

Promoting Indigenous Culture In Ghana: The Role Of Folk Music And The Mass Media

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Abstract: The practice of indigenous Ghanaian culture, which constitutes an entire life system evolved by the people to meet their challenges and, as well, find peace and progress in their socioeconomic, aesthetic and religious beliefs/activities, is now on a fast decline. Two ways in which cultures of societies can be re-packaged to satisfy the people's needs and purposes are through the roles that music and the mass media can play. Since these two forms of communication offer values, ideas and knowledge that promote culture and community life, a re-assessment of the present state of Ghanaian culture is a vital issue that needs urgent attention now than before. This paper, therefore, is an attempt at showing how folk music and the mass media can be used to foster the development and promotion of the culture of the people to benefit their present and future generations.

Key words: Indigenous culture, folk music, mass media, community life.

Introduction

African societies from primordial times regard their culture as a tool that not only shapes and molds their total life but also gives them the identity. A society devoid of culture lacks character and faces a possible doom or extinction shortly. The issue of culture, therefore, is so pervasive and critical to human life that in this connection, Onabajo argues:

People and culture cannot be separated. Culture stands for the aggregate values and concepts which characterize a community. It then follows that people who lack culture or are ignorant of their experience either written or unwritten are themselves not in full existence. Culture encompasses all the material and non-material expressions of people, as well as the processes with which these emotions are communicated. These consist of our literature, music, arts, customs, social institutions and other intellectual expressions of the society (2005: 94).

A striking feature which one can take note of in this contemporary era is the continuous growth and expansion of human societies and thus, making culture an authentic source of determining the direction in which a society must go if it wants to grow and develop.

Definition of culture

Though culture is difficult to define, much educated elite have explained it from different perspectives and prisms. Culture for this discussion, is explained by Amlor and Alidza (2012:108) as the customs, traditions, language and values that define social groups such as those based on ethnicity, region, or common interests. A Cultural identity which contributes to people's overall well-being is equally important for their sense of self-esteem and how they relate to others. Aina (1992:32) explains culture as the totality of the past and ongoing experience, material and ideational, and constituting the way of life of people.

According to Onabajo (2005:93), culture, likened to tradition, is a belief, principle or way of behaviour which people in a particular society have continued to observe for a long time. Culture, therefore, exists in people's political institutions, literature, language and morality in a community, perhaps forever and passed on from one generation to the other. What moves people to cling to their cultures such as their morals, beliefs, desires, motives and values, depends on the type of society in which they develop and the activities and institutions that surround their life. Olaide (2000:6) shares the view that what people (Nigerians) call culture are traces of achievements of their forefathers at levels or stages of their development and the accumulative knowledge of these various achievements. Mari, in an interview with a traditional Nigerian head, Onogie of Igueben, Eluojierior Ehjoze 1 about his definition of culture, reports:

To understand people's culture, one must survey the whole gamut of their way of life. Such characteristics to be considered include the physical as well as the abstract. In other words, the concept examines the material and non-material aspects of the people's way of life. From the preceding, it is safe to deduce that culture is an ambiguous aspect of nature with ambivalent characteristics which are both physical and abstract. While part of

culture cannot be pointed at in real physical terms such as beliefs, other aspects such as painting and carving in which there is the marriage of aesthetics and functionalism, are physical manifestations of culture (2015:162).

Culture and community life

Culture constitutes part and parcel of activities undertaken in African political, social and economic systems, ancient traditions, literature, languages and the arts. An individual, influenced or controlled by his/her acquired morals, depends not only on the culture that nurtured him/her, but also on influences from activities and institutions that are part of that culture. Community life according to Onabajo (2005) is almost the same as the culture of people, and it involves activities within the regulation and scope of culture and morals of the people. To him, the number and types of people in a community do influence that community and their social living, and pave the way for such traditions to have roles to play. Warren buttresses Onabajo's assertion and states:

Communities are likewise characterized by the things in which they are most interested, and their ways of living depend highly on the situations or qualities, or conditions on which they place value. The way society is organized does much to set the tone of the community and flavor the members' quality of daily living (Warren, 1965:12).

What is folk music?

Nketia (1974) explains folk music as an aggregate of musical expressions which linguistic, ethnic, tribal or clan groups have specialized in and perform since the advent of Europeans. This genre, which typically has unknown composers, is mostly devoid of foreign cultural influences, and are orally transmitted from one generation to the other. In Africa cultures including those in Ghana, traditional songs, dances, stories, proverbs, legends, myths, rituals, initiation rites, and artifacts constitute a data bank of folklore that has values and symbols that serve specific needs and purposes of the people. Thus, exposure to song lyrics, as expressed by Brand (2010), not only teaches vocabulary, grammar, rhythmic speech, phrases, and meanings, but also serves as a sort of ambassador of a culture which offers members of a society lessons in grasping the nature and style of a particular societal life. Nzewi (1997) similarly emphasizes the role of African folk music in establishing the cultural identity of society:

These musical types, (variously or collectively) have the capability of emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, communication, symbolic representation, physical response, enforcing conformity to social norms, validating social institutions and religious rituals, contributing to the continuity and stability of culture, protecting, conserving and integrating the society. While some feature incidentally in human activities, others are strung to ceremonies such as childbirth, incision/circumcision, installation, war, farming, festival and funeral celebrations.

To achieve the goal of a successful development and promotion of Ghanaian culture, there is the need for us as citizens, to reconsider the Ghanaian *Akan* societal maxim; *Sankofa*, a term which literally urges Africans to go back to their roots and pick up from where they have left or abandoned their cultural heritage especially those that are still relevant to satisfy our

present needs and purposes (Amlor, 2015:310). Promoting culture, therefore, in contemporary Ghana is a pressing issue that demands an urgent attention and action of all. From the preceding, it is obligatory for every Ghanaian to acquire a cultural education that would yield certain benefits. Similarly, the UN Agenda 21 (Chapter 36) stresses the need for education:

Education, both formal and informal, is widely used as a conservation intervention in order to develop positive attitudes, and it is often assumed that effective education will automatically lead to.....responsible behavior which creates ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behavior consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making. To be effective.....development should deal with the dynamics of both the physical/biological and socio-economic environment and human (which may include spiritual) development, should be integrated into all disciplines, and should employ formal and non-formal methods as effective means of communication.

Cultural education as a learning process, aims at increasing knowledge and awareness about people's life and its associated challenges (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978). From the preceding, it is incumbent on the citizenry of Ghana to gain knowledge about how their collective actions can be directed at salvaging the country's failing and falling native culture.

The paper now examines the relevance of Ghanaian folk music and the mass media and demonstrates how they can foster the development, practice and promotion of Ghanaian culture to benefit both present and future generations.

Folk music and promotion of Ghanaian culture

Folk music, couched in the language of people, is part and parcel of indigenous Ghanaian culture that can be re-tooled to mold the life of the people socially, politically, economically and religiously to firmly build a high culture and identity. The power, pleasure, and art of movements that accompany folk songs during dance performances, do express the historical, sociological, spiritual and emotional sentiments that depict individual and corporate life and identity of indigenous Ghanaian societies. Promoting Ghanaian culture, therefore, can materialize through the implementation of development strategies put in place to achieve this goal. Since development implies a willingness to improve or move towards enhancing the quality of life of people or a majority of people in a particular society/community, (Onabajo, 2005:93) states:

Development creates a more active system where relations that have been dormant are awakened and parts that have been largely eccentric become interrelated and able to bring enormous progress in further activity and productivity. This embraces the social and cultural progress of that society, including multitudes of different types of changes (in a society) from the relatively accurate notion of economic expansion to industrialization and increase in literacy.

Folk music as a cultural didactic tool

Apart from its entertaining value, folk music can be used to inform and educate traditional societies on topical issues that affect them in their communities. Informal education can be directed at checking selfish and negative attitudes that lead to environmental degradation such as

illegal mining (*Galamsey*), bush burning, deforestation through logging, water pollution and ways of resolving such problems must first begin with children in their young and formative years, for, they shall in future, be the custodians of our societal culture. Since they learn faster through songs laden with play activities, repercussions of apathy towards indigenous cultural practices as well as their solutions must constitute themes of simple folk songs that can be composed, memorized and sung at school and during their leisure times. The songs must also stress social etiquette of the communities and create in the people, particularly the youth, awareness and sensitivity to issues of unity and peaceful coexistence through strict observance of laws via other native communication channels such as stories, riddles, proverbs and taboos to create safe communities that are devoid of conflicts and health hazards.

Folk religious music and promotion of Ghanaian culture

A religion which constitutes part of the culture of Africans, is a universal phenomenon found in every human settlement. African societies are aware of super powers whose spirits are reached during worship through music performance, be it instrumental, vocal, dance or a combination of two or all three forms. Religious music is believed to psyche the people to commune and enhance peaceful co-existence with the spirits, nature and the environment.

Awuah-Nyamekye stresses the spirituality of Akans; a large Ghanaian ethnic group and states that Akans believe that land, water, forests, grooves, animals and plants are not just factors of production but have their place within the sanctity of nature. Traditional religious music must be used to highlight the positive roles that nature plays in the survival of humans and excite a reciprocal gesture from humans to preserve nature as well (2014:50). A step in this direction can preserve our flora and fauna as tourists' sites that can yield foreign exchange for the country.

Re-packaging and marketing indigenous Ghanaian music

At present, one can observe that apart from the celebration of festivals, funerals, and some state functions which incorporate indigenous musical performances like *agbadza*, *adowa*, *bambayaa* and *gome* into their programme of activities, very few Ghanaians today organize public or private events and invite indigenous musicians to entertain the attendants. This shows that these traditional music genres according to Asiedu (2003:38), "are not attractive to people, especially the youth. This is why very little or nothing at all is heard about them during music awards held in the country including the nationally recognized Ghana Music Awards".

If *Mapouka*, a collection of refined folk music genres performed in neighbouring La Cote d'Ivoire, and folk tunes re-packaged from the Fon ethnic society in the Republic of Benin by a Beninois Angélique Kidjo, an international and Grammy award-winning music recording artiste have all now turned into global hits, what prevents our local Ghanaian musicians, sound engineers and music producers from following the La Cote d'Ivoire and Benin examples? Traditional Ghanaian music performers from the countryside have little chances of coming to limelight because music producers and the media are interested in only those whose works have already made hits in the cities. Asiedu (2003:38) in this direction, remarks:

This may be part of the reasons why radio listeners and television viewers are constantly bombarded with the same tracks of music that often have western influences. There are lots of artistes out there in the regions, districts, towns and villages who have songs with good rhythms and lyrics but unfortunately; nobody seems to be interested in their works. Every music producer is interested in working with "already made" artistes in order to avoid sacrificing time and money to unearth fresh talents. This attitude needs to stop.

From the above, it is evident that if nothing concrete is done about this unfortunate development, indigenous music as a component of Ghanaian culture; will continue to stagnate and remain under the strong foreign influence. The outcome will be profane lyrics, sexy video clips and life styles that may be offensive to the people and their culture. It is high time music is re-packaged to attract the citizens, especially the youth who are the future custodians of Ghanaian culture. “Music has raked in lots of foreign exchange for the United States of America, Jamaica, and other Western countries who see its economic value and market it well” (Asiedu, 2003:38).

The role of stake holders

The government, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the media and music producers can put in collective efforts to support musicians financially and logistically to compose Ghanaian musical types and re-package them properly into audio-visual compact discs (CDs) and sell them in and outside Ghana to rake in foreign exchange to benefit the musicians, stakeholders as well as the government.

The Mass media

Communication remains the most fundamental element of society for its progress. Modern epoch of information technology also known as ‘satellite communication’ necessitates mass media as part and parcel of human existence, experience, and endeavor. Through communication, members of a society share their experiences and knowledge, understand each other and generate collective vision and wisdom. Communication through the mass media promotes social cohesion that firmly welds communities together, and....contracts the globe into a village (McLuhan, 1964). Voelker also sees the mass media as important forces in our society which provide information and entertainment and at the same time, have persuasive powers that are capable of effecting radical social changes. The role of the media in the development and promotion of culture, moral and community life can, therefore, not be overestimated (1975:22).

The electronic media, in particular, provide a global view that has allowed us to become involved in concerns far beyond the scope of earlier generations. Culture, morals and community opinions have been changed mostly by the fact that the mass media can provide seemingly uninterrupted news that influences indigenous culture, community life and people’s morals (Onabajo, 2005:93). The paper now examines the relevance of television and radio as two principal forms of communication media:

Television

According to Menon (1981) cited by Alahari (1997), “the notion of individuality is lost in the word ‘mass’ and various forms of media such as television, radio and newspapers, report events intended for a large number of listeners, viewers and readers. The mass media especially the digital media have huge potential for generating change and public awareness of the culture of a country through education as a way of bringing desirable social changes that can facilitate her development goals”.

A first step that the media can adopt to promote education and conservation of indigenous culture, is to reach out to the masses in both urban rural communities of Ghana and engage in what Singhal and Rogers (1989) describe as taking crucial roles by explaining cultural themes, providing technical information about relevant problems of culture and possibilities about appropriate management and innovations that can be carried out by the people.

What is Television?

Television (TV) is a communication medium which is principally used for transmitting and receiving motion pictures that can either be monochrome (black-and-white) or colored, with or without sound over a distance. According to Anthony (1991:191), the etymology of the word, television, is derived from mixed Latin and Greek roots meaning 'far sight'. That is, 'tele' in Greek, refers to far and 'vision' in Latin means view. Mari (2015) further adds that the term, television may also refer to a television set, television programming of the television transmission.

Role(s) of Television

If any developing country opts for television.... it must be because, among other things, TV has an important role to play in advancing the process of national development. It has, and is still making a lot of impact on the economic, political, social, cultural and educational advancement of a nation. It is the most effective modern means of mass communication now available to humankind (Akpan, 1988:13). As a communication device, TV uses programs as tools to preserve, promote and project indigenous Ghanaian culture in the form of drama, documentaries, animated television commercials, and alternative indigenous educational knowledge. As the most effective modern communication medium, (Onabajo, 2005) ascribes to certain important functions that stem from its audio-visual character and effectiveness in influencing development. Among its functions, TV;

- i. can present things as they really are; (realism achieved through sight and hearing).
- ii. can show events as they are happening (telecast of life events or performances).
- iii. Addresses people on a wide range of subjects that are both comprehensive and flexible.
- iv. addresses both the literate and the illiterate with equal success and effectiveness.
- v. speaks to the individual intimately and also lends itself to group reception.
- iv. has both intellectual and emotional appeal.

Cowdell argues that "television enhances cultural growth through the process of acculturation. This is best achieved through such characteristics explained as indigenizing what is foreign, idealizing what is indigenous and nationalizing what is sectional" (2013:176).

TV as a mass medium affects or influences many people and inculcates socio-political and cultural values into them. As a communication medium, it has done much and can do more by activating human intentions and cultural growth by promoting educational programs that should not only be confined to schools but also be extended to cover other socio-cultural values such as taboos, proverbs, and drama which give moral lessons to viewers.

Since programs on TV as a communication medium, are flawless, the need to guard against telecasting alien or bizarre culture and social activities that endanger the stance of traditional Ghanaian values is very critical. Instead, in-depth attention should be paid to the socio-cultural roles of this medium which activate, socialize, homogenize and adapt people to cultural values by shaping their opinions, attitudes and morals so as to build a useful and an all embracing cultural heritage that can instill good virtues into the people, especially the youth, and bind them as one people with a common destiny.

The Radio

The British first introduced radio to Ghana in the 1930s and used it as a propaganda tool to secure the loyalty and support of her colonies during the Second World War. During that time, radio became an important vehicle for providing information on the African soldiers fighting on behalf of the allies. Later, a broadcasting service originally known as the Gold Coast Broadcasting System, begun on 31 July 1935 from a wired relay station opened and located in a small bungalow on 9th Road near the Ridge Police Station in Accra by the then Colonial Governor, Sir [Arnold Hodson](#). It was code-named Radio "ZOY" and manned by eight technicians. The service of the Gold Coast Broadcasting System (as it was then called) begun in four Ghanaian languages: *Fanti*, *Twi*, *Ga*, *Ewe*, and later, *Hausa* was added. The name was later changed to Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) upon the country's independence in 1957 (McCauley and Peterson (2003).

The main reasons for introducing the relay service was to bring news, entertainment and music into the homes of all and sundry as a way of curtailing barriers of isolation and ignorance which hinder progress and, as well, enable the people of the Gold Coast to improve on their rich music culture. The legislation that set up GBC as an establishment was the National Liberation Council (NLC) Degree number 226(NLCD266) of 1968.

Government's monopoly of Airwaves

Though the Ghanaian constitution made provision for the ownership of private radio and television stations, it was not until 1993 that intellectuals began to talk openly about the need for the government to free the airwaves. In May 1994, residents of Accra woke up to the sound of a pirate Frequency Modulation (FM) station called 'Radio Eye' owned by one Dr. Charles Wereko Brobby an energy expert. The confiscation of his broadcasting equipment sparked bloody riots in Accra and ending the first attempt at breaking state monopoly over broadcasting in the country. It was not until July 1995 that Joy (FM) station was licensed to go into private broadcasting in Accra. Since then, the operation of private FM stations increased in number in Accra with several others spread across the ten regions of the country.

The role(s) of Radio

According to Ansah, (1985), one achievement derived from the role played by radio in Ghana has been the forging of a common spirit of national cohesion and identity. He further argues that opening up of the airwaves initially stimulated development and created more jobs like it did in Asia and Central America. Cantrill and Allport (1935) referred to this integrative role of radio when they wrote:

When a million people hear the same subject matter, the same arguments and appeals, the same music and humour, when their attention is held in the same way and at the same time to the same stimuli, it is psychologically inevitable that they should acquire in some degree common interests, common tastes and common attitudes.

Radio and culture promotion

Radio as a mass medium, in the past, supported and aroused the appetite and love for traditional Ghanaian cultural practices such as music performances, festival celebrations and religious activities of the people. It is sad to note that at present all these practices are now on a fast decline. There is, therefore, the need to re-introduce radio programs and aim at educating

and sensitizing the citizens, especially the youth on the virtues of our cultural practices which in the developed world, constitute a significant element of the economies of many countries. Radio discussions should be intensified and focused on the dangers of apathy towards our cultural practices. To regain our past cultural glory, there is the need to go back to re-assess and implement guidelines that informed the type of radio broadcasts on GBC at the time of its establishment. These guidelines/laws must also bind the numerous FM stations that now abound. For example, in the past, guidelines on putting up music programs on air emphasized on:

- a. African music performance, with an in-depth concentration on Ghanaian music.
- b. Ghanaian or African music to constitute a minimum of fifty (50) percent of all music broadcasts on the radio every week. Care must also be taken to have a fair representation of music of all ethnic groups in the country.
- c. Particular attention must be paid to the taste, lyrics, decency, morality and social values of the songs.

Radio broadcasts/discussions must not only inform the Ghanaian public about the adverse effects of foreign 'morals' that sneaked into Ghanaian or African societies under various cloaks and destroyed the people's cultural systems but also suggest ways of avoiding such negative external values. The discussions must involve traditional and opinion leaders as well as government personalities to share their knowledge and cultural experiences that can help promote love and appreciation for Ghanaian culture as a tool that facilitates shared opinions, unity, and encourages the development and welfare of individuals and the society as a whole.

Radio and school programs

The lack of suitably designed Ghanaian-centred school curriculum, research and teaching methods and lack of qualified teachers to promote the teaching and learning of indigenous knowledge is a great setback to acquiring cultural knowledge that satisfies Ghanaian needs and purposes. Deliberate efforts must, therefore, be made to integrate the study of indigenous knowledge into the curricula of basic, secondary and tertiary institutions. Topics treated must include poetry with themes on the importance and care for Ghanaian culture (Amlor, 2015:305).

In the past, some radio programs offered distance learning to school pupils. This was followed in 1992, by a "Literacy Line," a functional literacy program produced by the Non-formal Education Division (NFED) of the Ghana Education Service to provide adult education especially to elderly Ghanaians who were illiterate (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Research Paper, 1985). At present, these educational programs via radio have gone defunct. To increase the literacy rate of Ghanaians, there is the need to re-examine, revive and rigidly implement the abandoned policies that first guided GBC radio broadcasts; among which were the following:

- a. All radio stations must endeavor to broadcast educational programs of high quality and based on a specific curriculum designed for the methodical teaching of a subject, and personnel who presented the school programs must be experts in the subject(s) handled.
- b. sponsors of schools' broadcast programs must be allowed to feature their advertisements only at the beginning and end of the programs.

Radio can also be used for cultural innovation or diffusion. Since culture is not static, radio can help remove the negative aspects of our culture and help the citizens to absorb that which will improve their welfare and culture awareness. The radio can also be used to educate children, the youth and adults, on the achievements of our cultural heritage in terms of art, music, drama and poetry (Onabajo, 2005). Drama programs can also be used as important means of

education, creating the national consciousness, entertainment, as well as serving as vehicles for promoting the social, economic and cultural objectives of the country.

Implications

There are emerging trends in Ghana and many African societies which are not completely the making of the African/Ghanaian but rather from external socio-cultural pressures. While this paper does not aim at totally condemning foreign cultural influences, it suggests that there should be the adoption of only aspects that can enhance and project African cultural identity or values. In this direction, the personnel in the print/electronic media, composers/arrangers, researchers and performers should be mindful of these values and consequently protect them. If the aim of the mass media for example, is to inform, educate and entertain, the bulk of items that constitute the programs should reflect the environment in which the listeners and viewers live. This would enable them (citizens) know the essence, understand and take pride in appreciating and practicing their cultural heritage (Amlor, 2011:28).

Amlor (2011) further argues that policy makers in the educational sector should be conscious of the fact that majority of the products from the basic schools, colleges/universities would serve as future professionals in African societies; hence, the inclusion of African folklore as a basis of the curriculum is quite crucial. Utilizing these positions as champions of their professions and culture, would ensure a solid foundation for the future generation to build on.

In addition to the above, the government in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, NGOs and other stake holders can arouse the interest of the people by providing financial and technological support in the form of resource materials such as highly improved TV and radio transmission gadgets and public information vans to explain important topical issues relating to Ghanaian culture to both urban and rural dwellers. This will instill into them, a new cultural behavior, values, attitudes, commitment and skills that can protect, improve and promote a good quality indigenous culture that can be of benefit in and outside Ghana.

Conclusion

African societies, from primordial times, regard their culture as a tool that not only shapes and molds their total life but also gives them the identity. A society devoid of culture lacks identity and faces a possible doom or extinction shortly. The issue of culture, therefore, is pervasive and critical to human life and existence. The practice of indigenous Ghanaian culture, which constitutes an entire life system evolved by the people to meet their challenges and, as well, find peace and progress in their socio-economic, aesthetic and religious beliefs/activities, is rather now on a fast decline. To arrest this unfortunate situation, the paper discussed the need for the revival of Ghanaian culture and demonstrated how folk music and the mass media could foster its development and promotion through redirection, information, education, political and social mobilization and recreational activities to benefit the country's present and future generations. As communication channels, the interwoven roles of folk music and the media should be aimed at supporting, motivating and mobilizing the entire citizenry to embrace, develop and promote an integrative indigenous Ghanaian cultural system embedded with morals/values that can facilitate the attempt at achieving a state of nationhood, identity and national economic prosperity.

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