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Ecotourism development in Ghana: A postcolonial analysis

Gabriel Eshun¹ & Eva Tagoe-Darko²

Despite growing research on ecotourism in Ghana, it is unclear to what extent colonial approaches to forestry and wildlife conservation still influence ecotourism in the country. This paper examines ecotourism development in Ghana from a postcolonialist perspective. It is based on a thematic assessment of primary data from in-depth interviews with a range of ecotourism actors. The paper shows that ecotourism in Ghana, much like colonial forestry and wildlife conservation, faces challenges such as the marginalisation of the local community, the use of neo-crisis narratives, a dependence on international forces, and the marginalisation of local ecological knowledge. It argues for a holistic approach to the development of ecotourism as a win–win strategy for sustainable development.

Keywords: ecotourism; postcolonialism; state-led ecotourism; community-based ecotourism; Ghana

1. Introduction

For 40 of the world's poorest countries, tourism is the second-largest source of foreign exchange, after oil (TIES, 2005). Many of these countries are exploring the potential of ecotourism to help them achieve the dual aims of conservation and development. Ecotourism is estimated to be growing at 10 to 15% per year and contributing US\$154 billion to the world economy (Honey, 2008). Nation-states are increasingly assessing their unique tourism resources and attempting to develop these into competitive attractions (Rogerson & Visser, 2004). In 2004, nature-based tourism grew three times faster than the worldwide tourism industry as a whole (TIES, 2005). Foreign exchange revenue from ecotourism surpassed that of the traditional cash crop of coffee in Tanzania and Kenya (Honey, 2008). Likewise, the ecotourism sector in Nicaragua has overtaken coffee, meat and other traditional exports since 2001 (Zapata et al., 2011). The interest in ecotourism is attributed largely to its link with the paradigm of sustainable development, as per the 1987 Brundtland Report (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). While there still is no consensus on what constitutes ecotourism, The International Ecotourism Society definition of ecotourism as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people' is becoming increasingly popular (Fennell, 2008; Honey, 2008).

The 2013 Tourism and Travel Competitive Index Report ranks Ghana in 13th place in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of its competitiveness in travel and tourism. In 2011, tourism generated revenues of US\$2.19 billion, created 234 679 jobs, and contributed 2.3% to the gross domestic product of Ghana. The average spending per tourist was US\$2010 in 2008, and the country passed the million mark in international arrivals in 2011 (MoT, 2012). Tourism remains the country's fourth-largest source of foreign

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exchange after merchandise exports of gold and cocoa, and foreign remittances. Ghana seeks to build on its political stability, historical monuments and rich biodiversity to position tourism as the leading contributor to its gross domestic product. (The country ranks among the top 25% of African countries in terms of wildlife diversity.) Most foreign tourists arrive from Nigeria, the United States and the United Kingdom (MoT, 2012). Ghana's second National Tourism Development Plan for 2013–27 emphasises ecotourism as a beneficial form of tourism with a sizeable profit margin (Eshun & Tonto, 2014).

Significant evidence exists for the conservation and economic potential of ecotourism in Africa (Milazi, 1996). However, ecotourism research in Ghana is often ahistorical, using mainly econometric and hypothetico-deductive methodologies (Eshun, 2011). Also, it is unclear to what extent colonial approaches to forestry and wildlife conservation still influence ecotourism, especially in West Africa. Gilbert (2007) holds that any serious research on ecotourism in the postcolonial South must assess the influence of such approaches. Ashcroft et al. (1989) provide four main principles for assessing colonial influences: hegemony; representation; place, displacement and identity; and postcoloniality and theory. Hall & Tucker (2004) use these principles to assess the links between postcolonialism and tourism.

In line with Hall & Tucker (2004), this paper uses three key principles of postcolonial theory, namely hegemony, representation and knowledge creation, to critique the continuing influence of colonial approaches on ecotourism in Ghana. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. Section 2 briefly reviews the links between tourism and postcolonialism, while Section 3 outlines the methodological approach. Section 4 provides a postcolonial critique of ecotourism in Ghana, and Section 5 outlines the conclusions.

2. Literature review

2.1 'Fortress conservation' and hegemony

Although ecotourism is often seen as a beneficial and modern form of tourism, Beaumont (1998:240) states that 'the early geographers who toured the world in search for new lands, species and culture were ecotourists'. The global system of protected areas on which ecotourism is often based was inherited from the nineteenth-century American model for forest preservation (Honey, 2008). In 1872, President Grant signed an Act to establish two million acres of land as the world's first national park, Yellowstone. Although the aim of the park was to conserve the natural area and provide recreational benefits, it resulted in the removal of native Indians from the gazetted area. This approach, which became known as 'fortress conservation', faced (and still faces) strong resistance, especially from indigenous communities. Still, a large number of national parks were established across the world in the twentieth century, generally to preserve natural areas and support nature-based recreation. Globally, some 44 000 sites (about 10% of the world's surface area) have met the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) definition of protected areas. About 440 of these sites are in sub-Saharan Africa, covering around 2 600 000 km² (Eshun, 2011). Colonial literature often promoted Africa as 'the lost Eden', and colonial administrators seemingly felt an obligation to 'save' the continent from further degradation by creating protected areas.

Such external control of Africa's natural and cultural resources was a form of hegemony. This term refers to the dominance of one country's ideology and structures in another geographical area (Ashcroft et al., 1989). Although the colonies have obtained

political independence, they still experience some forms of external domination. Akama (2004) argues that the dominance of western environmental values still leads to the creation of parks and nature reserves that exclude local people but benefit foreign tourists. Britton adds that the global tourism structure is a:

three-tiered hierarchy, with metropolitan capital based in developed societies at the top, followed by local comprador capitalist, and at the bottom, small-scale enterprises, whose successes depend on that of the two higher categories, which cream off most of the profits. (1999:5)

Currently, up to half the tourism income of the South leaks from the destination countries, mostly to the companies in industrial nations that own the hotels and tour operators (Akama & Kieti, 2007). In Kenya, multinational companies own 60% of the tourism industry and only 2 to 5% of tourism revenue accrues to local communities (Akama, 2004). At the Mombasa Resort in Kenya, low local involvement and high leakage rates have significantly reduced the contribution of tourism to local socio-economic development (Akama & Kieti, 2007). The term 'eco-imperialism' is used to indicate how the economic structures of the former colonial powers still determine the economic structures and projects in postcolonial societies, and how tourism has come to represent the 'hedonistic' phase of neo-colonialism (Nash, 1989). Although the former colonies are not passive in this regard, the lobbies of foreign stakeholders and national elites strongly affect tourism development in Africa (Cater, 2006).

Ecotourism in its purest form aims to achieve its objectives through seeking what Brechin et al. (2002:53) termed the 'pragmatic middle ground'. The search for such a middle ground has led to the emergence of community-based conservation initiatives and natural resource management, which aim to increase the development options of resource-dependent communities while promoting conservation. Examples in Africa include the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (Campfire) in Zimbabwe, the Okavango Delta community-based natural resource management project in Botswana, the Makuleke Contract Reserve in South Africa, both the Luangwa Integrated Rural Development Project and the Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas in Zambia, the Living in a Finite Environment programme in Namibia, the Tchuma Tchato 'Our Wealth' project in Mozambique, the Conservation of Biodiversity Resource Areas Programme (Cobra) in Kenya, and the Ujirani Mwena 'Good Neighbourliness' project in Tanzania (Honey, 2008; Mbaiwa, 2008).

However, critics of these initiatives point out that their management by central governments reduces their potential for achieving the dual aims of conservation and development. In Campfire, for example, non-indigenous people are often excluded from the benefits of the projects (Dzingirai, 2003). The understanding of the term 'community' in ecotourism is clearly rather tenuous, in both concept and practice. The term 'local residents' is sometimes seen as preferable, as it includes all people living around eco-destinations. Postcolonial critique seeks to go beyond the simple concepts of 'South' and 'North' to assess the different forms of power that affect global, national and local dynamics in ecotourism.

2.2 Issues of representation

Echtner & Prasad (2003) analysed Canadian travel brochures for 12 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands. They concluded that

colonial language is still evident in tourism marketing, particularly in promoting three 'myths': the 'unchanged', the 'unrestrained' and the 'uncivilised'. Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996) argues that ecotourism offers tourists the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature, in contrast to their daily urban existence; this echoes Romantic writers such as Thoreau and Muir, who stressed the 'spiritual usefulness' and 'natural duty' to maintain contact with nature (Gilbert, 2007). There is a tendency to preserve the 'traditional' for the tourist to experience. This is based on a colonial topophilia (love of place) and tries to fix the identity of the 'Other', so that it remains static and distinct from the identity of northern tourists. In ecotourism, these romantic notions imply that visiting pristine natural areas, untainted by humans, is an antidote to the effects of modernity. Tourism tends to focus specifically on the 'positive', leading to what Dann (1996) terms the 'euphoric language of tourism'. Said (1978) notes that in representing non-western societies, western articulations created an 'Other' distinct from the 'Self', overlooking their interconnectedness. Tourism has often taken this approach, and its western institutional lens often perpetuates the misrepresentations created during colonialism.

Despite the sustained critiques of such colonial misrepresentations, Africa is still subtly promoted as the Dark Continent. This is underpinned by *lusus naturae* (freakish features) misrepresentations. For example, images of Africa that show lions, elephants, semi-naked men and bare-breasted women are still used to lure westerners keen to experience exotic adventures. This is an example of the 'reductive repetition' motif (Andreasson, 2005), which is defined as the reduction of the diversity of the historical experiences and trajectories, socio-cultural contexts and political situations of Africans into a set of core deficiencies during colonialism. Dunn (2004:487) argues that Africa is represented as 'an exoticised destination in which to see and consume both "nature" and the "native"'. Although the use of emotive words such as 'pristine' and 'untouched' may be a conscious effort to rally support against the global decline in biodiversity, ecotourism does seem to persuade people to become ecotourism ambassadors by romanticising the role of northerners in this regard. According to Amoamo & Thompson (2012), who conducted research on the Maoris in New Zealand, applying postcolonialism to ecotourism can help correct colonial misrepresentations.

2.3 Issues of knowledge creation and resistance

Gayatri Spivak (1995) asks 'Can the subaltern speak?' to highlight how mainstream European theories have largely neglected non-western views on self and identity. Chakrabarty (2000) argues that there is a need to 'provincialise Europe' to create knowledge that draws legitimacy from its geographical usefulness. Bryce et al. (2015:579) note that the 'academic study of tourism has been largely filtered through Western institutional lenses'. Chilisa (2005:662) holds that research in Africa is often characterised by the use of mainstream methodologies, 'which assume universal validity in assembling, analysing, interpreting and producing knowledge, thereby remaining colonising cannon that continues to delineate and define voices of the researched'. Similarly, Eshun (2011) cautions that the questionnaire has become the 'opium of social research' in Africa. He argues that Africa has a case of 'epistemological dromophobia' (the fear of crossing roads), which favours mainstream orthodoxies to the exclusion of lesser-known methods of analysis. Even most

postcolonial qualitative research is preoccupied with content analysis and ‘thick description’, while neglecting other possibilities (Yin, 2009).

Eshun & Madge (2012) explore one such possibility – the use of poetry in tourism research. Mkono (2013) uses net-based ethnography (which provides pseudonymity or anonymity) to obtain authentic views on the eating experience of western and African tourists in Zimbabwean restaurants. Another option is reversing the marginalisation of local ecological knowledge. The President of the Kenya-based Africa Conservation Centre argues that the use of local ecological knowledge in ecotourism could increase customer satisfaction. Initially:

tourists to parks in Kenya used to spend on average 37 seconds on the baboons and more time viewing Kenya’s ‘Big Five’ – rhino, lion, buffalo, leopard and elephant. Yet, with the use of local ecological knowledge, tourists are now learning more about baboons and spending two to three hours. (President of the Kenya-based Africa Conservation Centre, study interview, Leicester, 2010)

Postcolonial research aims to address the hegemony of mainstream knowledge, which sidelines other worldviews (Bhabha, 2004). It seeks alternative methodologies for ‘writing back’ or creating equitable platforms where the voices of the researched can be heard and then fully articulated in the research (Eshun, 2011). Against this backdrop, this paper critiques ecotourism development in Ghana from postcolonialist perspective.

3. Methodology

The study is a national-level investigation based mainly on primary qualitative data, in line with the calls for more nuanced qualitative research in tourism (Ateljevic et al., 2009). It used snowballing, a non-random sampling method. (The director of the Nature Conservation and Research Council kick-started this process.) The primary data collection included in-depth interviews with 11 Ghanaian officials and researchers. Before the interviews, the researchers held informal visits with the interviewees, which contributed to the richness of the data (as per Dey, 1993). The interviewees were from the Ghana Tourism Authority (two officials), the Nature Conservation and Research Council (one participant), the Wildlife Division (four participants), the Ghana Heritage and Conservation Trust (one participant) and Kakum National Park (one participant). Two tourism researchers from Ghanaian universities were also interviewed. The interviews focused on five main areas of ecotourism in Ghana: colonial influences on ecotourism; factors that undermine local participation; the marginalisation of local communities; the challenges of state-led and community-based ecotourism; and the importance of indigenous knowledge.

The interviews, which were recorded, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Where interviewees were uncomfortable with particular comments being taped, these were written down instead. The researchers also held an in-depth discussion on the study objectives with the President of the Africa Conservation Centre during a meeting in Leicester in the United Kingdom, and visited the leading eco-destinations in Ghana. After Dey (1993), the data were analysed in a three-step process. The description step involved transcribing data from the interviews; the classification step involved relating

the data into major themes; and the interconnecting step involved assessing the themes in relation to the study objectives.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The emergence of ecotourism in Ghana

Eshun (2011) classified ecotourism initiatives in Ghana into three categories: state-led ecotourism; community-based ecotourism; and privately owned ecotourism. State-led ecotourism initiatives are based in the protected areas in the country and are managed solely by the Wildlife Division. In contrast, community-based ecotourism aims for complete community control. The Wildlife Division, the Ghana Tourism Authority and the Nature Conservation and Research Council pioneered state-led and community-based ecotourism in Ghana, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Development Programme.

The Oslo Statement on Ecotourism (2007:3) notes that indigenous communities 'must be recognised and supported as equal stakeholders'. Similarly, the 1992 Earth Summit advocates the establishment of participatory mechanisms to involve all interested parties in the management of community-based conservation initiatives. Eshun (2011) cautions that quasi-governmental organisations (such as the Wildlife Division and the Ghana Tourism Authority) will gain the cooperation of local communities only when protected areas have real value to them. Community-based ecotourism in Ghana 'seeks to involve local communities to ensure that at least two-thirds of the revenue from the ecotourism accrues to them' (study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013). Moreover, a Wildlife Division official emphasises that 'the cost of land acquisition, small land sizes and the need for conservation to benefit rural people are the push for community-based ecotourism in Ghana' (study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013). The Nature Conservation and Research Council, convinced that such ecotourism initiatives could benefit the development of local communities, applied to USAID for sponsorship (see Table 1).

The 14 sites selected for the Community-Based Ecotourism Project included forests, artisan markets and sacred cultural sites, in line with Honey's (2008) observation that ecotourism initiatives increasingly include non-nature-based attractions. Hall & Tucker (2004) note that the strong position of Dominica, Belize and Guyana as eco-destinations is based in part on the inclusion of visits to their native Carib populations in standard eco-tours. According to the director of the Nature Conservation and Research Council, in 2006 the Community-Based Ecotourism Project sites generated revenues of US\$1 million and attracted 139 000 visitors. These revenues were used to provide amenities such as electricity and to promote artisan cooperatives among women (see Table 2).

Table 1: The emergence of community-based ecotourism in Ghana

1999–2000	USAID releases funds for CBEP Phase I
2002	In January, the CBEP Phase I commences
2003	In December, the CBEP Phase I ends but 4 months added (to April 2004) to ensure proper logistical transfer into Phase II
2006	In May, CBEP Phase II starts still with sponsorship from USAID

Note: CBEP, Community-Based Ecotourism Project.

Table 2: Inputs of CBEP Phase I to the ecotourism sites in Ghana**Improve ecotourism facilities**

Installation of directional signs: makes easy recognition and location of the attraction sites in addition to marketing the sites

Improve/construct interpretative centres: new interpretative centres were provided at nine destinations and upgrades were made to existing structures at four destinations. This was to facilitate the organisation of tourist services and exchanges of information, which adds to the overall experience

Improve nature trails: involved making improvement to the trail leading to Mt Afadjato's summit and developing new hiking trails at most of the sites

Sanitation facilities: has contributed to a cleaner natural environment

Improve ecotourism marketing

Advertisement: ecotourism brochures and two visitor surveys were conducted to monitor visitor satisfaction and review pricing structures for all services at sites

Uniform receipt system: to improve transparency and accountability of tourism revenues

Web presence: email connection to six GTA regional offices and also creating an official website for ecotourism in Ghana

Improve organisational developmental/ human resource capability

Tourism awareness: this activity was championed by GTA, aimed to increase community understanding and awareness about ecotourism. GTA conducted three awareness sessions in each project community and focused on tourism and environmental conservation education

Financial management: focused on streamlining accounting procedures at the project destinations through management and bookkeeping skills

Publications: included financial management, customer service and guide training manuals, an ecotourism marketing plan and a biological survey report

Interpretive training and customer service training: the project offered specialised training in tour guiding and customer service skills

Source: Adapted from USAID (2005:4–6).

Note: CBEP, Community-Based Ecotourism Project; GTA, Ghana Tourism Authority.

The second phase of the Community-Based Ecotourism Project aims to bring 10 000 km² of land under conservation, create 8000 job opportunities nationwide, and generate US\$2 to 3 million per year (study interview, Director of Nature and Conservation Research Centre, John Mason, Accra, 2013). An ecotourism portal, Ghana Rural Ecotourism and Travel, was created in a joint venture between the Nature Conservation and Research Council, the Ministry of Tourism and the Support Programme for Enterprise Empowerment and Development in Ghana. The next section assesses ecotourism development in Ghana from a postcolonialist perspective.

4.2 Hegemony and international forces in ecotourism in Ghana

Eco-destinations, be they whole countries (e.g. Belize and Costa Rica) or specific areas (e.g. in Ecuador, Kenya and South Africa), often adhere to the international discourse on the conservation of biodiversity, in part because of the need to generate foreign exchange. In May 2006, Mobile Telecommunication Network, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, launched a 60-second advert (at a cost of US\$200 000 per advert) on the CNN channel to promote Ghana as a tourist and investment destination, but there was virtually no budget for promoting domestic tourism. The latest Ghana tourism marketing strategy sought to attract a million visitors by mid-2012, mainly from the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States. However, it pays little

attention to domestic tourists, despite Ghanaians forming 33% of the total tourist numbers in 2011 (MoT, 2012). ‘International forces’ in ecotourism in Ghana are evident from the emphasis on aid, donations, foreign investment and international tourism. The director of the Nature Conservation and Research Council noted that the unsuccessful outcome of the Council’s application to the United Nations Development Programme in 1995 left the development of ecotourism in Ghana in the wilderness for years (study interview, Director of Nature and Conservation Research Centre, John Mason, Accra, 2013). The use of the phrase ‘development partners’ by the government and non-governmental organisations has become a euphemism for the country’s dependence on foreign funds (see Table 3).

The Community-Based Ecotourism Project in Ghana generated revenue primarily from donations (36%), followed by entrance fees (30%), accommodation (18%), souvenirs (7%), food and drink (5%), guides (2%) and other (2%) (USAID, 2005). Thus, much of the seemingly impressive revenue was due to donations from international tourists. An official from the Ghana Tourism Authority notes that the ‘selection of the sites for the Community-Based Ecotourism Project was determined solely by the sponsors, exclusive of local collaborators’ (study interview, Marketing Director, Frank Kofigah, Ghana Tourism Authority, Accra, 2013). This echoes Brondo & Woods’ (2007) assertion that external sponsors often control ecotourism. For example, sponsors determine the use of the Honduran Coral Reef Fund, which means that ecotourism development and the training of the local population in ecotourism are directed from the outside.

Ghana’s tourism is not dominated by foreign interests; however, its tourism development plans show continued colonial influences, particularly in the assumption that tourism can be sustainable only by drawing on foreign capital and international visitors. Since Ghana’s Second Development Plan (1959–64), first-class accommodation has been promoted at the expense of locally informed accommodation solutions (Eshun, 2011). An official at the Nature Conservation and Research Council estimates that ‘to build medium and high-quality accommodation requires over US\$500 000 to erect a unit, and if the truth be said most local investors will not build in rural areas because of low return on investment’ (study interview, Director of Nature and Conservation Research Centre, John Mason, Accra, 2013). Mole National Park, Kakum National Park and the Ankasa Resource Areas have been advertised to private entities that can provide tourist infrastructure, but the attention is on attracting international investors. Honey (2008) holds that public–private partnerships create opportunities for promoting sustainable development. The partnership between South Africa’s Makuleke Contract Park and Wildlife Safaris has helped to position the area as an ecotourism destination (Shehab, 2011). However, Christina Koutra rightly indicates that:

Table 3: USAID financial roles in ecotourism development in Ghana

Date	Financial obligation and purpose
Fiscal year 2002	US\$1.69 million: ecotourism and agroforestry activities
Fiscal year 2003	US\$0.50 million: Community-Based Ecotourism Project
Fiscal year 2004	US\$ 0.2 million: Community-Based Ecotourism Project

Sources: USAID (2005).

Stakeholders in tourism development, in especially Africa, perpetuate the 'colonial economic structure' by placing undue focus on foreign exchange at the expense of community development and what is plausible for the nation in terms of physical and socio-economic infrastructure. (Study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2008)

Despite the fact that the majority of visitors to eco-destinations in the country are Ghanaian, the low disposable income in Ghana is blamed for the focus on attracting foreign resources, and the tourism infrastructure mostly caters for northern visitors. In contrast to Lash & Austin's (2003) emphasis on 'ecological community', where the physical infrastructure at eco-destinations exhibits sensitivity to the local environment, developers still build extravagant accommodations, even in fragile attractions. Will home-grown solutions to ecotourism help to address the large leakages associated with many eco-destinations in the South?

4.3 Neo-crisis representations in conservation and ecotourism in Ghana

The loss of biodiversity is often attributed to habitat change, overexploitation, pollution, invasive alien species and climate change (Eshun, 2011). During the colonial era, native inhabitants were misrepresented as heedlessly destroying the environment. This painted the scenario of an environment in crisis, and contributed to the view that the postcolonial countries were incapable of managing their own resources and that external administration therefore had to be imposed (Brandon et al., 1998). Current discourses and practices in ecotourism development still incorporate these false notions; Upton (2008:176) suggested that ecotourism developers rely 'on ahistorical, aspatial and asocial blueprints'.

Usually, international and national actors enter into dialogue with 'local power centres' about developing ecotourism in their communities. Since land remains the property of landowners, their approval is sought first, followed by that of the chiefs. The concept of 'community' in ecotourism in Ghana thus gives precedence to these two groups, rather than the broader local community.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s led to the introduction of the Local Government Law (PNDC Law 207) in 1988/89, which emphasised involving local communities in development projects. However, international and national stakeholders in Ghana still treat local communities as though they lack the knowledge to participate in conservation and development projects. To many authors, western environmentalism seems to reinforce the deeply rooted image of Africa as a spoiled Eden (Leach & Mearns, 1996; Honey, 2008).

Article 267, section (6) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana stipulates that natural resource royalties should be shared among local chiefs, paramount chiefs and District Assemblies. The 1962 Concessions Land Act gives sole authority to the government to control the forest reserves proclaimed in the colonial era and any other natural area to be protected. The government inherited its position on conservation from the colonial administration. 'Crisis' narratives resulted in the colonial administration employing Thompson, an Indian-trained forester, to detail Ghana's forests in 1908. Sadly, as his Forestry Department grew, the foresters he hired were all expatriates, including Chipp, Gent and Moor, who were trained and had earlier served in India or Burma; this implied 'native deficiencies' in managing their resources.

The manager of Kakum National Park notes that ‘the surrounding communities see us as some kind of oppressors, who deny them access to their God-given resources’ (study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013). To the director of the Nature Conservation and Research Council, ‘the Wildlife Division, which is in charge of the management of state-led ecotourism initiatives, provides tokenistic jobs in local communities, as against creating equitable platforms, where local communities could bring their interests into ecotourism management’ (study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013). Therefore, especially in state-led ecotourism, ‘community refers specifically to chiefs, landowners and District Assembly members, which de-emphasises issues of heterogeneity and equity in local communities’ (study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013). Similarly, Akama et al. (2011) confirm that the pioneer national parks in Kenya tended to exclude local communities from decision-making, in part due to crisis narratives.

Nelson (2003:80) acknowledges that ‘the emotional power of these images for European and American audiences is not in doubt’. Colonial narratives promoted the idea that natural areas are destinations free from the negative effects of modernity. For example, a Wildlife Division official notes that ‘we seek to develop an eco-park in the Achimota Forest in Accra, to generate revenue by allowing people to experience nature in its undisturbed form, distinct from the hurly-burly of the city’ (study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013). Belsky (1999) points out that at Gales Point Manatee, Belize, the views of locals were misrepresented to suit the plans of the developers. National developers often misrepresent local communities in ecotourism by ‘concealing’ them and marketing ecotourism as a ‘pristine’ form of tourism. For example, Eshun & Tonto (2014) show that elephants raiding farms around Kakum National Park are seldom captured in ecotourism research in Ghana. A Wildlife Division official notes:

Community members stress that we as workers and visitors to the forest fail to acknowledge that the Mona monkeys are pest, as they steal foodstuff in homes and eat almost everything in gardens; yet this circadian pestilence is marketed to tourists as locals living traditionally and harmoniously with monkeys. (Study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013)

The director of the Ghana Heritage and Conservation Trust cautions:

We seem to fall into the trap of parading some ecotourism destination as untouched, when local communities have been living in and around them for centuries, as in the case of Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary, where the destination was marketed as an idyllic place with monkeys once serving as messengers of local deities, so as to create a mystical and exotic image to attract international tourists. (Study interview, Director of Nature and Conservation Research Centre, John Mason, Accra, 2013)

Andreasson (2005) argues that ecotourism still appropriates colonial images to lure western tourists by presenting the natives as ‘noble savages’. Eshun (2011) maintains that no matter what the economic benefit, the misrepresentation of local communities limits their ability to ‘speak back’ through tourism.

To increase community involvement, community-based ecotourism initiatives in Ghana select people around the eco-destinations to form Tourism Management Committees. These committees immediately face two challenges. First, since colonial conservation ‘privileged’ landowners and chiefs as the custodians of land, they are often still accorded special privileges in ecotourism development. For example, during the development of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary, the landowners demanded that the Tourism Management Committees consist only of members from their tribe. At the Makuleke Contract Park in South Africa, ‘there were too many members of the royal family serving on the park’s executive body and job opportunities were given to affiliates of the royal family’ (Shehab 2011:342–3). Currently, the revenue-sharing systems at most community-based ecotourism sites in Ghana involve landowners receiving individual shares. Such a lack of proper accountability to the larger community can create suspicion about this form of ecotourism. A Wildlife Division official at Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary states that ‘in 2003, because of a lack of accountability structures, 20 youths from the village stormed the Tourism Management Committees office and sacked all the officials on demand of accountability and transparency’ (Eshun, 2011). Tourism Management Committees are also poorly trained, especially in tourism management, which inevitably reduces the benefits from ecotourism for local communities (Eshun, 2011). Johnston (2000) also notes that ecotourism initiatives often marginalise conservation projects related to local ecological knowledge.

4.4 Local ecological knowledge in ecotourism

The Quebec Declaration and the Oslo Statement on ecotourism stress the need for ecotourism stakeholders to consider indigenous knowledge alongside the natural science and topographic features on which developers rely in determining the parameters of habitat and species health. Johnston (2000) argues that indigenous knowledge is important to conservation. Local ecological knowledge initiatives focus on the knowledge base of indigenous people. Hens (2006) differentiated between local ecological and scientific knowledge, seeing the former as community based, value laden and built on oral heritage, while the latter is systematic, universal, value free and documented. The importance of the two types of knowledge in ecotourism cannot be overemphasised. For instance, at the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary, the director of Nature Conservation and Research Council explained that:

[An expedition by Earthwatch scientists from 2000 to 2003] documented over 210 species of plants, birds (200 species), bats (16 species), rodents (26 species), snakes (13 species) and amphibians (6 species). Although plant species such as *Heeria isginis* and *Strychnos spinosa* are rare in Ghana, they are common in the Sanctuary, which might boost tourists’ experience. (Study interview, Director of Wildlife Division, Kofi Nsiah, Accra, 2013)

Such scientific expeditions often involve local people as guides or to clear trails, but ignore their knowledge. When Conservation International sponsored a five-year research project in Ghana, the consortium of researchers only invited the chiefs of the surrounding villages to the closing ceremony. Although effective local planning must reflect the knowledge of the indigenous people, international and national agencies continue to determine the value of biodiversity, further eroding the alternative socio-cultural values assigned to nature

(Eshun & Tonto, 2014). Conservation actors are gradually recognising that differences between local communities and ‘experts’ in the approach to particular issues may frustrate even well-intentioned projects (Lash & Austin, 2003). The manager at Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary in Ghana stated that:

Besides the science-determined flagship butterfly species, visitors are enamoured with a folktale about a liana – *Delbergia lacti* (known locally as ‘homakyem’). This plant has an intricate stem and local healers used to collect some of its leaves only at midnight and they were supposed to be naked; only then it is believed the leaves preserved their spiritual and medicinal powers. (Study interview, Manager, Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary, Kofi Domfeh, Kumasi, 2014)

Based on research on the Balkans, Duvic et al. (2014:61) state that ‘it is necessary to connect the culture with the natural resources in order to create complex images, so that visitors could be able to develop an awareness of the community and the local way of life’. A Wildlife Division official at Owabi Wildlife Sanctuary notes that ‘the need for blending indigenous ecological knowledge in ecotourism in Ghana is long overdue’ (study interview, Tour Guide, Owabi Monkey Sanctuary, Edward Owusu, Accra, 2014). These examples demonstrate how local worldviews can contribute to the sustainability of ecotourism initiatives. Eshun (2011) points to the need for ‘fusion knowledge’ or finding a compromise between local ecological and scientific knowledge in ecotourism. Through research tools such as rural participatory appraisals and rapid rural appraisals, actors involved in ecotourism can generate ‘fusion knowledge’ to help create a sense of ownership in local communities and even improve the experience for ecotourists.

5. Conclusion

Despite growing research on ecotourism in Ghana, it is unclear to what extent colonial approaches to forestry and wildlife conservation still influence ecotourism in the country. This paper examines ecotourism development in Ghana from a postcolonialist perspective. It shows that ecotourism in the country, much like colonial forestry and wildlife conservation, faces challenges such as the marginalisation of the local community, the use of neo-crisis narratives, a dependence on international forces, and the marginalisation of local ecological knowledge.

Indeed, local and national elites and international sponsors perpetuate ‘reductive repetition’ in conservation and development initiatives. Despite new ways of thinking about the failures of and possibilities for success on the continent, allusions to the ‘natural weakness’ of especially the African peasantry remain evident in these discourses and practices (Akama, 2004; Andreasson, 2005; Akama et al., 2011). Consequently, national officials and international collaborators largely exclude local communities from state-led ecotourism, on the premise that they lack expertise. However, there are virtually no training mechanisms to equip local residents to manage their own natural resources. Almost invariably, national officials and international collaborators couch their reservations about including local communities in management of ecotourism in neo-crisis narratives (Leach & Mearns, 1996; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). As a result, the focus on international tourism and foreign investment often stifles the development of domestic tourism in the country (Eshun, 2011; Eshun & Tonto, 2014).

Although community-based ecotourism in Ghana seeks to address some of these deficiencies, such initiatives remain dependent on international forces and often sideline the aspirations and ecological knowledge of local communities. Milazi (1996:45) argues that ecotourism in Africa should be ‘guided by what is necessary and what is possible and what it will cost in financial terms, in institutional terms, and in terms of shared social responsibility towards achieving biodiversity conservation and rural community development’. This said, the overarching challenge for the diverse stakeholders in ecotourism in Ghana is not whether the country should promote ecotourism, but rather what kind of ecotourism should be developed holistically as a win–win strategy for biodiversity conservation and community development.

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