

Political Regimes and Influence on Ghanaian Theatre: A Review

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Abstract

Ghana has undergone several political regimes which has invariably affected every aspect of the Ghanaian live. This paper retrospectively illuminates some of the political dispensations we have had as a country and reviews how they influenced Ghanaian theatre. It critically examines how the Ghanaian theatre opened itself up to the growing political regime changes taking on nuance development and desistance. The paper covers a broad timeframe assessing the approach to which the various governments valued art and for that matter theatre. From Pre and Post-Independence, existing political regimes have contributed or failed to contribute to development of the arts. The paper highlights contributions and developments that occurred during the various political regimes of the Nkrumah, Busia and Rawlings. Considering the influences of the political regimes, this paper strongly avers that there should be a policy document on theatre arts within a considerable time frame that commits every political regime to adhering to the tenets of it. The idea the paper proposes is that when the policy is set in motion, a regime change will not necessarily end up in toppling the documents. This is to safeguard the development of theatre arts regardless of the excesses of regime changing epochs.

Keywords: Ghanaian Theatre, Nkrumah, Busia, Rawlings, political regime

1. Introduction

Since Ghana gained independence in 1957, Ghana has experienced several changes in government and policy initiatives that directly or indirectly affected the arts. In 1957, when Kwame Nkrumah led the first independent government, he set out policies and decisions that were for the advancement of the newly independent Ghana. The arts formed an integral part of his plan and policy to change the mindset of the new Ghana as it had been led to rebel against her own cultural heritage, in an act of reverse ethnocentricism and cultural hegemony. Unfortunately, the Nkrumah government suffered an overthrow and successive government that took over also suffered similar overthrow by a military coup in 1972. The political regime was destabilised over the period with a continuum of coup-de-tats. It was until 1992 when the PNDC, a regime that ascended the reigns of governance through a military coup transitioned into a democratic government and won an election to run a democratic government.

During Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's term of office in 1957 as President, he supported and used the arts to sensitize the people for unity in diversity. As a leader of the first democratically elected government, he launched a supportive approach that emphasized on state support in harnessing the arts, performing the historical antecedent of our existence and the preservation of historical sites for the purposes of nation building and identity. Kofi Abrefa Busia similarly in 1972 did his best as President to create a different paradigm as far as theatre and the arts were concerned. The same as Rawlings who also launched several initiatives aligned with the development of the arts. The history of public policy on the arts in Ghana can thus be divided into three broad periods: the Nkrumah era, the Busia era and the Rawlings era. It was these eras' that continued to define the ways in which the arts have been supported and developed despite the numerous changes in government. Again, it was these three periods that framed major questions about the relationship that exist between national and international public and artistic productions. As might be expected, the various policy directives of these regimes had some explicit and implicit influences on the development on the arts.

It therefore goes without saying that theatre enjoyed a considerable attention during the three regimes enumerated above. The burgeoning theatre art bloomed taking upon itself, experimentation and hybridisation in a quest to develop a formalised theatrical practice. Several literary narratives were developed to index the post independence Ghanaian and African live experiences and realities. The concert party performativity became a national asset used to disseminate government's plans and policies. The awakening of the Ghanaian consciousness and government policies during the nationalist era was achieved not only through political action, but also through the concert party performativity which was a communal process of assimilation. It easily integrated into the Ghanaian way of life because it used as its base the local language and also used local stories as its foundation.

This paper reveals the specificity of the influences that were wrought on theatre arts practices and as well considers the effect of that tacit inattention by the political regimes on theatre arts. Equally important to this paper is to highlights the perpetuity of political change and how it commensurate with the development of the theatre arts. Also, at the centre of this paper is how these political regimes have over the years, influenced theatre in Ghana and how it has either kept or reformed in these modern times.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theatre Arts

Before and a little after independence, the most recognisable form of arts of which theatre is part was popular arts. Barber (1987) stated that popular arts can only be described or defined by “what it is not.” By this definition, popular arts are seen as a creation that does not fit into the neatly defined traditional and/or the elite literary forms of arts. The traditional and elite literary arts were seen as the two most sanctioned and organized forms of art. Traditional art forms are identified as those art forms which are communal, consensual, embedded in social and ritual practice, and produced according to rigid codes by highly trained, skilled craftsmen Barber (1987, p.2). Traditional arts are readily recognizable by members of the society to whom these arts belong. Again, traditional art forms are not readily malleable and one needs apprenticeship of a kind in order to be recognized as an authority.

Conversely, elite literary art are those ones that have identifiable authors who are self-conscious educated artists and are mostly complex, with the trappings of mostly western education or exposure. These two forms are given the needed attention by formal and informal sectors to help them flourish. Traditional art forms are highly patronized during official state functions and elites or high artists have the opportunity to exhibit their works at well-organized galleries or conferences. Somewhere between these two well defined arts lie popular art. It has adopted some characteristics of both the traditional and elite arts, but also differs radically from both to an extent.

Indeed popular arts, including popular music, are sometimes seen in opposition to both traditional and elite art. It mostly does not require any authority or apprenticeship and artists have a wide range of material to choose from. Hence, they twist and turn materials to suit personal taste or that of their audience. Popular arts are indeed considered popular because its sociological roots are not in the elite and or privileged minority sub-cultures but rather in the intermediate and agricultural sectors and the working class (Cole, 2001, p.2). Anyone who is a fan of popular arts can have easy access to them because they are widely available and it flourishes with or without encouragement or recognition, from political and cultural bodies, and sometimes in defiance of them (Barber, 1987, p.1). Barber in her view asserted that the most obvious reason for giving serious attention to popular arts is their sheer undeniable assertive presence as social facts. This statement by Barber (1971) reflected the powerful nature of popular arts generally and theatre particularly. Barber suggested that popular arts and for that matter

theatre served as a valve for voicing social issues and sentiments. They were more or less the mirror through which society reflected its values, norms and practices. According to Asiedu and Ampofo (2012), the ability of cultural products and popular culture to reflect and influence society therefore meant that the products could not be taken for granted as they potentially had the power to shape the consciousness of society. Popular music has always been acknowledged as the most potent, adaptable, transferable of arts and the only one to make a noticeable impact on people.

2.2 *Dance, Drama and Theatre*

Before the development of theatre and the arts in general, the Ghanaian music, dance and theatre were found in our festivals. Music, dance and theatre were incorporated in rituals which were found in every facet of the traditional life of the African, be it naming ceremonies, funerals, marriage ceremonies, religious and sacred rites and among other things (Asiedu, 2012). Basically it was through these traditional performative acts that the Ghanaian theatre emerged Gibbs (2000). Previously there had been heated debate as to whether drama did or did not exist in pre-colonial Africa, and to what extent it could or should be distinguished from rituals. It is believed that much of this confusion is caused by using English words like 'drama' 'theatre' and 'ritual', which were loaded with meanings derived from European rather than African culture (Kerr, 1995).

The Ghanaian theatre started with the basic storytelling sections which always had the spider, as the major stock character. The spider is known as *Ananse* in *Akan* language or *Ayiyi* in *Ewe* language. Thus, stories known as *Ananse* stories or *Anansesem* are told in the evenings on moonlit nights to small participating audiences under open air compounds when all household chores are done by family members, Asiedu (2012). These stories were told by old knowledgeable people who had wisdom to impart to the younger generation. These *Anansesem* or *Ananse* stories were moralistic in nature and were meant to teach the mores and norms of the communities in which they are told. The story-teller is not just a narrator but also an actor, Awoonor and Adali-Mortty (1971). Traditional Dance and Music were ubiquitous and an integral part of every traditional community. These forms of drama and dance were highly participatory as no gate fees were charged. The sessions for these traditional performance activities were a part of the people's everyday lives and had functions that went beyond mere entertainment. Asiedu (2012). It became a process of constructing a national identity although the process not be an easy given the fact that the country is partitioned into ten regions. For this purpose, the theatre became a medium to culminate all these ethnic and traditional differences under one umbrella.

2.3 Development of Theatre Art forms

Theatre art forms in Ghana and Africa predates back into the pre-colonial era where they formed an integrate part of our way of life and our life trajectories and ceremonies heralded the various practices and forms, Agovi (1988). Also, during the colonial era, the British indoctrinations were heavily trumpeted indirectly through our performances. In his view, Agovi (1990) reiterated that the policy of implanting literary theatre in Colonial Ghana was targeted at educated Africans. Colonial powers through the potency of theatre sought to create a target audience whose allegiance and loyalty to British models of theatre could not be questioned, although popularising theatre in West Africa was a feature of colonialism. In the Ghanaian context, Agovi (1990) believed that one Master Yalley's concerts of the twenties were performed for very prominent and influential rich people, lawyers, medical doctors, politicians, timber merchants, captains of the trade industry and other professional men of high social standing and the upper class. These were the select but very influential educated who themselves were colonial creatures in everything but colour, who were greatly enamoured by western entertainment forms. Equally important was the fact that Yalley's performances were also supportive of empire day celebrations, during which time those who patronised Yalley's concerts, both African and European, readily recognised the heavy influences of the American Vaudeville, the comic acts of Al Johnson and the film feats of Charlie Chaplin. Later, however, in the thirties, when Ishmael Johnson and his Two Bobs took over Yalley's tradition, they expanded its conception and redirected its appeal to a wider and a more proletarian audience.

The well-known form of Ghanaian theatre during the 60s, a little before and after independence was the popular form of theatre. An indigenous form of itinerant theatre which dated back to the early 1900s which was known widely in Ghanaian circles as concert party Agovi (1990). It was an improvised moralistic play on a contemporary topical issue interlaced with music and songs. American vaudeville, Al Jolson and Charlie Chaplin silent movies was said to have influenced its initial development Cole (2001), Barber (1997). Various concert troupes toured various parts and villages in Ghanaian communities to entertain the audience with performances interspersed with music and dance. This accounts for the first truly professional theatre in Ghana where artists lived off their art. At its' peak in the 1970s there were over two hundred (200) hundred concert party troupes registered in the country, Collins (1992). Agovi (1988) Also, during the development, there was a concurrent development of Literary Theatre with 1900-1957 dominating with European texts. The first Ghanaian play *The Blinkards* by Kobina Sekyi was written and produced in 1915 but not published until 1974.

In addition, Efua Sutherland a Ghanaian dramatist who researched into African drama developed another form the concept of *Anansesem* sessions. Sutherland later used her experimental theatre sessions with children to come out with a new theory and art form in the Ghanaian theatre called the *Anansegro*. Through her experimental theatre, play-texts like *Edufa*, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, *Foriwa* and other children's plays were published to add up to the educated literary forms, Anyidoho (2002). Sutherland was concerned with producing theatre that did not begin with William Shakespeare and end with Sheridan, but that which would obtain its strength and inspiration from Ghanaian life' (Asiedu, 2012). Another literary art form that was developed was that of Mohammed Ben Abdallah's *Abibigoro* which had traditional performance forms of rituals, story-telling, music, dance and mime.

2.4 Political Regime Change and its Influences on Theatre Arts

As theatre arts developed through the years, there were a series of changes in government and coup-de-tats. The changes in government influenced the developments of theatre arts since every leader had their own regimental ideas to incorporate. During the government of Kwame Nkrumah in 1957, theatre was known as independence and nationalist theatre. Indigenous community created popular theatre was on the rise. President Nkrumah saw the power of the arts as a tool to be used for national cohesion and development. It was in this vein that the school of music, dance and drama was established at the University of Ghana. The Dr. Busia government saw the rise of using theatre for political propaganda aimed at using theatre as a tool for development. It was also aimed at communicating developmental messages to target communities, especially about government's good policies and projects. This usage of theatre dates back in Ghana from the colonial times when the colonial administrators employed drama as a propaganda tool as noted by Asiedu (2012). Theatre for development was introduced onto the curriculum of the Theatre Arts Dept. in the early 1980s and was initially known as theatre for extension communication.

During the Rawlings regime in the mid-1990s, attempts were made to revive the concert party tradition by the Ghana national theatre. 'Key Soap' Concert Party, which was a feature of the calendar of the Ghana National every Saturday under the sponsorship of a company called Lever Bothers Ghana Limited. These were competitive sessions by the concert party groups where a winner is eventually crowned with a lot of gift and

take-away. It concert party programmes were well attended by patrons far and near as it was shown on national television and patrons enjoyed seeing themselves on television. It must be stated that the themes of these competitions by concert party groups were strictly centred on social issues like good sanitation, health, child labour, child delinquency, corruption, good neighbourliness, marriage among other sensitive all bordering on the fact, after the show patrons will be educated on attitudinal and behavioural change which in the end will affect society. Traditional forms of theatre continue to exist and evolve and remain very much a part of Ghanaian life. One may say that, African theatre is entertainment, but it can also be aesthetically, politically, socially and spiritually committed, and often it is all of these things simultaneously that affects society positively for a harmonious living, Asiedu and Dorgbadzi (2006). At its best African theatre is a total experience of mind, body and soul which engages with, and feeds off a highly responsive involving vocal audience (Banham, Osofisan, Gibbs & Plastow, 1999).

2.5 Theatre Arts Development and the Role of Government

2.5.1 The Nkrumah Regime (1957-1961)

Kwame Nkrumah's thoughts on colonialism laid the foundation of his political and cultural philosophy (Botwe-Asamoah, 2012). This reference by Botwe-Asamoah aptly suggests that the thoughts and philosophies of Nkrumah also influenced the Ghanaian theatre. Nkrumah considered the psychologically pernicious aspect of colonialism and imperialism and its dehumanization and the denigrating of African culture alongside its economic exploitation of the African people. Nkrumah's antidote was the usage of the potency of the communities created arts for the promotion and restoration of African humanity and indigenous forms of cultural expression in his ambition to create a new Africa and new African. Also, during the period of Presidents Nkrumah regime, the arts policy of Ghana government was very much influenced by a conscious and deliberate desire to emphasize the positive value of Ghanaian culture as one with roots in rural areas that should continue to thrive and grow and be supported and preserved. This particular concern was rooted in the experiences of colonialism. Great Britain influenced the local arts heavily as early as the mid nineteenth century but was not felt by many until the early twentieth century Ghanaians saw their various cultures denigrated as uncivilized and rooted in heathen or devilish practices.

Nkrumah argued not only that art was a reflection of social conditions and norms of a people but that African American art descended from Africa, that African people while not recording their histories in written form, recorded it in songs, dances, folk tales, music, and sculpture. Botwe-Asamoah (2012) asserted in his view that the quest for cultural liberation predated Nkrumah's cultural policies as he sighted some prominent Ghanaians such as Kobina Sekyi, Casely-Hayford, Ephraim Amu, and Kwegyir Aggrey who enthusiastically promoted Ghanaian and African and led project of a cultural renaissance in Ghanaian society. Nkrumah's government initiated series of policies to reverse this contemptuous view of local artistic traditions. In pursuing this approach, President Nkrumah sought to do more than simply challenge the denigration of Ghanaian artistic culture as it existed among many of the educated elite of the now independent country of Ghana. He also sought to incorporate the many different local artistic traditions, into a single concept of Ghanaian culture in which the diversity of Ghana artistic traditions was bound together by a common Ghanaian sensibility.

Nkrumah hoisted traditional and folkloric performances by promoting country-wide festivals, establishing regional Arts Councils, the Ghana Dance Ensemble and encouraging the teaching of traditional African music in schools and departments of Universities in the country with the setting up of The School of Music and Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. The third prong of his national arts policy was the Africanisation of art-music and Western type theatre through setting up a National Symphony Orchestra and National Drama Studio and supporting composers such as Ephraim Amu and Phillip Gbeho, Mawere Opoku, Efua Sutherland and among others to see how best the Ghanaian and the African can showcase more of its culture through the lenses of a National Theatre Movement (Yankah, 2012).

The arts and for that matter, theatre was very important to Nkrumah. He wanted to clear the bad notions of the new educated Ghanaian about the barbarisms of his own culture as a result of the influence of the colonial masters and their missionaries. Nkrumah was very interested in popular theatre. Even before independence he supported them and he also had their backing towards the attainment of independence. Many Ghanaian popular musicians and entertainers openly supported Nkrumah's CPP. In the late 1940's to and early 50's concert party and popular theatre groups such as the Axim Trio and Bob Ansah's staged pro-Nkrumah plays. Bob Vans actually changed the name of his war time Burma Trio concert party to the Ghana Trio because they needed an exclusive identity to get more attention from government. Other highlife guitar bands and concert parties that

supported Nkrumah were those of Kwaa Mensah, I.E. Mason, the Fanti Stars, Bob Cole and others. Nkrumah, recognized the vital role played by local popular entertainment in the independence struggle and the creation of an African identity. As a president he endorsed numerous state and para-statal highlife bands, cultural troupes, and concert party groups in their activities. These groups toured the various communities of the country to perform in local languages so as to help spread the message of good citizenship and other themes they found interesting and worthy of sharing (Botwe-Asamoah, 2012).

The importance of the arts to Nkrumah's efforts in forging this national identity can be seen in the numerous councils, organizations and centres created during this time. Two such organizations, the Arts Council of Ghana and the National Arts Festival had as their primary purpose the encouragement of greater awareness of the cultural distinctiveness within the regions. The Arts Council organized annual regional festivals of arts and linked these to a National Arts Festival which invited the best from the regional festivals, thereby promoting a sense of unity in diversity. The venue for this national event was shifted annually from one regional capital to another to promote the underlying theme of linking different cultures within the festival. Nkrumah also gave his official support through financial underwriting to Ghanaian drama and dance. The Ghana government supported the development of the School of Music, Dance and Drama at the University of Ghana, Legon. It sponsored Ghanaian artists, in particular talented musicians and dancers, so that they could expand their art, train others and represent the country abroad. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) brought to public attention Ghanaian music and poetry; the Ghana Film Corporation (a unit of the GBC) recorded dying musical forms, festivals and plays.

Nkrumah was so keen on developing Ghana's home grown arts by giving scholarships to the dance band artists Teddy Osei, Eddie Quansah and Ebo Taylor to study music at the Eric Guilder School of Music in London, and sent Broadway, George Lee's Messengers and the Farmers Council Band for a three month course in traditional drumming and dancing at the Ghana Arts Council in Accra whilst being housed at the nearby Puppet Theatre. Also it is observed that people like E. T Mensah, Efua Theodora Sutherland and the Osagyefo Players among others were funded to gain mastery in the Ghanaian cultural theatre (Botwe-Asamoah, 2012).

Nkrumah also supported the local popular music and drama sector by his policy of rapidly Africanising and expanding the state film and broadcasting sector. The radio transmitting power of the Accra Station was

increased one-hundred fold from its wartime level and later, in 1965, a television service was begun. Both these became part of the state monopoly called the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) which transmitted, popular songs and plays as well as patriotic and traditional ethnic music. After independence the Gold Coast Film Unit evolved into the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC) which, besides newsreels and government propaganda films, also produced films that involved popular music and drama. Nkrumah also encouraged the formation of two popular performance unions in the early sixties. The Ghana National Entertainments Association catered for guitar-bands, concert parties and stage magicians, whilst the Musicians Union of Ghana consisted of members of the more urban oriented dance-bands. Both these unions were dissolved in 1966, after the anti-Nkrumah coup, due to their links with his CPP, via the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

2.5.2 The Busia Regime and its Influence on Theatre Arts (1969-1972)

After the 1966 military coup that overthrew Nkrumah's government, the policies that had defined the government's relationship with the arts changed very little. Support for the arts was still very much tied to a nationalist agenda. The contributions of President Busia are a little farfetched but it is imperative to note that while Nkrumah was interested in the usage of popular theatre and education of the people in the drumming and dancing sections, Busia focused on recorded but classified as evangelical theatre where the message is theatrically recorded and played in vans and open area's to create the change. He came up with a medium that led the information services department to mount speakers on mobile vans and toured rural areas to educate and entertain communities using recorded drama. The rise of mobile cinema vans came about during Busia's regime.

The Ghana Dance Ensemble and the School of Music, Dance and Drama continued their work in dance promotion, research and performance under the Institute of African Studies until the early 1970's, when the university appointed K.A. Busia to investigate the structure, aim and objectives of the company and school. Concluding that the aims of the School of Music, Dance and Drama transcended the boundaries of Africa, Busia, who was later to become Prime Minister of the Second Republic of Ghana, proposed that the School of Music, Dance and Drama separate from the Institute of African Studies (Nketiah, 1961) This split was implemented in 1975 and the school changed its name to the School of the Performing Arts. The Ghana Dance Ensemble, however, remained under the Institute of African Studies in order continue its connection with traditional African dance research.

2.5.3 The Rawlings Regime and its Influence on Theatre Arts (1981-1992/1992-1998)

President Rawlings a military ruler during the early eighties and later a democratically elected President in 1992 till 1998 was very much interested the cultural activities of the Ghana and by extension Africa. He became friends with the Chinese government and as such was gifted a huge national edifice which was named as the National Theatre. The national theatre had as its main aim to develop theatre arts and promote the cultural activities of Ghana. President Rawlings supported the founding of the National Commission on Culture, an agency that was designed, in part, to seek foreign donations to revive theatre arts. In 1992, President J. J. Rawlings, after ten years of military rule, enacted the law establishing the National Theatre of Ghana. The building was designed to resemble sails being caught by the wind and propelling the affluence of Ghanaian theatre out into the wider world. However, it was more politically shrewd as a public link between Ghana and China. It was the Chinese who lent the construction workers for the building, and later cleared the debt, making the iconic home for Ghanaian theatre a gift to the arts of Ghana. In the last few years China repeated the gesture by funding the refurbishment of the building.

3. The Connection

Theatre art has been influenced by these regimes over the course of the years looking at Nkrumah and Busia's contribution on the development of the various theatre forms in the reforms made in terms of education. New policies clearly marked a very major change from the approach taken by the Nkrumah government, which placed heavy emphasis on the role of the state apparatus in shaping the national economy and supporting the arts. Nevertheless Rawlings continued to style himself an Nkrumah's and attempted to reconcile IMF policies (with their emphasis on opening the country to international investment) with his predecessors Pan Africanist ideological orientation. This is evident in the many overtures made to the African American business community during visits made to the United States to seek investments in Ghana's economy. It is also the approach to the arts. Among the initiatives launched with support from the Rawlings government has been the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival, also known as [PANAFEST] (Yankah, 2012). This is a periodic event designed to commemorate the devastation of the African slave trade and to reunite the African people that the slave trade dispersed throughout the world. It is a held in the town of Cape Coast, in central Ghana, where one also finds Cape Coast Castle, the first building in sub-Saharan Africa designated as a World Heritage Monument which also once served as a centre for the export of Africans as slaves to the Americas. Cape Coast, in turn, is just down the road from the town of Elmina where one finds the oldest slave trading castle in West Africa. Both of

these buildings were recognized as historically significant to both Ghanaians and Africans in the Diaspora during the Nkrumah and Busia period, but under the Rawlings government, they have come to play a central role in the government's efforts to obtain foreign investment for renovation purposes, which in turn is associated with the development of an international "heritage tourism" industry, Peek and Yankah (2004). The policy of opening Ghana's communication system to international forces and the current government's emphasis on "heritage tourism" has not been without controversy. The development of independent radio stations has created a situation in which local musicians have seen their art supplanted by "slicker", more popular music from the West (for example, rhythm and blues and hip-hop). Ghanaians complain of the LAFA (locally acquired foreign accents) of the disc jockeys and the concomitant de-emphasis on local language radio programs (a sharp departure from the time when the government dominated radio programming). The development of heritage tourism with its emphasis on involving the international community has also generated its share of controversies. In 1991, the Ghana government received a substantial sum of money and support services from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (US chapter), and the Smithsonian Institution to renovate Cape Coast Castle. As noted above, this particular castle served as one of the centres of the Atlantic slave trade, but it also served as the seat of the British government during the colonial period, and housed King Prempeh, the Asante king, before he was sent into exile by the British colonial government. The castle's history is intertwined as well with the history of the particular Fante chiefdom on whose land it sits. The Fante were historic enemies of the Asante and were deeply involved as sellers of slaves to the British during the era of the Atlantic slave trade. These facts generated a number of questions when the government began to plan the renovations of the castle. What period should be emphasized in the reconstruction: the era of the slave trade alone, British colonial administration? How were the locals to be presented as allies of the British colonizers, as slave dealers, as naive accomplices? How should the castle be presented: lighted, whitewashed and airy to present an inviting environment in which to showcase the history of the castle, or should it be kept in a deplorable state to illustrate its involvement in the most horrible of trades, the buying and selling of human beings? Most visitors to the castle were Ghanaians who had little knowledge of or interest in the Atlantic slave trade, yet the moneys that were being used to support the renovation came from American institutions that had deep interest in the Atlantic slave trade because it was this connection that brought so many of the Africans to the Americas that today form a major and influential segment of the American population. What of the artistic performances that were scheduled to be held in the castle during PANAFEST? Should they be geared solely toward the foreign tourist industry? The 1994 PANAFEST brought

this question into sharp relief when they invited a local concert party group to perform in the castle. Because this group knew that African Americans were planning to attend the PANAFEST, they decided to draw upon the American-derived aspects of their art in order both to showcase their work and flatter their African American audience. Not knowing to them, however, the American-derived artistic form that they had chosen to employ *blackface make-up* would have been deeply offensive to their audience, especially because the show was planned for the area just in front of the door that had been used during the era of the Atlantic slave trade to herd the slaves into the waiting slave ships. As it happened, the show was derailed by a completely unrelated set of problems. But if this had not happened, should those who were involved have discouraged this group from performing this aspect of their art even though their understanding of the significance of using of black face had nothing to do with the way it was used in American minstrel shows? What role should the international community have in influencing the character of local artistic productions in Ghana? With the opening of independent radio and television stations broadcasting much more technologically advanced programs than what is and currently can be produced in Ghana, with the development of heritage tourism as an industry that by design has been oriented less toward a Ghanaian market and more toward an international market, these questions have become increasingly relevant for policy makers. They reflected a very different situation than the one that existed during the Nkrumah era. Private enterprise and open markets rather than state sponsorship were the dominant approaches taken by policy makers in Ghana today. Yet the problems that have emerged from this new approach are very similar to the ones that developed during the Nkrumah period. Government control generated serious concerns about the degree to which support for the arts was a captive of particular nationalist and Pan Africanist agendas. In more recent times, serious concerns exist about the extent to which support for the arts in Ghana is held captive by commercial interests that often reside outside the country.

Should Ghanaian highlife be allowed to go the way of the dinosaur because it cannot generate enough financial support to compete effectively with other forms of entertainment productions? Should the Ghanaian understanding and use of blackface as a symbolic marker separating the performer from his or her audience be relegated to the past because it might hurt the effort to develop “heritage tourism” How does one reconcile the value of artistic creativity with development needs, where art if properly harnessed can play a particularly important role in facilitating the economic development of the country while also defining the identity of a region, a nation, a people separated by the slave trade? These questions are not unique to Ghana. Nevertheless the answers remain deeply contested as Ghanaians attempt to develop theatre arts while also developing Ghana.

4. Conclusion

Institutions that were established as post independence organisations, tasked with the responsibility of developing Ghanaian arts and cultural heritage have gone through a considerable number of changes over the years. Theatre art which form apart of these institutions has equally undergone several changes and these changes are partially as a result of political regime change. The political regimes realised the power of the artistic and rallied together through the arts to strengthen their political movements and ideologies. Consequently, the various political regime changes introduced policy directions that invariably truncated already existing ones because it did not align with their political philosophies. Equally important is that several external factors and happenings within the period that regimes existed contributed invariably to also influence theatre.

Taking a careful look at the changes in government since independence and how it has affected the arts over time, it is imperative to note that the cultural and theatre art policies of the country must be permanent so that successive governments would comply with it to promote national agenda and theatrical excellence. It is equally important that theatre be seen as a national asset and be used for the development of the historical and cultural practices of the people of Ghana as opposed to seeing it a tool to using it to project political ideals. There is the need for long term theatrical policies that will not be altered no matter the governments that take over in the four year change of power systems in the country. In light of the happenings of the above regimes and their influences on theatre and the arts in general, it will be safer for theatrical practice and the arts in general if laws are passed to protect the arts in the country to ensure a safe and sound growth of the theatre.

It is also imperative for every political regime to uphold the image of the arts in the country since it is one of the most important channels through which the image of the nation is presented and preserved. As mentioned by Awo Asiedu (2012), there are movements towards a professional theatre industry, but we still have some ways to go. Indeed, a more stable political and economic environment will aid this process..

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