

Inside Fuji Chamber: Memory and Memorialization in African Musical Art (Posted on Facebook on August 19, 2021)

My heart trembled as I was led into the home that has filled my imagination since I first saw it on television in 1989. Fuji Chamber, the private residence and later mausoleum, of Fuji creator Barrister, remains the most iconic building in Fuji history. Located in Isolo area of Lagos, when Fuji Chamber was completed in 1981, not only was it the most beautiful home of any Yoruba, and arguably Nigerian artist, it became the standard for measuring aspirational goals for up-and-coming musicians.

Fuji Chamber is more than bricks and concretes. In its entirety, it's a socio-political space that validates the significance of social history of architecture in Africa. When Barrister publicly declared that Fuji Chamber is where Fuji Constitution is written, he was not exaggerating. The veneration of elite power, musical patronage exemplified in the gatherings of the best voices, and the euphoria of artistry all created narratives and stories that are codified and synchronized into songs and beats. From new to established artists, the eclipse of stardom was incomplete until a pilgrimage was made to Fuji Chamber.

Conducting interview in the most important home in Fuji history gives legitimacy to my book and documentary projects. But it also raises some methodological questions about how spaces of encounter shape story telling. It would be hard to account for the impact of unseen forces in research methodology. But I felt the presence of Barrister, not simply because we were talking by his graveside. I have interviewed people (including his lead drummer and band captain Aderoju Yekini, public relations consultant and biographer Elder Dayo Odeyemi, and veteran journalist and author of the first known book on Fuji Wale Ademowo) about Barrister in different locations.

But in this case, I felt Barrister himself was listening to us. At some point during the interview, I thought he took over from me and began to lead discussions that I didn't prepare for. I thought he was telling me: "See this Idiot. What do you think you know about me? This is what you should know about me." I thought I was interviewing the ancestor himself, who was manifesting through himself and through his son. Jaw-dropping art works, representative pictures, furniture, dresses, Quran and other paraphernalia of Islam, earthwares, everything, I mean everything in Fuji Chamber open the floodgate of the past. But none surpassed feeling the energy of an ancestor.

Barrister is Fuji, Fuji is Barrister. It will be disrespectful to the living and the ancestors to lump his story into other episodes of the documentary. Thus my decision to do a stand-alone episode titled, "Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder." Barrister's home should be catalogued as one of the most important monuments in Nigeria and a weeklong yearly celebration (in the fashion of Felabration) should be institutionalized in his honor. "Barrister Museum of Fuji" should be built somewhere in Lagos where he built his career or Ibadan, his ancestral home.

Special gratitude goes to Barrister's son, Honorable Samsondeen Balogun, for granting me interview and for giving me free and unrestricted access to Fuji Chamber. In addition to paying for the petrol that supplied electricity for the interview, he bought drinks for my crew (myself, Tolani Onike, and Busuyi Adeleye) and answered difficult questions about his family. A Chartered Accountant and graduate of the Lagos State University, Honorable Balogun will be contesting to serve the people of Oyo State in the Federal House of Representatives in 2023. I'm equally grateful to Alhaji Rasaq Balogun, Barrister's first child, for facilitating the interview. And Alhaji Ismail Adesigbin for making the initial contact on my behalf.

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