

CULTURAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO THE
DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF CULTURAL
POLICIES IN AFRICA

By

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Among Cultural Administrators in Africa, the African Cultural Institute (ICA) will probably best be remembered for the pioneering work it did in proposing a draft cultural policy for the continent, which was eventually adopted by the OAU as the Cultural Charter for Africa. This was in Port Louis, Mauritius in 1976. It was a bold attempt to pose the problem of the future of culture in continental terms, and to focus the entirety of the ramifications of what cultural development should mean to a newly emancipated continent at this end of the twentieth century, in terms that transcend the peculiar colonial experiences of the different regions of our continent. An attempt was thus made, a decade or more after the attainment of political independence by the majority of our peoples, to reflect on the challenges that revealed themselves after the euphoria of newly acquired nationhood had cooled down.

This writer was privileged to serve on the staff of the African Cultural Institute from 1979 till 1984, first as Director of Research and of Cultural Patrimony from April 1979 for four months, and thereafter as Deputy Director General from July 1979 until February, 1984.

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Concurrently with the post of Deputy Director General, he served as Director of the Regional Research and Documentation Centre for Cultural Development (CREDEC) based in Dakar. This annex organisation of ICA shared many facilities with the parent body in Dakar in a way that was impossible for the CRAC in Lome, Togo and the GIEPAT in Abomey, Benin. There were thus a total of three annex organisations in addition to the African Cultural Institute proper.

The definition of cultural policies was a first challenge - and a continuing one - that faces Africa's peoples. Under the inspiration of UNESCO and in association with other regions of the world, this has been a fruitful search over the years, beginning with the Venice Conference in 1970, on the Institutional, Administrative and Financial Aspects of Cultural Policies, followed by Regional Conferences in Helsinki in 1972, Yogyakarta in 1973, Accra in 1975, Bogota in 1978, Baghdad in 1981, culminating in the World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico in 1982.

The first angle of attack that ICA adopted was the training of personnel. Along with UNESCO, the definition of culture adopted was one that went beyond music and dance to embrace not only the performing arts as such but also the languages, the belief systems, dress, social organisation, value systems, taboos etc. of each people. To bring these notions before the consciousness of the various peoples, it became imperative to train personnel for the specialised area of culture. To do this the first annex organisation of the Institute, the Regional Cultural Action Centre (CRAC) was established in Lome, Togo.

The task of the CRAC was to give specialised training to cultural animators and cultural administrators from the member states.

The simultaneous need for the two categories of personnel would be appreciated better if one looked in detail at the profiles of the two.

The cultural animator is best defined as a man of the terrain, an agent at the local or district level who, thanks to intimate contact with community-level artistes, opinion leaders etc., has his fingers on the pulse of local populations.

On the other hand, the cultural administrator functions at another level, of conception and management. He is called upon to exercise skills of a different sort. He is expected to have a wider experience of world forces, of the role of culture in national and regional development. His administrative capacities are expected to enable him to master the interplay of different sections of the governmental machinery, and to appreciate their relationship one with the others so as to appreciate the relative roles of the physical, aspects of cultural administration and the associated but congruent aspects. His experience of the world is likewise expected to be broad enough to encompass a more catholic appreciation of the evolution of cultural norms and practices across time and across space. His knowledge of the key concepts of history, of sociology, of politics are all deemed to be adequate for a higher appreciation of the habits of administrative practice and their relationship to the political economy of the bureaucracy to which he belongs.

In short, the cultural administrator is expected to be impregnated with a sense of history, to be aware of the evolution of cultural policies, of the history of efforts to forge a sense of identity among Black peoples across the world, and to be aware of the factors that have been determinant in the evolution of the nations which have increasingly assumed a major role in the determination of the destinies of the peoples of the world. In the specific regions of our continent, an awareness of the factors that impinge on the evolution of culture, attempts at creating the structures necessary for sub-regional co-operation, the impact on them of the colonial history of our peoples, the structures and functioning of the agencies of our nation state and the extent to which they have been decentralised. In particular, the existence or otherwise of evaluations of their operations.

At continental level, one has to take into account the sort of vacuum that ICA came to fill. Thanks to its history as a focus of structures of political decolonisation, the OAU placed an initial emphasis of decolonisation.

Historically, this is understandable. The OAU placed an emphasis on physical liberation of large areas of territory, and Central and Southern Africa remain to this day areas where political liberation has continued to be contested viz Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, South Africa. In the nominally liberated areas, there is a question whether mental liberation has been completed. We shall not go into the question of whether the OAU's decision to canonise

the frontiers inherited from colonialism need be accepted universally. But it is generally agreed that it is a workable proposition to accept it as such. Nevertheless, in the cultural domain which is next on the organisation's agenda after politics, there are some notable contradictions to which attention gets increasingly drawn. But of this, more anon.

At continental level, then, the pre-occupation with political liberation has had the effect of leaving in abeyance a weak educational and cultural component at the Headquarters of the Organisation, so that it is only in the last few years that the Cultural Charter has had any meat added to its bare bones, and that questions such as the need for an articulated statement on the pedagogy of African Unity has been posed with any seriousness. Operational programmes in this domain have not gone beyond a few faltering steps.

In the meantime, organisations like ICA have taken considerable initiatives to lay the foundations of various structures to consolidate trans-national, regional and other attempts at what could ultimately become continental structures of support in a variety of disciplines - or elements thereof. The annex organisation CIEPAT in Benin is one such. The Inter-State Centre for the Promotion of Handicrafts and Cultural Tourism links six member state of ICA (Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger) in a sub-regional attempt to establish a training and production centre for craftsmen. This centre will house lodgings and workshops in the disciplines of leather, wood work, gold and silver smithing, carving etc. so as

to progressively liberate chosen craftsmen, while they are temporarily in residence, from material worries likely to hinder their free reflection on problems of creativity, design and production - conditions likely to promote the evolution of standards of design and patents, ultimately capable of large scale commercialisation through postcards and other media of the best examples of designs of crafts. Booklets, travel brochures, slides and other supports for tourism can thus become a feasible proposition for the states concerned. This should drive shoddy examples of 'airport art' out of existence.

The CRAC to which we have already referred constitutes another example of a sub-regional facility for cultural administration. In its time, ICA has studied the possibility of repeating the experience, probably in English in, say, Eastern Africa for the peculiar needs of countries of Eastern and Southern Africa. Some logistic problems have resulted in some delay in the implementation of a similar centre elsewhere on the continent. One notes however that the Arab north does have a Centre in Tunis that fulfils a similar function. Also, several countries in West Africa do have national centres for the training of animators and/or cultural administrators, some of them fed by graduates of the CRAC, eg. Senegal and Togo; not to mention that a notable spill-over has occurred in many local institutions as a direct result of the experience gained in the pioneering centres.

What lessons may be drawn from these experiences? The Sahelian drought took a heavy toll on countries whose precarious ecology was sorely tried as from the late 70s, not to mention the ravages which the debt burden imposed on the continent of Africa and on the entire developing world.

First, a word of background information on ICA.

In the former Fort Lamy in January 1971, now Ndjamena capital of the hapless Chad, a convention was adopted giving birth to the African Cultural Institute. Thus was born the cultural specialised institution of OCAM, the all-francophone common services organisation for African States and Malagasy. The primary aim of the Institute was to harmonise the cultural policies of its member states, all of them in their second decade after independence from French colonial Status, and badly in need of trained personnel of a specialised background in cultural action. A second important aim of the African Cultural Institute was to rehabilitate the image of the black man and validate his culture and achievements.

It soon became clear that several countries supported the objectives of ICA without necessarily wanting to belong to OCAM. Notable among these were English-speaking countries in Africa who felt like making common cause with their francophone neighbours in the specific area of cultural action and cultural co-operation, especially in the wake of the Inter-governmental Conference in Cultural Policies organised in Accra, Ghana, in 1975. Largely in

order to accommodate concerns of these would-be members, the convention adopted in 1971 was revised five years later, thus opening the way for the adhesion of Ghana and Sierra Leone in 1977, and Zambia in 1980 an even wider membership, hopefully culminating in the attribution to ICA of a status of continent-wide vocation as the OAU's cultural specialised agency, much as UNESCO is to the UN. However, this stage was not attained before ICA was overtaken by material and logistic problems that nearly led to its demise in the early 1980s.

ICA's evolution in the first thirteen years of its history contains valuable lessons that deserve careful examination in terms of the problems of cultural administration in Africa. The strength and weakness of ICA need to be examined in this light.

With the birth of new nation states in the era of political independence, the problematic of culture became topical. The question was to what extent the new nation states were going to assert their cultural identity, or to what extent their colonial status was going to characterise their way of perceiving their role on the world scene. What difference, in effect, was their change in formal status going to make? After all, independence should connote more than a new flag, a new national anthem and such other symbols of nationhood. What of a thorough going change in the structures of their manner of thinking and their manner of acting.

This problem is still topical, and will remain so far several decades to come. So many aspects of what constitutes African culture cry out for re-evaluation that the question will continue to demand

answers until our political economies come out with new structures that convince our peoples that a new world cultural order has been instituted. That, then, are some of these aspects of our culture? And what aspects enter into consideration of "Cultural policies" and "cultural administration"?

August Gerard defines the aim of cultural development as the quest for a dynamic equilibrium between individual cultures and universal culture.¹ In other words, in a world of different peoples, a formula needs to be found that accommodates the individual genius of each people, its realizations, its preoccupations and its sensibilities. In every department of life, be it in social organisation, value systems, performing arts, languages, belief systems, dress, creative arts, taboos, in each of these departments, a need is evident for the accommodation of the peculiarities of the world's peoples, in a spirit of free inter-change and mutual respect. Not only does this refer to different geographical and cultural zones of the globe, but also to different social strata of each zone or country.

In the series of regional conferences on cultural policies that were held in the 1970s onwards, it would be noted that the African component isolated the affirmation of cultural identity as a key pre-occupation, notably through the valorisation of indigenous languages and the promotion of local creative arts.

None of what precedes was intended to paint an idyllic picture of ICA. The institute faced severe problems of mobilization of funds, having regard to the fact that, at the height of its glory, no less than half of its 48 member countries figured among the United Nations' list of the world's most deprived countries. The Sahelian drought of the 1970s and 1980s in addition caused an unimaginable crisis in the zone, whose repercussions could not but be felt at all levels of ICA's existence. Despite the increase in the audience of the Institute and the encouragement of its numerous admirers, the bulk of its budget still depended on the contributions of its hard-pressed member states. The fact that a majority of its members belonged to the franc zone should ordinarily have facilitated financial operations, as opposed to the situation where currency barriers exist. But the world wide economic crisis exacted a heavy toll.

All this meant that the execution of cultural policies had to suffer. The training programmes of the CRAC suffered a set-back, with the temporary suspension of courses for over a year. The inability to bring to fruition earlier proposals to convert the CRAC into a bilingual institution posed a problem of what to do with the increase in Anglophone member states. A palliative that was tried was the organisation of tailor-made short training courses in English in Central Africa for the sub-region. Naturally, this was no substitute for a full-blown course of training.

Structurally, the work of the Institute was organised on the basis of a series of programmes of activities, with sections on Scientific Research and Cultural Patrimony, Cultural Action, Co-operation etc. The first section, in liaison with Universities and Research Institutes was charged with taking care of pushing the frontiers of knowledge. Thus it was that, following a UNESCO conference in Accra in 1980 on the criteria for defining cultural zones, ICA took the initiative of convening a meeting of experts in 1983 to discuss in greater detail how these cultural zones could be delimited; experts from several countries in the West African sub-region attempted to rank the various criteria to determine how they related to one another, eg. how determinant in factor was Islam in the cultural evolution of the sub-region, to what extent were the value systems of the different peoples a vital factor in tracing sub-systems of the zone?

In the area of cultural action, workshops in drama, in handicrafts etc. were organised. One in particular, organised in Burkina Faso in 1981 brought together theatre practitioners from several countries in West Africa to contemplate the dramatic possibilities of the tradition of the griot (itinerant entertainers of the Sahelian zone). Musicians, chroniclers, historians, or entertainers, the griots have made an indelible imprint on the performing arts of the West Africa sub-region and have established a reputation for innovations in the region. The wider issue of the role of drama in cultural development had earlier in 1978 formed the subject of a

big workshop in Cote d'Ivoire. Reflexion and action have always been the two legs on which the Institute had sought to walk.

The ICA experience was rich in instruction. At a time when UNESCO was seeking to decentralize its operations, ICA became a ready-made instrument to enable our region of the world to take on several of the operations of the world body. In particular, a conference assembling East, Central and Southern African countries in Nairobi in August 1979 enabled that sub-region to pronounce itself for the first time as to its own perception of priorities in the cultural field. Three years later, in 1982, the next step was taken to give a chance to the Africa region as a whole to ponder in Dakar on the positions to take on issues of culture in the region in preparation for the UNESCO World Conference in Cultural Policies held in Mexico in August 1982. Without a doubt, the continent's impact on the world conference was well appreciated.

Side by side with these moves to enhance the internal cohesion of the region, other strategies came into play to promote the dialogue of cultures. Cooperation with Radio France International led to the organisation of competitions in the fields of music and theatre through the medium of RFI's award-granting activities in these two artistic fields. With Yugoslavia, a fruitful interchange of cultural personnel and programmes was instituted as from 1980, in which year an exhibition of one thousand publications in African and other languages was held. The publications were donated to this

non-aligned country. Subsequently, an exhibition of films was held, while the granting of a few scholarships to African cultural personnel from a number of member states made for a fruitful exchange of experiences. Some joint studies and publications were also undertaken, in the spirit of south-south cooperation.

Sub-regional co-operation has shown itself to be the way of the future. The increasing integration of zones of the continent has a lot to recommend it, so that ECOWAS in West Africa, SADC in Southern Africa, the Preferential Tariff Area in Eastern Africa are all seeking to group together neighbouring countries which seek to make of their economic groupings units which can re-inforce their common action in the cultural field as well.

The celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the Cultural Charter for Africa at the Conference of African Ministers of Culture in Mauritius in 1986 was ample vindication of ICA's initiative of ten years ago. The Institute and, indeed, the whole world community are braced at the moment to help the UN to launch in 1988 a decade of Cultural Development which will re-inforce the integration of Culture with the Economy. As far as ICA is concerned, an evaluation of its own actions that was undertaken at the end of its first decade, with the help of UNESCO, provides ample evidence of the lessons to be drawn from its experience.

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A global recommendation regarding the future of ICA consists of the wish that an organic relationship could be forged between the Institute and the OAU, so that its services and experience could be placed at the disposal of the continental organisation. This indeed was the desire formulated by more than one delegate at the Port Louis tenth anniversary celebration of the Cultural Charter.

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