

**Music Artistes and their Contribution to the Idea of
Development in Africa, 1974-1987**

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*Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of
Kenya (PAK)*

New Series, Vol.3 No.2, December 2011, pp.49-73

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<http://ajol.info/index.php/tp/index>

Abstract

This paper is a historical analysis of the contributions of music artistes to the idea of development in Africa in the period between 1974 and 1987. It seeks to show that concern for the development of the continent was not confined to the intellectual community. Music artistes were not merely interested in entertainment; they also paid attention to the real problems that

confronted the society of their time, thereby sharing in the concern of political thinkers of all ages. The works of three artistes - Sonny Okosun, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Bob Marley - are selected for detailed examination, although references are made to other artistes. The study depended on primary and secondary source material. The paper is a contribution to knowledge in the field of African Political Thought.

Key words

Music, artistes, idea, development, Africa

Introduction

It cannot be gainsaid that Africa, at least generally speaking, is underdeveloped. In an attempt to understand the causes of underdevelopment in the 1970s and 80s, scholars wrote from different perspectives, and put forward suggestions for overcoming the challenge (see e.g. Rodney 1970; Amin 1972). Music artistes also showed interest in the problem, and expressed their concern in their compositions.

Music is a universal phenomenon, but it has not yielded itself to an exact definition. Nevertheless, its attributes are well known: it is an “imitation of natural beauty” (Dahlhaus 1982, 20-21), not beauty in the raw but potential and actual beauty, that is, music can be used to depict an ideal. It is recognized as a potent force in the art of communication (some would say a universal language) which can be used to foster understanding among different peoples. It can be used as a tool for disseminating necessary information or for effective persuasion. It is therefore not surprising that music has served as a means of propagating the idea of development in Africa.

Development is another concept that is difficult to pin down. While some see it as coterminous with growth or evolution, others think it transcends growth and that it is a process of institutional change (Miller 1963, 273). Development concerns not only the meeting of mankind's material needs, but also the improvement of the social conditions of their lives (Alpert 1963,1; Reading 1977, 64). Thus development as understood in this paper is an all-embracing concept of improvement in the social, economic, cultural and political life of a people.

This paper undertakes a historical study of the contribution of music artistes to the idea of development in Africa in the period between 1974 and 1987. This theme remains largely unexplored in the history of modern African political ideas. Our focus is on artistes who expressed themselves in English or in English-based languages. Our aim is to identify the basic thoughts of these artistes on the idea of development in Africa. How did they think Africa could become developed? What did they suggest as solutions to underdevelopment in the continent? These are some of the questions that this paper attempts to answer.

The paper sets out with an examination of the formative years in the idea of development in Africa from the point of view of the musicians under study. It then explores the expansion and consolidation of the idea of development in the works of the said artistes. Three artistes - Bob Marley, Sonny Okosun and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti - are selected for detailed examination, although references are made to other artistes.

Music Artistes and the idea of development: The initial effort

Generally, it can be said that the initial attempt by music artistes at contributing to the idea of development in Africa came from outside the continent. The theme of the state of the "Negro" in the world could be found

in the musical compositions of “Africans” in the Americas who were then suffering from white domination and oppression. Of particular interest to us is the Caribbean community, where the “Reggae” music developed in the late 1960s (Campbell 1984/85, 3). As reggae developed as a medium of protest and resistance, it was not surprising that in Africa too, it became an avenue for espousing revolutionary ideas.

In the early 1970s, the trio of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingstone, collectively known as “the Wailers”, joined others such as Jimmy Cliff to uplift the ego of blacks all over the world. Indeed, African affairs *per se* were not to receive the immediate attention of this bunch of Jamaican artistes. Instead, it was the general state of the black man, not only in Jamaica but throughout the world, that was their concern. This is understandable, as they were primarily reacting to the prevailing circumstances in their immediate environment. They believed that the problems they faced, namely domination and oppression (under which no meaningful development could take place), were common to blacks everywhere including Africa, and that all blacks were indeed Africans.

In Africa, the situation was slightly different. By the end of the 1960s, most African countries had gained political independence, except certain countries in the Southern Africa sub-region. Yet very little was done by music artistes to advocate for the freedom of Africans in that sub-region. However, an exception was the South African-born Miriam Makeba. Although we do not know when exactly Makeba began to sing songs of liberation, available evidence points to the 1950s; for in 1959 she fled South Africa and went to Guinea (Awoyinfu 1974, 4). It is apparent that she took this action because of pressures from the South African government on account of the characteristic pungency of incitement which her music possessed. By the beginning of the 1970s, she was internationally recognized as a champion of the rights of black South Africans.

In her album “*Calling all Africans at home and abroad*”, Makeba appealed to African countries to unite and liberate South Africa “from the savage and bestial government of racist” (Awoyinfa 1974, 4). This appears to be the first significant and deliberate call from the music world to African leaders to unite to fight for a common purpose. Makeba not only sang of African unity; she also demonstrated her ideas by visiting various African countries and paying courtesy calls on their leaders. By June 1974, she had visited not less than eight countries including Guinea (where she had lived in exile), Ivory Coast, Ghana, Congo, Egypt, Niger, Mali, Uganda (where President Idi Amin conferred Ugandan nationality on her), and Nigeria (where she called on some Federal government officials). It appears that the visits went beyond mere courtesy calls, and that they were meant to obtain assurances in matters relating to a concerted effort to dismantle apartheid. Nevertheless, Makeba was, generally, still a lone voice, as other African music artistes were yet to be concerned about the problem of underdevelopment in the continent.

As the 1970s progressed, the problems of underdevelopment continued to stare at Africans, and music artistes began to take note of them. In February 1976, the popular Nigerian artiste, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, indicated his intention to tour the United States of America where he hoped to lecture some students on “blackism” and the concept of African revolution (Makinde 1976, 3). However, he did not explain what he meant by revolution. That same year, he formed the Young African Pioneers (YAP), which was formally launched on 19th September, 1976 by his mother, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. The purpose of YAP was “to create economic and cultural awareness among youths in Africa and also to restore the sense of individual fundamental human rights of its members as well as the whole public” (Odeyemi 1976, 21). On another occasion, Fela said that YAP had as its aim the promotion of African unity or Nkrumaism, as well as creating a genuine African identity. He indicated that YAP was to eradicate all those

colonial lies about slave trade and about the history of the African people that gave the erroneous impression that Africa had no culture (Odeyemi 1976, 21).

Fela appears to have known what he was saying concerning the promotion of African cultural identity or cultural development. In "*Africa Message*" released in 1973, he had shown how colonialism and neocolonialism had resulted in the neglect of Africa's rich cultural heritage. He had further explained his position on the richness of African culture in his album "*Paramulator*" (1974), where he tried to prove the superiority of herbal medicine over orthodox western medicine. In 1975, he had admonished in a song titled "*Yellow Fever*" those Africans who turned their skin from black (original) into yellow (artificial) through bleaching: "You de bleach, oh you de bleach. Yellow fever, stupid thing, ugly thing ...". In sum, Fela questioned the rationale of Africans imbibing western culture.

Furthermore, during this period, another Nigerian musician, Sonny Okosun, was making his contribution to the growth of the idea of development. Although there is evidence that he composed and wrote many well-meaning songs, very few of them were recorded as long playing records (LPs or albums). However, by 1977, he had staged over 30 live appearances, ranging from radio and television spots to concerts in various West African countries, that he earned the appellation of "the most ECOWAS oriented performer in West Africa" (Oshodi 1977, 6). The themes of Okosun's songs included political independence for African countries that were still under colonial domination, the problem of racialism in Southern Africa, the need for African countries to unite, and, ultimately, the development of the continent.

Yet in spite of all the above, the early 1970s up to the end of 1977 must be seen as the preliminary years in the contribution of music artistes to the idea

of development in Africa. Not only was the turnout of albums per year low during this period compared to what took place in the succeeding years, but most of the artistes discussed in this paper were also not yet seriously concerned about issues of development in Africa. Perhaps their goal then was entertainment, with the view to making money. Fela's albums, for instance, until 1977, did not portray the ideals of development that were to be found in the ones that came later.¹ Thus it would appear that the artistes were generally interested in establishing themselves in the music world. Perhaps one can also explain the late reaction of African artistes to issues of development by the fact that the euphoria of political independence in most African countries took a considerable number of years to fizzle out.

The era of consolidation and expansion in the idea of development

From 1977, the idea of development as articulated by the music artistes under study itself underwent significant development. This can be seen in the proliferation of songs covering relevant themes as indicated below.

Political Liberation

As earlier indicated, common to the music artistes discussed in this paper, namely, Bob Marley, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Sonny Okosun and others is the belief that genuine development can only begin after political independence. Hence, for those areas of Africa where *de jure* independence was yet to be attained, the artistes in their songs called for the acceleration of movement towards freedom. Sonny Okosun's "*Fire in Soweto*" (1978) was recorded with this idea in mind.² Its main theme centred on the political problems in

¹ Take 'Shakara' (1974), 'He miss road' (1974) or 'Excuse' (1976), for a few instances: they all have nothing to offer in the sphere of ideas on development.

² An archive of Sonny Okosun's album can be found at <http://biochem.chem.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~endo/EAOkosun.html> (retrieved on 12/08/2011).

Southern Africa arising out of racialism and the denial of liberty to black Southern Africans. Speaking on the situation of repression in Southern Africa, Okosun spoke about the “fighting in Namibia” and “rebels in Zimbabwe”, pointing out that the situation was leading to the “killing” and “crushing” of the African people. He noted that Africans cannot run away from their fatherland: “Tell me where they go na go. When they got no home.” He also wondered why all the trouble because “We (Africans) ‘ve done nothing. Nothing that we owe you”. Rather than take a confrontational attitude, he remonstrated: “We are pleading, will you leave us alone. We’ve got reason - freedom is our goal”.

In another work that same year, Okosun again urged that power be given to the people. “*Give power to the people*” (1978/79) was indeed a cry for freedom and justice. The song was meant to strengthen the hearts of millions of blacks suffering under the yoke of white oppression in Southern Africa, with a view to challenging them to arise and demand their rights. In this album, Okosun declared: “Unless you give power to the people, restore democracy, politically, economically and spiritually, there will be no just society.”

By 1978/79, the worth of Sonny Okosun had been appreciated on the international scene. He was seen as one of the leading musical crusaders against racial discrimination. This influence was sustained until the end of that decade, when he released “*Holy War*”(1979). His album, “*Light of Jah*” was a continuation of his advocacy for the liberation of black people. He envisaged an end to the suffering of the blacks in Southern Africa. Here we must notice a trend in Sonny Okosun’s music, namely, that it is a reflection of his Christian religious leaning. In “*Fire in Soweto*”, he questioned:

Tell me what you gona say

On the judgement day

Tell me what you gona say
When you find out the truth
That the colour of God is neither black nor white.

Okosun sang of a “holy war”, the result of which would be a paradise on earth where the “Light of Jah” would guide the people. The significance of this is that Okosun recognized that the challenges of development facing Africa were not pre-ordained, and as such amenable to solution.

The theme of freedom for the blacks which also revolves round the right of every people to decide their own destiny was taken up by Bob Marley in “*Survival*”³ in making a case for the independence of Zimbabwe. What was unique in the album was the track “*Zimbabwe*”, with its militant tone:

So arm in arm with arms
We will fight this little struggle ‘cause that’s the only way
we can overcome our little trouble
Brother you are right... we go fight, we’ll have to fight

Bob Marley regarded the independence of Zimbabwe as one that concerned the whole of Africa, indeed the whole of the black race, hence, “Our little trouble”. This was enough to sound the warning that if some parts of Africa were still not free, the whole of the continent was essentially yet to be liberated. He also emphasized the words “arm” and “fight” to indicate that the principle of non-violence would not solve the problems militating against the independence of Zimbabwe. “Zimbabwe” thus became the rallying call for African freedom fighters against the Ian Smith regime.

³ ‘Survival’ was recorded in 1979. A collection of Bob Marley’s albums can be found at <http://www.amazon.com/Bob-Marley-Collection-Dig/dp/B0009VNBQ0> and <http://www.cduniverse.com/search/xx/music/pid/1022995/a/Collection.htm> (retrieved 12/08/2011).

As Bob Marley was busy chanting “*Zimbabwe*”, his reggae compatriot, Peter Tosh,⁴ declared emphatically in the album “*Am the Toughest*” that he was not going to give up until “Africans and Africans are [sic.] free”. By this time, the atmosphere was sufficiently charged with demands for the exit of the racists and colonialists that Okosun could put it rather bluntly in “*Papa’s Land*”⁵ that “Africa must be ruled by Africans.” He queried:

‘we want to know who owns the land’, and if indeed,

Chinese are ruling in Chinaland

Japanese are ruling in their Japan

England is been governed by Englishmen

Americans are ruling America

Okosun saw no reason why Africans should not rule Africa “from Cape to Cairo”. It did not take long before “*Papa’s Land*” was adopted as the official anthem of the freedom fighters in Zimbabwe.

While Marley was sure that the issue would be decided “so soon” and the urgency in Okosun’s “*Papa’s land*” was almost tangible, another artiste was busy chanting that Africans, indeed, all blacks wherever they were, had to be free by the year 2000 A. D. In an album jointly waxed by Fela and black American music star, Roy Ayers,⁶ the latter in the track “*2000: Blacks got to be free*” had a vision about the year 2000, by which time all blacks were to be free, free enough to exclusively decide their own destiny. He

⁴ “The Wailers” had broken up in 1974. Some Peter Tosh collections can be found in <http://www.amazon.com/Collection-Gold-Peter-Tosh/dp/B000056KV6> (retrieved on 12/08/2011).

⁵ The album accessible to us was recorded in 1979 with the title ‘*Sonny Okosun in 1980*’, though it is more probable that *Papa’s Land* had been recorded earlier.

⁶ *Music of Many Colours* recorded in 1980; but the two tracks in the album had been earlier performed in 1979 during a country-wide tour by the two artistes.

said: “We know that by the year 2000 everybody will be knowledgeable. Think about 2000, blacks.”

The efforts of these artistes and other nationalists began to pay off. In April 1980, the first major success was recorded, namely, the independence of Zimbabwe. No sooner did this happen than Sonny Okosun went back to the studio, and before the end of the year came out with “*Third World*”. In it he said: “Congratulations, the people of Zimbabwe. This is your day, children of Zion”. However, he did not forget the fact that there were still other parts of Africa yet to gain freedom, hence he said: “We should be singing the hymn of peace and freedom. We should be ruling from Cape Town to Cairo”. He said “everybody will be happy in the end” if only there could be “total unity”.

The artistes also matched their music with action. While it is safe to assume that Okosun was present on the occasion of Zimbabwe’s independence (as he confirmed early in 1981 that he would be there during the first anniversary), Bob Marley’s appearance on the occasion contributed to its historic character. Apart from keeping his music close to the struggle of Africans, it was even speculated that he was involved in funding liberation groups in Southern Africa (Campbell 1984/85, 12). Thus when on 11th May, 1981 Marley died, he was mourned by virtually the entire black race and his admirers among the whites.

The realization of the fact that there were still other parts of Africa yet to be free from European domination led Okosun to produce “*Which Way Nigeria*” (1984), with a track titled “*Namibia*”. The track noted that there was so much crying, suffering and pain in Namibia. An attempt to find the cause for this suffering yielded nothing other than the presence of imperialists. It then concluded that “Africans must be freed from shackles

and chains”, and asserted that African soldiers would win the fight for freedom.

In 1986, the focus again shifted from Namibia to South Africa, when Gboyega Femi (Tera Kota) recorded “*Solitude ‘n’ shackles*”. The album, itself dedicated to the African National Congress (ANC), South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) and black activists such as Nelson Mandela,⁷ had a track titled “*Marching onto Pretoria*”. It is noteworthy that this track starts with Martial Music, already charging the atmosphere with its militancy:

African children, wipe this tyrant oppression

Militant children, carry on your protest

We must fight hard

Pull down the mantle of apartheid ...

Although Sonny Okosun, in “*Now or Never*” (1986) hinted that freedom from imperialism and racism for Africa was “now or never”, freedom did not come immediately, so that in 1987 artistes were still clamouring for the destruction of apartheid. One of them was a new Nigerian outfit known as “The Mandators”, who recorded “*Crisis*”. “*Redemption*” was the track that called for the “emancipation and redemption of South”. As they put it, apartheid was an evil not only to Africans, but also to the entire black race and indeed the whole of mankind. According to “*Redemption*”, the apartheid regime was filled with men who were “callous with no human emotions”. The point was also made that if South Africa was not free, the whole of Africa was yet to be free. As such, the business of fighting apartheid would not be that of South Africans alone, but that of all Africans.

⁷ See the sleeve of the album.

As some music artistes were busy clamouring for *de jure* independence for African countries, others, perhaps with a better grasp of the workings of imperialism, were arguing for *de facto* independence, condemning both the collaborators and the neo-imperialists alike. This was evidently the main message in Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's "ITT" ("International Thief-Thief") (1980). He was sure that the imperialists had formed an international concern – "ITT", and appointed Africans, amongst who were African leaders, to whom they gave a lot of money to help them in looting the resources of the continent. "ITT" ended with a call to Africans to deal with the collaborators in their midst and resent the overtures of the imperialist "thief".

Effective African Leadership

In 1981, Fela was in Paris, from where he began his "conquest of Europe". Nevertheless, more important was the press conference he held, in which he condemned what he described as the "fraudulence of African leadership". At the end of the day, he succeeded in painting African leaders as agents of imperialism. His basic evidence for this assertion is, perhaps, irrefutable. He placed before the audience the specter of the United Nations, where any number of African votes on any given issue could be overruled by a veto of the "superpowers". In other words, even in matters of utmost concern to Africa, African leaders would be virtually helpless. Fela's contention was that for African leaders to accept this without incessant protest was not only suicidal, but also tantamount to accepting legalised dehumanisation. Fela's profound thought can be explained by his educational background. Unlike most other artistes, Fela had a university education, and that in the United States, and as such was widely exposed.

The need for an effective African leadership also prompted Sonny Okosun to write "*We Want a Leader*" (in "Revolution II", 1985). Having mentioned the likes of Kwame Nkrumah, Murtala Mohammed, Jomo Kenyatta,

Mahatma Ghandi and Chairman Mao as examples of good leaders, he insisted that capable leadership was a pre-condition for development.

Socio-cultural Progress

As pointed out earlier, the concept of development from the point of view of the music artistes under study is broad. Thus while recognizing the significance of the political aspect of development – in terms of an efficient system facilitating the active participation of, and benefits to Africans, they did not neglect the equally important socio-cultural and economic aspects of development. We have already referred to Fela's idea of socio-cultural development - the promotion of an African identity. At the 1981 Paris press conference, he also talked of "African traditionalism" as the ideology for socio-cultural progress. This sentimental attachment to African values was not peculiar to Fela. For example, in 1978, Okosun had claimed that his music was "rich in African traditional history" (Rufus 1978, 15).

However, the concept of "African identity" appears nebulous when we take into cognizance the ethnic divergence and cultural pluralism of the continent (July 1967, 218-233). Yet the artistes were content to overlook whatever differences there were, and to concentrate on the values that Africans shared. This philosophy of cultural homogeneity was put to use in the pursuit of another objective, namely, African unity.

Effective Use of Natural Resources

For the music artistes, the inadequacy of water, electricity, food and housing was a feature of an underdeveloped country. Fela lamented in "*Original Suffer Head*" (1982) that African governments had failed to utilize natural endowments such as vast fertile farmlands, oil reserves and the sun's energy for the benefit of the people. This inability to harness the natural resources was in Fela's view "original suffer head" ("suffering"). Fela insisted that we

must all be ready to fight “suffer head”, eliminate it, and substitute it with “Jeffa head” (enjoyment). But how could we fight “suffering”? Sonny Okosun provided an answer in “*Revolution II*” (1985):

We will work in the rain and work in the sun,
We must work in the night and work in the day,
If we happen to trip and we fall,
The Revolution must never stop.

Talking of a “revolution” which “must never fail”, Okosun launched an attack on societal ills such as corruption, inflation and oppression.

What appears to be the most significant contribution by music artistes to the question of starvation in Africa came in 1985, when a number of artistes in the United States jointly recorded “*USA for Africa*” not only to expose the problem of underdevelopment, but also to raise funds to alleviate the plight of the masses of drought-stricken people in Ethiopia and other poor countries in the continent. They raised a staggering sum of 150 million US dollars with the launching of the star track “*We are the World*”, an event which has been described as the best thing that ever happened in the world of music. “*We are the World*” remains important for four main reasons. *First*, it drew our attention to the problems of poverty and nutritional inadequacy, which were (and still are) features of underdevelopment in Africa. *Second*, it demonstrated that music artistes need not operate merely in the realm of ideas, but can also contribute in practical terms to the struggle for development. *Third*, it stimulated Africans to be more responsive to issues around them. *Fourth*, and perhaps most importantly, “*We are the World*” reminded us of the necessity of cooperation. Indeed, the coming together of these artistes (over forty of them) with divergent musical inclinations to form a temporary ensemble was symbolic in this respect. They sang:

There comes a time when we heed a certain call
When the world must come together as one

We are all part of God's great big family
And the truth, you know, love is all we need ...

Unity and Cooperation

The idea of cooperation as an instrument of development was not introduced into African political thought by “*USA for Africa*”. Instead, as already indicated, it was a theme expressed in the works of virtually all the artistes discussed in this paper. Cooperation or unity was promoted through the concept of love among Africans. This bond of love emphasized common interest in the present as well as in the future. The common interest could take the form of accomplishing a common task for the mutual benefit of all Africans, or in opposing a common foe (Osei-Kwame 1980, 23).

That a degree of amity is necessary for effective cooperation is undoubtedly true. Thus the artistes put considerable effort into promoting the idea of “love” among African peoples. For example, Sonny Okosun reminded his fellow Africans that “We are from one father and mother. So that means we are brothers and sisters”.⁸ Hence the grudges that were causing destruction had to be settled through the promotion of love and harmony.

Having preached friendship, the artistes now took their audience through a historical excursion, bringing to the fore the common experience of slave trade, colonialism as well as some of the more recent crises in Africa. The best summary of these issues can be located in Sonny Okosun's “*3rd World*”:

Do you remember the voyage of African slaves?
so many people, so many people died
I want you to remember the Great Benin massacre

⁸ Sonny Okosun, “Give peace a Chance”, in ‘*Sonny Okosun in 1980*’.

Remember what happened in the bloody war of Congo

Remember what happened in the civil war in Nigeria

Don't you remember the killing in Soweto?

so many people, so many people died.

Given the scenario above, it is not surprising that these artistes continued to advocate cooperation or unity as an important component in the development of Africa. There must be the "joining of hands" to fight starvation, social ills, lack of social infrastructure and so on. There must also be unity in order that Africa may be able to hold her own in the comity of nations. As Fela reminded his audience, Africa is in the "centre of the world", and this uniqueness must not remain a mere geographical truth, but must be transformed into a real asset. For this to be achieved, Africa had to be strong. "Unity is strength", so the saying goes, hence Fela cried out:

Africans all over the world

Set your mind to Africa

We need Pan-Africanism

Black people all over the world

Pan Africanism, we need⁹

In urging blacks all over the world to set their minds on Africa, Fela implied that all black people are Africans. This view is not peculiar to Fela. "African", a track from Peter Tosh's *Equal Rights* (1979) says "Don't care where you come from. As long as you are a blackman, you are an African". He went on to assert that black men should not mind "nationality" because they "have got the identity of an African"; they should not mind religious "denomination" as that can only pass for "segregation"; nor should they mind their "complexion", whether light or dark, since "there is no rejection".

⁹ Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, "Africa centre of the World", *Music of Many colours*, 1980.

Similarly for Bob Marley, African unity was not only necessary for effective development, but also a first step in the preparation for the return of Africans from the diaspora:

Africa unite 'cause we're moving right out of
Babylon and we are going to our father's land
How good and how pleasant it would be to see
The unification of all Africans... Africa unite
'cause your children want to come home¹⁰

However, Marley was not blind to the forces of neo-colonialism, so he said:

They don't want to see us unite
'cause all they want us to do is
Keep on fussing and fighting
They don't want to see us live together
All they want us to do is keep on killing one another.

Marley urged blacks not to forget the “brotherly love” and “sisterly love” they had for one another, which were the simple “truths from an ancient time”.¹¹ Earlier in 1978, he had mooted the idea of the repatriation of black people from other parts of the world to “Zion”, which in his view was Ethiopia, or, more generally, Africa.¹²

¹⁰ Many other black music artistes outside Africa have at one time or another toyed with the idea of returning to Africa. See, for example, Peter Tosh's “Mama Africa” (1983), Mighty Diamond's “Africa” (N. D.).

¹¹ All the quotations from Bob Marley here are taken from ‘*Survival*’ (1979).

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Marley#cite_note-11

The music artistes considered African unity to be almost a *sine qua non* for the liberation of Africans from imperialism and racialism. In fact, the call for freedom for Southern Africans was almost always accompanied by a corresponding call for unity among African peoples and their leaders. In *Zimbabwe*, Marley said “we come together to overcome this little trouble”. A similar message ran through Peter Tosh’s “*Apartheid*”, Akeem Kareem’s “*My Revolution*”, Gboyega Femi’s “*Marching on to Pretoria*”, and De Bombers “*Africa will Rise Again*”. In “*Give Peace a Chance*” and later on in “*3rd World*”, Sonny Okosun advocated for unity among African peoples and their leaders, asking them to settle the grudges between them, and emphasizing that only unity could bring about stability, peace, love and harmony, as well as happiness for everyone in the end. Even later in “*Togetherness*”, he pleaded with Africans to unite, saying, “Unite so we can crush apartheid ... No matter the colour of ... your skin ... we are one ... together we can solve our problems.”

However, unity was not only pivotal to solving Africa’s development problems, but also to enabling her to play her role on the world stage, hence the existence of several sub-regional organisations.¹³ From the establishment and sustenance of these organizations, it can be argued that the ideas generated by these artistes were (and are still) being put into practice. While we are not suggesting that it was the exclusive thoughts of these artistes that led to the establishment of these bodies, the artistes’ expressions played an important role in their sustenance. This is due to the fact that African leaders had become increasingly aware of the ideas of these artistes. It is in this light that we must view the invitation of Bob Marley to Zimbabwe’s independence celebrations in 1980 and that of Sonny Okosun to the country’s first independence anniversary celebrations in 1981. In 1986, the latter was also invited by the Moroccan government to

¹³ For some instances, the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

join other music artistes in Rabat for a musical show to advocate for the liberation of Southern Africans (Bonnett 1986, 6). Furthermore, during the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit in Abuja, Nigeria (7-9 July, 1987), Okosun was there to re-echo his ideas of cooperation for development.

Some Challenges Faced by the Artistes

The music artistes who are the subject of this paper faced at least three challenges in the course of their work.

First, generally speaking, the response of African leaders to the works of music artistes ranged from lukewarmness to hostility. Most of them did not recognize the role of music as an agent of change. It is true that some of these artistes were invited to perform at government functions so as to “spice up” the occasions; but it is equally true that governments paid lip service to many of the artistes ideas, particularly those that touched on underdevelopment. Indeed, quite frequently, once the artistes became considerably critical of African regimes, they faced hostility. This was the experience of Fela, who was incarcerated on several occasions by various Nigerian regimes, which saw him as capable of inciting mass insurrection through some of his music, thereby engendering instability. Nevertheless, he frequently made it clear that he could not keep his mouth shut while his brother was hungry, and while justice was being subverted.¹⁴

Second, arising from lukewarm or hostile response by governments to the work of music artistes was their lack of enthusiasm to address some of the problems confronting the artistes, the most serious of which was record

¹⁴ This was a view widely expressed by Fela in his songs. See for examples “Zombie” (1977) and “ITT” (1980) among others.

piracy. In Nigeria, for instance, piracy was not the problem of the artistes alone, but also that of the country as a whole, as it did much damage to its economy. Whereas music has the potential to bring as much profit as oil and other natural resources, African leaders paid little attention to the development of the industry.

Third, there was the challenge of the medium of communication employed by the music artistes. On the face of it, a considerable proportion of the African public not only heard their music on radio and watched their video recordings on television, but also read in newspapers accounts about them which, for the most part, were instructive. Fela was regarded as one of the greatest gifts to Africa as far as music was concerned. He was a champion of African revolutionary music. Bob Marley was a man of “profound earthly wisdom, intellectual sagacity [with] a unique vision, and a true apostle of blackmanism”(Ayodeji 1984, 8-9); while Sonny Okosun was both “the most ECOWAS oriented performer in West Africa” and “Africa’s number one musical crusader against apartheid and racial discrimination” (Rufus 1978, 15; Oshodi 1977, 6).

However, in order to keep open the avenue for the commercial success of their albums, the artistes under study mostly sang in English. This meant that it was essentially the educated who could understand their messages. In addition, the level of education of the populace, and indeed that of the music artistes as well, tended to be impediments. Most of the artistes had a level of educational training that was enough for them to write and express themselves in English. However, few of them had a sound enough educational background to be able to understand the rudiments of politics and economics, which was a hindrance to better comprehending the complexities of development. Nevertheless, the inability to carry the ordinary people along was not peculiar to the music artistes. For example, with regard to the idea of Pan-Africanism, Osei-Kwame noted:

The idea of continental African unity has so far been discussed at summit meetings attended by Heads of States, Ministers and bureaucrats who keep changing with the incessant military coups in Africa. The discussion has not been brought down to the grass root ... to the level of the ordinary citizens (Osei-Kwame 1980, p.xvii).

A similar comment could be made about the discourse on development by the music artistes. Yet in spite of this challenge, they demonstrated that music could be effectively utilized to express and promote ideas.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the contribution of music artistes to the idea of development in Africa from 1974 to 1987. It has demonstrated that for most, if not all of the music artistes considered, the prescribed prerequisites for development could be summed up in two words - liberation and cooperation: political liberation of non-independent African countries from foreign domination, and cooperation among independent African states. These two concepts were interrelated because cooperation was needed to achieve emancipation from foreign rule and racial domination, while political independence was essential to making cooperation maximally effective. Indeed, the fruits of cooperation would not only be the attainment of independence and the granting of equal rights, but also the key to political, social and economic development. Thus cooperation was the centre-piece of the thought of these artistes.

However, in the period under review, apart from the lack of political independence common to a few African countries, neo-colonialism besetting virtually all African countries, as well as lack of unity among African states, the artistes also constantly referred to the inadequacy of the means to meeting basic human needs, particularly food and housing, inadequate social infrastructure (electricity, pipe-borne water and so on) and the need for effective leadership. The artistes not only drew attention to these problems, but also suggested solutions to them.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that music artistes can make a more significant contribution to their countries provided governments take them more seriously. Indeed, our interest in these artistes should transcend mere entertainment. Rather, intellectuals and government policy makers should seek to make use of the ideas of these artistes in formulating development strategies. Their work can also be harnessed to involve the masses in issues of development.

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