

Don't Be a Stranger! (Posted on Facebook on October 28, 2023)

I returned from Johannesburg last Sunday. As expected, I saw some empty shoe boxes in the trash bag. If I fail as a father and a husband, it would be my inability to selfishly convince my family that their shoe colors don't have to match their clothes—among other things. Waka Waka continues with a trip to Dakar, Senegal, to speak at an event organized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). I have begged my family to please not buy anything for me to justify buying something for themselves, while I'm away in Dakar. I don't want an iPhone 15. Thank You.

By the way, èyin fáńsì mi, e mà gbà mí kè. In June, one Fuji artist manager who literarily asked for my mother's head in exchange for an interview with his boss called and asked me to start rushing from my hotel around Unilag to Sango Otta to beg his boss to be featured in the Fuji Documentary. I was like, me?

Ìṣòlá Ojúrábẹ́másàá
Ìṣòlá éédìkoòtà èyàn
Ìṣòlá kan, erú è wón fiftì

Ìṣòlá iyan búrú a f'ájá
Ìṣòlá Ọmọ t'Àdùnní f'òjà àrán pòn

Ìṣòlá t'obinrin kò ló'nà to un blòòsì
óní bí eléyí ò j'é oko eni
asì jé elépòn eni

Eskis mi sa, as in, I should rush to Sango Otta from Akoka to loiter around to beg for an interview. Do I look like a desperado? Do you know the time, physical labor, intellectual costs, and material value of doing a project that has the potential to benefit a wide range of people and communities, including the Fuji world, in diverse ways? Would you ask a white American or European journalist, who doesn't give a damn about you, to rush down from New York or London to see your boss in Sango Otta? You dey whine—in Portable's voice.

If you cannot arrange a proper meeting with your boss, then forget it—I told him! In short, I know when and how to activate my pride. My dignity and humanity won't be compromised in my quest to write a book and produce a documentary on Fuji. Ask about me on the tarmac—Ìṣòlá will never be enslaved by his desire.

This experience is the context of the talk I gave on Thursday to the Florida International University Department of Global and Socio-cultural Studies about community of practice—that is, a group of people who are in solidarity over a common mission for a collective goal. A scholar doesn't automatically become a member of a community of practice by studying them. Rather, it's by seeing the community beyond a group to extract data/information from. They must be more than an object and subject of research—they must be a human whose humanity must come first.

Across the fields in the humanities, the conversation about extractive practices—that is, simply taking data and not connecting with the realities and concerns of the people, communities, and

institutions who provide data, among other things—is a serious one. How do we integrate ourselves into our community of practice without violating ethical issues, while also upholding objectivity in our research, and remaining rigorous intellectuals? Do we need to belong to a community of practice to study them? What should be the responsibility of scholars to their communities of practice?

Academics are in a better position to help communities of practice advance some of their missions, not only because many of us have stable careers, but also because, in some cases, we have the time, expertise, resources, intellectual “independence,” ideological “neutrality,” and network to do what many communities of practice would never be able to do by themselves.

I didn't pay a dime to shoot the Fuji documentary in iconic locations on Nigerian campuses and in Lagos and Ibadan because I'm a scholar, among other qualifications that grant me free and easy access to resources. The Fuji community doesn't have the kind of access I have to the infrastructure of knowledge production and even archives and data about their own past exploits. That's why I see the Fuji Documentary as an intellectual investment in the Fuji community—beyond increasing my own publication count. It's a co-creation of knowledge that benefits everyone involved in diverse ways.

Money is the biggest threat to creating a community of practice in African studies. Convincing a community that thrives on the exchange of cash and patronage that academic research on Fuji can translate into something (usually money) that can benefit them is as hard as trying to convince Abeokuta people that amala dudu (amala gidi) is better than amala lafun (paki)!

The crisis of instant financial gratification, worsened by Nigeria's economic problems, is an endemic one in all walks of life. Do I use my emotional intelligence to tip people (especially old and instrumentalists) after an interview? Yes. But money won't be a condition to grant an interview. Every researcher must master the art of compensation unique to their field and research. Once I pay to have access to an artist, I'm already contradicting myself about the non-commercial nature of the Fuji project. I'll be laying a bad template for other researchers.

To all the people, including Oludasile Fuji (pictured above) supporting The Fuji Documentary, without giving me a headache, THANK YOU. Your reward is not in heaven but on planet Earth!
Yours Sincerely in Fuji:
Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions