

Culture and Economic Development in Ghana: The Conventional Wisdom Revisited

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1. INTRODUCTION

Values and beliefs, social norms and traditions, languages, ethnicity, and religions are tightly intertwined with the process of economic development — the conventional wisdom articulates. They create the social and cultural framework within which all development is perceived, communicated, achieved and valued. More specifically, the sociocultural peculiarities are connected with national pride and integrity, the organization of economic activities and administration, tastes and lifestyles, and class relations, to touch upon a few facts. They form a collective pool of experiences and world views out of which the subjective ‘micro worlds’ are construed. Spatially, they can be identical to a nation state, comprise a small locality or community, stretch to several neighbouring countries or even cover a vast geographical area, or be dispersed in a multiple spots (Wildavsky 1994: 141–142). Together, they can be named as *culture*.¹

Empirical studies have, however, produced mixed results in terms of culture–economic development correlations. One of the background-looming explanations to this scientific discrepancy may be a poor definition of the concepts of culture and economic development making different studies incomparable with one another. Another as important factor may be a misinterpretation of culture, politics and the economy. In particular, cultural variables may easily be confused with political ones making the two sets a blurred cocktail.

This article aims at, first, clarifying the ill-understood notions of culture and economic development. In so doing, it endeavours to offer a firm conceptual platform for future empirical research on the correlations and causalities between culture and economic development. Second, this article’s target is to qualitatively reach insights into the intertwinedness of culture and economic development in a developing country, Ghana. More specifically, this study shows, by breaking

¹ This treatment of culture is partly idealist and holistic and partly materialistic and sectoral. The idealist approach to culture touches on spiritual elements like values, ideas and beliefs whereas the materialistic approach revolves around tangible symbols, tools and artifacts of culture like natural resources and physical geography. The holistic view of culture stresses, in turn, the totality of the collective past and way of life whereas the sectoral view is concerned with the arts, religion, customs and valuations. (Akin Aina 1989: 124–125)

culture and economic development into pieces, how surprisingly weakly they are directly interconnected, if at all.

Methodologically, this research must deviate substantially from the mainstream culture–economic development literature since values and traditions constitute a central body of culture. As much as they have been overlooked by the previous empirical research, they are highly nonquantifiable rendering a quantitative approach redundant in this case. Furthermore, even a description of Ghana's economic development is unnecessary here since the analysis is done at the conceptual level — once the description of Ghana's cultures has been established.

2. CULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Although the role of culture in economic development is taken almost for axiomatic in the contemporary academic thinking, not much research has been devoted to this topic. The most popular subarea, a derivative of the topic of culture, has been the impact of cultural diversity on economic development.

Most commonly, cultural diversity has been found hampering the potential for economic development. It is thought that different cultural groups have varied demands for economic benefits and political power, and this creates socio-political tensions and institutes an obstacle for development. The role of political parties is schizophrenic: on the one hand, the parties are the mouthpieces of various cultural groups, thus, possibly increasing societal instability (see e.g. Hannan & Carroll 1981). On the other hand, the parties act as safety valves on the most hardline views by offering a forum for speech and expression, thus, decreasing societal instability (see e.g. Horowitz 1971).

Lian & Oneal (1997) have reported on a few of the most influential research papers in this area. With differing sample sizes, explanatory variables, model specifications and time frames, they all (Adelman & Morris 1967; Haug 1967; Reynolds 1985) yield the same overall results: cultural diversity retards economic development. A recent study on the determinants of conflict-proneness in developing countries does not deviate from the line to a significant extent (Auvinen 1996). Lian & Oneal's (1997) own study is a clear counterexample: with a 98-country sample over a quarter of a century and with a good number of different model specifications, they found no correlation between cultural diversity and economic development whatsoever. Neither was the negative nor positive role of the intervening variable, political pluralism, evidenced.

3. CULTURE, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

This analysis of culture draws on Aaron Wildavsky's (1994: 158–162) classification of a way of life into social relations, cultural biases and behavioural strategies. The social relations, cultural biases and behavioural strategies form concertedly a culture that can, in turn, vary according to ethnicity, language, and religion even if the spatial representation of the culture remained unchanged. This is to maintain that the linkages between ethnicity, languages, and religions are by no means systematic and deterministic. Wildavsky (1994: 158) links the social relations, cultural biases and behavioural strategies together as follows:

Adherence to a certain pattern of social relationships generates a particular way of looking at the world; adherence to a certain world view legitimizes a corresponding kind of economic activity.

Social relations that manifest relationships between individuals, groups of people — e.g. that between the political elite and the populace — and between an individual and a group of people can be hierarchical, individualist[ic], egalitarian and fatalist[ic] (Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky 1990: 8). They should not, nonetheless, be treated as deterministic with a one-to-one correspondence to a culture but rather flexible and pluralist in that all the cultures contain several forms of social relations. Cultural biases can be defined as widely shared values and beliefs that could jointly be termed as world views (Wildavsky 1994: 158). Behavioural strategies are the practical-level forms of social organization and economic activities that confess the social relations and cultural biases.

If linked to politico-economic discussion on development, the hierarchical social relations are reflected by steep governor–governed positions that give the governors extraordinarily strong authority and autonomy in society. Coherence among the members of a group is felt strong, and the social norms keep the *status quo* of the governor–governed relationship unchanged. Hence, both political and economic competition are discouraged, and the social structure is highly differentiated. The individualistic social relations cherish the opposite position: weak group coherence and contestable relationship between the governors and governed. The individual is the eigenvalue for individualists, and the social norms do not bind the group relationships too tightly. Thus, both political and economic competition are encouraged. Individual competition keeps the social structures as less caste-like and less excluding for outsiders, which makes society socially dynamic.

The egalitarian social relations require keen group loyalty but are ready to put the governor–governed relationships to contest.² Coherence within a group is socially admired, but the loose social norms and less differentiated social structures

² Note that the egalitarian social relations are manifested in idealistic, Left-inspired advocations of 'direct democracy' rather than in any past command society. Egalitarians encourage social dynamism in the possibility of a revolution, but not economic and political competition. The past socialist countries tended to discourage both social eruptions and competition.

may provoke revolutionary changes in group relationships. Accordingly, the egalitarians do not favour political and economic competition but can together turn society upside down. The fatalistic social relations are trapped by constraining social norms that makes the incontestable oligarchy of the strong dominate the relationships between groups of people. The social structures are substantially differentiated and excluding for outsiders. Economic activity is incarnated in a crudest *laissez-faire* and social fragmentation. The fatalists do not promote political competition — on the other hand, they do not support political cooperation either — but live unhappily in the world of social *status quo* and economic rivalry.

4. DEFINING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Development can be assumed to take place in three — naturally highly overlapping and intertwined — forms. The forms of development are economic, social, and human development (Little 1995: 124–128). Briefly, economic development denotes increased material well-being, the provision of basic needs³, and equal income distribution. Social development is manifested by social integration and security whilst human development means self-actualization and enjoyment of prestige.⁴ This dichotomy is based essentially on psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs in which he presumed the route to high-stage human development to be initiated from low-stage economic development and to proceed through intermediate social development.

According to Maslow's thoughts, economic or resource development denoted fundamentally the satisfaction of basic human needs such as food, shelter, sleep, and sex. When these basic needs were fulfilled, a human being was able to proceed into social development which basically meant social security, stability, order, social integration and group belongingness. This social function of human behaviour could be met only if a group of people agreed to peacefully live in a joint

³ Basic needs are presumed here to include water, nutrition, shelter and sanitation. These heavily socioeconomically affected variables represent the basic needs category of economic development linkable to Maslow's resource needs. The variables are also among the four policy targets of the PAMSCAD (Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment) project's basic needs category (Roe, Schneider & Pyatt 1992: 117).

In addition to the four basic needs mentioned, Hicks & Streeten (1979: 578) enlist education and health care and the ILO report (1978: 7) adds employment and political participation as basic needs. Education, health care, and employment, let alone participation, are not considered here *economic* basic needs but rather indications of *social* and *human* development (cf. Allardt 1993: 89; Hicks & Streeten 1979: 578; ILO 1978: 7; Livingstone 1986: 10–11; Marsden 1990: 31; Rahman 1990: 48–49; Roe, Schneider & Pyatt 1992: 117; Streeten 1986: 20–21).

⁴ The trichotomy resembles much Erik Allardt's (1993: 89–91) elaboration. In his treatment, Having means economic development, Loving means social development, and Being denotes human development. The sole exceptions are Allardt's inclusion of education in Having, and the omission of income distribution from Having.

community. In such a community where human basic needs are adequately satisfied, the individual human being can advance into the highest stage of human development. Human development is crystallized in achievement, prestige, and self-fulfilment, i.e. a person does such things and lives in such a way that reflect his subjective perception of the reality. To make it brief, the person feels happy in doing things he regards as right, useful, and justified.

Although Maslow's idea of the human need hierarchy is openly contested, its value for development research is to note that economic development constitutes the basis for social and human development. Hence, human development is by no means a separable sector of development whose progress could be promoted in isolation of economic and social development but that requires adequate economic welfare and social cohesion as already achieved or as comparably occurring.

5. VALUES AND TRADITIONS IN GHANA

Ghana has the extended family structure — known as *abusua* in Ghana — in which a nucleus of a father, mother and children is supplemented horizontally with brothers, sisters and spouses, and vertically with several generations of their lineages. Ebenezer Mireku (1991: 62) puts forward an exemplary description of the extended family according to the Akan custom⁵:

[... One's] father's brothers are one's 'fathers' and one's mother's sisters are one's 'mothers', her brother [is] one's uncle, [and] their children are one's 'brothers and sisters' [...]. (I have added single quotation marks for those words that violate their biological meanings.)

Similarly, the NCS (1995) describes that

[...] the extended family is the force [*abusua ye dom*]. [...T]he extended family is the foundation of society, [...] members of the family are collectively responsible for the material and spiritual well-being, the physical protection and the social security of all its members.

The *abusua* and the communal village systems that are commonly found on the continent contain characteristics of keen group coherence and communitarianism of the egalitarian social relations (see also Dei 1992: 116–117; Panford 1997: 90). Hierarchy is also represented in the form of the respected and supported position of the elders. The communitarian premises *within* the extended family or the village are equally shared with the politico-philosophical tradition of Marxism, which has lured many African leaders and Western development critics and Utopians to translate systems as identical to the preconditions of social development (Gordon 1996: 1536; Mireku 1991: 56–57). It has been frequently claimed that the Africans

⁵ The Akan ethnic group (or composition of groups) embraces roughly 40–45% of the Ghanaian population.

should promote intensive social integration and, hence, strive for the economic regime of socialism (see e.g. Metz 1982: 380, 383–384 on Julius Nyerere's *ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania and Kwame Nkrumah's in Ghana). Rightist politics is taken for undermining the social foothold of 'a typical African society' by isolating the people psychologically and physically for which reason capitalism and democracy would be incompatible with the Ghanaian reality.

Communitarianism is though not felt very strong *between* larger communal units like the extended families, lineages and villages in Ghana. The extensive studies on the Ghanaian rural capitalism and indigenous traders have evidenced that rivalry between farmers and the market determination of agricultural prices are by no means unacceptable but rather encouraged in the Ghanaian countryside (Hill 1963, reprinted in 1970a; 1970b; see also Ahwireng-Obeng 1988: 26 for notes on the nineteenth-century East Africa). Furthermore, the idea of private property — excluding mainly land — is by no means absent in many diverse Ghanaian cultures, neither is the forced equalization of the results. Rather, the individual is expected to develop himself and live so that no disgrace to the family is brought. Personal responsibility for one's economic and social role in the communal society is also obvious (Mireku 1991: 56–57). This would indicate that the controlling economic policy, nationwide collective land ownership, denial of competition, 'collective responsibility', and artificial address to Marxism have found no firm foothold in Ghana because of the ill-interpreted indigenous values and traditions of the Ghanaian society. Consequently, since the *abusua* has neither determined the social organization of the economy nor diverted Ghana onto the path of Marxist economic policy, it has not been reflected in Ghana's economic development.

In effect, according to Ebenezer Mireku (1991: 8–15, 52–57) — a Ghanaian himself — the extensive resort to socialism is the general fallacy Africa has made in the aftermath of the continent-wide liberation from the colonial rule. He maintains that although the rudest *laissez-faire* should be avoided in communal societies with strong interpersonal ties like those in Ghana, the general, nationwide social organization does not legitimize the establishment of socialism in Ghana either (see also Gyekye 1988: 25; Nyang 1994: 438).

Chieftaincy is an important property of the Ghanaian traditional administrative hierarchy. The chiefs are respected, traditional leaders in their communities, especially in the countryside. The communities are commonly villages composed of one or several extended families and lineages that are, in turn, headed by family and lineage chiefs. Chieftaincy is extended at the district and regional level and even at the national level (the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs), but the modern, formal administrative structure of Ghana as well as the Christian and Islamic religions have come to disrupt the areal division of chieftaincy (Pobee 1991: 26–27, 34; see also Ahwireng-Obeng 1988: 31). The chiefs and headmen bear responsibility for religious functions, custody over lands, communal well-being, participatory grassroots democracy and settling over disputes (Mireku 1991: 63; Pobee 1991: 11, 25–27; Owusu 1996: 329–333, 335).

The chiefs are elected in most cases — with some minor exceptions — to their positions. Decisions are made e.g. in the Akan chieftaincy through consulting all the families involved in the issue. Everyone has the right to express his views. A few representatives are then selected to consult the queen-mother — who is a very important old lady in the community but not the chief's wife — to reach a consensus. The chief must also heed the queen-mother's views, and he, finally, pronounces their joint solution. Despite the power, the chiefs are also removable from their positions (Pobee 1991: 25; Mireku 1991: 64).

Chieftaincy has guaranteed a multilevel, grassroots democracy and the decentralization of power in the communities simultaneously with the fluctuations between formal authoritarian and multiparty regimes. In principle, influence has extended relatively high in the hierarchy (Gunther 1955: 779–780; see also NCS 1995). Peculiar to the chieftaincy system is the fact that it is simultaneously manifested hierarchical social structures, but decentralized participation and inclusion into decision making. However, the times of demoralization and corruption have exploited chieftaincy as a means of exclusion (Waterman 1977: 2). The most radical view has straightforwardly declined the role of chieftaincy as a mere privileged 'agent of imperialism' between the colonial masters and the oppressed masses (Amin 1985: 279).

The system of chieftaincy may have contributed to the fact that the people have at times believed in authoritarian regimes and at times in democratic ones. Although both the authoritarian and democratic features of governance are reflected in chieftaincy, it would be controversial to claim that authoritarianism is substantially dependent on culture. Rather, the authoritarian regimes have been imposed above all for political and personal reasons, to some extent also for economic reasons, but not overtly for cultural ones. In turn, democracy may have also cultural background in chieftaincy. Chieftaincy includes freedom of choice and participation in decision making that are inherent in a pluralistic regime. Therefore, the cultural feature of chieftaincy cannot be seen as contributing to Ghana's social organization and economic development.

Some Ghanaian indigenous cultures are said to be fatalistic in that the people are loath to target economic advance and development because they view the future unpredictable and random. The fatalistic cultures contain e.g. the following properties: short time horizons, unwillingness to invest, and the lack of personal responsibility (Wildavsky 1994: 141). Although fatalism in itself is incompatible with transformation and economic development, it is nearly impossible to determine in what degree the people really confess fatalism. Namely, even if some cultures could be broadly classified as fatalistic, the representatives of such cultures may not just helplessly float with the stream of life but also bear personal responsibility for their own and family's well-being, for instance (see e.g. Pobee 1991: 141). Since fatalism can barely be 100% pure, economic policy and economic development should not be 100% impossible either.

In addition to Ghana's indigenous values and traditions, there are external influences working in the sociocultural context. Ghana is a former British colony

that gained independence as the African pioneer in 1957. The historical heritage is certainly that of the British Empire and the Commonwealth, which has affected the entire society and the way in which people perceive reality. In concrete terms, the educational system in Ghana used to be a copy of the English form for decades until it was streamlined in 1986 (Daddieh 1995: 26–49).⁶ Through the selection and contents of subjects, the Ghanaians have received education that has not much emphasized Ghanaian indigenous peculiarities but rather attempted to root in and even superimpose the dominant, alien ‘Western way of thinking’ among local students. This may have enhanced individualistic social relations and legitimized economic and social competition.

In a similar vein to education, the political and economic structures, legal system, the social sphere of the elites, and health care practices have all bore elements of the colonial culture in various degrees, the role of which should by no means be overlooked in the process of economic development. This coexistence has surely been unbalanced and more or less uneasy, at times alienating and at times conscientizing the people with their own cultures (see Mireku 1991: 66; Nyang 1994: 433, 436; Quaye 1992: 13–14, 19; see also Pobee 1991: 12–13, 53–54 for intrusive external religions). Consequently, in effect, the Ghanaian politico-economic history is characterized by zigzagging shifts between Afro-Marxism that has intended to wipe the painful colonial memories aside and liberalism that has accepted and even adopted elements of the colonial past. In the political sphere, authoritarianism and multiparty democracies have fluctuated.

The contemporary, President Jerry Rawlings’s regime has properties of both fierce anticolonialism and smooth acceptance of some elements. Rawlings’s early address to populist Marxism may reflect the anticolonialist emphasis, followed by his strong verbal whipping of the role of external debt, international financial institutions and foreign corporations in Ghana. However, the rapid and comprehensive shift to liberalism may have highlighted the importance of rationality that has come to be so interwoven with economic performance, the respect of materialism, and the common acceptance of ‘economic logic’. The latter may partly explain why there have been fewer deviations from and less popular opposition to structural adjustment despite its severe social hardships during the Rawlings era than e.g. in Latin America. The political elite may, hence, have been able to implement the neoliberal economic policy with less friction and emphasize rationality and growth more than could be the case in any less materialistic community.

Nevertheless, albeit Ghana has witnessed political and economic trends superficially traceable to culture, no explanation can be found for why the trends have fluctuated over time. Rather, it should be maintained that political and

⁶ The contemporary Ghanaian educational structure is composed of six years of primary education and six years of secondary education that is divided into junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary school (SSS), thereafter the tertiary level of education can be headed (Bodomo 1996: 43).

economic calculations have contributed to regimes and policies leaving culture aside.

6. LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN GHANA

The role of indigenous languages in economic development is multifaceted touching primarily upon the perception and valuation of economic development and education and communication of economic development (Bodomo 1996: 40–41). Language forms, for its part, the cultural framework within which the meaning and targets of economic development are perceived. If the language mediates cultural notions of individualism and collectivism, for instance, so that one is conceived of as more acceptable than the other, the output of economic development — and most prominently the means of economic development — are also perceived and valued from this cultural perspective. This may contribute to the country's choice of economic policy and the degree to which the country is willing to assimilate itself with the Western values of global economics.

The systems of education and administration employ normally one or a few national languages through which the whole societal environment of economic development is communicated. If such a national official language is not understood by the local speakers of indigenous languages, persuasion and communication may remain at best modest. In that case, the population may view the government's economic policy efforts as illegitimate or incomprehensible. There may arise a feeling that the economic policy is not meant for the good of the local people but imposed from above for the purpose of subjection. Due to emerging implementation difficulties, it goes without saying that an illegitimate economic policy is unlikely to successfully encourage intended reforms and societal transformation.

Ghana is a surprisingly multilingual country. Although there is no full-fledged analysis on the language repertoire of Ghana, and the most recent national census in which an attempt to calculate the numbers of the speakers of each language was made dates back to 1960,⁷ estimates have pointed to more than 100 languages spoken (Encyclopaedia of the Third World 1992: 673). The Ghanaian languages that can be categorized into ten subgroups of indigenous languages⁸ are not necessarily 'pure' languages of their own but also dialects and peculiar kinds of mixtures the comprehensive and detailed separation of which has been impossible

⁷ The most recent national census in general dates back to 1984, but it did not attack the language situation in Ghana. The next national census is targeted in 1999.

⁸ The ten indigenous language (sub)groups in Ghana are: Akan, Mabia, Gbe, Ga-Dangbe, Gurma, Guang, Nzema, Grusi, Buem and Nafaanra (see Bodomo 1996 for an impressive list of the individual languages). The Ghanaian government has chosen nine indigenous languages to be sponsored for the purpose of challenging the dominance of English: Akan group, Dagbane, Dagaare, Ewe, Ga, Dangbe, Gonja, Nzema and Kasem.

even for qualified language researchers (Bodomo 1996: 35, see also his Footnote 2).

The indigenous languages that are widely spoken in the countryside but also in cities communicate the underlying values of the local cultures of Ghana. The values do not necessarily equate with the Western values, the most notable deviating example of which is the role of collective social cohesion. The Ghanaians are prone to perceive well-being in terms of the extended family's — *abusua* — welfare. This sociocultural feature of Ghana may have contributed to the fact that the Ghanaian government has by no means rushed into neoliberal individualism but reserved a prerogative to determine the contents of economic policy within the societal and cultural contexts of Ghana. By the same token, the huge variety of local languages may have reduced the communicative breakthrough of the political elite's economic policy among the populace in particular in the remote rural areas. These may be reflected by the degree to which the (P)NDC⁹ government has declined to implement the World Bank/IMF sponsored structural adjustment measures.¹⁰

English is, nonetheless, the official 'contact' language in Ghana the wide use of which is inherited from the colonial times of the British rule. English is long-established and commonly understood in the country, which may have lubricated the communication of the liberal shift of economic policy as of the early 1980s. The education system employs largely English as a formal means of communication (Bodomo 1996: 39). This is accentuated by the fact that 51% of broadcast hours are reserved for English alone. Since English is so widely spread in Ghana, it seems logical to suggest that the Western values of individualism, competition and market economy may have penetrated the Ghanaian society with less friction were the case such with a less dominant official language of the West (cf. many Arab countries). This may have lubricated the launch of liberal-oriented economic policy and conceive market-generated economic development of as socially acceptable.

Ethnic groups are by and large as many as languages in Ghana. The cultural plurality is manifested by some 100 ethnic groups with none constituting more than 15% of the population. No part of Ghana is reported to be ethnically homogenous. (Encyclopaedia of the Third World 1992: 672.) Moreover, ethnicity is not considered a first-order issue in Ghana (Aubynn 1997: 52; Jeffries 1992: 222;

⁹ The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) was the ruling politico-military amalgamation during the authoritarian regime in 1981–1992. Its identical successor, National Democratic Congress (NDC), occupied the Parliament almost entirely in the 1992 elections since the opposition parties boycotted the vote. The 1996 elections changed the composition dramatically, for the opposition now holds an important one-third minority.

¹⁰ The rate of unimplemented World Bank/IMF measures amounts to around 40% in Ghana. Haggard & Webb (1993: 157) have, namely, reckoned that the Ghanaian political elite has implemented 55–63% of the World Bank and IMF's suggested conditions whereas Toye (1992: 112) has reported that the figure is 58%. Despite the seemingly 'low' rate, Ghana has been frequently regarded as 'highly committed' to the pursuit of the structural adjustment program, or as Giles Mohan (1995: 21) puts it, a 'strong reformer'.

Pobee 1991: 7), which rarely makes politics tribalistic or ethnically-determined or even markedly ethnically-sensitive in Ghana.¹¹

The principal ethnic cleavage is that between the Ashanti and Ewe. Rawlings was born and raised in the Volta Region and belongs to the Ewe ethnic group (Jeffries 1992: 222; Oquaye 1995: 271–272). As an indication of the bifurcation, Rawlings received 93.6% and 94.5% of the votes in Volta Region in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections, respectively (Aubynn 1997: 29–30). Despite the fact that his wife, the First Lady, Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings belongs to the powerful Ashanti royal family (Owusu 1996: 337), the Ashanti voted for him by 32.9% and 32.8% merely. The largest shares, to the amount of roughly double the Rawlings share, benefited the main opposition candidates (Aubynn 1997: 29–30). Despite the fact that the regional breakdown of the results of the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections distinctly evidences the ethnic bifurcation in voting, it would not imply, nevertheless, that the ethnic or areal support would be channelled to national economic policy or economic development. Rather, economic policy is mainly driven by politico-economic considerations, not by tribalism.¹² It is reflected by the fact that the Ashanti Region — an ‘ethnic opponent’ to Rawlings — has benefited substantially more from the political elite’s economic policy than Rawlings’s own Volta Region.

7. RELIGIONS IN GHANA

The religious context of Ghana is a combination of various Christian denominations (45%, subdivided mainly into Roman Catholic and various Protestant churches such as Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches)¹³, Islam (12%, mainly

¹¹ The only severe ethnic clash in Ghana has been that over local paramountcy, a kind of local chieftdom, and associated land ownership in the eastern part of the Northern Region in early February 1994. The dispute was between the Konkomba on the one hand and the Dagomba, Gonja and Nanumba on the other. The riots demanded some 1,000 lives and destroyed 150 villages. (Akwetey 1996: 102)

¹² Further, Rawlings received shares well above 60%, and even almost 75% in 1992, in other regions, as well. Even in the Akan constituencies — to which the Ashanti belongs — the NDC won 52% of the seats in comparison to the opposition’s 48% in 1996. (Aubynn 1997: 29–30, 54)

Notwithstanding, ethnicity truly constitutes one of the most serious threats to liberal democracy in Ghana since it can be easily abused by party cadres and activists (see also Aubynn 1997: 54–55).

¹³ Pobee (1991: 15–16, 50, 79–80) enumerates a nonexhaustive list of churches in Ghana: he distinguishes between the ‘historic churches’ such as Roman Catholicism and Protestantism further divided into Anglicanism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, Baptism and Lutheranism, and the so-called ‘independent African churches’ which he also calls ‘sects’. These include four categories: (i) the Millennialists, e.g. Seventh Day Adventist and Jehova’s Witnesses; (ii) the Pentecostal Association of Ghana, e.g. Nigritian Church (founded by Rev Anaman), Church of Melchizedek (Bishop Wontumi), Musama Disco Christo Church (Prophet Jehu Appiah III), Divine Healing Church (Rev Amoa), Faith Brotherhood Church (Prophet F. A. Mills), Church of

immigrants)¹⁴ and indigenous religious beliefs and practices embodied in chieftaincy and family institutions. Albeit there are nowadays even atheists, secularists and agnostics in Ghana (Pobee 1991: 12, 38), it has been described as “a deeply religious and deferential society that strives for moral excellence, peace, and harmony in human relationships”. The people have a religious ontology and epistemology in that they explain and interpret life in a religious framework (Owusu 1996: 322; see also Mireku 1991: 61, 65; Pobee 1991: 10–12, 17 for religiousness)¹⁵. Albeit many religious leaders themselves have actively participated in politics, it is not known how their faith may have affected the politics of Ghana. It could be logical to maintain, hence, that only those features that are commonly shared by sizeable proportions of the population should be considered here as possible intervening factors into the process of culture–economic development and the remaining peculiarities of some religious sects left unstudied despite their leaders’ keen aspiration for political influence.

Interestingly, the Ghanaian values of morality, probity and accountability were the values to which Jerry Rawlings so emphatically applied to at the time of the coup d’état in 1981. He gave the populace the honest impression of a man bloodily fighting against the administration’s bribery, mismanagement of the country’s economy, widespread black markets and smuggling, misallocations and misappropriations of public funds — shortly, *kalabule* (Vehnämäki 1995: 135). Rawlings’s popularity and charisma have been addressed to this particular act although he did not give any religious appeal in its own right. He managed to touch upon the deepest cultural values of the Ghanaian society in a gentle and somewhat disguised manner.

The religions are, nevertheless, not watertight compartments in Ghana but influenced and compromised by one another. This is especially manifested in the fact that although the traditional Ghanaian religions have significantly lost

Christ (Odziifo Mensah) and Church of Bethany (Rev Dr P. J. Blankson); (iii) the Ghana Pentecostal Council (formerly Fellowship), e.g. Ghana Apostolic Church, Christ Apostolic Church, Church of Pentecost, United Pentecostal Church and Assemblies of God; and (iv) the Association of Spiritual Churches, e.g. Rev Abraham de Love, F’Eden Church (Rev Brother Yeboa-Korie), Rev Ohene and Rev Hawkson.

¹⁴ Islam falls into two main categories: the Sunnis and Shi’ites. The Ghanaian Muslims are mostly Sunnis, or to be more precise, Malikites. In addition, there are Islamic sects in Ghana: the Ahmadiyya (locally called *Akyima*), the Tijaniyya (*Nawum*), and the Anbaryyya (*Nunkyire*). The division between the Maliki and the Ahmadiyya is particularly deep since the former hold the latter for a heretical group. The relations amongst the sects are also far from warm following ethnic lines. The doctrinal differences of opinion intertwined with ethnic and economic disparities have at times even led to bloody clashes such as those most recent of December 1997 between the Sunnis and the Tijaniyya in Tamale (GNA 1997). (Pobee 1991: 18, 106–109)

¹⁵ This religiousness has, notwithstanding, been channeled to and exploited by the political life in Ghana to a varying extent during different regimes. Pobee (1991:20) maintains that Kwame Nkrumah and Ignatius Acheampong were the leaders who most appealed to and abused the Ghanaians’ religiousness.

followers in the light of statistics (see e.g. Pobee 1991: 12, 17; Horner 1994: 44), many people still bear “remnants of the traditional beliefs”. It could be said that many Ghanaian Christians and Muslims confess their religions “with a Ghanaian flavour”. This is especially pronounced among the diverse Christian-originated sects and in Muslim communities.

The traditional religions are manifested basically in three areas of economic development: land tenure, family planning, and the concept of time (Nyang 1994: 437)¹⁶. Land plays a particularly significant role in many Ghanaian religions (note, however, that land tenure issue has not been too much of a nuisance on the part of the dominant Christians and Muslims; *ibid.*: 441). Land is strongly thought to belong to small peasants (*ibid.*: 438) or communities (Dei 1992: 99) that may cultivate it with traditional and inefficient techniques for subsistence but also small-scale trade. The peasant and communal land ownership form a continuity violating against modern ownership patterns. Parts of land act, in addition, as graveyards of ancestors and holy places where religious acts and rites are conducted. Land reform associated with market economy introduces tenancy, leasehold, outright sale and purchase, and mortgaged or pledged lands which may represent discontinuities in land holding (*ibid.*: 99). Regardless of the ideological aspiration — whether land is wished to be absorbed by the modern private sector or collectivized by village cooperatives¹⁷ — such land reform that dismisses the traditional land holders is likely to be discouraged by local opposition. The Ghanaian land tenure system and the special symbolic importance attached to land seem, hence, to be in stark contradiction with policy-inspired land reform.

Land reform is integrally incorporated in societal transformation packages such as a structural adjustment program. Nevertheless, land tenure changes do not count as such into economic policy if strictly defined in terms of fiscal, monetary, trade and exchange rate policy. The question of land tenure is rather a reflection of the institutional reform accompanied by value and ideology changes that are, further, assumed to pave the way for shifts of economic policy. On the other hand, land reform can be seen as a reflection of the distribution of economic benefits which directly constitutes a part of economic development.

Family planning is disagreed by both Christians, Muslims and the followers of indigenous Ghanaian religions to various degrees. Generally speaking, none of

¹⁶ Nyang (1994: 442) discusses also the relationship between the young and the elders as a sociocultural peculiarity of African religions. While Muslims and Christians support the position of elders — Christians sometimes poorly — for their age, the traditional African religions give respect to older people also because of their spiritual mission in society as intermediaries between ancient fathers and younger people. Since the relationship is not directly an input or intervening element with the process of economic development but rather a consequence of modernization, the issue will not be analyzed in any more detail here.

¹⁷ Probably, the most famous experiment of collectivized village land tenure has been President Julius Nyerere's *ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania. After prolonged coerced collectivization and resettlement, even Nyerere himself has admitted that the *ujamaa* was a catastrophic failure (Nyang 1994: 440).

these religions welcome family planning and associated birth control without criticisms; they contend that offspring is ‘a gift from God’ to which the state should have no authority. Christianity has, however, most merged with secular perspectives in accepting birth control and e.g. the use of contraceptives as an effective means of reducing the barrier to economic development in the Third World. A few hardline views may deviate from this, however. Ghanaian Catholics have received family planners’ teachings with mixed feelings with some being receptive and the others hesitant. Muslims and traditionalists have, instead, remained opposed to the idea of a secular state intervening in the relationship between man and a god. The traditional indigenous beliefs maintain also that having children insures the perpetuation of the family and the community. Moreover, their weak conviction of the efficacy of Western medicine and possible wrath of ancestors are factors that discourage family planning exercise (Nyang 1994: 441–442). This suggests that fatalism is present to some extent in the Ghanaian society.

Family planning and the rate of population growth have a straight connection to economic development in the numerical terms of per capita allocations. Despite being present as a factor shrinking the output of economic development, the role of family planning and that of social policy in general form a parallel process with — but not identical one to — economic policy and economic development. Hence, economic development, defined as material accumulation, the provision of basic needs, and the distribution of economic benefits, does not include a one-to-one correspondence to family planning.

The concept of time can vary substantially between different faiths. Christianity and Islam both teach that there is a future in addition to the present. The concept of the future legitimizes man’s efforts to organize life and society so as to provide for welfare and satisfaction. In this sense, economic development can be systematically planned through a series of interconnected measures of economic policy. Although Ghanaian indigenous religions form a colourful spectrum with different conceptions of time, most of them share the two-dimensional notion with the present and the past. History is extremely important as well as the present, but the future seems vague and abstract in the traditional faiths. Because the future is so distant, planning is found speculative and lacking immediate practical effects (Ibid.: 443–444). With this concept of time, the people may see economic policy as a useless device and fail to grant popular support for such an exercise. The implementation of the economic policy by the political elite and the international financial institutions may face insurmountable obstacles due to the ill-conceived sociocultural properties.

Although all three forms of Ghanaian religion contain the theology of predestination in one sense or another, the followers of Islam and Christianity believe that the *post mortem* life depends on the goodness of one’s deeds in this life. The Christians used to work actively in various missions and voluntary projects that have had a marked role in the social services for which reason Christianity may have gained its respected and significant position in the country

(Pobee 1991: 14). Along similar lines, Muslims are taught to live “as if they were here forever but also as if they passed away tomorrow”. A Muslim should, therefore, make the best of the surrounding world without jeopardizing the living conditions of fellow human beings and ecosystems (Nyang 1994: 443–444). Particularly, the Ahmadiyya sect has been involved in establishing and running schools and hospitals (Pobee 1991: 19). Despite the belief of predestination, one’s fate can be partially influenced and recalibrated during the ongoing life, which enables the Muslims and Christians to improve their society and its economic sphere through e.g. economic reform and socioeconomic policy.

The traditional Ghanaian faiths, which are in a declining minority in the purest forms, confess the predestination of one’s fate in a somewhat stronger sense; the destiny — or *nkrabea* as the Akan call it — establishes the framework of e.g. one’s character, occupation, success or failure in life, and death. Things are believed to happen in their appointed time. Simultaneously, however, one’s own moral behaviour depends much on his personal fate albeit guided by the ancestors. Fate is, thus, not uncontrollable and unmodifiable (Ibid.: 38–39). Although fatalism is present in some degree in the concept of *nkrabea* constituting as such a hostile atmosphere to economic reform and socioeconomic contest, the predestination is not deterministic even in the indigenous beliefs of Ghana¹⁸. The facts that one’s life and destiny can be modified and that the traditional Ghanaian religions are declining and being compromised may explain why the Ghanaian politics has always been extraordinarily vivid and colourful; the Ghanaians are by no means fatalistic in a personal sense or in terms of nationwide political aspirations.

Christianity cherishes also industriousness and entrepreneurship in the present life. According to Max Weber’s thoughts, the Christians have commonly approved of the Protestant Ethic as the driving force in the life, guiding all behaviour and thinking from deep, holy subjects to everyday operations. The Protestant Ethic emphasizes man’s own striving for better so as to guarantee him a better position in the afterlife. Man is expected to live in asceticism so that all accumulated funds are to be saved and profitably reinvested. Hard work is regarded as a major avenue to success, and economic welfare — if not bombastic and extravagant — is seen as God’s promise of being chosen (Holton & Turner 1989). In Ghana, this emphasis on materialism and economic efficiency may have helped the political elite to sustain its legitimacy although the benefits and losses of the economic reform have accrued inequitably to the population.

All in all, the role of religions in economic development may turn out important if the religious features are very strict. In Ghana, however, fatalism viz. industriousness and the attitude towards land reform are not found in a very strict

¹⁸ An illuminating reflection on the nonfatalism of the Ghanaians is an Akan saying: “times change and the fortunes of people change” (*mbere dzi adandan*) (Pobee 1991: 47).

In addition, John Pobee (1991: 141) has reported that [a]n African is not sacralist in the sense of being so preoccupied with the sacred as to prejudice the material well-being of the community and to impede man’s control of his environment. The sacred and the secular are complementary ways of looking at reality.

form. Therefore, their contribution to economic development may remain somewhat weak at best.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The chief target of this article was to investigate the interrelationships between culture and economic development in Ghana. A secondary target was to clarify the concepts of culture and economic development so as to avoid vague explanations and overlapping conceptualizations. Culture was treated as a composite of values and traditions, ethnic groups and languages, and religions. Economic development, in turn, was assumed to be manifested in material accumulation, the provision of basic needs, and the distribution of economic benefits.

The main methodological device was to interpret — as logically as possible — the contribution of culture to economic development. Contrary to the mainstream literature, but in line with Lian & Oneal (1997), the direct role of culture in affecting economic development was realized insignificant in Ghana. Especially, the indigenous culture was not found markedly contributing to economic development. The only distinct exceptions were land reform and the Protestant Ethic. The land question can be interpreted as an example of the distribution of economic benefits which belongs to economic development by definition. The Protestant Ethic may have also borne an impact on the Ghanaian economic development in the form of entrepreneurial spirit.

Although this article will by no means be the last word in this area, it should give a reason for reassessing the contribution of culture in larger, cross-country studies. Particularly, special attention to cultural viz. political settings should be given in future studies.

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