

# **Introduction: Requiem – Alàgbà, Dr., Prince, Mosòbalájé Ajíbádé Àkàndé Adébáyò Fálétí, OON, DLitt., FNAL, JP, a.k.a ‘Pa Fálétí’ to Some; ‘Bàbá Fálétí’ to all and Sundry.**

Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith  
Retired Professor of English, Humanities & Women Studies  
Goodrich Scholarship Program  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
University of Nebraska@Omaha  
pamelasmith@unomaha.edu

## **Introduction**

What is in a name? It is a testament to everything relational, from the ceremonial to the conventional to the familial! The progression from ‘Knowing of a person’ (*mímọ ẹ̀ni kan*); ‘knowing something about that person’ (*mímọ̀ ǹnkan nípa ẹ̀ni náà, mímọ ẹ̀ni náà*); to ‘knowing that person well, personally’ (*mímọ ẹ̀niyàn náà dáadáa*) describes the various levels and depths of measuring knowledge of and/or familiarity with that person. It determines and builds the foundation of relationships. Thus, the trajectory of relationships run the gamut from having heard once of or about the person’s name *mo ti gbó orúkọ yẹn rí* (I have heard of that name before); to knowing a smattering bit of information associated with that name, *bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni, mo mọ̀ ǹkan díẹ̀ nípa orúkọ yẹn* (yes, I know a little about that name/person); to having a good knowledge of the person through study of his/her published works, *mo ti ka àwọn ìwé wọn; mo mọ̀ iṣẹ̀ wọn dáadáa* (I have read his/her works; I am quite familiar with them); to intimate, first-hand knowledge of and familiarity with the person, works and all, the *Mo mọ̀ wọn dáadáa* (I know him/her very well, personally), indeed, at the formal and familial levels of relationships.

Thanks to the immense, providential endowment trumpeted on the airwaves, and flashed on screen, and showcased on makeshift stages from hamlet, to village, to town squares and city halls, and planted in almost every household so the gen-X and gen-Y Yorùbá can, in varying degrees, claim knowledge of and familiarity with Bàbá Fálétí, the man, the artist, the actor, the prodigious poet, indeed, the half-sung, consummate bard, the cultural icon, beloved son of Yorùbáland.

With even greater gratitude to the dear friend who, as the story goes, having read, at Fálétí's request, a lengthy poem Fálétí had penned in English, advised his B.A. honors-in-English friend to start writing in Yorùbá. Thankfully, Fálétí heeded his friend's daring, but honest friendly advice, switching his language choice to Yorùbá, and thus making us all heirs to a lasting legacy undoubtedly steeped in and shaped by quintessential Yorùbá traditions.

### **A 'Man of Many Seasons'**

Bàbá Fálétí, 'Pa' to the more learned, was an iconic 'man of all seasons,' a tri-lingual and bi-cultural two-sided coin, a perfectly melded, well-tempered, well-groomed, soft-spoken gentleman. Playwright, novelist, essayist, critic, radio journalist, humanist, translator, social critic, purveyor of Yorùbá culture and language, poet par excellence – the mile-long resumé is replete with many notables, some of which began even before he stepped foot in a formal western schoolroom. Baba Fálétí's story is one dominated by enviable creative invention and literary genius, which began formally as early as his teenage years. Even though he had been able to read *Ìwé Kíkà Èkẹta*, (*Primary Reader*, level 3) of the standard (CMS) primary school text, this gifted son of a certified oral poet and entertainer father at the court of Aláàfin Şìyanbòlá Ládìgbòlù (1911-1944) did not begin his formal Primary School education until the late age of 9. But sealed in this early setback caused by his family's inability to pay his school fees, was an ingenious and creative streak, waiting to emerge. At age 15, he began collecting *oríkì* praise poems of hunters, having been influenced by a chance encounter with D. A. Qbasá's *Oríkì Orilẹ̀* (lineage praise poetry). He began teaching at 16, saving his earnings to fulfill a future dream of a formal education, and by age 17, he had written his collection of 100 proverbs. A year later, he had turned the disappointing "not-yet" message of the kindergarten and pre-secondary years into invention years of pure creativity when he launched a successful operatic and acting career by forming the Ọyọ Youth Operatic Society in 1949.

He eventually attended secondary school at Ibadan Boys High School from 1951 to 1955, first enrolling as one of 234 students in evening classes known as "continuation classes" and later, after making the cut as one of only fourteen

students who was moved to normal day classes. It was here, as one of two “oldest boys in the class,” that Fálétí engaged in a whirlwind of acting and writing and teaching activities. It took another ten years for Fálétí to finally realize his long-held dream of pursuing a college education between 1965 and 1968. During this time, in typical “late-bloomer” fashion, Fálétí took a leave-of-absence from his position at the Information Service Office to attend the University of Dakar, Senegal, where he earned a certificate of proficiency in French Language and Civilisation, followed in 1971 with a B.A. in English with honors from the University of Ibadan. In that same year, Fálétí swelled his hard-earned bragging rights with a Certificate in T.V. production, earned from the Radio Netherlands Training Center in Hilverum, The Netherlands. Notably, by the time Fálétí had lettered in this late-bloomer higher education, he already had a prodigious output of creative works to his name – a few in English, but the majority mostly written in Yorùba.

For instance, Fálétí wrote his prize-winning “È dá kò L’Àròpin” during his senior year of high school. This work earned him the 1955 Western Nigeria Festival of Arts Award – one of several such prizes in poetry which he won for three consecutive years. The next five years were filled with a flurry of award-winning creative writings – plays, short stories, volumes of poetry, essays and articles on Yorùbá institutions, poetry readings on the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), including three of his major works, *Nwón Rò Pé Wèrè Ni* (1956), *Ogun Àwítélẹ̀* (1956), and *Ọmọ Olókùn Eṣin* (1959), which were published some ten years later between 1960 and 1969.

Fálétí spent over twenty-years in cinema, news-casting, and program production, experiences which afforded him the opportunity to not only write, produce and direct several plays, but also to produce a number of Yorùbá traditional culture programs on television and popularize serialized readings on radio. As an avid exponent of Yorùbá traditional culture and creativity, he not only studied Yorùbá poetry formally under the Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme headed by Professor S. O. Bíòbákú in 1962, but he also taught Advanced Yorùbá language at the Institute of Extramural Studies, University of Ibadan and edited *Olókun*, an intellectual journal in Yorùbá, from 1963-1965.

His published literary works, numbering in the hundreds, include: several essays and articles on Yorùbá Institutions in *Olókun* and *Àwòrèrùn*; a list of creative works of poetry, prose, drama and script writing – “Eda Ko L’Àròpin” (poetry, 1965); *Nwón Rò Pé Wèrè Ni* (drama, 1965); *Ogun Àwítélẹ̀* (prose, 1965); *Ọmọ Olókùn Eṣin* (prose, 1969); *Ìdààmú Páádì Mínkàilù* (drama, 1971); *Baṣòrun Gáà* (drama, 1971); *Ewi Adébaýo Fálétí I & II* (poetry, edited by Professor Olatunde Olatunji 1982); *Adéjoké Ará Ìjilẹ̀je* (collection of children’s stories, also edited by Professor Olatunde Olatunji). His published and unpublished documentaries, film scripts and film and video productions -- a

number of which he either directed and/or acted in in substantial roles on stage, Radio or Television -- include *Ọmọ Olókùn-Eṣin* (filmed as *Ìjà Òminira* by Love Films), *Ọbàtálá, Ò'Duà Heritage* (a Galaxy Television Production), *Àgbò Méjì* (video, 1990), *Ọkúnrin Tí Ó Ju Ọkúnrin Lọ* (video, 1994), *Àfọnjá* (screenplay, REDEL Productions – 2001), *Mágùn --Thunderbolt* (Screenplay, 2001), *Baṣọrun Gáà* (video, 2003), *Ṣawo Ṣẹ̀gbẹ̀rì* (screenplay, 2004). Fálétí's creative works include an extensive Dictionary of Yorùbá Names – Pronunciation and Meaning, a screenplay of *Kírìjì and Kúrunmí*, epics of *Látòòsà* and *Kúrunmí*, two great Yorùbá warriors. He acted in several “Best Authentic Yorùbá movies” such as *Okùn Ifẹ́ Yi* (2007), *Èrù Amúkùún (Sins of our Fathers* 2016), *Ìwògbé (Mirror Gbengbeleké* 2016), and the list goes on and on. In addition to creative writing, Fálétí remained active in research, intellectual presentations, academic, public and civic debates on the state of broadcasting, drama, and Yorùbá culture. In his post-retirement years from academia, Fálétí turned mainly to film and the screen both as writer and actor, partnering with his colleague and compere, Alàgbà Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá, to play historical roles in those 19<sup>th</sup> century epics such as *Àfọnjá* (2002) and *Baṣọrun Gáà* (2004) and such screen classics as *Ṣaworoide*, *Ṣawo Ṣẹ̀gbẹ̀rì* (2005), and *Thunderbolt Mágùn* that have become synonymous with his name. His *Baṣọrun Gáà* received commendation at Breeze Awards in London for best epic movie in 2004.

His erudition, imprinted with both traditional *ìjìnlẹ̀* Yorùbá lore (the classics) and the fundamentals of Western letters, is the much-needed legacy to which the culturally confounded generation-X and generation-Y of Yorùbás can indeed look forward.

As with every aspect of his life and achievements, Bàbá Fálétí unsurprisingly garnered a respectable list of pioneering “firsts,” among them as Africa's first newscaster; first stage play director; first film editor and librarian with the WNTV/WNBS, Africa's first TV station (now NTA), making him first Yorùbá presenter on TV and radio. He served as General Manager of the Broadcasting Corporation of Ọ̀yọ́ State (BCOS) also known as Radio Ọ̀yọ́; and was Nollywood films director and actor. For Bàbá Fálétí, the lines between the professional and the voluntary/non-professional are non-existent as long as the endeavor was being undertaken to promote indigenous cultures. A forerunner in every way of all things cultural and artistic to uplift Yorùbá culture, Bàbá Fálétí served as pioneer director of Ọ̀yọ́ State Directorate of Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), now known as National Orientation Agency (NOA). As cultural historian and linguist, he translated Nigeria's national anthem from English into Yorùbá. More importantly, he translated the speeches of (past military) presidents into

Yorùbá for the edification of the rank and file. He also published a full-length dictionary of formal or official use of Yorùbá names in 2005.

In recognition of his reputation as an unparalleled repository of every aspect of Yorùbá culture, Bàbá Fálétí was honored with visiting appointments twice by the Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólówọ̀ University (OAU). First, he was invited to serve as a Visiting Lecturer in the 1970s in the Department of African Languages and Literatures to strengthen the department's cultural curriculum. Again, from 1998-2001, he was appointed as Visiting Research fellow at the Institute of Cultural Studies where he joined his compere, Alàgbà Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá. In celebration of his numerous achievements and immense life-long cultural contributions to the Institute specifically and Yorùbá culture generally, the Institute sponsored several events in a two-week-long celebration, two months after his burial.

For his immeasurable academic, professional and cultural contributions, Bàbá Fálétí was invested and celebrated with a series of local, national, and international awards, among them: the National Honor of Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON), Nigeria's highest honor; Doctor of Letters (D. Litt); Justice of Peace (JP); Jerusalem Pilgrim (JP). He won several awards, among them the Festival of Arts Award for his *Èdá Kò L'Àròpin* in 1955, and the Afro-Hollywood Award for Outstanding Performance in Arts in the U.S. in 2002. The list of such accolades abounds, chronicling the life story and achievements of a simple, unassuming, inadequately sung artist.

### **The Making of a Convert**

As the following memorial essays reflect, all of the above Fálétí accolades and more were the nonesuch qualities that made Fálétí a household name and endeared him to many. Unfortunately, though, unlike my bred-on-Fágúnwà/bred-on-Fálétí colleagues, I came to know Fálétí late – in the 1990s. Confessedly, in the 1960s the limited exposure we got to anything close to Yorùbá literature in Secondary School was Fágúnwà. As far as we were concerned, Fágúnwà was the one and only Yorùbá writer. No other writer existed. That was in 1962. But since there was no serious analysis of what we were reading; no contextual background material given; no analysis required, we merely took turns, reading and enjoying the “stories” and memorizing ponderous character names with which we “christened” each other or with which “the big bad asses” and “pretend would-be-like boys” amongst us in this “all girls” boarding school saw fit to cloak themselves. Fágúnwà, for us, even as late as two years before we would sit for the WAEC exam and write on “Yorùbá,” a newly-introduced, new “paper,” was “recreational.” Yorùbá was “legitimized” and, for us, reading Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Ọde*

*Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ̀* and *Igbó Olódùmarẹ̀* assuaged the rigors of Mathematics, Latin and scansion, etc. Yorùbá, unlike English Composition or English Literature and Mathematics, was “easy-peasy” even though the only times we could freely speak or use any elements of the language itself outside the “thirty-minutes-three-times-a-week” subject-of-the-day, was a “thirty-minutes-a-day” school-bell-announced, bell-curtailed enterprise. So, we, mostly my glib-tongued classmates, devoured as much Fágúnwà “deep Yorùbá” as one could fit into thirty minutes. Through this colonizing, linguistic experience – colonizing for my Yorùbá-speaking schoolmates – there was an underlying “something,” momentarily unleashing, that chased away all our tensions and reservations in the 30-minute class period. Adedoja, our Fágúnwà-reading specialist, as if possessed, read pages upon pages, effortlessly, the words rolling off her tongue like marbles, without a single error or stuttering, followed by the next tier of the “good” readers who read a page or two with a handful of corrections. Then, there was the rest of us, a group of four, comprised of three non-speakers and me, the born-in-Lagos of Sierra Leonean parentage “Sàró” kid, who spoke a language the teacher did not have a kind name for but almost always dismissively called Yorùbá *àgànyìn*. Needless to say, I hardly got the opportunity to “butcher” Fágúnwà for the rest of the class. But, perhaps it was that denial of participation in that short but precious, “anticipated,” liberating group activity that marked and solidified my resolve to show, prove wrong my classmates and particularly Mrs. Thorpe, beloved teacher, partial to me in her other class, but absolute and uncompromising in her 4<sup>th</sup> period Yorùbá class! Needless to say, I triumphed in my own way. I, or rather, my Sàro-Yorùbá mother, and amusingly, my English step-father, put their foot down and decreed that my list of subjects for the WAEC examination shall include Yorùbá and the much-loathed Latin! Much to everyone’s surprise, I earned a “C3” in Yorùbá, square and clear, and a “P7” in Latin.

Call my resolve true passion or the headstrong response of one spurned, I cannot until this day tell which it was. Something about the music of the language in that resolve lay dormant, since I moved abroad to study barely three years after my triumphant WAEC Yorùbá coup. However, the dormancy awoke six years later during my first semester of doctoral studies in the “Art of Translation,” a required course. Unbeknown to me, this would open wide the door into a world (of Fágúnwà) I dreamed I could penetrate but never thought I had or could acquire the linguist tools to engage. My English translation of the short “Èṣù kékeré-Òde” passage for that course was a hit! The late Professor Jones was curious and asked to learn more about the source-text (ST), source-language (SL), and a bit about the source culture (SC) of this translated passage, and possibly, could I translate first a longer passage, then the entire chapter itself, followed with a critique as my final submission for what turned

out to be an “exceptional performance score in the course.” And, thus, began my foray into the field of literary translation, and my love affair and unfinished business with Fágúnwà and Yorùbá language, in earnest, despite the disappointment of lengthy legal impediments and, more painfully, the discouragement of the Yorùbá scholars whose counsel I had sought.

It was a matter of time, of reading and rereading Fágúnwà’s books again and again, *Igbó Olódùmarè*, in particular, before I began exploring the rich store of the what, when, where and how of Yorùbá language and literature – the heart of a language whose music had kept me captive all those years. Then emerged the names of the masters of contemporary Yorùbá literature, four of them in particular: Fágúnwà, Fálétí, Ìṣòlá, and Òkédíjì. Further research showed me that the implications of the fast-paced evolution of Yorùbá are glaringly broad for the language itself and its literature. Importantly, it became clear that translated texts are needed to fill the gap created by a global curricula void and promising expansion which was made evident in the efforts of the creation of African Studies programs in American universities. Then, I took the plunge and the challenge of filling this glaring “global void” by translating Fágúnwà’s *Igbó Olódùmarè* (drafted in 1978, completed in 1983) and submitted it in 1985 as a full-fledged, researched translation project for my dissertation almost eight years after the 1975 “Èṣù kékeré-Òde” trial teaser passage that broke the “Yorùbá-àgànyìn lie” of my secondary school education.

Clearly, in the spirit of Asmara, if the cultures that African languages represent are to speak for themselves, then undoubtedly, they need to do so from the strength of their own literary works, albeit in translation. Thus, began in earnest the focus and significance of my research interests and contributions to the study of African languages and literatures in the past three decades. The successful experience of translating *Igbó Olódùmarè*, though not published,<sup>1</sup> set me on the translation course. Thanks, in part, to the University of Washington’s year-long Africa initiative outreach program which included bringing to campus Africa’s major writers and critics, including Wólé Šóyínká, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and the late critic Emmanuel Obiechina (who engaged in a quarter-long residency). This interest in literary Africa naturally created a whirlwind of activities in African art, an interest inspired by Robert Farris Thompson’s *African Art in Motion: Icon and Art* (1979). It was in the thick of

---

1 Due to unfortunate circumstances, the late Mr. Femi Fagunwa, eldest son of D.O. Fágúnwà, and administrator of the Fagunwa estate only granted “permission to translate” for use of my doctoral dissertation but not to publish. In 1986, coincidentally, two individuals, Ajadi and P. Smith translated the same Fágúnwà (*Igbó Olódùmarè*) novel as part of their dissertation requirements. Since it was assumed that the market would not support translations of the same original, the Àjàdí text beat the Smith translation to the market.



this legitimizing atmosphere of endless resource and scholarly activities that I decided to cast my academic lot in translation. Fortuitously, I had read Professor Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá's *Efúnṣetan Aníwùrà*, *Olú Ọmọ* and *Madam Tinúbú* in the late 1990s (meeting him in person a few years later) and had been intrigued by his interest in the role and contributions of women in Yorùbá history and culture.

Thus, with completion of the *Igbó Olódumarè* dissertation as a trial run, I embarked, with much trepidation, on Ìṣòlá's *Efúnṣetan Aníwùrà*, an eight-year long project from start to publication<sup>2</sup> and *Olú Ọmọ*, a five-year translation endeavor. Although quite a daunting thought, I knew translating *Ọmọ Olókùn Eṣin* was imminent for its status as Fálétí's historic masterpiece and for its unrivaled literary feat as the longest Yorùbá novel.

### **At the Master's Feet: A Testament**

While Fágúnwà and later Ìṣòlá gave me the music of the language, Fálétí challenged me with the mystery of the language. It was the daunting nature of my choice of commitment and the search for legitimacy that led me directly, and on bended knees, to the doors of the great ones. While Fágúnwà remained the reference point, Ìṣòlá and Fálétí intrigued me. Reading Ìṣòlá gave me a certain kind of "lyrical" comfort, a literary ease, while Fálétí's linguistic prowess frightened the hell out of me. Prior to delving head-on into their works, I was at a *mo mò wón* (I know them) stage. Not only had I heard about them, seen them on television and in person, albeit from afar, I had read a few of their works. I felt *mo mò wón* (I know them) but knew that to reach the much-needed "knock at their literary doors," I would need "help" in effecting the *mo mò wón dáadáa* (I most certainly know them well) level. My sister, Margaret Délé Akintéwe, an NTA News and Current Affairs manager took me along on a visit to both Bàbá Fálétí and Alàgbà Ìṣòlá's homes during my sabbatical in 1995. Shortly after an introductory visit, there was no need to write up my "adoption papers." It was a mutual love of literature instantly, as rare books and literary manuscripts started climbing down from their bookshelves and desk drawers, and the "sharing," the "advising," the "instructing," indeed, the "mentoring," began almost immediately. Undoubtedly, I entered an instant internship/understudying before I knew it, and the relationships remained constant until the end.

---

2 Both *Efúnṣetan Aníwùrà* and *Olú Ọmọ Tinúbú* were published under one cover as *Efúnṣetan Aníwùrà & Olú Ọmọ Tinúbú: Two Historical Dramas*. Africa World Press, New Jersey, 2002.



## The Maturation of a Translator

It all began with a letter from Bàbá Fálétí dated, July 12, 1995 in response to my June 14, 1995 letter, expressing my interest in translating his *Ọmọ Olókùn Èşin*. He wrote back, praising my translation “attempts at prose” as “indeed a welcome addition” which “will amply compliment the efforts of Prof Ulli Beier...and Dr. Níyì Ọládèjì” since translation efforts had been mainly “in the area of poetry and drama.” He was willing to offer “a hand wherever...assistance is required.” In it, he bemoaned the sad fact that “Nigerian literature has always been assessed only in terms of those written in English,” noting that my “efforts will put an end to this narrow approach and throw a search light on the vast volumes of Yorùbá written literature which are as pungent and formidable as those written in English.” It was clear that my work had been cut out for me by the master himself, with the promise to “catch me lest I stumble.”

Although quite nervous despite over five years tutelage under Alàgbà Ìşọ̀lá and the experience of translating and the publication of *Èfúnşetán Aníwúrà Ìyálóde Ìbàdàn* and *Olú Ọmọ Tinúubú* under my belt, I showed up, braced for my new sojourn under the tutelage of *àgbà nínú akéwì tí sọ̀rọ̀ ìjinlẹ̀*<sup>3</sup> (The Master Poet who proffers profound messages). I arrived in December for a five-month sabbatical, prepared to enter my *Mo mò wón gaan ni* (I know him very well) phase. Thereafter, on and for every visit I made, usually annually in July and December, the unchanging, familiar image of the teacher-mentor I had grown to know is Tunji Olaopa’s apt characterization of Bàbá Fálétí as “a sturdy man of culture” who “could pass for an ordinary farmer in Òkè-Ògùn, as well as a professor of literature at any Ivy League university across the world.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed! Meeting him for the first time outside the environment of his home, it is easy to understand this characterization, as only his elocution, perhaps, could be the only sign to betray the indisputable fact that one stood in the company of a man of distinction. You would never know it. The simplicity of carriage and mien, matched with a soothing tongue for speech and song, were absolutely endearing. The humility matched with the soothing, soft spokenness, akin to a mother’s lullaby, is astounding.

I could have been ‘daughter,’ ‘sister,’ or ‘friend,’ or simply, ‘Olúbùnmi.’ But I was none of these; yet I was all of them. But the farmer-like gentleman always addressed me simply, respectfully, softly (not formally) as “Madam.” He was not exactly father because that was already baked into the relationship. He was

3 Alàgbà Adébáyò Fálétí, 1977, ORCLP 12, Ibadan -- An homage paid him by Yorùbá poet, Oládàpọ̀ Ọlátúnbòşún on the dust jacket of an LP featuring four of Fálétí’s poems, quoted in Tejúmọ̀lá Ọlániyan, “Adébáyò Fálétí,” *Nigerian Writers*, p. 137.

4 Tunji Olaopa. Adebayo Faleti: The Portrait of a Cultural Connoisseur. *Premium Times*, August 4, 2017.

simply MENTOR in the unmistakable sense and meaning of the word. This is how I came to experience, firsthand, the seamless melding of the “farmer Fálétí” and “scholar Fálétí” of Qlápá’s description in the many years I sat at his feet. The picture was perfect, yet simple, uncomplicated: The (a)live/living author and his translator.

There was always Bábá Fálétí, humbly and comfortably dressed in his *buba* and *Ṣòkòtò*, bare-footed, his typical, colorful signature *gòbì filà* elegantly, proudly pulled to the right or left side of his head, as it suits his fancy. Bábá Fálétí would sit on the living-room floor with legs stretched apart, cradling books and all sorts of manuscripts on the floor, his back leaning against a stuffed chair, and me, usually perched on the edge of the couch, at the ready, mentally, to catch his every word. Usually, at such session, a seemingly, relatively small question about the meaning of an archaic word or expression from his inexhaustible vocabulary of arcane words or expressions, or the “Why?” of a textual passage, or specifically the implausible character creation (such as Ibiwunmi) opens a floodgate of rich, dynamic and privileged, insider information about Yorùbá culture and much of Òyó palace intrigue. With a glint in his eyes, or sometimes with a betraying smirk, he would recount near-miss exploits on how he gathered seeming ‘classified information,’ and how he was able to get away with some of his defiant, sometimes outright “rebellious” acts in the enclosures of the *ààfin*. These were the incredible, unforgettable author-translator moments that gave birth to *The Freedom Fight*. What a gift to be so lucky to be the envy of many a translator!

Usually, at such moments, Bábá Fálétí’s voice filled my head. I recorded mentally, hardly any written notes because, somehow, all I needed was to “hear” his word-equivalence or approximation, or meaning, given in and/or accompanied in lilting song (with eyes shut, head thrown back) or embedded in similes or proverb, as, luckily, I was “never too far off,” he would say encouragingly. Bábá Fálétí’s presence was a rare treat; a balm in the usually quiet part of the expansive house – just teacher and student, the former regaling and the latter soaking it all in. Until, at last, to our delight, I “birthed” *Ọmọ Olókùn Eṣin* in English in 2010 as *The Freedom Fight: A Novel of Resistance*, a story which, according to Alàgbà Ìṣòlá, “travel[ed] through the strange, uncomfortable English language terrain to arrive “with all its vital organs still intact.”<sup>5</sup>

The setting and routine for our usual hours-long erudition, remained always the same: the same spot on the living room floor, legs spread apart

---

5 Akinwumi Isola’s Foreword to *The Freedom Fight: A Novel of Resistance and Freedom*, English translation of Faleti’s *Ọmọ Olókùn Eṣin*. Pamela J Olubunmi Smith, trans. Africa World Press, Inc., 2010.

among books, manuscripts and sheaves of paper ... until one day, the inevitable signs of ageing began to curtail, first, the ambulation that restricted him first to his room upstairs, and then, by the next year I returned to visit, arthritic pain had sentenced him to a daybed in a makeshift bedroom downstairs, just off his usual spot in his parlor. Yet, while location and props changed, the master's erudition continued just as sharp while the mentee-turned-nurse, provided much-needed comfort, massaging first one arthritic-plagued leg and then the other. And then it became the acolyte's turn to coax the master to take his vitamins.

Strikingly comfortable in his skin – one minute in a trance-like pose, reciting sing-song elegiac poetry or telling stories punctuated with songs or losing himself in remembrances of historical things past – things not found in any history books or riffling through his mental dictionary/encyclopedia of ancient words and terms. Then, by my December 2014 visit, with mind still as lucid as ever, but body frail, strength ebbing, now needing to be aided in the simplest of daily needs, yesterday's stories were now shrouded in uneasy prayers for a quick end. The last such prayer I heard my fellow Sagittarian pray was during my December 2015 visit: 'A wish for a quick end, now that the task is done!'

Indeed, by any measure, the product of the "task" is prodigious: decades on decades of poetry; sheaves upon sheaves of drama, novels, short stories, films; and decades of "firsts" in public services, drama production, and private engagement. Yet, for all the "pioneering" and the huge patrimonial legacy he left us all, there is a sense that Bàbá Fálétí only received a half measure/half recognition in return. For the man was far too humble to take more than one bow where others would take ten for half as much prodigiousness. "A prophet is not without honor in his own country," indeed.

As his fellow Yorùbá writer and close friend, Akínwùmí Ìsòlá, aptly noted in *The Modern Yorùbá Novel* (1998), the unparalleled fabric of Fálétí's language is classical Yorùbá language at its best from the hands of a master poet, whose "deliberate reanimation of old words throw the reader back effectively into the culture and civilization of 19<sup>th</sup> century Yorùbá empire."

Thus, in remembrance of a legacy that will live forever, the collection of essays that follow, laud, in a small way, these decades of exceptional artistry. They acknowledge individually and collectively one common fact: that in claiming with pride our common legacy and patrimony, catalogued in the lasting gift of Pa Fálétí/Bàbá Fálétí, we proclaim the human cultural repository that legitimizes our *gbogbo wa la mò wọn* claims. Thus, in celebration of Baba/Alàgbà/Pa Fálétí, the man, the mentor, the master historian/linguist/walking encyclopedia in all things Ọ̀yọ́ and environs-related, indeed the master of Yorùbá imagination, poets Moses Mabayòjé, Adédòtun Ògúndèjì,

Báyò Ọmọlọlá, Ọláyínká Àgbétúyì, and Léré Adéyemí pay homage with praise poems composed for him; scholars Adédòtun Ọgúndèjì, Ọláyínká Àgbétúyì, Àrìnpé Adéjùmò and Adéfẹmí Akínşelóyìn, Abídèmí Bọ́lárínwá and Michael Ọládẹ́jọ Afóláyan examine various aspects of his poetry; scholar/critic Adéshínà Afóláyan examines his poetry “to unearth the philosophical sensibility that undergirds Fálétí’s literary prowess,” describing Fálétí as “a Nietzschean value-creating being;” critic Léré Adéyemí offers an analysis of Fálétí’s two novels, *Ogun Àwítẹ́lẹ* and *Ọmọ Olókún Eşin*; essayist Şólá Owónibí examines *Başòrun Gáà* through the prism of political ideology and power relations, while Ọláyínká Àgbétúyì examines authority and moral conflicts in Fálétí’s films, and Tolúwanímí Ìbíkúnlé examines his iconic role as screen actor. Three essayists, Fẹ́mí Ọşófisan, Túnjí Ọlàońpá, and Akin Adéşòkàn also join in paying homage to Fálétí. Their pieces, included with their permission, were previously published in *Punch* and *Premium Times* shortly after Fálétí’s death in July 2017. Included also are two laudations: a tribute essay by Felix Ayoh’Omidire, chronicling Baba Faleti’s contribution to the development of the Institute of Cultural Studies at Obafemi Awolowo University and a pictorial arts and artifacts exhibition in Baba Faleti’s honor, co-curated by Akin-sola Adejuwon and Seyi Ogunjobi.

To a pioneer in many respects, a fountain of knowledge yet a half-sung literary genius in a career that spanned over seven decades in the literary annals of contemporary Yorùbá life and culture, I say, on bended knees, in sentiments inspired by twenty-two years of discipleship and friendship, may my, indeed the collective voices of Yorubaland, sing your name eternal:

Adébáyò Ajibade Akande Fálétí (a.k.a. *Ọde Àdàbà*).

ALÀGBÀ, AKỌNI ỌMỌ ODUDUWA,

Fountain of knowledge.

Born a child of creative genius (December 24, 1921),

When earth received an Honored Guest.

Called to eternal rest (July 23, 2017),

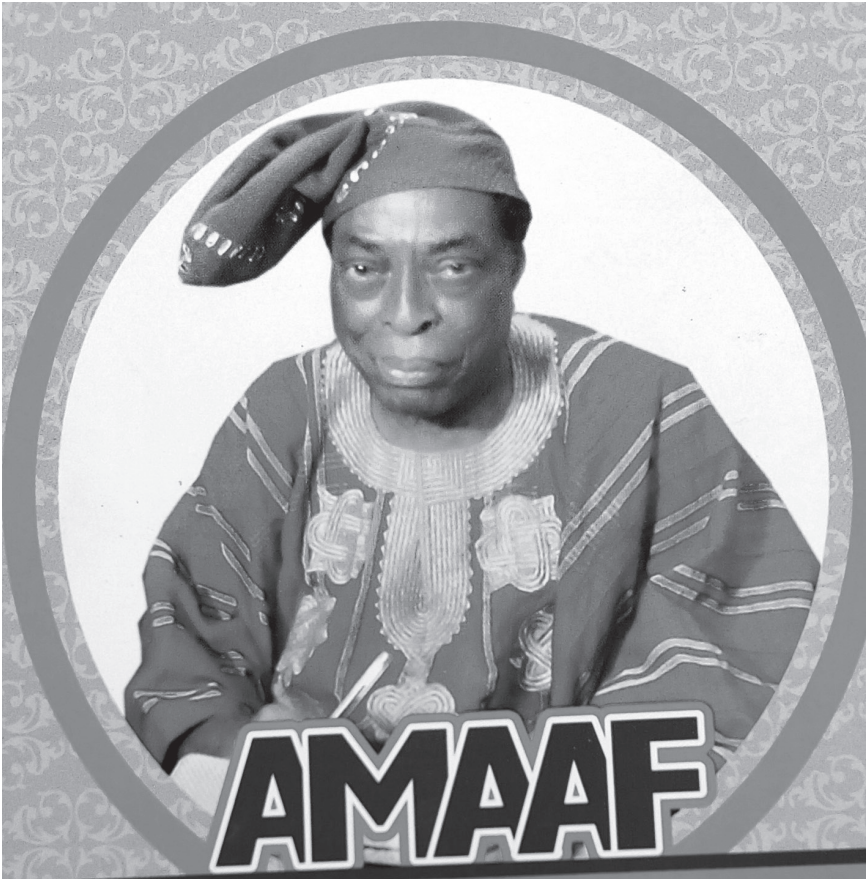
When Heaven granted your longed-for Repose,

And Yorùbáland buried her half-sung,

Consummate bard,

Beloved son of a bard father.

Rest in Eternal Peace.



**AMAAF**

**ALAGBA DR PRINCE  
ADEBAYO MOSOBALAJE  
AJIBADE AKANDE FALETI**  
(OON, D Litt, FNAL, J.P, J.P)

**AGBOYE BAPTIST CHURCH,**  
AGBOYE VILLAGE, OGBOMOSO ROAD, OYO.  
Saturday September 8, 2018 11:00am