

Please, Introduce Me Properly! By Saheed Aderinto (Posted on Facebook on April 13)

I played a prank on Professor Adebayo Oyebade who invited me to give the opening keynote lecture of the 9th Africa Conference at Tennessee State University last week. I accused him of not introducing me properly and then went ahead to render a self-profile, not the familiar one that people would expect, but an assortment of praise poems of my native Ibadan from three different artists, across centuries of creative readaptations. Who am I without a tribute to the people on whose shoulder I'm standing?—I asked a rhetorical question to preface the keynote. My decision to perform a praise poem fulfilled something more than stylistic and epistemic purposes—what's the value of a keynote address on Fuji that doesn't include poetry performance? Beyond the fact that it's commercial music from which several forms, including African Hip Hop, have been stealing, Fuji is popular culture also because Yoruba poetry has an emotive effect on people across generations and classes.

For millions of Yoruba born and raised in the inner cities of southwestern Nigeria in the 1970s through 1980s, Fuji was their first unpaid teacher of Yoruba literary traditions and Islamic pedagogy. Even when they became more cosmopolitan and their music preference turned heavily Western as they journeyed through life, Fuji was/is the pathway through which they retrace and rediscover their Yorubanity—and by extension, their humanity. If you doubt that Fuji is a faith or a religious text, join the WhatsApp or Facebook Group of high-ranking Fujicians, especially Sikiru Ayinde Barrister.

Why do people across social classes in the 21st century still connect with a poem originally composed for the military oligarchs of the 19th? The elasticity, transgenerationality, and transhistoricality of praise poetry are why a generation of culture producers in 2023 would connect to an unbroken chain of narratives and experiences dating to centuries—even when the circumstances under which the poems were originally created—don't exist anymore or have become anachronistic.

Hence, when Fuji emerged in the 1970s, it built on the timelessness of praise poetry that blurs the boundaries of era and class, creating an imagined community of faithful consumers, performers, and re-creators of flexible, relatable, and inexhaustible texts. Language, poetry, and orality, I argue, are the strongest bonds that bind every generation of culture shapers and producers. A Fujician can do without a lot of things, but not praise poetry.

Among other things, my poetry performance for the Africa Conference further convinced me to stick to my retirement plan. When my time in America is over, I'll return to Ibadan, my own retirement Bahamas, to form a real Fuji band. Every weekend, I'll perform recreational Fuji in beer parlors/hotels/and the mosafuneto of the innermost lungu of Molete, where Ibadan aunts and uncles seek superior or alternative erotic pleasure—away from the eagle eyes of busybodies. You must be so unkind to trail a fun seeker to a mosafuneto. What else do you want? Mo-ti-sa-fun-e-to!

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