

## **Of Treasure and Dirt: Excavating the Hidden Past of Fuji (Posted on Facebook 05/27/2020)**

For the past two weeks, my new "home" has been the repository of the Ibadan office of the Nigerian Television Authority, the oldest TV station in Africa. I made myself a simple yellow coat, a matching face mask, and a temporary work station inside the repository. The dust is thick; the heat is excruciating. Located in a basement, the repository does not have proper ventilation. I pour water on my over-heating head every 30 minutes, so I don't die in active service!

This discomfort is frequently interrupted by incredible discoveries, justifying why the risk is worth taking. From the first film reels of the 1950s to the compact disk of the 2000s, and from the original posters of entertainments, arts, and concerts to newspapers spanning many decades, the repository opens the door to Nigeria's creative past. If reading the original text of Yoruba news broadcast restored flashing memories, holding physical video tapes of Fuji concerts and studio performances gives order to my roving ideas.

The NTA did more than broadcasting—it held concerts in its large open space, gave awards to Fuji artists (including K1 who was crowned "King of Fuji" there in 1993), and shaped people's musical taste in significant ways. I saw original promotional folders made by Sony Music to promote Adewale Ayuba's "Bonsue Fuji." Merenge was surprised that I found a story of how an hotelier allegedly seized his instruments in June 1994, from the Vanguard newspaper.

Newspapers do not forget things! This rumor, like other materials I uncovered, would shape ethnographic research, allowing me to pose questions about the past that artists might have even forgotten!

The newspaper collection of the repository is impressive. For many, working with newspapers is the most tedious of research work because it involves searching for mostly obscure issues in a dense trove of text. However, the pain is bearable if newspapers are treated as one of the most expansive textual primary sources of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. When I search the newspapers, I just don't look for a specific topic of interest, but read the entire issue to gain insight into the general political, economic, social, and cultural life of the people of the past. Even the narrowest research topic cannot be understood outside the broader experiences of the time.

For instance, to make sense of the firm internationalization of Fuji from the late 1980s one must understand how the Structural Adjustment Program opened the floodgate of new migration to Europe and North America. Hence, art, migration, and the political economy of underdevelopment are deeply connected. In addition, Fuji did not exist in isolation from other genres of popular and expressive culture. One must understand Juju, Highlife, Raggae, Afrobeat, inside out, to realize the path that Fuji took. So, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister wore a suit, not agbada, to the 1990 Nigerian music awards night where he won the "Best Fuji Artist of the Year" because Fuji was competing with other genres of music that professed "enlightenment" and drew a large crowd from the so-called educated people. For SAB, the politics of self-fashioning, space-belonging, and the body was as important as his creative capacity!

Yours sincerely in Fuji,  
Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions!