer feel secure at the minutest sight of the police and the army. The masses conceptualise them as instruments of oppression who only execute the dictates of their oppressive masters, and aggravated by their own immediate and remote selfish desires.

This is the reality of everyday life in those eras of military rule. The song, fuelled by outrage is a biting interrogation of a cocktail of adversities including the free fall to anarchy. The police and the army become catalyst to de-emphasise dialogue, bargaining, compromise, which are all essential elements of effective governing style. As a result, virtually all segments of the economy are rendered comatose by corruption, shady deals and fraudulent practices. The gap between the elite military officers and the people widened so much and the government displayed convincing apathy to caulk the looming space between themselves and the ruled. Fela's aesthetic leap to recreate vividly, this shocking reality attests to the synthesis of historical truth and incidents into the fictional fabric. The intermesh between the imaginary world of art and the world of reality serves to clog the excesses of inhumanity and harmonise society towards acceptable values.

Furthermore, Fela identifies fear on the part of the masses as the cause of their sorrows, tears and blood. In the following lines, Fela thus sings:

My people self dey fear too much/my people usually  
express so much fear  
We fear for the thing we no see/we are afraid of things  
unseen  
We fear for the air around us/we are afraid of the air  
around us  
We fear to fight for freedom/we are afraid to fight for  
freedom

We fear to fight for liberty/we are afraid to fight for liberty  
We fear to fight for justice/we are afraid to fight for justice  
We fear to fight for happiness/ we are afraid to fight for  
happiness  
We always get reason to fear/we always have reasons to be  
afraid  
We no wan die, we no wan wound/we don't want to die,we  
don't want to be injured  
We no wan quench,we no wan go/we don't want to die,we  
don't want to go  
I get one child, mama dey for house/I have one child,  
mother is in the house  
Papa dey for house,I want build house/my father is in the  
house,I want to build house  
I don build house,I no wan quench/I have built a house,I  
don't want to die  
I wan enjoy,I no wan go, ah/I want to enjoy,I don't want to  
die, ah

The artist expresses chagrin in the disposition and attitude of the people towards their sufferings. He is enraged at the fears – fear to fight for freedom, liberty, justice, happiness – that are expressed by the people, which have continued to cause them to be entangled in sorrow. Others include the fear of death, fear of losing an only child, fear of losing a loving mother, fear of losing a loving father, fear of not enjoying one's home. However, the song makes it clear that these fears only atomise our lachrymal matrimony with untold hardships and invariably bestow tremendous sufferings on us on perpetual basis because we lose more at each onslaught of police and army brutality. The hyperbolic expressions – “fear for the air around us” and “always get reason to fear” – are objective comments

describing the marasmic consciousness of the masses and the height in which society has sunk in leadership ineptitude. Fela tells the people that if they continue to display indifference, their condition will continue to worsen because

... police go slap your face/... police will slap you  
You no go talk/you will remain silent  
Army man go whip your yansh/soldier will whip your buttocks  
You go dey look like donkey/you will be looking at him like a  
donkey

In the midst of brutality, the persona compares the reaction of the people to that of the dumb and the donkey, who accept suffering as their lot and thus remain complacent, waiting for a *deus ex machina* to end the conflict of their brutalised condition. The figurative essence of the song is to exhume total sense of self-confidence, rejuvenate freshness of humanity and expunge the emasculating sense of doubt and fear in the masses. In the following lines, Fela expresses artistic vision and optimism seen in the success of the envisaged revolution. He exposes the fact that oppression has become universal and oppressed people all over the world are vehemently fighting for their freedom. He thus reminds the people that

Rhodesia dey do dem own/Rhodesia is doing their own  
Our leaders dey yab for nothing/our leaders make noise for  
nothing  
South Africa dey do dem own/South Africans are doing  
their own  
Dem leave sorrow, tears and blood/they left sorrow, tears  
and blood

Ah,na so time will dey go, time no dey wait for nobody/ah  
time waits for no man  
Like that choo, choo, choo, choo-ah/like that choo, choo,  
choo, choo-ah

Nigerian masses are urged to rise up from slumber like the people of Rhodesia and South Africa who fought tirelessly to end the inhuman apartheid regime. The success of the revolution signals a life totally bereaved of sorrow, tears and blood. The ending couplets bring out the urgency of action in the tone of the song. The onomatopoeic words depict the unending and unstoppable movement of time. The song is thus not only an emphatic statement on the sufferings of the people but also an optimistic appeal on them to resist oppressive governments and their allies.

### Foregrounding Pidgin and Satire in Fela's Songs

Fela's songs are copiously dominated by the use of pidgin English expression and satire. The artist uses pidgin and satire as style to delineate the realities of oppression and poverty known and recognizable within the spectrum of a particular time and space. For the artist, pidgin and satire are basic in considering the synthesis between content and form on the one hand, and the effects the songs achieve on the listener. Fela's aesthetic complexion projects his artistic intent in creating significant ideas, images and metaphors. Pidgin serves as a major language of communication in Fela's songs. In literary discourse, language is sacrosanct in the domain of style.

Leech and Short aver that "... examining the language of a literary text can be a means to a further understanding and appreciation of the [artist's] artistic achievement (11). Brook equally explains that the "primary function of language is to convey ideas from one person to another, but these ideas may be information, command or entreaty. Language is used to make it clear whether we are well or ill-disposed towards the person addressed or it may simply be a way of calling attention to ourselves, the equivalent of a mild, depreciating cough, which may itself be a form of language" (12). The issue of language thus becomes that of artistic ingenuity depending on the intent of the artist and the encoding situation. In his songs, Fela consistently made use of pidgin to reach out to his numerous listeners. His choice of pidgin attests to his knowledge of the heterogeneous linguistic nature of the Nigerian society. It also speaks of his understanding that pidgin is the language of wider coverage especially among the oppressed masses, both in the metropolis and in the countryside.

Pidgin is regarded as no one's native language. It is a medium of communication that accords mutual linguistic benefits to its users. John Holm holds that "pidgin is a reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some means of verbal communication, perhaps for trade, but no group learns the native language of any other group for social reasons that may include lack of trust or close contact" (5). This explains the reality of pidgin as a form of communication. Fela persistently alludes to this linguistic reality in order to caulk the gap between the various languages spoken by the people. The preference for pidgin to Standard English is basically because of its homogeneity among Nigerians. It is a language understood by the educated and the uneducated, the literate and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled, the oppressors and the oppressed. Thus, it removes any form of linguistic barrier to efficient communication of the message enshrined in the songs. The artistic vision of the artist is craftily soused with the language. It allows the artist adequate freedom to initiate and sustain a visionary alliance with the oppressed masses. The following lines are an example:

We no wan die, we no wan wound  
 We no wan quench, we no wan go  
 I get one child, mama dey for house  
 Papa dey for house, I wan build house  
 I don build house, I no wan quench  
 I wan enjoy, I no wan go, ah

The epithets expose irrational fear on the part of the masses. The diction is aptly chosen to reflect a touching reality that envelops the life of the masses. Obviously, the persona wants the masses to break away from the shell of fear and fight for their freedom. Pidgin also allows for the exposition of the brutality of oppressive leaders. The insane brutality of the oppressors and their allies is pictured in the following lines of "Sorrows, Tears and Blood":

Everybody scatter scatter...  
 Police don come, army don come  
 Confusion everywhere

Seven minutes later  
 All don cool down...  
 Police don go away, army don disappear  
 Dem leave sorrows, tears and blood...

The well-crafted language of the lines brings out the anger, outrage and militancy in Fela's use of pidgin. It helps "to expose the military as an aberration in governance in post-colonial Nigeria, and to reveal the brutality and dehumanisation of Nigerians during military rule" (Okunoye, 76). The artist expresses strong repulsion to the cruelty of brutality on the masses. The simple and descriptive epithets are open confrontations, serving as panacea to quench the existing oppressive system. The use of language by Fela will not pose any problem to his numerous listeners because pidgin is a language that is mutually intelligible among the target audience. Because of its apt and straightforward recreation of oppressive realities in the society, pidgin serves as a redemptive force in ending the obnoxious circumstance that prevails in the society.

In addition, Fela employs glaring satirical expressions in most of his songs. In artistic discourse, satire is basically an instrument of social control aimed at an individual or group of individuals. The effectiveness of satire in lampooning societal vices depends largely on the ingenuity of the raconteur. Ngugi wa Thiong'o explains that "satire takes for its province a whole society, and for its purpose, criticism" (55). He further avers that "the satirist sets himself certain standards and criticises society when and where it departs from the norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious laughter". Tejumola Olaniyan has equally made a description of satire. He states that "the whole society being its constituency, satire focuses its lens on our feelings as a community of people, and magnifies one or several of such our sores for critical inspection, using as its surgical tools such sharp weapons as scorn, derision, ridicule, bitter irony and laughter" (48). The extensive use of satire in Fela's songs correlates the thoughtful suppositions by Ngugi and Tejumola. Fela imprints satire as humour or exaggeration to speak out against the pervasive nature of oppression, brutality, looting of public treasury and corruption in the society.

In using satire, Fela has however developed and made use of *Yabis*, his own unique form of satire. *Yabis* does not necessarily dichotomise from conventional satire. The only difference lies in the nomenclature of the form, which as it seems originated from Fela's profuse infusion of the phrase, "let's yab dem", meaning, "let's satirise them" in his songs. Olatunji defines *yabis* as "a biting satirical song that is deliberately composed with the aim of correcting an atrocity, a misdemeanour or sacrilege committed by an individual or a corporate body within a particular society" (27). He notes that "this brand of music was pioneered and propagated by Fela Anikulakpo who during his Friday night musical show known as *yabis* night, criticised the government for corrupt practices and insincerity to the suffering of the people". This generic brand of satire is one of the legacies that Fela bequeathed to the Afrobeat music industry. Again, Olatunji attests to this when he states 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 afrobeat and so forth. That is the reason why musicians such as Eedris Abdulkareem, African China ... Femi Kuti [Fela's son], Seyi Akinlolu [beautiful Nubia] and a host of others are all having some *yabis* to their credit" (30). The tone of *yabis* lends credit to the praxis of the form. It is a vigorous satirical form. Its vigour is aimed at provoking violence, action and revolt by the masses, ultimately to restore freshness of harmony to the society. The following lines of the song, "International Thief Thief" evinces the use of *yabis* by Fela:

Motherfuckers  
Bastard motherfuckers  
We yab dem, yeah  
Hurry up there, say "yeah" ...

Before dem come force us away as slaves ...  
Na European man, na him dey carry shit  
Na for dem culture to carry shit

During the time dem come colonise us  
Dem come teach us to carry shit  
Long long long long time ago  
African man we no dey carry shit  
Na European man teach us to carry shit

The derogatory image of "shit" is a biting *yabis* on the European man in the process of civilising the African. Realistically, Fela deploys satire to *yab* the corrupt nature of alien domination and exploitation. The oblique surreptitious epithets are fittingly articulated comments on the effects of corruption in the nation. Fela has indexed this reality in the following lines:

I say turn your face small to the right wing  
Oga patapata dey for there authority people dey for there  
Instead of workers, we have officials, instead of buses  
Dem dey ride motorcar, instead of motorcycles  
Na helicopter, instead of dem waka  
Na worker go waka for dem

Him no need gun, him need pen  
Pen get power, gun no get  
If gun steal eighty thousand naira  
Pen go steal two billion naira

The atrocity, shoddy performance and insincerity of the military and their local and foreign allies are well crafted in the above lines. "The recurrent military incursion into Nigeria's political terrain and its attendant blights are inscribed in the monumental decay in infrastructures, economic pillage and devaluation of Nigeria's social norms" (Akingbe, 59). Fela equally uses satire to *yab* the lopsided marriage between the clergy and the government. In line with his artistic obligation to pursue a fearless social crusade to cleanse Nigeria of its social malaise, Fela does not exempt the church which he views as a citadel of extended corruption. This is captured in the following lines:

Suffer suffer for world

Enjoy for heaven  
Christians go dey yab  
"in spiritum Heavinus"  
Muslims go dey call  
"Allahu Akbar"

Open your eyes everywhere  
Archbishop na miliki  
Pope na enjoyment  
Imam na gbaladum

The above lines is a reflection of a sorry and disturbing state of daily spiritual harassment and pauperisation of the oppressed masses who are perpetually cowed into accepting their sufferings with a blurred promise of a blissful life in heaven. Shedding more light, Tonia Umoren explains that "Marxists see religion as trying to make poverty more tolerable by offering a reward for suffering and promising redress for injustice in the hereafter" (19). Karl Marx was more trenchant in his views. He contends that "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of the heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. Religion acts as an opiate to dull the pain produced by oppression. It does nothing to solve the problem. It is simply a misguided attempt to make life more bearable" (qtd. in Haralambos and Robin 526). The artist satirises this hypocritical stance of the clergy who indulge in various immediate gratifications while urging the masses to wait for the remote enjoyment. This attests to Fela's aesthetic bravura at deploying humour, irony and sarcasm for satirical purposes. Fela brings to the fore the continued spiritual enslavement of the church by the clergy. The artist is concerned about the diverted attention of the clergy from their primary responsibilities of preaching the gospel and protecting the rights of the oppressed in the existing status quo. He *yabs* the attitude of the clergy because he believes that such deliberate dereliction of duty is the consequence of the demeaning moral crisis in the society. The criticism of the church by Fela thus becomes important in the context of artistic concern. It is a concern which acknowledges his indebtedness to the society, and as an artist demands that he must fulfil his artistic obligation as a social barometer in the exposition of wrongs in the society.

## Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to evaluate the artistic vision of Fela Anikulapo Kuti. It is also an exploration of artistic domestication of Pidgin English and satirical thrust of *yabis* in exposing acts of foibles of oppressive and visionless leaders and their senseless allies which hold the society to ransom. The paper drew insights from the Marxist literary framework in creating awareness of the negative impacts of oppression, suffering, brutality, fear and hypocrisy of the clergy in the society. Fela displays inelastic obsession in expressing social role and commitment to the society. His recalcitrant repulsion to restore the hopes that Africans particularly, Nigerians place on their nascent independence attests to his partisanship devotion to the welfare and might of the masses. This is evident in the militant and satirical tones of the songs studied in this paper. Indeed, Fela's artistic vision becomes very apt in mirroring the society.

Suffice to aver that his songs seen from the perspectives of this paper parallel an elusive synthesis between artistic truth and social reality.

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