

The Impact of Globalization on *The Arts* in Contemporary Ghana*

M. F. Annku and J. Adu-Agyem

Annku, M. F. and Adu-Agyem, J. (2012), "The Impact of Globalization on *The Arts* in Contemporary Ghana", *Ghana Mining Journal*, pp. 86 - 91.

Abstract

Cultural diversity has now become a fact of life in today's *global village* and many people have been experiencing the negative effects of the globalization process. The objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of globalization on certain aspects of the arts in the Ghanaian cultural milieu in recent times. The study is guided by preliminary qualitative studies based on formal and informal interviews, direct observations, questionnaire administration and review of pertinent documents. The data collected was analyzed against the backdrop of Ghanaian cultural diversity as far back as the pre-colonial era. The study revealed a number of positive and negative impacts of globalization on the visual arts, architecture, the performing arts, music, film and language. The study also brought up polysemous issues that border on the positive and negative influences of globalization on *the arts*. Globalization has been found to be analogous to *carrying porcupine in a haversack*, a task which is a combination of joy and pain or often associated with good and evil – in fact, a necessary evil in the Ghanaian context. This paper concludes that it is a *sine qua non* for Ghana to be part of the *global village* in today's cutting-edge information and technological awakening, but it is equally imperative to be circumspect and strike a symbiotic balance that will help retain true Ghanaian cultural values void of moral crises, violence and drug abuse.

1 Introduction

Ghana, a former British colony known as the *Gold Coast* until 1957 when she attained political independence from British colonial rule, has a population of approximately 22,409,572 (2006 estimate). Although there are 10 administrative regions, the country is multicultural, composed of numerous smaller subcultures which are made up of more than 60 different ethnic groups (Owusu-Ansah, 2006). The country is made of two major linguistic groups of people known as the *Kwa* and the *Gur* who have maintained a unique sense of ethnic identity for many years. The *Kwa* linguistic group includes the Ashantis, Bono, Fanti, Akwapem, Akyem, Kwawu, Nzima, Ga and Ewe among others. The *Gur* ethnic groups are the Dagombas and the Mamprusis. Because of the cultural diversity, a typical Ghanaian understands at least one of five major languages — Akan, Nzima, Dagbane, Ga, or Ewe — as well as English, which is the official language of the country (Owusu-Ansah, 2006).

Ghana has very rich cultural heritage and can boast of a very rich tradition of indigenous and contemporary artifacts of exceptionally intriguing philosophical values and qualities. The significance of the arts in the cultural life of the average Ghanaian is exceptionally high and very much admired by other foreign nationals and cultures. The arts have consequently attracted many multinational firms, for ex-

ample, in the advertising and textile industries in the country.

There is no gainsaying that rapid transformation in technology today has established closer correlation between culture, globalization and development. Many developing countries like Ghana have witnessed sharp and massive cultural transformation from their time of colonization. Ghana has experienced tremendous growth in education, health, commerce, industry and other sectors of the economy. The interplay of globalization has come very strong in recent times to the extent that massive cultural imports such as brand-name clothing, technological artifact products, film and music have become a commonplace. Indeed, the goods and services from cultural diversity and globalization have become so tantalizing in recent years that, a cross-section of Ghanaians are becoming worried over external cultural hegemony. While Sotshangane (2002) attests that the process of globalization disrupts fragile societies and traditional identities, Levine (2011) also observed that cultural diversity and globalization enhance existing cultures but cautions that we must not lose sight of the *pecking order* since the *adopter* culture must survive at all costs.

This paper takes a critical look at six specific areas of Ghanaian culture, in contemporary times, to find out the extent to which the Ghanaian traditional identity has been disrupted through the

* *Manuscript received March 17, 2011*
Revised version accepted December 2, 2011

arts. These specific artistic areas are *the visual arts, architecture, performing arts, music, film and language* which will also be referred to as *the arts* in this study. The six areas have been chosen because they are powerful propagators and fountain of other Ghanaian cultural values and religious believes. Preliminary qualitative studies based on formal and informal interviews, direct observations, questionnaire administration and review of pertinent documents, have been used in this study to find how far globalization manipulates *the arts* in Ghana and the extent to which it has impact the life of Ghanaians.

2 Globalization

Globalization is the state in which all countries and peoples of the world are perceived as one cultural community or *village* where different means of existence come into play for reciprocal growth. Globalization involves individuals, multinational corporations, transnational corporations and governments (Tabb, 2009). It is extensively the result of unprecedented improvements in transportation, communication and information technologies in recent years. Its significance to culture is enormous; for example, the Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity, a UNESCO initia-

tive to strengthen local cultural industries that would promote the diversity of cultural expressions, was launched in 2002 (Anon, 2010). This was to be realized by creating partnership between private, public and civil societies.

3 Impact of Globalization on *The Arts*

3.1 Positive Impacts

The gains from globalization, particularly in the transformation of *the arts* in Ghana, from pre-colonial era to the present day have been mammoth and unprecedented. Though the effects of globalization came strongest with the World Wide Web (www) information and communication technology in the 21st century, many colonial countries, including Ghana, belonged to a sort of *global village* since the 15th century. The Gold Coast was a *member* of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade which involved Europe, Africa and America. As a British colony, Ghana had to make do with a blend of two or more cultures. Ghana became culturally, materially and psychologically engaged with Europe and America. The implications for people interacting with other people beyond traditional cultures - a driving force of development for the arts in Ghana – have been positive as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Impact of Globalization

Art Form	Pre-Colonial Standpoint (10th-15th Century)	Colonial Era Standpoint (16th-20th Century)	Post-colonial/Contemporary (21st Century)
<i>The Arts</i>	Education: informal Materials: stone, wall, hide vegetable dye, clay, metal, reed, bark cloth, raffia palm fiber, woven cotton, palm leaves, thatch. Methods: painting, weaving, carving, building, oral tradition, tricksters' tales. Tools: hand, palm fiber brush, axe, chisel.	Education: formal, primary, Materials: paper, stone, wall, vegetable dye, clay, metal, reed, hide, raffia palm fiber, woven cotton, palm leaves, thatch, Atakpame, sun-dried brick wall, cement block wall (zinc roofed). Methods: painting, weaving, carving, building, English, French, indigenous languages, books. Tools: Sable/Air brush, mechanical devices hand, palm fiber brush, axe, chisel analog film, B/W TV.	Education: primary, secondary, tertiary Materials: natural and synthetic, various. Methods: computer generated designs, urban mosaic buildings with aluminum roof, digital recordings, literature, etymology, metrical/folk tales, poetry, folk songs, libraries, electronic books, and computer. Tools: computer generated and mechanical devices, CD, colour TV, LCD.

Perhaps, the first impact of globalization on culture is the unification that it brought among diverse cultures in Ghana. Globalization has brought in arguments for both homogeneity and heterogeneity. The arts now have a more diverse set of cultural values, institutions and opportunities. The set of aesthetic options available are increasingly the same as those options available to other countries. This is irrespective of the cultural level from which the arts are perceived and symbolic of *unity in diversity* which is deeply rooted in the traditional *Adinkra* symbol, *Funtufunefu*, literally meaning siamese crocodiles, in Fig. 1. According to Agbo (2006), it signifies the unification of people of different cultural backgrounds who are optimistic of common objectives and goals despite divergent views. It is the cementing of brotherliness and sisterliness among the people of a particular society or fraternity. According to Bodley (2009), anthropologists often use the term culture to refer to a society or group in which many or all people live or think in the same way. He cited four distinguishing characteristics which culture has as: symbolic; shared; learned; and adaptive.



Fig. 1 Funtufunefu Symbol of Unity in Diversity

Material diversity is the second significant impact of globalization on *the arts* through education and research (Table 1). A symbiosis of *the arts* in Ghana and Europe, from pre-colonial era, became evident through British educational policies, economical, technological and political domination. The ten regions of Ghana are a repository of varied traditional and contemporary art forms. The artistry, interest, philosophical and commercial values of *the arts* largely precipitated the establishment of some tertiary institutions for the study of *the arts* and research in working materials. Some of these institutions include the College of Art and Industry (now College of Art and Social Sciences) and the School of Architecture at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon, and the University

of Education at Winneba. The range of disciplines that are no longer limited to traditional carving, metalworking, weaving, pottery, storytelling or concerts now include broader areas like sculpture, textiles, ceramics, linguistics, communication design, musicology, choreography and cinematography. Today, there are many more accredited institutions in the country that are directly or indirectly involved in the teaching and learning of *the arts*. The non-accredited art institutions and concerns (comprising thousands of wayside artists and performing artists) may be found in every town and village in the country.

Architecture, for example, has been *overhauled* with a wide range of materials and media. Drawings, paintings and decorations could be executed on any type of substrate by the use of appropriate programmes on personal computers. A wide variety of synthetic fiber in the textile industry has also added colour to the texture of costume in the performing arts and our everyday dress codes. Dishes are served from China plates in lieu of *apotoyiwa*.

Methods of design and production have been enhanced hundred fold (Table 1). Computer generated design templates have made it possible for people who are even outside the profession to dare in the production of some aspects of the arts. Computer software applications like Corel Draw, Adobe Photoshop and AutoCAD architecture are gradually closing up the art and architectural landscape between Western culture and *the arts* in Ghana. Screen and digital textile printing have been made easy. Computer generated images on transfer paper can be easily transferred onto textile materials by the use of domestic pressing irons.

Duplicating and publishing of art and literary works have increased tremendously in recent times to support the academia, industry and business. These have been made possible because of global trade liberalization policies that brought in digital cameras, mechanical and digital printers, computers, papers, inks, toners and many other related materials. Scenes from the performing arts – cinema or musical video – can be digitally recorded on Compact Disc (CD) or other storage devices for play back on Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) and Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) units or by projecting on screen. Artifacts and literary works can be digitally documented in 2D or 3D in hard copies or soft copies in computer databanks or museums for posterity.

The economic contributions of *the arts* in Ghana to national development have been substantial.

To a very large extent, these gains often come through giant global multinational corporations like Coca-Cola or Vodafone. Responses from selected respondents in a number of advertising firms in Accra and Kumasi, government officials and business men, in 2010, show that the arts are a potential force in the economic growth of the country. Royalties paid by advertising companies to Metropolitan and District Assemblies for renting billboard spaces, for example, have generated millions of Ghana cedis for developmental projects. Two export opportunities were also created for *the arts* through globalization: first, as non-traditional exports through the Export Sub-Sector of the Ghana Export Promotion Council; and second, as a drive under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), structured to improve economic relations between the United States and Africa.

At governmental levels, globalization has brought in many non-governmental bodies or institutions to supplement governments efforts. They help in the creation of jobs to salvage unemployment situations in the country. The Danish Centre for Culture Development (DCCD) has been very instrumental in this direction. In 2009, the Ghana Cultural Fund (GCF) under DCCD approved GH¢ 75,519.80 for six projects. Three of these projects are: the establishment of Pottery and Art Centre for the Sirigu Women's Organization; the upgrading of the traditional architecture of Sirigu, a village in the Upper East Region; and the acquisition of traditional drums and xylophones for the Music Department - University of Ghana (Anon, 2009).

The advantages of English as the country's official language cannot be downplayed. The adoption and use of English as the official language has closed up the communication gap, pushed education to very high pedestal and contributed immensely to trade and business in the country. English has also facilitated easy movement and transactions with other members in the *global village*. Literature, etymology, poetry, folk songs, metrical and folk tales have all been enhanced by borrowed words and jargons from other cultures.

3.2 Negative Impacts

The emergence of globalization in the 1990's as a result of unprecedented advancement in communication, transportation and information technologies have immensely enhanced *the arts* as far as Ghana is concerned. Nevertheless, critical observation and analysis have revealed some downbeats in the process. Some of the unfavourable areas include educational methodologies, creativity in the arts, cultural identity and languages. The role of education in Ghana and the world

over has become linked to global competitive positions. Paucity of funds coupled with global issues has led the various institutions towards full fee paying programmes or direct entrepreneurial activity to sustain themselves and manage prevailing global forces or trends. Chinnammai (2010) posits that the rise of a globalized knowledge-based economy has brought universities in many countries under closer scrutiny for the economic contributions they make. Changes in course content and cutting-edge laboratory equipment for training have redefined job opportunities in the global job market. The implication is that graduates from institutions, having outmoded laboratory equipment, mainly from developing countries like Ghana will have to undergo on the job training programmes or courses after employment.

Creativity is the ability to ignite ones imaginative faculties to visualize or evoke something new or different. To create is to bring into existence – the ultimate objective of *the arts*. The power of the computer and its application to all aspects of life has been playing down upon the creative faculties of many people in the arts. Students no longer use their imaginative powers. They often draw on wizard tools, clip arts and templates to produce art works. A power point presentation on a typical Ghanaian social subject is often *enhanced* with light-skinned clip arts instead of ebony-skinned figure drawings because the software has no collection of the appropriate clip art.

Trade and technological revolutions have come to transform not only the Ghanaian milieu but the very mindsets of its people in the consumption of the arts. The youth of today are gradually adapting to Western culture and identity. Indecent dressing is high on university campuses. The rush for cheap foreign fabrics branded as “design” wears at the expense of quality local alternatives is worrying. Mass production and exportation of artifacts from China and other industrialized countries to Ghana have made many artists redundant while others lost interest in *the arts* as a career.

English, the official and global language, has virtually pushed the indigenous dialects to the background in many urban homes to the extent that the children of many urban dwellers cannot speak their mother tongues fluently. Excessive use of computers and mobile phones for playing games or listening to MP3 music among the youth make many of the children have little or no time for reading novels that would enhance their communication skills in English. The overuse of these global gadgets is believed to be a contributing factor to falling standards of English in recent times in Ghana (Mireku-Gyimah, 2008). This situation has been a major concern for many re-

searchers. Mireku-Gyimah (2008) concurs with Gyasi (1990) that English in Ghana is very ill with traces of the cancer in teachers, journalists, other professionals and students at the primary, secondary as well as tertiary levels in Ghana. Globalization has also given rise to the use of indecent language among students and the general public. Some of these “unwholesome” phrases are *shit men, what’s up?* or *hey guy, pick up the fucking phone*.

4 Supportive Evidence

The study brought up polysemous issues that border on the positive and negative influences of globalization on *the arts* in Ghana. The elderly concord *the arts* have benefited, to a substantial extent, from cultural diversity and globalization but were very much concerned about the future of the Ghanaian child. Free trade, unprecedented technological revolution in the 21st century and the information superhighway have made it easy for powerful economies like China to deride material arts from Ghana. The importation of posters, furniture, building materials and other artifacts (that even include catapults and bamboo toothpick) from China is worrying. Globalization has virtually driven the Ghanaian artist out of business.

The general *endorsement* of globalization as a necessary process or engine of growth for *the arts* in Ghana, as revealed in the study, has two traditional symbolic connotations. Firstly, globalization may be perceived as a porcupine in the Ewe adage, *Hlomade Kotoku; kpakpla doe makplamakpla doe*. The adage literally means, *carrying a porcupine in the haversack can be a delightful or painful task*. Porcupine is a rodent with a coat of sharp spines, or quills, that defend or camouflage it from predators. Porcupine is also eaten as a delicacy. Carrying it home will surely enrich the huntsman’s *meal* (the benefits *the arts* derive from globalization), but one must be prepared for pricks from its *spines* (the negative impacts of globalization on *the arts*)! It is important to be circumspect in the handling of the globalization process in such a way that we do not lose our identity as a unique African nation. Efforts must be made by government to encourage local entrepreneurs and artists to work as a team to reverse the trade balance that would remove redundancy and improve employment.

Secondly, the *Adinkra* symbol *Kronti ne Akwamu* (Fig. 2) which amply signifies collaboration and wisdom, summarizes the globalization process. *Kronti ne Akwamu* means *one head cannot go*

into consultation. According to Agbo (2006), the symbol reminds people of the need for collaboration and cooperation. Culture is dynamic. The characteristics of culture – symbolic, shared, learned and adaptive – have contributed to the recoloring of the traditional arts in Ghana. The ability to: use symbols and language to communicate ideas or feelings; share common behaviors and ways of thinking; learn from others beyond biological behavioral traits; and adjust quickly to changes in the world, have all combined to reposition *the arts*, over the years in Ghana.

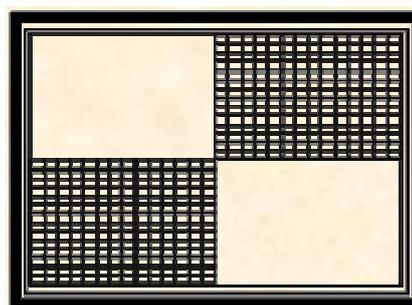


Fig. 2 Kronti ne Akwamu Symbol of Collaboration

Globalization has not only become *the order of the day* but the order of the GLOBE especially for those who are in the third world bracket as far as *the arts* are concerned. Globalization and cultural diversity in Ghana have redefined the state of *the arts*. Tradition and knowledge constitute the nexus of development and sustenance. Successive governments and stake holders take cognizance of this and have been supportive in order to reap the social and full economic benefits of globalization and cultural diversity.

5 Conclusions

The arts in Ghana have survived many decades of transformation through the colonial era to emerge as one of the potential forces in the economic growth of the country. The gains from globalization and cultural diversification have been tremendous in terms of education and unprecedented technological innovations. Though traditional arts have been greatly spiced, over the years, with Western concepts and technology, *the arts* in Ghana still have more room for improvement in order to be sufficiently competitive in the global market. This is evident in individual ideologies and consumption of foreign arts by the average Ghanaian with respect to the volume of

arts imports from China and other advanced countries. There are no qualms that globalization has digitally caused a great stir in *the arts* of the whole world. And for a developing country like Ghana to measure up or make a remarkable mark, it is a *sine qua non* to re-strategize the production lines from two distinctly unique angles – symbiosis of African and Western arts – to be well positioned in the global village for gainful business in *the arts*. In other words, while we enjoy the benefits of globalization, we need to be innovative enough to preserve original arts in Ghana for posterity.

The arts continue to serve their traditional functions as sources of inspiration, provision of more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual values as well as shelter, clothing, entertainment, beautification and as a booster to the tourist industry. Indeed, the acceptance and recognition of the globalization process and cultural diversity is an indispensable asset for the achievement and sustainable development in *the arts* today, particularly through the use of the media, computers, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the internet and global trading.

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Authors



McBoafo Annku is a Research Fellow at the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Graphic Design, Postgraduate Diploma, Masters and Doctor of Philosophy Degrees in Art Education from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. Dr. Annku is currently the head of the Audio Visual Unit at the University of Mines and Technology. His areas of specialisation are in Educational Technology, Aesthetic Principles Practicum, and Conceptual Presentations on environmental issues. Some of his works include conceptual 3-D drawings of re-vegetated lands for Abosso Goldfields Limited and Sankofa Gold Mine in 1998 and 2000 respectively. He is a member of the Ghana Society of Education through Art (GhaSEA).



Joe Adu-Agyem is a Senior Lecturer and former Head of the Department of General Art Studies, College of Art and Social Sciences of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. He holds the degrees in PhD, MA and PgD in Art Education; and BA (Art) in sculpture from KNUST. Dr Adu-Agyem's areas of specialisation and interests are mostly centred on Documentation, Aesthetics and Criticism, Educational Technology and Sculpture. He lectures in several courses at the postgraduate level. He is a member of the Ghana Society of Education through Art (GhaSEA).