

Wasiu Ojola of Ede: A Local Artist Per Excellence (Posted on Facebook on 4/17/2020)

Like music, alcohol changes everything when it kicks in. Wasiu Ojola and I involuntarily increased our gesticulation and diversified our rhetoric while downloading Goldberg. I don't like Goldberg, but I managed it because Ojola, who paid for the drinks, offered it. My close friends know what I drink! The remaining four members of my gang, including Sikiru Yusuf who facilitated the interview, took "soft" drinks.

No two interviews are the same. In the case of Ojola, I wanted to understand, among other things, how he would define "success" within the context of his community (Ede), time, and the expectations of his fans. Now that he has completed his first private home, Ojola would like to perform hajj, one of the tenets of Islam, even before visiting North America and Europe. It is dishonorable for an Alhaji to live in a rented apartment—a respectable one would be "Aribidesi." In keeping with tradition, he would insert two "golden Mecca teeth" as evidence of encountering Islam from its original home. Of course, a big party (Sabaka night) would welcome him from the "House of God."

Ojola's hajj evidence further gives weight to the current debate that the Internet may be overrated in the story of identity construction in Africa. When I probed further that live social media video would be a perfect evidence that he performed hajj, he responded loudly: "Ede people won't believe me. They would think I stopped at Osodi and did not enter any airplane." Only the golden Mecca teeth and mentioning of popular co-pilgrims, not social media or live video, would suffice as evidence of hajj. Like any serious artist, Ojola knows his fans—majority are not on social media and are predominantly Muslims.

By focusing on Lagos and Ibadan and on the so-called superstars alone, popular narratives about Fuji have neglected thousands of local artists across Nigeria and the diaspora. Indeed, Ojola's career compels us to rethink what constitutes success and artistic stardom. For one, he does not have to produce a musical record to be popular in his town, he does not have to drive a Mercedes Benz to be respected, and he does not need Tunde Ednut, among other social media influencers, to feel accomplished. Indeed, artistic stardom is not transcultural--every society and generation must define their own standards of public recognition.

Local artists who are not connected to the high Fuji grid of Lagos and Ibadan have a lot to offer in a historians' drive to account for the continuity of the past in the present. To Ojola, tradition is not an aberration. This explains why his booking office doubles as a beer parlor and why he defines hajj authenticity, home ownership, and sequence of success in the 1970s and 1980s

terms.

