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Extending the Cultural Policy Agenda



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On Behalf of the Guest Editors

This special issue of *Tout Moun* entitled 'Cultural Policy and Practice' features three wide-ranging articles that raise fundamental issues in the cultural policy discourse. The articles address different aspects of cultural policy and examine the various mechanisms and tools that are used to support artistic expression, conserve cultural heritage, encourage creative work and develop the cultural industries. In this sense, this issue illuminates a critical turn in cultural policy studies, namely the democratisation of the cultural policy agenda to include a diverse set of communities, concerns and regimes that are veering away from established orthodoxies.

This volume underscores the expansiveness of the cultural policy domain as it grapples with different understandings of 'culture'. The traditional cultural policy agenda focuses on culture as creative and aesthetic expression and concerns itself with artistic endeavours. More recently, another reading that ties culture to the economic sphere has emerged, where policy is concerned with the instrumental values ascribed to cultural goods and services. Finally, Raymond Williams' view of culture as ways of life and structures of feeling informs a policy agenda that embraces the diversity of people's everyday experiences and expressions. However, all of these approaches have one thing in common, they seek to produce cultural citizens. While contemporary discussions of cultural citizenship include various perspectives and operate with a range of different definitions of the term, for the purposes of this special issue we can think of cultural citizenship as the "maintenance and development of cultural lineage via education, custom, language, religion and the acknowledgement of difference in and by the mainstream" (Lewis and Miller 1).

The cultural policy domain addresses specific forms of conduct and draws heavily from Foucault's thesis on governmentality that examines how we govern ourselves, how we like to be governed, how we govern others and how we are governed by the state. In this sense, cultural policy is involved in the various tactics and regimes that the state employs to govern itself and its citizens. These concerns have become even more urgent as states increasingly look to cultural policy as a site to negotiate the complexities of cultural globalisation. According to Crane, "Cultural policy is a political instrument that countries use in an attempt to control the types of channels and types of content that enter and leave their territories. A country's success in responding to the pressures of cultural globalisation has major consequences for the future of the country's culture" (12).

However, cultural policy is not only about protecting and promoting the needs of the nation state. Diverse communities have been pushing back against the primacy of the state and inserted their worldviews onto the policy agenda by questioning the legitimacy of the state in negotiations over cultural citizenship.

The three essays in this volume illuminate all of these issues. Abdoulaye Gaye's article 'Mi Burn di Industry: When the DJ Counteracts the System' presents cultural policy as a site to negotiate creative expression by examining the relationship between Jamaican dancehall and the global popular music industry. It underscores the growing conflation of the hitherto autonomous domains of cultural and economic policy, as dancehall artists emphasize their materiality and earnings as a significant aspect of how they govern themselves and how they want the state to govern them. In this sense, cultural policy intimates an economic policy as it focuses on supporting dancehall as a vehicle for economic development. Gaye asserts that the incursions made by dancehall artists into the global popular music industry serve as a reminder to policy gatekeepers that economic equality and justice are also part of cultural policy's remit. The article also documents several important challenges facing the cultural industry policy as it grapples with providing support for counter-cultural expressions such as dancehall and hip hop music that were originally established and best known for their alterity to mainstream popular music.

Ben Braithwaite's article 'Researching the Language Cultures of Deaf Communities in the Caribbean' explores the notion of the Deaf as a separate cultural community. He makes a case for the recognition of their different ways of life as well as the need for policy to respond to the diversity within the deaf community. For instance, Braithwaite calls for the acceptance of national sign languages such as the Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL) as a linguistic right. He recommends the introduction of mechanisms to preserve and protect TTSL as a form of intangible heritage as part of the cultural policy agenda.

Stanley Griffin's piece 'Citizenship Legislation as Cultural Policy: The Debate on Antigua's Millennium Naturalization Act of 2004' examines the case of the Quisqueyanos community of Spanish-speaking immigrants from the Dominican Republic who were granted full Antiguan citizenship. Griffin documents the national debate that ensued in the wake of the legislation and raises critical issues of how cultural policy can be manipulated as a mechanism for cultural inclusion, or as a political tool by governments to shape the discourse around immigration and cultural citizenship. In addition, the essay indirectly illuminates the recent trend whereby other areas of public policy such as trade, economics, education, security, and in this case, immigration policy have acted as a cultural policy.

Finally, the limitations of a nation-centric approach to cultural policy are implicated in all three articles. For example, as dancehall artists traverse the international popular music scene they are forced to respond to the demands of the global marketplace in terms of how they create, distribute and perform their music. Meanwhile, the passage of the Antigua Millennium Act of 2004 created a pathway to citizenship for the Quisqueyanos community through immigration legislation that eclipsed national cultural policy concerns. Trinidad and Tobago's Deaf community's struggle to have the state recognise their inherent diversity is informed by their association with Deaf communities in other parts of the world. In this sense, this special issue 'Cultural Policy and Practice' asks questions about the potential and limitations of cultural policy to govern that most fundamental of human capacities, identity.

Works Cited

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