

# University Report

**BBC**

AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

2/7/71

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UNIVERSITY REPORT

No. 142

Broadcast 4th, 6th and 8th April 1971

COSMO PIETERSE:

This week a look back to December 1970. The third Festival of Arts, organised by the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ife, Nigeria. Our report was unfortunately delayed owing to the recent British postal strike - but it's still brimful of interest. For with this third festival Ife seems to have fulfilled a good handful of the hopes that its sponsors expressed three years ago. The festival has quite clearly come to stay. It is annual. It has become a national event. Also it draws international, chiefly African participants.

Now it was after the second Ife Festival that Professor Michael Crowder, Head of the Institute of African Studies, expressed the hope to Akin Euba, our man in Ife, that in 1970 Ife might "broaden our horizon a bit and include Senegalese modern culture and traditional culture as the theme of our festival". And this did, in fact, happen last December. Senegal came to Ife in numbers, and very successfully. And so it will be the Senegalese contribution to Ife that will be the theme of our report.

But first, the whole question of cultural exchanges between neighbouring African countries. At Ife, Akin Euba raised this issue with playwright, and theatre director, Ola Rotimi, Research Fellow in Drama in Ife Institute of African Studies. Given the value of

COSMO PIETERSE: cultural co-operation and given the lack of inter-African cultural exchange, what's to be done?  
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OLA ROTIMI: Well charity they say begins at home. I should think first the individual nation itself should excite the people to the cultural resources within its province. I think this is more important considering the challenge posed by foreign culture to African culture. For instance, you will be amazed how many youths know a little about 'soul' music and 'soul' dancing, but I wonder how many know anything at all about, say in Nigeria the Apala dance form or Bata dance movement. So I think there should be first an internal concern, whereby, each individual government should organise some kind of internal cultural programme, that would excite every corner of the country to the rich cultural resources that exist within that country. And then of course we could project these cultural blessings to other parts of Africa, and expect a reciprocal, spectacle from neighbouring countries.

AKIN EUBA: What kind of role can the O.A.U. play in this respect?

OLA ROTIMI: Well, there is a cultural wing in the O.A.U. structure and as of now, I am inclined to feel that that wing is a dead horse really. It hasn't taken up the challenge which culture poses to the African continent. In this modern age where the intrusion of foreign culture to indigenous African culture is quite significant, and could be detrimental to the indigenous African culture. I would like to say the O.A.U. cultural wing be more active. One understands, you see, if the political wing gets bogged down by other obstacles like protocol or the influence of super powers

OLA ROTIMI:  
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on the internal workings of the O.A.U.'s political policy. But the cultural wing, I think, doesn't have all these external invidious influences, and I should think that we have a greater chance of asserting ourselves on the cultural angle faster than we could on the political scene. So I would really like to see the cultural wing of the O.A.U. be more active.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Ola Rotimi, playwright, on the need for activating the cultural wing of the O.A.U. Still, for Ife's third festival, the benefits of international cultural contacts were achieved. Senegal sent a cultural delegation to seventy artistes and twenty-four officials to the festival. There were relatively minor problems of language; larger ones of transport and the major one of financing so large a contingent. And Akin Euba raised this question with Professor Michael Crowder, Head of the Institute of African Studies at Ife, and Chief organizer of the Festivals. How was the Senegalese visit financed?

PROFESSOR CROWDER:

Well that vast cost of flying them down from Dakar to Lagos was covered by President Senghor. Of course on top of that you've got to take into account that they are all salaried professionals supported by the government both the National Theatre and the Musical Ensemble. Therefore, the finance included not only moving them from A to B, but their salaries and their per diems that they were paid by the Senegalese government. On top of the Theatre and the Musical Ensemble we also had an exhibition of tapestries, as you know, of traditional art, and of modern, or contemporary craftsmanship, and this all had to be flown down. We probably covered less than a twentieth of the total cost that I imagine must have been paid by Senegal, I think. One has to see that it was a pretty big investment by President Senghor.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Professor Michael Crowder on the financing of the Senegalese cultural visit to Ifo. Now it is interesting to note the expenditure also of energy by Senegals Head of State, and Government, on the cultural aspect of life. But now to the impact of this visit. For reaction to the performing arts, Akin Euba turned to Ola Rotimi:

OLA ROTIMI:

Well I was very much impressed by the achievements of the contribution in the field of the performing arts served by the Senegalese troupe. For one thing I was exposed to a performance in the "grand" theatre style which I thought was rather significant. Watching an all african cast perform dramatic presentation in the "grand" theatre style - so that's one. I also watched the Khwar which was a medley of dance, music and dramatic monologue, backed by musical accompanment, and again this was something new to me. I think it has inspired me towards thinking of doing something in a similar vein you see, whereby, dance music and drama could be combined, not necessarily as an integral piece, but as a beautiful, artistic menagerie of different performing acts or items.

AKIN EUBA:

The major performing arts contribution was of course L'Exite d'Alboursy by N'daw. What did you think of this performance?

OLA ROTIMI:

Well, L'Exile d'Alboursy really was the aspect of Senegalese performance presentation that I was referring to when I said I was intrigued in watching theatre in this grand performance style. It was done on a very massive scale. Everything was perhaps, super-realistic. The acting was in grand, broad gestures, and the music too was heightened to meet the grand challenges of the histrionics. The lighting, the costumes, everything was done in a big grand way.

OLA ROTIMI:  
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We here in the Institute of African Studies at Ife have so far approached theatre from the naturalistic, or realistic, style of presentation, and to see something that has a different form of presentation, I think was an experience which one would hardly forget.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Next, a response to the visual arts contributed by Senegal to the Ife Festival. Professor Michael Crowder.

PROFESSOR CROWDER:

I think it was an extraordinarily impressive exhibition. I feel, as does one of our own research fellows Babatunde Lawal that there is a certain tendency to sameness in style as though they're overwhelmed by one teacher, and I think that this is true to say of possibly art in a number of African countries where one dominant personality, or one dominant theme, exerts itself a little too strongly. One felt that technically they were extremely good, the tapestries were most exciting, but one felt that at times one hoped that they could liberate themselves a little, and develop different styles. One felt that it was difficult to, except that the name was written on some of them, to tell which was which. But this doesn't detract at all from my admiration for the work as such, I thought the tapestries, in particular, were most exciting, and showed high craftsmanship as well as artistic imagination. I think that it was probably extremely good that a number of the artists from Senegal came down and saw their work juxtaposed with work going on in Nigeria, because they did see quite a lot of work here and I hope that the Nigerian artists who saw the work by the Senegalese were also cross-stimulated.

PROFESSOR CROWDER: Getting back to Ola's earlier point about the need for cultural exchange, I think one of the exciting things is not only to learn about what other people are doing, but to be inspired by this contact, as he said he was inspired by the presentation of their theatrical works. I thought their exhibitions of tapestries and paintings was very exciting indeed and very beneficial for cross-fertilization.

COSMO PIETERSE: There is, unfortunately, only enough time to itemize some of Nigeria's own fifteen items in the festival. Akin Euba's musical setting of the dramatic poem, CHAKA, by Leopold Senghor; dance drama devised by Peggy Harper, Ola Rotimi's production a premiere in English of "King Christophe" by Aime Cesaire of the West Indies, photographic exhibitions and films, including "Tides of the Delta" by J.P. Clark and Frank Speed. One can only envy those whose good fortune this feast was, and must still be!

The Festival itself, especially the Senegalese contribution, travelled beyond Ife: the tapestries and paintings to Lagos, to museums. The performing arts of the Senegalese were seen by students, Nigerian dignitaries, the populace of Ife, the Nigerian Head of State. But did the visit make a real impression - did it live up to expectations? Akin Euba asked Ola Rotimi to sum up the impact of the Senegalese visit to Ife, and to Nigeria.

OLA ROTIMI: The Nigerian Government should now take the challenge opposed by the visit of the Senegalese Ensemble, and help the Nigerian cultural programme planners to get something going to the magnitude of what the Senegalese themselves presented to us. There is a lack in the

OLA ROTIMI:  
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area of cultural exchange in this continent, and a group should take up the challenge of making sure that this gap, this hiatus is somewhat bridged. And I think the Ife Festival, in its own small way, is trying to ensure continuity and the bridging of this gap, in the area of culture.

COSMO PIETERSE:

And on some of the prospects of Ife's Festival, Professor Michael Crowder looked three years into the future.

PROFESSOR CROWDER:

As you know Akin, I believe the Nigerian Government is going to host the Second World Festival of Negro Arts in 1974 which, of course, will need a large amount of physical plant, in the form of theatres and concert halls in Lagos. So this may well mean that the present government will give a real fillip to national investment in culture.

COSMO PIETERSE:

But now on to the more immediate future. Ola Rotimi on whether the over-all structure of the Ife Festival would continue:

OLA ROTIMI:

We believe so long as the University exists, and still believes in its motto, which appreciates the value of culture as an integral part of learning, the Institute of African Studies, which is a part of this institution known as the University of Ife, will continue to function and one way in which the institute can function and justify its presence, in an African university would be to really demonstrate culture, rather than write about culture. With this, I think, the impetus

OLA ROTIMI:  
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to carry on the Cultural Festival would continue. And as I said, you see, the Festival has taken added significance in its international outlook and I don't think this is something one drops just when its inception is being realised.

COSMO PIETERSE:

And that, from Nigeria, was Ola Rotimi, who with Professor Michael Crowder, talked to Akin Euba about the third annual Festival of Arts organised by the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ife. The Ife Festival of 1970 is over, but its memory sounds like being a long one, and long may its spirit continue.

And that, unfortunately, is all from University Reporter for this week. So, until next week this time, it'd goodbye from me, Cosmo Pieterse.

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