

What is African in African Philosophy? An Encounter with a Fuji Philosopher (Posted on Facebook on January 5, 2022)

Until her passing in 2018, Professor Sophie Oluwole was the most influential scholar of African philosophy that I know. She committed her career to decolonizing academic philosophy by studying indigenous Yoruba thoughts and publishing books on Ifa and Orunmila. Oluwole wasn't a computer desk or a book philosopher. Rather, her scholarship relied heavily on ethnography to the point that she later became an Ifa priestess. Her career path convinced me that I can still sing Fuji, professionally!

But what constitutes African philosophy is beyond indigenous African ideals and ideologies, dating to centuries of civilization. There is equally an African philosophy that is deeply influenced by Islam. And no other artistic source in the public domain makes this clear than the Fuji of the 1970s and 1980s. Barrister, not any other Fuji artist, epitomizes a Yoruba-Muslim conception of African philosophy. On December 1, I had a great interview with Hajia Fodheelat Oreoluwa Dikko, author of "The Philosophy of Dr. Sikiru Ayinde Barrister." Dikko, a native of Ilorin and an accountant, believes that Barrister was/is a philosopher based on the preaching on ethics, wisdom, and the contradictions of everyday existence in his songs. Dikko's book is not an academic text. Rather, it's a compilation of Barrister's philosophical perspectives, with English translation and commentaries.

Dikko's claim that Barrister is a philosopher shouldn't be debated. The oral and written texts of the Yoruba and Islam that Barrister used have been in existence for centuries. Curating them for public consumption in the 20th and 21st centuries involved identifying common grounds in the two civilizations. Indeed, Islam took a strong root among the Yoruba partly because the early converts were more interested in the points of convergence than the points of divergence in Yoruba and Islam. Revelation and faithfulness, kindness and good conduct, sacrifices and worship, misdeeds and repercussion, death and immortality, tribulations and triumphs are dominant features in the stories/lived experiences of Yoruba orisas and the Muslim prophets. It is this same tradition of seeing the world through multiple, yet complementary lens, that allowed artists like Barrister to manage the contradictions of living inside dual spiritual bodies. One minute, Barrister is unleashing Quranic verses in Arabic, another second, he's mobilizing Ogun's survival in the "wilderness of life" to justify why Orunmila and the terrestrial mothers should protect him from his enemies.

Appreciation

How do you make a documentary without breaking the bank or losing your mind? Answer: know the right people in the right places! I was able to shoot, free-of-charge, in the brand-new Museum of Natural History at the University of Lagos because my very good friend Professor Yetunde Zaid who is the University Librarian, and Museum Curator Dr. Olatunde Barber facilitated approval by the central administration. After the interview, I ordered Uber to take us from campus to the train station, 7 miles away in Yaba. Instead of coming to our location around Unilag main library, the Uber driver went to Yaba Tech library! We had 30 minutes to catch the train. I placed a call to Dr. Felix Ajiola, who left everything he was doing to take us to the train station. Unlike some people I won't mention, veteran journalist Elder Dayo Odeyemi didn't ask for money in exchange for Dikko's contact. I didn't have to buy Dikko's book because journalist Tunde Busari allowed me to steal his own copy. Without Dikko, the interview

wouldn't have taken place. Grab your copy of Dikko's book. Call: 07034484445 and 08023528235.

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