

The Craft Industry, Oral Literature and Language in the Development of Tourism in Ghana: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper examines the role the craft industry, Oral Literature and language play in the development of tourism in Ghana. From the study, it was found that all the three are important for several reasons, namely economic value, exchange of information, sharing of experiences or world-views and finally changing biases. However, lack of outlets and finishing of products constitute major problems.

Key Words: Artifact, Cosmo-vision, pragmatic interpretation, equiparable, lyrical interpretation.

1. Introduction

The evolution of knowledge has led us to modify our view of and approach to the study of events and phenomena. The advent of intersemiotics, which is the scientific study of common processes and procedures across different signifying systems, has introduced an area of research that had been hitherto neglected but holds a lot of promise for the insight that it gives and the contributions that it makes to enhance the state of knowledge of our world. It is our interest in the afore-mentioned common processes and procedures that led us to write the present article.

2. Methodology of Study

The methodology used in this study is the semiotic approach to the study of sign systems which identifies the units or elements in each system of signification and establishes the relationship between them since they are supposed to be interdependent with each other, and proposes an interpretation to be given to the system so formed using the principle of plausibility rather than in terms of very-conditionality (truthfulness/falsehood).

3. Discussion

The real story of anything of Africa is her people and their cultures. With the emergence of the independent African nations in the late 1950's and early 60's came a healthy curiosity about the vast and mysterious continent. Modern technology – notably air travel and the media – made Africa accessible to the world as the world became accessible to Africans.

Various forms of exchange have encouraged a new insightfulness about Africa and have often helped change outmoded and false conceptions about Africans and their countries. These multilevel exchanges have also helped assuage the painful experiences of the colonialization of Africa by bringing into light hitherto-hidden treasures in African art and craft.

It is against this back background that, for instance, international diplomatic relations with the newly formed African Republics opened areas of awareness which provided more realistic concepts about these countries. Many universities and African Studies Centers, featured exchange programs and extensive field work in Africa. Government and private agencies subsidized study grants in Africa and sponsored programs enabling Africans to study abroad. In addition, tourists and businessmen began to visit Africa as never before. These exchanges made immediate contributions toward a more rapid dispersal of information and ideas within Africa as well as on other continents.

These visitors and their families, some of whom stayed for years, went home from Africa, sharing their treasures as well as their experiences. For instance, crafts with simple forms, carved figurines and sculptures, painted calabashes, leather products, beads and, of course, fabrics brought from Africa, were displayed in homes which had once housed only familiar bric-a-brac. Some of these crafts, startling collections of African objects, included complete costumes used in initiation rites, ingeniously designed rural mousetraps, and basketry devices for catching fish. Other visitors took back to their home country and wore indigenous

African clothes, such as the bou-bou, the yele head tie, and wrap-around pagne from Africa. Fabrics were also a direct way people could relate to African cultures, for textiles are almost a universal experience. There are no language barriers with leather and fabric products. They speak directly to the senses, and we can wrap ourselves in its sensuality and special textures, densities and movements. They make us feel close to the culture as well as the craftsman.

Sporadic and peripheral international interest in African decorative art had been expressed in writing by missionaries and explorers for centuries before it became popular. Arab Scholars wrote about African leather and fabrics as early as the Eleventh Century as functional or utilitarian objects. They were, by definition, artifacts, yet aesthetically pleasing as art, to the Western eye. The distinction between art and artifact become blurred, thereby broadening the meaning of art.

While thousands of artistic objects, so highly charged with energies and vitalities of their own societies, lay dormant for years in dusty basements of natural history and museums in various countries, eager and insightful art historians gradually recognized these hidden treasures and brought them to the open where they were made available to scholars, students and the public by anxious curators who were to revitalize their study collections. These humble items came to be recognized as objects worthy of exhibition with the 'classic' art of Africa represented by those masks and figures which inspired Picasso and others who were also collectors. African artifacts were thus given a new significance and moved from museums of natural history into museums of fine and decorative arts. This new significance shows in the fact that leather and fabrics have been used as currency in many societies and have often served as marriage tender – as bride 'wealth' in Africa and 'dowry' in Western societies. So, naturally, it would be assumed that traditional hand-crafted fabrics and skin or hides from animal held highly as trophies' of bravely began to occupy a place of esteem.

By the late 1960s, however, growing interest in African Studies was revealed in various ways. Original research was carried out among international and African scholars. While connoisseurs and collectors of art developed interest in extending and reclassifying their collections, other experts increasingly regarded African art as one of the world's greatest art forms.

The change in perception of the decorative arts was aided by a revolutionary change in the definition of African art itself. The long and dreary debate separating anthropological and ethnographic 'material culture' from the world of "Art" was coming to an end. The source of the conflict in opinion was initially in the contemporary Western idea that the art object may be of value purely for its aesthetic form while for the African creator of art, his artifact may also be of artistic import from his own perspective. The following reasons provide justification for the African's broader perspective.

Firstly, the conservative approach to artistic development has obscured a historical perception of the nation's artistic achievement. Hence, it has been easy to dismiss Ghanaian classical art as lacking in history. Secondly, it is important to emphasize that the traditional art of Ghana is produced for functional purposes but also at the same time, out of necessity, it has inspired aesthetic qualities of considerable value. For these reasons, the traditional art of Ghana must be seen from both its functional and aesthetical perspectives. It must be noted that African art, and for that matter, Ghanaian arts/crafts, are not primitive, that is, if by primitive we mean simple, crude, or original in the sense of being without history. The arts of Ghana/Africa are, in fact, sophisticated and possess a long history, deeply embedded as they are in the belief patterns of society.

With respect to style and form, the art and crafts as a discipline may be characterized as conservative, for at the core it lie the commonly held traditional belief patterns which strongly reflect those shared values and at the same time reinforce and symbolize them. They are symbolic rather than abstract. To the Western eye, the carvings, especially figure carvings, tend to appear head-heavy, and this tendency is combined with emphasis on balance and symmetry. The proportions appear and become accepted and once accepted, they become required and expected. Masks and figures depict an expressionless, cool countenance; facial twitches of range and pleasure of honour are absent. In spite of these abstract and often simplified forms, details are accurate, with characteristic hair styles, body ornaments or scarification. Patterns are depicted with clarity and correctness.

Strictly speaking, with carvings across West Africa, art appears most frequently, and there is a rich and amazing diversity of cultures: tribal and sub-tribal styles which are the most distinctive because they are the most easily identifiable styles of artistic development in traditional Ghana.

The above historical changes in the artistic expressions of these artists/craftsmen tend to enrich and entrench rather than dilute and agitate for drastic changes in pattern.

With independence came new attitudes. Leaders of individual African states have renewed national pride in traditional textiles and attire, which they wear. African diplomats used to wear robes similar to those which clothed the suzerains of ancient kingdoms. These sumptuous cloaks and ensembles have inspired international admiration and acclaim. This in turn has stimulated the wearing of traditional garments of handcrafted textiles by more Africans at home as well as abroad, though in Africa one still sees Western apparel mingled with the traditional. Beside, the use of leather pouffes, armrest, and floor mats as well as wall hangings have all become new findings. This renewed interest in African textiles and crafts has spread to African museums. Many of these institutions seek to reinforce a sense of national pride by displaying traditional costumes and accessories and setting up exhibitions on handcrafted textiles of all kinds. Some museums have workrooms/studios or courtyards where craftsmen and craftswomen demonstrate weaving and dyeing techniques; finished items are then sold by the museum – a development which can be adopted by the museums and galleries in the country to help boost the tourism business. A number of European and American museums feature similar exhibits and many more are in the planning stages.

With better factory/studio/workshop methods of reproduction and with great care for the fineness of original designs, industrialized Africa could even take part in preserving and perpetuating the cultural significance of handcrafted artistic pieces. This could be achieved by counterbalancing the adoption of Western styles with dresses made of African fabrics for special events, national functions, festive occasions and office work.

The paper has so far been talking about the craft industry and the development of the tourism industry in Ghana. Now let us turn our attention to our types of music, specifically lyrics, as artistic expressions, and their relevance to tourism. Just as we have unique features or characteristics in our craft industry that will be of immense benefit to the tourism industry, so do we have very unique features in the area of literary studies which, when paid due attention, can help the tourism industry to firmly establish itself on the global tourism landscape. The inevitable question of whether the interest of tourism would have been better served by music as a discipline rather than the study of oral literature comes up here. No one can dispute the fact that music as an indigenous art has a great role to play in our tourism industry. Interestingly, the importance of the relationship between Ghanaian music as an indigenous art and Ghanaian oral literature has grossly been underestimated and, therefore, there is the need to put things in their right perspective and accord the study of Ghanaian oral literature more specifically Ghanaian music as a discipline, the importance it deserves and bring out the benefit the Ghanaian tourism industry stands to gain if attention is paid to the relationship between these two disciplines.

The *Encarta Encyclopedia* (2008, Butler, 2007), defines music from the perspective of Western culture as follows: Art that is concerned with combining sounds-particular pitches to produce an artifact that has beauty or attractiveness, that follows some kind of internal logic and exhibits intelligible structure, and that requires special skill on the part of its creator.

Even though the above definition is from the perspective of Western culture, we all agree that it is applicable to the African perspective as well and it will, therefore, be superfluous to restate the African definition. The *Encarta encyclopedia* (2008) goes further to state that there is a relationship between, “sound and other sound phenomena such as speech” and that, “somewhat analogous to having a language, each society may be said to have a music” – that is a self-contained system within which musical communication takes place and, like language, must be learned to be understood”. The relationship between music and language and, for that matter, literature has clearly been established by the *Encyclopædia* and it puts paid to all arguments that might move in the direction of dissociating music from language.

Perhaps looking at the definition of oral literature will more clearly bring out the relationship between music and literature or language. Oral literature is basically oral tradition and oral tradition is how a particular culture exists by passing on information from generation to generation by word of mouth. This means that language is indispensable in oral literature because oral literature is concerned with the literality of the words used in oral tradition. Perhaps one interesting feature of oral tradition is that most of the words are packaged in the form of poetry and that is why our oral tradition is replete with aesthetics. We thus find poetry in most forms of oral tradition including the epic, the ballad, the ode, the elegy, the panegyric, appellations, vocational songs, proverbs, the lullaby, negro spirituals and many more. What is common to all these forms is that in every culture, there is a particular way in which sounds are organized for communication. The common ground

between music and oral literature is sound organization and, as stated earlier on, sound manipulation is common to both literature and music with music organizing sounds in a time continuum following keys and notations while literature uses a phonemic phenomenon to organize sounds. The effect is, however, the same: aesthetics. This is not different from the definition of music offered by *the Encarta Encyclopædia* (2008) which posits that music is combining sounds to produce an artifact “that has beauty and attractiveness”. It is the beauty and the attractiveness that the study of sounds and other literary features in the lyrics of both contemporary and traditional music might offer that we are interested in at this juncture.

Now, as we discuss the art in the craft industry, let us in the same breath, discuss the craft in Akan lyrics, which for the purpose of this paper, is an aspect of poetry, an essential component in the study of oral literature. Beauty or meaning interpreted or appreciated at the word or content level is, therefore, not under discussion here because it will require greater depth in Akan phonology to do that and also such a study will surrender the universal appeal of sound organization in Akan poetry since one must necessarily understand Akan before one can do proper appreciation of lyrics written in Akan. We are here interested only in the phonemic phenomenon in Akan or any Ghanaian language and examining how sounds, not words, are used to create art. For example, Ghanaians do not understand any South African language and yet are able to appreciate the accapella of Blackman Mombaso. Ghanaians do not understand the Mandingo language and yet they enjoy the music of Yousou N’dour. Again, we do not need to understand the Bambara language before we appreciate More Kante’s music. The list is endless. This is why we call music a universal language. We do not need to understand the language before we appreciate it: the sound does the communication. We will therefore concentrate only on sounds and leave aside imagery, especially the use of figures of speech, diction, content and other literary devices and structures.

Poetry is characterized by musical patterns of sounds that are based on natural qualities of spoken language. The rhythms and sound patterns of the poem or the lyrics are not only important for the beauty of the message of the song but they also add some linguistic glow to it. Reference is here made to pitch, sound length, sound quality, sound pairing, loudness, sound decoration (major and minor sounds) sound order, sound distribution, and other supra-segmental features like stress and intonation. In lyrics, sounds are arranged in a vertical or horizontal order. At the horizontal level we have rhythm, alliteration and assonance that are aspects of internal rhyme. For example, Obour’s “Atenteben”, “Obour, woho ye huhuuhu” is a masterpiece in sound organization at the horizontal level. You have a regular rhythm. The consonant /h/ alliterates in “woho” and “huhuuhu” and the vowel /u/ “huhuuhu” creates a forbidding effect through assonance. In oral literature, this is a kind of repetition and Obour effectively uses this device to express his awesomeness and one does not need to understand Akan to appreciate the kind of message that this line puts across.

At the vertical level, we are dealing with external rhyme (end/terminal rhyme, perfect rhyme, eye rhyme, perfect rhyme, masculine rhyme, feminine rhyme, triple rhyme and many others). We need to go far; the second stanza of the same song gives us an example of vertical sound order:

AKAN	ENGLISH
Atenteben	Atenteben
Ebaa no sen?	What happened?
Meyee mo den?	What did I do to you?
Mo mmu m’aten	Why do you judge me?

The monosyllables [ben], [sen], [den] and [ten] are all rhymes carrying their own euphonic effect and decorating the musicality of the song. Again a combination of the regular beat in the lines and the repetition of the sounds recreate the effect of rhythm within a rhythm and the sounds provide enough beat for the song and might not need any accompaniment or instrument for providing either the time line or the time marker. The bell marking the time beat eight over sixteen is syncopated here. This technique, if properly practiced by our musicians, especially those who do hiplife music, will enhance music composition in the area of lyrics and our musicians will be able to appeal better to non-Ghanaians. If we can get very good sound engineers and competent music programmers, we can compete with United States and French/Francophone musicians. After all, the tourist would like to leave indelible imprints on his senses and after enjoying a good cuisine, sleeping in a comfortable

hotel and sight-seeing across the country, the next thing is an auditory appeal and that is through good music: that which communicates beyond the language of the host community.

Apart from the lyrics (that is to say the interplay of sounds and rhythm within and across word strings in music) which has an appeal that is not bound to time or space and whose relevance to tourism as an instrument of development we have attempted to demonstrative above, there is also language packaged in the form of tourist language guides, which serves to break down communication barriers and through that helps to forge closer links between people of different cultural, racial and religious backgrounds. Now a language guide for tourists should be functional to the extent that it contains essentially words, phrases and sentences woven into very short texts which the user will need to perform specific speech acts in definite situations of communication. Among these acts, one may cite Greetings, Introducing oneself or other people, Welcoming someone or Stating one's mission, asking for information, Expressing opinion, Bargaining, Relating an incident, Describing an event, Calling for help etc. In all these cases, the language should be simple, clear and concise, especially for complete beginners and false starters. For tourists with some knowledge of the language, a language guide with information on the use of idiomatic expressions, proverbs and local jokes is a unifying factor, a way of breaking cultural barriers, of identifying with and endearing themselves to their new environment. For all categories of tourists, a good language guide should also give short but concise information about the local people and their customs. To date, the tourist language guide market in the rural areas remains largely unexplored not to say poorly resourced.

4. Findings

Our findings may be summarized as follows:

- African craft is conservative and symbolic and lays emphasis on balance and symmetry. Cloaks and ensembles made in the past stimulated admiration and wearing of traditional garments and also renewed interest. African textiles and craft have spread far and wide and could, with better methods of reproduction and greater attention to fineness of original designs, Africa could take part in preserving and perpetuating the cultural significance of its artistic pieces.
- Music, specifically the lyrics based on the form rather than the content of words, is characterized by its own kind of beauty and attractiveness that constitutes a silent language with an appeal that transcends all racial, cultural and religious barriers.
- Tourism is currently receiving considerable boost with assistance from government, non governmental organizations and local people at tourist destinations. However, as at now destinations in rural areas are poorly resourced and the few existing language guides in the country by individuals who have, generally, no scientific language background.
- To sum up, In addition to the social benefits gained from music and tourist language guides, there is also the economic factor. The three products (music, crafts and tourist language guides), are also potential foreign exchange earners and hold a lot of promise now that tourism products and markets are receiving an unprecedented boost from government.

5. Recommendations

- What remains to be done in contemporary industrialized Africa is to find a way of striking a delicate balance between satisfying man's need for technologically advanced methods of production, which lightens life's burden and allows for more meaningful pursuits in work and leisure (technology's great advantage) and the threat of a technological take-over where man loses his own vital involvement in the mechanics of his culture.
This balance can be achieved by the following means:
The craft industry needs to explore the shift in tourist interests, due to the growing attraction to African Culture in response to the departure from fashion to a new individuality and informality in the arts and a renewed respect for all things handmade.
- There is the need for the government to draw up a national tourism plan taking marketing of tourism products, especially of product design and packaging abroad, as a major promotional tool.
- Attention needs to be focused on capacity building. Efforts should be made at increasing the capacity of tour operators, developing craft villages and finding ways to boost domestic tourism, and ultimately, establishing Ghana as the homeland for Africans in the Diaspora.
- Crafts are the great creative reservoir for the future and in view of that, perhaps, the opening of new centres with the participating art institutions, organizations and the traditional authorities who are the stakeholders is highly recommended.
- These centres will employ the traditional forms of sculpture, leather, rattan and bamboo work, weaving, embroidery, leather and beadwork to help in the worship of the Christian God. There could also be decorative pieces as ornamentations, (figure insert trad symbols) or to correspond very closely to the way in which sculptures, painting and stained glass in the European churches of the middle Ages served

God. This is both to inspire Christian sentiments in the worshippers and instruct those members of the congregation who cannot read.

- If our musicians are taught how to manipulate sound for better lyrical sound effect in their music as practiced by Bujubanton and Sean Paul, both from Jamaica, and 2pac Shakur (of blessed memory) of United States of America, tourists will pour in on our shores just like they pay to go and see Yousou N'dour perform in Senegal. They will also buy the compact disc of these songs as souvenirs. Perhaps the greatest advantage is that our music will be international, the music industry in the country will bring a lot of foreign exchange to Ghana and musicians will stop complaining that they are poor.
- Looking at the immense benefit that music can bring to the economy of the country by way tourism, we cannot afford the luxury of inactivity while at the same time wishing that manner falls from heaven. In a paper titled, "Ten Ways that Ghanaian Music Can Alleviate Poverty", Prof. John Collins of the Music Department of the University of Ghana (Collins, 1986), believes that with growing interest in "World Music", Ghana stands a great chance of being a beneficiary of its patronage and goes on to say that, "Ten percent of the foreign exchange spent here by tourists is connected with entertainment and there are increasing numbers of World Music" tourists interested in African music" (Collins,1986). In the same paper, he outlines the importance of music as an export commodity for the national market. His position is that, "Ghanaian bands touring abroad for "World Music" fans and the three million Ghanaians living abroad" and sales of the African component of "World Music" estimated at \$1.5 billion in 2000" should serve as a great incentive for the local music industry. In fact, the potential of the music industry has caught the attention of the World Bank which has sponsored and organized a series of workshops for MUSIGA. In addition to that, it has given the Ghana Government a grant of ten million dollars to develop the music industry to serve as an instrument for poverty alleviation.
- There is now no gainsaying the fact that music could be a very lucrative industry and one way of increasing its potential will be to widen its study to oral literature. We can do that by developing our craft in lyrical compositions. We have also seen the potential the study of oral literature has for music and the huge benefit that can come from paying attention to developing the art in lyrical compositions. Prof. Komla Amoako in a paper entitled "Unleashing the Potential of Ghana's Music Industry to Support Poverty Reduction", (Amoako, 2006) minces no words when he says that, "Indeed, we live in a globalised world in which we cannot deny the interplay between national economies and culture"
- The sector Ministry in charge of Tourism may have to contract some organization or language experts or practitioners to design language guides in the languages of the areas already identified as tourist destinations.

5. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that the craft industry, the artistry of Ghanaian oral literature and modernized language guides can boost tourism and generate funds which can be channeled into viable ventures to ensure sustainable development. Tourism should not be dissociated from the ancillary functions it performs and for that matter a holistic approach is needed to enable it serve as an agent of transformation.

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