

Of “Ordinary Things” that Make Big Difference: Unveiling My New Home Office

My new home office is now fully set! All the things or objects in it tell stories, are representative of my trade, have an emotional attachment, are nostalgic, or stand for a personal perspective about life, family, and work. They range from the Dell, all-in-one computer, I owned from 2010 to 2020. It’s now an artifact I would remember for helping me to complete 8 books. Other electronic artifacts--two travel laptops, a camcorder, an audio recording tape, and old phones, used between 2005 and 2019 narrate itineraries across Nigerian archives during fieldwork.

The horse mask is an artistic imprint of my latest book on human-animal relations, as much as about the identity of the animal that complementarily combines aristocracy and elegance with rebellion and resistance. In short, the noblest of all beasts! The drums and percussion instruments (gangan, iya ilu, sakara, omele, bata, sekere) are the main ensemble of orthodox Fuji, the subject of my current book and documentary projects. In a deeper sense, the rhythms of the drum mirror humans’ daily order of ups and downs, happiness and sorry, fast and slow, gentle and rough, and everything in between.

Hanging over the electronics artifacts shelf is a drawing of Harriet Tubman’s “Underground Railroad.” It reminds me never to build a personal or professional relationship of servitude with anyone, regardless of the degree of their vulnerability. Nothing must qualify me to brag about exerting power over another human’s freedom, opportunities, and life trajectory, and take direct actions to undermine their ability. I must fight every impulse of a slave master within me. I installed a mirror, not to admire my aging face, but to see through myself, deliberately. We changed the registration plates of our cars to Florida. The old North Carolina plates keep the region, for which I will forever remain grateful, in my heart.

Other objects appear to have easy meanings on the surface but are deep beneath. I named the female art beside the bata drum “Segilola,” a “prostitute” who featured in my book on the history of sexuality. The story of the “real” Segilola Eleyinju Ege, Elegberun Oko L’Aiye (“Segilola Endowed with Fascinating Eyes, the Sweetheart of a Thousand and One Men”) was first told in a thirty-chapter serialized article in Akede Eko (Lagos Herald), a leading bilingual newspaper in 1929–1930. It was later published in 1931 as the first Yoruba novel.

The 1965 microfilm reader, which I still used last week, revolutionized my scholarship. Having a microfilm reader at home for 11 years quantitatively increased my primary source database through colonial newspapers, and the textuality and African-centeredness of my writing because of the unique character of colonial literary culture. The name badges I received at academic events are all hanging beside the bata drum. They are about the nostalgia of the movement of my physical and intellectual bodies across the world as I proselytize knowledge.

Then the books accumulated over the years. My library collections mirror all my book projects of the past and the present. I rarely buy popular books. Why should I keep a book on “How to Make the Best Pizza” when there is presently no book on “How Amala Changed the World?” All the archival materials I used for my past projects are in the 10 large boxes behind the recliner, where I take my daily mandatory nap-- to reset myself and change my rhythm.

The transparent book glass parades all my eight books! Each time I go to bed with a body ache after meeting my daily word count on the Fuji project, or pissed off by people who refused to

give me interviews, or unable to think through an idea effectively, I want to look through the glass case and remember that if I can do all those books, the Fuji project shouldn't kill me. The painting of two women playing ayo olopon reminds us that history and African creative life do not support the masculinization of the African experience that colonialism introduced.

So, all is set, remaining just one thing. I need to commission a gelede masquerade mask from Nigeria. I'll name it: Igbanladogi. I should write about how (re)reading Babatunde Lawal's book on gelede for the chapter on "Political Fuji" in my new book project exposed me to new things about Yoruba satire and the metaphor of power. The customized curtain is from the talented adire artist [Omoge Ifeoluwa Ojo](#). She is taking orders! (+2349064184346). It arrived from Nigeria yesterday through Zheyuan Deng, a graduate student at the University of Florida, who served as a human courier!

Yours Sincerely in History,
Isola Atoko waa gbowo nle