



3

NONVIOLENT PROTEST IN AFRICA: ECHOES AND LESSONS FROM FELA ANIKULAPO KUTI¹

Noah Opeyemi, Balogun & Adeyemi Johnson, Ademowo

Abstract: This study examines the intersection of popular music, social movement and protest by analysing the numerous protest music produced and performed by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Africa's most iconic resistant artist of the twentieth century. It engages the core questions of right, injustice and inequality that have manifested in Nigeria's underdevelopment since the Union Jack was lowered in 1960. It argues that Fela's music did have an obvious impact on Nigerian masses who attempted to revise or renegotiate their relationship with the Nigerian state. Yet, it posed hitherto unanswered questions of the changing meaning of social movement in relation to artistic production - an aspect of peace studies

¹ This piece was first presented at the 4th Annual Graduate Conference of the Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda; held between 27th and 31th July 2018, entitled "Nonviolence in Africa: Echoes and Lessons from Fela Anikulapo Kuti". It is also an abridged version of my Unpublished MSc Project entitled "An Examination of *Fela Anikulapo Kuti's* Philosophy of Nonviolent Protest in Africa" submitted to the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Open University of Nigeria. As well as my Unpublished MA Project entitled "The Notion of Freedom in Fela's Music". Submitted to the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan.

that scholars have completely overlooked. It concludes that as people reconfigure social relations from one stage to another in their life, their engagement with the State and the social meaning attributed to social justice, which Fela's music emphasised, also change. Thus, popular consciousness shaped by resistant music is not immutable to nonviolent social protest. Rather, it continued to change as individuals and groups reconstitute their relationship with the society, and as their social status was transformed in accordance with the acquisition of better education, wealth/resources, among other significant elements that shape human's consciousness.

Keywords: *Nonviolence, Protest, Consciousness, Fela, Afrobeat*

1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING NONVIOLENCE

Nonviolence is a powerful philosophy and strategy for protest that rejects the use of physical violence. The basic principle of nonviolence not only encompasses an abstinence from using physical force to achieve an aim, but also a full engagement in resisting opposition, domination and any other form of injustice. This points to the fact that nonviolent protests downgrade the use of physical force. It is a personal practice of being harmless to oneself and to others under every condition which comes from the belief that hurting people, animals or the environment is unnecessary to achieve a goal. It also refers to a philosophy of abstinence from violence based on moral, religious or spiritual principles.

Nonviolent action is a set of techniques of struggle, blend together into campaign. Nonviolence is taken to be the most powerful means available to those struggling for freedom, not only from the grips of dictatorship, but also from the grips of governance characterised by corruption and greed, marginalisation, obnoxious policies, economic inequalities, human insecurities and above all violence. One can arguably say that achieving a society with both freedom and peace is not a simple task, it requires great strategy and skill, organisation and planning, and above all, it requires power. Strategic and peaceful planning of a nonviolent struggle is vital in defining the trajectory to freedom. It is on record that nonviolent struggles have been waged on behalf of myriads of causes and groups, and even for objectives many people rejects.