

At a Time like this

Text of the Speech Delivered by Prince (Dr.) Olagunsoye Oyinlola, Chairman, Board of Trustees, Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding at the National Colloquium on the Enduring Legacies of Duro Ladipo (1931-1978) on Tuesday, March 13, 2018.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, I warmly welcome our royal fathers, all distinguished guests, dignitaries, speakers, members of the art community in Nigeria and most importantly the family of our sage and world-acclaimed dramatist, composer, actor and playwright, late Duro Ladipo (Dec. 18, 1931 – March 11, 1978).

Let me single out for recognition, in particular, the matriarch of the Duro-Ladipo's dynasty, the personification of the legendary amazon of Yoruba history, Moremi, and the embodiment of Duro-Ladipo artistic legacy, **Mama Abiodun Ladipo a.k.a. Oya Oriri**. Mama, may you continue to age gracefully and in excellent health too. We are proud of you and what you stand for. We acknowledge that you are a good symbol of womanhood, a champion of pristine family and cultural values and a role-model exemplar.

I also welcome all of us to the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, Our esteemed guests, kindly permit me to provide a short brief about our Centre.

The Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU), was established early in 2009. It is a category II UNESCO affiliate, together with the Institute for African Culture and International Understanding (IACIU), Abeokuta.

Believing in the modernization of African cultures from within, CBCIU is committed to cultural promotion from the grassroots level up, and in cultural exchanges primarily within Nigeria, across West Africa and the rest of the continent, and with the rest of the world.

CBCIU started as an archive, with Ulli and Georgina Beier's materials forming its nucleus. As such, CBCIU is also interested in, and has been archiving a lot of contemporary Nigerian cultural productions since 2009. It now has over 400 music CDs and about 200 Nollywood films on CD.

Finally, CBCIU has a US office in Philadelphia and is, through that office, working on a partnership with The Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

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Our Mission: To elevate Black culture by focusing on its recovery, preservation, promotion, and utilization of its enduring ways of being for the purposes of holistic development, appreciation, and international understanding.

This has been our focus since 2009 in spite of obvious odds and challenges.

Late Duro Ladipo, the iconic theatre art practitioner, composer and playwright. It gladdens my heart to witness this occasion meant for the celebration of contribution to the promotion of Yoruba cultural heritage and advancement of humanity. The events planned for this occasion, therefore, negate the classical statement of William Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar* that “the evil that men do live after them and the good are interred in their bone”. Since the death of the foremost dramatist in March 1978, no evil thought or discourse has been directed towards him till date. I thank God and humanity for the mercy, favour and posthumous honour bestowed on this cultural ambassador.

If my memory remains my guide, an event similar to this was organised in 2008, exactly thirty (30) years after the death of late Duro Ladipo, at the University of Ibadan. At this event, there was a public presentation of a book, **Duro Ladipo: The Thunder- God on Stage**, published by IFANET. This book that was written by Remi Raji-Oyelade, Sola Olorunyomi and Abiodun Ladipo is an archival documentation of the nature, aesthetics and dramaturgy of Duro Ladipo’s plays. This and similar events organized across the globe is a recognition of the noble contributions of Duro Ladipo to the development of theatre and culture in Nigeria and Africa as a continent.

My preamble is to appreciate the previous and the present events organized to honour late Duro Ladipo. His creativity and critical thinking made him stand out among his contemporaries such as late Hubert Ogunde and late Kola Ogunmola who were also professional theatre practitioners. What I can say about late Duro Ladipo is that he usually went for what he knew was good for him and always strove hard to attain his goal and he would not relent until this was done. Since he is no more with us, I will blow his trumpet for him because he cannot do so himself.

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At a time like this, this event is relevant to the contemporary cultural discourses which have been redirecting attention to the restoration of African heritage as the contribution of the continent to the contemporary cultural renaissance across the globe. I, therefore, expect the discourses and deliberations here to focus more on the core elements of culture such as language, thought and belief system, African traditional religion and other intangible features of our culture. This is because all these are parts of our identity across the globe. These features of culture are always present in all of the plays of late Duro Ladipo. His plays always carry the weight of his culture. His most popular play, *Oba Koso*, attests to all these features in his plays. I will pay much attention to the significance of language in the promotion of culture of a people and sustainable national development.

Scholars and linguists have argued that the only way to kill a culture or exterminate a people is to take away their language from them. This statement reveals the significance of language in human society. One of the ways to prevent a language from becoming endangered or moribund is through persistent use in literary and non-literary communication. This is exactly what Duro Ladipo has done with Yoruba language in all his major plays such as *Oba Koso*, *Oba Moro*, *Moremi*, etc. These plays were performed in Yoruba language with communicative competence for Yoruba and non-Yoruba audience. The use of Yoruba for the performance of these plays does not reduce the reception of his plays, particularly *Oba Koso* beyond the shores of Nigeria. The dramaturgy and language aesthetics of Duro Ladipo's plays encouraged some white culture enthusiasts such as Ulli Beir to embark on the translation and transliteration of Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso* and some other plays into English, the language of wider communication.

The kernel of my argument is that language is a very important element of culture and that we should always strive to ensure that we promote our language through literature. It is, however, disheartening to see that most our children of today cannot speak in Yoruba language not to talk of reading literature in Yoruba language. This ugly trend has become notorious because most parents expose their children to English language at the very

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formative stage of their lives. In Duro Ladipo's home, before death closed his eyes in 1978, we were all encouraged, even as a matter of duty to our cultural heritage, to communicate in Yoruba language. All stake holders in culture industry should look into this ugly trend for the sustainability of our cultural heritage because language is a very important vehicle of cultural thoughts. The recent statement of the Federal Government of Nigeria that very soon Mathematics and Science subjects in Nigerian schools will be taught in indigenous languages of the country is a right decision in a right direction.

At a time like this, this programme is also important as it will educate the contemporary film makers on the need to make films that will be impactful on Yoruba culture. The ugly trend in the contemporary Yoruba film industry is that film makers do not undertake any research into the intricacies of their culture. Most of these contemporary film makers base their films on cultural assumptions that are always wrong in terms of costuming, décor, make-up and scenery and other aesthetic components of film making. The contemporary film makers are always conscious of the profit margin of their productions.

For us at Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU), Duro Ladipo lives forever, he lives in his works, his plays, his mentees, his former associates and friends and in the family he left behind at the unripe age of 47. Duro Ladipo turned 86 on December 18, 2017. We celebrate him post-humously today because he lived a truly rich, purposeful and cultural life and gave global expression to Yoruba cultural ideas.

Today, we have chosen to celebrate and immortalize one of our foremost cultural icons and dramatists, the late Duro Ladipo. Though Duro Ladipo was of Osogbo origin and Osun State by birth and parentage, he was indeed a global man who took Yoruba language and culture to the world's centre stage.

I am glad to inform this audience that the Centre for Black Culture is currently rehabilitating, restructuring and renovating Duro Ladipo's Mbari Mbayo's Club and Mausoleum. Indeed, our commitment is to restore the place to its original form and

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ensure that it serves the purpose of culture and international tourism. When completed, the Duro Ladipo Mausoleum promises to serve as melting-pot for all culture enthusiasts and practitioners. I am aware that the Duro-Ladipo family commenced the Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the passage of their father on Sunday, March 11, 2018 with a visit to and prayer at the No. 44 Station Road, Osogbo, site of Mbari Mbayo. We are also committed to archiving all documents, materials and garments relating to the late Duro Ladipo.

Furthermore, I am pleased to report that two of former student of Duro Ladipo's School of Theatre/Art are today members of the Board of Trustees of CBCIU: Chief Muraina Oyelami and Chief Jimoh Buraimoh. May Duro Ladipo lives forever.

Finally, I wish to urge the various speakers and participants at this National Colloquium that the communiqué should be properly used to evolve and promote new dimensions to theatre and cultural heritage in Nigeria. Besides, attention should always be on the living legends who are also cultural ambassadors to debunk the popular Yoruba proverbial that *ojó a bá kú ni à ñ di ère, èniyàn kò sunwòn ní àyè* (deification comes with death for humans whose worth is not acknowledged while living).

I thank you for your attention.

Prince Dr. Olagunsoye Oyinlola
Chairman, Board of Trustees,
Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, Abere,
Osun State
Tuesday, March 13, 2018.