

## *The Role of Nigerian Celebrity Music Artists in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle, 1978-1990\**

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### **Abstract**

*Following the March 1960 Sharpeville massacre, Nigeria's engagements with South Africa took on a deeply hostile posture for the next decades, intensifying after the 1976 Soweto uprising. Through an indignant 'Afrocentric' foreign policy, the Nigerian state and Nigerians began to contest the apartheid regime at different levels. Among the group of Nigerians involved in this endeavour were four celebrity music artists – Sonny Okosun, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Onyeka Owenu and Majek Fashek. These music artists released anti-apartheid songs specifically between 1978 and 1990, four of which have been selected in this article — *Fire in Soweto*, *Beasts of No Nation*, *Winnie Mandela* and *Free Africa, Free Mandela*, to galvanise national and global condemnation of apartheid. This article examines the role and musical concerns of these four music artists as part of a global anti-apartheid movement. Drawing primarily on secondary sources, newspaper articles and album covers, the article demonstrates that these concerns were mostly connected to two defining and interconnected currents — the unifying militant resistance in most parts of Africa against white-minority rule and the contribution of governments in the West to the sustenance of the apartheid regime despite global condemnation. In this article I put forward three themes which shaped the songs of Nigerian celebrity artists protesting apartheid: protest, solidarity and advocacy. With its lens on four Nigerian musicians, and their connections to both the domestic and the international arena, this article provides new perspectives on the artistic interventions driven by African artists in the struggle against South African apartheid on the African continent.*

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## Introduction

The role of the interplay between international and internal politics which triggered Apartheid South Africa's negotiated settlement to end apartheid cannot be overemphasized (Landsberg 2004). Numerous studies have examined the pivotal role music played in facilitating a confrontational approach against the apartheid state, and in shaping anti-apartheid discourse more generally (Schumann 2008: 17-39; Shirli 2007: 421-441; Tenaille 2002). The trove of anti-apartheid songs released by celebrity musicians across the world, particularly from the 1970s onward, paints a bold picture of how human artistic agency contributed considerably to the struggle against apartheid and the effort to end white-minority rule in South Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, celebrity musicians joined their government in taking an acutely critical position towards apartheid. This was achieved through the release of anti-apartheid songs that not only demonstrated the pitiable condition of the black majority in South Africa but was also critical of the world powers' calculated silence towards human rights abuses in the country.

The article takes a critical look at Nigeria's role in the anti-apartheid struggle. By drawing primarily on secondary sources, newspaper articles and album covers, the article's analysis shows that the artistic production of the four Nigerian celebrity music artists was defined by two main currents — (1) the unifying militant resistance in most parts of Africa towards white-minority rule and (2) the contribution of Western capitalist governments to the sustenance of the South African apartheid regime despite global condemnation. It is important to note that this article is not focused on a textual analysis or lyrical interpretations of the four songs. It is rather inferred to explain the defiant posture that characterised artistic participation at the national and transnational levels against apartheid at the time. It examines three thematic threads, that is, protest, solidarity and advocacy, which framed anti-apartheid discourse in the songs of four Nigerian celebrity artists — Sonny Okosun (*Fire in Soweto*), Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (*Beasts of no Nation*), Onyeka Owenu (*Winnie Mandela*) and Majek Fashek (*Free Africa, Free Mandela*). The four artists selected in this study stand alongside other renowned Nigerian artists who also released anti-apartheid songs during the period under study. However, they were selected due to two main reasons: firstly, they were regarded as the most popular artists of the period and secondly, their songs attained considerable global appeal.

The article is further concerned with the role these celebrity artists played in the internal political positioning within the context of Nigerian politics and the

nature of the celebrity status that connects each of the four artists. To this end, the first section provides an overview of Nigeria's apartheid policy from the 1960s until the 1990s and uncovers how Nigerian celebrity music artists figured within these policies. This is followed by a brief survey of the musical production of Okosun, Anikulapo-Kuti, Owenu, and Fashek, with an emphasis on how their songs (or albums) interlocked with the increasing demand by continental and global voices to end apartheid in South Africa. The article shall then move on to explore how each artist harnessed his/her celebrity emplacement through music to articulate the anti-apartheid struggle. Discussions shall focus on the iconographic representations of the four artists' album covers through the thematic threads – protest, solidarity and advocacy – which framed anti-apartheid discourse in the songs.

This article offers an original perspective by framing the four artists' anti-apartheid song/music as an expressive culture deployed to criticize 'outside' support which continually emboldened the apartheid state. On a broader canvas, I claim that the musical concerns of these celebrities are linked to a unifying resistance movement in most parts of the African continent struggling against white-minority rule, particularly in response to the 1976 Soweto uprising.

### **Nigeria in the History of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle**

At independence in 1960, Nigeria made African solidarity the core of its external relations (Kia et al. 2016: 23). That South Africa would become one of the first foreign policy concerns of Nigeria was, therefore, no coincidence (Dan Ali et al. 2010). Between 1960 and the early 1990s, Nigeria viewed South Africa and other parts of the continent under one form of colonial or white-minority rule as areas of priority (Abegunrin 2009: 5-27). At this early stage, Nigeria adopted a very conservative foreign policy but it was clear that she would pursue total decolonisation of the rest of Africa through diplomatic negotiations. This was considered a viable solution to the question of apartheid since the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa government (1960-1966) had reiterated its concerns about apartheid against the backdrop of South Africa's provocations towards the black majority. This garbled form of foreign policy posture sought to curb any potential hostility that might have arisen between Nigeria and western powers whom the radical African nationalist movements challenged more openly.

After the Nigeria civil war (1967-1970), Nigeria's foreign policy took on a new turn. Yakubu Gowon's regime (1966-1975) pursued an aggressive foreign policy that demonstrated Nigeria's commitments not only to full eradication of apartheid but also to the rejection of racial discrimination and apartheid (No

Compromise with Apartheid 1975). As a fierce and leading adversary against apartheid, Nigeria supported the cause of leading South African figures and movements. For instance, the African National Congress and other African liberation movements were provided with both financial and material supports to carry out resistance operations and were permitted to operate within Nigeria's borders (Wilmot 1989: 1-15).

Increased financial assistance to liberation movements in Southern Africa was channelled through the Organisation of African Unity Liberation Committee which received more than \$5million (USD) in direct financial assistance to the OAU Liberation Fund in 1975. Notwithstanding a major oil glut in the 1980s (Nnadozie 1995), the Nigerian government did not minimise or alter its diplomatic and financial assistance to the ANC and other anti-Apartheid movements in Southern Africa. Other material assistance came in the form of provision of arms and ammunition, logistics, loans of military aircraft and so on. Nigeria continued to exert pressure within the bloc to which it belonged; this was in contrast to the British and western capitalist governments' support for South Africa. To be sure, two local newspapers reported that Nigeria had convinced no less than 32 member countries of the Commonwealth to boycott the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, Scotland, as a way of protesting against the prevailing sports' links between Britain and South Africa (Guardian, July 6, 1986; Sunday Times, July 13, 1986). As Akpan-Obong noted, the opposition to sports' links between Britain and South Africa was simply a part of more general consideration for panoptic sanctions against South Africa (2009: 169).

Significantly, Nigeria continued to chair the UN Committee Against Apartheid until apartheid was dismantled in 1994 and also pledged a huge sum of \$50million (USD) in aid during the UN Conference on Sanctions against Apartheid hosted in Paris in 1986. Although she lost \$45billion (USD) in 15 years for refusing to export oil to the South African apartheid regime, Nigeria nevertheless invested over \$1billion (USD) in her decolonisation project and anti-apartheid struggle (Osuntokun 2009). Joseph Garba (1987: 93) observed that Nigeria's aggressive stand against the question of apartheid in South Africa created for her both enemies and friends.

Despite the historical conditions that often come to play in Nigeria's quest for a stable polity, the anti-apartheid struggle turned out to be a rallying point for many Nigerians who reacted to white minority rule in South Africa with open indignation and routine condemnation. In a way, the government's anti-apartheid posture served as a building block for Nigeria's nation-building. To corroborate this position, for instance, as part of its support for the government, boycotts and intellectual events were staged by Nigerian citizens to convince

other citizens to join the national anti-apartheid cause. Coalition groups which included youth, union members and veterans were formed to articulate anti-apartheid policies for onward delivery by the government (Personal communication with Dr. Oluranti Afowowe, Department of History and International Studies, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria). Nigerian artists, beginning from the late 1970s, also took up the gauntlet. It is not clear why anti-apartheid songs were not composed earlier, given Nigeria's anti-apartheid posture since 1960. It appears that the dominant music genres that developed before and at independence in 1960 such as, in no particular order, waka, highlife, apala, sakara and juju, were strictly created for social interaction and entertainment. This is unlike Reggae, Ozzidi, Afrobeat and Afro-pop which Emielu (2016: 83) suggest were "[t]he modes of expression of anti-Apartheid sentiments by Nigerian musicians." Incidentally, these music genres emerged in the 1970s and dominated the music scene for much of the decade leading to the collapse of apartheid.

While there is no evidence to suggest that these Nigerian artists were influenced by successive Nigerian governments to support its anti-apartheid policy, their songs, however, gave a higher impetus to the objectives of that policy. The artists selected in this study produced songs that were in many ways in tandem with the short and long term anti-apartheid posture of the government. Their anti-apartheid music may not have been part of the government's policy framework by design but in terms of delivery, it aided in the spread and conscious knowledge of the machinations of apartheid to a wider audience. Sonny Okosun, for instance, specifically adopted the reggae sound and lyrics that shed light on everyday life in South Africa while Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, with his signature Afrobeat tune, questioned the duplicitous role of global institutions and powerful states in emboldening the apartheid government.

It is important to state that while four political changes occurred in Nigeria between 1975 and 1990 since the removal of Yakubu Gowon - Murtala Mohammed/ Olusegun Obasanjo (1975-1979); Shehu Shagari (1979-1983); Muhammed Buhari (1983-1985) and Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) - Nigeria's foreign policy in Southern Africa did not falter. Rather, it alternated between an ultra-radical, militant and less aggressive foreign policy to one that was inconsistent, incoherent and reactive.

### **Harnessing Celebrity Status to the Anti-Apartheid Struggle**

The term, 'Nigeria celebrity music artist' is used in this article as against 'Nigerian popular artist' to connote the broad category of personalities (or

groups) whose work or action has a colossal influence on public consciousness. The author is not unmindful of the varied meanings of the term celebrity, which has proved problematic for scholars to define even as the debate around its origin, function or taxonomy is still ongoing. The article is not focused on the complexity of the term but aims to show that the celebrity is a social agent of transformation who “intersect[s] with a remarkable array of political, cultural and economic activities to a threshold point that is worth identifying” (Marshall 2006: 6). The four artists selected in the article represent proportionally the above position within a culturally defined (Nigerian) setting. Their position as celebrities has very little to do with media exposure as is usually the case in the recent discourse on celebrity classification in media and cultural studies but more on their interventionist approach to resolving societal challenges. It is for this reason that we speak of the four Nigerian artists in this article individually as celebrities who championed the cause of the liberation struggle in South Africa and energised it by their musical/artistic intervention. This occurred at a time when apartheid was emboldened in Southern Africa and through ‘outside’ collaboration.

There is a handful of extant biographical literature on the four celebrity artists selected for this article (Moore 1982; Aka 2012: 278; Ogbebo 2016, and Nwabufo 2015). Despite this, I am compelled to provide here, though briefly, a general survey of their musical production, particularly within the period their songs (or albums) interlocked with the increasing demand by continental and global voices to end apartheid in South Africa.

### **Sonny Okosun (Fire in Soweto)**

*Fire in Soweto*  
*Burning all my people*  
*Now was fire in Angola*

*A burning all my people*  
*Riot in Mozambique*  
*Affecting all my people*  
*Fighting in Namibia*  
*Crushing all my people*  
*A shooting in Soweto hey*  
*A killing all my people*  
*A rebel in Zimbabwe*

*Victimizing all my people  
I look at them a burning  
My people are crying  
I look at them a shooting  
My people are dying  
I look at them a robbing  
My people are sighing (Fire in Soweto 1978)*

With early influences from the Beatles, Elvis Presley and Victor Uwaifo, Sonny Okosun started in the early 1970s with a genre he styled Ozzidi which infused mainly highlife, funk and Afrobeat sounds. He experimented with few other music genres throughout his musical career but he was best known for adopting reggae all through the late 1970s up till the closing decades of the 1980s. Ozzidi was more of a cultural synthesis early on but Okosun later chose to combine reggae and highlife as a distinct musical identity that could categorically influence his song-text and project him as both a societal critic and Pan-Africanist. The popularity of reggae between the 1970s and 1980s in Nigeria and across the world was a very strong factor that changed Okosun's preference from Ozzidi to reggae. Since reggae was often characterised by popular socio-political themes directed at, for instance, colonialism, war, capitalism among others, Okosun found a visibly potent musical platform to launch him nationally and cross-continentially as a music activist and perhaps, an African voice of the Third World.

In 1978, Okosun released the album, *Fire in Soweto* ([LP] Oti) to critical acclaim. With early albums such as *Ozzidi* (1976), *Living Music* (1977), *Papa's Land* (1977) among others, Okosun became a household name. The single 'Help' further elevated his fame as a promising artist of the early 1970s. Okosun late in the 1970s decided to embrace the reggae genre as a means to identify with the painful realities of blacks in South Africa. Incidentally, Ozzidi had also been developed as a local genre to call attention to the challenges faced by black people across the world. Nonetheless, there are insinuations that Okosun's music changed in the late 1970s because of the reggae rave that captured the global community in the 1970s (Onwuegbuna 2015). This may not be far-fetched, given that one of the popular Jamaican reggae stars, Peter Tosh, had made a lasting impression on Okosun. It could not have been a coincidence that Tosh released the album, *Equal Rights* in 1977, featuring the track, 'Apartheid', while Okosun released *Fire in Soweto* (with an almost similar theme) in 1978. Aside from this early influence, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti may have influenced Okosun's Ozzidi

which contained elements of Afrobeat. It is also likely that the sponsored musical shows and concerts performed by black South African artists such as Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba and Yvonne Chaka Chaka in the 1970s, and after the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977, may have been a strong deciding factor that shaped Okosun's choice of protest music beginning from 1977.

Incidentally, Okosun had revealed in an interview that he was acquainted with events in South Africa as far back as 1965 through one Florence Kukulere, a Zimbabwean who was on a scholarship in Nigeria that year. According to Chike (2016), Kukulere informed Okosun of the political situation in Southern Africa which spurred him "into further research, and as a musician, I decided to start writing songs to express my concern about things going on there, by way of reflecting them in my music as protest songs." This episode between Kukulere and Okosun is noteworthy, given the importance of student/artist encounter networks for transmitting first-hand knowledge of the human exigencies in Southern Africa. Although Okosun may have become conscious of the situation in Southern Africa through such informal communication channels, many citizens were conscious of the situation through other channels such as the press. The anti-imperialist and militant foreign policy approach towards South Africa under the Gowon and Murtala Mohammed (1975-1976) regimes (Wilmot 1989: 4-5), respectively, also helped to provide citizens with first-hand knowledge about South Africa and less on personal encounters.

In any case, these diverse channels of communication Okosun encountered invariably informed the musical transitions he made from Ozzidi into reggae. It is also possible that the outcome of his findings (on Southern Africa) may have influenced the rather radical posture that informed his musical itinerary from 1977 until the late 1980s. Based on the role reggae would play globally in the early 1970s, it was not a surprise, therefore, that Okosun's musical transformations began with the 1976 song, 'Let My People Go' and with albums like *Papa's Land*, *Fire in Soweto*, *Holy Wars* and *Power to the People* released in 1977 and 1978, respectively. These, Chike further notes, are enduring musical itineraries that encapsulate his path to the anti-apartheid struggle. Okosun would continue to release protest and anti-apartheid songs and albums such as *Third World* (1982), *Liberation* (1984), *Africa Now or Never* (1986) and *African Soldier* (1991) until much later in the 1990s when he switched to gospel music.

The album/track, *Fire in Soweto* created 'trans-national' and 'cross-continental' avenues for contending with the struggles of the black man and woman in South Africa (Emielu 2016: 83). This would demonstrate that Nigerian artists' musical protest against apartheid started for the most part in the late 1970s. As a musical



pioneer of the anti-apartheid struggle, and perhaps its most vocal and unrepentant opponent, Okosun was viewed among fellow anti-apartheid celebrities in South Africa as a viable link that could actuate the anti-apartheid movement across Africa and particularly to a global audience. This may have influenced his inclusion in the 1985 Sun City Project where he shared a stage with music greats (Daramola 2016). The Sun City Project known as Artists United Against Apartheid was formed in 1985 by Steven Van Zandt. As a protest movement, its initiators produced the song/album Sun City to enforce change and freedom in South Africa (Goldberg 2015: 304). Sun City was, of course, a casino resort in Bophuthatswana which commonly attracted popular rock and pop stars. According to Dan Solomon (2013), targeting Sun City was meant to enhance previous economic and cultural sanctions targeted at the apartheid regime.

The Sun City Project's calculated attempt to unify diverse voices and merge several musical genres added to the awareness and imaginations of apartheid which was said to be part of "a larger tapestry of historical oppression" (Pfaff 2004: 27). The Project was, hence, perceived as a debt each celebrity owed South Africans and most significantly, provided a firm "understanding of the long-term anti-apartheid struggle" (Onwuegbuna 2015). Coincidentally, Okosun would go on to collaborate with the reggae icon, Jimmy Cliff, who was also part of the Sun City Project, embarking on Nigerian tours in the 1980s.

Indeed, since the ultimate objective of the project was to ensure that fifty of the most famous musicians across the world adequately pledged a cultural boycott against South Africa (Marsh 1985), Okosun, as Chike (2016) argues, quickly reinforced this transnational pledge through an uncompromising position towards record labels and other artistic agencies which unsuccessfully sought to convince him to discontinue his anti-apartheid criticisms in exchange for huge monetary compensations. *Fire in Soweto* was, indeed, perceived as a natural fit for what the Sun City movement intended for it to achieve. Although interests in the project soared globally, Okosun's early artistic identification with apartheid, observed a writer, was highly recognised by the initiators who "wanted people who had done something [about apartheid] with their work in the past" (Solomon 2013).

### **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (Beasts of No Nation)**

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti is commonly regarded as a pioneer of the music genre Afrobeat. He began his career by experimenting with highlife, jazz and briefly, a combination of both (highlife jazz) and was even exposed to such genres as

mambo, calypso, and ska back in the 1950s (Olaniyan 2004: 9). Early in the 1960s, the theme of his music drew on mundane subjects like love, flirtations, among others, which highlife music was known for at the time. With the release of *Alagbon Close* in 1974, Fela's music witnessed its "first anti-state composition" as Olaniyan refers to it, and in 1976, after the release of *Upside Down*, took on a "politically combative and outspoken phase" (2004: 50). An aspect of Afrobeat music is its bellicose nature which often targets specific individuals and institutions while drawing from themes occasioned by socio-economic and political realities. These realities were locally induced but also veered into continental and global issues as shall be illustrated below.

Ironically, Fela was not known to have produced any music about apartheid or on notable South African freedom fighters. He was of the view that the oppression of blacks notwithstanding in South Africa, the people fared better than their fellow Nigerian citizens. Fela in his typical fashion argued in a documentary (Chege 2018) that Nigerians were being maltreated and oppressed by their government which for him was a hybridised form of apartheid. On the surface of things, therefore, *Beasts of No Nation* appears not to be an anti-apartheid song (Fela 1986). Despite Fela's 'charity begins at home' posture, he did not seem to condone apartheid and gave overt support to the struggle against it. There is evidence that indicates that the *Afrikan Shrine*, Fela's commune, was used as an avenue for discussions on apartheid and other emerging national and global trends (Botchway 2014: 19). The outlook of the Shrine as an entertainment and educational hub made it a site for restating Fela's indignations against the Nigerian state and the global community (Olatunji 2007: 26-46). Jaboro (2012: 150) was also of the view that Fela was pleased with the news of Mandela's release in 1990. While he may have expressed strong disapproval to sing about Mandela, he made up for it by way of exposing the international conspiracy that aided in perpetuating apartheid policy.

An article has addressed the issues around the album, illustrating the hypocritical position of many of the western member states of the UN (except for a few) towards the apartheid regime despite the latter's threat to unleash terror on the blacks in response to the persistent riots unleashed on the government (Raheem 2017: 46-60). In this article, however, we are concerned with the trans-national and cross-continental configurations, particularly the vectors linking apartheid to broader issues. Fela's *Beasts of No Nation* album in its characteristic tone indicts both international institutional and social agents for their respective roles in reinforcing the brutal turn apartheid assumed following the 1976 Soweto uprising and the 1985 Langa Massacre, despite repeated global condemnation. Fela selects the UN first by identifying its failure to act decisively against the

excesses of the powerful member states. The album expressed outrage over the UN's unsatisfactory organisational principles which hands the Security Council more veto powers than the General Assembly, thereby exposing the undemocratic status of the global body. Most interesting is the turn the song takes in its sordid description of specific political figures behind the disturbing trend.

*Wetin united inside United Nations?  
Who & who unite for United Nations?  
No be there Thatcher and Argentina dey  
No be there Reagan & Libya dey  
Israel versus Lebanon  
Iran-i-oh versus Iraq-i  
East West bloc versus West bloc East  
No be there dem dey oh United Nations  
Dis "united" United Nations  
One veto vote is equal to 92...or more, or more  
Which kind sense be dat o, na animal sense  
What is united in the United Nations?  
Who is united in the United Nations?  
Where Thatcher and Argentina are [locked in battle]  
Where Reagan and Libya are [locked in battle]  
Israel versus Lebanon [locked in battle]  
Iran versus Iraq [locked in battle]  
East-West bloc versus West bloc East [locked in battle]  
Yet they are all members of the United Nations  
Disunited United Nations  
One veto vote is equal to 92  
What is the sense in that, it is an animal sense (Fela 1986)*

Following the death of former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, FW de Klerk Foundation released a statement where it observed that Thatcher "...was sceptical about the ability of sanctions to force the South African government to adopt changes that it believed would threaten its core interests." In a speech at the Nigerian Official Dinner in Lagos, Nigeria on 7 January, 1988, Thatcher, like her United States counterpart, called for "similar patience and persistence" with the Botha regime since "between apartheid and democracy, the known devil was preferable" (Evans 2013). This is even though the UN under their control

emphasized human rights across the world. The album argued that the UN could not advocate for human rights since this was a natural right of every individual. It also contends that the call for human rights fell short of the realities across the world where the powerful states continue to bully the weaker ones to submission. Fela's conception of the UN could be summed up in what he described as an assembly of beasts where the West in cahoots with the apartheid regime was only desirous of discrimination rather than respect for human rights as advocated for.

### **Majek Fashek (Free Africa, Free Mandela)**

Majekodunmi Fasheke, popularly referred to as Majek Fashek, started as a reggae solo artist (after his group, Jastix was disbanded) and has remained consistent with the genre. He had, like some of his older colleagues and contemporaries, similar influences through reggae although he came into the music scene late in the 1980s when other local genres such as Fuji and juju appeared to have overtaken reggae. Majek's music may appear as reggae for many but Novia (2012: 93) observed that the artist preferred to call it Kpangolo, a mix of reggae, juju, Fuji and, to a lesser degree, rock.

Okosun's image as a 'freedom fighter' and his acclaimed international success perhaps raised a new generation of reggae artists who, like him, chose to adopt the reggae genre and also carried on with the struggle he had pioneered. Others found Afro-pop a suitable genre that could translate meaning for the anti-apartheid struggle. Some of the celebrities that emerged from the 1980s and the early 1990s who particularly sampled the reggae and Afro-pop genre include Wiser Generation, Best Agoha, Mandators, Terakota, Orits Wiliki, Patfin Okonjo, Maxwell Udoh, Majek Fashek, Evi Edna-Ogholi, Ras Kimono, Onyeka Onwenu, Andy Shurman, Dready Boys, Peterside Ottong, Manik Leo, Jah Sticks among others.

Of this list, Majek Fashek stood out. He expressed deep commitments to the anti-apartheid movement through protest and solidarity songs. There is no doubt that Okosun may have spurred Majek's interest in reggae and the similar turn the themes in his music took. The former's influence could, however, not be compared with Majek's knowledge of protest and revolutionary figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Bob Marley and not surprisingly, Peter Tosh, whom he adored and found deep inspiration from. Their characteristic posture against racism, injustice, segregation laws, bad leadership, state brutality among other state-sponsored vices, helped to nurture Majek's consciousness such that his music since 1987 often followed similar themes which reject oppression in all shades. Like Okosun was enthralled by Tosh, so was Majek who claimed to be

'more Peter Tosh' than any other celebrity freedom fighter. Giving a logical interpretation of his music and its impact up till the early 1990s, Majek observed that while iconic figures such as Marcus Garvey, Socrates and others were not musicians, their life works suggested that they were, indeed, activists. He, therefore, intended to use his music "to fulfil their message" (Fallon 1992: 32). The links these ideologies conveyed by the above-named personalities influenced the trajectory of Majek's music and his decision to fall in line with the anti-apartheid solidarity movement.

His first album, *Prisoner of Conscience*, was released in 1987 and captured the essence of Mandela's struggles with apartheid. He recreated Mandela's imprisonment by walking around in chains and at the same time with a metal bell to act out in public what Emielu suggests was the latter's confinement which he believed was not different from the incarceration of the black man (2016: 83). For each public performance, Emielu (2016: 84) further observed that Majek used the opportunity to inform his audiences that the black race, like Mandela, are 'prisoners of conscience' seeking redemption from oppression.

Majek's appropriation of the chain and bell illustrate deep meanings that transcend 'confinement' and 'incarceration of the black man'. While we are not certain about Majek's spiritual connections with the Rasta movement despite his outward appearance (dreadlocks, crocheted cap, pendant, liberation coloured belt and others) alluding to this, there is a possibility that his Yoruba and Edo roots may have had some overriding influence over the adoption of these metallic objects. Bells among the Yoruba and Edo were regarded as symbols of ancestral worship and won on the battlefield, for instance, by the latter as a form of protection and to intimidate the enemy. By employing the use of the bell, Majek was, perhaps, conjuring the inherent powers around the material to express defiance and defeat against a deadly force (apartheid).

He followed his anti-apartheid rhetoric in 1989 with the album release, *I and I Experience* where the track, 'Free Africa, Free Mandela' was dedicated to Mandela.

*Now now now now*

*Margaret Thatcher*

*Eh eh eh Free Mandela*

*Now, now, now, now*

*Frederick de Klerk*

*Eh, eh, eh*

*Free Mandela*

[Chorus]  
 For 27 years  
 He's been sleeping under the chain  
 For years long  
 He's been lying under the chain  
 He left his wife, he left his children  
 For the sake of Africans (Fashek 1989)

This track is significant in several ways. First, Majek had introduced the track by dedicating its message to Mandela, a prisoner of conscience like himself and to all freedom fighters in time past. It is not clear why Majek chose to wear such toga but it is likely that the hapless socio-political situation in Nigeria under Ibrahim Babangida (1985-93) and his brushes with the law may have fittingly explained the reasons for this. Fallon noted that Majek had confessed how he became a subject of constant police harassment following the release of the track, 'Police Brutality' in his first album (1992: 32). Second, it settles the belief that Majek was invariably a 'hero' of the anti-apartheid struggle, giving that Mandela was released in 1990 a year after the track was released.

### **Onyeka Onwenu (Winnie Mandela)**

It may appear that a relatively young Nigerian female pop artist, Onyeka Onwenu, like Majek, arrived quite late as one of the renowned Nigerian celebrities who took an active part in voicing out against apartheid. This may not be particularly true even though her music career had only begun in 1981. As a young African Tour Guide at the UN headquarters in New York in the 1970s, however, Onwenu had been conscious of the anti-apartheid movement and the solidarity it spurred among Africans and Nigerians. Apart from being "decidedly anti-apartheid" at the time, she often attended UN sub-committee meetings where apartheid was convened and discussed to keep abreast of all developments in Southern Africa. Her opportunity came in the 1980s as a UN Electoral Officer in Namibia where she was able to witness first-hand the vicious turn apartheid took beyond its mere discussions at the UN headquarters.

On her return to Nigeria, she began a musical relationship with Okosun through whom she released her first debut album, *Onyeka* in 1981 and *Endless Life* the following year (Ahman 2012). Her musical relationship with Okosun may have also contributed in many ways to her 1988 track, 'Winnie Mandela' (See Onwenu 1988). Surprisingly, Onwenu did not adopt reggae like her female

contemporaries such as Evi Edna-Ogholi and in fact, stood out in the 1980s as one of the few artists who crossed pop with highlife and juju music. She, like few others, however, could be regarded as a celebrity artist who voiced their concerns against apartheid through pop music despite the popularity and huge acceptance of reggae in Nigeria in the 1980s.

At the point when Nigerian celebrity artists began to sing about apartheid, the themes in their songs placed male figures of the anti-apartheid struggle at the top of the agenda. Others illustrated issues dealing with the excesses of the apartheid regime like racial discrimination, segregation laws, injustice, police brutality, massacre among others. Remarkably, Onwenu immersed herself in the struggle in a much different way. Possibly as a result of her gender and Winnie Mandela's painful experience as a wife and mother since 1962, when her husband (Nelson) was incarcerated, she chose to 'feminize' the struggle. Coincidentally, Onwenu had also witnessed similar experiences like Winnie as a young wife and mother. As she noted, her husband suddenly exiled Nigeria, following threats to his life, and in effect left her with the burden of caring for her young child alone. A television documentary on the political travails of the Mandelas would later motivate her into identifying with Winnie's adversities. In a recent article on her blog, Onwenu revealed that Winnie's depressing challenges appeared incomparable to her privations and to be able to express her sympathy, she decided to give back to Winnie for [her] sacrifice...to the apartheid struggle, in which every decent human being had a stake ... [and so] I saw her sacrifice as a global one, made by an African woman...for her man and her country (Onwenu 2018).

*Winnie*

*Winnie Mandela*

*Mother Azania*

*Crying to be free*

*Winnie*

*Winnie Mandela*

*Soul of our nation*

*Fighting to be free* (Onwenu 1988)

The track's dedication to Winnie illustrates identity with womanhood and the familiar peculiarities that embody the strength of a woman and the struggle to survive in the face of everyday adversities. It also emphasizes the pivotal roles and active part women played as a collective in the global struggle against

apartheid.

### **Celebrity Protest, Solidarity and Advocacy: Iconographic Representations**

The four artists selected in the article were undoubtedly professionals with songs linked to the socio-realities of the time. Between the 1980s and the early 1990s when apartheid collapsed, Nigeria was ruled by military dictatorships. A good number of the songs during this period did not say much about the roughshod nature of military rule in the country. However, the effect of military rule which had taken a heavy toll on the economy and the people were satirised or formed part of the music commentary in several albums. Fela remains one of the most vocal of these celebrity artists whose protest songs were channelled towards the internal politics of the time. He regarded Nigeria as a Gestapo state under the military and fought each regime by protesting against unpopular policies and regimes. For instance, Fela used *Beasts of No Nation* to criticise the sense in which the government referred to its citizens as undisciplined lots when the latter was itself guilty of the same offence. Protest is treated in Fela's songs in ways that tend to diagnose the challenges of the post-colonial state and the human agency within it. The 'Beasts of No Nation' readily captures this view except that it also transcends the discourse by identifying transcontinental human and institutional agencies as factors behind the challenges of Third World states.

A critical look at the album cover of *Beasts of No Nation* shows peculiar defiance. The cover explained with precision Fela's caustic impression of the state of affairs of the global community vis-à-vis Nigeria. It quotes a statement from P.W. Botha where the title of the album was extracted from, shows Congolese dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, British and South Africa's Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and Botha, United States' President Ronald Reagan, Nigerian dictator, Muhammed Buhari and his Vice President, Babatunde Idiagbon, all with horns engraved on both sides of their heads and fangs across their teeth to illustrate 'animalistic' identities typical of oppressors as Fela would have listeners believe. In a CNN interview with Ghariokwu (2013), the album cover designer, Fela is said to have appeared in pink attire and his characteristic triumphant Black Power salute in this particular album cover (Kermeliotis 2017). Images of rats all dressed in Nigerian army apparel also appeared on the cover. As rightly observed, "The images of *Beasts of No Nation* seethe with primal urges—greed, control, vengeance—and the spirit of defiance" (Ghariokwu 2013). In so many ways, *Beasts of No Nation* identified with the anti-apartheid movement and, to my knowledge, remains the only song that revealed the internationalisation of apartheid as captured in the abiding support of powerful Western countries



towards the policy and white-minority government.

In Okosun and Onwenu's case, their songs on apartheid were composed in solidarity with the travails of South Africans and South African anti-apartheid figures. For Okosun, *Fire in Soweto* was in many respects a direct reaction to the 1976 Soweto uprising which recorded several hundred people shot dead by the police. Although other Southern African states such as Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique were part of the song's focus, South Africa's Soweto was given due attention. This song is significant for the reason that Okosun views the travails faced by the oppressed blacks as a personal one, hence his persistent reference to South Africans in the song as "my people". Most interesting is the iconic image on the album cover of *Fire in Soweto*. Throughout the period apartheid lasted Emielu states that Okosun was often seen wearing a signature headband made from African textile which apart from its defining symbol also "became emblematic of his Ozzidism crusade to free Africa from colonial vestiges, including Apartheid" (2016: 91). Onwenu may not have expressed any form of defiance or 'defining symbol' on her album sleeve like others did, however, she understood the power of imprinted words which she judiciously used aside from the lyrics in the track, 'Winnie Mandela'. The jacket of her 1988 album, *Dancing in the Sun* was dedicated to Winnie and all South African women "in recognition of their contribution to the struggle against Apartheid" (Onwenu 1988). Feminizing the anti-apartheid struggle, thus, singled out Onwenu as a heroine of South African women liberation. Her interesting reference to Winnie as "Mother Azania" and the "Soul of our nation" is in a sense an indication of the burden shouldered by a single female power over the adversities of her nation and a call to set them free.

Majek's emergence on the reggae turf in Nigeria positioned him as Bob Marley incarnate (Pareles 1990). He virtually propagated everything the latter stood for and given the kind of music Marley played, and the huge influence he had on him, Majek laced his songs with spiritual messages. In his 'Free Africa, Free Mandela' track, he dedicated the song not only to Mandela but all the freedom fighters across the world. Most interestingly, unlike the other celebrities selected in the article, he took the path of advocacy by calling out specific renowned political figures supportive of the apartheid regime to give freedom to Mandela. For instance, Margaret Thatcher, Frederick de Klerk, George Bush were identified as the faces of apartheid and made a collective appeal to them to free Africa from the shackles of colonial rule. That the track also made useful reference to the everyday struggles of Nigerians under the Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) regime at the time illustrate the sort of collectivised image of dependence even after independence among African states. He paints the picture of suffering,

frustration, confusion and poverty on the continent, blaming the colonial masters and African leaders for the continued deplorable condition of African peoples. Majek's I and I Experience album cover shows him pictured in chains and handcuff to illustrate Mandela's prison condition and as part of his advocate for immediate release. What many of the above examples show, interestingly, is a very personalized anti-apartheid struggle with the person of Mandela or the Mandelas (as in the case of Onwenu on Winnie).

As this comparative perspective on all four artists reveals, Fela, Okosun, Majek and Onwenu had some direct internal political positioning with Nigerian politics. From this follows, I argue, that the anti-apartheid songs released by the four artists were directly influenced by the Nigerian government's (commencing with Murtala Muhammed) internal measures put in place for its propaganda efforts to support blacks in South Africa. As Amusan puts it, they were encouraged to spread negative messages on the hostile nature of apartheid. Nigerian musicians accomplished this by

Portray[ing] some of the nationalists among the blacks, such as Winnie Mandela, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo and the 'Soweto Kids', as immortal. Awareness of such leaders, even among uninformed people, grew like wildfire (Amusan 2004).

Amusan's observation above seems to contradict Fela's often critical position against the Nigerian military government. In the same vein, as the above quote suggests, the four artists in their songs portrayed specific South African figures as 'immortal', they did so based on the moral justification to draw 'emotional' attention to the real and deplorable everyday conditions of South Africans. In essence, there were as such no clear differences among the four artists except that each chose to protest or advocate against specific issues and on other occasions, show solidarity within the broader context of apartheid. One major point of divergence could be seen in the fact that each of the celebrities adopted music genres peculiar to the times (circa 1970-late 1980s), for instance, reggae as used by Okosun and Majek, Afro-pop and Afrobeat as adopted by Onwenu and Fela, respectively. The genre incidentally did not matter much as long as the language use which includes English, Pidgin English (mixture of English and local language), patois (English-based creole languages spoken mainly in Jamaica) and Yoruba helped to pass the message of resistance across to a wider audience. In a broader sense, I argue that the musical concerns of these celebrities are connected in a way to a unifying resistance movement in most parts of Africa targeted at white-minority rule, particularly in response to the 1976 Soweto uprising. The nature of these connections is impacted by the shared history of the

two nations within the context of colonial rule. That Nigeria and many other African states had been freed from the shackles of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s while others in the southern half of the continent were not only under foreign domination but by a white minority few gave impetus to the conception of total decolonisation and independence for the latter. And so, if politics was not able to end apartheid soon enough, politics by other means – such as music – could be a powerful instrument. Overall, it is difficult to assess the role Nigerian celebrities played in generating protest and creating advocacy and solidarity with the black population in South Africa to end apartheid. Austin Emielu's article on Nigerian reggae music artists in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa provides an insightful contribution to the role played by this agency during apartheid and, in particular, outside the South African Development Community. He uses texts, images, repertoires and themes of anti-apartheid music as a means to recall cultural memory that may have gone unnoticed in the post-apartheid era (Emielu 2016).

That the apartheid regime increasingly expressed worrying concerns over the way music and other forms of dissidence became a ready tool for disrupting further exertions of apartheid indicate the colossal impact of celebrities and their music in ending apartheid in South Africa.

### **Conclusion**

This article has set out to examine the role played by four Nigerian celebrity artists as part of national and trans-national solidarity, using a variety of music media to engage critically against the apartheid government. Also, this essay is not solely focused on reggae artists like earlier work done by Emielu did but rather sheds light on artists who adopted other music genres such as Afro-pop and Afrobeat, to complement government and citizens' transgressive reaction towards the apartheid government. Lastly, this essay departs from the existing literature in the sense that it considers the four artists' anti-apartheid song/music as an expressive culture deployed to countermand 'outside' support which continually emboldened the apartheid state. This article has accomplished, therefore, an examination of three thematic threads – protest, solidarity and advocacy – which framed anti-apartheid discourse in the songs and album covers of the four selected Nigeria celebrity artists.

The repertoire of songs connected with apartheid between the late 1970s and the close of the 1980s were woven around themes such as victimisation, segregation, silence, brutality among others. However, as has been demonstrated, three identifiable themes – protest, solidarity and advocacy – remain very potent in calling the world's attention to the reprehensible nature of the apartheid policy

in South Africa. These powerful notions were used to harness the ‘commonality’ of purpose which denounced apartheid in strong terms, diminishing the dangers individuality may have caused for continuity of the struggle. Protest, solidarity and advocacy continued to resound throughout the 1980s most especially and while Fela seemed to have practically chosen the path of protest in *Beasts of No Nation*, Okosun, Majek and Onwenu’s songs had combinations of solidarity and advocacy, sometimes either of the two.

As noted earlier, Nigeria’s external relations was one of the major deciding factors that influenced the commitments of the majority of Nigerians towards the anti-apartheid struggle. Nigerian celebrity artists like their counterparts in sports, academics and the public sector, complemented the government’s efforts by expressing through their music defiance and complete resistance towards white-minority rule which apartheid exemplified. There seemed a sort of symbiotic relationship between the government and the people that helped to shape the imaginations of apartheid in Nigeria as utterly malignant. The government, by this statement, would appear to have done enough to raise a conscious population but this was far from it. Anti-apartheid songs played an educative role by contributing in no small measure to the masses’ knowledge of the South African painful reality.

Undoubtedly, the Nigerian artists selected for the article succeeded in drawing the attention of Nigeria’s public to the deplorable conditions of apartheid through their music. Their celebrity status was a useful asset that generated cross-cultural interactions and solidarity and as it appeared, it was not enough to sing about apartheid using the reggae genre, patois, pidgin, Yoruba or English languages, but by appropriating some of these ‘foreign’ materials within this artistic agency connected these Nigerian celebrities more with the anti-apartheid struggle.

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