

ABBIA



LAUNCHING CONFERENCE

On Wednesday, the 20th of February 1963, the Board of Directors of Abbia gave a conference, at the French Cultural Centre in Yaounde, to present the Review. Before a large and attentive audience, the Director, Dr. Bernard Fonlon, gave an account of how ABBIA came into being; the Editor-in-Chief for the French section, Mr Marcien Towa, expounded the principal objectives of the Review; Mr. Francis Mbassi Manga, Editor-in-Chief for the English section, laid emphasis on its bilingual nature, and Mr. Foalem Foto, a member of the Board of Directors, presented the maiden issue.

Below are three of the speeches.

The opening Address, by Bernard FONLON

Honorable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of « ABBIA » the Cameroon Cultural Review, I thank you for taking the trouble to come to this conference that we have organised, to launch the Review.

It is a very modest effort indeed - of that I am only too painfully aware - but it possesses this merit that it represents our country very fittingly, being bilingual; and this quality makes it unique, perhaps, in all Africa.

As you all know, the need for an organ like this, to stimulate constructive thought, to stimulate creative activity, in this country, has long been felt.

Fortunately, last year, a magnificent good fortune came, to supply this need, in the creation, here in Yaounde, of the Unesco Centre for the Production of School Manuals and Educational Aids. The Minister of National Education brought this chance to our notice and persuaded us to avail ourselves of the opportunity by undertaking to direct and produce a Cultural Review for Cameroon. We are gathered here today to witness the first step in the realisation of that idea.

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Here, I must express the very deep thanks we feel for the moral and the material support we have received from the Highest Executives in the Federation and in the State of East Cameroon; I mean His Excellency the President of the Federal Republic himself, the Vice President and the Prime Minister of East Cameroon. My colleagues here can bear witness how deeply we were touched by the words of encouragement and of practical wisdom, how deeply we were touched by the prompt assistance, proffered us by the President, when we went to him, to present our idea.



First row, left to right : Francis MBASSI MANGA, Joseph FOTSO FOALEM,
(standing) Bernard FONLON and Eldridge MOHAMADOU.
Back row : Andrew MAIMO and Michel DOO KINGUE.

I wish also to pay a warm homage here to the team of the Unesco printers. The first class job they have done is here for all to see. But what is not here for all to see is the selflessness, the enthusiasm and the courtesy that Monsieur Bossy and his wife and his men brought to their work. I have a duty to salute them here in public.

If we meet, on every side, with the same goodwill, with the same encouragement, with the same active co-operation that we have received from the Head of the State, from the Vice President, from the Prime Minister of East Cameroon, from the Minister of National Education and from Monsieur

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Bossy and his team, there can be no doubt whatsoever that this venture will prove a resounding success.

We stand in dire need, therefore, of the same co-operation from the general public. We need your articles, your poems, your stories, your plays, we need your subscriptions, we need your suggestions and your criticisms ; yes, especially your criticisms.

For this periodical shall succeed, if the Cameroon people accept to buy it and read it, if the Cameroon intelligentsia accept to contribute to its columns ; shall fail, if they refuse.

We are launching this Review with the watchword :

Let a hundred flowers blossom !

Let a hundred schools of thought contend !

Let a hundred flowers bloom, because we are firmly convinced that it is far healthier, for any country, to have a Hyde Park, where free discussion can blossom and flourish, than to have hide-outs, where muffled discontent rankles and festers.

Our constant care, in working for this Review, shall be to search relentlessly for all that is true and good and beautiful ; for without truth and goodness and beauty there can be no culture.

We have pledged ourselves to stand by these principles, because we are profoundly persuaded that you cannot go wrong if you keep them ever in mind, to guide you, wherever your course may lie. For, then, the road before you is sure and straight, and you can proceed, as Abraham Lincoln did,

With malice toward none,

with charity for all, but

with firmness in the right.

ABBIA'S PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES

by Marcien TOWA

ABBIA has a threefold purpose : research, creation and education.

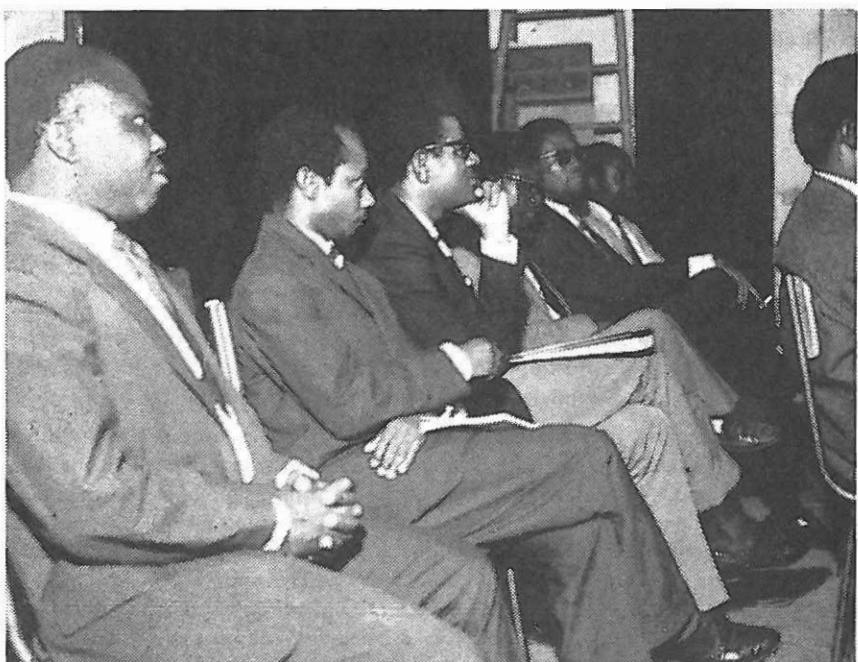
1. Research

Abbia wishes to stimulate research by affording every facility to researchers for publication and public reading.

In this field of research, almost everything remains to be done. Our history, languages, economy, customs, the sociology of our people, our arts, constitute an almost unlimited field for learned investigation.

2. Creation

The seriousness and urgency of the problems assailing us do not allow of our simply making an inventory of our culture, but require us to make a creative effort in the theoretical field as well as in the artistic; a creative effort on the scale of the great African revolution that it is incumbent upon the present African Generation to achieve.



A section of the Board of Directors.

From the outer edge : Felix LOUNG, Andrew MAIMO, Michel DOO KINGUE, Jack KISOB, Michel DINA LOBE, Nicolas ATANGANA.

Africa, and especially Cameroon, must cease to appear a cultural void which divers conflicting world cultures are striving to fill. While opening wide our doors to foreign culture, we no longer wish to play the part of simple culture consumers to which colonialism had reduced us for so long. We have had enough of dressing up in clothes cut to other people's measure. What we need are economic, political and philosophical theories arising out of our own experiences and capable of solving our problems, while at the same time profiting from the theories and experiences of others.

Abbia's highest ambition is to initiate and encourage such a creative movement in our country.

3. Education

Our ardent youth, who constitute, as we all know, our future, our school-children and students really hunger and thirst after culture, yet they have only at their disposal a culture which, no matter how rich, cannot satisfy the needs of their particular situation, for the obvious reason that to say the least, it was not destined for them.

Abbia wishes to provide spiritual nourishment, admittedly inadequate, to these young people who are perhaps more undernourished culturally than physically.

Another important objective must be pointed out : that of bilingualism, and, generally speaking, of the integration of both parts of our federation. But this point will be dealt with elsewhere.

THE PROFOUND UNITY OF THESE OBJECTIVES

In truth, the main objectives of our Review (research, creation, education) are, in their essence, closely and thoroughly linked.

Colonialism introduced total chaos into our culture, driving it at the same time, by a veritable repression, into lethargy and unawareness to the point where we are reduced to living our culture like a complex.

The fundamental purpose of Abbia, therefore, is to acquire, through research and creation, and to impart through education, an explicit consciousness and a systematic knowledge of what are only simple states of being and confused and incoherent presentiments, that is to say, consciousness and knowledge of our culture which has become more or less unconscious behaviour. In short, we must expose our being and make it objective through research, our being which is the result of our situation, (historical, sociological and political), and, on the other hand, express the same being through creation, but this time as a project for modifying this situation.

The importance of this expression of the self, must be emphasized : through this manifestation, through this transition from the sphere of things lived to the sphere of things represented and thought, the situation exists explicitly for the consciousness, acquires a new mode of existence, which is to exist not only in oneself but also for clear and lucid awareness. Aside from the rôle of a veritable psychoanalytical cure that this transition from the implicit to the explicit plays, this new modus vivendi constitutes culture in the ordinary and narrow sense of the word, in short, the situation then exists in the form of erudite, theoretical and artistic works.

Moreover and above all, the situation in this form becomes more practicable, more manageable, more plastic. Why ? Because this new form of the situation constitutes the situation as it is, the situation disengaged of the hotchpotch of accidental undergrowth and reduced to the essential, or to what is considered as such. It then becomes easier to grasp the principal con-

nctions and to conceive disconnections and reconnections, in short, an ideal restructure of the whole. Once we are in possession of a comparable abstract schema, it remains to concretise it.

Thus the expression of a situation permits us to have a greater grasp of the real situation.

Through research, creation and education, "ABBIA" wishes to contribute, with the help of all, towards providing a well thought-out expression of our situation in its twofold static and dynamic context and thereby contribute to universal culture.

THE BILINGUAL ASPECT OF ABBIA

by Francis MBASSI MANGA

"In this phase of our political evolution, the elite of the underprivileged world, the numerous Cameroon elite, especially, should see to it that, de-colonisation, in terms of culture, should become a positive achievement. In this way, the African civilization, the Cameroon Civilization, the civilization of the spoken word, the civilization of embodied expression will be in a position to convey by the use of its symbolism, a message to modern civilization, a civilization which is disintegrating under the threat of a situation in which men, becoming more and more like robots, are being increasingly despoiled of their personality."

Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to quote from ABBIA. This passage summarises effectively the importance of the civilizing influence of the spoken word, the cultural importance of embodied expression, in a word, it says that the vehicle of culture is language.

The leaders of our country have wisely selected two languages as the official languages of Cameroon. These two languages you know very well - French and English. These languages, as you may perhaps have learnt, are the most widely spoken languages in the world. You'll please, permit me to use statistics although they have become a third inflating factor in propaganda. Let us begin from home.

In Cameroon, the East with a population of 3.5 million uses French as the language of higher culture; the West with a population of 800,000 uses English as the language of higher culture.

There are in Africa some 22 states using French and 23 using English. The population of the French speaking countries of Africa is roughly 70 million and that of the English speaking countries roughly some 160 million. ABBIA would therefore easily project the Cameroon personality into these 45 states and, if every body in these countries knew how to read and write the two languages, it would have a possible coverage of 230,000,000 in Africa. And

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thus we would be sure that North, West, East, Central and, South Africa and the Malagasy Republic would read ABBIA and read the Federal Republic of Cameroon in ABBIA. Now let us move out of Africa into the other continents and study the possibilities that ABBIA has.

Apart from France's 50,000,000 and Great Britain's 53,000,000, we know that most of Europe uses either English or French as a lingua franca; for example, more than 50 per cent of all Soviet school children take an intensive, eleven-year course in English. The U.S.A., we know, speak English. In Canada about 5,000,000 speak French and 12,000,000 speak English. You can get along very well in Latin America with English and French. Australia's 10,000,000 people and New Zealand's 3,000,000 have English for first language. Asia and the Far East use English as their second language. But let me not weary you with a catalogue of facts and figures. We appreciate already that with English and French a tourist can go everywhere. In other words, if ABBIA could reach all the continents, it would be read, and the five continents of the world would read Cameroon in ABBIA.

But is it because we want ABBIA to be read everywhere in the world that we have made it bilingual? Yes, we want this Cameroon review to have a world coverage and a world reputation. We want to project the Cameroon bilingual personality wherever men read French and English. But we want even more.

Our French and English readers, we want you to pause a while and imagine the effort required of the editorial staff of this review to produce the articles you enjoy. It takes two and even more people to produce each of these articles. Articles that come to us in French only must be translated into English and vice-versa.

We want this double process in each case to be the work of one person, one Cameroonian.

We have tended, up to now, to associate English in Cameroon with the Federated State of West Cameroon and French with the State of East Cameroon. We know that this state of affairs will continue for some time.

But if ABBIA has a bilingual mission it is this, that sometime to come, maybe 5 years, maybe 10 years, maybe 20 years, when we say Cameroon we should see one personality writing indifferently in French and English. We want that writers in ABBIA should, in the very near future, write sociology, economics, politics, law, in these two languages, indifferently.

In this way, our civilization, our culture, will be in a position to convey, by the use of its symbolism, a true picture of Cameroon to the modern world. In this way, one single Cameroonian will be equal to two persons, each of whom speaks only French or English. In this way, the same Cameroonian would represent our country, say, in a Conference of writers of English expression and in one of writers of French expression.

This is the bilingual message of ABBIA to you. ABBIA wants you to use the two great world languages to draw from cultures older than ours. These

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two tools are of great importance. We can wield them to achieve a marriage of these two great cultures. They would help us to go everywhere in the world to study in institutions of higher learning. In a few years from now, every Cameroonian will speak his dialect and the two languages. When we shall have acquired these two, we shall be in a position to build a third, for ABBIA believes that it should be read at home by those, as well, who will not



Premier rang, de gauche à droite : Francis MBASSI MANGA, Joseph FOTSO FOALEM, Eldridge MOHAMADOU (debout).

Deuxième rang : Félix LOUNG, Andrew MAIMO, Michel DOO KINGUE,

then, as yet, be privileged to know English and French. Call this other Edition the Home Edition of ABBIA written for you and me, at home, in a third language, vehicle of our culture.

Our institutions have given us the chance, the way has been prepared for us. Let us roll up our sleeves, let us turn our backs on fleeting pleasures, on selfish mercenary ambitions.

The past has built the present we enjoy. Our present bilingual State is a gift to us in this phase of our political evolution, when the arrogant principle of cultural supremacy has given way to the dynamic and fruitful principle of co-operation between cultures and civilizations.

Friends of Cameroon, friends of ABBIA, come to our help. The task we have undertaken is difficult, but it is also interesting and important. Our cultural laboratory is ready for new inventions. The possibilities of these inventions are evident. All we need to do now is to reorganize ourselves, to reorganize our work.

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