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# FROM SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE TO SOUND SPACE: PROTEST SONGS DURING OCCUPY NIGERIA FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL

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## ABSTRACT

Protests result from unpleasant situations and the need for change in the social and economic conditions of the people. Music is often employed during protests. Several articles have been conducted on the Occupy Nigeria protest of 2012. However, little has been said about the musical sound space that mobilised the masses to embark on protest marches in Nigeria. This article focuses on sound space as employed during the Occupy Nigeria protest of 2012. It analyses the movements of people from the social media space to a musical space, as witnessed during the protests in Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park, Ojota Lagos. It further analyses the content of the music of selected musicians, whose music was played, or who personally performed during the protest. Both primary and secondary data were used. The data included interviews with protesters and some musicians in Lagos state, Nigeria. Secondary sources included books, periodicals, journals, the use of YouTube videos of the protesting masses, as well as information sourced from the net. Based on Deprivations-Frustrations-Aggressions and critical discourse analysis (CDA) theories, the findings show that the organised protest started on the media space and was sustained through the sound space at the Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park. The article further argues that the music space was not a jamboree, but a revolutionary movement against the government of the day in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** fuel subsidy; music performance; Nigeria; protests; Nigeria; sound space



## INTRODUCTION

Music has the power to educate about current burning issues on national policies. In addition, the socio-political life of the people is embedded in their music, and this includes the roles played by individuals and groups. The objective of this article is to critically analyse the transition and mobility of people from social media space to sound space. The article argues that music has a mobilising effect, as well as the ability to sustain protests; as was the case with the Lagos protest.

In traditional Yoruba society, music has always occupied a unique place in the preparation, mobilisation, and execution of wars. The importance of songs in instigating conflict is aptly captured by a Yoruba proverb that says ‘*orin ni isaju ote*’, meaning “songs herald hostilities” (OlaREWaju 2011, 3). Ilesanmi (1998,1794) examines the significance of drumming, chants, and songs among the Yoruba, and asserts that beyond their entertainment roles, these activities fulfil religious, social, military, and revolutionary purposes. As a communicative device, songs are employed to inspire warriors and for launching verbal assaults in inter-personal conflicts. Songs of assault are always accompanied by cheering, laughing, and savouring of the exchanges, until the conflict translates into a brawl. This implies that that the metaphors or linguistic devices employed in songs are not as innocent as they seem; and should be taken seriously. Songs of assault have been sung from time immemorial and have been employed, not only to instigate conflict on a personal level, but as politically effective weapons as well.

This article attempts to answer the following questions: *How does the mobility of people from social media to sound space occur in the Occupy Nigeria Protest? How does sound space help sustain the environment of protest? And finally, How are analysed textual protest songs played and performed?*

As indicated earlier, this article is based on Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression and critical discourse analysis (CDA) theories.

## DEPRIVATION-FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS THEORIES

The Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression model offers a psychological explanation for conflict, violence, and unrest in society. It holds that people rebel due to the discrepancy between their expectations and what the government of the day is actually offering. Gurr (1970) asserts that instead of an absolute standard of deprivation, a gap exists between expected and achieved welfare, that brings about collective discontent. This theory also applies to individuals who may have a sense that their own welfare is not taken into consideration like that of others. The Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression theory has been used to explain different kinds of political violence, and is aptly applied to protest rallies and songs of mobility witnessed in the Occupy Nigeria protests. Nigerians were dissatisfied with the government and its policies in the face of hunger, unemployment, homelessness, lack of education, and other basic needs in general.

Gurr again notes that Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression is a term used to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the “ought” and the “is” of collective value satisfaction. This gap between an individuals’ expectation and achieved welfare results in collective discontent. The concept of Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression dates back to ancient Greece. Aristotle articulated the idea that revolution is driven by a *relative* sense or feeling of inequality, rather than an *absolute* measure. According to Gurr, “For Aristotle the principal cause of revolution is the aspiration for economic or political equality on the part of the common people who lack it, and the aspiration of oligarchs for greater inequality than they have, i.e. a discrepancy in both instances between what people have of political and economic goods relative to what they think is justly theirs.”(1970, 23) This sums up the Nigerian economic situation, where it was arguably said that a common Nigerian subsists on less than US\$2 a day. Gurr says this “perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities” is what leads to discontent.

How do feelings of relative deprivation translate into revolutionary protest songs? Gurr provides a psychological approach to explain how collective discontent is manifested as political violence. Gurr notes: “The primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism the anger induced by frustration is a motivating force that disposes men to aggression, irrespective of its instrumentalities.”(1970, 42) Gurr’s descriptions depict the situation in Nigeria, where less than five per cent of the population is in control of the country’s wealth, while the remaining 95 per cent languishes daily. However, Gurr was not the first scholar to identify a link between frustration and aggression. Dollard et al. (1939) were the first scholars to formulate the theory that frustration leads people to act aggressively (see Gurr). While examining the relationship between terrorism and frustration, Richardson (2011) argues that this frustration is caused by relative deprivation, and the resulting aggression is manifested as terrorism. I therefore argue that the Occupy Nigeria protest and the use of sound space can be explained in part by the Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression theory.

This article views song texts performed during the Occupy Nigeria protest as a form of protest discourse, which is also a form of a “discourse of resistance” (Putnam et al. 2005; Chilwa 2012a). Chilwa (2014, 2) asserts that this type of discourse is often characterised by strategies that highlight unequal power relations or some forms of oppression, either in an organisation or in society. In the neo-Marxist perspective, Putnam et al. 2005 (as quoted by Chilwa 2014, 2) note that resistance is a function of the oppressive nature of capitalist modes of production that lead to the alienation of the workers. According to Putnam et al., discourse in this context, often serves as an expression or the construction of organisational subjectivity; and reveals how power relations serve to constitute particular identities and influence the resultant resistance or protest. At a personal or group level, discourse (of resistance) may serve as an expression of dissatisfaction or frustration with terms of employment or a way to renegotiate a

new order/policy or a strategy for challenging prevailing social arrangements (Brown 2000 as quoted in Putnam et al. 2005). Hence, resistance is bound to occur where power (political, organisational, religious, etc.) exists and change is desperately needed (Chiluwa 2012a). This is true of the suffering of Nigerian citizens under its government. The lack of basic amenities has forced Nigerians to fight for their rights and privileges in subsidising fuel. An informant notes that the focus of the protest is to bring the government to understand, not only the plight of the common people in their daily struggles, worsened by the petrol prices, but also to draw their attention, and if possible, bring a revolution to Nigeria.

Chiluwa (2014, 3) argues that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analysis that “aims to contribute to addressing the social ‘wrongs’ of the day (in a broad sense – injustice, inequality, lack of freedom etc.) by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them” (Fairclough 2009, 163). Hence, a critical discourse analyst will examine how certain levels of discourse (e.g. multicultural use of language in the music, especially songs performed during the protest rally), reveal value judgments and ideological perspectives. Ideology in this context, refers to ways in which individuals or groups/identities represent themselves or are represented by others.

According to Van Dijk (2005, as quoted by Chiluwa 2014, 6), ideologies go beyond the representation and legitimisation of class domination. Dominated groups (for example, the workers) also require a form of ideology as a basis for resistance. Ideological discourse very often reveals evidence of positive ‘we’ representations (“we” representing the workers, an ethnic group, or a particular political persuasion) and negative “other” representations (“other” being either the government or a political opposition group). Protest discourse in this study therefore, illustrates Van Dijk’s (1998) ideological square (that is, the stressing of the positive actions of the “we” in-group and the negative actions of the “they” out-group). Also, the study analyses the songs as showcasing the pains of the common man and the economic gap between the political leaders and the governed in Nigeria.

In this study, Chiluwa’s (2014, 8) claim that the ideological discourse in the Nigerian fuel subsidy withdrawal protests of January 2012 can be viewed as a means of resisting what workers perceive as an unfair and oppressive government policy is corroborated. Categories of ideological discourse analysis using Chiluwa’s (2014) analysis includes (i) singers’ description, involving the positive “we” in-group description and negative “other” out-group representation) and (ii) the activity and goal description of the singers.

## PROTESTS IN NIGERIAN HISTORY

Protests, whether peaceful or violent, are not new occurrences in Nigeria—the country has been contending with protest, from the pre-colonial era to colonial times and into the post-colonial era. The notable earliest protests, according to Okonkwo (1998, 23), include protest action by Aba women in 1929. The “riots” or war, led by women in the provinces of Calabar and Owerri in south-eastern Nigeria in November and December 1929, became known as the Aba Women’s Riots in British colonial history, or as the Women’s War in Igbo history. Thousands of Igbo women organised a massive revolt against policies imposed by British colonial administrators in south-eastern Nigeria, presenting the most serious challenge to British rule in the history of the colony. The Women’s War took months for the government to suppress and became a historic example of feminist and anti-colonial protest.

The roots of the riots evolved from 1 January 1914, when the first Nigerian colonial governor, Lord Lugard, instituted the system of indirect rule in southern Nigeria. Okonkwo (1998, 25) asserts that under this administration British administrators would rule through appointed warrant chiefs. Within a few years the appointed warrant chiefs became increasingly oppressive. They seized property, imposed draconian regulations, and began imprisoning anyone who criticised them openly. Although much of the anger was directed at the warrant chiefs, most Nigerians knew the source of their power; the British colonial administrators. Colonial administrators added to the sense of grievance when they announced plans to impose special taxes on the Igbo market women. These women were responsible for supplying food to the growing urban populations in Calabar, Owerri, and other Nigerian cities. There were fears that these taxes would drive many of the market women out of business and seriously disrupt the supply of food and other goods available to the populace. In November 1929, thousands of Igbo women congregated at the Native Administration centres in Calabar and Owerri, as well as other smaller towns to protest against the warrant chiefs and the taxes to be imposed on them. Using the traditional practice of censoring men through all night song and dance ridicule (often called “sitting on a man”), the women chanted and danced, and in some locations, forced warrant chiefs to resign from their positions. The women also attacked European-owned stores as well as Barclays Bank, and broke into prisons, and released prisoners. They also attacked Native Courts run by colonial officials, burning many of them. Colonial police and troops were called in, and fired shots at the crowds that had gathered at Calabar and Owerri, killing more than 50 women, and leaving over 50 wounded. During the two-month “war” at least 25 000 Igbo women were involved in protests against British officials. The Aba Women’s war forced colonial authorities to drop their plans to impose taxes on the market women, and to curb the power of the warrant chiefs. The women’s uprising was regarded as the first to challenge British authority in Nigeria and West Africa during the colonial period.

Another women’s protest, according to Okonkwo (1998, 28), was led by the mother of Anikulapo Fela, Funmi Ransome Kuti, against the reigning Monarch, Alake

of Egband, which led to the dethroning of the Monarch in the early 1930s. Other protests, according to Okonkwo, include the land protest in 1912, the Nigeria Civil Service Protest of 1919, the 1978 popular student protest known as “Ali Must Go”, against the then Commissioner for Education in General Obasanjo’s military regime. There was also a protest action in western Nigeria against electoral processes; which led to loss of lives and property. This protest was commonly known as “Operation We Tie.” I argue that the recent Occupy Nigeria protest was fuelled by the social media and sound spaces that were judiciously employed to mobilise the masses.

## OCCUPY NIGERIA SPACE: MOBILITY FROM SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE TO SOUNDS SPACE

Pickerill and Krinsky (2012), in describing, the general philosophy of the Occupy movement, note that there is a core claim to space in the form of deliberately challenging the privatisation of certain city sites—thus, the “occupy” or “sit-in” philosophy reinforces the need to reclaim space from the corporate sector. The movement also crafts and repeats slogans such as “we are the 99 per cent”, which was powerful in establishing true democracy. Hence, the Occupy movement prefigured and envisaged a new society. Chilwa (2014, 12) and Ayobade (2015, 1) assert that “Occupy” represents the revolutionary tactics of the Arab spring, and that it has since become the slogan in other countries and regions for similar actions (e.g. “occupy Frankfurt”, “occupy Zurich”, “occupy Hong Kong”, etc.). Chilwa (2014) notes that “Occupy Wall Street” protesters and members of similar movements in New York and other American cities, who claimed to represent 99 per cent of the American population, adopted a non-violent protest against social inequality in the United States; which they blamed on the assumed greed and corruption of the one per cent that wielded economic power. Chilwa (2014) argues that “Occupy Nigeria” is slightly different from the “sit-in” and “camping” practice because, protesters did not just “occupy” a particular spot like Tahrir Square in Egypt or lower Manhattan in New York—they were angry workers and demonstrators on the streets, and major cities. In Nigeria the protestors occupied Express roads, chanting war songs and holding placards and green leaves, protesting against the controversial withdrawal of a fuel subsidy in Nigeria on 1 January 2012. Although the protesters did not “occupy” in the real sense of occupying a single location, they still chose to call their action “occupy Nigeria” because it articulated a collective civil engagement.

## SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE

Some writers have already discussed the role of social media in the organisation of the protest, so I will not dwell much on this aspect. However, I would like to focus on areas that have not been succinctly explained. Chilwa (2014) and Hari (2014) note that the Occupy Nigeria protests, which were regarded as successful in terms of organisation

and participation, were largely organised and mobilised through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, SMS text-messaging, as well as specialised political blogs. According to Deluca, Lawson, and Sun (2012, 12), social media create new contexts for activism that are not possible in traditional media, because they “foster an ethic of individual and collective participation and mobilisation, thus creating a norm of perpetual participation and that norm creates new expectations of being in the world.”

As Chiluya (2014) observes, since its creation in February 2004, Facebook has become a household name; and is today the biggest and most popular social networking site. Facebook is also regarded as the popular social network site used by young Nigerians (Asoto 2011).

Apart from being used as a leisure activity, Facebook has become a valuable resource for monitoring the political mood of the country; especially because it provides people a forum to make their voices heard (Cleveland 2010). It is mostly the younger generation who are involved in Facebook activities in Nigeria, with about 71 per cent falling within the age bracket 18–34 (Socialbakers.com). Of greater interest in recent times is the adaptability of online social networks, particularly Facebook and Twitter, for social activism and protests. The successes of the Tunisian protests and the initial Egyptian protests that ousted Hosni Mubarak, for example, have been attributed to Twitter and Facebook. Libyan protesters also utilised Twitter and Facebook in the protests that ousted Muammar Gaddafi to mobilise themselves and coordinate their activities (Raddatz 2011; Chiluya 2012b).

In Nigeria, Twitter, blogs and online forums have also been used for social mobilisation and political participation (Ifukor 2010; Chiluya 2012a; 2012b). Several scholarly works on social protests and activist movements on the internet support the view that indeed the internet and ICTs influence the ways in which activists communicate, collaborate, and demonstrate in a significant way (Vegh 2004; Garrett 2006; Tao 2011; Idle and Nunns 2011). According to Shirky (2011), social media have become a coordinating tool for nearly all the world’s political or protest movements. In this way, the Internet has enabled a networked population to gain greater access to information and more opportunities for collective action and increased freedom to demand change. Social media not only provides a platform for civil protests, but also makes it possible for participants from multicultural backgrounds to express their cultural identities; as is the case with Nigeria. Heyd (2014, 38) observes that some Nigerian online forums (e.g. Nairaland, as in Facebook) are used for “doing race and ethnicity”, where cultural labels and multicultural/linguistic identities enable participants to engage in “narratives of belonging.” Some of the forums are even established along ethnic lines, such as “Oduduwa net” (for Yoruba speakers) and “Igbo net” (for Igbo speakers) (Ifukor 2011). On Facebook or online forums, socio-cultural labels and greeting formats such as “Igbo nma ma nu” (equivalent to “hello Igbo”) or “Udo gadi” (i.e. “there shall be peace” in Igbo) or linguistic behaviours such as codeswitching (i.e. standard Nigerian English-pidgin/standard Nigerian English-local languages) are used for cultural identification and solidarity, that are necessary for collective action (Chiluya 2012b).



## POLITICAL SPACE AND FUEL PRICE INCREASE AND SUBSIDY IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is endowed with natural resources that include crude oil. Since Nigeria's first export of crude oil in 1959, it has become the major contributory mobiliser to the country's economy. Nigeria is rated Africa's second largest producer of crude oil after Libya (Omotoso 2010). The huge revenues realised since the inception of production and exploration of the oil in the country have not however, benefited the majority. Instead, there have been widespread protests of various degrees from different quarters against short supply and steady increases in the pump prices of refined products. As a sequel to this situation, the federal government had to come up with the policy of a fuel subsidy, with the aim of reducing the prices of the products, thereby minimising the direct burden on the masses.

Subsidy is money that is paid by the government or an organisation to reduce the cost of producing goods and services so that the prices can be low (Hornby 2005). The fuel crisis has become a common phenomenon in Nigeria. The breakdown of refineries because of bad management and lack of maintenance has aggravated the cost of oil. The federal government unequivocally stated that by removing the fuel subsidy it would be saving about US\$1.3 trillion per annum, which it had earmarked for shoring up other sectors of the economy, such as infrastructure provisions; particularly for the effective downstream operation. However, the Federal government has not been able to convince Nigerians that the oil subsidy will be judiciously utilised in the interest of the masses. The Federal government has it on record that the fuel subsidy has been consistently removed from 1986; during President Babangida administration; and yet Nigerians have no cause to smile. For instance, the table below shows the various fuel subsidies removed by the past regimes in Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Removal of fuel subsidies between 1986 and 2016

Year	Regime	Former Price	Increased price	Difference in Increase
1986	President Ibrahim Babangida	From 23K	70kobo	47kobo addition
1993	Chief Ernest Shonekan	70kobo	₦5.00	30 kobo
1994	General Sani Abacha	₦5.00	₦ 11.00	₦6.00
1998	Gen. Abdulsalami	₦11.00	₦ 25.00	₦14.00
1998	Gen. Abdulsalami	₦25.00	₦20.00	₦5.00
1999	President Obasanjo	₦20.00	₦30.00	₦10.00
2000	President Obasanjo	₦30.00	₦22.00	₦ 8.00
2002	President Obasanjo	₦22.00	₦26.00	₦4.00
2003	President Obasanjo	₦26.00	₦40.00	₦14.00

2003	President Obasanjo	₦40.00	₦34.00	₦8.00
2006	President Obasanjo	₦34.00	₦40.00	₦6.00
2007	President Obasanjo	₦40.00	₦75.00	₦35.00
2009	President Yar'Adua	₦75.00	₦65.00	₦10.00
2012	President Jonathan	₦65.00	₦149.00	₦84.00
2012	President Jonathan	₦149.00	₦97.00	₦52.00
2015	President Jonathan	₦97.00	₦87.00	₦10.00
2016	President Buhari	₦87.00	₦145.00	₦58.00

**Source:** *Afonne 2011; Titus 2016*

From the table above, it is apparent that the price of petroleum products has steadily increased since 1986. In this regard, it is not out of place to state that Nigerians have never experienced good times or moments of joy, owing to the withdrawal of oil subsidies. This move contributed to rising level of poverty, as a result of unemployment, which was estimated at around 65 million people. Uncontrolled inflation, lack of health facilities, and other social problems are some of the factors that culminated in the nationwide organised protest, accompanied by the music of Fela Anikulapo and stage performances by different artists such as Eedris Abdulkareem, African China, Saidi Osupa, Femi Anikulapo Kuti and others. These performances kept the spirit of the protesters alive; despite threats to their lives. The Federal government was left with no option but to reduce the price of petrol.

## SOUND SPACE IN OCCUPY NIGERIA RALLIES

Music performance plays a central role with regard to artistic expression and experience in African tradition. Musical performance in Africa maintains an integral relationship with other aspects of life. A notable feature of this interaction is the fact that music is often performed in a multimedia context in which dance, elaborate costumes, mime, poetry, and drama are featured in a total theatre spectacle. The location of this total theatre spectacle within the context of religious, social, and political activities underlies this indigenous perception of music. As an expressive idiom, it is characterised by an engaging interaction between professional musicians and communities. Music performances of notable Nigerian musicians, especially the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Abdulkareem Idris and Chinagorom Onuoha performed at the rallies. The songs of the late Fela especially energised the protesters. Recordings by artists such as Abdulkareem Idris, Osupa Saheed, Femi Anikulapo, and Chinagorom Onuoha, popularly referred to as African China, were played while the musicians themselves led the singing during the organised protest.

## Fela Anikulapo Kuti

Much has been written about the musical icon, Fela Anikulapo Kuti. According to Olaniyan and Olorunyomi (2005, 23), Fela started out with the Koola Lobitos in 1961 in London. Returning to Nigeria in 1963, he coined a new style of music (Afrobeat); by combining James Brown's funk music, highlife, and jazz styles. In 1966 he joined the Highlife Jazz Band. In 1968, after visiting the United States of America (USA); and being influenced by the black power movement, he added sociopolitical lyrics. Persecuted by the Nigerian government, he became the voice of the oppressed. Some of his albums include *Everything Scatter* (1975), *Zombie* (1977) —perhaps the most popular album during the era, containing four jams (*Zombie*, *Mister Follow Follow*, *Observation Is No Crime*, *Mistake, No Agreement* (1977)) —with two jams (*Sorrow Tears* and *Blood* (1977)) featuring the United States trumpet player Lester Bowie—intense and uncompromising, dedicated to yet another police raid that landed him in jail— the *EP Suffering and Smiling* (1977), *Unknown Soldier* (1979), *International Thief Thief* (1980), *Authority Stealing* (1980), *Coffin for Head of State* (1981), among others. Some texts from Fela's songs performed during the 2012 fuel subsidy removal protest are provided below.

Water, light, food, house  
 Wetin do dem, wetin do dem  
 You mean you no know  
 When I tell you, you will hear dem  
 Dat be say you no de for Nigeria  
 May be u de come from America, abi London abi, Germany  
 You go know, plenty, you go know  
 Na so so water for Africa  
 Plenty plenty water for Africa  
 Water underground, water over ground water in the air  
*ordinary Water to drink for man n ko o*  
*E no de.*

[Water, light, food and house  
 What is wrong with these?  
 You mean you don't know?  
 When I explain to you about the condition of Nigerians you will know  
 I am sure you are not from Nigeria  
 Maybe you don't live in Nigeria  
 And hopefully you just came from America, London or Germany  
 Maybe you just came to visit someone in Nigeria.  
 The situation of water, light, food security and housing is terrible in Nigeria  
 There is water everywhere yet none to drink, the government has power to finance these basic  
 needs to ameliorate the poor but they will not do that.]

The singer depicts the lack of basic amenities in Nigeria; despite the economic gains that are daily accruing from oil. The song explicates the suffering masses lacking water (“which we have in abundance”), housing, food and light. Another song used during the subsidy removal protest is titled *No Agreement*:

I no go gree make my brother de homeless make I no talk,  
 I no go gree make my brother hungry make I no talk  
 No agreement today no agreement tomorrow  
 No agreement today no agreement tomorrow.

[I will not agree for my fellow citizens to be homeless  
 and you say I should not sing about it,  
 I will not agree that Nigerian citizen will be going hungry  
 and you say I should not sing bout it  
 I will not agree today neither will I agree tomorrow.]

## A NO GO 'GREE

FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI

Moderato

4 A no go 'gree make my bro-therhome- less\_ make a no\_\_ ta\_\_ lk la la la

8 la la la A no go 'gree\_\_make my bro-ther job- less make a no\_\_ ta\_\_ lk

12 1. la la la my pa-pa talk your pa-pa talk those wey talk sef dem dey see A no go

16 2. la la la no a-gree-ment to day, no a-gree-ment to-mor-row no a-gree-ment to-day no a

18 gree - ment to - mo - rrow no a - gree - ment\_\_ now lat - er

ne- ver\_\_ ne-ver no a - gree-ment to-day no a - gree-ment to-mo-rrow

Figure 1: A No Go 'Gree (Kuti): Scored by the Researcher

In the above song Fela claims that he will never be quiet for as long as the common people of Nigeria go hungry every day. The song reveals the common life and the level of poverty in Nigeria; while those in political power are wasting the taxpayers' money, traveling around the globe with the excess crude oil fund and money from past subsidy removals.

## Eedris Abdulkareem

Eedris Abdulkareem, born Eedris Turayo Abdulkareem Ajenifuja, is a Nigerian hip-hop artist. Born into a polygamous family in Kano, Nigeria, his father is from Ijesha, Osun State; and his mother from Ogun State. Raised in Kano, he adopted Kano State as his state of origin. His father resides in Lagos, while his mother continues to reside in Kano. In 2004, Abdulkareem's third album titled *Jaga Jaga* was launched. Its title track, which laments the corruption and suffering in Nigeria, was banned from radio airplay by Nigerian former President Olusegun Obasanjo in a televised address; although it continued to be played at nightclubs. The text of the song paints the picture of the life of common people in Nigeria. The message of the song is that the money realised from the oil industry should have been used to improve the living and social conditions for Nigerians.

Nigeria jagajaga, everything scatter scatter,  
 poor man dey suffer suffer  
 Gbosa, gbosa, gunshot inna de air  
 NEPA won ti di regular 419 in Nigeria,  
 Agege to ikeja na 100 naira,  
 fuel scarcity na popular action film for Nigeria.,  
 Everything scatter scatter,  
 poor man dey suffer suffer,  
 gbosa gbosa, gun short inna de air.

[Nigeria is in disarray,  
 the poor people are getting poorer,  
 And suddenly you hear *gbosa gbosa* gun shot in the air.  
 (NEPA) National Electric Power Authority,  
 now PHCN is a regular (419) movie in Nigeria,  
 transportation from Agege to Ikeja in Lagos state is hundred naira  
 fuel scarcities is a common popular action film in Nigeria.]

Some of the words have been repeated for emphasis. Words such as *jaga jaga*, *scatter scatter*, *suffer suffer*, *gbosa gbosa*. Such a repetition places the emphasis on the events in the life of the common Nigerian. The song analyses the daily struggles of the common man to get three meals a day, while the political armed robbers steal billions of Nigeria *Naira* on a daily basis— especially from withdrawn oil subsidies. When the price of fuel

goes up, the common man will find subsistence difficult and transport costs will increase as well; and so will the price of food and other commodities.

### *Chinagorom Onuoha*

Chinagorom Onuoha, popularly known as African China, is an AJ (Ajegunle) breed. According to Onuoha, who is also the Chief Executive Officer of “A Entertainment”, when he was still in primary school his Yoruba teacher struggled to pronounce his name correctly. To make things easier, he started calling him “China.” Later, when he started his music career, he adopted China as his stage name, and added Africa to reinforce the fact that he is African. His music was also played during the subsidy protests.

Fuel e no dey,  
 Brother transportation no dey,  
 And our road e no good o  
 What about the NEPA people o,  
 We no get light everybody just dey halla  
 Fuel no dey na how we wan survive, Many youth ready for work  
 But as work no dey,  
 Na how dey wan survive,  
 We be giant of Africa.

[There is no fuel despite the rich and surplus produced daily,  
 our roads are so bad and NEPA  
 National Electrical Power Authority are terribly malfunctioning,  
 how do we survive without fuel  
 the little that is available is too costly for the masses.]

The singer argues that the removal of fuel subsidies makes the poor masses even poorer. The secrets and the revelations of the oil cabals after the protest brought government corruption under the spotlight.

### *Femi Anikulapo Kuti*

Femi is one of the prominent sons of the music icon, the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Femi was at the rally to present songs to the protesters. Below is one of the songs he sang at the rally:

The common practice of our leaders is to chop our money and go.  
 These leaders should be called stealers, For sure they no dey be our heroes.  
 As dem they waka free, Dem live big, Remember na our money dem dey blow.  
 See our brothers and sisters dey suffer o, because our leaders dem greedy o  
 It is time to let dem know, This politics is not for show o, It is time to let dem know, this politics  
 is not for sure, If you see Obasanjo, (where is our money) Make you ask him o (where is our  
 money If you see Tinubu (where is our money)

Make you ask him say (where is our money) if you see Babangida (where is our money) make you ask him say (where is our money), if you see Ibori (where is our money) make you ask him say (where is our money).

[It is the common practice of our political leaders, to steal from the national treasury, these leader should be call armed robbers, surely they are not our heroes, as they move around so freely, and living so big, remember it is our money they are wasting around, see our brothers and sisters as they are suffering, it's because our leaders are covetous  
it is time to let them know, this politics is not for show  
if you see Obasanjo (where is our money) ask him that (where is our money  
if you see Tinubu (Where is our money), ask him that (where is our money)  
if you see Babangida (where is our money) ask him that (where is our money)  
if you see Ibori (where is our money) ask him that (where is our money)].

## C

The com-mon prac-tise of our lea-ders, is to chop our mo-ney and go - these

lea-ders should be call stea lers, for sure-ly them no be our - he roes, as them they

wa-ka free they live big - re-mem-ber na our mo-ney the de blow - see as

our bro-thers and sis-ters they su -ffer be cause our lea-ders them theygree-dy o, it is

time to let them know - this po-li-tics is not for show if you see Ba-ban-gi - da

make you ask him o if you see O-ba-san -

where is our mo-ney where is our mo-ney

jo

where is our mo - ney.

## DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SONG TEXTS

Nigerian pidgin has been widely used in Nigerian literature, entertainment, music and the media; hence, it became part of the songs of the protests. As Fasan (2014, 4) notes:

The Nigerian hip-hop musicians of the 1990s and the 2000s, like their counterparts elsewhere, had their forerunners in local musicians who performed in local languages and dialects. The most notable of these forerunners in the case of Nigeria was Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the creator of Afrobeat music. His centrality to the art of contemporary hip-hop musicians, influencing their use and promotion of indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin, deserves a close look.

Fasan (2014) goes on to argue that the indigenisation or domestication of the linguistic space in Nigeria did not begin with Fela. He notes that there were initial efforts of such western-trained indigenous music practitioners such as Mojola Agbebi, Fela Sowande, and Akin Euba among others (Olorunyomi 2005, 8) who made a conscious attempts to “nativise” Nigerian music. Fasan (2014, 5) again emphasises Fela’s role:

Fela, the Afrobeat icon, whose music would in later years become the anthem of political opposition in Nigeria, indeed, started out in the early 1960s like most of his Western-trained contemporaries, singing in Yoruba as well as English. Fela’s linguistic predilection went through three discrete stages: an initial period of overt Western, modernist influence during which he sang in English; followed by a “reactive ethno-nationalist stage” marked by his use of Yoruba,



and an ideologically inflected Pan-Africanist stage, which saw him singing in Nigerian pidgin or broken as it is otherwise called.

Nigerian pidgin is more widely used in songs in Nigeria, and is used for the most part in the selected songs sung and performed during the protest in Lagos. Fasan (2014) further notes that considering its socially-marginal status vis-à-vis English, the adoption of Pidgin by the emergent hip-hop youth culture can be regarded as both a transgressive and decanonical act. It is increasingly an act of willpower and exclusion, a deliberate rupturing of the master narrative that English represents, and an attempt at re-representation and meaning-making that reflects agency within a local economy of signs. From *Original Suffer Head, No Agreement, Nigeria jagajaga, rule us well, the common practice of our leaders, hear the voice, e go better*—all these are examples of Pidgin English, that common Nigerians speak and hear in the songs. It currently serve as an important medium of communication in local/urban towns and cities for inter-ethnic communication and in pop songs in particular. Songs in Pidgin reach the wider Nigerian society, which would otherwise not be reached by the English language, or local languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efikl etc. (Ofulue 2004).

The singers sometimes code switch between Nigerian pidgin and a local language, depending on the singer's cultural and linguistic background. This study reveals that protest singers code switch between various Nigerian pidgins, while some code switch between pidgin and local languages. In a different but related context, Awonusi (2004a, 2004b, as quoted by Fasan 2014, 7) regards this practice as “text multilingualism.” Through mixing and switching codes, it encompasses the use of Nigerian Pidgin and the indigenous languages by Nigerian hip-hop performers, and is a symbolic marker of the first stage of “transition.” Most of the singers deliberately avoid using indigenous languages, which might have expressed ethnic sentiments—because the protests were originally perceived as “national” in the pursuit of “national interest” irrespective of Nigeria's ethnic diversity. But code switching from local pidgin to English not only expresses solidarity; but also gives the singers more freedom to express themselves.

Some linguistic and discourse strategies were deployed by the singers during the protest to describe themselves and their actions; especially in the (negative) representation of the Nigerian government. Chilwa (2014) asserts that both explicit and implicit representations of government's actions were achieved using negative words; whether in literature, songs or social media (e.g. wicked) —some discourse strategies are also used to construct negative actions. For example, code switching, pidginisation, as well as the use of loan words (from local languages) are used to heighten the negative public perceptions about government.

## THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN “WE” AND “THEY” IN SOCIAL SPACES

In all the songs selected, the assertion of identity is prevalent. For instance in the song by Fela, *I no go 'gree'*, the singer demonstrates his environmental belonging and identity. He belongs to the hungry Nigerians. The hungry, homeless, and the jobless are all his brothers and sister. They form the “We” in the social space; while Femi Anikulapo’s *The common practice of our leaders is to chop our money and go*, brings out the contrasting “they” identity. The songs place a special focus on who is “with us” and who is “with them.”

These are the situations that made the singers proclaim that Nigeria is in a *jagajaga* (confused) state. Eedris’ song comes to mind during the fuel subsidy protest. It was prudent that the political and economic armed robbers called political leaders be stopped. The oil cabals and different cabals troubling and stealing made Nigeria a *jagajaga* country. This song was played repeatedly with the artists singing along. The song, together with other forces, made the Federal government reduce the petrol price from one hundred-and-forty-five to ninety-seven *Naira*.

The text and songs of the selected artists are seen as educative, and they created an awareness about the levels of poverty and hunger in Nigeria. Music was used as a powerful weapon to checkmate political leaders and decry the *jagajaga* state of Nigeria, as portrayed by Eedris Abdulkareem. The song elucidates the confusions in the country, with the looting of public funds. *It is the right of the citizens to have and enjoy social amenities, which are desperately under-supplied in Nigeria. Like the song of Fela, Water, light hou e no de, the song motivates protesting citizens to stand firm together.*

## CONCLUSION

This article has explained the different spaces involved in the Occupy Nigeria protest. It elucidates the social media space as the mass mobiliser of the people and then sound spaces as another form of mobility; when the protesting citizens gathered at Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park for a protest rally in Lagos City, Nigeria. The study outlined the role played by social media sources used and the vital role played by music in the mobility and sustainability of the protests, until the Federal government surrendered and kept the petrol subsidy in place. It is evident from the study that protest music motivates the masses to fight their course. The result of the fuel subsidy protest in Nigeria in 2012 exposed the true state of the economy and cabals and individuals who, through government policies, were draining the economic life of the Nigerian nation. The songs also shows that Pidgin English is the language that is generally used and mostly understood by different ethnic groups. The use of pidgin had a de-tribalising effect—although the protests took place in Lagos, which is a Yoruba-speaking state, Nigerians pledged solidarity with one another, irrespective of their locality. Artists, through performance, rose up at this time against the corruption that was ravaging the

country and campaigned against the corruption that was rife in the land. Government duplicity in handling corruption is a cankerworm that needs to be eradicated. The government should know that appropriately channelled fuel subsidies will improve the people's general standards of living.

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