

Filmic Agency: Promoting Local African Writers (Part 3) by Saheed Aderinto (Posted on Facebook on January 5, 2024)

On December 1, 2023, Baaroyin Tunde Busari, a distinguished journalist and publisher of <https://thetabloid.net> shared the process of writing his book “My Journey with Barry Wonder,” at the 66th Annual Conference of the African Studies Association of the United States. His book is neither an autobiography nor a biography. It’s both—an auto/biographical detailing of his encounter with Sikiru Ayinde Barrister from the 1970s through the present decade.

In this short clip from “Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder,” the first episode of the Fuji Documentary, Busari reemphasized what many of us have always known about world-class poets and musicians like Barrister. He remarked that Barrister would have been a professor if he hadn’t gone into music. In drawing a parallel between music production and knowledge production, Busari centers on how ideas are generated and then delivered. Hence, Barrister, like an academic professor, is someone who can easily generate new ideas.

If no single road leads to the marketplace, no single path leads to knowledge. Unlike academic professors who communicate their new ideas in written publications, Barrister, a musical professor, delivers his own with songs. There is knowledge in Fuji, among other world music, not just because it’s a product of condensed experiences and narratives that are verifiable and require research and thoughtfulness, but also because the organizing principles, compositional techniques, and delivery all mirror academic knowledge production in many ways. Barrister’s Fuji is an exercise in knowledge creation.

First, he announces the title of the song, vocally or with percussion—similar to the way academics title their publications. He would then compose a few condensed lines, without rendering much explanation and justification. This is exactly what we call an “abstract” in academic writing—namely 300 words that succinctly and codedly explain the content of a publication without giving too much out.

He would then go into the heart of the song, using anecdotes, histories, everyday narratives to explain what he coded in the abstract and the title. What constitutes references/citations/sources for Barrister are the dense trove of literary texts about the exploits of Yoruba deities and prophets in the Quran, proverbs, public histories, customs, and conventions. The musical percussions are the methodology, not just because they hold the entire text/music knowledge together, but also because they are in themselves original to a particular song. Hence, each song, like every academic paper, devises its unique methods/methodology based on its theme.

Only a liar would claim that their witness is in heaven. Like academic publications, Fuji references are verifiable. You don’t have to agree with the conclusion of a Fujician, but you must respect the thought processes that went into the conclusion. Hence, Fuji knowledge base is not conclusive, and like academic knowledge production could easily be contested and overturned with additional evidence or context. When the public debates the meaning of a percussion or the context of a song, they hold a conversation similar to the ones academics have in classrooms and at conferences. Different knowledge, different publics!

Academic knowledge, like music knowledge, can become an ideology. When people make references to Barrister's music to explain life experiences, they are mobilizing the conventional language that treats text (secular or religious) as "sacred things" because they were composed by geniuses who doubled as prophets.

Why scholars of Africa have not included Barrister, among other indigenous musicians, in the pantheon of indigenous knowledge production in Africa is one of the reasons The Fuji Documentary and book are necessary. For many years, attention to local intelligentsias or indigenous knowledge production has focused on figures like Samuel Johnson, Akiga Sai, Jacob Egharevba, among others who wrote history books despite not having formal academic history training. It is not enough to recognize Fuji as an indigenous knowledge—curating this knowledge in different forms—books, documentaries, exhibitions, digital, etc, and explaining its uniqueness are far more vital.

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