

Digital Ethnography in Action: Engaging Sule Ayantade Adigun (Posted on Facebook on 9/20/2020)

Until he joined the ancestors in April 2020, many people didn't know that master drummer Tony Oladipo Allen was co-creator of the Afrobeat rhythm. Fela Kuti has traditionally received all the praise for Afrobeat invention, leaving little or zero credit for others, including the queens, his 27 wives who doubled as his co-performers and collaborators.

What is true about Afrobeat is correct about other genres of music. Money and lack of proper artistic credit (the primary reasons Allen left Fela's band) are also why Fuji artists and their lead drummers are always at loggerheads. This conflict even found expression in a variant of Yoruba creation narrative. Many would say that because "word" (oro) is the first thing that Olorun (God) created, the lead vocalist is the boss. The saying that "there is dance in words, if the leg permits" reinforces the presumed dispensability of the drummer and the evocative power of words. Others would argue that sound came before words, hence the drummer should be the boss. In "ancient" times, we are told, drummers used to be the boss, who hired vocalists--not the other way round. Around 2012, Fuji maestro Saheed Osupa and his lead drummer Sunday Oluperi put this ancient rivalry to the test. The result of this musical battle was inconclusive!

On Monday September 14, I participated in an online livestream show, featuring master drummer Sule Ayantade Adigun. The 52-year-old native of Lanlate performed with K1, Easy Kabaka, and Salawa Abeni. In simple words, you can hear and feel his talking drum in K1's albums of the 1990s through the early 2000s. Adigun would later move to the United Kingdom, where he joined older generations of diaspora performers. Today, he is arguably the best talking drum percussionist in the UK. Adigun's response to my question about why band "boys" absconded during world tours validates some of the things we know about the inequality between percussionists and lead vocalists. His body language, his emotion, his intonation, all did not fail him. He spoke passionately for band "boys" and decried the disproportional distribution of wealth.

Although I have conducted phone interviews and have participated in online group discussion on hero Fuji artists, this first experiment with a unique form of digital ethnography reveals some new things to me. In conventional ethnography, the live audience is limited to the researcher or a few people around. In digital ethnography, the participant pool is wider. De Marshall Entertainment, the UK-based online platform, which hosted the virtual show has 126,000 followers on Facebook. Digital ethnography also poses some methodological challenges, too many to itemize here. Irrespective of its merit, it mustn't be a substitute for "conventional" ethnography. It shouldn't be an excuse to skip fieldwork.

Yours Sincerely in Fuji,
Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions

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