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My Loom and Me: The Role of the Handloom in a Weaver's identity Creation

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Abstract

Handloom artistry dates back to the 17th century in Africa. In Ghana, the handloom is used to produce the traditional Kente textiles, which form part of the country's identity. This research focuses on Bonwire, Ghana a weaving community in the Ashanti region, that is specialised in the weaving of the Kente textile. However, modernisation and globalisation are seemingly threatening this industry, as a new trade law allowed imports of printed Kente-inspired textiles from Europe, America and Asia. This chapter focuses on the artisans involved in the handweaving process of the Ghanaian Kente textiles, by investigating the role of the handloom on the identity of the weavers. Weaving with a handloom has a long-standing tradition in Bonwire, thus, exploring the implications of modernisation and globalization on this traditional trade and subsequently on the identity of the weavers will be explored. This qualitative enquiry draws on 20 semi-structured interviews with artisans involved in the Kente weaving process, to explore the role of the handloom on their identity. Initial findings highlight that the art of using the handloom is infused into the culture of the weavers of Bonwire. The weavers have taken the handloom to represent a part of their identity, in that without the handloom, it will appear as though they have no identity.

Keywords: *handloom, weavers, identity process, Kente, corporate heritage identity, social sustainability, Bonwire, Ghana*

1. Introduction

Change is a key part of our society, which sometimes also implies that traditions may disappear. Losing traditions can, in a worst case scenario, lead to also losing parts of a country's heritage, whilst in other cases, it may support bringing traditions into a new century (Afeadie, 1989). One of the few traditions which forms part of heritage that has stayed in the continent of Africa is the art of weaving with a handloom, to create heritage materials (Essel and Asare, 2020), which traditionally was done by hands only, yet over time has seen the creation of a handloom that simplifies some of the weaving process. To explain, although the handloom is an upgrade from the methods used in weaving in the past (Ball, 1997; Asmah et al., 2015), it does not stray from the idea that the hands still do the weaving and the handloom only helps to keep threads in line and makes the overall weaving of the textiles easier and more manageable. The art of weaving with the handloom dates back to the 17th century in Africa (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). Even before handlooms were created, there were different ways by which weaving was achieved. The handloom was developed by concerned individuals that sought for a way to weave in a faster manner and achieve a quality finish in the products within a shorter period of time. Research on weaving considers the textiles that are being created (Boateng, 2011; Amissah and Afram, 2018). The handloom, however, is rarely discussed and when it is, it is in relation to the different components of the handloom and the role each component plays (Amissah and Afram, 2018; Nyante et al., 2019). As times are changing, so are the minds of people with regards to the methods used to produce certain products (Adom et al., 2016). As people are focusing more on speed and being able to produce the Kente cloth (traditional heritage material) in a shorter time (Ball, 1997; Asmah et al., 2015), the weavers of Bonwire, Ghana, have decided to continue on with their tradition (Smulders Cohen, 2019); although it takes time, it is a luxury product that requires attention and great detail.

Handloom weaving not only has a long tradition, but also is considered an important activity in West Africa (Afeadie, 1989), especially in a community such as Bonwire, Ghana. Although the traditional handloom weaving has been threatened by tough competition from European and Asian markets, fostered by globalisation and modernisation and an ever growing demand for textiles to be produced at a faster pace (Awuyah et al., 2018), the art form of handloom woven textiles in Western Africa

has managed to survive until the present day (Afeadie, 1989; Cour and Snrech, 2020). A possible explanation for this could be the fact that cultural heritage is embedded within these traditionally produced handloom woven textiles, of which *Kente* is one. This chapter explores the aspect of 'cultural heritage further', by investigating the role of the handloom woven textiles and the artisans (weavers) behind the trade. Thus, we further explore how global changes affect the wellbeing of these weavers on a social and economic sustainability scale, seeing as globalisation and modernisation are an ongoing trade and will have an impact on communities, such as Bonwire.

Bonwire is located in Western Ghana (in the Ashanti Region), and is the birthplace of *Kente* production, with the community having been established over 300 years ago (Lartey, 2014; Asmah et al, 2015; Mawere and Mubaya, 2016; Smulders Cohen, 2019). The community itself consists of more than 800 houses and is home to approximately 2000 weavers, all of whom are involved in the *Kente* creation process. Weaving in Bonwire is a predominantly male trade that is supported by females in the early and late stages of the production process. To explain, women, in the past, have processed and dyed yarns in order to be woven into the *Kente* strips, as well as sell the finished products on the market (Boateng and Narayan, 2017; Smulders Cohen, 2019). In more recent years, yarns are not dyed and spun by women anymore but are rather outsourced due to the lack of care given to the weaving industry and high demand for imitated textiles (Boateng, 2011; Lartey 2014, Boateng and Narayan, 2017). Interestingly, it is a taboo for women to weave the actual *Kente* strips for fear of being barren (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). Thus, knowledge of the weaving process is passed down to men by their forefathers, whereas the knowledge of spinning and dyeing yarns, and selling *Kente* products is passed down to women from their female ancestors (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). Based on the weaving process that takes place within Bonwire, social sustainability will be considered.

Social sustainability emerges as a potential theme, as it is the aspect of using what is necessary to sustain life and social wellbeing within a community (Paris, 2020), and this is achieved through the *Kente* textiles that are being produced in Bonwire (Fening, 2006; Boateng and Narayan, 2017; Smulders Cohen, 2019). It plays a crucial role in the community as the weavers build their livelihood on the textiles they produce (Boateng, 2011). Cases have emerged about how social sustainability is not being regarded within the fashion industry (Thomas, 2018; Safi and Rushe, 2018;

Young, 2020). An example of this is in regard to the Rana Plaza factory incident in Bangladesh. This incident raised issues about the social concerns associated with fast fashion and brought about the move towards ethical fashion (Young, 2020). The social concerns in this case are linked to sustainability, more precisely, social sustainability. Social sustainability considers addressing social concerns within a community, whether it be tangible factors that can be measured [which includes urban planning and design principles (Jabareen, 2006; Dempsey et al., 2011; Woodcraft, 2015)] or intangible factors that cannot be measured (Coleman, 1988; Eizenberg and Jabareen, 2017). The social concerns in this definition can be linked to the case of the Rana Plaza factory, which considers the well-being and safety of the employees, the working conditions [in relation to the environment in which they work] and labour rights (Young, 2020). According to Vallance et al. (2011) social sustainability is made up of three parts: the development aspect, which focuses on meeting basic needs; bridging sustainability, which considers changing behaviour to meet bio-physical environmental goals; and maintaining sustainability which focuses on what can be sustained in social terms. Based on this, this chapter will take a closer look at the level at which social sustainability is applied to Bonwire, and will consider the role the handloom plays within these conditions.

Handlooms, in communities such as Bonwire, provide jobs for the inhabitants and a learned trade, which provides them with security (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). The weaving process is their (weavers) means and source of income to take care of themselves and their families (Smulders Cohen, 2019). Yet, in the 21st century, as was indicated, this source of income and security is threatened by globalisation and modernisation, partially through the trade liberalisation law, which was established in the 1980s, which caused a decline in textile production within communities such as Bonwire being highly impacted by this trade law (Boateng, 2014). Thus, it may not be surprising that wax prints have taken over the Ghanaian market, which often replicate traditional *Kente* designs, yet are printed on lesser quality fabrics at higher speed, due to using machinery (Boateng, 2011). In order to understand the impact of globalisation and modernisation on the weavers, this chapter will consider if the handlooms bring about a sense of identity for the weavers.

2. Handloom weaving and the Identity Process

2.1 Identity Process

As indicated, *Kente* plays an important role in Ghana as this textile contributes to the identity of the country, per the First president of Ghana's, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, declaration (Fening, 2006). This shows the importance ascribed to not just the *Kente* cloth, but also to the processes that take place using the handloom. This section will look into corporate heritage identity (CHI), taking into account the identity the handloom may give the weavers. In looking at CHI, it would be relevant to understand how heritage and identity have been defined by scholars in order to have a clearer understanding of it (corporate heritage identity) is defined (Balmer, 2011). The definition of identity will be drawn from the identity process theory. An identity encompasses the characteristics and distinctive features of a subject, and implies that something remains the same irrespective of changes over time (Bosma, 1995). Thus, the identity of something can be maintained regardless of the processes or changes it may undergo. According to Burke (1991) an identity "*is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is*" (p. 837). In the case of Bonwire, the social role refers to the weavers, whose trade profession is linked to the past, as it is 'handed down' through generations. This aspect of heritage, the aspect of handing down knowledge of the trade, will be linked to Corporate Heritage Identity (CHI) which will consider the collective identity of the weavers within Bonwire.

As seen above, Bosma (1995) and Burke (1991) definitions consider the characteristics attached to a subject or the meanings applied to oneself in a social role respectively. Morton (2019) also suggests that an individual's identity is linked to heritage; heritage here meaning a unique inherited sense of family identity which involves valuable tangible and intangible culture being handed down by previous generations. This definition by Morton (2019) links heritage with identity. Heritage, as defined by UNESCO (2017), supports Morton's (2019) notion, by extending it to a location, thereby informing tourists about cultural objects and heritage, in which it was obtained. Harvey (2008) suggests that heritage looks at how people use the past and links this with identity construction at a communal and personal level. Heritage, in this sense, is used in the tasks that are to be carried out that also consider future generations (Harvey, 2008). McDowell (2016) indicates that heritage "can be seen as an aggregation of myths, values and inheritance determined and defined by the needs of societies in the present" (p. 37). Here, heritage is defined based on the needs of

societies in the present. One may suggest that heritage in itself, based on some of the definitions, is an identity. Thus, it can be seen that there is a link between heritage and identity, which is similar to the case of CHI in that CHI refers to organisational traits from the past [heritage] that have remained meaningful and relevant for present and future generations (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014). Having seen the link between heritage and identity, CHI can be further explained and linked to the handloom.

CHI can be described as a combination of continuity and change (Balmer, 2011), because they are of the past, present and future (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014). This is similar to the definition of identity suggested by Bosma, (1995), in that there is continuity, which is remaining the same, and change. Burghausen and Balmer (2014) suggest that some aspects of an organisation's past are considered as corporate heritage. In the context of Bonwire, what can be considered as corporate heritage, would be the generational tradition of weaving the textiles (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). Heritage identities change to acquire new identities as time goes by (Balmer, 2011; Burghausen and Balmer, 2014), which means that although the identities remain the same, the meanings behind them can change over time. This is known as Relative Invariance (Balmer, 2011). They are an accumulation of various identities, which are linked to organisations, places, culture and to timeframes (Balmer and Greyser, 2006; Balmer, 2011). At the core of the framework (Figure 1) is trust, which shows the relationship between the organisation and the stakeholders of heritage identities (Balmer, 2011a; 2011b). However, this chapter focuses only on the organisational side of the framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Organisation side of the CHI framework (adapted from Balmer, 2011b)

On the organisational side of this framework, it considers the organisation's identity in relation to being royal, regal, its rituals and religious aspects. This side of the framework considers the perseverance of the salient heritage features in relation to their authenticity (Balmer, 2011). The Royal dimension considers the identity of the organisation in relation to its distinction and importance. The regal dimension focuses on the behaviours and the culture of the organisation. The ritual dimension focuses on the values and the beliefs of the organisation. And the religious dimension considers the spiritual attributes which have been infused into the heritage brand. These four dimensions emanate from the authenticity of the organisation. After looking into the identity framework, it would be beneficial to also look into its linkage with the trade of weaving.

Bonwire has been a community of interest in relation to the trade of weaving. Some articles have considered the educational aspect in the weaving process (Boateng and Narayan, 2017; Boateng, 2018; Kraamer, 2020). These articles consider the transfer of knowledge of the art of weaving to the upcoming weavers. From an early age, there is the process of learning about all the weaving techniques and how to be able to draft designs in the mind, and be able to apply them physically on the handloom without any physical guidance (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). Also, the cultural aspect is linked to the handloom (Schneider, 1987; Amissah and Afram, 2018; Essel and Asare, 2020; Kraamer 2020). These articles consider the strong culture behind the art of this trade as well as heritage (Schneider, 1987; Amissah and Afram, 2018). There are also meanings associated with the textiles that are woven using the handloom (Badoe and Opoku-Asare, 2014; Kwakye-Opong, 2014; Kuwornu-Adjaottor et al, 2016; Boateng and Narayan, 2017). There is also the most important aspect that is strongly linked to the handloom and that is the art of weaving (Badoe and Opoku-Asare, 2014; Kwakye-Opong, 2014; Kuwornu-Adjaottor et al., 2016; Boateng and Narayan, 2017; Amissah and Afram, 2018; Smulders Cohen, 2019). This being the most important considers the work the weavers carry out using the loom (Smulders Cohen, 2019), and is shown in the textiles produced, which in Bonwire is referred to as the *Kente* cloth (Figure 2 & 3) (Fening, 2006; Boateng and Narayan, 2017).

Figure 2: Kente strip being woven by weaver. (Photographed by Yaw Pare, 2019)

Figure 3: Different Kente strips with different designs (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2019)

Based on the understanding of the research that has been conducted in relation to weavers and the art of weaving, the dimensions of the CHI framework will be explored in relation to the weavers as the organisational part of the CHI framework. The Royal dimension, in relation to the weavers, considers what makes them distinct and what also gives them their identity. From the regal dimension, the culture of the weavers is all centred around the art of weaving with a handloom. Their behaviour in relation to the loom will be further explored through interviews which will be discussed in the Methodology section. The ritual dimension considers the values and beliefs of the weavers associated with the trade, which would also include the objects they use. And the religious dimension will consider all spiritual or ancestral attributes which have

been infused into this trade making it very important. Here, one may say that the religious aspect, which focuses on what is outside the physical realm, strongly drives the trade as the ancestors are still to some extent guiding the trade (Boateng, 2011; Sabutey et al., 2013).

After closely looking at the organisational dimensions from the CHI framework in line with the weavers as the organisation in the framework, a few points can be highlighted. According to Wheeler and Bechler (2020), objects [in this case the handloom] being frequently used increases its linkage between the object and the self. This can be the case in relation to the royal dimension. Objects owned, or in the case of this chapter, inherited, add more value to the object because of the sense of owning it (Wheeler and Bechler, 2020). Objects are often cherished because of their association with beliefs, experiences, memories, people, places or values that are significant to their owners (Orth et al., 2018). This can be linked to the ritual dimension. It may be the case in Bonwire as the weavers have been brought up to know about the processes of weaving and have been shown exactly what object [the handloom (Figure 4)] must be used to achieve quality handwoven fabrics. As this trade has been used in Bonwire for over 3 centuries, one may suggest that the art of weaving and using the handloom in Bonwire is highly cherished due to the beliefs and heritage behind it. From this, the owners of the objects develop a sense of self, in that they feel that the object completes their identity (Orth et al., 2018). Following this, and considering that the community of Bonwire produces textiles, social sustainability sparks an interest into exploring what the social conditions are like within the community in relation to this trade.

Figure 4: Weaver working on the handloom (Photographed by Yaw Pare Photography, 2019)

2.2 Social Sustainability and the weavers:

Considering that Bonwire is a community that is centred around weaving a heritage textile, one may wonder what the working conditions may be like, as well as the livelihood of the weavers. Thus, an aspect of sustainable development must be further explored in such a setting. Sustainable development is usually thought of when social sustainability is mentioned. Sustainable development is defined, per the Brundtland Report (1987) as being able to meet the needs of the present generation without affecting the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Following the development of sustainability, social sustainability has been considered a subset from the sustainable development framework (Elkington, 1998). Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017) suggest that social sustainability considers people living within certain environments and wanting to work within those environments but are also mindful of the environment, in that they are not abusing the resources. McKenzie (2004) however believes that there has been a struggle for businesses to show concern towards the social dimension of the sustainability framework. In the light of considering the weavers, one of the objectives considers the way by which the trade helps to support the weavers, if it does and how social sustainability can be linked to the object in itself, the handloom (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Weavers using the handlooms (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2019)

McKenzie (2004) suggests that social sustainability is a “life enhancing condition within communities, and a process within communities that can achieve that condition”

(p. 12). This shows that in considering social sustainability, the livelihood of the people involved should be considered. Much like Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017), there is the joint mindset of preserving the environment even though some of the resources may be used. From having such a mindset, the processes, as mentioned in McKenzie's (2004) definition, will come into play to manage the resources and the environment. This chapter will explore how the handloom can be linked to social sustainability. From the literature so far, one can see that objects bring about a sense of help and help in generating one's identity (Orth et al., 2018). This can be linked to social sustainability as the process of identity can be seen to enhance the lives of the people within communities. Under social sustainability, there is the aspect of maintaining equity between generations, which means that the future generations will be able to also have access to certain features due to the fact that they are not being misused or mismanaged by the current generation (McKenzie, 2004). Identity also is linked to social roles (Burke, 1991) and in the case of this chapter, that would be the roles as weavers. What is uncertain is whether the handloom will affect the identity of the weavers as well as their livelihood in such a community.

Following this, the methodology will discuss the methods involved in obtaining data in relation to this chapter. The methods will aid in understanding what the exact role of the handloom is in Bonwire, as well as if the handloom can be linked to social sustainability.

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature in that it aims to explore and understand the relationship between the weavers and the handloom as well as the wellbeing of the weavers due to modernization and globalisation which is also affecting their industry. This research takes on a case study format focusing on Bonwire and the weavers within the community. A total of 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted and are used as a method to obtain information from the participants. The duration of the interviews with the weavers lasted between 10 to 30 minutes, bearing in mind that they have busy schedules and are still working. The average interview lasted 14.36 minutes. Table 1 gives the details of the participants and their profession

as well as their gender. One woman was considered in the interview process who also gave insight to what is being researched on. This was due to the fact that her husband, who is a weaver, was unavailable to be interviewed so she volunteered to be interviewed in his place. The sampling technique used is the purposive method as this will be the most effective in studying a certain cultural domain (Dolores and Tongco, 2007). This method of sampling will generate the needed quality of data gathered. As such the technique considers the following criteria: *a) must be a weaver or involved in the weaving process or have a good understanding of the weaving process, b) must live in Bonwire.*

Table 1: Participant Interview Information

Participant code	Profession	Gender	Interview duration
Interview1Weaver	Weaver	Male	27.28
Interview2Weaver	Weaver	Male	30.32
Interview3Weaver	Weaver	Male	14.11
Interview4Weaver	Weaver	Male	12.33
Interview5Weaver	Weaver	Male	12.45
Interview6Weaver	Weaver	Male	9.18
Interview7Weaver	Weaver	Male	8.20
Interview8Weaver	Weaver	Male	10.55
Interview9Weaver	Weaver	Male	12.31
Interview10Weaver	Weaver	Male	12.35
Interview11Weaver	Weaver	Male	16.06
Interview12Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	10.42
Interview13Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	11.24
Interview14Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	10.28
Interview15Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	25.33
Interview16Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	6.07
Interview17Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	17.24
Interview18Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	17.40
Interview19Weaver	Seller	Female	15.42
Interview20Weaver	Weaver/Seller	Male	8.59

A grounded approach to analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from the participants. It followed Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2012) Seven step guide in analysing the data to produce desired results. The aim of using this analysis approach is to reveal the phenomena behind the relationship between the handloom and the weavers who use it, by allowing the data collected to speak for itself (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The grounded approach to analysis uses the seven steps guide as suggested by Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), which are: familiarization, reflection, open coding, conceptualisation, focused re-coding, linking and re-evaluation (Table 2). The researchers familiarised themselves with the data to understand what the data suggests and the weavers' point of view and how it is being expressed. The researchers reflected on the theories that were discussed in the literature to understand what the data is about and if it challenges the existing theories or reveals others.

Table 2: Defining 7 Steps to Grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012)

7 Steps to analysis	Purpose
Familiarisation	To go through the data set and be reminded of what the study is about.
Reflection	This refers to looking at the existing knowledge provided about the theory and trying to see in what ways the data set relates to it
Open Coding	This refers to creating links between chunks of data that appear similar or related
Conceptualisation	This seeks to discover if there are any patterns observed in the codes derived from the dataset
Focused Re-coding	Requires the researcher to identify what is more important in the initial codes by referring back to the original dataset and conducting an in-depth analysis

Linking	Refers to drawing links between the patterns emerging between the concepts found in the data set
Re-evaluation	Refers to the researcher going through the data set to see if there are any other important factors that may have been omitted.

4. Findings

From the interviews conducted with people involved in the weaving process in Bonwire, there are a few highlights that we picked out. These are the fact that the loom acts as the workspace for the weavers, and without it, they cannot work efficiently; second, the loom is a part of the way of life for the weavers. As such, the weavers are very much connected to the loom in that without it, they feel almost lost. Lastly, there is a fear of modernisation with regards to weavers adapting new methods in order to be more efficient in the production of the textiles. These will be explained further below. From the findings, it can be noted that the loom identifies with the social roles of those that use them, that is the weavers. As suggested by Wheeler and Bechler (2020), the object being used frequently brings about the linkage between the user and the object and this can be seen in the case of the weavers and the looms they use. It is also important to note that the social concerns in the community, in relation to the jobs and working conditions are managed by the handloom itself as the handloom identifies the individuals as weavers. Without the handloom, there will be no jobs and there also would not be the means to support their families. The loom in this respect, addresses to some extent the social concerns that may arise within Bonwire. As seen through McKenzie's (2004) insight into social sustainability, the life enhancing condition here relates to the weavers being able to support their families and the community and the process to achieve this condition is by using the handlooms to weave. The findings thus justify the literature and shows that the handlooms provide a livelihood for the weavers and also gives them their identity.

4.1 Loom equals office space

The recurring words that came up in the interviews that were conducted was “we cannot find another way to weave without the handloom because the machine one makes it like a polyester, and you cannot get a texture like that” (Interview10Weaver). Interview4Weaver further highlights that “it is not possible to make the Kente without the handlooms because that loom we have some places that use it before so that thing helps us to make Kente. So, without the loom, we cannot make Kente”.

These quotes have several implications: 1) it revealed that they were not interested in any other way of weaving except that which they were taught. This shows a strong tie with heritage that has been passed down and also shows there is a strong connection between the weaver and the loom he uses. This can be seen through the use of words “not possible” and “without the loom”. This verifies Orth et al.’s (2018) research in that the object, in this case the loom, completes their identity. And 2) it shows that these weavers take pride in their work, and want it to be luxurious rather than being associated with ‘copycat’ items. *Kente* is a thicker cloth with a well-rounded tactile texture reminding consumers that the product is not only handmade and from natural materials, but also part of a tradition and a luxury item, which further highlights the importance of heritage and value.

“The handloom is our process. If you remove the handloom right now, you can’t weave Kente. The loom is like your office. You cannot go and sit somewhere without a chair and say here is my office. So far as you create an office, you need certain things to make that office special. The looms show that here is our office. We will find another loom and it is difficult for you to come and pick our looms. Without the looms we cannot do anything” (Interview1Weaver)

The quote above was drawn from a weaver who suggests that the loom is like their office. This shows the identity that has been associated with the loom, in that it gives them a profession. The loom provides jobs for the weavers and this is what contributes to their welfare and well-being. Through the use of the loom, which provides them with jobs, their needs are met in that each *Kente* that is handwoven by them using this loom will provide income for them to be able to take care of their families. Without the

looms, there would not be another way for them to generate income to take care of themselves. There is the Kente Weavers Association which contributes to the social construction of the environment. In the course of the interview, the weavers made reference to the fact that their income is cut short due to the imports of already spun spools which are used in the making of the Kente cloth.

“Also, almost all the yarns we use are imported. But it adds to our cost. And even that might not be the problem. The problem is, let’s say you come with your colour, you need this colour for a particular...for a purpose. You go to the whole shop, you don’t have that colour. If I intend to use that colour I need to see the importer to import that particular colour and that one will also attract extra cost. So sometimes you have to travel outside to get the materials. So if it will be, it will be better on our side to get, let’s say, a factory here that will produce this yarns for us. So as you come here and you want a particular colour that we don’t have it in the shop, we can easily go to the factory and give the colour to them and they mix the colours and produce it for us.”
(Interview17Weaver)

Suggestions were made to set up a local factory within Bonwire that produces and processes the yarns, which will be not only more cost effective for them, but also would bring back some of their traditions. As indicated in the introduction, women used to be responsible for spinning and dyeing yarns, yet due to modernisation and globalisation this tradition ‘has been outsourced’, but not forgotten. Building a factory, thus could also provide on the one hand more jobs for individuals within the community who do not want to weave (males), and on the other hand bring women back into the *Kente* weaving process. Thus, this also tackles another aspect within the social sustainability strand, in that females may feel more valued by contributing to the *Kente* creation process and thus, national heritage.

With regards to the maintenance of social sustainability, the culture and traditions of the inhabitants have been passed down for over 300 years and these traditions still remain today. However, aspects like the workspaces and working conditions are still quite underdeveloped as there can be around 20 weavers within a confined space without much legroom. The Kente Weavers Association aims to develop the

community through the contribution they collect together which is taken out of the monies made from the sales of their handwoven masterpieces. It is seen that social sustainability is directly linked to the handloom in that the handloom creates a livelihood for the weavers and provides them with stable income.

4.2 Loom as part of way of life

From the interviews, what stood out was how the weavers take pride in the fact that the loom provides them with jobs. As the Kente weaving process is a part of the community culture and plays a major role within the community, this has been infused into the culture and as such is seen as a norm. Young males, after completing high school, are drawn into the process of handweaving. Some learn at a much earlier age, as said by a weaver, but it can take up to 8 years to master this trade.

As all the males within Bonwire are involved in this, the skill is passed on to their sons to continue. Thus, everyone becomes at some point self-employed. However, this form of working is a cultural heritage which has to continue to thrive in order for Bonwire to remain relevant. This can then be linked to the identity process and CHI in that the heritage is passed down to the weavers and has become their identity.

“We do not want to find any other way to weave. We prefer this kind of weaving than anything else because the Tech people have created their own machine which they use to do the kente cloth so that one they will get a broader loom. But we do not want to go into that. You see, Kente, the joining at least makes it identified as kente. The joining helps us to identify whether it is real kente. Some people prefer hand stitching than machine stitching. If there is no handloom, we can never weave. We can’t do anything. We have these looms, so we are not looking any further.” (Interview6Weaver)

“You cannot make kente without the handloom because all the different pieces in the loom allow us to be able to make the kente. Even without certain pieces in the loom, we cannot make the kente. This helps to tighten the threads and keep them in place, and this helps to straighten the thread to make it easier to create the designs.” (Interview16Weaver)

From the quotes above, the weavers highlight certain things which shows that they know there are different processes involved in making the *Kente* cloth and the minute one item is missing, it cannot be made. This shows that they know the trade inside out to the extent that a missing item can interfere with their trade. There is some cultural fulfilment with the weavers taking pride in living in Bonwire. This is an intangible need that is being met by the standards of the development of social sustainability. In relation to bridge social sustainability, there is not clear communication as to inhabitants being “eco-conscious”. However, from previous generations, the environment has always been considered in the weaving process, as all the materials that were initially used in the weaving process were obtained from the environment. Now, there is the management of the agricultural aspect within the community to maintain and restore whatever is being taken or used. This chapter considers the handlooms as a way of life for the weavers, which has not been explored. It also shows that the looms, as heritage items, form the identity of the weaver and without it, they have no way of making a living.

4.3 Loom and fear of foreign take over

We observed that there is a fear of losing their culture if weavers succumb to globalisation and modernisation. The meaning and value that is seen in the *Kente* cloth will be gone the minute the textile is made using a machine. In this regard, it considers the *Kente* textile being made completely using a machine (the weaving aspect). The factory as proposed earlier in the finding relates to the community having a factory that produces the yarns that they use to weave the *Kente* cloth, and as such could contribute to the cultural heritage. However, from the data it becomes apparent that the weavers are strongly against having factories that produce *Kente*, but rather the factory should only support in the raw material stage, the reason that was given previously is that if *Kente* is made through a machine, it will lose its value. This also puts fear in the weaver that they will be without jobs due to the fact that the looms will not be relevant if the *Kente* cloth is produced using a machine.

“You cannot find another way to weave without the handloom. This is what we have been taught to use so without it, we cannot weave. The loom makes me the weaver. Without the loom I cannot weave. Who can go to a farm without a

cutlass? Everything is linked to the handlooms. This is our tradition and if we change and use machines, foreigners know machines more than us so they will take away weaving we are doing.” (Interview2Weaver)

There is also the fear of losing the tradition and culture to foreigners, which is the hand weaving. To explain, the weavers wanted to have a factory in their community that can be carefully monitored by them, rather than outsourcing their knowledge and traditions. As pointed out previously, the weavers currently have to import the yarns, which can be challenging especially if they need additional colours. If it would be produced within the community, these could be sourced faster and potentially more economically effective.

Not that factories for yarns are outsourced there is a fear this may be happening for the weaving process, which would lead to a sense of loss in that their identity will be stripped from them. Although Kente is made to give identity and this textile holds meaning, it does not mean much for the weaver because he gets his identity and recognises himself with the loom. This in a sense can be related to taking the breath out of a person and leaving them lifeless. The breath makes them exist, just as the loom makes the weavers relevant. Without the loom, they feel they are nothing.

5. Conclusion

What can be noticed in this chapter is that the identity process is very much linked to the handloom. The handloom in itself gives the weavers their identity. Also, within the identity process, heritage is revealed which then links intangible and tangible aspects to identity. Per the research questions listed above, this section will address the conclusions drawn.

1. What is the role of the handloom in the Kente producing community such as Bonwire?

As seen from the findings, the handloom is a heritage object that gives the weavers their social roles. This handloom classifies them as weavers within Bonwire and without it, the weavers feel unable to carry on in the trade. Based on previous research

that discusses the textiles woven, one can consider that if the weavers do not have the handloom, there would not be any textiles to research into. The loom acts as their office space where they are able to be creative and weave the textiles manually from memory (Boateng and Narayan, 2017). As such the handloom gives the weavers their identity as weavers and keeps them within this social role.

2. Can the handloom be linked to aspects of sustainability, more specifically social sustainability?

As seen above, social sustainability considers the livelihood of the weavers as well as how they work within the environment within which they live without abusing the resources. It also considers the processes involved in bringing about change to improve the lives of people within a community. The handloom, as a heritage object, can be linked to social sustainability in that it provides jobs for the male inhabitants of Bonwire. This can be linked to the definition of social sustainability given by McKenzie (2004) which considers that processes should be carried out to improve the conditions within a community. In this case, Kente weaving is known as the main trade of the community. In this sense, the trade is one of the processes to improve the quality of life within the community, Bonwire, as each male is involved in the process. The trade of weaving in Bonwire enhances the lives of the weavers in Bonwire. This enables them to take care of their families as well as the community.

Both research questions, having been addressed, brings about the contribution of this chapter. This study contributes to the Social Sustainability literature by linking the role of identity to the social sustainability dimension. The fact that a heritage object gives one identity that in turn enhances their living conditions is something to be considered in research. The study also considers the identity process which leads to a better understanding of CHI. Also, what can be noticed in this study is that heritage can be an identity, per the definition given by UNESCO (2017). This shows that the weavers are identified by what they engage with on a daily basis.

Limitations

The limitations to this research include the fact that the research focuses on the weavers within a specific community, Bonwire, and has not applied it to other aspects that may be present within a community. As Bonwire is a community, the inhabitants are closely knit together, hence the data saturation was met much earlier. As such other members within the community could have been considered to get their views on the handlooms and their role within the community.

Future Research

Research could be done considering the COVID-19 situation and how this impacted the weavers generally due to the lockdown and social distancing protocols. This can be further researched considering the social sustainability dimension as well as the identity process and the different stages involved in losing one's identity linked with a heritage object.

Secondly, this research can be explored further within different communities considering heritage items and the roles they play within the communities as they can vary. It can be explored from a cultural or beliefs dimension as well delving further into heritage to draw a stronger linkage between the identity process and heritage.

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