



The Dichotomy Between Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti's Revolutionary Iconicity and Wizkid's Global Stardom in the Nigerian Popular Music Continuum

Vincent Bamidele Omolaye

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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Abstract

Among Nigerian music enthusiasts, a recurring debate exists over the erroneous tendency to use the titles 'revolutionary icon' and 'global superstar' interchangeably, whereby a revolutionary icon is mislabelled as a global superstar, and vice versa. This study arises from fans' reactions on social media to Seun Kuti's recent livestream session, examining the dichotomy between two iconic artists in the Nigerian music continuum (Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti and Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun, alias Wizkid). This is with a view to shedding light on the differences between the archetype of the revolutionary icon and the global superstar, drawing on Olaniyan's (2004) postcolonial theory and Emielu's (2018) progressive traditionalism. The study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through unstructured interviews with twelve participants. The sample consisted of six randomly selected fans for each artist, drawn equally from Osun, Oyo, and Lagos states, which are the hubs of the Nigerian music industry. The study also drew extensively on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers and online materials. A netnographic analysis of fan discourse was conducted across social media platforms, particularly Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), to capture fans' perspectives within their digital communities. Findings revealed that while both titles command immense influence and recognition in the musical landscape, their influence stems from different sources. The study concludes that equating a revolutionary icon with a global superstar misconstrues artistic legacy, as each title represents a distinct, powerful, and legitimate path to cultural influence.

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Introduction

The Nigerian music industry constitutes one of Africa's most dynamic and influential cultural exports. Its rich sonic tapestry, shaped by decades of evolution, has emerged as a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy, economic productivity, and artistic innovation. Onikoyi (2024) affirms that this creative ingenuity and global appeal have made the Nigerian music scene one of the most dynamic and influential cultural movements in contemporary global popular music. Indeed, what began as a tapestry of regionally distinct traditional genres has evolved into a multi-million Naira industry that not only dominates the African continent but also attracts global attention. Meanwhile, the most



globally recognised offshoot of Nigeria's musical tradition today is Afrobeat, pioneered by the Olufela Olusegun Ransome-Kuti (also known as Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti) in the early 1970s. Veal (2000) states that Fela's fusion of highlife, jazz, funk, and traditional Yoruba music created a genre that was as much an act of resistance as it was a product of his artistic innovation. Consequently, Veal situates Fela's contribution within a broader framework of postcolonial African intellectual thought and positions Afrobeat as a form of radical cultural decolonisation. This genre continues to influence artists globally, serving as a testament to its enduring creative vitality. In light of this, Oyelaran (2020) posits that the Afrobeat wave has positioned Nigeria as Africa's cultural capital. Adedeji (2014) and Adesanya (2022) note that technological advancement and access to diverse media platforms have reconfigured the production, distribution, and consumption of Nigerian music. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube have become primary channels through which Nigerian artists build fan bases, launch promotional campaigns, and distribute content. The viral potential of these digital platforms has fundamentally altered the trajectory of artistic careers: success is no longer measured by sustained legacy but by immediate commercial gain, driven by the rapid circulation of hit recordings.

Meanwhile, debates among fans who consistently advocate for their preferred artists across genres and generations are not merely inevitable; rather, they constitute a fundamental dimension of fan culture and community formation. As Ajibola (2019) observes, music functions as a primary medium through which human intention, emotion and sentiment are expressed, thereby rendering it an inherently personal and subjective experience. This intrinsic subjectivity predisposes fans to engage in comparative discourse, wherein they seek to substantiate the perceived superiority of their favoured artists over others. This practice transcends mere aesthetic preference, encompassing broader questions of cultural valuation and artistic legacy. In this regard, and as noted previously, the proliferation of digital technologies and the widespread accessibility of social media platforms have substantially intensified public discourse within fan communities. Recent controversies in Nigeria's popular music scene have undermined the revolutionary legacy of Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti, effectively positioning him on a par with the global stardom of Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun (Wizkid). This occurred during Seun Kuti's livestream, in which he confronted Wizkid's fans over what he perceived as their role in diminishing Fela's enduring influence. To this end, Olorunnisola and Odoemelam (2020) observe that access to social media platforms has significantly amplified and democratised public discourse and decentralised fan communities. As mentioned earlier, platforms such as Twitter (now X), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok constitute arenas within which historical legacy and contemporary stardom are continuously negotiated, contested and performed. Conversely, Shola-Adido (2021) argues that social media does not merely report on cultural phenomena but actively shapes them, transforming artistic appreciation into participatory and often combative engagements. It is on this premise that the present study examines Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti and Wizkid, interrogating the perceived dichotomy between the two artists as to what constitutes a revolutionary icon, on the one hand, and a global superstar, on the other. There is no doubt that Fela's legacy is fundamentally grounded in socio-political activism, Pan-African ideological commitment, and a sustained confrontational engagement with the oppressive power structures of the military regime. This is why Eesuola (2023) notes that Fela's music critiques the dominant socio-political policies and practices in Nigeria and, by extension, across Africa. Thus, the ideological consistency of his artistic expression and its transformative effect upon collective social awareness constitute the core pillars of his enduring relevance in African socio-political discourse.

In view of the above, Folarin (2017) contends that Fela's iconicity derives from what may be characterised as 'sacrificial authority' – a form of moral and political capital accrued through sustained persecution and an unwavering commitment to speaking truth to power, just like other notable artists



such as Burna Boy, Davido, Asake, Rema, Tiwa Savage, Yemi Alade, and Wizkid, who embody the paradigm of the contemporary global superstar, functioning simultaneously as a product and an agent of cultural globalisation within the digital media space. Wizkid's achievements are largely measured by quantifiable indicators of global commercial success, including chart performance, streaming metrics, international collaborations, sold-out world tours, and critical recognition through prestigious awards. This juxtaposition raises a fundamental question: is musical legacy more meaningfully constituted by a profound counter-hegemonic message, or by expansive mainstream appeal on the global stage? This issue is further complicated from the perspective of cultural sustainability when Nwakuna (2018) raises the critical concern that the commodification inherent in the pursuit of global stardom may progressively dilute the cultural potency exemplified by Fela. Adesanmi (2020) contends that the process delineated by Nwakuna neglects the agency of contemporary artists, who strategically navigate commodification to attain global recognition while preserving their cultural core. He maintains that, for these artists, commodification, rather than being intrinsically opposed to cultural potency, provides a new context for its expression and can even amplify it.

A recurring conceptual conflation of significant scholarly consequence warrants careful critical attention within the literature on Nigerian popular music and its broader cultural significance. Across the spectrum of Nigerian musical discourse, fans, critics, and music journalists have collectively sustained a pattern of terminological imprecision, marked by the erroneous and interchangeable application of conceptually distinct honorific designations such as 'revolutionary icon' and 'global superstar'. This study, therefore, examines the honorific terms 'revolutionary icon' and 'global superstar' as they are deployed interchangeably, without explicit operational criteria. This is the gap that the present study addresses, employing Fela Kuti and Wizkid as case-based analytical lenses to enhance conceptual clarity and explanatory depth within Nigerian music scholarship.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through unstructured oral interviews with twelve participants. The sample consisted of six randomly selected fans for each artist, drawn equally from Osun, Oyo, and Lagos states, which are the hubs of the Nigerian music industry. The twelve participants were deliberately stratified across generational cohorts: six respondents were aged between 20 and 35 years, and the remaining six between 45 and 65 years. This distribution ensured representation across varying levels of engagement with Nigerian music culture, ranging from casual listeners to dedicated fans, as well as a balanced depth of knowledge of both artists' discographies and their historical contexts. The study also drew extensively on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers and online materials. A netnographic analysis of fan discourse was conducted across social media platforms – especially Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) to capture the perspectives of fans within their digital communities. This multi-layered approach enhances both the validity and the contextual richness of the findings. The data gathered were transcribed verbatim and subjected to critical discourse analysis within a popular musicological framework to examine the dichotomy between revolutionary legacy and global stardom.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the perspectives of postcolonial theory as articulated by Olaniyan (2004) and in Emielu's (2018) concept of progressive traditionalism. Together, these theoretical frameworks facilitate a more nuanced exploration of the perceived dichotomy between revolutionary authenticity and commercial globalism, revealing these forces as complementary rather than contradictory. As



Olaniyan contends, Fela's significance resides in his dual role as a cultural biographer and an artist who systematically documented Nigeria's unfolding political realities – its contradictions, violence, and aspirations across successive military and democratic regimes. This has continued to position Fela's Afrobeat as an archival practice that captures the texture of everyday life under postcolonial duress while simultaneously offering a searing critique of those in power. This theoretical insight proves indispensable to the present study, as it illuminates how Fela's revolutionary iconicity derives from his capacity to render the political dimensions of everyday life simultaneously audible and danceable. On this basis, the present study argues that a fundamental distinction exists between Fela's politically committed Afrobeat and the commercially oriented Afrobeats of contemporary artists such as Wizkid. Applying Olaniyan's postcolonial framework enables this study to pursue an analysis that neither dismisses contemporary Afrobeats as depoliticised nor subjects Wizkid to the political standards embodied by Fela.

Consequently, Emielu's theory of progressive traditionalism directly responds to the rigid binary that has long characterised African music scholarship. Emielu contends that positioning traditional music as static, while granting the popular sphere ample room for innovation, constructs a binary opposition that contemporary scholarship now actively seeks to dismantle. Central to this theory is a dynamic model that foregrounds the interpenetration of the old and the new, thereby allowing scholars to trace both the continuous modernisation of indigenous African music and the ongoing indigenisation of imported musical resources. This dual process, far from being sequential or oppositional, operates simultaneously, revealing a reciprocal relationship in which tradition and innovation constantly shape one another. This model avoids reductive binaries of 'authentic' versus 'westernised', offering instead a nuanced framework for understanding how musical practices evolve through sustained cultural and creative adaptation.

This theory, therefore, provides a crucial lens for situating both Fela and Wizkid within the same continuum of Nigerian popular music, revealing how their seemingly divergent projects – one revolutionary, the other a global superstar – are, in fact, interconnected expressions of the same adaptive tradition. The study argues that while fans often assign divergent labels to these artists – positioning Fela as a revolutionary icon, owing to his creation of Afrobeat, and Wizkid as a global superstar, driven by his commercial success on the world stage – the concept of progressive traditionalism reveals both as pivotal agents in the evolution of Nigerian popular music. In this light, the study draws on Emielu's assertion that innovation itself can constitute a form of tradition. Both artists exemplify how the essence of this musical lineage lies not in static preservation but in dynamic engagement with the world. The application of this theory to the study suggests that the dichotomy between Fela and Wizkid is not one of authenticity versus commercial sell-out, but rather a reflection of the differing perceptions held by their respective generational audiences.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it provides a systematic comparative framework for distinguishing the evaluative logics underpinning the honorific titles 'revolutionary icon' and 'global superstar' in Nigerian popular music scholarship. Drawing on netnographic data from fans' reactions on social media, the study offers empirical insight into how audiences conflate or differentiate these paradigms, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical abstraction and lived reception. Furthermore, the application of Olaniyan's (2004) postcolonial theory and Emielu's (2018) progressive traditionalism provides a novel theoretical lens for understanding artistic valuation beyond purely commercial or political metrics. Accordingly, its findings carry practical implications for music critics, journalists,

and educators, encouraging the use of more precise and contextually sensitive terminology when evaluating outstanding musical artists internationally.

Evolution of Afrobeat

The emergence of Afrobeat is intrinsically linked to the life and artistic vision of Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti (1938–1997). The formation of the Koola Lobitos band in London in 1961 served as a precursor to Fela Kuti's musical trajectory, providing an artistic foundation for his early experimentation with the synthesis of jazz and highlife idioms. As Majola (2025) observes, Koola Lobitos represented an early blend of jazz and highlife idioms and, throughout the 1960s, functioned as a crucial creative laboratory for Fela's artistic development. On this foundation, Fela reconstituted his band as Africa 70 – a transition that marked the definitive consolidation of the canonical Afrobeat aesthetic. This new formation was defined by interlocking rhythmic strata and antiphonal vocal structures, techniques directly traceable to indigenous Yoruba musical practices (Waterman, 1990). Subsequently, as Oikelome (2020) observes, Fela's formation of Egypt 80 reflected a more austere, horn-driven musical militancy that mirrored his escalating resistance to postcolonial oppression. The successive reconfigurations of Fela's band reflected both the stylistic refinement and ideological radicalisation that characterised his musical trajectory. This resistance was further realised through his adoption of the name 'Aníkúlápó' – meaning 'He who has death in his pouch'. Moreover, the establishment of the communal Kalakuta Republic served as an emblem of African cosmological and socio-political autonomy. It housed Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti's nightclub, the Afrika Shrine, which functioned as a counter-institutional site wherein the liberatory ethos of Afrobeat was both realised and embodied. In this regard, Afrobeat was consolidated not only as a distinctive sonic genre but also as an enduring mode of political praxis. In line with this view, scholars within Africa and beyond argue that Fela's creative ingenuity, formative experiences, and ideology – nurtured within a supportive cultural environment – collectively facilitated the emergence and subsequent evolution of the Afrobeat genre. The artistic value of Afrobeat music, therefore, resides in the distinctive configuration of its textual context, social synthesis, and instrumental sound. As a multi-instrumentalist of remarkable range, Fela demonstrated versatility that extended well beyond the saxophone – an attribute captured in the image below, taken from one of his live performances. (see fig. 1 below)



Figure 1: A picture showing Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti playing Keyboard during one of his stage performances

Source: Internet. <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/fela-kuti>

As Ajayi (2023) contends, Fela's significance extends beyond the confines of his biographical chronology; his artistic practice – comprising musical form, lyrical substance, and performative embodiment – formed an inseparable trinity that together constituted a holistic instrument for African emancipation and self-definition. In this way, Fela established Afrobeat as a profound and enduring musical identity for the African continent.

Musical Influence and Legacy of Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti and Wizkid

Fela Kuti's musical and philosophical foundation, on one hand, was forged in a distinct crucible of history and ideas. According to Majola (2025), Fela's Pan-African and Black Power political ideology provided the ideological superstructure that transformed his lyrics into potent political critiques. Majola further contends that Fela's family lineage embodied a paradox of privilege and radicalism, which profoundly shaped his artistic and political trajectory. His parents exemplified this paradox: his father, Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, was a Protestant minister and a pioneering figure in the Nigerian Union of Teachers, while his mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was a formidable feminist and anti-colonial activist. This maternal influence, as Olaniyan (2004) aptly observes, cultivated in Fela from birth a profound consciousness of social justice and instilled at the very core of his identity a fearless, combative stance against authority. Consequently, this heritage transformed his upbringing from a merely bourgeois experience into the bedrock on which his emergence as an iconic voice of the masses and a revolutionary figure in Nigerian music would rest. Fela's music reframed Nigeria's postcolonial struggles not as isolated instances of national failure, but as essential sites of contestation within a broader global confrontation against resurgent neocolonial forces. In this context, Afrobeat became the soundtrack of resistance. In contrast to Fela's overtly political and historical engagement, the contemporary Afrobeat scene, exemplified by artists such as Wizkid, operates within a markedly different cultural and temporal framework. Born on 16 July 1990 in the Ojuelegba area of Surulere, Lagos, Wizkid emerged from the same geographic milieu yet channels his artistry toward global popular appeal, personal narrative, and sonic innovation, rather than direct historiographical critique. (See fig. 2 below)



Figure 2: A picture showing Wizkid on stage during one of his performances.

Source: <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/wizkid>



Wizkid, among other notable artists, embodies the trajectory of contemporary African music, standing at the forefront of Afrobeats' global ascendancy while fundamentally reshaping international perceptions of Nigerian popular music. He began his musical journey at the early age of eleven as a member of the now-defunct group known as Glorious Five. Early in his career, the artist performed under the stage name 'Lil Prinz' before adopting the iconic name 'Wizkid' in 2006. Wizkid's artistic influences are rooted in a distinctly post-structural adjustment society – one that is digitally interconnected and globally aspirational in its cultural outlook. His creative foundation is premised on the post-millennial Nigerian pop soundscape and remains less explicitly ideological. Although Wizkid emerged in the late 2000s, his work was shaped by the older generation of artists who pioneered modern Afrobeats. According to Adepoju (2021), this period of Wizkid's emergence signals a broader cultural shift within the genre – from protest-oriented lyrics towards themes of celebration. Consequently, the lyrical content of contemporary Afrobeats artists from this era focuses on motifs such as love, success, a flamboyant lifestyle, cars, and leisure. Complementing this perspective, Bangura (2017) notes that Wizkid's musical career has also been significantly inspired by prominent American artists, including Drake, Chris Brown and Michael Jackson. This is audible in his melodic phrasing and song structures, which often adhere to the hip-hop framework of verse, chorus, bridge, and chorus. Such structural choices exemplify what Emielu (2018) conceptualises as progressive traditionalism: a framework in which African artists actively engage with and reshape global pop aesthetics from a position of cultural confidence, rather than mere imitation. Although Yoruba culture remains a subtle undercurrent, Wizkid's occasional use of Yoruba and Pidgin English functions as a marker of identity. This distinctive approach first garnered widespread attention with the release of his hit single 'Holla at Your Boy,' which preceded his 2011 debut album *Superstar*, following his signing to Banky W's Empire Mates Entertainment (E.M.E.) in 2009. An excerpt from the song, titled 'Holla at your Boy', is presented below.

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a 'Call' line and a 'Response' line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the notes.

System 1:
Call: If you see me drive by, I find more swag I pop more
Response: Hol-la at your boy. Hol-la at your boy.

System 2:
Call: bot-tles, Chill-ing with mo-dels. If you see me drive by, I find more
Response: Hol-la at your boy. Hol-la at your boy. Hol-la at your boy.

System 3:
Call: swag, I pop more bot-tles, Chill-ing with mo-dels.
Response: Hol-la at your boy. Hol-la at your boy. Hol-la at your boy...

Wizkid released his second album, titled 'Jaiye Jaiye', in 2014, following which he departed from E.M.E. upon the expiration of his contract. His international breakthrough came in 2016 through a collaboration with the American artist Drake on 'One Dance.' The single topped the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart and also reached number one in 14 other countries. Consequently, the record-breaking success of 'One Dance' earned him a historic entry into the Guinness World Records as the first Afrobeats artist to be featured. Riding this global momentum, Wizkid signed with the multinational



label RCA Records in 2017 to launch Starboy Records, under which he subsequently released his third studio album, *Sounds from the Other Side*. This project was supported by five singles, including 'Come Closer' – another collaboration with Drake. In 2019, Wizkid released the single 'Joro' under RCA Records and Starboy Entertainment. Its widespread popularity led to its eventual inclusion on his 2020 album, *Made in Lagos*. The following is an excerpt from the song.

Joro

Jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro je a - jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro,
jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, o-mo jo-ro je a jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro hmm, jo-ro ooo,
jo-ro, jo-ro, jo-ro, o-mo jo-ro je a jo-ro oo, oh oh un unnunnunn

Following the release of his fifth album, *More Love, Less Ego* (2022), he issued his sixth studio album, *Morayo* (2024), as a tribute to his late mother. The latter subsequently achieved a historic milestone, recording the largest streaming debut on Spotify for any African album to date.

Fela Kuti and Wizkid: The Dichotomy Between a Revolutionary Icon and a Global Superstar

Scholarly discourse on Nigerian popular music frequently engages with the inherent tensions between artistic activism and commercial success. Critical frameworks have been developed to elucidate these divergent trajectories. For instance, Olaniyan (2004, p. 12) characterises Fela as a 'cultural guerrilla', positioning his artistry as both an intrinsic weapon of political struggle and a form of musical insurrection. It is within this framework that findings derived from interviews, together with analyses of fan engagement on social media platforms, substantiate the assertion that Fela's status as a revolutionary icon was forged through the synergistic interplay of three core elements: musical innovation and hybridity, political radicalism and activism, and a potent countercultural persona. Moreover, this evidence further establishes that Fela's revolutionary iconicity cannot be attributed to any single factor in isolation; rather, it emerged precisely from the sustained and dynamic convergence of these interrelated dimensions. Corroborating this view, Adesokan (2019) argues that Fela's Afrobeat was not merely a genre but a total art form, integrating complex musical arrangements with lyrical content that functioned as journalism, political analysis, and philosophical treatise. For instance, his song '*International Thief Thief*' (ITT) stands as an indictment of multinational corporations, constituting a direct and unambiguous attack on structures of power during the military regime. An excerpt from the song is presented below:



International Thief Thief

Call

Response

In - ter - na - tion - al thief thief, In - ter - na - tion - al thief thief,

5

Call

Resp.

I. T. T. In - ter - na - tion - al thief

In - ter - na - tion - al thief thief, In - ter - na - tion - al thief thief,

9

Call

Resp.

thief,

In - ter - na - tion - al thief thief, In - ter - na - tion - al thief thief,

The lyrics of this song, composed in Pidgin English, were deliberately pedagogical, aimed at raising the political consciousness of the oppressed masses. The extended song structures, repetitive rhythmic movements and call-and-response techniques were designed to foster a communal space for ideological immersion and collective solidarity. Fela's life and persona served as a performative extension of his ideology. His establishment of the Kalakuta Republic represented the ultimate embodiment of his revolutionary praxis. This is why Olaniyan (2004, p. 45) describes the Kalakuta Republic as a micro-nationalist project and a site of radical alterity, where Fela lived out his principles of African autonomy and social rebellion. The brutality inflicted upon him by the state functioned as a powerful vindication of his political critique, a dynamic vividly captured in the excerpt below, titled 'Trouble Sleep, Yanga Wake Am.'

Call

Response

When cat... sleep, rat gobite him tail, we-tin e dey find _____ Pa -

Pa - la - va... e dey find.

5

Call

Resp.

- la - va e go get ti o _____ Pa - la - va, _____

Pa - la - va _____ e go get.

This congruence between his message and his experience ultimately secured his iconic status as a revolutionary figure, particularly in the Nigerian music scene. This study, however, posits that Fela's legacy should be measured not by commercial success but by his socio-political and intellectual influence. His enduring relevance stems from Afrobeat's ongoing role as a global sonic template for protest, as well as from a legacy that cements Fela's position as a pan-Africanist icon. As Vieira (2017: 112) aptly asserts, Fela's iconicity lies in his mobilisation of music as a tool for decolonisation and social justice, leaving a legacy that is ideological, pedagogical, and transformative. While Fela



Aníkúlápó-Kuti deployed Afrobeat as an explicit weapon of political confrontation, contemporary artists such as Lagbaja, Beautiful Nubia, and Asa, as well as the broader cohort of Afrobeats artists, have largely avoided direct political discourse. This shift, as Okwuego (2025) contends, stems not from a deficit of artistic courage but rather from intricate negotiations with evolving political economies, state surveillance mechanisms, and global market imperatives. These forces have fundamentally restructured the relationship between Nigerian musicians and political expression. There is no doubt that Lagbaja's lyrics consistently address corruption, inequality, and social dysfunction; however, he does so indirectly rather than adopting Fela's practice of naming specific officials. Williams (2025) notes that Beautiful Nubia practises what might be termed 'epistemological indirection' – using storytelling and indigenous knowledge as a form of social analysis. This orientation represents not depoliticisation but the continuation of political commentary through culturally legible forms, a technique Fela himself employed. Similarly, Asa's critiques of hypocrisy and injustice embed political concerns within broader explorations of love, identity, and personal experience. As Balogun (2025) aptly observes, this constitutes not avoidance but tactical adaptation to a political environment in which confrontation carries risks, yet indirect communication remains possible.

Wizkid's trajectory epitomises the characteristics of the twenty-first-century global superstar. His career is distinguished by strategic commercial ubiquity and the seamless integration of brand partnerships. In light of this, Uduak (2021) interprets Wizkid's rise as a masterclass in strategic cross-pollination. Uduak highlights the artist's deliberate collaborations with international pop and dancehall figures – including Drake, Beyonce, Justin Bieber, and Skepta – framing these partnerships as calculated moves aimed at playlist dominance and chart penetration. Analysis of fan comments gathered from social media platforms indicates that quantifiable metrics, including record-breaking streaming figures, sold-out performances at prestigious venues such as the O2 Arena and Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, and a portfolio of lucrative brand endorsements, substantiate Wizkid's success. For example, Onikoyi (2025) observes that Wizkid made history in 2018 as the first African artist to sell out the 20,000-capacity O2 Arena. Furthermore, in 2021, he achieved a record-breaking three-night sell-out at the same venue, with tickets reportedly sold within just twelve minutes. This commercial success culminated in his historic achievement as the first African artist to sell-out the 62,850-capacity Tottenham Hotspur Stadium – an event that, as reported by the *Nigerian Guardian* (2023), generated an estimated £3.6-£4.8 million in ticket revenue. However, Wizkid's cultural authority and appeal to global brands are underpinned by more than mere statistical milestones. According to Chima (2022), his influence extends into fashion and consumer behaviour, positioning him as a cultural ambassador whose endorsements inspire emulation among fans.

In this regard, his marketability becomes a powerful vehicle for projecting Nigerian culture and style onto the international stage. Unlike Fela Kuti's adversarial stance towards corporate entities, Wizkid's model is characterised by strategic partnerships with global brands such as Pepsi and Nike, thereby aligning his persona with transnational capital (Olorunyomi, 2020). Undoubtedly, Wizkid embodies a form of sonic and aesthetic hybridity that facilitates mainstream crossover. This is particularly evident in his music, exemplified by the track 'African Bad Gyal' from his 2017 EP 'Sounds from the Other Side'. The song, featuring Chris Brown and produced by Sarz, skilfully blends Fela's Afrobeat rhythm with the textural elements of Caribbean dancehall. On this basis, Adeyemi (2019: 54) contends that Wizkid's cosmopolitan smoothing of sound constitutes a strategic manoeuvre aimed at enhancing global listenability, thereby rendering his music accessible beyond its specifically Nigerian cultural referents. This accessibility is further reinforced by the deliberate cultivation of his public persona, which manifests as an aspirational lifestyle that integrates seamlessly with a global consumerist ethos.



Meanwhile, Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti exhibited a rare and unwavering courage in circumstances that would have intimidated most people. He consistently confronted military dictators and political elites, speaking truth directly to power. Remarkably, he balanced this activism with his role as an entertainer, keeping his audience engaged without ever compromising his political message. In 2024, his unique artistry and sonic innovation were posthumously recognised by the Recording Academy, which honoured him with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. This recognition represented a triumph for the Black diaspora, affirming Nigeria's position as a pivotal hub of African music on the global stage. In the same vein, his 1976 album *Zombie* was formally recognised in 2025, when it was posthumously inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, honouring Fela Kuti's revolutionary impact on music. This accolade marks a significant milestone for the Nigerian music industry, as Fela becomes the first Nigerian artist to receive this honour. The album *Zombie* is widely acknowledged for its enduring artistic and historical significance, and it is regarded as one of Fela's most iconic works. Its scathing critique of Nigeria's military regimes provoked severe government backlash, culminating in the 1977 raid on his Kalakuta Republic commune. An excerpt from the song is presented below.

Zombie

Fela did not merely produce music; he engineered a complete sonic and philosophical system. According to Olorunyomi (2020), Fela established a lineage of artist-activists for whom music and politics are inseparable. This legacy is directly carried on by his sons, Femi and Seun Kuti, and its influence extends to contemporary artists such as Burna Boy. Despite his commercial success within the Afrobeats genre, Burna Boy explicitly channels Fela's confrontational style, thereby reaffirming



the enduring nexus between musical expression and political resistance. While Fela sought to confront and dismantle systems of oppression, contemporary artists such as Wizkid have forged a different path – one that seeks to normalise and celebrate contemporary African identity within global pop culture. Through his style, language, and sound, Wizkid presents a vision of Africa that is modern, sophisticated, and desirable to the world. In light of this shift, Udeze (2022, p. 154) posits that artists like Wizkid practise a form of digital diasporic soft power, using global platforms to project a positive image of Nigeria and Africa. This distinction underscores that Wizkid’s music prioritises individual and collective affirmation over direct political mobilisation. His recurring themes – such as ‘ginger’ (a colloquial term for excitement or motivation), good times, love, and success – resonate strongly with a global, youthful audience seeking connection and joy. In doing so, Wizkid and his contemporaries have solidified Afrobeats’ position on the world stage, inspiring a new generation of African artists who aspire to global stardom. It is important to note that Wizkid’s power lies in his capacity for soft diplomacy, as he continues to advance a form of cultural influence that is celebratory and integrative, rather than confrontational, in his musical artistry. This study further demonstrates that Wizkid has established a commercial precedent by proving the substantial market potential of Afrobeats, thereby paving the way for both mainstream and emerging artists across the African continent. Based on the findings presented, this study posits that while Fela Kuti’s legacy as a revolutionary figure is anchored in his ideological defiance, the integration of art and life as a mode of political resistance, and the cultivation of a distinctly oppositional political consciousness, Wizkid embodies a contrasting paradigm. As Idonije (2018) observes, both artists operate within distinct cultural and technological epochs, each characterised by unique possibilities and constraints. The friction between these archetypes continues to animate Nigerian musical discourse. Within the contemporary music landscape, Wizkid and his peers – as key architects of global market transformation and cultural diplomacy – continue to reshape the terms of popular music reception. The strategic sonic hybridity embedded within Wizkid’s Afrobeats repertoire, combined with deliberate commercial expansion, has positioned him as a central figure in the reconfiguration of popular music on the global stage.

Conclusion

The study reveals that Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti and Wizkid garnered profound international recognition and have shaped global perceptions of African music within their respective historical and cultural eras. Through the lenses of postcolonial theory and progressive traditionalism – as articulated by Olaniyan and Emielu, respectively – the perceived dichotomy between both artists is conceptualised not as a binary opposition between authentic artistry and commercial compromise, but rather as a manifestation of the distinct value systems and criteria for cultural relevance that have evolved across generations. Specifically, Fela's era privileged ideological resistance as the benchmark of meaningful artistry, whereas Wizkid's prioritises global market integration. These reframing resist simplistic judgements of artistic purity or sell-out, instead situating both figures within their specific historical and cultural conjunctures, thereby illuminating the shifting grounds upon which cultural legitimacy is negotiated in postcolonial Africa. To this end, the trajectory from Fela Kuti to Wizkid should not be interpreted as a hierarchical narrative of artistic superiority, but rather as an illustration of stylistic evolution driven by progressive traditionalism. The study, therefore, concludes that the need to maintain a clear analytical distinction between a reverential title such as 'revolutionary icon' and a more commercially oriented designation such as 'global superstar' necessitates a critical re-evaluation of how legacy is conceptualised and ascribed within the field of African popular music studies.



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Appendix

Table 1: Oral Interviews

S/N	Name	Age	State	Date of Interview
1.	Engr. Akinlolu Adebisi	63	Osun State	January 12, 2026
2.	Mr. Friday Stanley	31		
3.	Miss. Faith Amarachi Chinedu	23		
4.	Mrs. Rukayat Modupeola Ogunwale	47		
5.	Mrs. Biola Mosunmade Kolawole	52	Ibadan, Oyo State	February 9, 2026
6.	Mr. Olaifa Precious Akande	59		
7.	Mr. Amos Adejare Adewale	28		
8.	Adeola Nafisat Quadri	25		
9.	Dr. Akinyinka Oladogba Moses	57	Lagos State	March 3, 2026
10.	Miss. Adanna Chidinma Obinna	21		
11.	Engr. Steven Alabi Adeyemi	46		
12.	Mr. Johnson Odekanyin	33		