Beyond the History and Reverence : Cultural Heroes as Factors of Community Development

Evans Asante

Department of Theatre Arts, University of Education, Winneba. Ghana

Abstract

The culture of many indigenous communities in Ghana revolves around persons, (often warriors) who either led them to war or to their current settlements. These historical figures otherwise known as *Cultural Heroes* have greatly influenced the initiation of festivals and other cultural activities of the people in their honour. In this regard, consideration is given to such ones like Tweneboa Kodua who sacrificed his life so that Asantes could win their war of independence (Agyekum, 2013); Ansa Sasraku of the Akwapims, Amenfi of Asebu and the great Fante Trio Obumankoma, Oson and Odapagyan. These historical figures have been given special places in the histories of their communities thereby affecting cultural systems in one way or other. Most of these heroes have aroused the interest of biographers, historians and critics who among other things, analyze the genealogies of communities and acknowledge their heroism. Beyond the reverence however, are there possibilities to use their rich history and legacies to stimulate economic growth in our current dispensation? This paper examines events surrounding *cultural heroes* and how their cultural circumstances and other activities have shaped the development process of communities.   Specifically, the paper examines the legendary *Amenfi*, the greatest warrior of the people of Asebu in the Central region of Ghana. It explores how his adventures can be used to stimulate development in the Asebu community by adopting Community Cultural Development (CCD) and Participatory Performance Practice (PPP) methods. Additionally, the paper seeks to incite the discussion of cultural heroism into mainstream rural development process.

Keywords: Cultural heroes, development, community cultural development, Amenfi, cultural tourism.

1.   Introduction

Community development is viewed as a means of local people coming together to create development opportunities for themselves to make their communities fundamentally better and able to manage. The heart of community development is the employment of indigenous community structures to address the social needs and empower the various groups of people as opined by Chaskin (2001). It is the general assumption that local people at the community level get actively involved in finding solutions to issues affecting them when the solutions sought are more 'internalised'. Every community is unique and so in looking for solutions to issues and other development avenues, it is advisable to look within the communities for opportunities and indigenous knowledge before action can be taken. Studying a people's culture to come out with viable development opportunities have been recommended by several community development practitioners and agencies. Community development is influenced by the positive aspects of people's culture, in the sense that they (the community folks) are able to identify themselves with such practices or aspects of their lives.

In the study of cultures, it has emerged that most cultures have certain individuals who at a point in time change the cultural setting or landscape for their communities through dedicated and selfless service. These individuals are described as cultural heroes. Cultural heroes establish the community's institutions and traditions through total dedication sometimes at the peril of their lives. Cultural heroes transcend their cultural spaces of origin and are re-rooted, adapted and translated in new local contexts across the world. The famous deeds of these powerful heroes are recounted through historical legends. These legends give the accounts of the establishment of kingdoms, war- conquest and defeats (Agyekum, 2013). Examples of such cultural heroes are Menes, the first Pharaoh who unified the then Upper and Lower Egypt and established Menifer as its capital; Thespis, who is considered as the first Greek playwright and actor; Mahatma Gandhi , whose exploits made India a unified state and Alexander the Great who led the Greeks to world conquest. Other significant examples include Osei Tutu and the great Okomfo Anokye of the Ashantis in Ghana, Shaka of the Zulus, and Sundiata of Mali and many others. It is generally agreed that these historical figures affected the cultural identities and also changed the courses of history of their communities during their periods of existence. In the opinion of Di Stefano and Jayawickreme (2012), the likelihood of the feat of heroism, as well as the social costs that may be incurred by his heroic behavior, may be tied to the moral beliefs valued by the hero's community. This means that the lives of cultural heroes are closely tied to the development or otherwise of their communities. Cultural heroism is seen as an exceptional phenomenon that has a positive significance in relation to the values, ideals and norms of the communities in which these figures are admired, followed and functionalised.

There are other historical figures whose lives may not have affected the whole world through their exploits but have affected the culture and history of a group of people, especially those groups they belonged to. In this regard, consideration is given to such ones like Tweneboa Kodua who sacrificed his life so that Asantes could

win their war of independence (Agyekum, 2013); Ansa Sasraku of the Akwapims, Amenfi of Asebu and the great Fante Trio Obumankoma, Oson and Odapagyan. These historical figures have been given special places in the histories of their communities thereby affecting cultural systems in one way or other. This makes true Redfield's(1994) assertion that the hero always demonstrates the embodiment of the ideals for creating culture.

2.   The Problem

Making *culture* the heart of rural community development process is an approach that has been promoted and accepted by many as the way to go in a typical community development program. According to UNDP (2010), most western countries have embraced this approach and have resulted in *"using cultural facilities to bolster their cities' image as well as fostering economic development"*.   Conversely, there does not appear to be a significant adoption of such an approach in Sub-Sahara African communities, whose peoples are often touted as "cultural animals". Rather, in such societies, there appears to be a general tendency to fall on western societies and their cultural icons to provide local developmental stimulus. Achieving **real** development has thus become arduous for many communities.   It is suggested that, development activities will have a greater impact if local communities are involved and have a sense of ownership of the various activities.

In Ghana, there is a substantial literature and other practical works attempting to link culture to rural community development. Several indigenous knowledge forms have been exploited for the purpose of development but little attention has been given to cultural heroes. Little attention has been paid to the delicate and intricate issue of community heroes and how they can help build their communities, especially Asebu Amenfi whose exploits and legacies are numerous but known by few. Amenfi, a war lord who helped in the establishment of the Asebu kingdom is gradually losing his relevance to the current generation. Per the successes and the feats he achieved, his memoirs should be on the lips of the ordinary Asebu indigene but the story is different. A lot of indigenes especially the youth do not know how relevant this 'character' is to their past as well as current dispensation. Stories about him are told like mere folk tales putting him in the bracket of such mythical creatures.

3.   Rationale

Cultural activities and practices have been identified as one of the major economic force in several communities. It is against this back drop Dunham (1970) asserts that *'cultural development and planning are regarded as valuable strategies to accelerate the process of community growth'*

In order to '*globalise'* our cultural heroes and their legacies, there is the need to add value to their historical feats, landmarks and other monuments associated with them. This will attract high level cultural tourism there by pushing the stories of these heroes beyond the borders of their communities as well as creating jobs for indigenes. Making 'culture' the heart of rural community development process is an approach that has been promoted and accepted by many as the way to go in a typical community development program. It is widely claimed that cultural development is an empowering process that enables communities to voice their own stories, learn new skills, express diversity and identity, establish relationships and communicate their concerns and aspirations for the future, and in doing so contribute to building community capacity and wellbeing (Sonn, Drew, & Kasat 2002; Hayden, & Kasat 2013). This study is significant in the sense that it will:
    a)   demonstrate how historical figures are important in the cultural make-up of communities
    b)   Suggest approaches by which stories and legacies of cultural heroes can be packaged to serve as catalyst for sustainable development.
    c)   be able to situate the contribution of certain individual lifestyles and achievements to the promotion of community level development
    d)   serve as means of encouraging and inspiring other indigenes to emulate the positive aspects of the lives of such historical figures.

4.   Related Literature
4.1. The Concept of Heroism

"True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost." - Arthur Ashe

Heroism—an individual's commitment to a noble purpose, usually aimed at furthering the welfare of others, and the willingness to accept the consequences of achieving that purpose. Heroes are people who transform compassion (a personal virtue) into heroic action (a civic virtue). In doing so, they put their best selves forward in service to humanity. (Zimbado, 2007) Heroism represents the ideal of citizens transforming civic virtue into the highest form of civic action, accepting either physical peril or social sacrifice. On the basis of definitions given by scholars, it can be concluded as follows: A hero, in Greek mythology and folklore, was originally a demigod, the offspring of a mortal and deity, its cult being one of the most distinctive features of ancient Greek religion. Later, hero and heroine came to refer to characters who, in the face of danger and adversity or from a

position of weakness, displayed courage and the will for self-sacrifice. Stories of heroism may serve as moral examples for current generations. The origin of heroism has been rooted in ancient culture; religion, politics, and geographic position of such cultures (Wei & Xu, 2012). The concept of Heroism is simple at its surface; a straightforward definition "to act in a pro-social or cultural manner despite personal risk." Heroism is a social attribution, never a personal one; yet the act itself is often a solitary, existential choice. Heroism is historically, culturally and situationally determined; thus heroes of one era or community may prove to be villains in another or different community with time when controverting evidence emerges; yet some heroes endure across the centuries.

Heroism underscore the importance of nobility of purpose, a key principle underlying the heroic act (Zimbardo, 2007). Fighting for a social order or to change the cultural positions of societies; standing against oppressions and other forms of social injustices and charting a new order for a group of people are among what Eagly and Becker (2005) term as "cultural heroism,". Heroism here, resonates with the ideas of civil heroism which has been conceived of by others and cited by Zimbado (2007) as "courageous resistance" "moral rebels" , or "moral courage"

In his work, Zimbardo (2007) outlines the heroic action of a cultural and social hero as someone who
   a) Engaged in voluntarily;
   b) Conducted in service to one or more people or the community as a whole;
   c) Involving a risk to physical comfort, social stature, or quality of life; and
   d) Initiated without the expectation of material gain.

4.2. Community Development Process

Development is growth and change. The change in turn is social and cultural as well as economic, quantitative as well as qualitative…the key concept is to improved quality of people's life. This means development can be measured and can also be seen or assessed by everyone. (The U N Development Decade 2000. Pg. 3)

Jones and Silva (1991) consider it as an integrated approach of community building process that includes problem diagnosing, problem solving, capacity building, and systems interaction. Stated another way, they posit that a truly integrated approach assesses the problem, goes on to build community capacity, and importantly, addresses the problem. As a concept, a body of theory and a field of practice, community development cover a broad set of meanings. But at its core, community development involves mobilizing community members to become agents in improving the quality of life where they live. Sometimes local leaders and community members accomplish this by working together, and sometimes it is done with the assistance of outside practitioners who are skilled in facilitating community processes to help bring about change. When considering resourcing a community development initiative it is important to consider what infrastructure is required, what the relationship is to what currently exists and whether or not there are policies or existing support systems to which contact or adherence are required. In their *Community Development Handbook*, Flo and Anne (1999) have extensively dealt with the process of community development. This process according to them can be applied universally in every community. Craig (2000) has also outlined the various processes which in principle are almost the same as those given by Flo and Anne.

The process of effective community development most often begins when:

- a challenge or opportunity presents itself, and the community responds;

- community members are aware of their power to act together to benefit their community;

- there is a desire to build on diversity and to find common ground; and/or

- change is taking place and community development is understood to be a positive approach to manage this change.

Part of effective community development is to be good stewards of the land and maintain a healthy balance between the environmental, economic and social undertakings in the community.

4.3 .Community Cultural Development

Community cultural development is perceived as a form of artistic practice which seeks to emancipate and develop an identified community. This 'community' can be based on common territory, common interest and shared concerns. It emphasizes a consideration of concerns within a group, and is a critical means for communities to understand their position within the forces of globalization, which sometimes renders them powerless and voiceless. Inherent in Community Cultural Development is the ideal of enabling communities to be culture-makers, rather than followers, active problem solvers and thinkers, rather than passive do-ers. Community Cultural Development is an exchange of skills and experience between professional artists and members of a community; the development of work by professional artists which is informed by members of a community and which will often deal with an issue of relevance or concern to that community (Goldbard, 2006). Like any community development strategy, community cultural development also has active participation of members of a community in the artistic practice and social and behavioral change as its ultimate goal. It

describes a process of artists working with communities to explore and express people's views on important issues while helping them to pick up new skills along the way.

5.   Methodology

This study adopts the historical research design with the aim of systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events. It involves a critical inquiry of a previous age with the aim of reconstructing a faithful representation of the past. The study is also a single case study which has two main central foci; the historical accounts of the Asebu traditional area and the personal life and legacies of Asebu Amenfi as a unit of the community. Collecting data for case study design in most cases is to collect data about actual human events and behaviours and as such always requires multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2004). In order to satisfy this demand, the researcher requires multi variant data methods which became the basis for collecting data for this study. . In locating relevant information, the researcher extensively studied and reviewed;

a)   Documents:
b)   Numerical records:
c)   Oral statements
d)   Relics.

5.1. The Study Area

The main area of focus for this study is Asebu Traditional Area which is in the Abura/Asebu/Kwamankese District in the central region of Ghana. The Asebu Traditional Area can be found at southernmost part of the district named above. It shares boundaries on the west by the Cape Coast Metropolis, on the north by Abura Traditional area and on the east by Nkusukum Traditional Area.

The Asebu Traditional Area has quite a number of towns and villages with Asebu Amantsendo as the traditional capital. Other towns include Amosima, Akonoma, Mmiensa, Abaasa, Ohiaba, Old Ebu, Brafoyaw, Moree, Sordoful, Apewosika and Patase.

The people of current day Asebu refer to themselves as Fantis but history makes us believe they were originally Efutus. Fanti language has thus become the 'mother tongue' of these people. However, there are other tribes' men from different part of the country who have settled there for various reasons including farming and other economic activities.

6.   Discussion

6.1. The Man Amenfi

Amenfi is believed to be the founder of the Asebu (Sabou)Kingdom hence his name Asebu Amenfi. It is believed that the noble people of Asebu are migrants from Egypt led by a giant who was a crown prince of the house of Pharaoh and a warrior called Amenfi ,a name he derived from the Memphis along the southern part of River Nile. Oral rhetoric gathered from the study suggests Asebu was a giant, a man whose physical appearance was out of the ordinary. Asebu was part of the army who were in pursuit of the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. As seen from the biblical account, many of these men drown in the Red Sea but the rest who survived could not return to Egypt. They wandered about for years and eventually settled near Lake Chad from where they subsequently moved to their present state in the then Gold Coast. In the Lake Chad territory, they lived by the side of a river called Sabou. It is believed that, it is from this river the state derived its name 'Asebu'. During their exodus under the leadership of Amenfi, they took some of the waters from the river Sabou. It became their god. Upon their arrival and their establishment of the current Asebu Kingdom, they deposited the water in the middle of the town. It has become an object of worship annually till date. It is noteworthy that, present day people of Asebu still worship this god, an important benchmark which corroborates their historical lineage.

6.2. Amenfi as a cultural hero

According to Agyekum (2014) African myths, stories, and legends have changed drastically over the pass thousands of years, but the myths have stayed true in developing morals and culture that are unique to the African continent. Cultural heroes are what Moser (2013) describes as being constitutive of community identity, capable of crystallizing in anthropomorphic figure major forces, new trends, and of offering models of behavior in contemporary cultural life (pp.219). True cultural heroism has been compared to the kind of selfless acts which occur in the community; like one defending his tribe against the presumed enemies even at the peril of his life. Amenfi is the very embodiment of the Asebu Kingdom. Upon its establishment he fought and defended it with all his might until it became a unified and a stronger state. His legendary feats and legacies are the very fabric of the people's history. He was the first King of the Asebus; Amenfi I. their annual festival Apayemkese (passover) is done in his memory. As a giant and a warrior he left behind several relics which these town folks

can boast of. There are equally other monumental landmarks and sites attributed to his exploits.

6.3. Cultural Legacies of Amenfi

As the founder of the Asebu Kingdom, all the three major festivals in the traditional area are done in remembrance of him. *Apayemkese, Kae Ako* and Abura-Abura(cleansing and naivity festival) . He has thus become the embodiment of their annual celebrations.

The Supreme god of these people is Sabou, the river god. This god is the water he carried from around the territories of Lake Chad. The shrine for this god is placed at the center of the Asebu Amantsindo community.

The 'Amenfi Sword'; located at Abura, near river Asokwa, is a sword believed to have been used by the giant in his escapades. History has it that he thrust it onto the ground and it has forever remained so. All attempts to remove it have proven futile.

The 'Cover Stone'; around the same river is a big rock which has the finger prints of Asebu embossed on. It is said that, when enemies were attacking, he lifted the rock and hid behind. This event led to his fingers and palms perpetually getting embossed on the rock.

The grove 'Fufumpowmu' where Asebu first settled after his wanderings can still be found in Akatakyiwa community. These historical landmarks and others that are yet to be explored have not been given the proper place in the development trajectory of the Asebu community. These historical landmarks and relics can be used to create viable tourism industry in this community to begin the process of community development and urbanization.

7.   Findings

This study contends that the concept of sustainable development particularly as it applies to community cultural development has not been appropriately defined and operationalized. Whiles some cultural landscapes have been developed for the purposes of tourism in Ghana, there are still other aspects of local culture that have not been given the proper recognition as potential factors for community development. Most of the folks in these areas do not have a clue as to how to churn these rich cultural repositories into developmental ventures.

It requires an appropriate approach and a comprehensive plan to identify these culturally relevant sites to set them up for the purposes of rural development. Conservation of such historical monuments is a huge problem. Most of these relics and monuments are left in the bushes and at the mercies of the weather. People's histories are thus getting rotten away day in and day out.

This study has revealed how effective community participation can help in rural development. Rural folks should be made to own part of their development process by engaging them on regular basis especially on developmental issues concerning their very existence and lifestyles. They are those whose lives will be most affected by the development process and must have a major role in its creation and shaping.

Capturing the legendary lives of cultural heroes under the net of cultural tourism will widen the scope enough to cover areas/communities that may not possess natural landmarks and monuments which are often used for tourism purposes.

8.   Conclusion

In recent years, tourism has been taunted as a possible tool that can assist and improve the socio-economic problems confronting indigenous communities. The main appeal for the development of tourism as a tool for socio-economic development in indigenous communities, may well be due to recent tremendous increase in the number of international tourists, especially from developed countries who are willing and have the financial ability to travel to various destinations including visiting indigenous communities in far off Third World destinations. If culture is seen as the totality of life of a group of people, then tourism in this sense will mean commodifying all aspects of community life including their past and present for the purposes of attracting tourists which will intend incite a kind of development in that community.

Cultural heroes are inspirational to the current generation; they are those we admire just because we know we can emulate what they have done and achieved. They challenge us to aspire to be like them. Disadvantaged communities can change their status to economic viable ones through packaging their stories, feats and legacies of their heroes and sell them to the outside world; thereby placing their communities on the world market.

The culture and history of a people are what make them unique from other groups of persons, therefore if these unique cultural items are well packaged, people who belong to other cultural settings will want to come and see how 'unique' ones cultural heritage is.

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