Chapter 13

Culture, Religion, Life Skills and Tourism

As a country of diverse ethnic and cultural groups, Ghana is home to many different beliefs, traditions, languages and religions. This diversity is equally reflected in the youth demographic. Generally, there exists diversity in religion – the majority self-identify as Christian (71.2 per cent), followed by those who identify with Islam (17.6 per cent), leaving only a small minority adhering to traditional religions (5.2 per cent) (GSS, 2013). The northern population of the country generally identifies as Muslim, while the centre and south populations are predominantly Christian. Both culture and religion have been identified as two fundamental aspects of youth identity and serve to shape the relations between groups of different ethnicities and their belief systems.

Interviews with stakeholders suggest that the focus in Ghana for many years has been on rediscovering the intrinsic values and aspirations of the nation in order to form a post-colonial national identity. However, there has not been adequate investigation into what impact government initiatives have had in furthering the overarching goal of breaking away from the oppressive colonial heritage inherent in much of Ghanaian society and promoting indigenous values and beliefs.

In 2010, the NYP formally acknowledged the importance of religion, arts and culture as fundamental to the successful development of Ghanaian youth. The NYP describes arts and culture as important vehicles for appreciating and understanding the heritage of the Ghanaian people. It recognises these as media through which youth can learn and transfer progressive skills and techniques related to social relations and survival, and as representing a sense of identity and self-respect. The NYP also commits to the promotion of youth participation in arts and culture through a number of activities to achieve national cohesion and integration. Furthermore, it acknowledges that youth development is tied to cultural context.

13.1 Youth and religion

Presently, the youth demographic in Ghana gives more importance to religion than previous generations (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Nevertheless, inter-faith relations among the youth population are not uncommon and Ghana has a history of peaceful co-existence between religious groups (Wandusim, 2015).

Despite the generally positive religious climate in Ghana, there have been negative experiences. In 2015, a moment of tension ignited when officiators for the West African Examination Council forced Muslim students to remove their hijabs or veils before examinations (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2015). Corrective action was taken immediately but the International Religious Freedom Report of 2017 cites additional cases of religious intolerance in religiously affiliated schools (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2017).

13.2 Culture

The National Commission on Culture and MOE are working collaboratively to ensure the development of education in Ghanaian languages, including the use of literature and art from indigenous groups, as part of an overall effort to move away from the inherited colonial educational system (National Commission on Culture, 2004).

13.2.1 Indigenous arts and crafts in schools

In 2004, a study took place to analyse which indigenous art forms were being taught in Ghanaian schools. Unfortunately, researchers discovered that indigenous knowledge was conspicuously absent from the educational curriculum (Ross, 2004). Despite the National Commission on Culture's intentions 'to promote the cultural awareness of the youth through formal and non-formal education to ensure that they are prepared to play their role in the cultural life of their communities' (2004, p. 2), including indigenous education in the prevalent Western school system has proven easier said than done. As Edusei (1991) explains, indigenous and Western school education systems are very different – the former operating under a holistic, integrated approach and the latter based on competitiveness and separation of distinct fields of study. Trying to compartmentalise indigenous knowledge into the Western approach to education as initiated by the missionary school structure only serves to further devalue indigenous ways of knowing, marking them as tokenised 'cultural activities' that are not prioritised (Flolu, 2000; Ross, 2004). Additionally, if the curriculum does include indigenous art forms, the majority of this comes from the historically dominant ethnic group of the Asantes, ignoring the diversity of other ethnic groups (Ross, 2004).

In 2010, a study was conducted to investigate the importance of different identity aspects in the self-perception of students and the general population (Langer, 2010). The results showed that students, when compared with the general population, were less attached to their language, ethnicity and regional origin. This indicates that higher education reflects a detachment towards local and indigenous culture and a more modern global perspective.

13.2.2 Policy initiatives

In 2004, with the goal of developing a united, vibrant and prosperous national community with a distinctive African identity, the Cultural Policy of Ghana was initiated. With the overarching goal of preserving and conserving Ghanaian culture, this recognises the importance of youth in achieving success. As such, it commits to promoting cultural awareness in youth through formal and informal education opportunities. Additionally, it acknowledges the role of the arts as a medium for transferring traditional skills to the youth demographic.

From 26 to 30 January 2015, as part of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) mandate to develop and promote Ghanaian culture and the creative arts, the Museum of Science and Technology extension was opened for a public exhibition. The event provided a platform for youth to exhibit their talents and

creativity. Additionally, the National Commission on Culture organised training programmes in traditional arts and crafts production for 3,000 Ghanaian youth (MOTAC, 2016). Furthermore, as part of the Tourism Research and Marketing Programme, MOTAC appointed 30 ambassadors to promote Ghanaian cultural products on their international and local platforms that could serve as business incubators for youth and the unemployed (MOTAC, 2018). Government expenditure on arts and culture continues to increase each year; as of 2018, GH₵41 million (54 per cent of the total MOTAC budget) was allocated to continue initiatives in this direction (Kwofi, 2018).

In the private sector, the Integrated Rural Art and Industry Programme at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology seeks to create links between the professional education world of the university and the reality of small rural indigenous villages. This programme allows knowledge to transfer both ways, providing the local craft industry with access to new ideas and technology and allowing university students to acquire experiential knowledge of indigenous crafts, enabling them to build on their skills in the marketing of these products (Druyeh, 2008).

13.3 Human rights violations and indigenous practices

Trokosi is a cultural rite still practised in Ghana, among the Ewes in Volta region, that many see as a form of sex slavery. Girls are 'selected by the gods' and sent to live in fetish priests' shrines in order to atone for crimes committed often by their older relatives (Nukunya, 2003). While in the shrine, girls serve the fetish priest by fetching water, sweeping the compound and having sex with him. These girls are denied the opportunity for education, often go hungry and lose their family ties.

GoG criminalised this practice in 1998 but some parents still believe it is a cultural heritage that should be respected. It was originally used as a method of searching for truth and knowledge, but in more recent times has been used to punish wrongdoers. Where previously crimes could be atoned for with offerings such as cattle, money and liquor, today atonement takes the form of sexual slavery of virgin girls. Many Ghanaians fear that enforcing the criminalisation of *Trokosi* will simply encourage it to become an underground practice.

13.4 Youth and tourism development

Ghana is home to numerous attractions, cultural, natural and historical in form, such as rock formations, animal sanctuaries, art and festivals. Although domestic tourism currently accounts for 65 per cent of all tourism activity (GSS, 2014), Ghana has not fully tapped into the multibillion-dollar potential embedded in youth tourism (Preko et al., 2017). Preko et al. studied the future of youth tourism in Ghana and found that youth were pulled by the desire to experience historical and cultural attractions and pushed by the ego-enhancement derived from visiting novel places that they could talk about. If tourism stakeholders recognise the potential benefits of rebranding to attract the youth demographic, they are likely to increase revenue by attracting this large share of the population.

In 2010, MOTAC inaugurated 25 Tourist Clubs in tertiary and basic schools as part of the promotion of student excursions and youth travel and exchange programmes as well as expanding tourism sector revenue generation (MOTAC, 2014).

13.5 Summary points

1. The 2010 NYP commits to promoting youth participation in arts and culture through a number of activities, with the overarching objective of promoting national cohesion and integration.

2. The positive trend of religious tolerance and acceptance is continuing despite episodes of tension.

3. Implementing mandatory teacher preparation to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to speak to the diversity of religions and cultures in Ghana would further governmental objectives of promoting a culture of tolerance.

4. Attempts to include indigenous ways of knowing into the Western system of education have been unsuccessful and serve only to further tokenise indigenous arts and culture.

5. Some youth in Ghana continue to be victims of negative religious-cultural practices such as *Trokosi.*

6. Rebranding tourism with an increased focus on youth populations could help diversify and increase revenues.

13.6 Recommendations

1. Proper teacher preparation is imperative to the promotion of a culture of tolerance with respect to religion.

2. Further work is needed in rewriting current curricula to reflect indigenous ways of knowing rather than the colonially imposed Western system of education.

3. Address negative religious-cultural practices that are violating the human rights of the youth demographic.

4. Given that youth have an interest in historical and cultural attractions, relevant stakeholders should focus on the development, branding and advertisement of tourist attractions to encourage youth tourism activities.

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