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Lamming, Shakespeare, and the Bank: An Essential Marriage in the Business of the Arts (An Intervention)¹

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This article looks at the Caribbean Arts model for the 21st Century and attempts to understand how the undeniable love for the arts can create and develop an economically sound and financially viable business practice in the creative sector. The political agenda of the Caribbean suggests that the arts must be for the marketplace; however, some practitioners believe that the creativity will be lost if mass-produced for financial and economic gains. Within the investigation of this union, I seek to determine how the tension and conflict which exists between the tangible and the intangible can be resolved and finally harmonized and therein propose an ethos for this “perfect marriage”, if there is such a thing.

Art or Eat?

Barbadian novelist and poet George Lamming once remarked during an interview that “how can I make art and eat?”, or similarly, “will my art have any value if it doesn’t make me money?”, noting the link and economic significance to creativity. Likewise Shakespeare, in the play *As You Like It* ², “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts...” At first glance, this may be interpreted to

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30817/0152.apr0214>

² *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Volume 1, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII (Nelson Doubleday, Inc.) pp. 532; also <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/asyoulikeit/asyoulikeit.2.7.html>

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mean that Shakespeare understood the link between the players (the artists), the stage (their craft), and the many roles within the play (the arts business). My interpretation is that the deep-rooted passion for the arts must have a clear link – the need to express creativity, the fiscal responsibility of the artist to his or her creative product, and the economic impact of the arts to the country.

Making a Living in the Arts

I have a back story to this article...

When I was growing up, I knew I wanted to be involved in the arts. I loved the stage from as early as I could remember, whether I was dancing, singing or in a dramatic piece of work; I wasn't very good at the first two, but I excelled in theatre. My elders kept telling me, "You can't be an actress! How will you make a living and enjoy life? There is no money to be made as a performer in Barbados!" I did everything my folks wanted me to do. I went on to complete my first degree in Accounting at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, all the while still being involved in every aspect of theatre with Stage One Theatre Productions and various other theatre groups throughout the year – getting experience in all areas of the stage, and performing on stage every chance I got. My day job for about ten years was in accounting, but I was bored and miserable, and at some point, I decided that I could not continue. So, I resumed my studies, this time with a Master of Arts Degree in Arts Management, as I wanted to gain a better understanding of how artists could make a living from the arts they so loved. All the while, I continued to do what I loved most – perform on stage as well as write, direct, produce plays, and manage artists and venues. Note though that my Accounting degree has come in handy over the years with financially managing various creative projects. While working closely with various artists, I realized that many of them, although at a professional level creatively, had no plans in place to manage their money, to enhance their business skills, or to properly understand their contribution to the cultural economic sector in which they lived and worked. My accounting skills were not a total 'waste' in the end. The questions I ask are: why is it hard for some artists to marry their art (ideas) with business, and make a living solely through their creativity; and why do they not acknowledge the vital role they can play in the economic and financial sector of the country? Artists do not fail because they are unqualified or not adequately trained in their field, but because they lack knowledge of how to plan and manage the business associated with their creativity, build their clientele, increase their visibility in the local marketplace, and promote and sell their creative product(s)

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on both local and international levels. Unfortunately, they do not see the immediate value of residuals or returns on creative talents or investments.

That assessment prompted the questioning: "how can I make my art and eat? In other words, how can I make money from my creativity, and how can I marry my craft to a business model?"

Creativity vs Gains

Earlier in this commentary, I noted that some practitioners believe that creativity will be lost if mass-produced for financial and economic gains. Theodor Adorno³ notes that the term 'culture industry' is preferred to 'mass culture' as it suggests that it is chosen by people to suit their needs. However, he refutes this position by indicating that this has nothing to do with the needs of the masses, but rather the production of commodities which generate false needs such as the skilful production of film, music, and television which are by no means equal to the techniques developed in art. He therefore recognises the cultural industry as being utilised to implement cultural hegemony, where the ruling class is trying to control the thoughts, ideas and behaviours of the masses who are easily influenced to act according to their (ruling class) programming and agenda. Adorno also believes that art is no longer being used for informative and educational purposes, which can expand our minds or make us more cultured, however art is being exploited and misused as entrepreneurial ventures for monetary purposes, known as the commodification of art.

Creativity has several straightforward principles, according to John Howkins⁴:

- It is a basic element of life; it is a universal talent – everyone is creative to some degree;
- it is fun – creative people don't look like they are working; creative people are very competitive and set high standards for themselves;
- they exhibit several personality traits – more determined, strong egos, more independent, to mention a few; and
- there is no positive or ethical guarantee.

³ Adorno, Theodor W., *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O'Conner, (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), pp. 230-7.

⁴ Howkins, John. *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. 1st Edition, London, England, The Penguin Group, 2001, pp. 10-15.

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But at which point can or will creativity turn into a worthwhile business venture? Creativity has no economic value by itself; it needs to emerge or materialise as a tangible and tradeable product. This product or item for consumption can then be sold or traded in an open market, with sellers (artists, performers) and buyers (consumers, audiences), with guidelines for the purchase and sale of this product, to achieve or realise any financial benefit to the artist or economic value⁵ to the country, whether it is a piece of artwork exhibited in the Queens Park Gallery, or a prize-winning choreography at the National Independence Festival of Creative Arts (NIFCA), or a social commentary written for Crop Over Pic-of-de-Crop Finals competition in Barbados.

In *Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce*, Richard E. Caves⁶ discusses the artists' labour supply and notes that the artist is willing to sacrifice in order to devote him/herself to their creative work; however, they would accept insignificant or near zero artistic fees as proof of their 'creative success', but the artist must still eat. As I noted in the introduction regarding my own desperation to make a living and pay bills while maintaining my theatre life with little or no financial remuneration or earnings, the artist accepts a regular job with regular hours, with less time dedicated to their craft, and a decrease in output or supply of their creative labour/product. Taking that discussion further and in understanding the relationship between economics and culture, David Throsby⁷ notes that in doing so, attention must be paid to the origins of cultural production as well as the creative process. He continued with the idea that if creative work has negative impacts on economic and cultural value, then economic and cultural influences will affect the way in which practitioners and creatives generate their artistic ideas and products. But are these two, economic value and cultural value, corresponding with each other and seen as incentives to and outcomes of the creative process, or are they working contra to the goals and plans of the artist? I believe it is safe to say that the artist puts more weight on the cultural value of their work than the economic value and therefore, creates according to heart rather than financial benefits. This is not to say that creatives are not interested in

⁵ Howkins, John. *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*, pp. 17-18.

⁶ Caves, Richard E. *Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 78.

⁷ Throsby, David. *The Economics of Cultural Policy*. Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 93-94.

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the monetary significance of their work, but it is of lesser importance, so unless there is a market or demand for it, no matter how creatively valued or respected it is, the economic benefit cannot be easily derived or assessed. What therefore needs to emerge is a complete support mechanism and commercial infrastructure which jointly works to encourage creative productivity and entrepreneurship toward economic advancement and sustainability.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions note that cultural activities, goods and services have both an economic and cultural nature because they convey identities, values and meanings, and must therefore not be treated as solely having commercial value. It confirms that sovereign states need to “maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory”⁸.

The Caribbean Framework

The artistic community in Barbados has over the years proven that they have strong capabilities in the creative production; however, some of them lack entrepreneurial competence, and in some cases, inadequate facilities to showcase their skills. They have shown that they are capable enough to maintain a mediocre living on the local market but are swallowed by the imports and technologically knowledgeable overseas counterparts. In some cases, the artists and practitioners, including small creative companies, are very reliant on others, including external/overseas agents for assistance with management, business planning, marketing, financial support, distribution and export. Governments from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have recognized the contribution of the cultural and creative industries to the economies of the region, and with the necessary policies and legislative support in place, this sector as one of the most dynamic in world trade, could increase growth and create more jobs and wealth within the region, especially among the younger generation. CARICOM understands that the cultural industries are sustainable and are based on the creativity of its people; however, the artists are not so impressed with the findings

⁸ UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions - Paris, 20 October 2005 – Article 1(h) Objectives, pp. 5, retrieved on 10 August 2021.

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of the CARICOM member states, as some believe that the diluted approach to and exploitation of their craft is a great cause for concern.

While working with the Ministry of Culture, Division of Culture in 2006 on policy documents related to the drafting of the then Cultural Industries Bill⁹ (this work would expectedly have been continued by successive governments), I held discussions with various practitioners in the cultural industries. Some artists, especially the visual artists, were very vocal on what they called “the mass production of their work” without the benefits they believed ought to be received from the government. Why reproduce a dozen copies of my hard work to sell to outsiders, when the government taxes us so heavily on imports, and does not even give duty free assistance with the raw materials we need? Why help them (the Government) to record and boast about increases in foreign exchange when they are doing nothing to help the small man and poor artists?

In Jamaica, in a struggling economy with the decline in traditional industrial offerings, there is greater urgency to invest in cultural industries as a practical alternative. In the National Cultural Policy¹⁰, it was noted that the Culture Industries, especially in the music sector are directly related to empowerment possibilities for young people in Jamaica, particularly men, and offer real opportunities for employment and wealth creation, and to further the development of cultural industries is the need to foster and promote entrepreneurship within the wider community. In a report entitled “The Cultural Industries in CARICOM: Trade, Investment and Development Challenges” by Nurse *et. al.*¹¹, the creative synergies between the Creative Economy and the other sectors are outstanding; Tourism, Intellectual Property, Manufacturing, Education, and Media, to name a few, are intrinsically linked to the creative arts. For example, the composer writes the music/lyrics, and the performing artists and musicians record with the recording companies, while managers make

⁹ Barbados’ Cultural Industries Development Act, 2013

¹⁰ *National Cultural Policy of Jamaica: Towards Jamaica, the Cultural Superstate Culture Division*, Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, December 2003 Section 15.6 - 15.7 - Cultural Industries and Entrepreneurship, pp. 30.

¹¹ Nurse, Keith. *The Cultural Industries in CARICOM: Trade, Investment and Development Challenges*, Paper Presentation of findings of a study on Cultural Industries in CARICOM, pp. 3.

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arrangements and negotiate agreements for overseas concerts. Music promoters and publishers then invest in the product, which may lead to reviewing contracts with intellectual property experts and lawyers for copyright and legal matters, with agents/facilitators in the manufacturing and distribution of digital media for downloading and streaming services, to the final point with the consumers or audience by way of the broadcast or purchase of the product. Nurse categorized the income streams for the creative industries into goods and visible earnings, services and intellectual property as invisible earnings¹². This model works well for mass-production, however, the visual artist who uses their savings to buy a few canvases and creates masterpieces with his/her unique intellect and creativity, what of him or her? Would we then request the mass-production of this creativity without diluting it for monetary gain? But who gains the most in this union – the artist/agent or the audience, or are governments reaping the rewards of this union?

In analysing the trade patterns across the creative sector, it is important not only to look at the supply of goods and services, but also to concentrate on protection for the artists who own those creative goods and services. Trade, as it relates to the copyright and royalties of intellectual property, is a vital source of income for owners of those rights, and key areas of growth for the sector. However, this seems to be challenging as some Small Island Developing States do not adequately capture the data necessary to effectively assess the overall contribution of the sector. Nurse¹³ notes that although the Barbados Government has published a Cultural Industries Bill, and similarly the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has created a Creative Industries Company, both to greatly assist with facilitating growth in the sector, Caribbean competitiveness is still registering a deficit in the trade of cultural goods. This, he states, is mainly because we are still importing more CDs, books and paintings than we export and can be attributed to the decline in the manufacturing within the related sectors. It is also noted that our lack of documentation therefore does not accurately reflect the trade of services, for example, performance fees for live tours and concerts, or intellectual property from royalties from authors and composers. The creative

¹² Nurse, Keith. *The Cultural Industries in CARICOM: Trade, Investment and Development Challenges*, pp. 20.

¹³ Nurse, Keith. *The Cultural Industries in CARICOM: Trade, Investment and Development Challenges*, pp. 3-6.

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sectors in the Caribbean do, however, have strong ties with the tourism sector and use this link to create substantial employment opportunities via the branding and promotion of its festivals and natural heritage products.

An Enabling Environment

The basic principle of this therefore, is that cultural practitioners need to understand the importance of contributing to the creative economy. As artists, they have to be empowered and invested to play an active role in the growth and development of the economies of the region; however, government and policy makers also need to encourage and promote entrepreneurship among the creative youth. Incentives like grants for start-up businesses and business incubators, collaborative and/or networking efforts, and duty-free imports may help to streamline these initiatives, especially in the digital age. As Nurse states, there is a clear opportunity to take advantage of the expanding digital trade in online, streaming and subscription services; however, the supply of Caribbean content does not have an identifiable marketplace to maximize the opportunities in the digital market which have the greatest potential. These therefore may require an innovative governance framework where the key owners of copyright are working in collaboration to offer their creative content to the global market.¹⁴ In 2008, *Council for Business and the Arts in Canada*, commissioned McKinsey & Company to carry out a study on the investment in the arts. They noted the social importance of the arts, that the arts have a significant economic impact; with indirect benefits generated from the tourism, education, and community development sectors. Now known as Business/Arts, they continue to demonstrate the importance and power of adequate partnerships between business and arts, working with arts leaders, government and the business community to ensure a thriving arts and culture sector in Canada.¹⁵ Nurse in his analysis of the

¹⁴ Nurse, Keith. *The Cultural Industries in CARICOM: Trade, Investment and Development Challenges*, pp. 215.

¹⁵ Council for Business and the Arts in Canada, <http://www.businessandarts.org> Retrieved on 10 August 2021 (Previously assessed on 11 May 2017).

<http://www.businessforthearts.org/why-art-matters/>, also <http://www.businessforthearts.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/BftA-business-case-for-funding-the-arts.pdf>

framework for the Caribbean ¹⁶, has identified major challenges which have to be dealt with in order to expand creative entrepreneurship: lack of investment and funding; little or no access to working capital; lack of knowledge in business planning or management; inadequate and/or expensive supply of material; high import taxes/duties and costs; government agencies which lack financial resources, knowledgeable staff and adequate policies; weak marketing and distribution of creative products; lack of understanding of the business markets, e-commerce and digital distribution; lack of commitment to excellence and professionalism; weak leadership and managerial training and skills in the sector; the inability to meet global standards and best practices; and the low rating of the creative sector, when compared with the other economic sectors.

The overall problem is that the arts and creative industries are not viewed as generous contributors to the economies of the region. This is simply because there are no facts and figures which can stand to prove the significant contributions made to the financial sector, in terms of employment numbers or foreign exchange earners. There is a substantial lack of reliable data on the economic performance of the industry, and therefore the importance of this sector is greatly undermined and misunderstood by policy makers who need this information to make steady strategic plans for support of the creativity of local artists and innovative young entrepreneurs. Today, according to UNESCO,¹⁷ more people are turning their ideas and imaginations into income generating livelihoods. The creative economy is one of the world's most rapidly growing sectors, contributing 3% of the global GDP, with cultural and creative industries generating US\$2,250 billion annually, and the culture sector employing thirty million people worldwide. Within the Caribbean, CARICOM has persistently continued to work toward creating an enabling environment for the Cultural Industries to thrive, as people involved in the creation, production, and distribution of cultural products were permitted to submit proposals in order to access additional sources of funding as creative and cultural entrepreneurs. This was via the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) when they put the Creative Industries Innovation Fund

¹⁶ Nurse, Keith. *The Cultural Industries and Sustainable Development in Small Island Developing States*, pp. 5

¹⁷ International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development. <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/international-years/creativeeconomy2021>; retrieved on 10 August 2021

(CIIF) into operation.¹⁸ The CIIF was created to support the development of the creative industries sector, and encourage innovation, job creation and improved enterprise sustainability by providing grants and technical assistance to governments, business support organisations, and academia that support the creative industries sector. This fund will also provide support to creative and cultural entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises.¹⁹

Conclusion

It can certainly be agreed that money can complicate life, but as Shakespeare suggested in his piece *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,²⁰ where Ford tells Sir John Falstaff “if money go before, all ways do lie open”, which suggests that money can make life much easier by providing opportunities. As John Howkins notes, a creative economy is measured just like any other: demand, price, profit and margins; it deals in ideas and money, and is the first kind of economy where imagination and ingenuity decide what people want to do and make, and what they want to buy, and passionate artists create new concepts and develop new ideas, and put a higher value on their work ²¹. In my own findings on this topic, discussions with some practitioners in the arts have led me to believe that although they have brilliant minds when it comes to their craft, many have no confidence in ‘the marriage’, and that the cultural stakeholders and policy makers do not have their best interest at heart as it relates to the development of the creative industry. Some believe that attempts start as genuine, but then a political agenda is formed which, depending on the related sectors, may overshadow any efforts of portraying the fullness of the creative/cultural industry in the region. However, a few visual artists, for example, John Walcott of Art and Stage Inc., has

¹⁸ CARICOM fine-tuning financing mechanisms for Cultural Industries. <https://caricom.org/caricom-fine-tuning-financing-mechanisms-for-cultural-industries/>, retrieved on 11 August 2021

¹⁹ CDB introduces Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Fund to regional practitioners at CARIFESTA XIII – CARICOM. <https://caricom.org/cdb-introduces-cultural-and-creative-industries-innovation-fund-to-regional-practitioners-at-carifesta-xiii/>, retrieved 11 Aug 2021

²⁰ *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Volume 1, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act II, Scene II (Nelson Doubleday, Inc.) pp. 480, also http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merry_wives/merry_wives.2.2.html

²¹ www.johnhowkins.com Previously assessed on 11th May 2017

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found a way to use his creative business sense to make a name for himself. Using mainly oil and acrylic on canvas, Walcott produces original artwork and either sells or leases giclée prints on original hand-crafted frames to businesses on the island. His small company which includes his brother, also reproduces the prints, provides frames, delivers, installs locally or ships the artwork overseas to the purchaser. This allows him the autonomy that others in his field ought to have, but may not have the entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence or support to do so. This effort, versus the artist who only creates works of art for the love of it, and is basically a pauper as he/she chooses not to sell any of their creations.

My recommendations for this perfect or essential marriage would therefore be:

- work as an artist with commitment, rely solely on the business of selling your creative product and visualizing it as a commercial business generating income;
- try to fully understand your product brand, and your target market;
- take advantage of every professional stepping stone, and chances for further training and development;
- research all funding opportunities; take every occasion to display or present your creative work; and become empowered with knowledge and invested about information regarding intellectual property rights.

Governments and their creative and legislative agencies need to create a framework for greater opportunities for all artists, including training and developmental programming; guarantee that policies, bills and legislation are discussed frequently and updated in keeping with the current requirements; ensure that relevant statistics are adequately measured and collected so that these policies can be well informed and structured for the advancement of all artists within the creative and cultural sectors; develop greater partnerships between corporate businesses and the arts community; and create and continually update national records of artists and arts organisations/communities within the region. Therefore, Lamming or Shakespeare (the creatives) and the Bank (the economic future) of the region are in fact an essential marriage, as the creative industries should be seen as a key strategic feature in the quest for creating and maintaining sustainable businesses in the arts, and the ultimate growth of the economy. But sometimes despite the best efforts to make this union work, some dancers just want to dance, and some visual artists just want to get down to the business of creating and are not interested in the business of finance or economics, so it is up

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to the arts managers and entrepreneurs like me to bring the ring to the wedding and ensure that both parties are contented and say “I do!”

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