

Fuji Pedagogy: When a Fujician Became a Professor

On November 30, undergraduate students of the Department of Music at the University of Ibadan participated in the shooting of my documentary with Fujician Easy Sawaba at the zoological garden, located on campus. This experience taught me new things about how audience perception and location shape the quality and delivery of data for knowledge production. When I first interviewed Easy Sawaba in his home in March 2020, he treated me like a journalist, even though I insisted that my research is an academic one and that I'm a professor. In that audio interview, he imagined his audience as the general public—the consumers of interviews collected by journalists.

However, interviewing him on campus in the presence of students produced a completely different outcome. First, it was his first time at the University of Ibadan, even though he rose to prominence in the mid-1980s as an Ibadan-based Fujician. Second, his encounter with students transformed how he saw himself and responded to questions, in Yoruba. In a matter of seconds, he assumed the identity of a teacher, answering questions in a scripted, contextual, coded, and more thoughtful forms. Although he sat in front of me and two recording cameras, he saw the students watching and asking him questions as his main audience. He was performing Fuji knowledge to the students and asserting himself as a high ranking expert in his own field—a Professor of Fuji, in short.

This self-awareness of professional identity didn't start in this decade. When Fuji emerged as a dominant beat in Yoruba soundscape in the 1970s, Fujicians fought stereotypes of being “local,” “native,” and “illiterate.” The interview gave Easy Sawaba a space to articulate a Fuji-centric conception of professionalism that he believed must be lacking in the music curriculum at the University of Ibadan. To reciprocate his gesture for teaching Fuji to them, the students performed his hit song “Message” (1992) at the annual University of Ibadan “Christmas Concert & Carol Sing Along” held at the historic Trenchard Hall on December 21. Their performance will be included in the Fuji documentary.

Why did I shoot the interview with Easy Sawaba at the bird section of the zoo? In the coming weeks, I will write a short note on “Awoko L’oga Olorin: Birds and Fujicians in the Kingdom of Song,” to explain one of the aesthetics of the Fuji documentary.

Appreciation

It is easy to think that I did the University of Ibadan a favor by inviting Easy Sawaba to campus. The reverse is the case. By cooperating with me to invite Easy Sawaba and shoot the documentary with their students, Music Department lecturers (Dr. Ogunsanya, Dr. Ajose, Dr. Owoaje, and Dr. Dada) enhanced my project in a remarkable way. Zoological Garden Director Dr. Kehinde Popoola waived 45 entry tickets—thus reducing my research expenses—because he saw the transformative impact of my project on the students. This experience agrees with my long-standing conviction that students, regardless of location, are not empty vessels, but reciprocal thinkers in the dissemination and production of knowledge.

Yours Sincerely in Fuji:

Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions