

From Genetic Romanticism to Afro-romanticism: Fela as an Agent of Social Change in Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300232>

Received: 12 March 2026; Accepted: 19 March 2026; Published: 02 April 2026

ABSTRACT

From time to time different individuals have changed the global ways of life. They confronted the system; subjected every belief to skepticism and dreamed of a new world. Some adopted behaviour, politics, Literature, Music and Fine Art to express their personal sentiment, which embodied the concept of Romanticism in the 19th century. This study therefore interpreted the revolutionary activities of Fela Kuti - a romantic of 20th Century who explored Music as a means of dissemination of his romantic philosophy. This study specifically used historical method by likening Romanticism in Literature to Romanticism in Music, from 19th Century Europe to 20th Century Africa through the period of colonialism and by proving that Romanticism can move from one generation to another. The study established that Romanticism often occurs as a result of quest for freedom and change; and this often leads to social problems, that Romanticism that manifested majorly in literature in the 19th century, now manifests majorly in films and music, and that Fela's Romanticism is traceable to his mother's Romanticism. This study has contributed to literature available on studies on Fela Kuti, Romanticism, Romanticism in Music, 19th Century European Literature, 20th Century Nigerian Music and Social Changes.

Keywords: Afro-romanticism, Fela, Genetic Romanticism, Music , Romanticism & Social Change

INTRODUCTION

Change is the only constant factor in the existence of humanity. The world has been changing drastically after Covid-19 pandemic; although human factors have always been the major causes. This study therefore focused on the revolutionary activities of a Nigerian Music legend, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, an African romantic of the 20th Century who explored Music as a means of dissemination of his romantic philosophy.

The quest to change the society often leads to strange behaviour which can be antisocial, irreligious or sometimes immoral. Social changes occur through the activities of these rebels, non-conformists and revolutionists who can be likened to those of the 19th century such as Hugo, Musset and Vigny of France, Wordsworth, Blake, Byron and Shelley of England and Brentano, Goethe and Tieck of Germany. The literary movement of Romanticism started in 1749 in France and ended in 1860 in the United States of America. In Nigeria, 1860 marked the year when Lagos became a colony of Britain. This has implications for literary critics of Romanticism due to the fact that the first generations of colonial administrators in Nigeria before amalgamation of 1914 were actually romantics who had rebelled against religion in Europe and America. This was the time when Romanticism came from Europe to Africa through colonization.

Most 20th Century African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Zulu Sofola and 'Wole Soyinka must have studied the 19th Century Literature of the romantics either at secondary school level or university level. Therefore, the romantic period in Africa was the 20th Century when things actually fell apart and the center could no more hold. Most 20th Century playwrights depicted heroes who were rebels and criticized the African moral values and cultures in the process. They published poems, novels and plays to enlighten Nigerians, re-orientate the masses, modify barbaric cultures, condemn colonial administrators and their African puppets, finally display their

romantic philosophies. One should know that Literature can give birth to Philosophy and vice versa. A philosophy can be disseminated through Literature just as one can derive a philosophy from a literary work. The aim of this paper is to show that the Romantic period varies from continent to continent and that individual Romanticism can be detected from ancestors or immediate parents.

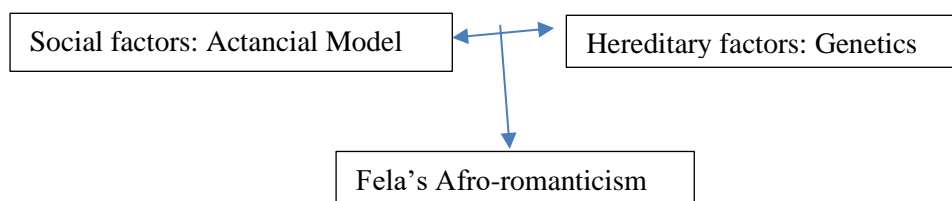
The term *Romanticism* is traceable to family words like *Rome*, *Roman*, *Romance* and the French word for a novel (*roman*). Thus, being romantic means behaving like people of Rome in the ancient time, like Romans do, like lovers of Romance Literature and like a character in a novel; that is in a fictional world. Numerous scholars have defined romanticism and carried out researches on it based on different perspectives: chronological, historical, literary, revolutionary, political and geographical. A few of the definitions available in English will be discussed in this paper. Johnson (2004) defined Romanticism as “an upsurge of man’s imaginative spirit and search for the absolute, favours reflecting exceptional situations in literary works, poetry in particular, and fully tapping the resources of language in the depiction of human emotions”ⁱ.

Thus, Romanticism can be defined as “ A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted (from) about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature”ⁱⁱ. From Clemens (2009), the romantic philosophy of subjectivism emerged and romantic principle of imagination reoccurred. According to this study, Romanticism is conceptualized as a philosophy of non-conformity that celebrated individual over the community which can be propagated through a literary, artistic, musical works as well as behavioral means. Let us now examine how romanticism leads to a social change.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The term genetic is borrowed into the field of Literature, particularly in the 19th century literary movement of Romanticism. In fact, current study of Genetics is tending towards Behavioural Genetics. This field is close to this study. However, the perspective in this criticism is the criticism of a Romantic legend in Music through the literary concept of Romanticism. The application of the concept *Genetic romanticism* in this study simply means the type of Romanticism - in an individual or generation - that is traceable to a blood related person. Here, it is the criticism of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti’s Romanticism and that of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti’s Romanticism. The study examines the history of both a Nigerian female activist and a Nigerian male activist by studying the transfer of genetic behaviours (romantic behaviours from genetic traits) which are romantic behaviours, through literary and historical methods. A few number of Videos in form of documentaries as well as some relevant works of critics serve as useful materials for this criticism. The study combined Greimas’ theory of Actancial Model with the concept Heredity in the field of Genetics. This carried out to depict romanticism in the life of Fela Kuti. The former explained the influence of social factors on his romantic personality while the latter explained the transfer of romantic traits from his parents to him.

Combination of Greimas’ Actancial Model and Concept of Genetics



Both concepts broadened the understanding of the concept of Romanticism. Actancial model depicted the social factors that contributed to Fela’s Afro-romanticism while Genetics explained the possible behaviour traceable to hereditary factors.

Romanticism and Social Change in the 19th Century

The 19th century in France was very dynamic for many reasons. It is a century of seven political regimes, many literary movements, numerous revolutions and emergence of many unions and liberation movements. Society

changed greatly during this period and Romanticism being the first literary movement of the 19th century played vital roles in changing the ways of life. According to Johnson (2004), Romanticism is an “upsurge of human imagination”. Being romantic is being rebellious and full of wonders. A romantic is a person who influences the society through his behaviour, philosophy, actions and works. Romantic writers are therefore writers who shun classical rules of unity of time and unity of place, rule of decency (*bienseance*) and rule of reality (*vraieemblance*). Victor Hugo played remarkable roles in changing France of the 19th century by condemning capital punishment, criticizing oppression of women and children, defending Universal Adult Suffrage and by opposing Napoleon III. Hugo had to go on exile because he was anti-government through the publication of novel such as *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Les Misérables* and plays such as *Cromwell*, *Ruy Blas* and *Hernani*. Hugo condemned religious hypocrisy in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, encouraged revolution in *Cromwell*, practiced freedom in literary creation in *Hernani* and depicted the misery and terrible way of life of the people in *Les Misérables*. Because Romanticism is a literary movement dominated by adolescents and young men and women, it hardly lasts for long. This explains the reason why many variants of Romanticism emerged since the 19th century till date. Many literary movements after Romanticism such as Realism, Parnassus, Naturalism and Symbolism started like Romanticism by being rebellious at first before clarifying their distinction. Since Romanticism is a philosophy of individual, then different and opposing ideas will always lead to divergent views which will later become philosophies.

In fact, Romanticism can never occur if there is no quest for change. As a movement, romanticism had five waves: **first wave** - 1749 - 1789 (imprisonment of Diderot and beginning of the French Revolution), **second wave** - 1790 - 1799 (the period of the French Revolution when about 3000 royalist were killed), **third wave** - 1800 - 1820 (Napoleon's reign and his wars in Europe to the publication of Lamartine's *Méditation poétique*, **fourth wave** 1821-1830 (Rise of Hugo as a young poet and the crisis in France due to Hugo's play called *Hernani* that caused what is referred to as *Bataille d'Hernani*); and **fifth wave** - 1831-1860 (the movement of Romanticism of the United States of America to its disintegration to many other literary movements from time to time).

European Writers' Romantic Behaviour and Social Problems

Most Romantics of the 19th century were just like the heroes they created in their works. They were conscious of their intention to change the society by producing works that would promote the individual over the community. Their political activities through public lectures, through the publication of literary lyrical poems, social novels and plays of rebels constitute the mechanism to change the system. However, this caused many social problems such as riots, demonstrations and finally revolutions. While trying to liberate the women from oppression of men, Hugo depicted two types of women: one suffering from the society and other suffering outside the society. According to Hugo, women in marriage are subjected to oppression due to tradition and culture of Europe. Other women who refused to get married and who had many lovers were considered as prostitutes and were humiliated. Through this, Hugo promoted modern women who would abandon their primary duty in the society in pursuit of romantic ambitions.

This romantic behaviour is not limited to Hugo alone, but it is common among his contemporaries. Some of the social problems discovered from the biographies and from the histories of writers' activities as well as the behaviour of the heroes in most of their works in the Romantic period include the following: (i) Victor Hugo's wife, Adele Foucher, prevented him from having sexual intercourse with her out of fear of being impregnated after five children in seven years of marriage; but she preferred to satisfy herself with Saint-Beuve, her husband's friend who out of ailment could not impregnate her, (ii) Victor Hugo lived with another woman, Juliet Drouet, without leaving the mother of his children, and he practised polygamy without declaration in the 19th century, (iii) Goethe fell in love with the fiancée of his best friend in Frankfurt, and he also proposed marriage at the age of eighty to an adolescent just like Faust who transformed to a young man to engage in love relationship with Gretchen, (iv) John Keats took the virginity of a 16 year-old girl over the tomb of her mother; and (v) Lord Byron had many girlfriends including his step-sister, and was accused of incest. With the above examples, it is very obvious that most romantics of the 19th century were the first celebrities whose Romanticism continued into the 20th century through the chains of successive literary movements after Romanticism.

Criticism of Funmilayo Kuti’s Romanticism Using Actancial Model

This study will be more pragmatic with the application of Greimas’ Actancial Modelⁱⁱⁱ. The theory will clearly depict the criticism of the personality of study- Funmilayo Kuti. The table below shows Greimas’ six actants who interact in the environment of the heroine.

no	Six Actants	meaning	Romanticism of Funmilayo
1	Destinateur	Initiator	Racism experienced in England
2	Subject	heroine	Funmilayo Kuti
3	Object	task	Change the Nigerian society during colonial period
4	Adjuvant	supporter(s)	Level of education (university degree)
5	Opposant	opponent(s)	Indirect rule during colonial period
6	Destinataire	beneficiaries	Nigerians generally and women especially

Understanding the role Funmilayo played in Nigeria during the colonial period will be better explained using Greimas’ Actancial Model. The first actant is **Destinateur**. This means the factor that incite the personality into action. One discovered that Funmilayo was disappointed by the racism of her colleagues in the University in England. For this reason she dropped her English names Frances Abigail and preferred Funmilayo. She would speak Yoruba to the colonials during her arguments against irrational taxes against women. The second Actant is **Subject**. This means the protagonist in a literary work or a personality of study in a non-fiction. In this study the subject is Funmilayo Kuti. She is the focus in this part of the study. Our aim is to examine how the other five actants relate with the central actant- the Subject.

The third actant is the Object. Funmilayo wanted to change the Nigerian society during the colonial period especially the dominated world of patriarchal system, indirect rule and exploitation of Nigerians by the British Government. The Object of the Subject comprises the followings: (i)to change the status of women , (ii) to compete equally politically in a country where women are used as tools to obtain power during elections, (iii)to condemn traditional practices that are inimical to social progress, (iv)to elevate the status of Africans during the colonial period, (v) to prove that colonials are not superior to Africans, (vi) to establish egalitarian society of men and women as well as Europeans and Africans and (vii) to redefine Christianity. Concerning the fourth actant, **Adjuvant**, the followings could be the factors that facilitate Funmilayo’s struggle and activism: (i) her level of education, (ii) the fact that she was a pionner in education in a society dominated by illiterates, (iii) level of exposure to world standard of living, (iv) friendship and interactions with political elites during the colonial period as well as (v)determination, stoicism, doggedness and bravery.

Every protagonist always has an antagonist. This is called **Opposant** in Greimas’ Actancial Model. The following factors served as hindrances against Funmilayo Kuti during her romantic days: (i) the fact that she was a woman in the political struggle, (ii) indirect rule ignores educated elites such as Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Funmilayo Kuti, (iii) the role of a wife and a mother of four and (iv) the colonial period. The beneficiary of the object of the Subject Funmilayo Kuti is called **Destinataire**. The followings are identified the *destinataires*: (i) The Nigerians, others Africans and the world at large; (ii) The women in all parts of the world especially in Nigeria; (iii) Her children and (iv) the generations after her.

Through the application of this theory, it is evident that Funmilayo’s romanticism is global in nature. However, one can describe her dialectics of romanticism as a feminist romantic because she was a woman. A feminist romantic is a figure who dreams of changing the society she finds herself by expressing her instinct through the use of behaviour or works. She expressed her romanticism through the criticism of the British colonial system, confrontation of indirect rule system, establishment of women’s forum for freedom, struggle in a masculine dominated world and reflection of Akachi Ezeigbo’s Snail sense feminism. Funmilayo was able to train her children despite her activism. Olikoye became a Minister of Health, Bekolari became a political activist during the struggle for democracy and Olufela became globally recognized in music.

Was Funmilayo able to realize her dream of changing the Nigerian society? The answer is affirmatively yes. Funmilayo improved the status of women through the women riots against the Alake of Egbaland who then represented the head of indirect rule system. More and more women are engaging in politics after Funmilayo

Kuti. Her activity contributed to the Nigerian independence in October 1st, 1960. Christianity is redefined in Nigeria as more and more Protestants churches who are led by Africans replaced the Anglican Churches and Catholic churches who are traceable to the Europeans. Funmilayo would encourage the pupils in Abeokuta Grammar School to drop their English names. She hardly danced to the religious tunes of her husband, a reverend and the principal of the school where she worked. She was a partially rebellious Christian. The trauma of the racism she experienced in Europe transformed her to a romantic of the colonial period.

Fela Kuti: As an Afro-romantic and a Social Change Agent

Every romantic writer of the 19th century was a change agent. The quest for freedom often leads to strange sentiments which in turn manifest in antisocial behaviours. While Decker (2016:1) established that every individual has impact on social changes, he stated “that every society, no matter the historical time period in which it exists, undergoes changes that require every of its members to understand the constantly changing dynamics of inclusion and the status-building and enhancing mechanisms available”. Decker portrayed how Oshodi Tapa, a Lagosian transformed his life through the social changes. Decker (2016) depicted the personality of his study thus: “Oshodi’s childhood is shrouded in the social milieu that promoted the prosperity of the slave trade between Yorubaland and the Nupe area, particularly at a time when the attention of slave traders were diverted to the Island of Lagos in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries”^{iv}. It is interesting to note Decker’s reference to both late the 18th century and the early 19th century which was indeed romantic period in Europe and America. Most romantics of this period criticized the slave trade in Africa of this period. The contact between the Lagosians and the Europeans through slave trade can also be likened to that of exchange of ideologies such as Romanticism.

Expression of individual’s freedom in a society dominated by the people who restrict the fundamental human right always provokes social conflicts. Alimi (2016) portrayed this through his study on the social problems of individuals who took America for the land for freedom. He declared that: “Individuals, groups, and communities who acknowledge and extol America as a land of liberty, opportunities, and equality in one context would turn back to carpet the society as a place where marginalization thrives. Prior to the 1960s general outcry and protest by African Americans against racism, multiculturalism was broadly understood as a system of accommodation or integration of minority groups by the mainstream White culture”^v. As a romantic from Africa who expressed his romantic philosophy through Music, his way of life and his confrontational statements, Fela was neither a Christian nor a Muslim. He can be considered as a freethinker, a traditionalist or a partial-atheist. Through Music full of criticism, enlightenment and analogies, Fela led the people of the 20th century to freedom of expression of self and romantic ideas. He criticized both Christian religion and Islamic religion through his song where he sang “*Suffer, suffer for world, enjoy in heaven, Pope na enjoyment... Imam na gbaladun... I wonder wetin you dey...*” Fela promoted atheism by condemning any foreign religion and promoted African religious practice through the establishment of Shrine in his Republic of Kalakuta. He criticized the hypocrisy of religious leaders and encouraged people to live a life of absurdity. One could see the influence of Camus’s philosophy of Absurd in Fela’s way of life. This can be traced to Romanticism because Albert Camus was influenced by Shelley, an English romantic who published *Necessity of Atheism* in 1811 in Oxford. Like many romantics of the 19th century, Fela was a freedom fighter and this has landed him in custody many times.

The Nigerian legend of Afrobeat star, Fela destroyed moral values in Nigeria through his marriage with his 27 female dancers in a single day, through his argument for the smoking of marijuana (*Igbo* in Yoruba language) and by assembling fans who are smokers and thugs. He liberated Africans through his criticism of African leaders, military regimes and corruptions of elites of Africa. “*Zombie o, zombie zombie o zombie*”; Fela would liken military officers to puppets or toys who have no brain of their own. The Republic of Kalakuta was a place where every romantic in Lagos used to join Fela, the romantic legend of Afrobeat. This Kalakuta was a romantic space where it was difficult for any reasonable and moral person to survive without being corrupt morally and influenced by romantic philosophy called Felaism^{vi}.

As an Afro-romantic agent of societal change through his unique style (Afrobeat), his female dancers that later became his polygamous wives without church, mosque or societal weeding, his wearing of trousers with bare chest and his outspokenness, Fela became the first musical romantic of the 20th century in Africa. This Afro-romantic of Fela promoted free and open sex, public smoking of *Igbo* by the Area Boys and political thugs, free

union, Camus’s philosophy of Absurd and atheism. He was an agent of change who sensitized the generation of Nigerians of 1970s-90s before his demise. Fela Kuti nursed his romantic instinct, defended his romantic behaviour against his father and the community, propagated his romantic philosophy through his music *engagé* and produced a romantic group that later influenced the new generations of musicians such as Daddy Shoky, Lagbaja and his son Femi Kuti. Fela disliked certain European values. This made him to become a very proud Africanist, Traditionalist, *Negritudist* and Afro-romantic.

Criticism of Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s Romanticism Using Actancial Model

no	Six Actants	meaning	Romanticism of Fela
1	Destinateur	Initiator	Fela’s mother’s romanticism inherited
2	Subject	hero	Fela Anikulapo Kuti
3	Object	task	Change the Nigerian society after independence
4	Adjuvant	supporter(s)	Level of education (university degree)
5	Opposant	opponent(s)	Military rule after independence
6	Destinataire	beneficiaries	Future generations of Nigerians

Fela was motivated to become a radical romantic in the Nigerian society of the post-independent period. Hence, the **Destinataire** of this part of criticism is Fela’s mother’s romanticism. His mother influenced him a lot. Besides, he resembled her physically the most when he is compared with other siblings- Dolupo Kuti, Olikoye Kuti and Bekolari Kuti. Of course, Fela Kuti is the **Subject** in this study. He is the hero who struggled in a real world as if he were a character in a novel. An imaginary character could not have acted better than Fela in a literary work of art.

Fela’s **Object** constitutes the followings: (i) he wanted to change the Nigerian society through his music where he narrates oppression, corruption and abuse of power of the military and civilian governments in Africa, (ii) he tried to enlighten Africans about their ignorance on their rights, (iii) he struggled to prove that Western education is poisonous to African values and progress, (iv) he established that military rule is illegal and that democracy is the only legitimate government, (v) he wanted to show that African elites after independence have replaced the Europeans during colonial period, and finally (vi) he tried to lead the new generation of romantics towards the future. .

The followings constitute the **Adjuvant** of this analysis of Fela: (i) His study of Music at the university abroad, (ii) her mother’s political activities and exposure to political elites at a younger age, (iii) the period of dominated ignorance in Nigeria, (iv) his father’s skill in composing songs in the church, (v) his mother’s radicalism and love for him as he resembled her physically and behaviourally, (vi) his travelling to U.S.A. where he had contact with the struggle against racism by the Black Americans as well as Jazz Music,^{vii} (vii) his education in Europe during the time when majority of Nigerians were illiterates, (viii) his abandonment of Christianity for African traditional religion, (ix) his study of Music at the Trinity College of Music in London, (x) his father’s death of cancer when he was just seventeen, (xi) his great grandfather was a Musician, and (xii) his father used to compose numerous Yoruba Christian songs as a reverend.

Fela Kuti encountered a lot of challenges during his struggle to propagate his romantic philosophy. These hindrances against Fela’s Afro-romanticism can be termed **Opposant** according to Greimas’ Actancial Model. These include the followings: (i) The incessant military and police attacks especially Obasanjo’s military regime (1976- 1979) and Tunde Idiagbo/Muhammadu Buharis’s military regime (1883-1985); (ii) his father’s plan to make him become a Medical doctor; (iii) ignorance of the Nigerian masses, (iv) his own abuse of personal freedom and deviation from moral and social values; (v) his arrests many times by the government^{viii} (vi) the military attack on his house in February 18, 1977 by one thousand army officers led by Obasanjo and Yar Adua, and (vii) his criticism of Islam and Christianity.

Any activity that tend towards the struggle for freedom, new horizons, inventions reorientation of the society is termed romantic. The Subject always engages in his or her quest (object) so as to pave ways for certain new ways of life. This means that some people have to benefit from that Object of the Subject, that from the vision of the romantic agent. Thus, the **Destinataire** of Fela’s Afro-romanticism include the followings: (i) his generation and

future generations to come, (ii) Black African masses, (iii) Nigerian Masses, (iv) the Black race in the entire world, (v) Nigerian soldiers, (vi) African traditionalists, (vii) religious leaders; (viii) educational system, (ix) democracy in Africa and (x) the world of Music.

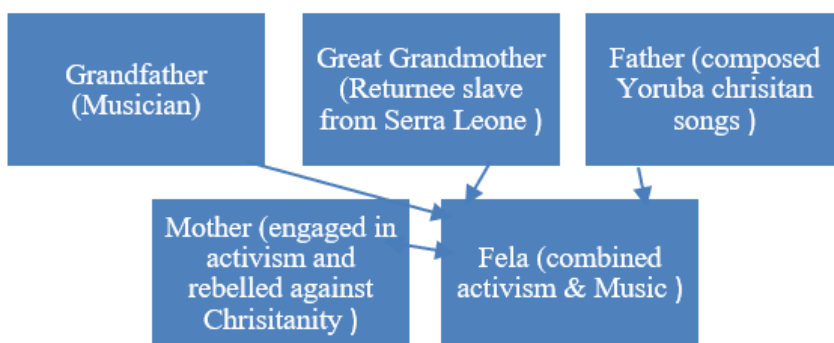
Was Fela Kuti able to change the Nigerian society? The answer is also “yes”, he did influence the country and changed a lot of youth during his time. The then youths have become grandparents. We should be talking of the third generation after Fela Kuti because both Seun Kuti and Femi Kuti are already parents of the third generation of romantics.

The Afro-romanticism of Fela broadened the Feminist romanticism of Funmilayo Kuti. This explained the reason she lived with Fela, the beloved son whose degree of romanticism was higher than that of her. Fela exploited musical tool of saxophone and his narratives in form of information in his songs to express his romantic instinct. Fela’s romanticism constitute the fact that he established shows at night where the youths who have run away can gather to drink, smoke Indian hemp and engage in pornographic activities. Fela confronted the Nigerian authorities physically, verbally, behaviourally and musically. He did this desperately, boldly and nonchalantly. He created a romantic space called Kalakuta Republic where all dreams of the new romantics can be expressed. He was against the classical system of decency, matrimony, obedience to parents, abiding to law and religious practice. He promoted new generations of feminist romantics through his accepting women who ran away from home. His marriage to twenty-seven dancers is contrary to any social norm. Fela, the most romantic Nigerian of the twentieth century broke many social norms radically. Fela Kuti changed the world of Music and influenced many new generation of Afrobeat musicians. He enlightened Africans who later gained consciousness of freedom to smoke publicly anything that is not cocaine or heroin. His influence is also noticed in the ways ladies dance almost nakedly in musical clips. Many African countries now practice democracy, but the issue of corruption and abuse of power remain. In Nigeria, we have been enjoying democracy since 1999 till date, 2021. Political elites still practice thugocracy and plutocracy. *End-Sars Protests* is one of the impact of Fela on Nigerian youths who enjoyed themselves through music, food and merriments, wooing and flirting, making impossible demands from the Nigerian government as well as sleeping in the open air. Most lost their lives to express their romantic dreams.

Genetic Romanticism: Funmilayo Kuti to Fela Kuti

Since Romanticism is a philosophy of rebellion, non-conformity, self-defense, personal sentiment, celebration of dream and imagination which manifested in the 19th century in Literature, Music and Fine Arts and 20th century through Photography, Cinematography, Science, Technology, Entertainment and Music, it is very logical to establish that any arbitrary behaviour that is strange can be termed romantic expression. The term Genetic Romanticism is a new concept derived from previous researches on Romanticism. This term implies that every individual has a unique tendency to be rebellious and non-conforming to societal rules and norms. This means that every child is born romantic. This means that each child comes to the world to challenge the existing system, ignore any religious and moral values, and display new romantic instincts. This is hereditary as no two children can express their degree of Romanticism the same way. Even when subjected to the same condition, they reacted differently and became different personalities. Fela Kuti’s Afro-Romanticism is traceable to his ancestors majorly dominated by Funmilayo Ransome Kuti’s Feminist-Romanticism. The diagram below illustrates the flow of romantic gene from Fela’s ancestors to him.

Transfer of romantic genes from the ancestors to Fela Kuti



Based on diagram above, Fela must have inherited Music from the paternal lineage and activism from his mother’s lineage. He must have rebellion in his blood due to slavery that his great grandmother experienced before tracing her origin back to Abeokuta after gaining freedom in Serra-Leone. Funmilayo must have carried this trait from her parents who were early Christians that maintained African culture and transferred it to her third son Olufela. Her trait of activism dominated Fela more than the other three siblings. His (Fela’s) musical traits must have originated from his grandfather. He must have inherited this from his father who used to compose Christian songs as a reverend. Fela copious albums justified his natural talent for songs. His mother used Yoruba to teach the Nigerian illiterate women while Fela used Pidgin as a means of communication in Music. He must have inherited his verbal strength from both parents as Funmilayo was known for being a good orator; and as a Musician, his grandfather must have used talking drum or expressed himself professionally and melodiously well during his time. Therefore, Fela’s Afrobeat as a narrative song is very difficult to dance to. One enjoys it more by listening to it than dancing to it. This justified his reason for inventing his dancing style peculiar to his music.

Comparative Analysis of mother and child – Funmilayo and Fela

From the discussion so far, one can feel a sense of relay in Funmilayo’s romanticism to Fela’s romanticism. The table below summarizes the major points of the Greimas’ six actants that interact in this Actancial Model. [for detailed on Actancial Model, see Tiamiyu (2020)]

no	Six Actants	Funmilayo (1900-1978)	Romanticism of Fela (1938-19..)
1	Destinateur	Racism experienced in England	Fela’s mother’s romanticism inherited & racism in England too
2	Subject	Funmilayo Kuti	Fela Anikulapo Kuti
3	Object	Change the Nigerian society during colonial period	Change the Nigerian society after independence
4	Adjuvant	Level of education(university degree)	Level of education (university degree)
5	Opposant	Indirect rule during colonial period	Military rule after independence
6	Destinataire	Nigerians especially women	Future generations of Nigerians

The degree of Romanticism in Funmilayo increased in Fela’s life. There seems to be a baton from mother to child. What limited Funmilayo was her feminine gender in a period heavily dominated by men. She had to compete with great African elites such as Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, Anthony Enahoro and Samuel Akintola. Fela was able to be more romantic than his mother due to the fact that he was a man. He could easily walk around without shirt, stay out late at night during his shows, and marry many female dancers and went to prison. Fela lived for the romanticism of his mother. He broadened it and expatiated it though his music, behaviours and political struggle.

Both Funmilayo and Fela started with letter “F” and they were both romantics of 20th Century. Both fought against racism, oppression of the masses and practiced religion the way they liked. They both studied abroad at a time when majority of Nigerians were illiterates. Both of them wanted to change the society through activism. The mother explored politics and the son explored music. One can establish that there is a relay in the romantic wave of the mother and child. Funmilayo fought against the British before independence and Fela condemned African elites after independence. By mobilizing women of Abeokuta, Funmilayo - a very dynamic Egba woman- led a revolution against the abuse of power by the Alake of Egbaland, Oba Samuel Oladapo Ademola, She is the first female Nigerian to drive a car. She can be considered as the source of Fela’s Romanticism. This Romanticism of Funmilayo must have been suppressed by the fact that she was a woman in African society of the 20th century; she had to battle with the traditions, religions, and norms that made women seem to be second-class citizens in Africa. Although this is not medically proven, but it is logical to link Fela to Funmi due to their likeness and unity as a result of the concept of dear mother and beloved child. Funmi must have preferred Fela over the former Minister of Health, Olikoye Ransome Kuti, by introducing Fela to her political friends and by living with him during her old age. Funmilayo Kuti was a Nigerian Romantic who believed in promoting the romantic instinct of Fela into a recognized philosophy later in life. Fela is a romantic agent who was influenced biologically by being the third child of Funmilayo Ransome_kuti. He must have inherited from the romanticism of his mother. Both mother and child were very daring, fearless, revolutionary, influential and extraordinary. For Funmilayo to love a musician whose father would have loved to become a doctor, must have led into numerous clashes in their

matrimony. “Funmilayo once told him when he was disappointed after the Nigerian Civil War about the poor reaction of Nigerians to his music “to sing in the language the people would understand.”^{ix} Both romantics (Funmilayo and Olufela) questioned all moral values and religious etiquettes, depicted rebellious and antisocial ideas logically and argumentatively as well as influenced generations of their time and centuries to come. From the above discussion, it is now very germane to establish that Funmilayo’s genetic romanticism was transferred through birth to Fela’s body, that his mother must have supported his romantic antisocial instincts that later degenerated to *drugomania*, nymphomania and excessive freedom. “As his band grows, his personal life was crumbling.”^x Only the Kuti could mess with the Nigeria military junta of that time. Fela started young – at the age of eight- just like many romantics who were adolescents and became a philosopher as he continued his romanticism till old age even when majority of people abandon their exuberant social damages.

Interpretations of comparison based on *Modele Actanciel* and findings

The theoretical concept of **Destinateur** shows that both Funmilayo and Olufela were driven into activism due to **western racism** of the black who went to Europe and America for higher education or university study. The **literary philosophy of Negritude** shows the experience of the Francophones such as Aimé Césaire and Sedar Senghor who did the same in France. But, Fela’s second drive was his mother who he knew to be a radical, confrontational and influential politician of the early 20th Century Nigeria.

The second theoretical concept of *Sujet* (Subject) presents the heroine and the hero of the 20th Century Nigeria as Funmilayo Kuti and Olufela Kuti as the romantic agents of change. They were both ahead of their generation as they saw far ahead of the Nigerian masses who were majorly illiterate. The third theoretical concept is *Objet* (object) which presents the aim of the romantic activities including public speeches in interviews, political propaganda, open criticism and sensitization of the populace. The object of both mother and son is to change the Nigerian society for better. The mother confronted the colonialists and indirect rule system of government while the son faced the military junta, mediocrity of leaders, corruption, and abuse of fundamental human rights. Social change was the main object of both subjects - the romantic agents. The forth theoretical concept is *Adjuvant* ; that is what facilitated their romantic activities. The factors that make up *adjuvant* are: their level of education at that time when the majority of Nigerians were illiterate; the fact that they both schooled abroad and witnessed the policy of discrimination, racism, and dehumanization of Africans in Europe and Africa. This made Fela to abandon Christianity despite the fact that his father was an Anglican Reverend. The factors militating against both romantic agents of the 20th Century Nigeria constitute the *Opposant*. The indirect rule during the colonial period made it impossible for Funmilayo to have a greater impact on the governance. The illiterate local chiefs became an obstacle to her dream of social change because they still had stronger influence on the masses. The incessant military coups which brought many military dictators into power without strong intellectual capacity as well as the insincerity of the politicians of the first republic constitute the hindrances of changing Nigeria for better till today. The last concept “*Destinataire*” which implies the beneficiary of a struggle or effort to change a system. The entire Nigerians in general and women in particular would have benefited much better than the current state of affairs in terms of women’s political influence and representation. The generations of musician after Fela benefited from his romantic philosophy of change. This study has contributed to the efforts of scholars on Fela such as Olorunyomi (2023), Olaniyan (2004) and Eesuola (2011) who invented the theories of **behavioral approach to protest** and **resistance model**. This is the first time the concept of **absolutely romantic instincts** is attributed to study on Fela. The romantic agent of Fela did not fail Nigeria, it is the masses who refused to benefit from economic growth that Fela clamored for through good governance. Nigerians are still wallowing in poverty after 65 years of independence. Fela was indeed a candle who consumed himself to liberate the others.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both Funmilayo and Fela influenced the world since the 20th Century, and still continue to influence many generations to come. In this study, the world legend of Afrobeat of the 20th Century, Fela Kuti, is conceptualized as a 20th Century African Romantic who used Music to liberate Africa at large and Nigeria in particular. As French romantics such as Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine and Alfred de Vigny liberated France of the 19th Century through Literature, Fela Anikulapo Kuti also became the voice of the voiceless, the speaker of the oppressed and the defender of the naive. This study has established that Romanticism often occurs

as a result of the quest for freedom and change; and this often led to social problems. The study also proved that Romanticism was manifested majorly through Literature in the 19th Century but it is now being manifested through films and music. The study established that Fela's Afro-romanticism which can be called **Genetic African Romanticism** (GAR) is traceable majorly to his mother's **Feminist-Romanticism**.

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ⁱⁱ Clemens, R. J. (2009). *Romanticism*, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, W A: Microsoft Corporation, 2008. Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation.

ⁱⁱⁱ For detailed study on Greïmas' application to literary criticism see Tiamiyu (2020) "Analysing Action in Two Romantic Tragedies Using Greïmas' *Modèle Actancier*" in *Lagos Notes and Records*, Edit Johnson Ilori , Lagos: Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Vol. 5, No.1, 223 -242.

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^{vi} Fela-Kuti-Interview-1988-Reelin-the years-archives you-Tube, produced by www.reelintheyears.com, downloaded and watched several times.

^{vii} "After his first tour to America in 1969, his life changed completely" Faces-of –Africa-Fela-Kuti-The-Father-of=Afrobeat-Part-I-YouTube, a production of CGTN presented in the programme *Faces of Africa*, directed by Daniel Furnad & George Mutero, downloaded and watched several times.

^{viii} " He was arrested about two hundred times", Faces-of –Africa-Fela-Kuti-The-Father-of=Afrobeat-Part-I-YouTube, a production of CGTN presented in the programme *Faces of Africa*, directed by Daniel Furnad & George Mutero, , downloaded and watched several times.

^{ix} Faces-of –Africa-Fela-Kuti-The-Father-of=Afrobeat-Part-I-YouTube, a production of CGTN presented in the programme *Faces of Africa*, directed by Daniel Furnad & George Mutero, downloaded and watched several times.

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