

## Filmic Agency: Promoting Local African Writers (Part I) by Saheed Aderinto

It's my pleasure to share a short clip from "Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder," the first episode of The Fuji Documentary, scheduled to premiere at Barryfest, the biennial celebration of the legacies of Fuji creator Sikiru Ayinde Barrister, in February 2024. Here, Ibadan native Elder Dayo Odeyemi, a retired journalist, biographer, and confidant of Barrister interprets what the artist thought about his achievements and lasting legacies.

Elder Dayo Odeyemi is one of the numerous Africa-based writers who have supported scholars over the years. These writers only receive occasional acknowledgment in academic books. For the most part, their contributions are silenced or outrightly stolen by scholars. Worse still, they are rarely invited to campuses or conferences to participate in disseminating the knowledge that scholars create through their labor.

I'm glad that The Fuji Documentary is helping me to address this problem. By its unique character, a documentary film, especially in this digital era, can achieve what would remain in the imagination of a book. Baba Odeyemi had the longest-running time in the 110-minute first episode of The Fuji Documentary, not only because he has written two books on Barrister, but also because he understands the broader history of popular life in Nigeria since the 1960s. In The Fuji Documentary, Baba Odeyemi performed his own text and visualized his own narratives—a form of storytelling that gives expanded meaning and life to written words. Text will never effectively capture the beauty of spoken words, or of speaking two languages simultaneously (code-switching) and advanced poetics and gesticulations that dramatize events of the past.

Instead of being (re) interpreted, The Fuji Documentary allows Baba Odeyemi to self-represent himself and his own work, unfiltered--thus giving him what I have termed "filmic agency." Not even a biopic could achieve what a documentary film would help a writer do. In a biopic, the filmmaker and professional cast get visibility at the expense of the writer who produced the text that makes film production possible.

Because The Fuji Documentary doesn't have a voice-over, I'm able to feature as many writers, Fujicians, artists, and professional actors as possible—thus diversifying voices, perspectives, and visuality to achieve a multiplicity of artistic, epistemic, pedagogic, and aesthetic ends. As it turns out, "Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder," the first episode of The Fuji Documentary is about the five local writers who featured in it, about Barrister who created Fuji, about Fuji, about the Yoruba—as much as about popular life in postcolonial Nigeria.

Because of the particularity of a documentary film, more people will know about these writers and their contributions to the biographical literary genre because The Fuji Documentary, which is subtitled in English, will be used for teaching a wide range of courses in universities across the world and accessible to popular, public, non-academic audience. I have devised a strategy to actively promote the documentary, globally.

But I won't stop there. I will regularly invite the writers to speak at the events associated with the documentary. This kind of appearance is not a mere symbolic recognition of talent and labor—it can also enrich conversations. I'm grateful to have reached a stage in my life and career when I can share honor and spotlights with any deserving person/s without any

consequences for my own global intellectual visibility and financial bottom line. Abi, what else? Alhamdulillah--good health in the veins, a loving family in the heart, amala in the kitchen, Fuji in the stereo, Dan David Prize in the bag. What else? Walahi, abuku lo ku. God Forbid!

Actually, there is something else. I still want the Olubadan (king) to formally recognize my chieftaincy title, The Oka-o-sofo of Ibadan, which my peers gave me in high school. Few things are cooler than being the Chief-in-Charge of all amala restaurants in Ibadan, eating free amala, while making sure buka owners don't want food and abide by ancient culinary standards.

To everyone who has been supporting The Fuji Documentary, I say, Thank You, again.

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