

INTRODUCTION

Culture is Lifestyle as manifested by a particular people or society. It is man-made, not genetically inherited. It is evolved for the purpose of living. It is socially taught and learned. It originates as human response to the local physical and biological environment. Cultural traditions look to the past for their mandate, authority and authenticity as cultural traits are regarded as society's norms handed down the generations.

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However, culture is dynamic and is often affected by local and external influences and stimuli.

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Culture is expressed in intangible or non-material form, for instance in terms of languages, dialects, philosophical thought, cosmology, morals and ethics, religious beliefs and rituals oral traditions, folklore, festivals, political ideas, music and dance, social customs related to birth, puberty, marriage, family life, work, death etc. Culture is also manifested in tangible or material form, in terms of types of food procurement and preparation, diverse technology and crafts clothing, body decoration, visual art and symbols, secular and religious architecture, monetary medium of exchange, transport systems etc.

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Available records show that Ghana has some three score ethnic groups each characterised by peculiar cultural values and traditions that give Identity to the ethnic group

Identity is defined as "a fixed set of customs, practices and meanings, and enduring heritage, a ready identifiable sociological category, a set of shared traits and/or experiences" (D. Ross, 1998).

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In present-day Ghana, citizens of certain ethnic groups may be closer and more "identical" to each other in shared traits than to citizens in other ethnic groups.

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The Akan populace and its numerous dialect sub-groups make up nearly 60% of the national population. There are minority southern groups like the Gwa, Ewe, Dangme, Ga and there are minority northern groups such as Mole-Dagbani, Senofo, Grusi, Gurma and Gonja Gwa. Each group has dialect sub-groups.

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In terms of shared traits, and historical ancestry, the Akan of Ghana and the Akan of Cote d'Ivoire (like the Abron and Agni), have much in common, even though belonging to different nationalities. Similarly, the Ewe of Ghana, Togo and Dahomey/Benin have shared traits including language, festivals, rituals, traditional governance etc. Various ethnic groups of Northern Ghana share similar traits with others across the border in Mali and Burkina Faso.

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In this respect, certain Ghanaian ethnics are, "culturally closer" to ethnics in neighbouring West African countries than even to some local ethnics within Ghana's borders.

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Hence, the term "Identity" is a relative term.

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It It It It CULTURAL POLICY

The cultural diversities in Ghana notwithstanding, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana recognises culture as a vital tool for national integration and development. In Chapter 6 of the Constitution under the heading "the directive principles of State Policy", Article 39 states that:

"The State shall take steps to encourage the integration of appropriate customary values into the fabric of national life through formal and informal education and the conscious introduction of cultural dimensions to relevant aspects of national planning. The State shall ensure that appropriate customary and cultural values are adapted and developed as an integral part of the growing needs of the society as a whole; and in particular that traditional practices which are injurious to the health and well-being of the person are abolished. The State shall foster the development of Ghanaian languages and pride in Ghanaian culture. The State shall endeavour to preserve and protect places of historical interest and artefacts."

In the Cultural Policy of Ghana, published in 2004 by the National Commission on Culture and approved by the Ghana Government, three main objectives are set out":

Firstly, to document and promote Ghana's traditional cultural values such as those enshrined in concepts of human dignity, attitudes to nature and the environment, law and order, honesty and truthfulness, unity and peace, self-reliance and dignity of labour, family community and national solidarity.

Secondly, to ensure the growth and development of our cultural institutions and make them relevant to human development, democratic governance and national integration.

Thirdly, to enhance Ghanaian cultural life and develop cultural programmes to contribute to the nation's human development and material progress through heritage preservation, conservation, promotion and the use of traditional and modern arts and crafts to create wealth and alleviate poverty.

For purposes of implementing the National cultural policy, the National Commission on Culture has set out a Strategic plan which recognises all Civil Society groups, Business and Corporate Organisations as Stakeholders in the nation's cultural heritage and seeks their participation in the implementation of policies and programmes.

Among the list of stakeholders, prominence is given to the Houses of Chiefs regarded as having a key role in the task of heritage preservation and cultural transformation. Other stakeholders are the District Assemblies, Religious Bodies, Educational

Institutions, Social groups, Voluntary Associations, Artistic groups and associations, Non-Governmental Organisations, as well as the Media agencies and Institutions.

In sum, the Cultural Policy of Ghana as set out by the Government's Cultural Commission argues thus:

"Ghana has over 50 ethnic groups whose common values and institutions represent our collective national heritage. Each of these ethnic groups brought together by dint of history, has unique cultural features and traditions that give Identity, self-respect, and pride to the people. Since independence, the emerging civil society of Ghana has recognised the need to promote Unity within this cultural diversity and Ghana has since enjoyed relative unity, stability, and peace."

to foster unity among the diverse ethnic groups of Ghana is indeed a daunting task. But the National Commission hopes to achieve this by "promoting cultural interaction and inter-ethnic understanding through programmes that create enabling environment for national development."

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CULTURE AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

Â In many respects, Ghana's cultural traditions can be exploited for development. While some aspects of culture are already vibrant and need only to be expanded, others that are moribund need to be restored or revitalised.

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Â Chieftaincy

Â Several decades ago chieftaincy in Ghana came under fire.Â In 1977, Justice Nii Amaa Ollenu contributed to a debate on "Chieftaincy in Ghana, rejuvenation or decay."Â He observed that the chief in his official capacity cannot reasonably aspire to hold an office in national central government and that his place is among his people.Â Dr. Jawa Apronti, then Research Scholar at University of Ghana Legon, expressed the extreme view that "Chieftaincy is really a farce since present-day chiefs hardly enjoy any realÂ Â power.Â

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Chieftaincy is obsolete because the modern trend is from Nationhood towards Continental Unionism and from Monarchical government towards Egalitarianism, Republicanism and majority socialism.Â In our continent in which Workers and peasants constitute the majority of the population, chieftaincy as an example of public office attained on grounds of birth is parasitic and a laughable anachronism."

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However, traditional governance is closely tied up with ancestral veneration, ritual and ceremonial exigencies related to the social, spiritual and economic well being of society.

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Â The 1992 Constitution (Article 270) guarantees the institution of chieftaincy together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage, but Article 276 notes that chiefs cannot take part in party politics, and that any chief wishing to do so, and seeking election to Parliament shall abdicate his stool or skin.

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Â The National Cultural Policy regards Chieftaincy as "the Kingpin of Ghanaian traditional culture";Â "an anchor of cultural life in all communities and in the nation as a whole".Â

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Chiefs are patrons of the traditional arts, crafts, festivals, folklore, languages and literature, customary law, traditional customs and usages.Â They provide vital leadership at the local level and superintend the task of transmitting oral traditions, and maintenance of historic relics, sites, monuments and cult centres.Â Their role in the implementation of State Cultural Policy is vital.Â

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Admittedly, traditional governance is known to be associated with various abuses and chieftaincy disputes but it must also be borne in mind that in decades past when the Democratic system of governance was dislodged by Military Dictatorships, it as the system of Chieftaincy that gave some stability to Ghanaian Society.

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Â To the extent that chiefs display the grandeur of cultural forms in chiefly regalia, festival art, pomp and pageantry they are an asset for promoting cultural tourism.

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Moreover, as a reference point of cultural values and traditional rules, chiefs are effective agents for changing negative cultural practices.

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Kente Industry and Art

The Asante and Ewe ethnic groups are the main producers of kente textiles in Ghana.Â Among both ethnic groups the tradition harks back some 300 years.Â In Asante, the major centre of production is Bonwire where there are over 800 houses with some 2000 weavers.Â Bonwire weavers have a repertoire of over 1000 kente designs and motifs most of them identifiable by their generic or specific names among them Sika futuro, Oyokoman, Adweneasa, Kuduo, Babadua, Asasia, Fathia fata Nkrumah, Akosombo Kanea, New Ghana, Sika fre mogya, Abrewa ben, African Unity etc.Â Bonwire Kente is patronised by many foreign embassies in Ghana although some 50% of the Bonwire products are purchased by African Americans.

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Â In January 1998, the weavers of Bonwire celebrated the 300th Anniversary Festival of Kente evolution (1697-

1997). The festival was to publicise and advertise the industry at home and abroad, so as to further its economic development. It was noted that eight women took part in the Festival's Kente weaving competition thus breaking the taboo restricting Asante weaving to men only.

In Eweland, Kente production is practised in a number of townships – Agbozume (known as the Kente market of the world,) Anyako, Kpetoe, Kpandu Dzeluko. Whereas Asante kente is largely confined to production of "geometrical" kente motifs, the Ewe repertoire is unique in emphasising representational "figurative inlay" designs while also producing some typical Asante motifs like Fathia Nkrumah and Oyokoman.

In recent times, African Americans and the Merchant Bank of Ghana have provided strong sponsorship for Kente producers at Dzeluko enabling them to access markets in the USA, South Africa and elsewhere. In 1996, Agotime Traditional area and its "capital", Kpetoe held the 1st Annual Kente Festival called Agbamevoza.

One scholar in assessing the place of kente in African textile export stated: "In 1991, sales of African and African style fabrics reached 14 billion dollars in the USA and kente was by far the hottest-selling item. Although other African textiles have been adapted for use in clothing, linen and upholstery none evokes the racial pride, identity, and solidarity associated with Akan Kente". (Nii Quarcoopome in *Wrapped in Pride*)

What is remarkable and astounding is the phenomenal way the African American Community in USA has adopted the kente textile as an item of "identity". Everywhere in the USA, Kente usage has been popularised and democratised (notwithstanding the Ghana Government's copyright laws on kente folklore items), deliberately to send a loud and clear message to the rest of the world that Africanists have capabilities and ingenuity like other races and can produce Kofi Annans and Wole Soyinkas, as well as great Medics and Scientists.

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Glass Bead Culture

What is not so well known because it has not been widely publicised like Kente, is the Dangme and Asante/Dabaa. glass bead technology culture. The Krobo and Se/Shai Dangme ethnic group resident in Eastern Region and Greater Accra Region respectively, have a puberty rite for females.

There is a long-standing tradition among them that requires that when girls first experience their puberty they should undergo special traditional cult ceremonies before they can be betrothed and given in marriage. Pre-marital sex without puberty rite observance is punished by exiling from society. At the climax of the puberty ceremonies, the puberty graduands are dressed in a mass of ornate bead ornaments and Kente textiles. This has led to the growth of an artistic glass bead industry with its major centre at Odumase Krobo.

Old Beverage and Ointment glass bottles are purchased, ground and mixed with imported coloured powder fed into clay moulds and baked in high temperature ovens or mud kilns. The products (plain, bichrome or polychrome beads) are exported throughout Ghana and to Europe and USA. Various African American Private Companies are using this bead culture also to portray African Community identity.

In 2003, UNESCO Ghana sponsored a field research by myself and Madam Kati into Ghanaian bead industry as a whole, including glass, bauxite, shell stone beads. The resultant publication is a testimony to the way private entrepreneurs can use culture as a tool for national development.

At the Cedi, Enterprise at Odumase, Mr. Nomoda Djaba not only has a prosperous glass bead factory and shop but both local and foreign students attend regularly workshops and lectures at his centre to understudy him in bead production. He employs sophisticated western-type technology alongside local equipment and resources.

Ethnomedicine In Ghana

Over the past two decades, I have carried out both archival and field investigation into traditional medicine

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^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The earliest archival ethnomedical records date to Portuguese times in 16th Century Elmina. ^ Paul Isert
Peter Thonning, the Danish Scientists, documented Se/Shai and Akuapem traditional medicine in the late 18th Century.

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In 1817, a Physician, Henry Tedlie who was part of the British Mission to Ashanti led by James and Bowdich documented Asante indigenous medicine.

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^ Similar studies were later undertaken among the Ga people by Margaret Field in the 1930s, among the Takyiman Bono by Dr. Warren. D. Abbiw documented ethnomedicine countrywide, in a recent magnum opus entitled "plants that heal". ^ My own field research has been among the Se/Shai indigenes inhabiting the townships of Doryumu, Kodiabe, Agomeda, Ayikuma, Dodowa, Suhum, Kraboa-Coaltar, Kofi Pare, etc. ^ The herbs that were documented by Isert and Thonning in late 18th century Seland bear the same names today and are used for similar cures.

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Currently the Ghanaian media is excited by the news that Onua Amoah has tested locally and internationally the local medicinal plant, Kutugbletso or Abrototo and found it to be very effective for use as fuel in diesel engines. ^ Kutugbletso known as Physic nut or Jatropha curcas is well known for its powerful curative qualities for treatment of Kwashiorkor, jaundice, ulcers, rheumatism and gonorrhoea. ^ Clearly then, our tropical medicinal plants like Physicnut are now seen as treasures that can generate billions of dollars and are being cultivated on a large scale in Ghana. ^ Today, in spite of great strides made by western medicine in Ghana, over 60% Ghanaians still patronise ethnomedicine.

Miscellaneous Cultural Traditions

A host of cultural traditions have been on the decline over the past century or so, especially indigenous metallurgical skills employed in production of iron tools implements and artefacts, brass vessels and ornaments, silver and gold jewellery. ^ Also many Indigenous Asante Abosomfie or cult shrines and Fante Posuban or Asafo Company shrines have fallen into disuse and decay in recent times although in past decades they were a centre of attraction for foreign tourists and visitors.

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Ghana has a rich diversity of foods and culinary cultures as a legacy of its diverse ethnic cultures.

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Some of the truly indigenous foods known to the Gwa (Guan) believed to be the oldest ethnic group in Ghana have virtually become moribund for instance, Anum spiced maize/red plantain meal, Nkonya Fefle hill rice meal, Wude Guan meal Esien corn/pepper meal etc.

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A clause in the Cultural Policy states that: "The State shall actively support research into production and preservation of local foods and the compilation of traditional recipes and methods of preservation. The State shall encourage the consumption of Ghanaian cuisine from all parts of the country and discourage the over- dependence on imported ^ foods; the state shall explore the nutritional values of our local food stuff and promote them; Ghanaians shall be encouraged to develop a culture of producing what they eat and eating what they produce."

Emerging New Cultural traits

Culture is dynamic not static. ^ That fact is clearly demonstrated in the legacy of a Mosaic cultural network inherited from the past, which incorporates indigenous local elements, West African borrowed elements, Islamic borrowed cultural elements as well as Western Cultural elements.

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^ In the past two decades, there has emerged in the Ga-speaking area of Teshie-Nungua, a new culture of production of spectacular "fantasy coffins" carved in variety of themes based on professions. ^ One coffin takes on the form of a book for burying a Teacher; a second coffin depicts a Mercedes Benz or "Tro-Tro" Passenger lorry, for burying a professional driver; a third takes the form of an Okro vegetable for burying a farmer or market vegetable Saleswoman; a fourth depicts a cockerel for burying a poultry farmer.

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^ The "Fantasy Coffins" have become more popular with foreign buyers who order them for export.

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^ A number of articles have been published in Journals and a book entitled "Going into darkness" has been published abroad on the subject. ^ A new cultural tradition of Ga origin has thus been born.

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By Professor James Anquandah

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