

Celebrating Obama, Performing Blackness: Fuji Artists and the Global American Fantasy of 2009 (Posted on Facebook on 4/1/2020)

This is me on March 30, 2010, a day after I defended my doctoral thesis on the history of prostitution in colonial Lagos at the University of Texas. I was experimenting with a second project on the history of Fuji by giving a presentation on how Fuji artists in Nigeria celebrated Barack Obama's inauguration as America's 44th president in January 2009.

One must look beyond show business to comprehend why Fuji artists in Nigeria would throw a big party to celebrate Obama. These artists did not have to sit in a formal class on Negritude to insert themselves into the long history of pan-Africanism and global Blackness. They didn't have to read Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" to claim Obama as "their own." Their Obama claiming also translates to space (America) claiming, both metaphorically and practically. Fuji artists took the Obama phenomenon into unconventional domains, allowing millions of people disconnected from the grid of modernist discourse of Black cultural affinity to fantasize over the world (aye) and its corresponding timelessness, or what big English people would call temporalities.

Nonetheless, the March 30, 2010 presentation was a complete disaster. I just didn't have the language and training to do a second project on that thing called Fuji in 2010. So, I abandoned the idea and went on to consolidate my hold on colonial Nigerian history by writing books and articles on prostitution, love and emotion, children, guns, and human-animal relations.

The point in emphasis is that ideas do not emerge out of a vacuum. It has taken me a decade to return to Fuji and appreciate that its knowledge potential transcends the debate over genealogy, sound, lyrics, normative performance, sociability, and pedagogy. Indeed, it is a culture lived by millions of people. Fuji is more than music.

The Obama Inauguration Dance of 2009 (like all Fuji dances) remains a danceable dance, even though it is just one episode in the long history of Yoruba artists' fantasy and imagination of the world beyond their immediate physical reach.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnfykO_zxos

Yours truly in Fuji,

Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions!

