

Fuji and Social Class: A Conversation with Otunba Adisa Osiefa (February 13, 2023)

After nine years of living and studying in England, Otunba Adisa Osiefa returned to Nigeria in 1973 as the country was rebuilding after a devastating 30 months of civil war and undergoing an unprecedented economic explosion made possible by wealth from the global oil boom. Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Business Administration from Manchester Metropolitan University and Liverpool John Moores University overqualified him to join the thriving class of high cash-earning, upper-layer urban Nigerian educated elites, which included top business executives, lawyers, industrialists, building contractors and engineers, and corporate bankers. In addition to directly patronizing art, these Lagos-based socialites funded much of the business enterprises, including but not limited to nightclubs and hotels, records distribution and label companies, recording studios, and the advertisement economy, which paved the way for the efflorescence of old and new musical forms in the 1970s. Most of them were Yoruba and Christians. Their favorite music was Juju, not Fuji, Afrobeat, Reggae, or any of the so-called classless noisy palongo and "native" beats of the inner cities and the hinterland.

It is within this context that a highly educated Yoruba, born in Epe in 1942, became one of the first business executives and patrons of Fuji. Because of the low enrollment of Yoruba Muslims in Western-styled schools, Christian elites dominated the upper echelon of formal bureaucracy in the colonial and immediate independence eras. Hence, Yoruba-Muslims in the class of Otunba Osiefa were very few in the 1970s. Most of them would rather patronize Juju than Fuji, which carried the stereotype of razz music. Because music was/is central to class-making and identity formation, the kind of music people listen to could shape access to the domain of power, privilege, and authority.

By the late 1970s, Otunba Osiefa would migrate from a lover of Juju to a die-hard fan of Barrister's Fuji. He was drawn to Fuji because of the creativity of Barrister who was making a frantic effort to turn Fuji into a cosmopolitan genre through the syncretic blending of sounds of diverse genealogies and the cultivation of educated upper-class culture and lifestyle. Otunba Osiefa's relationship with Barrister went beyond art patronage. They became true friends, took chieftaincy titles together, established the famous "Committee of Brothers" –one of the coolest social clubs of the 1980s together—and directly shaped normative notions of consumption, fashion, self-representation, and socialization. Adorning Otunba Osiefa's living room is a 1980s photo of Barrister, who lives in his heart, even 13 years after their physical separation. My interview with Otunba Osiefa ties into one of the central aims of my book and documentary projects on Fuji. To fully harness what constitutes the popular in African popular culture, we need to turn our attention from artists to numerous people, communities, demographics, constituencies, and elastic publics. Patrons like Otunba Osiefa have a lot to offer in the broader history of Yoruba's most dominant popular culture since the 1970s.

Appreciation

In May 2020, Dr. Habeeb Sanni of Lagos State University, in his characteristically affirming tone, said to me during a phone call, "Professor, you must interview Otunba Osiefa. He knows a lot about Fuji and social life in Lagos." I shelved my interview with Otunba Osiefa because I was busy with other interviews. Then came the passing of Alhaji Buhari Oloto, one of the greatest Fuji fans of all eras, in July 2021. At that moment, I knew I must close in on Otunba Osiefa, quickly. I was able to finally interview Otunba Osiefa in his Lagos/FESTAC home in November

2021 because Otunba [Okunola Olatokunboh Muhilly](#) (Oludasile Fuji) made repeated calls on my behalf and convinced Omo soki o do t'ana that my research is significant to the Fuji community.

Thank you, Abolore. Omo Alfa nla to un ya igba ojule loojo.

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