

REFLECTIONS OF THE CUBAN DELEGATION ON TOPICS INCLUDED IN THE AGENDA OF THE 10th FORUM OF MINISTERS OF CULTURE OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Forum of Ministers of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean has become a space of great significance in which those in charge of the cultural policies of the region can exchange ideas and coordinate actions. That is the reason why after becoming acquainted with the agenda of this 10th Forum, Cuba has decided to share with the Ministers of the area her points of view on the topics to be analyzed.

Like the rest of Humankind, our peoples are living this turn of the century under the impact of the so-called globalization, a process that unfortunately is not a synonym of true universality or democratic access to its possibilities. The great technological revolution has been placed at the disposal of those trying to turn human beings into consumerist creatures. The national identities of Latin American and Caribbean peoples are threatened and our cultural diversity suffers today more than ever before the erosion of the globalizing media.

In this Forum we are in a position to work together against vertical, authoritarian and soliloquist discourses trying to homogenize languages, ways of life, habits and cultural expressions.

Fortunately, the cultural contribution of a people has nothing to do with their geographic size, their Gross Domestic Product or their industrial potential. In the so-called Third World, expressions of the utmost richness and depth have arisen and continue arising, while all too frequently the developed North sends us sub-cultural expressions plagued with stereotypes illustrating a profound spiritual vacuum in which on many occasions racism and xenophobia, violence and war are promoted.

In the cultural field, perhaps more than in any other one, there is evidence of the way in which hegemonistic globalization hinders our access to the true heritage of contemporary Humankind and attacks the wealth of our spiritual life. Instead of being grounded on true universality, this process is determined by unipolar hegemony. Perhaps one of the most dangerous impacts of globalization is its permanent - and many times demolishing - action on the historical memory, on intelligence, on true thinking.

We nevertheless take note of a sort of "positive reverse" in the so-called globalization: the appearance of a new type of critical thinking which becomes aware of the real world, rejects hegemonistic patterns and tries to find alternative roads to vindicate the humanistic vocation of true culture. This type of thinking is also expressed in global terms and starts seeing the need to propose universal solutions.

We believe it is important to meditate together on the culture-development linkage. Unfortunately, the notion of development limited to economic growth has expanded, just as the notion of quality linked to consumerism has expanded too. In this regard we wish to recall Jose Marti, one of the intellectual paradigms not only of Cuba but of all the Americas. Marti said that poetry

is more necessary to the peoples than industry itself, because the latter provides them the way to survive, while the former gives them the desire and strength to live. Where can men having lost the habit of thinking faithfully on the significance and implications of their acts go?

At another time, Marti wrote about the great poet Walt Whitman and the United States. His words were a warning against the civilizing model in which the poet's work ripened, a society which Marti knew all too well. In his essay, Marti noted that "prosperity", and "development" without poetry,

without art, without culture, solely geared to material well-being, to consumption, did not make human beings grow; on the contrary, they eroded their best potential. Marti said that, in the long run, these degraded masses

will confuse in the chaos of an ever incomplete prosperity the hopeless affliction of the soul, that takes pleasure in the beautiful and magnificent.

This Martiano concept is ever present in face of the dangers currently pressing Our America. We would render our peoples very little service if we neglected their necessary spiritual growth: underdevelopment would be perpetuated and we would be hopelessly doomed to be a cluster of human beings with no memory, no identity, no density, simple machines for consumption.

We have the duty to safeguard our heritage, the images and words we have created, and struggle so that future generations can enjoy our legacy. To promote this struggle we have to reach out, systematize spaces for collective discussion and promote an independent and creative reflection that will consolidate our arguments.

If my country attaches great importance to this Forum it is, first of all, because we are convinced that we have a real possibility of building a space for thinking and creating that will involve our peoples and promote alternative values to the models hegemonistic cultural industries are trying to impose on us. We are speaking of a plural space, aimed at sustaining the voice of the legitimate bearers of our essences.

We believe in a type of globalization that will make solidarity and cooperation universal. Every minute we lose and every instance we waste will impair our possibilities of consultation and weaken us in the face of the onslaught of centers monopolizing information and culture.

How are we to face these challenges? How can we be ourselves without fading or disappearing today or tomorrow? Let us start from some premises, first of all, the one called by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier

a history differing from the rest of the histories in the world; a history that differed from the beginning, since this American soil witnessed the most sensational ethnic encounter registered in the annals of the globe: the meeting of Indians, Blacks and Europeans of more or less light skinned, who in the future were bound to mix, to establish a symbiosis of culture, beliefs and people's arts, in the most tremendous crossbreeding ever seen.

This originality may guarantee advances beyond suspicion, while serving as a basis for another premise we must keep well in mind: the vitality of Latin American and Caribbean cultures.

We actually have an enormous cultural wealth expressed in many diverse forms. In spite of the corroding impact of the worse of the so-called mass culture and the aftermath of cultural colonization and alienation, the traditional legacy forms a living, acting heritage. And more important still: that tradition has continued in an on - going inexhaustible creativity. Throughout this century, and even much the more so today, it is not possible to speak of avant-gard on a universal scale without duly praising the indisputable and decisive contributions of Latin American and Caribbean writers and artists, even though acknowledging these feats it demanded overcoming the excluding diktat of global circuits of cultural distribution, under estimation and biases imposed by the so-called "center" on the intellectual productions of the "periphery". There is another evident proof of this vitality: once our contributions to the avant-gard have become undeniable, once the strength of our creators cannot be concealed any longer, this hegemonistic industry has tried to assimilate it through manipulations ranging from pigeonholing our works -the so-called presentations of "ethnic art" or the machinations of "world music" - to efforts aimed at uprooting our most brilliant talents.

Possibly many of us will ask ourselves what can we count on, in terms of resources, to undertake significant integration and harmonization actions in the field of culture, since today the promotion of art, literature and all spiritual creations necessarily demands technological supports and complicated and expensive infrastructures. Probably having at our disposal the technological levels sustaining the media and cultural industries in hegemonic centers will take long, but our main resources are that universally acknowledged, impressive cultural wealth and our ability to associate. If we unite, we may be more competitive and our productions will be in a better position in the international market. We may also establish alternative circuits to disseminate our productions.

Taking into account the above, Cuba wishes to submit to the Forum some ideas that may be useful in our work:

- We believe the necessary conditions exist for harmonizing cultural policies in the area in order to promote legislations making more flexible, and even favoring, the free dissemination of art productions between our countries.
- The experience achieved by the Forum of Ministers, evidenced in its continuity, allows for a critical review of the harmonization and integration projects adopted in previous meetings in order to find an effective way to begin their implementation.
- We can have a decisive influence on the more significant participation of the topic of cultural industries in present and future sub regional integration mechanisms.
- We would like to consider alternatives to promote the dissemination of the rich and diverse musical and dramatic expressions of the peoples in the area, as well as in visual arts and handicrafts. Cuban cultural industries are ready to consider any proposal favoring the promotion of our most authentic values.
- We are ready to carry out actions in the difficult and complex field of audiovisuals, given their undeniable significance in disseminating cultural values and as a means to oppose the increasing invasion of images of negligible aesthetic value.

- We support the integration of regional festival and art circuits. Our country holds the Fire Festival every year in Santiago de Cuba and is ready to work with Caribbean cities sponsoring similar festivals and contribute to the establishment of a sub regional circuit for exchanging and marketing of these events.
- In the area of the culture - tourism relationship, we are also willing to favor the circulation of cultural products as a means to foster our cultural industries. It is a topic we have been considering in recent years and one in which different forms of harmonization and cooperation may be found together with UNESCO. In countries with a strong African descent, this organization has sponsored a cultural tourism program called The Slave Path. My country expresses its willingness to implement actions for activating this plan, in coordination with the other countries involved.
- The development of cultural industries demands the highest degree of professionalism in cultural management. Our Forum may consider forms of cooperation in the training and education of specialists in this area.

Cuba reiterates to the delegations attending the 10th Forum of Ministers of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean its commitment with this important space for exchange and dialogue, as well as its willingness to work together in implementing the projects and agreements adopted in this meeting.