

Text of a Speech Delivered by the Chairman, Board of Trustees, Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, at the 2019 Ulli Beier Annual Lecture and Workshop at Ulli Beier Hall, CBCIU, Abere, Osun State

[PROTOCOL]

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and Management of the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, (CBCIU), I warmly welcome everyone to the 2019 Ulli Beier Annual Lecture. This annual lecture is one of the cardinal programmes that this great Centre, since inception in March 2009, has instituted to continue to reminiscence the profound contributions of Ulli Beier, a German and cultural expert, to the preservation and promotion of Yoruba cultural values beginning from the 1950s. This annual lecture also provides us with the opportunity to assess the place and state of Yoruba cultural values today, in the wake of globalisation, multiculturalism and its inherent problems with the view of proffering possible way forward.

As captured in Yoruba proverb, *Everybody who come into this world is meant to become something – only we don't know what*. This proverb aptly captures the coming of Ulli Beier to Nigeria in 1950 when he arrived at the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) as a Junior Lecturer in Phonetics. Perhaps, in search of *Ori Inu*, that is, the real essence of man's existence, Ulli Beier became uncomfortable with the exclusive life of the university environment and therefore sought to traverse the Yoruba land. Precisely in October 1950, Ulli Beier began a voluntary extramural teaching at Abeokuta. At Abeokuta, Ulli Beier provided art therapy for the mentally challenged people at Lantoro. In 1951, Ulli Beier moved from Phonetics to the department of Extramural studies and became a tutor for the western Nigeria. Indeed, his relocation to Ede from Ibadan marked the turning point in the life of Ulli Beier and his enduring legacies on Yoruba culture.

Between 1950 and 1966, Ulli Beier tremendously transformed Yoruba cultural life. Upon his arrival, he met a thriving Yoruba culture, social, religious and political exchange

among the Yoruba, but, he immediately realised the danger ahead, that is, the indifferent attitude of the young educated elite. Indeed, Ulli Beier's apprehension concerning the survival of Yoruba cultural values, philosophy and aesthetics was expressed in one of his articles titled: *The Attitude of the Educated African to His Traditional Art*. It was this attitude that Ulli Beier saw that propelled him to seek for the preservation and promotion of the tangible and intangible Yoruba cultural heritage. Ulli Beier travelled a lot, mostly in Yorubaland, but, also often in the non-Yoruba parts of the Nigeria. From Ede, he moved to Ilobu, Ifon, Okuku, Osogbo, Ile-Ife, Otan Ayegbaju, Ogbomoso, Ikere Ekiti, Idanre, and some other important Yoruba centres. Indeed, Ulli Beier's sojourn in each of these Yoruba centres was like a proverbial saying, *onijo pada onilu* (the dancer meets the drummer). This is particularly true because, in each of these traditional communities, he was introduced to several Yoruba ritual processes, cults and festivals. At *Ede*, he became an *Obatala* devotee, at *Ilobu*, he was initiated into *Erinle* worshipping and earned a name, *Omidiji Arabagbalu* while he became a Sango adherent at Osogbo and named Sangodare Akanji. Ulli Beier was also privilege to become a bosom associate and friend to many top ranking traditional rulers at the time. He was an intimate friend to Oba John Adetoyese Laoye, (the Timi of Edeland, 1944-1975), Oba Moses Oyewole Oyinlola (the Olokuku of Okuku, 1934-1960), Oba Samuel Adenle II (the Ataoja of Osogbo, 1944-1975) and a host of others. Ulli Beier's interactions with these monarchs of international repute no doubt enhanced his understanding of the Yoruba socio-cultural, religions and philosophical values. His passion and compassion for Yoruba was so profound that after he left Nigeria in 1966, he gave his two sons a Yoruba name – Tokunbo Sebastian born in London in 1967 and Olatunji Akanmu, born in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in 1970.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to account for some of the remarkable contributions of Ulli Beier to Yoruba culture. As a writer, curator and teacher, Ulli Beier encouraged the documentation of each of the Yoruba towns he visited. In 1954, he organised Summer Conference on Yoruba Culture where he invited and encouraged educated Yoruba Obas to present paper on any aspect of their culture. The outcome of this conference produced

a magazine named *Odu* where some of the well written and edited articles were published for public consumption. The establishment of Black Orpheus in 1957 and Mbari Club at Ibadan in 1961 and Mbari Mbayo Art School at Osogbo in 1964 contributed to the development of modern African literature and contemporary African arts. Through the collaboration of Susan Wenger, Georgina Beier, Jacob Lawrence, Denis William, Rud Van Rossem, and Duro Ladipo, Ulli Beier successfully developed mainly African artists whose conception and expression were dominantly influenced by African cultural, religious and philosophical content in the art world.

Through the Osogbo art school the finest contemporary artists such as Rufus Ogundele, Jacob Afolabi, the late Chief Taiwo Olaniyi popularly refers to as Twins Seven-Seven, Muraina Oyelami, Jimoh Buraimoh, Ademola Onibonokuta and a host of others were developed. One interesting thing about these set of artists is that, at the point they were being discovered by Ulli Beier, none had knowledge of art or painting. However, it was Ulli Beier's insight and innate ability to see in individual what such individual could not have realised about himself or developed. Hence, almost all the product of Mbari Mbayo Summer Art School of 1964 practically had no knowledge about drawing or painting, yet, they emerged as the purveyor of the contemporary African artists. Two of these world recognised product of this school are on the board of trustees of this centre – Chief Muraina Oyelami, the Eesa of Iragbiji and Chief Jimoh Buraimoh, The Baale Gbodofon of Osogboland.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, today, the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding is a living testimony to the essence and importance of Ulli Beier to the preservation and promotion of Yoruba culture and culture of the black race in the world at large. There is no gainsaying the fact that since the inception of the centre in March 2009, the centre has been committed to the retrieval, preservation and promotion of tangible and intangible culture of the Yoruba and the entire black race. CBCIU is committed to preservation and promotion of African and African Diaspora cultural values and traditions. Within a decade of its existence (2009-2019), CBCIU has demonstrated

are resolved through a number of international and national conferences, colloquium, workshops and seminars that cut across sustainability of cultural values, religious co-existence, international understanding and promotion of African and African Diaspora icons. Very recently, CBCIU just instituted weekly and monthly seminar series where academics, professional, experts and policy makers come together to discuss issues of national relevance with a view of proffering solutions to some of the contemporary problems facing our dear nation. I therefore, at this juncture, also urge some of our distinguished audiences here today to find out time to be part of this intellectual re-awakening.

That this year's Ulli Beier Annual Lecture is coming up now is not a mere coincidence of history as we all know that Osun Osogbo festival is presently ongoing. This is to also corroborate the essence and importance of Ulli Beier because; Susan Wenger (Adunni Olori) whose contributions to the survival of the Osun grove have not been exhaustively appreciated was a wife to Ulli Beier. Beyond Ulli Beier and Susan Wenger entanglement, this lecture is also to open our eyes to the economic importance of tourism to a serious minded nation. It would therefore mean that aside the ritual aspects, which are critical to the celebration of Osun Osogbo, both governmental and non-governmental organisations need to continue to rob minds on how to tap from the economic values associated with this festival for future purposes.

Ulli Beier had come and gone, his legacies still loom large in our heart. Ulli Beier was the compass through which Yoruba cultural, religious and philosophical values navigate the post-colonial terrain multiculturalism and globalisation. He contributed to Yoruba cultural heritage and advancement of humanity at large. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me use this opportunity to urge everyone sitting here today to learn from Ulli Beier's selfless contributions to the revival of the Yoruba culture and traditions and to also thank you for finding out time to remember this multi-talented German-Yoruba cultural preserver and promoter.

Thank you all for listening.

Prince Dr. Olagunsoye Oyinlola

Chairman, Board of Trustees,

Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding,

Abere, Osun State.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018.