

**10th Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Culture
and Officials Responsible for Cultural Policy
of Latin America and the Caribbean**

Trading in Power
Popular Constructions and the Discourse of Nations

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Dialogue is about give and take. All dialogue is an exercise in the exertion of power. Dialogue is always a process of struggle. Dialoguing or trading words is tantamount to trading in power. All global relations at all levels can be termed as dialogue. There are therefore an unlimited number of power struggles that all cultures which dialogue will confront. And because of this inevitability we must begin to interrogate the nature of our relations, locating the hindrances to our ability to dialogue in the region, by way of better understanding the potential for future engagement between Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the current juncture of global politics, the will to access power is no less an imperative than it used to be during the cold war era. The present global structures profess to provide greater access to power, for all nations. This is the intention of concepts such as free trade, parity and interactive technologies. But the underlying philosophies which support these developments within the new world order, scoff at any alternative ways of viewing the present global trends. National and so called peripheral territories are therefore silenced, for fear of being seen as backward thinkers in this progressive era. It is no secret that global structures and procedures are created within Europe and the US; and there is little direct input sought from peripheral territories. In a region like the Caribbean it is apparent that administrations do not fully grasp the way in which the world is constructed. And I deliberately choose the word constructed, since, I want to suggest that our current global set up is not a natural condition. It is not as it is because it is as it is. It did not evolve on its own. There are underlying ideologies and power forces which concoct the world. The world as we encounter it today is an experience created for us. It is global imperatives which dictate the state of play for us. That is why every now and again our societies are at a moment's notice suddenly thrown into some new climate. Some new trade regime. Some new aid programme. Always

something new but never something different. The task is always ours to fit in, to adjust to global conditions and directives. The latest global maxim we have to adhere to is that: national cultures are dead! regionalism is a better way to go; we have to see ourselves in blocks and mega-blocks. And in a sense we should. But for what reasons? Do we do it from a position of conviction or with mutual respect for our new bedfellows? Are we simply responding to what others tell us that we should do?

As regions we continue to experience the condition of what I call cultural ventriloquism. This has to do with the manipulation of our societies by external sources. It is significant that while we struggle to put on the overt structures which directives dictate. We do not assess the underlying hidden politics which manipulate us and throw us into an infinite spin. History has never allowed peripheral areas like ours the possibility of finding our centre. Of locating our agendas and consolidating our position for our selves, and within wider global politics. Current history also denies us that opportunity by blurring the reality of our situations. We never therefore are allowed to see our selves. (~~And we never have the opportunity to see our co-related others~~). Latin America and the Caribbean share a common space, yet, we are so far apart in so many ways. I want to suggest that our 'farness' is a real concern. And before we can contemplate trade in the context which our coming together here promises, I would suggest that we need to interrogate those barriers which impede our transfer of products and cultures.

It is a good thing that we are here to dialogue. Dialogue is so vitally critical. Especially when you are able to do so directly, without hindrance. I want to suggest that our dialogues and contact within our regions, are marked by the presence of interference. There is never direct contact really between Latin America and the Caribbean. There is always hindrance and interference. There is always deferral. In the current global climate it is critical to understand the nature of the distance and difference which is constructed between us. There is need to examine the methods by which power entities displace co-related (so called) peripheral cultures, like ours, one from the other.

As the world is presently constituted, the major power centers have set themselves up in opposition to peripheral cultures like ours. I do not need to spell out how this is done, except to say, that the end of die cold war has seen the further consolidation of power entities. The new paradigm which has surfaced is one in which the dominant culture gestures towards others and feigns/pretends dialogue. Because this dialogue between the dominant regions and the peripheral is concocted, mere is inherent tension. As in any such dialogue, mere is a struggle for control of discourse. All human relations ate constituted by this struggle. It takes place in its most base, open and violent form when. AH1 H attack helicopters loaded with smart bombs attack hidden targets and are themselves confronted by surface-to-air missiles. What I am saying therefore is that it is naive to think that

confrontation and impasse and the will for power are dead as the new millennium approaches. The dialogue which we frequently experience with dominant countries is constituted by contestation for power and control of discourse. We seem unwilling to admit that there is an underlying tension which accompanies all relationships within this present global structure.

We are in an age, they tell us of free trade, interactivity and international dialogue. But the real reality is that, that is not true. Free trade means unlimited access for the more powerful entities. International dialogue means being given a voice to acquiesce to special-interest 'international' agencies. Interactive technologies like the Internet and satellite media are really for the most part still one way interactive systems. So this is the backdrop from which I say the things which I want to talk to you about here today.

When we speak of trade usually we are guided by the economists. They talk of the actual transfer of commodities and services. For example, a country imports sugar and exports rum. That is trade as we perceive it in most cases. However trade needs to be understood in other terms especially in the current global context. There is what might be termed virtual trade. This has to do with the process of transfer of culture in non-formal ways. Sometimes this trade is clandestine. It is hidden in many disguises, so that we do not readily observe it. And the reality is that we are actively involved in trade every day. Every creative act which we nurture within our societies is a virtual product for actual trade. Our sharing of words in this forum, for example, is a moment of trade. Uninhibited direct dialogue is to my mind the most promising moment for the creation of trade. Still, direct dialogue is an ideal.

When we speak with others, across cultures, we are immediately set about by a number of ideological armories. We bring to the give and take of dialogue our language/s, history, indeed our cultures. There is no one who can divest him/herself of these hindrances, these assets. I submit to you that the very coming together of ourselves here is marked by the concomitant presence of all kinds of baggage. These are with certain degrees loaded with the imperatives that our national territories have created. So in most cases we are all here carrying the barriers and bridges of our particular states. It is not so much the language barrier that divides us, as it is our own encounter with history, and an inability to perceive beyond the barriers which history has constructed both for and between us. [And I do not speak of history as an abstract phenomenon. When it is identified as conquest, it is Columbus, Drakes, Cortez (who kamau Brathwaite terms as club foot in X/Self). This history is enslavement, domination and the encounter with Europe, and then later with the USA.]

Geographically we are close to each other, yet at the level of dialogue and discourse and communication we do not speak directly to each other. For the most part we encounter each other (as if) through a cultural translator. That is, the television, the sound and print media, popular culture monoliths which all have their basis in other cultures. For some people in the Caribbean, Latin America is a shady area in our knowledge bank. We can barely fill in the names of countries on a map of Latin America. We do a little Latin American history at school. We encounter Latin America on account of Latin America's experiences with colonial European powers. And we suddenly learn in some later stage of life that Latin America is a region of many contrasts in terms of population, geography, and culture. It is problematic to lump that regional area together.

So listen to this leading of Latin America (and you can do your own critique). These societies possess rich natural and physical resources. These have been exploited from the early C16th by Spain and Portugal. This was the situation for some three centuries, until some political independence in the early C19th. Independence was achieved before there was an infrastructure of communication across the region, there was market by a did not achieve a unified federated state. There was a division into approximately 17 separate republics. The establishment of these was marked by a mutual dislike, rivalry and hostility. This situation was fostered and perpetuated by foreign commercial interests for their own ends. Foreign interests and foreign migrants from Europe maintained heavy presence in the region overtime. Foreign capital can be said to have modernized Latin America, but me foreign investors have extracted more than their fair share of resources. The critical shift in the C20th from Europe to the U.S did not bring about any better condition for most of the population.

There is the sense in which our nations must go through a process of de-education. We must unlearn many of the things which have been fed to us. Since, we have in many respects only met each other through television, and through images of ourselves, created by external powers. We need to begin to interrogate those images.

And so, governments must begin to consider the new important site of global confrontation. It is at the level of popular culture. We are in an age where popular culture mediums are responsible for more things than we are aware. Isn't it a frightfully real experience that although we meet here this week, and we introduce ourselves, that we have already been constructed. We are types. In a sense therefore I am not meeting my colleagues from Latin America for the first time. We have already met. I think I know you well through the television. News items of catastrophies: - some natural and many man made. You are constructed in the Caribbean through American and other ideologically charged networks. You are constructed in the way that they want to construct you. In the same way that television convinces us that Sadam Husein, and Muamar Ghadaffi are all mad

men and that most muslims are extremist terrorists, there is also a televised image of Latin America. You are Noriega, Pinochet, Sandinistas, Dictatorships, extraditeable, a little Carnival now and again, football, Us led invasions, unstable regimes, then US backed indictments... But thankfully there are active hearers and viewers in the Caribbean, who begin to interrogate these popular images.

But at the same time, I am also created as a construct by an intermediary medium. So I am not surprised neither am I offended if you sit silently and by some miracle know somehow (you feel), that I am the son of a business man/farmer who is given to the cultivation of sugar or some other commodity, maybe bananas. And it might not matter to you really which island of the Caribbean I am from, Trinidad, Dominica, Grenada, Barbados... same difference. But in all this knowing, you also will come to a realization that I share with you a mutual dependence on Europe and the US. And it must be in that moment of realization of dependency that you also begin to see a reflection of yourself. This is the honest truth of our meeting. We cannot talk culture in abstraction, it must be linked to the body politic, social and so on. George Lamming makes the point that culture as a concept derives from the concept of a connection with the land, agriculture. What he really means is that culture pervades all forms of human activity. And that is why I am fearful of the neat assigning of culture to a separate category within political administrations, which suggests the separateness of culture from other spheres of human development.

Beginning at the national levels, we have to think again about the project which this forum undertakes. What do we want from each other? What do we give each other? What are our commonalities? What are our differences? Do we have the will to confront and overcome them? What are the factors and forces which militate against our efforts to dialogue more seriously? Some of these problems have to do with history, and with the perpetuation of history into the present. But mostly they still have to do with imperial domination, exploitation, access to power, and divide and rule. Language is only a sub-section within these larger considerations. Political will, or lack thereof is a much bigger hindrance. But maybe I am too harsh on regional governments. It is perhaps truer to say that the lack of insight into culture and power is a much much bigger problem for governments.

There are obvious imbalances in the set up of trade structures. It is not a level playing field. Larger trading powers are engaged actively daily in shipping to the region their cultural products. In turn countries in this hemisphere do not reciprocate. Within the current global set up, countries like ours are under-represented in the trade and transfer of culture. The U.S trades its culture to the region every day. Music, films and other commodity forms. In addition to trading in their own cultural products they also trade to us our own cultural products. They trade us images of ourselves, for our own consumption. Most of these images of ourselves which we pay-to-view, are passive, stereotypical and negative. For example in the film "Godzilla", Godzilla the monster touches down on the Caribbean. It is a Caribbean of stereotypical icons: beach, boat, bush, passive observers on life. Individuals who can only look on in awe at life's larger issues. And so in that movie an aging woman with head tied and a blank eyed Rastafarian are only statuesque side-liners to the major action which the superpower's greatest exporters, Hollywood and the music industry, construct about us. That is an image of the Caribbean which becomes constructed and is difficult to erode.

[See other images of Latin America and the Caribbean in "Lost World", "Total Force", "Soldiers of Fortune" ...)

As I speak I feel that greater impetus must be given to popular arts. Literature, painting, music, dance, fashion, design, theatre, and also television. Latin America has immense experience with television, and particularly film production. The Caribbean must tap into this rich resource. This is a major potential growth area. Along with this we have got to think of fostering networks among ourselves. This way we can consolidate a culture trading area. We should have cultural exchanges of artistes, exchanges during festivals, student exchanges at various levels of the education spectrum, secondary, tertiary, exchange of teachers. But apart from the exchanging of artists and personnel of this kind there should be the trading of experts in various aspects of culture, crafts people, artisans, academics, cultural workers etc. These would be engaged in programmers where they both teach aspects of their trade culture, but also the cultural features of the culture which they visit. Later on they relay their experience ~~and their own teaching~~ back to their native societies.

But there is also the situation that the popular arts must be given a fillip of dissemination. They must be recorded, and distributed. The reality though is that we are still in many cases backward thinking. We do not perceive the value of recording things, far less seeing the enhanced

value to disseminating them. In the Caribbean in particular we have not as yet worked out the relationship between cultural heritage and culture projection. The domain of culture is the least explored and the least considered resource of our societies. Culture has in many cases been fated to exist under the umbrella of folklore and tradition. But this is only one of many manifestations of which culture is possible. Many of you will say that the private sector should take on working with cultural production and packaging. But I cannot but feel that there is need for policy initiatives which can set a larger process into motion. Cultural creation, production, and dissemination is an undertaking which must be entered into by many agencies. Governments and other private agencies must support this kind of initiative.

Where film is concerned, though, it is generally agreed that in the so called Third world, national cinema can be a matter only of state policy, not of individual effort. But, yet, film fits awkwardly into the state's institutional priorities. It cannot be seen as a governmental achievement in modernization (like the building of a highway or industrial complex). Neither is it an aspect of traditional culture, to be promoted internationally along with, say, local crafts. Since national cinemas tend to be socially critical rather than complementary of government achievements, it is not seen as an area to encourage. Since many leaders are Western-educated, they are sensitive of their image abroad, and so the images of a local film industry is the last type of product they want to be advertised abroad. (Armes 40-41). So they prefer to allow other producers to mis/represent them globally. In any case many governments prefer to extract taxes from film imports and box office receipts (sometimes at the level of 40%), rather than concerning themselves with the problematic of art and aesthetics.

Television and Film are critical and viable areas for development and future empowerment. Some have said that language will not facilitate the exchange of programmes, and trade in t.v programmes and films, but everyone in the Caribbean will know the phenomenal success in the Caribbean of the Kung Fu genre of films. These were largely produced in Chinese (cantonese+mandarin), but they have come to us over-dubbed in English. They have given us access to a culture and a genre which is far removed from ourselves. [And yet I remember some years ago when many Caribbean men especially wanted to grow pony tails, or walked around in kung fu shoes in order to look like Bruce Lee, Ching Sing and Jackie Chan]. These days Jet Lee is a powerful icon. In our region he is more influential than culture ministers,

prime ministers. When he and others are exported abroad they metamorphose into mega entities. Still stereotypical, but they appear as larger than life icons. They are on the lips of popular culture. You see them in "Rush Hour" the film with Chris Tucker and in "Lethal Weapon 4" with Mel Gibson, Danny Glover, and saving the world. This is the extent to which the nurturing of popular culture forms can begin to reposition a culture from the periphery of obscurity to centre. I am saying that it is impossible for the major world players to ignore self supporting cultures. They must take notice. A counter argument to this will suggest that mainstream only appropriates and misrepresents and exploits peripheral cultures even when they feature them. That is true. But power relations do not always work like that. We do not know it but major powers are as dependent on us as we are on them. In any case, the kung fu genre does not depend in a big way on mainstream for its survival. It is no secret that Hong Kong has produced more feature films per year than the US in recent times. In a year like 1992 for example to the US's 261, they produced some 364. (Guinness 16-17). They have created a legitimate industry. [I know you will say to me that Hong Kong experienced a great upsurge in industrialization in the 50s 60 and 70s and that the capital investment needed for film development was put up by large scale family owned corporations and that industrialization provided a mass urban population of viewers in need of entertainment. And you will remind me that their tapes are produced and distributed by large independent companies, which themselves are in some way affiliated to major companies. But] I point to the achievements of the native owned Golden Harvest Company celebrated for its Bruce Lee films. [Hong Kong Connection is a large production company. Which has worked with Arena Home Video and relied on the Santa Monica distribution company Xenon Entertainment Group for greater access to discourse.] Hong Kong has built a flourishing export industry in film, supplying films to Chinese communities throughout the world and breaking into Western domestic markets (from the 1970s). I think what I am really advocating is not only an interface with popular forms, such as video creation and film, but the conscious engagement with the power which these popular mediums can harness and relay.

In the Caribbean, Cuba has considerable experience with feature film. There it has served a cultural and industrial purpose. In the wider Caribbean this is a very recent phenomenon. There is T+T's 1937 "Callaloo" and in the 1970s Jamaica's "The Harder they Come" and recently "Dancehall Queen" and these are the foremost examples that we can identify. These films, though low budget, have created a sensation in our region. We can count the limited number of feature films in the Anglophone Caribbean. In the Caribbean we have not experienced film as Latin America has. From as early as the 1900s Countries like Brazil Argentina and Venezuela have had

'local' productions. But in terms of shorter versions, and documentary films, many islands produce shorter features every day. These are potentially highly valuable cultural products as well. And yet we hardly see them throughout the region. We do not realize how the global discourse has changed. Television, cyberspace, and interactive technologies are the new conduits for constructing experience, (and in the absence of palpable human presence). There must be ways of creatively harnessing this power and relaying it between ourselves. But also relaying it beyond. We must be given images of one another which emanate from ourselves. We have to negotiate some space for ourselves. It is a pity that in the Caribbean we do not share in the culture of Latin America through our own popular media.

[Some years ago there was an increased interest by Europe and the US in world music. This had been interpreted as an industry led phenomenon, but closer examination showed that the music industry was contracting at its centre, whereas peripheral areas were developing. The industry's core therefore turned to regional music's. They cannot, do not do without us. We need to seize on to this knowledge and re-assess and reposition ourselves.]

The Latin American area is a much larger block and can sustain an autonomous music industry. This explains the continued interest of the music industry's mainstream. The Caribbean needs to actively reorient music formats and preference etc. in order to tap into the exceedingly big culture areas of Latin America. We should think also of crossing over not only to the American mainstream, but to Latin America. Our musics have for a long time borrowed from Latin America In fact ours are related in many ways. Venezuela has influenced Trinidadian Calypso. This explains why in the 1900s Decca, then a large company, lumped all the music of Latin America and the Caribbean together as folk music, and began to record it. It is ironic that others see us as related, but we do not see ourselves in that way. [n.b it is in the metropolises that the fusion of Latin music and rap, dancehall fuses into Latin rap and is called a branch of Caribbean music. (Manuel et al)]

At present many musical acts in the Anglophone Caribbean draw consciously and unconsciously on Latin music aesthetics. It impacts keyboard and synthesizer applications. Guitar chordal progressions in the Eastern Caribbean from around 1995 began to revert to Latin styled treatment (hear KrosFyah +Atlanticetc...). Music is an area of enormous potential. To the extent that Latin America has a bigger and longer established tradition of music and film making, production, and some distribution, they can trade experiences with the Caribbean, in this area.

Governments do not readily perceive the enormous potential of popular culture. Popular

culture forms are usually seen as being in opposition to administrations and policy. This is not always the case. That is an old way of seeing the relationship between popular culture and governments. But the truth is that there is some negotiation which takes place between popular culture and officialdom. There is therefore a telling need for cultural planners and administrations to become current on aspects of cultural theories. How many of us for example are familiar with the relationship between post-structuralist and post-modernist cultural theory and the hidden politics of globalization? Culture must be taken seriously at all levels. But since our cultural planners are still trapped in the philosophies of Theodore Adorno they believe that since popular music and television have been claimed by popular culture, they must distance their administrations from these popular culture symbols. Popular culture forms are therefore left to independent development. Governments do not contemplate the enormous potential for export which an engagement with such phenomena can engender. These are seen as not falling under the ambit of central Government or administration. And in a sense these cannot be legislated. But governments throughout the region must begin to trade in their conservative outlooks for a more progressive vision of societal and intra regional empowerment. Occasional references to popular culture forms does not denote an engagement with popular culture. Governments must take pro-active initiatives to understand and develop aspects of popular culture. Take the case of Australia who's Ministry of education in 1988 established the Australian Contemporary Music Company. (Robinson Buck + Cuthbert 135-136) A nonprofit organization which would receive more than \$US 300,000 per year to help turn promising garage bands into international acts. This sprung from that nation's realization of its potential. The plan was to use government support to triple export earnings. In the same year there had been at least 5 Australian performers on the Billboard Top100 including INX, Midnight Oil, and Kylie Minogue. But perhaps I expect too much from regional ministers, since a major fillip for the Australian move was the fact that officials in the Australian government were of an age group which grew up with rock music and recognized both its intrinsic value and its economic potential. The Minister for example was a grass roots music fan who believed in that aspect of popular culture. We do not have this commitment, and confidence in our region. Radical performers, cutting edge nationals must begin to be perceived and handled in different ways within the national contexts which nurture them. This reassessment of the popular can lead to a transformed relationship between government

and popular culture throughout the region. This is a form of dialogue to be encouraged.

But instead we only think of dialogue within narrow parameters. Unfortunately our primary desire for dialogue is not for dialogue with our selves, but with the major power/s. The global climate sets up the super power as the object of desire, of pleasure. We experience an orgasmic thrill from signing treaty with that power. Less emphasis is placed really on fulfilling bargains. Which reminds me of when the president of the USA was here last year. A pleasurable time. He smiled. We stood in awe as he lit the flames of liberty in us, for all the world to see. These months after, there is still an air of nostalgia in our voices from having had the pleasure of meeting the president here! But enough for pleasures. The sober reality is that any dialogue conducted then was not dialogue at all, at least not in the real sense of dialogue: - which means a two way flow. When a powerful entity confronts its insignificant others it is already given to condescension. The powerful entity is itself constructing a relationship in which it derives its own pleasure from being desired by others.

If I seem to be saying that it is not possible for countries designated as peripheral to hope for interactive two-way dialogue with some global moguls then I am suggesting just that. But understand me, I am saying that dialogue is not possible in the traditional ways that governments tend to expect. That is, at round tables and so on. We must begin to explore the possibility that there might be other avenues for conducting covert dialogue with these same powerful entities. We similarly have to find ways of empowering ourselves, exporting ourselves abroad I am not talking of actual physical migration in mercy boats. I am talking of exporting our views, an activity which major powers themselves have consistently employed to market their culture. They create a climate which is conducive to the development and projection of their popular culture forms and media. They are able to position their culture industries favorably.

I would even suggest that the dominance of major entities is maintained through popular culture. Aircraft carriers, stealth bombers, marching soldiers do not on their own uphold power. Militarism is an overt activity. In our post-cold war era it must be understood that the new tools of confrontation are situated in technological media, in entertainment, in sport and related areas. Our failure to assert power and inculcate a sense of significance about ourselves springs from the restricted thinking imposed on us by global structures. We have continued to see economics as being

linked to traditional sectors. It is no wonder therefore that most governments as constituted do not locate culture along with finance. Can you think of any governments in our region which have such a linking of ministries? Any ministries of finance and culture? Culture is often linked with community development, or with education, or with sport. And it is almost always seen as being at the far end of the cabinet's concerns. It is an appendage. Even in instances where it is a legitimately constituted arm it seems amputated from the main body of the nation. Because of this disconnection from the body and head of society, governments do not think about or for culture. And indeed they cannot until there is a re-connection of culture, to the base of society.

[Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean must deconstruct their own philosophies (not necessarily in the Derridean sense). They must reinitialize, reorient thinking in terms of relationships between Latin America and the Caribbean. This calls for a reassignment of education systems and the positioning of each other's region to a more central position within education curricula. I know our governments have spoken about the importance of foreign languages and this is an extremely vital concern. But, I still know that it is difficult for some students in the Caribbean and Barbados to access more than one foreign language beyond the level of third form. The imperatives of time tabling offer an option between one or another foreign language. But more so than that linguistic challenge there is the challenge of overcoming our mis-perception of each other. Either there should be an initiative to achieve greater control of satellite or line broadcast facilities, or we must find other media through which we can create more meaningful representations of ourselves. Above everything else that is a major barrier to our consolidation of position and the empowerment of our societies.]
