



# **Decolonising the Mind: The Impact of the University on Culture And Identity in Papua New Guinea, 1971-1974**

*Ulli Beier*

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In the late 1960s, in the backyard of a bleak suburban house in Port Moresby, the newly established University of Papua New Guinea constructed a studio, ambitiously titled the Centre for New Guinea Cultures. Here, Akis drew his exuberant animals, Mathias Kauage beat his copper panels, Avavo Kava carved contemporary hohao boards, Marie Tata Aihi designed textiles, and Ruki Fame worked on welded iron sculptures. meanwhile, at the university, a course in creative writing was established, an active drama group came to life, the Papua Pocket Poets series commenced and Kovave, A Journal of Papua New Guinea Literature was born. The arrival in Port Moresby in 1967 of Ulli and Georgina Beier was a catalyst for the growth in contemporary indigenous literature and art. In leaving Nigeria, where they had spent many years working to promote the art and literature of the Yoruba people, the Beiers came to Papua New Guinea -- where Ulli took up a lectureship at the university -- excited with the possibilities of embracing, nurturing and promoting a rich artistic and literary culture.

In this memoir, Ulli Beier asserts the essential relationship between a university , culture and personal identity. The period spent by the Beiers in Papua New Guinea, a time of burgeoning national independence and celebration of the arts, was fulfilling in a way that left an indelible imprint on their lives. This lucid and inspiring memoir of those years is a moving tribute to the people of Papua New Guinea and their heritage.

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