

Fuji: A Documentary

In addition to writing a book on Fuji, I have decided to make a documentary! So, today, I inspected brand new video recording equipment worth \$5,000. My university's summer research grant bought the tools for me. My Department Head rocks!

The decision to produce the Fuji documentary, while also researching and writing the book, is informed by two interrelated reasons. The first one is common sense! Some friends feel that my Facebook posts on Fuji read like text of a documentary. Others suggested that a narrated visual would communicate a significant component of Yoruba history and identity, more effectively, than texts. More so, with the exception of documentary script writing and video recordings, producing the documentary won't increase the overall logistics and cost of research in any significant way. Research is the most difficult and time-consuming part of documentary making. And since I have the research going already, there is no reason I shouldn't produce the documentary. Time is also on my side. With my sabbatical starting in August, I have enough time to shoot the documentary.

Some personal set skills, not initially meant for documentary making, would also help. Over the years, I have experimented with memorizing and presenting my public lectures, off-the-cuff, while looking straight into camera lens. This is an important skill required to narrate a documentary. Moreover, transportation won't be problem. Hibernating in Ibadan is a mini SUV (a 2006 Hyundai Tucson) I bought in the US for \$1,200 and shipped to Nigeria for \$800 in late 2019 for the Fuji book project. E shock you! I drove it across southwestern Nigeria for fieldwork during my five months of Corona-sabbatical last year.

The second impetus aligns with the politics of production of knowledge and access to academic ideas. The Fuji book, like my previous books, will have limited circulation in Nigeria. Even if a Nigerian edition is released by a Nigerian publisher, the very nature of academic book, as a body of compact knowledge communicated to a targeted academic audience, would limit its reach. This has significant implication for knowledge decolonization, which is more than dismantling colonial practices to include challenging modes of knowledge dissemination rooted in unequal access to ideas. For the first time, I'm writing about something that a roadside mechanic, a paraga seller, and the teeming population of socio-economically and politically- marginalized Black Camoru gang (whose daily life is reproduced in the video contest of Slimcase's "Ijoba"), will care about. Colorado--Gbe! Narrating the documentary in both English and Yoruba will expand access and retain nuances that are best communicated in an African language.

I anticipate a couple of methodological and epistemological challenges with the new dimension the Fuji project has taken. Technology shapes fieldwork experience and data collection in significant ways. Recorded voice interview alone poses some challenges to "truth-telling," not to talk of videotaped ones with the technological and human modulation/interventions. Asking people to speak directly to the camera is not necessarily a perfect approach to data gathering. Experience has shown that interviewees tend to respond best to questions when unmodulated--that is, in a free-flowing "natural" process of inter-personal or group communication that allows a researcher to also monitor body language. One possible solution is to conduct two sets of interviews--one for the book and another for the documentary.

In addition to the vexed question of knowledge production is the new digital economy that allows people to make money directly from online contents. It would be hard to convince interviewees that the materials/interviews they are giving are purely for knowledge purpose or for public good. "Paying" for interviews is not what academics love to do or claim to do, even though "tipping" in different forms and in contrasting circumstances is inevitable.

When I started the Fuji project, formally in 2019, I didn't anticipate making a documentary. But this is not surprising to me. I have always allowed my projects to evolve "naturally," by following the directions they take me, rather than restricting them to my original plans. I don't do my projects; my projects do me. I don't write my books; my books write me. The learning curve, especially the technical aspect, of this add-on to my career will be arduous. From late May, I will start a 2-month online class on documentary making and script writing. It should be fun--fingers crossed!

Yours Sincerely in Fuji,

Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions