



Tourism as an exercise in three-dimensional power: Evidence from Ghana



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ABSTRACT

This study uses Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional power to explore the ability of traditional chiefs to influence slavery-based heritage tourism decisions. Traditional chiefs of five former slave communities in Ghana were in-depth interviewed about their efforts to harness community development through tourism and perceived influence in tourism decision-making process. Results indicated that despite being guardians of tourism resources, traditional chiefs perceive themselves to be powerless in affecting management decisions because of governmental control of local community institutions. They, however, exert considerable influence on tourism activities by either avoiding engagement or acting as community vanguards to discredit the interests of other stakeholders. Interview data support the theoretical tenets of Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional view of power, and the need to pursue cooperative tourism planning is discussed.

1. Introduction

The influence of Ghanaian chiefs in slavery-based heritage tourism has lately attracted significant research interest, especially among anthropologists (see, Bruner, 1996; Steegstra, 2012; Silverman, 2015). The main thrust of the argument is that slavery-related sites and slavery-related public commemorations are presented as commodified tourism products for international visitors (Bailey, 2005; Greene, 2011; Benson & McCaskie, 2004; Schramm, 2008b). Similarly, long-held chieftaincy customs have been compromised as foreigners (particularly of African descent) have been installed as *development* chiefs (*nkosuo-hene* in the Akan language) as a means of inducing community development, as well as bolstering the community's identity and image in the tourism marketplace (Benson, 2003; Bob-Milliar, 2009).

However, much less has been mentioned (or perhaps implicitly assumed) about how the exercise of power by traditional chiefs affects tourism. This point is important to pursue because although the current political dispensation in Ghana removes most of the legal and political sovereignty of the chief in council (Quarcoo, 1982), chiefs wield a considerable amount of influence at the community level (Ubink, 2007). Indeed, the socio-political roles played by chiefs in centralized and hierarchical societies during the Transatlantic Slave Trade era weigh heavily as a factor. Bosman (1705:180) reported in the 18th century that “most of the slaves that are offered to us are prisoners-of-war which are sold by the victors as their booty”. This observation is buttressed by historical records that indicate that the bulk of enslaved Africans in the New World were victims of wars and raids instigated by powerful chiefdoms (Der, 1998; Perbi, 2004; Shumway, 2011).

Whether contemporary chiefs should acknowledge or be absolved of the complicity of their forebears in slavery remains a matter for disagreement (Gates, 2010; Akurang-Parry, 2010; Keren, 2009).

However, since the abolition of slavery, traditional chiefs in former slave communities have faced a quandary with dire socio-political and economic implications. Those who have acknowledged complicity of their forebears have had to publicly apologize for the past. Still, they find themselves at a loss when repudiating the past, given the prevailing socio-economic conditions in their communities. One background fact to bear in mind is that most residents of former slave communities are unemployed, are unable to access quality health care, clean water, and waste disposal services and have low levels of education (Holden, Sonne & Novelli, 2011; Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). Under such circumstances, the embrace of tourism as a ‘passport’ to community development confirms the intuitive understanding that very few options exist (Burns, 1990; Yankholmes, Akyeampong, & Dei, 2009).

The dilemma that the process of atonement presents is further complicated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Slave Route Project, which seeks to develop a tourist trade focused on remembrance and the promotion of socio-economic development through tourism in former slave communities in Africa, Europe and the Americas/Caribbean (Schramm, 2008b). This goal, although laudable, might not achieve the desired results for many reasons. The primary shortcoming is that the UNESCO Slave Route Project promotes a single global collective memory of slavery. As Ashworth (1997) observed, whenever and wherever ownership of the past is collectivized on a global scale, multiple stakeholders with differing power imbalances and interests attend to it, leading to the

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reconstruction or transfiguration of that past. In Ghana, gaining recognition as part of the Slave Route Project has become a coveted prize not only for traditional chiefs but also for other stakeholders in former slave communities with intricate connection to slavery. In such a scenario, the different stakeholders are pitted against each other for control and access to tourist dollars. However, traditional chiefs are at the apex of the community power structure, indicating that they wield considerable influence when decisions about tourism are made at the local level (Wyllie, 1998). Without consideration of the power mechanisms that underlie community tourism, researchers have not only failed to thoroughly investigate the structural characteristics of destination communities which are relevant to their power structures and decision-making process (Blackstock, 2005), but they have also ignored the historical, socio-economic, political and geographical (or spatial) contexts in which tourism occurs (Beeton, 2006).

The current study investigated the social or psychological mechanisms of power in tourism management decision making and their behavioral outcomes. It argues that traditional chiefs are able to influence slavery-based tourism (either consciously or unconsciously) analogous to Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional power. The goals of this study were to explore the extent to which traditional chiefs attempt to use slavery-based heritage tourism as a developmental option and degree of impediments encountered, and their influence in tourism decision-making process. Scholars have long recognized that destination communities are heterogeneous with unequal power relations (Richter, 1999; Ryan, 2002), which may lead to the exclusion of stakeholder groups with opposing views in the decision-making process (Freeman & Gilbert, 1987; Freeman et al., 2010; Reed, 1997). The ability of chiefs to influence slavery-based heritage tourism has received relatively little research attention (Schramm, 2008a; Peterson, Gauva & Rassool, 2015).

2. Literature review

2.1. Lukes' three-dimensional view of power

This study employs Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional power as the underlying theoretical framework to compare the scope of influence that traditional chiefs of five former slave communities in Ghana have had with tourism. In particular, the aim is to highlight how the historic, socio-economic, political and geographical contexts of former slave communities ascribe an undefined residuum of power to traditional chiefs in tourism decision-making process. Lukes (2005) introduced the third dimension of power to challenge earlier conceptions of power he felt were behaviorally focused. Briefly, the one-dimensional perspective of power is where A (relatively powerful) prevails over B (relatively powerless) in decision-making. Ultimately, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Dahl, 1957, 202–203). Much of the early community-based tourism planning studies (e.g., Murphy, 1985) reflected insights from the one-dimensional perspective of power by identifying who makes decisions and controls participation in tourism. By the same token, the two-dimensional approach to power emphasizes who participates and what is debated in decision-making. Pioneered by Bachrach and Baratz (1962: 948), power is exercised when "A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences".

However, Lukes (2005) contended the two previous views particularly the second definition of power is too individualistic. He argued that, rather than simply seeking observable conflicts (overt or covert) from becoming issues in the political arena, we should examine the complex and subtle manners in which the interests of B are very

difficult to ascertain with precision, incapable of being expressed or even recognizable at all. To him the most insidious form of power is domination. Lukes (2005:27) goes on to define power as "A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants". This conceptualization of power captured its many variants, that is, coercion, influence and authority. He acknowledged that any conceptualization of power in social relationships must imply an answer to the question: what counts as a significant manner? what makes A's affecting B significant? (Lukes, 2005:27).

Three related concepts are relevant for empirically identifying the three-dimensional view of power in the absence of actual observable conflicts. The first is the relevant counterfactual and power mechanism. Here, A can affect B, either on his/her own or with other sufficient conditions so that B does what s/he would otherwise not do. However, in a situation in which there is no observable conflict between the two, other conditions must be met regarding the relevant counterfactual. Hence "we need to justify our expectation that B would have thought or acted differently; and we also need to specify the means or mechanism by which A has prevented, or else acted (or abstained from acting) in a manner sufficient to prevent B from thinking so" (Lukes, 2005:44). Second, power dwells on the notion of 'real interests' and 'false consciousness'. Lukes observed that, when conflict exists between the preferences of A and B but A's preferences are in B's real interest, two response options present themselves. Lukes' preferred response is that A exercises 'short-term power' over B but ceases when B is able to recognize his/her real interests. He reasoned, however, that A is likely to abuse his/her power and possibly to become tyrannical, but B can avert this situation by being relatively autonomous and operating independently of A's powers. Moreover, B can be misled into believing that sacrificing his/her autonomy is for the best or his/her only viable option. Third and closely related to the previous response to real interests is adaptive preference. Since B's interests are constrained by A, B might adapt to the wants, desires and preferences that conform to the status quo. However, these adaptive preferences might not be what A directly intended. Unlike the first two conditions in which A is aware of his/her domination, in this case, A does not realize that the power that s/he exercises creates or elicits false consensus from B. What accounts for this crucial difference is that power could be unintentionally wielded, yet B might be quiescent due to misunderstanding of A's domination.

However, the empirical use of Lukesian approach to power is fraught with conceptual and methodological difficulties (Edwards, 2006). Polsby's (1963) question regarding how the researcher knows which non-observable issues to study still persists. Even though Lukes (2005) discussed several empirical studies that found evidence of the relevant counterfactual as satisfactory proof of the operation of his three-dimensional view of power; a comprehensive and convincing answer to Polsby's question was not provided. Haugaard (2010) is more adamant; he argues that the third dimension of power does not necessarily lend itself to the exercise notion of power but it rather bifurcates power into either/or decisions. Of greater interest here, is assessing the reliability and validity of the true consciousness of powerholders. Even though, traditional authorities in the current study are very willing to discuss their actual experiences of invisible power to achieve tourism development, they articulate an unchallenged view of their subjective preferences. As such, their frame of reference or plausibility of account is not open to challenge. The three-dimensional power, therefore, needs to consider a multi-evaluative or a two-way confirmatory framework.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Hall (2003, 2007), drawing on Norkunas (1993), argued that heritage tourism provides a useful setting for elucidating the third dimension of power. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no studies to date have tested this assumption in non-Western hierarchical destination communities. The current study respond to Hall's (2003, 2007) call to re-engage Lukes' (2005)

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