

Documentary Films as Social Activism by Saheed Aderinto (December 16, 2023)

Exactly 13 years ago today, the first phase in the immortality of one of the world's greatest prophets, composers, lyricists, wordsmiths, music intellectuals, and entertainers, commenced through the hard work of his family and fans who have kept his legacies alive. Close to 20 social media platforms and fan clubs are dedicated to Barrister's legacies. And at least 5 weekly online and radio shows where fans use his music to engage in a wide range of subjects. On February 9 and 10, Barryfest, the biennial celebration of Barrister's legacies, will occur in Ibadan, Barrister's ancestral home.

In short, Barrister's legacies are alive in many powerful forms. What Barrister's fans and family are asking for is state-sponsored immortalization projects. If a university arts theatre could be named for a Nobel Laureate, if an airport could be named for a world-famous novelist, if a stadium could be named for a medal-winning athlete, Barrister's family and fans are not asking for too much for a man whose talent created a musical genre worth billions of naira and feeding millions of people, both on the continent and in the diaspora. Fuji, that thing he created, is a major cultural achievement of the Yoruba of Africa and the global African diaspora since the 1970s.

In August 2021, I joined dozens of Barrister's fans and family members to witness the debate over a Bill to immortalize Barrister at the Oyo State House of Assembly in Ibadan. Among other things, the Bill asked that the iconic Cultural Center in Ibadan and a music department in one of the state-owned higher institutions be named for Barrister, the erection of a statue for him in a visible location, and endowed professorship and scholarships. The Bill was successfully passed in August 2021, but the government of Oyo State has not signed it into law. So, all the provisions have not been implemented.

Within this context, I see the Fuji Documentary as more than knowledge production. In addition to telling research-based stories, creating new artistic expressions, while expanding the old, and introducing new textures to the art of filmmaking, I see the Fuji Documentary as an activist project that, in addition to decolonizing a wide range of themes in African studies and challenging how to conduct and share research, also has an immortalization dimension for artists whose stories are narrated, the cast who participated in it, and the general African culture and history, filmically documented.

In this short clip, the final words in "Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder," the first episode of the Fuji Documentary, Hon. Samsondeen Balogun, one of Barrister's children, expressed the wishes of their family and millions of Barrister's fans, across the world. He's optimistic that the government would fulfill its promise to turn Fuji Chamber, the iconic home that Barrister completed in 1981, into a museum. Ideally, Fuji Chamber should be on the National Monument Register, not only for its materiality but for how it shaped popular culture across eras of Nigerian history.

"Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder" is possible, in part, because of the foresight of Hon. Samsondeen Balogun who understands the true value of knowledge in the project of immortalizing his father. He didn't commoditize access to Fuji Chamber, he didn't ask for money to tell his father's story. He's a smart, a very smart man, who understands the true value of building social capital by supporting a project that takes his father's name and legacies into the global

mainstream of knowledge—a powerful site where it didn't exist before, and which equally has the potential to contribute to the sustenance of his father's legacies.

The project to immortalize Barrister has already gone beyond the shores of Nigeria. It's already a global thing—even when the Nigerian federal and state governments are slacking on it. The Fuji Documentary was not produced by a Nigeria-based scholar but by a diasporan. It wasn't produced by artist managers, Fujicians, or even music promoters, but by an academic based abroad. The funds for it didn't come from a state or the federal government, or Fujicians, music promoters, or big media companies but from foreign academic institutions (Florida International University, the Dan David Prize, and Western Carolina University) who understand the transformative power of knowledge.

The point here is that the immortalization initiative for a world-class artist, like Barrister, doesn't have to come from Nigeria, Nigerians, and Nigerian money.

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