

There is Something inside Something that is called Something: Explaining Fuji Epistemology to the General Public (Posted on Facebook on September 19, 2021)

I wasn't prepared to speak to the public about my Fuji project when I arrived at the studio of Oludasile Fuji, the most famous online program memorializing Fuji creator Barrister, on September 2. The plan was to record the show and observe host Otunba Okunola Olatokunboh Muhilly do his thing. About thirty minutes into the program, Otunba announced to the audience that a professor working on Fuji is in the studio to speak about his project. The audience and host didn't expect a Professor of History (one from America for that matter) to be interested in Fuji—a musical tradition stereotyped as belonging to illiterates, touts, and indecent people!

My heart accelerated, not because I don't know what to say, but how to say it. I had the option of speaking "standard" Yoruba, like a Western educated Yoruba. Or speak Ibadan like Ibadan, who is a professor. The "standard" Yoruba is the one BBC Yoruba compels educated Yoruba to speak—with all its modulated artificiality! I think that people will speak better Yoruba if they speak as Lagosians, Ijebu, Ekiti, Akure, Ibadan, Ijesa, Ife, etc. The real art and beauties in language art come to life when people's authentic personality radiates through their "native" and sub-ethnic dialects and natural speech pattern. For instance, when Ibadan speak Yoruba, they go beyond communicating their thoughts, to expressing certain nuances that some would consider inappropriate. The so-called "aso ba je" or verbal excesses that Ibadan are known for, are in some (not all) cases, sincere expression of obvious or hidden facts or the audacity to speak the truth. Depending on context, location, and circumstances, asobaje is not necessarily a vice, but a virtue of calling a spade a spade in a provocative way. Asobaje is one of the arts of being Ibadan!

Eventually, I chose to speak Ibadan, and be myself. Why should I speak "standard" Yoruba in a show hosted in Ibadan and in memory of an Ibadan child? By their nature, Yoruba online shows entail performance of oral art. The digital interface itself is a two-way performative spectacle (Ba se un wo'ran, ni 'ran un wo ni). During the interview, which lasted for over one hour, I tried to entertain the audience with my Ibadan, while emphasizing that our self-realization shapes how we produce knowledge. And that one cannot be fake in real life and expect to be an original thinker in the intellectual world. The knowledge potentials in Fuji remains undervalued, I emphasized, because Fuji has very few academic thinkers who can speak for it in local and global knowledge circles. Of all the words I used to describe the archive of Fuji, I loved this one that came without a prompt: (Nkan be ninu Nkan, ti nje Nkan/There is Something inside Something that is called Something).

People who are familiar with how Hip Hop became an integral component of African American studies curriculum in universities would easily understand my politics of Fuji. The Black American intellectual warriors and professors who fought for formal recognition of Hip Hop knowledge also enjoy the music and saw themselves as part of the community of fans and artists. They couldn't have successfully done it by being pretentious or hiding under the skin of another human. Harnessing the knowledge potentials of Fuji requires rethinking the evolution of the notion of "good" or "bad" music from the perspectives of class, gender, education, religion, and morality, etc.

Appreciation: I thank Otunba Okunola Olatokunboh Muhilly for inviting me to speak to the public about my project and for providing contacts of knowledgeable people. This experience taught me new things about my project and about myself. I didn't have to explain to Otunba why Fuji needs its own intellectuals. He didn't behave like some artist managers who are unable to see the value of my project beyond immediate personal financial gains.

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