SOCIAL CONFLICTS IN CONTEMPORARY EFFUTU FESTIVALS

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The annual Deer Hunt Festival of the Effutu people of Ghana’s Winneba state continues to perplex the elders and chiefs of that land. Until recently, Aboakyer, which translates literally as “animal catch,” had been known as the nation’s most important traditional festival. But this has begun to change. A recent report in Ghana’s Sunday Mirror noted that the Aboakyer festival has decreased in importance. In its place, residents have begun to put their energy into the Fancy Dress Festival which, though initiated in the 1920s as a spoof on Western culture, has now taken on new importance, even replacing (for many) the Aboakyer.

This shift is due to a variety of developments, including: arguments between practitioners of traditional religion and converts to Christianity, divisions between age groups (elders remaining committed to Aboakyer), and national political parties (with members of the National Democratic Congress supporting the Aboakyer and members of the New Patriotic Party supporting the Fancy Dress Festival). Complicating this further is an ongoing dispute, which has repeatedly resulted in violence, within the Effutu royal family, where the Gyateh (or Ghartey) line is fighting with the Ayrebi Acqua line over which line is the rightful ruler. This ongoing violence has generally pushed people away from celebrating the Aboakyer festival, including commercial companies that once offered financial and administrative assistance.

The activities of both festivals are dominated by music and dance. For example, at the commencement of the deer hunt festival, elders meet at a shrine and invoke the spirit of the war god Penkye-Otu, who will lead them to the forest to hunt for a deer. Invocation is accomplished by singing provocative songs that anger the spirit who in turn mounts and possesses his
followers, preparing them for the hunt. Though done surreptitiously, leaders of the Fancy Dress Festival invoke Penkye-Otu as well. These same songs, now presented in a secular context, are later performed by brass bands.

This thesis will compare and contrast these two festivals. Research for the project was undertaken in Winneba in the summer of 2004 and included interviews with members of the Winneba traditional council, members of the brass ensembles, as well as elders, choreographers, and spiritual leaders of the four Fancy Dress Festival groups and the confederation that unites them. In addition I draw upon my own experience having grown up in Winneba and having participated in both festivals.
This work is dedicated to my beloved Wife

Allison Webb

for supporting me emotionally and financially

throughout the course of my study.
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INTRODUCTION

On the Gulf of Guinea, just 35 miles west of Accra, the capital of Ghana, lies Winneba, a historic fishing town with a population of about 26,000. It is a town with a long and important history. During the colonial period, the seaport was used to transact businesses between the Gold Coast (Ghana’s former name) and Europe; architectural shadows of this colonial past are still found in the old Elder Dempster shipping warehouses along the coastline. Years later, Winneba became the second Ghanaian town to receive electricity, shortly after the 1966 completion of the Akosombo Dam. Winneba boasts a respected university made up of the National Academy of Music, Specialists Training College, and Advance Teacher Training College. These institutions produce scholars and intellectuals who serve not only Winneba, but towns and villages across the nation.

Winneba’s traditional name is Simpa; inhabitants are known as Simpafo (people of Simpa). While these people belong to the Guan ethnic group, the Winneba land is surrounded by Akans (the largest ethnic group in Ghana). The groups do not speak the same language, though the Simpafo language borrows from Akan and several other Ghanaian languages (this is presumably due to the

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1 The three institutions were joined together to form the University of Education, Winneba.
group’s migratory past). Because of this mixed heritage, the Akans generally refer to the Simpafo as Effutufo, which translates as “people of mixture.”

How did the Guans end up in the midst of the Akans? According to Effutu oral history, they were among the first ethnic groups to settle in this region of the Gold Coast, arriving in Simpa prior to the Akans. Legend has it that the Effutu people migrated from Timbuktu (ancient Western Sudan Empire). After the fall of the old Ghana Empire and the 14th-century rise of Mali Empire, the Effutu people headed towards the south, traveling through the savanna and the rain forest to the coast, finally settling at Simpa. This journey was supposedly led by the war god Penkye Otu, who protected the ethnic group from all dangers.

To show their appreciation, the people consulted the custodian of the god in order to find a proper sacrifice. They wished that they had not, for to their astonishment, the god asked for a human sacrifice, someone from the royal family no less. This command was followed, for awhile at least. Not surprisingly, after some period of time the human sacrifice became unacceptable among the royal family, so a lion was substituted. This too was problematic as the animal was supposed to be caught alive and with bare hands. Finally, a deer or a kind of antelope was agreed to be used as sacrifice for the Penkye Otu.

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2 As an Akan who grew up in Winneba, I too came to use the term Effutufo. That is what I will mostly use in this paper when I refer to Winneba natives.

3 Formally, in Ghana members of the same ethnic group lived in the same vicinity with the same occupation. It remains like that today in some areas. So, it is strange to find a Guan ethnic group in the middle of Akans.
This sacrifice of a deer to the gods was later turned into the Aboakyer or “the animal catch” festival, which involved the entire community. The festival is presently celebrated on every first Saturday of May and it draws people from every part of the nation. This is just one of Winneba’s many annual festivals. Others include the colorful Fancy Dress Festival, backed by brass band music and held on January 1; Akomasi, a ritual festival celebrated in August that involves sacrificing domestic animals to the lesser gods of Winneba; and Easter, which is more observed and celebrated in Winneba than any other coastal town. All of these festivals are dominated by music, an art form close to the heart of the Effutufo. In the past, every educated person was expected to know how to play the piano, at the very least.

Some of the festivities mentioned above, like Aboakyer and the Fancy Dress, have gone through several changes that have either negatively or positively affected the entire Winneba community. As someone who grew up celebrating these traditions, I am both fascinated and concerned with these various changes. I worry that many of Ghana’s traditional festivals—and the cultures they support—are gradually dying, or at least changing for the worse. This is a tragedy. After all, if no one stands up to tell the story, a time will soon come when the next generation will be left with no understanding of their cultural heritage.
The various changes (and their motivations) are complex, often confused. For example, every festival in Ghana is being used to generate funds for the development of communities through incomes generated through tourism. But curiously, while festivals are becoming more modernized and westernized, the tourists (who often represent older generations) are often looking to witness traditional performances and practices. Yet, at the same time today’s youth—who are far most interested in new ideas and styles rather than those of their own heritage—tend to label traditional cultural activities as primitive and undeveloped. They prefer the so-called modern festivals. This conflict of interests is being played out in Winneba, which supports both traditional and modern festivals. Today, however, the sinews of tradition are being tested. There are several ongoing disputes in the town that have contributed to the deterioration of the traditional festival, including those over chieftaincy (constant fighting between the two royal families, modernization verses old tradition, the Gyateh and Ayirebi Acquah), religion (Christianity versus traditional worship), as well as a variety of political, social, and economic conflicts. It is my hope that airing

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4 "Tourism is the fastest growing sector of the Ghanaian economy. In the past seven years, it has achieved growth rates of 16-30% per annum in terms of number of tourists as well as foreign exchange revenue. The tourism industry contributed over 5% of the 1995 Gross Domestic Product, a total of U.S. $370 million. Tourism now ranks third as a priority sector after gold and cocoa. The Ghanaian government and a number of international development organizations have targeted tourism as a major contributor to the expansion of the nation’s economy." (Accessed December 2004). [http://www.ghana-com.co.uk/economy.html#Tourism](http://www.ghana-com.co.uk/economy.html#Tourism)
both sides of these issues will contribute to a dialogue that may help provide resolutions to these disputes.

In this thesis, I attempt a hermeneutical study of social conflict within two contrasting Effutu festivals, the Aboakyer and the Fancy Dress. The former represents traditional (critics say “primitive”) culture, the latter exemplifies the modern. I argue that the Aboakyer festival’s practices, which are generally seen as outdated by today’s youth, are open to a variety of interpretations by both practitioners and observers. The events are lively and full of vitality, providing a framework through which practitioners can engage, review, and discuss lived experience. In addition, I provide vivid accounts of the practices as used and understood by Winneba’s traditionalists and elders while also explaining the ways in which these long-standing insider meanings differ from those gleaned by today’s youth. In so doing, I do not mean to discredit the youth perspectives on the traditional festival’s practices. Rather, I strive to locate modern notions—such as arguments about animal sacrifice—within the context of traditional culture. This awareness—if once disseminated to Winneba’s youth—will help them to better assess the past while simultaneously allowing that past to fit more comfortably with the present.

The information presented in this paper is based on data collected during my research in Ghana during the summer of 2004, but it also derives from my
personal experiences living and growing up in Winneba. As a young man I invariably participated in both Aboakyer and Fancy Dress Festivals, often at the organizational level. My interactions with the elderly enabled me to learn more about the history of Winneba, from the time they migrated from Timbuktu until the development of the Aboakyer festival. As an insider, I had access to restricted information about the Gyateh royal family, which ordinary people in the town might not have. My Winneba peers were from the Gyateh family so the palace was open to us, a relaxing place where we could sit and discuss the family’s rich heritage without interruption. Such an opportunity is not open to outsiders.

Even though I am an Akan, my involvement with the activities of the Gyateh clan unfolded as if I were one of that family. Accordingly, I then invariably supported the Gyatehs against the Ayirebi Acquahs during their struggle to decide which group was the rightful heir to the throne of Winneba. Looking back today, I realize that I took these positions at that time because my one-sided source of information flowed from the Gyateh family; I never bothered to hear the other side’s argument. This contributed to inaccuracies in some of my early judgments on Winneba chieftaincy disputes and even on the Aboakyer festival itself.

This was clearly a problem, but not one unique to me or any other Winneba native. In fact, this is what happened to American anthropologists
Robert Wyllie and Eva Meyerowitz, who conducted field research in 1968 and 1994 respectively. Wyllie told the story from the Ayirebi Acquah’s perspective, Meyerowitz from that of the Gyatehs. Thus, while both wrote about the Aboakyer festival, each was caught up with inaccuracies and misleading information according to their limited perspectives. Of course, the difficulty for any scholar is to find a balanced perspective that can be understood and accepted by both sides of the conflict.

To get there, I decided to take a second look at the situation in Winneba by undertaking an approach that included well-conducted research of both royal families as well as of the various cultural practices of the Effutu people in general. In the summer of 2004, I left the United States for Winneba in order to conduct the research for this thesis. I had previously lived in Winneba for 15 years, but this time I worked to remain neutral and not take sides. Thus, I met with elders from both Gyateh and Ayirebi Acquah families, met with close and distant relatives of the royal families as well as ordinary town members, youth, cab drivers, church elders, fishmongers, and students from the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). I was always careful to begin by asking simple questions, even the naïve sort that a foreigner might ask, just so that I could get an idea of my informants’ perspectives and politics. Talking to the youth was enlightening. Some actually did not care about what is going on with the
traditional festival and therefore had nothing to contribute. Others were deeply involved and could not hide their biases (just as I could not have some eighteen years ago when I was in their place). Students from the UEW with whom I talked tried to impress me with what they had read from the work of Wyllie and/or Meyerowitz.

Many people provided important and useful information, which they backed up with facts and dates. Some supported their points by showing pictures of the royal families when they used to live as one people, before the conflict unfolded. Others provided very old documents to defend their particular stand. The thing that I found the most important of all this evidence and helpful in my thesis was the remembrances of the elders. Each of the two families included elderly people in their late nineties and early hundreds, people who were only consulted in times of difficulties or matters of some importance. I had the opportunity to talk to three of these elders.

The first was 104-year-old Reverend Ghatey Tagoe, a great grandson of King Ghatey II. It was fascinating to speak with Reverend Tagoe who, even though he is from the Gyateh family, thinks both families are crazy for fighting over worldly things. He presented his story about Winneba chieftaincy from a minister’s point of view. “The Ayirebi Acquahs are butterflies calling themselves birds,” said Reverend Tagoe, who thinks greed and ungratefulness (attribute he
claims for both families) contributed to the present disputes. It was Rev. Tagoe who suggested the other two elders with whom I spoke, one from each side of the conflict. He instructed me to mention his name when attempting to contact them, saying that if I did so I would be granted access. During his career as a minister, Reverend Tagoe was one of the few who could interact with both families without starting a fight.

The second and third elders were in their late nineties. My meetings with these two really changed my previous perspective on the Aboakyer festival and all that it entails. One commonality that I found was their concern with the state of Winneba’s traditional practices. They both talked against the constant fighting between the two royal families and condemned it as the cause of the problems Winneba faces today. I told them about my thesis and what I intended doing with it. I received the same response from both the second and third elders: I was told to listen attentively and decide for myself, because there is nothing anyone can do about the disputes unless the community revisits its past and corrects mistakes committed along the way. I wrapped up my research on the traditional festival and the Winneba chieftaincy after talking to these elders.

The second face of my research was to investigate the Fancy Dress Festival, which is gradually replacing the Aboakyer. As an old member of “Red Cross,” one of the Fancy Dress groups in Winneba, I did not have any big
problem organizing people to interview. I went through the same procedure I used when gathering information on the *Aboakyer* but had to pay some money to my group for evading monthly dues for almost ten years. It was fun going back to the group’s club house where I met with group executives and elders. I spent just three days in collecting the necessary information.

To help the reader get a clearer insight of the *Aboakyer* and the Fancy Dress Festivals of Winneba, and their impact on the Effutufo, I have presented both festivals by providing information that covers the following: identification of the Effutufo as an ethnic group, identification of the *Aboakyer* and Fancy Dress, the history behind both festivals (including why and how they are celebrated), changes made to the celebrations, and their continuing cultural significance.

Chapter I talks about the *Aboakyer* festival, the rituals and how the Effutufo celebrate. In this chapter I explain why a secret ritual that used to be performed by only the royal family later became a public celebration, therefore involving the town’s various *asafo* companies. This chapter also discusses related disputes in *Aboakyer* and gives particular attention to the issue of chieftaincy, which is the major problem of present Winneba. Chapter II gives a vivid account of the Fancy Dress celebration, beginning from the time it was established and continuing to the manner in which it is celebrated today. Chapter III discusses related disputes in the Fancy Dress Festival. The chapter also addresses the role
politics and religion play in these festivals, and finally analyzes the various youth perspectives. Chapter IV compares and contrasts both festivals and provides suggestions for future development. In concluding, I argue that both festivals are of relatively similar importance and suggest that all of Winneba’s people will benefit by learning to accept and respect the existence of opposing views.
CHAPTER I

THE ABOAKYER FESTIVAL

The Aboakyer or the deer hunt festival is celebrated annually every first Saturday\(^5\) of May, as an honor to Otu, a war god of Winneba, and Osim Pam, the great warrior who led the Effutufo through their migration to their present settlement. Eight weeks before the commencement of the festival, chiefs, elders, Supi (the heads of individual companies), and the Osow (priest), meet at the Omanhene's (paramount chief) palace to discuss the upcoming activities. After this meeting the Omanhene places a Winneba district ban on deer hunting, drumming, and the playing of any electronic music, even church organs. Violators are sent to the chief’s palace and are often slapped with a huge fine, payment for which can range from cash to bottles of schnapps to food stuffs (as much as a goat). There are often clashes with Christians, who feel they don’t belong to the old tradition and therefore need not follow the proscriptions, and the traditional believers. It is thought that the elders of the town use this quiet period to perform rituals pertaining to the old culture. At the same time, smaller groups meet secretly to rehearse the music and dance that is to be performed on the festival day. Such meetings are held late in the night and are always followed

\(^5\) Saturday was selected for the celebration because it is believed the Effutufo first arrived at Winneba on a Saturday after their migration from the Western Sudan Empire.
with street parties. Despite the music ban, no one is charged for making noise.\textsuperscript{6} The ban on music or noise making is lifted two weeks before the festival; the ban on hunting expires on the festival day, after the two groups have returned from the forest with their game.

Formally, the rituals honoring Penkye Otu included human sacrifice. Every year a member of the royal family was offered up in this capacity.\textsuperscript{7} This practice ended around the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Consequently, elders, members of the asafo companies, and the priest (known by the title of Acheampong, which is also the name of the god he represents) consulted the oracles and asked the god to accept a different sacrifice to replace the human one. “The lion’s blood is the only thing close enough to the human being,” claimed Nana Kofi Budu a sub-chief of Winneba with whom I spoke in the summer of 2004 at his family house near the Winneba prisons. According to Nana Budu, the first attempt to catch a lion (live with bare hands) ended with at least eight people dead.\textsuperscript{8} After several consultations, the god finally accepted the deer as the annual sacrifice, thus the rise of the Aboakyer (or the deer hunt festival). After that, the deer hunt became the most important event in the ritual calendar of the natives who live in

\textsuperscript{6} These transgressors are forgiven for variety of reasons, including: They create awareness of upcoming events, festival competition is keen, groups need to rehearse their choreographed movements and music compositions, and also the economic status of most participants makes it impossible for them to pay any fine.

\textsuperscript{7} Formerly slaves had been used for these sacrifices, but Penkye Otu demanded pure native blood from the royal family.

\textsuperscript{8} Perhaps it would have been better to sacrifice just a single person than to go for a lion.
Winneba and its environs. At present, sacrifices are made to the gods and ancestors. In return, these entities offer their protection and strengthen communal and familial bonds between *asafo* companies and the community as a whole.

**Asafo Companies**

The term *Asafo* is a combination of two Fanti words, “*sa*” (war) and “*fo*” (people), in other words “people of war.” These *asafo* groups, which are normally called companies, are spread throughout the coastal region of Fanti-inhabited Ghana. The number of companies in a single state ranges from two to seven depending on the size of the town and its inhabitants. Bigger towns like Cape Coast, Elmina, Anomabu and SaltPond have more companies than the smaller towns.

There are conflicting statements about the origin of *asafo*. One faction claims that the European presence in Gold Coast influenced the formation of the *asafo*, another claims it existed before that and resulted from internecine fighting among Akan groups, especially between the Ashanti and Fanti. Ghanaian scholars J. S. Wartemberg (a native of Elmina) and Kwame Arhin support the former notion. They believe that the European military and the *asafo* are connected in various ways. According to Wartemberg, during the wars between
the Fantis and Ashantis,9 “the able-bodied men in the towns and villages of Elmina were organized, with the assistance of the Dutch, into military groupings which became known as asafo companies, for the defense of civic interests.”10 Kwame Arhin states that “the asafo companies on the coast might have had their origin in the armed retainers who gathered around certain merchants for protection and security in the uncertain period of the slave trade”11 The asafo companies adopted other European military practices, including: the firing of musketry, the numbering and naming of companies, and the use of distinctive flags, many of the older of which bear the British Union Jack. Supporting the opinion that asafo existed before the Europeans, was my grandfather, E.J.P. Brown, a former magistrate of Cape Coast and asafo scholar.

Asafo companies are differentiated by the colors of their headdress and hairstyles, special drums, horns and other musical instruments, designation, and emblems. Automatically, one becomes a member based on the patrilineal system. Ansu Datta and R. Porter stated in “The Asafo System in Historical Perspective” that “the companies are identified by the colors of their uniform and flags, and by their emblems, either embroidered on flags or used separately as well as by a

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9 The Fantis and Ashantis belong to the Akan ethnic group of Ghana.
special appellation which is drummed as a form of greetings.”

Most important of all are the *franka* (flags), which are normally associated with the social activities of a company. During festivals, funerals, and an enstoolment of a chief, these flags are displayed through the streets, to the chief’s palace and even to the town shrines to portray their loyalty. Also, during festivals and state holidays, companies of the coastal towns demonstrate with colorful designed flags and proverbs to incite other companies. Such activities often lead to violence. Some of the images and the writings shown in the flag portray conflicts between rival companies.

ASAFO company activities are highly militant; members are predominantly young men. But the elderly also have their role they play within their various companies. Formally, among the Akans, elders who could not take part in fighting were often given the title *egyanom* (fathers); their duties were to give strategic advice in times of war. That title and the honorifics associated with it, remain in use today, despite the fact that there is no war. Female members *(adzewa)* were also assigned to special duties within the companies: they cooked for the men and took care of the wounded. They also provided music with calabashes to entertain the men after combat. Some *adzewa* song texts still heard

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today are based on the activities that happened during the times past. Thus the historical past of the *asafo* companies is preserved and told through song.¹³

Customarily, members of the same *asafo* company are supposed to live together or within the same area where they have their *posuban* (company post). In the past, the *asafo* posts were used to store arms and company’s regalia; they were seen as throttleholds for the protection of the village or town.

The divisional officers within an *asafo* company include *Tufuhene* (the military adviser to the chief of the town or village), *Asafobaatan* (next in line to the *Tufohene*), *Supi* (commanding officer), *Safohene* for the male or *Asafoakyere* for the female (divisional captain). Other officers include the *Asafokomfo* (priest), *Askanbafo* (bodyguard), *Okyerema* (divine drummer), *Frankatanyi* (flag bearer), *Skanbonyi* (sword maker), *Okyeame* (spokesperson or linguist), *Abrafo* (police officers), *Adumfo* (executioners) and the *Asafomba* (general body). According to Datta (1971), “even though the *asafo* in the past had its primary role as the defense of the state, it did perform other social services.” Today the *asafo* no longer fight in wars but rather serve in public duties, such as search parties when one is lost in the forest or when one drowns. The *asafo* companies also participate in communal labor, such as maintaining public cleanliness, clearing foot paths to

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¹³ Some brave women amongst the Akan ethnic groups did participate in wars, even becoming captains. An unusual example of a woman fighting in a war front is Yaa Asantewa of Edweso; she led the Ashanti army to fight against the British in the Yua Asantewa war of 1900.
the riverside and to the shrines, helping to build rural schools, and competing against each other during festivals.

In Winneba, there are two main asafo companies: Tuafo No. 1 Company and Dentsifo No. 2 Company, each with numerous subdivisions (divided according to tasks as outlined above). Membership in each company ranges from young to old, but Tuafo membership tends to be older than Dentsifo. Every Effutu, from childbirth does not merely join his or her father’s asafo company but also the division to which he belongs. Non-natives who like to participate in the Aboakyer festival will normally join a group of their choice based on the company’s colors, friends, age group, or area or residency.

**Aboakyer/Deer Hunt Festival**

The Friday before the festival, both companies prepare the paths that lead to the forest by performing rituals believed to conquer potential dangerous magical objects that might have been hidden by the opposing group.\(^{14}\) Any such magical objects removed by the priest are taken to the shrine and burnt to ashes.

As early as 3 a.m. on the Saturday of the festival, all male members belonging to both asafo companies gather at the shore to bathe in the sea, a final

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\(^{14}\) The ritual involves every member of the asafo companies. They meet at their various shrines and invoke the spirit of the god that will lead them in the hunt with music challenging their existence. After awhile when the priest is possessed by the spirit of the god, the elders pour libations and ask him to go after any evil objects planted by the other company to make them lose the competition. The possessed one steps out with a long spear, which he often places around his ears to communicate with the spirits. With constant singing and handclapping, the ritual finally comes to an end and everyone goes home to catch some rest and prepare for the early dawn hunt.
purification in readiness for the hunt. Women, meanwhile, prepare the men a breakfast of “rice water,” a rice-based porridge. After breakfast, the men gather at their posts and with chant of war songs, March to the paramount chief’s palace where they will be met by the chief, elders, members of the royal family. They exchange traditional greetings, and receive blessings and protection from the Effutu gods, valuable gifts for the forthcoming hunt. At exactly 5 p.m., Dentsifo takes the lead, since their forest is further than that of Tuafo. Both groups break into smaller units while singing and chanting war songs. These serve as sources of motivation for the hunt, just as they would have in a real war.

Every sub-group within a company is led by a Supi, who directs and commands the members on what is to be done during and after the hunt. On arriving at the forest, the companies quickly form concentric circles around the forest and then wait for instructions from their Supi, who awaits a signal from the sound of the sacred drum, “kyen Kofi,” to begin the hunt. At this point, everyone is anxious to begin. As soon as the priest finishes with the libation and the drum sounds, the Supis rush to the forest followed the rest of the members. Continuous deafening sounds are created from whistles, chants, drum beating, bullroarers, different metallic instruments, and hand clappers. These noises are intended to scare the deer out from the forest so that it can be caught barehanded. Most of the hunters are unarmed. They wear short pants, protective
charms and talismans, amulets, but neither shoes nor shirts. They carry short sticks used to trip the deer when it tries to flee. During such hunts, more than one deer is caught but it is only the first catch that counts because it is the first deer that is offered to the god *Penkye Otu* and other lesser gods.

While the hunt is going on in the forest, the *Omanhene*, sub-chiefs, elders, royal family members, and the entire *Effutu* community (as well as tourists from all over the world) wait on the grounds of the African Memorial Episcopal Zion School for the *asafo* groups to return from the forest. Also on the grounds are a variety of activities, including fund raising for future town developments and performances by folkloric groups.

In the forest, meanwhile, the *asafo* groups are making their catches and rushing back to the school grounds with their deer. Once arrived, the chief must inspect the animal and judge if its physical condition is worthy of *Penkye Otu*.

This process does not always go smoothly. On various occasions in the past decade, companies accused their rivals of cheating. For example, it is believed some members belonging to one company regularly tie a deer in the forest so that during the hunt its members can simply untie the animal and present it to the chief. I witnessed one such embarrassing situation in 1984 when a European Catholic priest, who was then serving in Winneba, confronted the chief before he could step on the deer at the durbar grounds. He claimed that
was his own stolen deer. News traveled fast. The incident reached the other
group before they were even back from the forest and they quickly had a song
ready to describe the incident:

_Womma Onyentam wom fa nkoe._
Roman Father oregye naaboa.
_Womma onyen tam wom fa nko._

Take it back as soon as possible.
The Roman Father wants back his deer
Take it back as soon as possible.

When the chief is satisfied with the catch, he then steps on the deer three
times signifying his acceptance and that officially brings the first part of the
festival and the contest to an end. After this, the deer is carried on the shoulders
of the victorious group amidst drumming and dancing through the excited
crowds of spectators lining the Winneba streets and on to _abosomba_\(^{15}\) where the
_Osow_ or the _asafo_ priest will be waiting to receive the deer on behalf of the gods.
Once the priest has performed a libation to the gods and ancestors of the
Winneba land, the deer is tied to a bundle of canes and carried away through the
principal streets amid drumming and chanting of _asafo_ war songs and finally to
the _Otuano_ shrine of _Penkye Otu._

\(^{15}\) _Abosomba_ is believed to be the meeting spot for the “_abosomadusonesoun_” (the seventy seven gods of
the Effutu land). It is the final destination for the deer that is caught before it is offered to the god _Penkye Otu._
Once at the shrine, the drumming and singing cease in order not to disturb the god. The deer is carried in a gentle manner into the shrine and left on a mukyia (three rocks arranged in a triangular form), after which the chief priest enters alone leaving behind other priests who will in their respective turns treat subsequent catches in the same manner as the first.

The Osow places his left foot on the deer and begins the rituals with a libation of thanks to Penkye Otu, other lesser gods who were called upon during the hunt, and the ancestors for their blessings and protecting the hunters. The priest follows the libation with a chant:

_Awo O! Awo O! Awo O!_
_Apaa ye Omangye saa._
_Ayee e! Ayee e!_
_Nsuo o, Nsu._
_Nam o, Nam._
_Omangye o, omangye saa._

O hail! O hail! O hail
_Apaa_ says peace and prosperity to the land.  
Yes. Yes.  
If water, then water.  
If fish, then fish.  
If peace and prosperity, peace and prosperity.

The crowd responds.

_Yeregye nsu o._  
_Na ma nam mbra o._

We ask for rain.

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_16 Apaa is another name for the Effutu war god Penkye Otu._
And bring us more fish.

After the rituals, the drumming and singing continues throughout the streets. At this moment jubilating supporters exchange insults with opposing companies. The winning side boasts of having the powers to hunt while chastising the losers. The losers respond by stating that the winning company simply bought the deer and pretended to catch it during the hunt. Meanwhile, the second company, which may still be in the forest, does not just give up, even though they see that they have lost the competition. Instead, the hunt still continues till a catch is made. It is seen as a bad omen when a group returns home empty handed. Accordingly, if no deer is to be found, it’s not uncommon for the group to simply purchase an animal and present that as their “catch.” Even if a deer is purchased, the hunters will likely stay in the bush until they catch something, even a grass cutter.\(^\text{17}\) To fail utterly would open them up to severe criticism about their hunting skills and masculinity. As an asafo member said to Wyllie, who observed the Aboakyer in 1964, “If we did not catch any deer at all it would be shameful, but once we have one it is enough.”\(^\text{18}\)

By noon, the first session comes to an end. Most of the participants retire to their various homes to rest before the afternoon’s grand parade.

\(^{\text{17}}\) Only the deer would be presented to the chief, but the hunter might celebrate in town with another less prestigious animal. The grass cutter is a large rodent.

Akosuadontoba.

Akosuadontoba is a procession of the chiefs and other leaders within the asafo companies. Around 3 p.m. all the members dress in colorful costumes: Denstifo dresses in red and yellow, Tuafo dresses in blue and white. They parade in sequence down the main commercial street that leads to the chief’s palace. The group that made the first catch is in front; the losers follow. Both companies present their symbols of authority. The Tuafo Company displays a float carrying a wooden white horse, which is “ridden” by a Supi. The Denstifo Company’s float carries a wooden ship sporting the Union Jack. The Supi and other leaders are all on board in prominent positions. In both cases, the company’s women dance alongside with drums and tambourines. Crowds of out-of-town visitors, as well as non-natives from town, follow the procession and are joined by brass bands and DJs working from moving cars. Others emerge from the drinking bars and “chop bars” to join the procession, which will end at the chief’s palace.\(^{19}\)

At exactly 6 p.m. the procession comes to an end, but the carnival atmosphere continues throughout the town and finishes sometime in the early morning hours with a state dance and the crowing of Miss Aboakyer. This dance, added sometime in the late 1980s, has no traditional significance in the Aboakyer festival. Rather, it helps the Effutu traditional council to generate funds for the

\(^{19}\) This is providing that the cadres from the opposing royal family do not interrupt and spoil the parade. Such events often turn violent.
town through fees charged at the entry gate. The organizers have adopted the event from the Miss America pageant in the United States and their event follows the same procedure. Women dress in Western clothes to show off their bodies, including swim suits and other costumes. All this is not without controversy. Some elderly people think such dress is contrary to the moral practices of the land.²⁰

Around 3 p.m. on Sunday, the deer is offered to Penkye Otu and the other seventy-seven gods of the Effutu land. A statue of Penkye Otu, surrounded by icons of the other deities, is placed under a black umbrella a few meters away from the shrine. This arrangement signifies the unity between the gods and the people of Winneba. The Osow then performs the libation and ask the gods to accept the people’s offer. After the libation, the deer is slaughtered and the blood smeared all over the image of Penkye Otu. It is then skinned and cut into seventy-seven pieces, which are boiled and scattered around the shrine for the gods. The deer skin is later used to cover the image of Penkye Otu. After this ceremony has been successfully performed, the Osow leads the crowd in the final stage of the rituals known as Ebisatsir.²¹

²⁰Those who mostly patronize the dance are the youth who have adopted a Western style of living, mostly college students, even though they claim not to be interested in participating in the traditional festival.
²¹The Ebisatsir (asking for the future) ritual reveals what the future will be like for the entire Effutu state and also offers a vehicle to reconcile the two asafo companies in the town. Whenever there is a positive prediction, the crowd immediately jumps into jubilation. Should the prediction be negative, however, the Osow quickly consults the oracle to find out what needs to be done to avoid danger.
After the rituals, the crowd breaks into celebration with drumming and singing through the principal streets. Both companies join together in the celebration without putting any emphasis on their individual asafo companies or showing any sign of separateness. That said, it should be noted that the Aboakyer is designed as a means of solving social conflicts, though outsiders have misinterpreted it. Instead, the reconciliation expressed here is only designed to help improve communal participation and put constraint on any potential violence that might erupt during the festival. Such intrinsic and ongoing conflicts such as the chieftaincy disputes, matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance, and religion and political affiliations continue long after the celebration of the Aboakyer festival.

**Chieftaincy and Politics in Winneba**

The politics, economics, and culture of the Effutufo can never be understood unless one takes into consideration the traditional authorities, which encompass kings and other lower political offices as well as extended family heads and political-religious offices that pre-date the pre-colonial eras. Winneba, like other post-colonial Ghanaian states, is built upon a political structure based on chieftaincies, which, in their turn, were rooted in the pre-colonial era. To understand these complexities, we need to look at the British colonial era.
After Britain imposed herself over the various polities in Ghana, political and geographic boundaries were created to which the traditional authorities were forced to adjust. Therefore, while traditional rulers maintained some powers, they lost others, such as the control of armies and capacity to wage or end war. Moreover, British-style courts of law had the fiat to override the traditional courts and laws of the pre-colonial period. These colonial mentalities were transferred to the successors of post-colonial rule.

Today, part of the problem Winneba faces concerning the chieftaincy disputes could be attributed to the government’s involvement in traditional matters. The struggle for kingship between the Gyatehs and the Ayirebi Acquahs cannot be resolved, even with the intervention of the Superior Court. Curiously, support from the national government has shifted from one side to the other; while the Rawlings government supported the Ayirebi Acquahs, the current government supports the Gyatehs. In neither case, however, have the Winneba natives bowed to government coercion. Sometimes the national government has simply exerted pressure, at other times it has tried to impose formal laws. For example, the Ghanaian government endorsed the reign of “Ayirebi Acquah IV in the Local Government Bulletin No. 48 dated 16th December 1977 as having been recognized by government on the 17th of September 1977.” It was no wonder that such a decision was made. The Ayirebi Acquahs were a well-educated
family and some held ministerial positions in the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government where it was possible for them and their colleagues, including the president, to pressure the Supreme Court to adjudicate in their favor.

Why are chiefs or candidates for chieftaincy not involved in political activities such as described above? They are barred by law. In Ghana, the constitution unequivocally bars chiefs from active political activities (Article 276, #1). There is no clear definition on what such “active political activities” might entail, but it seems to include holding office in a political party, addressing the public on a platform of a political party, or clearly identifying with a political party by being a card-carrying member. Chiefs in Ghana swear oaths of office and allegiances to their people. Participation in active politics places the chief in the position of serving two masters. Such divided allegiance could easily impair the trust and confidence that his people have in him. Kwame Boafo-Arthur stated in his book “Chieftaincy and Politics in Ghana Since 1982” that, “on the participation of chiefs in politics, a chief who dabbles in politics is likely to be treated like a politician who could be hooted at or booed, and this would not only undermine his position but ultimately desecrate the institution of
chieftaincy as a whole. This topic was brought up when I talked to Nana Kofi Budu in his residence and he argued that it is right for chiefs to stay away from active politics because, he stated, “a chief in partisan politics may expose himself to the dictates of the party and could be victimized should the party he supports lose power.”

This has been the fate of some of the previous chiefs in Winneba. Politics currently plagues Nana Kobina Ghartey VI, the present Winneba chief, who previously actively supported the New Patriotic Party (NPP), a party generally out of favor in Winneba, where the majority supports the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Now, the conflict with chieftaincy in Winneba is not only

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The following comments were made by a majority of the chiefs who supports the constitutional restrictions on chiefs’ participation in active politics, taking from Kwame Boafo-Arhin’s “Chieftaincy and Politics in Ghana Since 1982.”

- Chiefs aligning with political parties compromise their roles as the “fathers of everybody” in their respective communities.
- Joining a political party will not promote peace in the area.
- Chiefs lose their respect when identified with political parties.
- As leaders, chiefs should be the rallying point and the spiritual head and should be able to unite their people. They may not be able to perform this function to any appreciable satisfaction if they engage in partisan politics.
- Since the oman (town, community or village) belongs to the chief, he should embrace all subjects irrespective of their political affiliation or inclinations. A chief may not be able to do this if he is a member of another political party.
- Although chiefs are by nature politicians, joining political parties may set them against their subjects who may be members of other political parties.
- A politically partisan chief polarizes his people and compromises his decisions because of party affiliation. He may thus not help to foster the national synergies necessary for development.
- A partisan chief is likely to lose respect if the party he openly identifies with loses power.
- As the father of the community, a chief should be neutral so as to be able to arbitrate in an impartial manner.
- A new government may deal drastically with a chief who has aligned with a party that is not in power.
- A nonpartisan chief becomes the conscience of the nation with sufficient moral authority to call politicians to order when matters appear to be getting out of hand.
between the two royal families but it has also become a tug of war between the supporters of the two major political parties in the country, the NDC and NPP. National politics has made for strange alliances, with some Gyatehs and Ayirebis breaking familial ties to follow ever-strengthening party lines. Such supporters no longer follow the traditional inheritance but rather the ruling party, because they hope that the government in power, which controls the National House of Chiefs, will have the power to install their favorite. Kobina Ghartey VI no longer participates in political issues but his past activities in politics have also divided his own people, compelling many of them to choose a party affiliation.

Family versus party politics is yet another example of the conflict between traditional and modern ideologies. Some argue that tradition cannot be replaced with politics, or, as our elders say, “wood can stay in a river for a thousand years, but it will never turn into a crocodile.” Thus, why should, a modern system of party politics replace a traditional one based on chieftaincy? Where does this come from? The answer appears to be that people follow their own self interests, and change affiliations as needed to fulfill those interests. Perhaps, if the Ghanaian government had allowed the traditional council to decide on the case of chieftaincy descent without intervening with its own political interests (just like the British government once intervened in chieftaincy disputes in order to
promote its political interests), Winneba would be a peaceful state with a common king loved by everyone.

**Religious Conflicts**

Winneba natives who practice Christian religions rarely see eye-to-eye with those who follow traditional religious practices. This conflict was in the background in the past, but has come to the forefront since the 1970s with the arrival of the new Pentecostal and mushrooming charismatic Christian churches, including the Central Gospel Church, Light House Ministry, and the Christian Action Faith. For example, while Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian churches mostly observed or ignored without incident the Effutu traditional council’s Aboakyer-related ban on drumming and noise making, the new sects have become confrontational. The reason appears to be a fundamentally different approach between these two categories of Christians. The long-established Protestants tend to respect the traditional customs and therefore operate to “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17), whereas the newer churches—with their membership drawn mostly from young, urban, women looking for husbands and men looking to secure visas to find greener pastures abroad—constantly and explicitly condemn traditional religion for its “outdated” and “ungodly” practices. Thus, the newer churches
encourage their congregations to ignore and resist any order with religious implications that is disseminated from the traditional council.

The Aboakyer festival seems to bring out hostilities between rival religious groups. On several occasions, the festival’s drumming ban has spurred violent fights between Effutu traditionalists and members of Christian charismatic churches. Traditionalists believe that their time-honored customs should be accorded due respect, while some Christians resent the imposition of bans, which they believe infringe on their right to worship. The government, knowing very well about growing conflict and contestation over the ban (which almost invariably ends with violence), has made no attempts to mediate between charismatic Christians and traditionalists. I have witnessed such situations where churches were attacked for violating the ban on drumming and noise-making. For example, on April 7th 2000, the first day of that year’s ban, the Winneba Traditional Council (WTC) announced that the agreement it had previously reached with local churches was no longer applicable and that the ban would apply to all drumming and noisemaking. Charismatic Christian leaders countered that the ban was unconstitutional and that they would not observe it. That decision was met with several violent attacks by traditionalists on Christian worshippers.
On April 13th, groups of young men attacked and damaged two charismatic churches, resulting in a number of injuries. On April 20th, the second Sunday of the ban, groups of young men attacked more charismatic churches, and stole musical equipment and money. On April 23rd, some of the various Ghanaian religious bodies issued a statement, which was signed by seven religious councils, calling for peaceful coexistence and further negotiation with the WTC. Nonetheless, a WTC leader stated that no agreement had been reached with the churches and that he did not endorse any compromise. Although no agreement was reached, there were no reports of violence during the final two Sundays of the ban. Of the eleven people arrested for attacking churches during the year’s annual ban on drumming, three were released for lack of evidence and eight were set free on bail. There have been no prosecutions as of the time of this report. No police action was taken in regard to any attacks from previous years.

Such violence as described above has also contributed to newer Christians not participating in the annual deer hunt festival. Some churches have moved their annual conventions to coincide with the festival in order to win more souls and conversions. Some preachers consider the celebration of the Aboakyer festival as ungodly and, referring to the first of the Ten Commandments, proclaim that
anybody who participates in the activities will go to hell.\textsuperscript{23} According to some preachers, Christians participating in the \textit{Aboakyer} festival, which is meant to offer sacrifices to the war god \textit{Penkye Otu}, compromise themselves because they are as serving two masters, a contradiction of Biblical law. Not all Christians believe this, of course. I, for example, love traditional music and drumming. I am able to participate without paying any attention to the ritual aspects or in any other forms of offering sacrifices to \textit{Penkye Otu}.

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{23} “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land Egypt, out of the house of bondage, thou shalt have no other gods before me,” (Exodus chapter 20 verse 1).
\end{footnote}
CHAPTER II

THE FANCY DRESS FESTIVAL

The Fancy Dress Festival celebrated in Winneba was initiated in the 19th century by the Dutch and British who applied their trade at the Winneba seaport. During Christmas, these Europeans wore different masks and danced in white-owned bars while drinking to celebrate the occasion. Janka Abraham, a Fanti bar attendant at one of the white-owned bars and a native of Saltpond, where the masquerade had already been introduced by the Europeans, became interested in masquerade as a native celebration. Thus, in 1923 or 1924 Abraham, along with cofounder friend and pharmacist A.K. Yamoah, formed a group called Nobles in the Alata Kokwado neighborhood. Membership was mainly based on friends who belonged to the same football club and various indoor games owned by A.K. Yamoah. All the members were educated and could express themselves in the English language, a requirement for membership.

In the pre-dawn hours of Christmas day, the “Nobles” met at the old Rocoast warehouse24 dressed in a variety of costumes, including those of doctors, nurses, teachers, ministers, pastors, farmers, fishermen, prostitutes, pastors, drivers, cowboys, sailors and even angels. Some masks depicted the white colonial masters. By 6 a.m., before the townspeople had begun their daily chores,

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24 The Rocoast warehouse no longer exists, but the area where it once stood is identified by its name even today.
the celebration of masquerade parading through the streets of Winneba backed by *adaha* music had already begun. The idea for these costumes and masks was to imitate the various jobs that existed in the town and make fun of the Europeans. The celebration continued throughout the day and ended at 7 p.m. in Yamoah’s home.

After two to three years, membership to the Nobles was opened to the public; locals who did not belong to Yamoah’s football club were admitted. The numerical strength of the Nobles quickly increased. So did the idea’s popularity among others. Thus, in 1926 the paramount chief of Winneba, Nana Kow Sackey (whose stool name was Ayirebi Acquah III), and his friends were inspired to form Egyaa, a second group at Aboadze, a fisherman’s neighborhood. The chief’s friends quickly took on set roles within the masquerade: Kow Enyinda became a renowned female impersonator, Kofi Akom a stilt walker, Kojo Bortsie a fetish priest.

These fishermen, who did not speak English, found it difficult to pronounce the word “masquerade.” Instead, they used the term “Fancy Dress,” which they pronounced “fanti dress.” So Winneba now had two “Fanti dress” groups. To make things easier for people to differentiate between the groups, the

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25 *Adaha* was a regimental marching band style that included bass drum, snare drum, and flute. According to Professor John Collins, a music scholar at the University of Ghana, "The young Fanti brass band musicians were influenced by these West Indians. During the 1880s they went on to create their own syncopated brass-band music that utilized both West Indians clave rhythms as well as African ones that used hemiolas, off beats and 6/8 poly-rhythms.”
town folks referred to “Nobles,” as “Number One” and “Egyaa” as “Number Two.” Nana Kow Sackey being a chief could not participate fully in the Fancy Dress activities, so he became the life patron of Egyaa by sponsoring the group financially. While this move was designed to avoid controversy, in fact, it stirred it up. Members of the Gyateh royal family did not approve of Kow Sackey’s Egyaa support. They called a meeting in which they decided to form another group, Winneba’s third.

In 1930, “Tumbo rusu,” pronounced Tumus (the sound of the blacksmith’s anvil), was founded in the Gyateh area of Donkoyemu under the leadership of Arkoful (a blacksmith), Kweku Akom, and Inkabi, all of the Gyateh family. The location of the group, which is between the fisherman community, where most are illiterate, and the Winneba Catholic Church contributed to a membership made up of unschooled Catholic youths, supported by the European ministers from the Catholic Church. Tumus became the most fashionable Fancy Dress Company. Because this group was so well funded—the Catholic fathers provided them with European masks and paid each year for new costumes—membership soared. Even members of groups one and two sought to join.

During my research in Ghana for this thesis, I had the opportunity to interview Tumus member Egya Kobina Amo, the illiterate grandson of Arkoful, also the first person to introduce the character “Robin Hood” in Winneba Fancy
Dress. Amo is a Catholic who learned his present occupation as a carpenter at the Catholic Vocational Institute (constructed in 1920), an organization that trained illiterates on tailoring, carpentry, electronics, leather works and hair dressing.

Here is Amo’s story, one that he was loath to tell and which he prefaced with the comment, “I really don’t want to comment on my expulsion from Tumus but for the sake of your work, I will tell you what happened.” Amo said that he got the idea of imitating Robin Hood from movies the Catholic Fathers had shown to kids at the mission house. There were many fascinating characters, but Amo became particularly fascinated with Robin Hood’s costume and his bow skills. So, with the help of Father John, Amo acquired full Robin Hood regalia and began to behave like the outlaws. That was a recipe for disaster as Father John and his family, who were visiting from America for the Christmas holidays, soon faced the horror of their lives. On Christmas day 1930, while the Tumus were camping at the Catholic Mission house getting ready to parade through the streets of Winneba, Amo accidentally shot father John’s nephew in the eye. This incident disrupted the activities of the masquerades and Amo was expelled from the group, never to return to it or any other. What’s more, elders from each group met and decided that, with the exception of children below the age of seven, no one will ever be allowed to portray the character of Robin Hood during the Fancy Dress celebration. Even today Amo continues to be known in Winneba
as Robin Hood. He has never complained when people make fun of his bow shooting.

In 1933, A.W. Yamoah, a merchant and one of A.K. Yamoah’s brothers, was relocated to Abasraba, a new settlement for government workers who were transferred from other cities and towns to work in Winneba. As a merchant who dealt in the importation of masks and brass band instruments, he decided to form a Fancy Dress group himself, calling it “Red Cross” or Number Four. The membership for this group was mostly the elites in the town, which included more youth in the high schools or colleges. Members had to take entrance exams, which included English language and Ghanaian Cultural Studies to gain admission to the Red Cross. Monthly dues were introduced in the Red Cross. Every member was supposed to pay some amount to the group’s coffers. At the end of the calendar year it was used to pay for the cost of costumes and Halloween masks from abroad. The group took care of the children below eight years, even paying their school fees if the family could not afford them; children did not pay dues, nor did others who could not afford them. As a trade off, those being supported had to accept whatever was provided, unable to reject styles or colors chosen for them by the group.

In the early stages of the Fancy Dress celebration in Winneba, all the groups used the adaha music when parading through the principal streets of the
town. In 1934, however, the Catholic fathers introduced brass band music by bringing in a Presbyterian missionary-trained group from Swedru Bibiani (a town located at the northeast side of Winneba). The music was not so great, the group by then could only play one song, “Abaawa Begye Wo Letter Kema Woewuraba” (“Maidservant, This is a Letter for Your Madam”). They played it continuously throughout the day, a choice that irritated some. According to John Yamoah a grandson of A.W.Yamoah, “this music aggravated the old man and he always referred to them as village musicians.”

Perhaps it was this “aggravation” that led A.W. Yamoah to start his own group. There were some obstacles however. Even though Yamoah imported musical instruments, he himself never learned to perform. Consequently, he enlisted the help of Uncle Sam, a friend and a native of Saltpond who had had some training in playing brass instruments from the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), and therefore could play most of the instruments Yamoah imported.26 A.W.Yamoah organized his brothers and cousins and asked Sam to teach them how to play the instruments. This was the beginning of Winneba’s brass band tradition. The Yamoahs became more advanced in the playing of their instruments but could not play for the Fancy Dress during celebrations, since they all preferred to join the masquerade rather than play brass instruments.

26 I was unable to discover Uncle Sam’s real name.
Other brass band groups like the *Takoradzi Kwesiminstim*, *Apewosika*, *Beefi Kurom*, *Ebu* and *Asafo* were also brought in to play for other Fancy Dress groups in Winneba for a fee.

**Winneba Brass Band Tradition**

Brass Band was first introduced in Ghana in the 1880s by the West Indian Rifle Regiment, who were based in Cape Coast Castle after the Second World War, and also European missionaries, who settled in the hinterlands and taught their church members how to play western hymns and marches. Brass band became more popular in Ghana in early 20th century. Many ethnic groups along the coastal belt adopted the new music into some traditional and religious ceremonies, which included traditional festivals, funerals, church services, political rallies, night clubs and even movie theaters. Unlike the local people who lived in the coastal areas, for example Cape Coast and Winneba, they encountered other influences that were incorporated with the traditional music and used as their own. In Winneba, there were three major external influences on their brass band music. First was the arrival of the European merchants in the mid-seventeenth century. The second influence came from cultural practices of

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27 The Yamoah’s brass band served as the source of advertising for the town’s movie theater. The movie operator hired the brass band to play across town with the idea of attracting crowds to the cinema hall (the one and only movie theater in Winneba, even up to the present.)

28 These Europeans used the sea port to transact their businesses; “Some imported musical instruments including brass band, general goods and also exported gold and diamond. Winneba was an important center of the overland gold trade.” Lecture by Robert Kobina Yamoah (grandson of A.W. Yamoah,) 2004.
other ethnic groups who had settled around Winneba town, mostly the Akans. The third influence was the Fancy Dress Festival. A. W. Yamoah was the first to start a brass band in Winneba. It all began as a family group, which later became the Yamoah’s orchestra, led by Uncle Sam, an educated musician who orchestrated the band’s repertoire and taught it to the ensemble by singing out the parts for various instruments. According to Robert Yamoah, “Uncle Sam always listened to music played on BBC and taught it to the group. Isn’t that wonderful? The Yamoahs were always the best compared to other bands in Accra and Cape Coast.” The band had instruments that other groups did not, a situation that remains true today when the only band that can challenge the Yamoah instrument collection is the Ghanaian regimental band. But maintaining that standard was not without difficulty.

As a merchant who dealt in the importation of musical instruments and a music lover, A. W. Yamoah attempted to make sure this brass band tradition continued in the family by attaching it to the traditional system of inheritance. After his death Yamoah’s instruments were inherited by his niece Efua Esaaba Yamoah, an Evangelist who had never been pleased with the drunkenness and sexual indiscretions of some of the members of the family brass band tradition. So, she seized the instruments and sent them to her church to form its own band, a project that lasted only a year before collapsing. This set the stage for the
reformation of the Yamoahs’ brass band tradition, sometime in the early 1900s.

Yamoah family members (minus those who supported Efua Esaaba in her uprising) collected the instruments from the Esaaba church, though many were by this time in serious disrepair.

In 1967, the Catholic Church formed the CYO band (Catholic Youth Organization), led by Ebo Yamoah, a trumpeter and a member of the Esaaba church. Ebo was in his sixties when he was contacted by the Parish priest to become the leader of the band. Old age coupled with health problems compelled Ebo to bring in other family members to help build the CYO band. Thus the stage was set for a competition between the two Yamoah families, with the former being the members holding forth for the majority of the Yamoah family and the latter being the opposition supported by the Catholic Church.

Initially, the CYO band played at funerals and a variety of church social activities. Participating in the Fancy Dress Festival was not part of its early duties. That changed in 1984 when the musicians were approached by the Nobles-No. 1 who asked the band to accompany them in Fancy Dress Festival.

After the festival, the CYO band accompanied the Nobles wherever they performed. Those opportunities evidently led to religious and social backsliding. The church received so many reports of bad behavior that in 1986 the church
retrieved their instruments, claiming they wanted to take inventory. They were never returned.

Ebo Yamoah responded by asking his brother in America to buy him new instruments with which in 1992 he enlisted old CYO member to form the Peace Band, which became the residential band for the Nobles. That arrangement was short lived, however. In 1997 an irresolvable rift between the masqueraders and Peace Band members compelled Ebo Yamoah his musicians to break off the affiliation. The group then joined up with Tumus-No. 3. That relationship continues today.

After the 1999 death of Ebo Yamoah, his eldest son (Ebo Yamoah Jr. ) collected his father’s instruments and formed his own group, which he named Egyapa (“Good Father”). Yamoah Jr. admitted only youths from the Yamoah families, whom he trained in secret for two years. Their first outing was in 2001, at which time they accompanied the Nobles to win the first prize in the Fancy Dress competition. Egyapa remains the Nobles’ residential band and boasts a number of excellent players.

In Winneba all the Fancy Dress groups have their residential bands with the exception of Egyaa No. 2, which always engages outside bands or the music brass band from Winneba’s University College of Education. There are two major problems with engaging a college band, however. First, the festival
coincides with Christmas celebrations; most students are home with their families. Second, college-trained musicians are trained in Western styles. They are not used to the Fancy Dress-styles of music, which use traditional songs, rhythms, and harmonies. Egyaa uses the college band only as a last resort.

Fig. 1. Winneba Brass Band Chart

Hierarchy of Power Within the Fancy Dress Groups

There is a hierarchy of power within each Fancy Dress ensemble. At the top is the group father, who exercises control over the ensemble as a whole. At the next level are the band leader, Fancy Dress leader, and group mother, who are in charge of music, general organization, and food, respectively. Cowboys, who occupy the next level, work for the Fancy Dress leader. Under the cowboys’ control are the scouts, stilt walkers, and general members.
Fig. 2. Fancy Dress Hierarchy Chart

Each of the four Fancy Dress groups is headed by a group father whose duties are to take care of the welfare of the masqueraders and the musicians. He does this by giving money to cover expenses and repairs, looking for additional performance venues, and taking care of general managerial duties. This position is always held by a respectable male family member who belongs to the same family of the group’s founders. Formerly, the rich, either literate or illiterate, were mostly considered for this position, but this ideology has recently changed. Today, well-educated family members have become the priority. Nowadays, a group father is expected to be at least someone with high school degree, one who can write and speak English well. Wealth remains essential, for a group father is expected to support his group financially. There is give and take in this
relationship. The group’s father collects no fees for his work, but he can engage the services of the Fancy Dress group for his own benefit without paying fees or accounting to anyone. Some group fathers have taken advantage of this situation at the expense of the general members. In 1998 for example, an incident happened that nearly collapsed the No. 3 Fancy Dress group.

What happened was this: No. 3’s group father, Mr. Annan, received a request from the National Cultural Center to organize members from all four Fancy Dress groups to represent Winneba and Ghana in a tour to Canada. But Mr. Annan, who was director of the Winneba Cultural Center, managed to take only *Tumus* and the CYO Brass Band on the tour. Adding to the problem was the fact that the band’s old and pure brass instruments that were taken to Canada never returned to Winneba. Instead the band came back with new student-level brass instruments. No one back in Winneba ever found out what happened to the instruments, or the money their sale presumably generated. Despite these irregularities, because of the wealth and power that the group father commanded, he was never held accountable.

The band leader is a trained musician who is in charge of rehearsals, creating arrangements, general instruction, and is expected to work closely with the group’s choreographer. Because many of the instrumentalists do not read music and therefore must be taught by ear, training is time-consuming work.
Band leaders have always been men, but there is no proscription against a woman holding that post. While the position commands great power, it comes with high expectations, especially during the Fancy Dress competition. Leaders can be fired by the group father and his elders at any point of time. In order to maintain their positions, band leaders often seek the help of other players from outside Winneba, which normally included members of the regimental bands, the Police Band, Fire Service Band, or even students from the National Academy of Music. These musicians generally play better than the local musicians. They read music well and are expert harmonizers. Most of the band leaders receive payment after every engagement, a motivation that sets them looking for still more performances.

Before one becomes a member of a group, the Fancy Dress leader will investigate the background of the candidate, interview the candidate, and, once accepted, conduct an orientation for all newcomers. The Fancy Dress leader is also responsible for fine-tuning the choreography. He leads the group during parades and other performances. Unlike the band leader, who could bring in musicians to play on the very day of the competition, the Fancy Dress leader tries to recruit good performers from other rival groups in the middle of the year, somewhere late June or early July, and include them in their outfit. This timing is strategic. By June groups are halfway through preparing their choreographies.
Normally, members who leave their groups betray their former by leaking information on the songs and choreographies to their new colleagues. While this may give competitors a leg up on one another, it also seems to contribute to monotony. Groups often perform the same songs and choreographies.

Fig. 3. Kwayira (the black Santa), Fancy Dress Leader for Egyaa No. 2. Photo by author.

Just like the group father, a group mother is always chosen from the founders of various groups. Her duties are to organize the female members of the family to cook and take care of the masqueraders during the Christmas celebration. A group mother is also entrusted with the financial savings of the masqueraders who have no bank accounts. She operates according to the traditional *susu* system in which she receives money from the masqueraders
during the year and saves it towards the payment of their costumes and band fees. Because every member of the Fancy Dress and the brass band treats the group mother as if she were their own biological mother, family disputes and social conflicts are brought before her for resolution. At times, the group mother will even perform a marriage or a naming ceremony, another duty normally executed by a biological parent.

Every group has cowboys who protect and guide the general members during and after performances. They take their orders from the Fancy Dress leaders. Cowboy’s positions are given to members who are physically strong, disciplined, and athletic. They often go for a military drill at the Winneba Police Depot at least once in every two months. During this drill, which normally lasts for eight hours, the cowboys are taken to the beach, where they compete against each other in various activities that includes swimming, tug of war, hundred meters running, and finally lessons on how to command and control the general members during inspection and marching.

After their training, these cowboys go back to their various groups and teach the skills they have learned in marching and even how to salute the national flag. It became necessary for the Winneba Fancy Dress Federation to make this arrangement with the Winneba Police because some of the

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29 *Susu* is an informal banking system in which illiterate people, who do not want to work with institutional banks, consign their savings to a trusted elder.
masqueraders have never marched before and needed to be trained. Old members could teach newcomers or anyone who needed help in marching but following the establishment of the Winneba Police Academy, which is noted for its great performances during the celebrations of Ghana’s Independence Day, the federation thought it would be wise to give the masquerades a chance to learn from experts.

The idea of a cowboy character was taken from the television show *Bonanza*, so they dress to imitate that look, sometimes carrying whips to control the crowd from getting too close to the masqueraders. In the absence of a Fancy Dress leader, a cowboy has the equal right to discipline any masquerader or decide on what action needed to be taken when the need comes.

Fig. 4. Egyaa Cowboys Marching. Photo by author.
The scout position is always given to members who are good in public relationships. How you relate to members and the community is taken into consideration before the post is assigned. The duties of a scout include attending community programs, securing a better resting place for the masqueraders during street parades, informing members on any emergencies, and also gathering information on other rival groups and reporting back their findings to the general members during meetings. During performances, scouts aggressively secure funds from the public. Part of this is used to subsidize brass band fees; the rest is kept in the group’s coffers. Whenever the group performs during Christmas, the scouts are busy attempting to collect funds. They always carry money boxes and take the lead going from house to house to solicit donations. Once this work is completed they report back to the cowboys who take note of all the money or gifts received during their outing.
The sakramodu, or stilt walker, is a character very popular among the West African masqueraders. In Winneba, the height of the stilts ranges from twelve to fifteen feet, and performers are expected to play on the stilts for four continuous hours without sitting. It is generally believed among the Africans that the height of the stilt walker is associated with protection. Elevated as they are, they have the ability to foresee the appearances of evil faster than ordinary men. Accordingly, they can prevent it from causing any harm to the community.

There is a second legend associated with the stilt walkers. From the seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries, very powerful medicine men or traditional religion practitioners would mount the stilts. Invariably, these men

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30 Stilt walking is relatively new to the Winneba festival. It may have been borrowed from the Caribbean, where stilt walkers known as Moko in festivals like the Bahamian Jankanoo are known for their powers of divination. That tradition was inherited from Central African slaves.
were seen as powerful figures of good character. This ideal holds still today, but not the reality. A Winneba stilt walker is supposed to be both athletic and a teatotaler, but most imbibe before strapping on their stilts. Indeed, many are so inebriated that they fall during performance. Of course, thus indisposed they have great difficulty performing their primary duty of watching for danger, which today generally means oncoming traffic.

The stilt walker’s position, unlike other positions discussed above, is inherited from father to son or older to younger brother. While the spiritual heritage of stilt walkers is no longer relevant, the passing of the stilts from one practitioner to the next involves special rituals performed at the beach by the group father and other elders. These must be completed before one straps up and stilt walks for the first time. (New performers are given shorter stilts of eight to ten feet before they advance to the major ones.)
Fig. 6. Supporters trying to get this Egyaa stilt walker back, after he had fall flat on his face due to excess drinking of akpeteshie. Photo by author.

Fig. 7. Ammano and Tawiah, perhaps the nation’s most skillful stilt walkers, follow their group during the March-Pass. Photo by author.
This involves both the masqueraders and their supporters. They share dues and take care of other responsibilities that involve the welfare of the group. If there are excess funds left after taking care of all the costumes for the masquerades, supporters are provided with the same fabric, which is normally taken as a uniform for a group’s supporters who follow the instructions given them by their leaders. Every leader in the group begins at the general member level. Through hard work, he or she is eventually promoted up the hierarchical ladder.

The masqueraders form smaller groups within the Fancy Dress and each comes up with his own theme and create a costume for it. Most of the time members try to anticipate the tastes and biases of the judges, often by displaying the colors or flags of the ruling government. Some of the general members have also adopted characters from the Caribbean carnivals. The most prominent Caribbean figure that is seen in all the Fancy Dress groups is the Sasabonsam (devil) known in Trinidad and Tobago carnival as “Jab Molassie.”

From the 1920s to the late 1940s, masqueraders did not spend much money on Sasabonsam costumes. Generally, they wore only black or blue shorts and a mask with horns. They may have carried a garden fork, a spear, or wore long artificial finger nails. Things changed in the early 1940s when masqueraders
added other materials to their costumes to fit and satisfy their imagination.\textsuperscript{31}

According to my informants “the red color of the [devil] costume signifies the fire of hell” and the spear portrays the readiness of the devil to fight any opposing powers. The picture below is an example of how a new \textit{sasabonsem} character might look.

![Image](image-url)

\textbf{Fig. 8. Sasabonsem/Devil. Photo by author, 2001.}

Other fascinating characters include those masqueraders dressed like the “ECOMOG” (Economic Community Monitoring Observer Group),\textsuperscript{32} with Ghanaian military uniforms, wooden AK47s, and fake parachutes hanging on their backs. These characters operate like the real military men who worked to

\textsuperscript{31} On the 1\textsuperscript{st} of December, 2001, during the Fancy Dress Competition, I asked Kweku Mensah, one of the two \textit{sasabonsem} characters of No. 4 “why have you changed the original costume of the \textit{sasabonsem},” and he responded “no one has seen the devil before, so this is my perspective on how the devil should look like and also I feel more comfortable hiding my pot belly without exposing it to the hot sun.”

\textsuperscript{32} The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) is a non-standing military force consisting of land, sea and air components that were set up by member states of the ECOWAS to deal with the security problem that followed the collapse of the formal state structure in the Republic of Liberia in 1990.
keep peace in war torn countries. They separate fights between other rival members and guard their own group members who might be impersonating political figures. ECOMOG masqueraders often serve as a source of information for those who do not know the state of current affairs; just ask and they will explain. In a sense, however, this latter aspect is characteristic of all the masqueraders. When not performing, they walk around to show off their costume and explain themes and symbolism.

Fig. 9. ECOMOG Soldier. Photo by author.

Every year, during Fancy Dress competition only, the Red Cross (No. 4) leaders arrange with the Winneba Community Health Service to provide medical assistance to all masqueraders and spectators. Even though these health workers wear masks to disguise themselves, or maybe to create an impression of being actual members of the group, their poor dancing skills quickly give them away,
even those from others who may be similarly dressed but are merely impersonating health workers.

**Fancy Dress Competition**

The Winneba Fancy Dress Festival, which is basically a competition, is the only cultural event of its kind in Ghana. The splendid costumes, the huge fabulous hats and masks displayed by various groups create a unique atmosphere. Even though the group competition is the main event of the day, each and everyone present in the audience feels that he or she is part it. The competition aspect of the festival was commissioned 1958 by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of the Conventional People’s party and Ghana’s first president. Why would a president bother himself with Fancy Dress in Winneba? Because he decided the festival was good for both Winneba and the nation.

The competition started in the following manner. Some of the top officials from Winneba who were then serving in the government—including Dr. Quasin Sackey (the first Ghanaian to serve in the United Nations), Dr. Mills Robertson, and others—realized that the Fancy Dress Festival was attracting visitors to the town during Christmas. Accordingly, they decided to generate funds to support the various groups and the community as a whole. They also suggested a competition amongst the four groups. To promote the festival at the national level, other performances—like the inspections of Fancy Dress groups by the
regional Minister and the judges, March-Pass, Slow-Dance/Blues, and the Highlife—were added to Atwim, which was the only dance or performance known to the masqueraders. The organizers also looked for sponsorships from various well-known Ghanaian alcoholic beverage companies, like the Accra Brewery Limited (the leading producer of Ghanaian Beer), Gihoc Distilleries (producers of gin, whisky, brandy and kasapreko), Kumasi Brewery Limited, and Guinness Limited. These companies donated cash and some alcoholic products that were used to reward the competition winner. The government also provided a shield for the winner and a cash consolation prize for the rest. In 1958, the Red Cross became the first group to win this competition and the shield that Dr. Nkrumah presented was kept for good. Afterwards, the rules for keeping a winner’s shield were changed. Nowadays, a group can only keep a shield for good after winning it three times. Then a new one will be presented.

In order to give a vivid account on the Winneba Fancy Dress Festival and its competition, I begin with preparations, which begin months before the event. Over my fifteen years of living in Winneba, I had the opportunity to visit all the groups at their secret rehearsal grounds. The Fancy Dress competition among rival groups is fierce. Therefore, certain precautions are taken. For example, each

33 According to Mr. Annan, the chairman for the Winneba Fancy Dress Federation, adding other performances to the original dance was a good marketing strategy. “The idea covered every musical taste during that period, elites who thought Fancy Dress belonged to the lower class citizens were trapped to watch the Fancy Dress competition just to satisfy their curiosity on how such lower class people would perform the ‘blues,’ which was only done by the high-class citizens at dance halls.”
group attempts to ensure that songs and choreography are kept secret until the day of the competition. Fancy Dress group members get together to work on their choreographies, brass band musicians practice their songs, costume designer’s work on their creations. The designers create according to the theme chosen by the group. These themes vary and can be contemporary or traditional. Some costumes require a whole year for completion, so designers begin just weeks after the last competition has ended. That way, by December costumes will need only minor touchups.

During my visits I was allowed to witness some of the rituals these groups go through during rehearsals, but because such rituals are meant to be known by only the members belonging to the specific group, I will not talk about them. Nevertheless, I can give a general overview. Rituals are used to protect members from any evil doings from their rival groups. It is believed within the Fancy Dress groups that members at times fall sick or become injured through the juju or some kind of voodoo powers during the preparation period. According to groups’ spiritual leaders, specific members are targeted. These include the Fancy Dress leaders, choreographers, stilt walkers and band leaders. Responding to my question, why these rituals? Robinson Crusoe, an old and active member of the Tumus No.3 group, told me that “to lose a leader or your trainer in times like this is just like one trying to jump when he hasn’t the strength even to lift his feet
from the ground. Juju can kill and that is the reason the members needed to be fortified.”

Before the 1st of January, the Winneba Fancy Dress Federation secretly and randomly picks five judges from any part of the country and these individuals are brought to Winneba. The judges spend some time watching previous competitions and also other violent incidents that had occurred during and after competitions. The reason is to give the judges some insights into the festival’s workings. It is essential that the judge do their work well. At times these officials have been attacked and beaten up for allegedly being biased or for a perceived negligence in giving marks. I personally witnessed one such incident that happened in 1996. On that day, two judges were hospitalized and a member of Egyaa No. 2 was set ablaze. Not surprisingly, alerting judges to these sorts of events has created another set of problems. Now, judges are nervous in making decisions at all times. Some do not even show up for the competition.

The competition is based on the following routines: Inspection, March Pass, Slow Dance/Blues, Highlife, and Atwim. Before the dances begin, the Fancy Dress groups line up in the middle of the park for an inspection, which is always

34 This masquerade had a costume made out of furs, the costume maker, melted a Styrofoam in petrol and used it as a glue for the costume, so during the fight between rival groups over the competition results, someone with a lighter intentionally set a costume on fire, killing the masquerader before he could be saved by sympathizers.

35 There is no simple solution. Judges from Winneba are invariably biased, but those brought in from other regions lack the cultural understanding to make good decisions.
led by the Central Regional Minister or any representative from the Office of the Minister. After the inspection, Fancy Dress leaders are called to the ballot box to pick the order of performance for the day. The group that picks the number one goes first, followed by the order of the numbers. Before the competition begins, all the groups leave the field to create more room or space for the performers, which begins with an Inspection. Even though groups know the order of performance for the day, their names are mentioned so that order of performance is not construed for the group’s name.36

![Fig. 10. Inspection of Fancy Dress Groups. Photo by author.](image)

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36 In the early 1980s, judges just mentioned group numbers instead of their real names, which always brought confusion that triggered fights between rival groups and at times judges themselves got beaten up by the masqueraders and their supporters.
This is my favorite part of the competition. Even though groups have been trained how to march like the military, during competition spectators are always treated to funny marching. Especially popular are parodies of the fishermen and other members who might get nervous and slack in their marching. Individual groups take turns in marching across the field to salute the national flag, which is always located near where the government executives are seated.\footnote{The way the Fancy Dress groups salute the flag is similar to the celebration of Ghanaian Independence Day (1956). Someone with a powerful voice shouts “eyes right” and every head turns to the right with stiff necks staring at the flag until the last person screams “eyes right.” Then participants will all look straight and march past the flag. The Fancy Dress enacted similar proceedings, but in a slow march.} On display here is the traditional marching that was introduced in Ghana by the Europeans and the West Indian Rifles regiments, who were based at the Cape Coast Castle and marched with colorful flags and uniforms. These figures had a great impact on the cultures of Akans who lived by the coast. The judges look carefully at the Fancy Dress march. Footsteps and hands movements must be synchronized. If anyone’s foot steps or hand movements do not coordinate with those of the rest of the group, a point is deducted. Also, points are awarded for any spectacular style a group exhibits when saluting the national flag. There is a time limit for all the dances: both delays and exceeding the given time limit result in point deductions. Accordingly, after saluting the flag, which is the most important aspect of the March Pass, participants rush off the field to save time. The brass bands are also judged according to uniforms,
instruments, musical harmony, and how they coordinate with the choreographies of the Fancy Dress. During the March Pass, the band mostly plays gospel songs or common tunes that were taught by missionaries. Popular choices include “Will Your Anchor Hold,” “Master Speaks, Thy Servant Heareth,” “I am a Soldier in the Army of the Lord,” and even “John Brown’s Body.” These songs are taught in schools, but virtually everyone can hum the tunes. After the March Pass, the groups follow the same order of performance to the next dance.

Fig. 11. Nobles Marching. Photo by author.

The term “slow dance” is an adaptation of the African American blues that was introduced by American troops stationed in West Africa after World

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38 Some of the songs have gone through several changes depending on the geographical area and the ethnicity of the performers. Thus, the same song will be heard with slight variations in melody or harmony.
War II. Dance movements for this round are very slow. Therefore, masqueraders rarely make mistakes. Selected songs, which are mostly mournful, are carefully chosen by various group elders to reflect the tastes and times of the generations being remembered. Supporters sing along to performances, even weeping at the moment specific leader’s or founder’s names are mentioned. In all the dances, this is the only time the entire park gets calm (with the possible exception of a very few drunks who feel like pouring out their grief).

Overall, the Fancy Dress Festival is meant to be a happy event, not a time for sorrow. Yet, even though the festival is not based on traditional practices, still the cultural norms of the people play a major role. As is done in all cultures in Ghana, the ancestors and other deities are invited to celebrate with the living at any needed time. Thus, the addition of the slow-dance to the Fancy Dress Festival. From here, the festival moves on to the highlife section. Now, a cheerful and lively music is performed to bring back life into the program.

This dance is very popular in Ghana and thus universally enjoyed by the audience. Highlife songs recount the day-to-day social and political issues of the nation.\footnote{In Ghana, according to John Collins, “highlife is one of the myriad varieties of acculturated popular dance-music styles that have been emerging from Africa this century and which fuse African with Western and Islamic influences.” The term highlife was coined in 1920 by the local Ghanaians who could not afford to participate in the ballroom dances, which were mainly for the Colonial masters and the Ghanaian elites} Even though no one may actually be singing these lyrics, judges are
given written copies of the texts and expect to find a relationship between lyric topics and choreography. Groups are given extra five minutes for this dance. This is done for two reasons. First, the judges need some time to read the text and relate it to the choreographies. Second, groups often perform a short dance drama that relates to the songs. This requires extra time for setting up and clearing performance props.

Themes that are presented in such dance dramas include: religion (Christianity against traditional worship), gender (man against woman), and formal education for girls, teenage pregnancy, brushfires, and immunization against the six killer diseases (measles, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis and diphtheria), and AIDS awareness. Most of the natives in Winneba, especially the fishermen and farmers, are not up to date on current affairs. Thus, governmental organizations—which include, the Ministry of Health, Ghana Education Service, Ghana Christian Council, Association for Ghana Traditional Council, and the Ghana Fire Service—organize seminars open to all choreographers. Any information acquired by the choreographers may then be put into a dance drama, which in turn is used for public education.

who worked for the Europeans. The local people saw these elites as high class people, because, they could not afford to pay the fee the elites had to pay to participate in such dances. Those who were seen as elites were local trained clerks or typists, secretaries, administrative assistants to the colonial administration. Most of the songs are composed in the Akan language, which is problematic for non-Akan-speaking judges. Thus, in order for the judges to execute the best possible judgments, brass band leaders are expected to translate the song lyrics into English.
Atwim, or adaha, is the original Fancy Dress dance performed everywhere in Ghana. This dance was named after the traditional Ghanaian brass band, which include bass drum, snare drum, patsir (a small drum), agogo, castanet, and flute. The rhythm for atwim or adaha is in an exuberant \( \frac{3}{4} \) time. Thus, even though the broader competition is between the four main groups (and judges award marks to group performance rather than individuals) when it gets to atwim, members within the same group try to out-dance each other while also entertaining the audience with agile and energetic dance movements. Indeed, atwim is so fast that the whole park becomes polluted with dust. This layering has come to signify a fitting end to the Fancy Dress competition. Said Maawa, the group mother of Tumus, “God created man with dust and after death we go back to the dust.”

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41 Only in Winneba is the dance known as atwim, a term which literally means to stretch.
After the last performance, all the groups are invited back to the center of the park. While they listen to the procedure used to award marks, security forces take the judges to the police station or some other safe place. Then, finally, the chairman of the Winneba Fancy Dress Federation announces the winner. Celebration after the competition is now open to all with a street carnival. Groups and their supporters parade and party through the four main streets until late in the night when they finally arrive at *Nkwantanan*, Winneba’s town center. The celebration of the street carnival is continued the following day. The masqueraders use this time to thank all their supporters and the well wishers who have traveled from afar to witness the festival. Some individual masqueraders use the moment as an opportunity to sell their old costumes to outsiders who might need them for their own festivals elsewhere. And ideally, the money earned by the seller goes towards the preparation for next year’s costume.
CHAPTER III

RELATED FESTIVAL DISPUTES

When in 1920 the CPP government with other political leaders got involved in the Fancy Dress Festival and turned it into a competition among local groups, some of these elites carried the notion that the Fancy Dress participants were lower-class vagabonds. But this notion changed when they discovered that the festival-related fees generated funds for the development of the town, some of which could be siphoned off to line individual pockets. The Fancy Dress groups already had their different traditional committees taking care of monetary business before the political leaders joined to form a unified committee in the late 1920s, this being the Association for Winneba Fancy Dress (AWFD). The main thought within the AWFD was to commercialize the festival, with the idea that the celebration would promote tourism and create employment through the production and sales of costumes, masks, and other festival-related souvenirs. But the new committee became divided when the original members (most particularly leading artists from various Fancy Dress groups) discovered that the new members were using the Fancy Dress Festival for their personal political and commercial gain. This situation precipitated a breakup in which the original Fancy Dress members quit the AWFD and
reestablished themselves as the Winneba Fancy Dress Federation (WFDF),
proclaiming that there could be no Fancy Dress Festival without them.

Members of the WFDF were no less political or financially conscious than
the AWFD, but they held the common understanding that the Fancy Dress
Festival was an artistic event with its own principles and that any obvious
exploitation, political or commercial, would destroy it. Even today, the subject of
the relationship between the Fancy Dress Festival and Winneba politics remains
part of the broader question of the relation between culture and power, a
struggle that inhibits the promotion and participation of a variety of Winneba
festivals.

Another problem that the Fancy Dress Festival faces is that the WFDF
must serve not only its own needs, but also those of its sponsors, who primarily
participate for commercial gain. This business model is not always good for the
celebration of traditional festivals, however. For example, the time for the
commencement of the Fancy Dress competition, which was traditionally 2:00
p.m. has been moved to noon so that the Accra Brewery Company (ABC), the
major sponsor for the occasion, has more of the afternoon to sell its products.42

Some members of the town believe that the celebration should stick to the

42 That’s how it works on paper at least. In practice, these sponsors generally arrive at the park late because they come from outside Winneba, thereby delaying the entire competition which was moved forward on their own request.
festival. Others note that shifting the festival’s time has in a way deprived some community members (such as the elderly who cannot get to the park) of enjoying fully the festival. This is because groups that formerly spent hours parading in the streets now have to rush to the park before noon or face penalties.

Finally, masqueraders are warned not to display any competing alcoholic company’s products other than that of ABC and are required to incorporate elements of the sponsoring company’s logos in their outfits, even against their will. I found that the majority of masqueraders now think that the festival is too structured, lacking in the original and essential spontaneity—without boundaries or restrictions—that was a part of its original heritage.

Fig. 13. ABC Masqueraders. Photo by author.
So, while the festival’s increased size, national reputation, and power for revenue generation has brought status and increased opportunities to Winneba, these positive changes are counterbalanced by negative feelings related to individuals’ sense that the festival is no longer their own. Social mores suffer as well. For example, as tourism continues to grow and more people come to Winneba, violence and other criminal activities seem to have grown in step. Community elders and the WFDF are unable to resolve this problem. In fact for some, violence has come to be seen as an integral part of the celebration, with clashes between rival groups frequent since the late 1930s. There is usually at least one incident of a masquerader or a supporter being hospitalized through such clashes.

The biggest problem the community faces during festival time is with excessive drug use, drunkenness, and overtly sexual behaviors. Abortions rise in the months following the festival, perhaps in part due to the actions of foreigners who lure young girls into prostitution with the promise of hard currency. Invariably, such liaison leaves behind single mothers, unwanted babies, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The strongest opposition for celebrating this festival has always come from the small churches, including Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostalists and other evangelical groups. These churches organize crusades
and also send out flyers denouncing the festival activities as a dwelling place for uncleanliness, fornication, witchcraft, and idolatry. Curiously the GCC, which opposes the *Aboakyer* festival for its supposedly pagan values and rituals, breaks step with the evangelical churches above when it comes to the Fancy Dress Festival. While the GCC may oppose the individual debaucheries associated with Fancy Dress Festival, it supports the event as a whole because of its association with the Christmas holiday. Indeed, the GCC uses the festival as an opportunity to educate the public through dance dramas. The majority of the opposing congregations stand firm in their notion that the Fancy Dress activities conflict with biblical beliefs, adding that most of the time the church has to take care of the hospital bills for girls made pregnant through illicit sex acts.

Church disapproval of the Fancy Dress Festival has become a thorn in the flesh of the organizers. It might be tempting for organizers to simply ignore the condemnation of these churches, but the fast rate at which people are drawn from Fancy Dress participation and into Christian retreats is significant. If this situation is not reversed or slowed, it may be that someday only tourists will be the spectators of this wonderful festival.
CHAPTER IV

THE FESTIVALS IN CONTRAST

Both the *Aboakyer* and the Fancy Dress celebrations are burdened with divisive problems, which have become impediments for the festivals’ promotion and development. Youth support the Fancy Dress Festival, but the elderly tend to support the *Aboakyer* festival. Christians, meanwhile, complain about immoral activities that go on during both celebrations. The ruling government’s politicized involvement in program planning prevents participation by opposition party members; feminists continue to struggle for the recognition and inclusion of women in the decision-making process.

Perhaps the most sensitive issue that needs immediate attention is the younger generation’s choosing the Fancy Dress Festival over the *Aboakyer* festival. The youth claim that the *Aboakyer* is an archaic festival, no longer relevant. They want to throw out the old and bring in the new. Yet, *Aboakyer* is an occasion that needs the support and participation of the youth, especially during the deer hunting. According to the elders and custodians of the deities, they have always depended on the strength of these youth in making a good catch for pacifying the *Effutu* gods, who in turn protect and bless the land. Should the younger generation continue to resist participation in the traditional festival, a time will come when the elders will not be able to perform the ritual, thereby
bringing calamity to all. But the youth of today remains unconcerned. They believe in the Christian god and are confident that no other lesser god can harm them. They also talk about other practices of the traditional festival, which have contributed to their withdrawing their participation in the Aboakyer. These include:

a. Cruelty to Animals  
b. Immoralities  
c. Division Among Families  
d. Practices of Primitive Culture

All the problems mentioned above make sense when one considers the rate that the African world is changing. While some traditional practices can be modernized, others—like the sacrifice of a deer for the gods—cannot. If Aboakyer is to survive, elders and youth must come together and negotiate a way in which the traditional and the modern can live side by side. The Fancy Dress Festival is more “up to date” and Westernized. It brings different people from all parts of the world together, generates funds for town development, helps youth to be artistically creative, and educates people on different issues concerning the development of their personal lives.

The two festivals seem so different, but in fact, they are not. The same problems found in Aboakyer exist in the Fancy Dress Festival as well, but in disguised forms. To clarify these points, I revisit the celebrations of both
festivals—from the beginning preparations to the celebration itself—and discuss the above problems one by one, pointing out how they are linked to both festivals.

Cruelty to Animals

The *Aboakyer* festival involves sacrificing a deer to the gods of the land. An outsider, or permit me to say the youth of today, might be right in their judgment that this practice is cruel when considering the way these animals are treated before they are slaughtered for sacrificial purposes. This act is no secret to even a toddler in Winneba; it is performed openly in front of children and adults, and thank God there have not been any reports of children being traumatized. Yet, the Fancy Dress groups in their own secret ways perform such bloody rituals as well in order to protect themselves from evil doings by rival groups. (I was warned not to mention names when presenting my research, so I will not.) I witnessed one of these groups slaughter a dog, the blood of which was smeared all over the feet and hands of the masqueraders. Another group killed a black cat and burned the fur, the ashes from which was mixed in a sheer butter and smeared over the masqueraders.

In *Aboakyer*, animal sacrifice is a public act; it is private (even secretive) in the Fancy Dress. In *Aboakyer*, the sacrifice is dedicated to the gods and brings protection on the entire community. In the Fancy Dress, the sacrifice protects
only one rival group against the other. The former is unifying, the latter divisive. Thus it would seem that the *Aboakyer* ritual, which is community oriented, has a greater positive value than Fancy Dress rituals. Therefore, one must ask if the modern really is an improvement over the old ways. I leave this to the reader’s judgment.

**Immoralities**

In every festival where men and women meet, there is a temptation of committing infidelity. Even though the *Aboakyer* festival is more of a deer hunt, *akosuadontoba* (the afternoon session) involves men and women dancing in a line while depicting sexual behaviors. Is that what the youth are complaining about? What about the street carnivals during Fancy Dress Festivals, which even involves children’s participation and in the same format as the *akosuadontoba*? Yet at the Fancy Dress, these behaviors are often taken to the next level, as exemplified by hospital pregnancy reports.43

**Division Among Families**

It is true that constant fighting between the two royal families over who is the rightful heir to the throne of Winneba, supported by the *Tuafo* and the *Dentsifo asafo* companies, have segmented the town with brothers against brothers, youth against elderly, traditional against modern, and so forth. The

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43 This was my experience as well. My mother used to run a maternity home and clinic where I worked as a clerk keeping records at the out-patients department.
Fancy Dress faces similar problems. Membership does not strictly involve traditional inheritance. Therefore, blood brothers can join any group of their choice. When it comes to fighting between two rival groups, it is always possible that brothers will fight against each other in support of their particular groups. Families can be broken apart. Thus, both festivals involve violence that contributes to social division.

**Practices of Primitive Culture**

The youth claim that *Aboakyer* festival needs to be modernized. Whether this is true or not depends on how you look at the problem, what specifics you talk about. I suggest that labeling such a historic and educative festival as primitive is too harsh and that the youth need to reconsider their evaluation in light of the reality that their own newer festival borrows many elements from the so-called “primitive” festival.

Let us look at the main events of both festivals from a musical standpoint. In the deer hunting, particular war songs are constantly used to motivate the hunters in the forest. The rhythm for these songs is very fast; any time the songs stop, people turn to relax. In the Fancy Dress competition, when it gets to the dance finale—that is, when the *atwim* or *adaha* music is played by the brass bands—some of these same deer hunt festival war songs are used. Why use such songs in a modern Christmas-related festival? Because the musicians know that
such music gingers the dancers to come out with their best possible movements. This trick always works. Masqueraders are invariably motivated to the extent of challenging their own members with their fast dance movements.

**Conclusion**

In the course of this thesis, I examined both histories of the *Aboakyer* and the Fancy Dress. The research for the thesis was motivated by my own personal experiences as an Akan who lived in Winneba (a Guan state) for over fifteen years, combined with interviews I conducted in the summer of 2004. In addition, I examined and evaluated the problems both festivals face at present, including cultural and economic impact on the town. In the end, I argue that ignoring the past is every bit as unproductive as moving blindly into the future, that both the *Aboakyer* and the Fancy Dress Festivals represent essential and complimentary aspects of Winneba social and cultural life. I hope that promoters of both festivals will learn to live in harmony with each other as well as the various religious, political, and corporate factions involved.
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