

Ọ̀rọ̀ Lẹ̀yẹ́ ń Gbọ̀! A Deserving Tribute to Alàgbà Adébáyọ̀ Mosòbalájé Ajíbádé Àkàndé Fálétí (Ọ̀ḍẹ̀ Àdàbà)¹

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The Institute of Cultural Studies is today celebrating in grand style the life and arts of Late Alàgbà Adébáyọ̀ Mosòbalaje Ajibade Akande Fálétí (1921-2017). This grand gesture is a testimony of the importance of Bàbá Fálétí and the great value this University community attached and continues to attach to the passage of this great man through our Citadel of Learning.

On the whole, Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí was recognized as a singular man of culture whose imprints in the sand of the Yorùbá cultural terrain have forever become indelible, thanks to his intense dedication to the promotion of the Yorùbá “*ọ̀mọ̀lúàbí*” cultural ethos and the use of his God-given talents to promote Yorùbá history, poetry, orature, cinema and the Arts in general.

It is history now that Alàgbà Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí served as a Senior Research Fellow of this Institute between the late 1990s and early 2000s. In the same way that it is also history that he passed through and served meritoriously in various other institutions – academic and cultural alike – during his long and colourful life. From the old Western Nigeria Radio and Television Broadcasting Corporation to its radio and television successors – BCOS, NTA and their numerous offshoots all over the Yorùbá-speaking states of Nigeria, through

1 Being an address presented by the Director, Institute of Cultural Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, on the occasion of the One-Day Colloquium organized in honor of the late Alagba Adebayo Faleti by the University Community on 21st November 2017 at the Pit Theatre, Department of Dramatic Arts, with Pictorial Exhibition at the ICS Arts Gallery.

his impactful stint as the First State Director of the famed MAMSER in Oyo State where Adébáyò Fálétí brought honour to an otherwise unpopular military government that was desperately seeking legitimacy through grandiose but ephemeral projects, to baba's bold strides in the then nascent Yorùbá film industry where he made a mark in different capacities including as actor, script-writer and director.

All that was apparently why one Bayo Omoṣoṣa of Howard University in the United States referred to Fálétí in his tribute as *A-lo-sáà má ba sáà jé*. As further professed eloquently during his funeral service by Emeritus Archbishop Ládìgbòlù of the Oyo Anglican Arch-Diocese in the funeral sermon of 8th September 2017:

Adébáyò Fálétí was a man of great erudition who demonstrated tremendous versatility in his preferred art form – the literary arts. He was highly proficient and had impeccable writings in poetry, journalism, acting, Yorùbá translation, broadcasting and TV production. He translated the National Anthem into Yorùbá. He was also the translator of the speeches of many Heads of State...

Yes, Fálétí was a translator par excellence. His was a rigorous translation of the rich Yorùbá culture, not only through the written texts and on stage, but more significantly, through his own personality and his physical appearance. The memory of his *gòbi*-topped attire will forever linger on in the corridors of this university, and on the television screens of many homes in Nigeria and the Diaspora. Interestingly, Bàbá Fálétí originally studied French in his undergraduate days before he turned around to become one of the greatest exponents of the Yorùbá language and culture. Not only was he considered as the *oba gbogbo akéwì* by his peers in the literary circles but his impeccable language and cultural skills put him in a class of his own in every art genre he ventured into.

Indeed, Bàbá Fálétí's CV and list of achievements are as long as his gracefully long life here in our midst. He was the originator of "Èyí Àra" program ni Ilé Akéde, Ìbàdàn as well as the originator of the call-in model in radio broadcasting, as Arch-Bishop Ládìgbòlù aptly reminded us in his sermon.

On his demise, kings honored him, senators and even the presidency echoed the larger academic and cultural communities to hail the great icon that has transited. Emeritus Professor Wólé Sòyínká summed up the collective sense of loss as quoted in the editorial of the *Nation Newspaper* of 3rd August 2017: "Adébáyò Fálétí was a pioneer in virtually every genre of literary creativity and its expansion. No one should have been surprised to watch him lift the level of acting in the flush of Nigerian films with his studied, subtle

character portrayal. Yorùbá scholarship owes him much, and we honor him befittingly...”

Fálétí, A-mu-àṣà-bi-èni-mùkọ...

When, in the twilight of Military rule in Nigeria, in the wake of the stubborn popular resistance of the intrepid Campaign for Democracy (CD) tackling head-on the goggled-bature jackboot that was ruthlessly crushing the nation, an indigenous Film production outfit – Mainframe (Òpómúléró) unveiled what came to be probably the greatest of all Yorùbá Nollywood production of cultural content titled *Şaworoide*, we were all elated to see a bold statement of our collective faith in a better tomorrow for our dear Jogbo-Nigeria in spite of the political schemings of the Lapites, Baloguns and Lagatas... Brilliantly played by Alàgbà Adébáyò Fálétí, the sterling, lucid, octogenarian bard in the court of the Onijogbos became an instant darling of all as the only voice of dissent and caution against the corrupt and murderous intents of Lapite. Although his was not a major character per se, Adébáyò Fálétí's cast, Baba Opalaba's serene wisdom as the old man of the *òrò lẹye ñ gbó* fame, was the only voice of reason that never failed to discomfiture the greedy king and his corrupt cabinet, thus predicting the ultimate triumph of the good guys over the bad guys in a political and social context that was fast getting more and more punctuated by the wild cowboy political gangsterism of the 20th Century... This same talent was what Fálétí deployed in film after film that were rolled out from the stables of Mainframe, Remdel and other indigenous film producers.

Before I close this befitting eulogy for a worthy hero, I would like to thank the Vice-Chancellor of this great University for his vision and encouragement towards the conception and execution of this well-deserved tribute to a foremost Yorùbá cultural icon of the 21st Century. I would also like to thank the family of Alàgbà Adébáyò Fálétí for their faith and determination at preserving the unparalleled legacy of their late patriarch. The Institute of Cultural Studies is highly appreciative of their gesture of donating the rich bibliographic archive of their late father to this academic community. Today, we invite all here present to join us in unveiling the “Alàgbà Adébáyò Fálétí Library and Documentation Archive” proudly domiciled at ICS-OAU, Ile-Ife. It is our earnest hope and desire that scholars from far and near would be able access the Yorùbá and African bibliographic, artistic and imagistic preciousities enshrined in the Fálétí collection.

Furthermore, we would like to invite all of you, our dear guests here present, to join us, at the close of this colloquium, on a journey into the world of Alàgbà Adébáyò Àkàndé Fálétí, through the thematic arts and pictorial

exhibition that the curators of this Institute have carefully and caringly put together to honour this cultural icon.

If it is true, as the Ayan-Agalu idiom insistently drummed into our collective conscience in *Şaworoide* that *aşo funfun ní sunkún aró, ipilè òrò ní sunkún èkeji tan, tan tan...*, then we have good reason to believe that what Fálétí had initiated in Yorùbá arts, poetry, journalism and film will yet yield new talents and visionaries that would strive to uphold these art forms, sustain and defend the rich Yorùbá cultural heritage well beyond the present times.

*Òrò leyẹ́ n' gbọ́, òrò leyẹ́ n' gbọ́,
ẹyẹ ò dédẹ̀ bà l'órùlẹ̀ o;
òrò leyẹ́ n' gbọ́ o!*

