

Performing Ferocity

Fancy Dress, Asafo, and Red Indians in Ghana

Courtney Micots

It is good entertainment. It is part of our culture.”¹ The words of tailor Francis Kodwo Coker sum up how the lively secular masquerade known as Fancy Dress has become an integral part of local celebrations in coastal Ghana today (Fig. 1). Adopted by Ghanaians in the early twentieth century from a European form of masked ball popular during the Victorian era, Fancy Dress arrived through Black Atlantic connections and for a variety of reasons. This article will address the hybridity of Fancy Dress and, more specifically, the hybrid origins of a character known as the “Red Indian,” which was performed during the twentieth century and, to a lesser degree, sometimes appears in the twenty-first century (Fig. 2). The Red Indian is an appropriation of the Plains warrior, a stereotype generated by American media when depicting Native North Americans. The Red Indian has been a widely popular character, the only character adopted by *asafo* groups as well as Fancy Dress. *Asafo*, an old Akan institution with paramilitary and community responsibilities, utilizes performance at ritual celebrations and serves as a local inspiration for Fancy Dress performance. Fancy Dress and characters like the Red Indian exemplify the selection and transformation process, according to artists and individuals who are exercising a complex set of personal and cultural preferences. Such agency has broad applicability to worldwide Carnival forms. Seeing the development of the Red Indian character as a hybrid form through the theoretical model of “cultural authentication” offered by Tonye Victor Erekosima and Joanne Bubolz Eicher (1981:51) provides a deeper understanding of the fluid creativity and political undercurrents in festival arts of the Black Atlantic World.

FANCY DRESS

Fancy Dress participants comprise young men and sometimes women between the ages of three and forty-five; the majority are in their teens and twenties, with leaders in their thirties and forties. While most identify themselves as Fante, an Akan subgroup who dominate Ghana’s Central Region, members from Effutu, Ahanta, Ga, and other coastal communities are also involved (Fig. 3). Fancy Dress street parading (walking) involves periods of intense dancing in front of chiefs’ palaces, hotels, and public squares. In competitions, like those in Winneba, five performance elements including costume inspection, a “march pass” (similar to parading), and three different types of dancing are judged. Tailors, often group members, craft the patchwork and striped costumes. These are paired with either a local mask made of cloth, wire mesh, or papier-mache, or a rubber animal or horror mask purchased in Accra and Takoradi or imported from America (though most are made in China) and given to the members by friends and patrons. A headdress constructed of fiber, cloth, Christmas garland, and/or mirrors may be added.

Early travel journals, colonial records, and coastal newspapers did not document this performance art in Ghana, and scholars have shown remarkably little interest in it. John Kedjanyi (1966, 1968) was the first to write about Fancy Dress in the 1960s, in two brief articles. It was not until 1977 that art historians Herbert Cole and Doran Ross documented Fancy Dress in their book *The Arts of Ghana*. Elmina participants told Cole and Ross that Fancy Dress was inspired by Europeans, particularly the Dutch, as an alternative to violent *asafo* in-fighting (Cole and Ross 1977:185–86). Several decades later, Kwesi Ewusi Brown (2005) documented the history and current politics of Fancy Dress in the port town of Winneba in his master’s thesis for a degree in music. Anthropologist Keith Nicklin and historian Jill Salmons



1 Fancy Dress “Holy Cities” group performing during Bakatue in Elmina, Ghana. July 9, 2011.
PHOTO: COURTNEY MICOTS

2 Fancy Dress mini-troupe of Red Indians from Nobles No. 1 in Winneba, Ghana. L to R: Alex Kwoage, Samuel Amaning, Emmanuel Nenyne and Ebow Yawson. January 1, 2009.
PHOTO: COURTESY SAMUEL AMANING

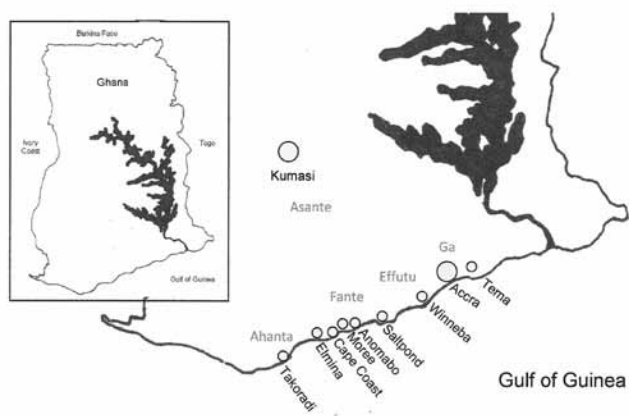
(2005) published an article for *African Arts* about the masks created by Fante artist Donatus Archibald Acquandoh, a.k.a. Hippies, for Elmina’s Fancy Dress groups (Fig. 4).

Brown states that Fancy Dress was “celebrated in Winneba in the nineteenth century by the Dutch and British who applied their trade at the Winneba seaport” (2005:35). Cole and Ross question the oral histories that assume a Dutch origin for Fancy Dress in Elmina, finding more plausible links to Italian comedy and Caribbean Carnival, which would have arrived on this part of the western African coast from Liberia or Sierra Leone (1977:186–86). Both Kedjanyi (1968:85) and anthropologist John Nunley (2010:61–61) explore the trajectory of Fancy Dress through the trans-Atlantic route, suggesting that Kru peoples from Sierra Leone along with West Indians brought it to Ghana in the late nineteenth century. In fact, Brown traced the history of brass bands, used in today’s Winneba Masquefest competitions, to the 1880s, when the West Indian Rifle Regiment introduced the brass band to the coast in Cape Coast, the largest port of the Gold Coast at the turn of the twentieth century (Brown 2005:41).² Many formerly enslaved Africans from the Caribbean islands were recruited into British regiments to reinforce troops in Ghana suppressing Asante forces as early as 1822 (Cole and Ross 1977:186). By 1853, a thousand men from the Caribbean staffed the West Indian Regiments. This increased to two thousand by 1863 (Metcalf 1964:240–41, 195–96). Nunley

(2010:48–53) follows the “fancy” aesthetic from Freetown, Sierra Leone (documented in 1889) along the West Atlantic Rim to Ghana. In fact, Kedjanyi stated that a Fante man claimed Fancy Dress was introduced by people from Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century (1968:85). Nunley attempts to draw connections between Fancy Dress practices in various ports along the Rim, from Sierra Leone to Nigeria, and with the Caribbean (2010:53–65), yet it is difficult to accurately trace such developments.

Fante fishermen, consummate sailors, worked aboard ships and visited ports as distant as Dakar, Senegal, and Duala, Cameroon, undoubtedly bringing back ideas from these cities.





3 Map of coastal Ghana.
DRAWING: COURTNEY MICOTS

While a general Caribbean origin for Ghanaian Fancy Dress is possible, its arrival may not have been direct and it was likely the result of a mixture of sources. Caribbean and American forms of Fancy Dress, or *mas*, are hybrids of indigenous, European, and African performance traditions, probably merged again with European Carnival celebrations brought by the sailors of varying European origins to the West African port cities (Fig. 5). Archival photographs available at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University and online³ document Fancy Dress played by Europeans on ships and at colonial locations at the turn of the century. Characters included those based on the Native North American Plains warrior (Fig. 6). Fancy Dress, or variations on the form, appears not only in Ghana, but also in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, and Freetown, Sierra Leone, today (Nunley 2010:60–61, Crowley 1989:74–86).⁴ Sources for costume ideas, such as the pattern book *Weldon's Practical Fancy Dress or Suggestions for Fancy and Calico Balls* (1887), were in circulation along the trade routes. According to Martha Warren Beckwith and Helen Roberts (1923:14), artists in Jamaica used this book.

In the 1920s, another performance hybrid developed on the Ghanaian coast known as the concert party. Like concert party performers, Fancy Dress participants “appropriated material from American movies, Latin gramophone records, African American spirituals, [and] Ghanaian *asafo* ...” However, whereas concert party performers wore “minstrel makeup” and enacted plays (C. Cole 2001:1), Fancy Dress members wore masks and paraded through town. Whenever Fancy Dress first appeared on the Gold Coast, and whatever its relation with the concert party, it appeared in a brief notice in the August 30, 1919, newspaper *Gold Coast Leader* stating that a Carnival was held the afternoon of August 25th with large crowds in attendance in Cape Coast, and that a

Fancy Dress Ball was held at the Government Gardens on the following Tuesday evening.⁵ The identity of the participants is not stated. The earliest photograph I have located depicts the 1941 Winneba Red Cross No. 4 group (Fig. 7). While a cowboy is present (far left), no Red Indians are pictured.

According to elderly residents interviewed in 2009 and 2011, Fante inhabitants first performed Fancy Dress in Saltpond, an important coastal port town at the turn of the twentieth century. The tailor Coker told me that Brazilian tourists introduced Fancy Dress to Saltpond in the early 1920s.⁶ It is possible that repatriated Afro-Brazilians, or their descendants, came to this town from Accra or Lagos, Nigeria, bringing stories about their Brazilian masquerade practices with them. Brazilians emigrated to the Gold Coast in three successive waves. Seven families from Bahia landed in 1829, and two more groups arrived in 1836; one came directly from Bahia, while the other went to Nigeria first (“Brazil House” n.d.).⁷ Their descendants maintain that these Brazilians were the first tailors in the Central Region. Brazilian tailors likely brought their Carnival costumemaking talents to Ghana. A different history was presented by another Saltpond tailor, Kodwi Antwi Baiden, who told me that around 1940, a Saltpond Fante went to Europe, possibly England or Germany, and returned with the idea.⁸ While elders have conflicting memories regarding the source and date of Fancy Dress, those interviewed in Saltpond and in many other coastal towns consistently credit Saltpond as the first town to host Fancy Dress. It quickly spread to Cape Coast, Winneba, and nearly every town in the Central Region.

ASAFO

Unlike the recently imported Fancy Dress, *asafo* is a traditional paramilitary institution existing among Akan groups since at least the seventeenth century. The word *asafo* derives from *asa* (“war”) and *fo* (“people”) (Christensen 1954:108–109). While *asafo* refers to the collective town’s military force, *etsikuw* refers to the individual companies. The *etsikuw* are designated by a name referring to something of local significance—their function in war, location in the state, or occupation or history of the members (Cole and Ross 1977:186). The matrilineal family, or *abusua*, the matrilineal role of the *omanhen*, or ruler, and the patrilineal *asafo* are fundamental Fante social groupings. This system was described by James Boyd Christensen as double descent. While a man inherits property from his mother’s brother, he and his sister belong to their father’s *asafo* (Christensen 1954:108–109, Rattray 1969:35–37). During nineteenth-century wars with the Asante the men organized into armed fighting companies and the women served as a supply corps to the front lines. Occasionally women assumed positions of field command, but these apparently occurred only under extraordinary circumstances (McCarthy 1983:20). They usually functioned as cooks and nurses in time of war. Today they follow the men to important ceremonies, praising, dancing, and cheering (Christensen 1954:111).

Although the study of Fancy Dress is in its infancy, the literature on *asafo* is extensive. Some of the best of these include works by anthropologists James Boyd Christensen (1954) and R. Sutherland Rattray (1969), sociologist B.I. Chukwukere (1980), and historian Thomas C. McCaskie (1995). Their arts have been

discussed by art historians Herbert M. Cole and Doran H. Ross both together (1977) and separately (Ross 1979), George Nelson Preston (1975), and Kwame A. Labi (2002, 2002a). Fante *asafo* perform numerous rituals throughout the rainy season (July–October) to ensure good harvests and general well-being. During the festival known as Akwambo, for example, *asafo* companies parade through the main streets, down to the spring, river, or ocean—sources of drinking water, food, and home to protective deities—and then to the house of chiefs. The *asafo* priest or priestess dances to the drum beats, often succumbing to spirit possession. The specially trained flag dancer, or *frankakitsanyi*, dances the company’s appliquéd, embroidered, or painted flags, taunting their rival (Fig. 8). He wears a raffia skirt and may add bracelets, necklaces, baldrics, and anklets. His arms, legs, and feet are visibly whitened with sanctifying kaolin. His skirt may have attached beads, bells, and amulets, adding to the sound of the performance. Art historian Robert Farris Thompson wrote that a vigorous dance with qualities of aliveness, high intensity, and speed characterizes an African ideal of artful muscularity and depth of feeling. This vitality, or playing the youthful body with “percussive strength,” is often accompanied rhythmically by a beating drum and the rustling of raffia, bells, and other elements (1974:9). Fancy Dress costumes also incorporate attached bells, possibly influenced by the local *asafo* or by costumes from the Caribbean and West Atlantic Rim.

Unlike Fancy Dress, each *asafo* group also may perform in the area in front of their *posuban* (a brick and cement shrine) or a rival’s *posuban*, transforming a previously secular and public space into one that is ritually significant. In order to do so, the *asafo* priest or priestess must pour libations to venerate the ancestors before the performance. Then, the groups transform the entire character of the surroundings with activity, color, art forms, drama, and music. This enlivening of the performance space draws huge crowds, creating a dramatic public show or festival. Performance as a “site of cultural memory” involves “the production of knowledge, where philosophy is enacted, and where multiple and often simultaneous discourses are employed” (Drewal 1991:2; see also Drewal 1990).

One of those discourses may involve a performer’s ability to bring harmony to uneven human relationships and restore balance. Akan festivals involve events that fluctuate in an “off-beat phrasing.” Thompson discusses the off-beat phrasing, or moments of syncopation, employed in African music, dance, sculpture, and cloth patterns (1974:10–13). The Akwambo involves libations that are slow-moving and dancing that is vigorous. Anthropologist Richard Schechner stated that ritual and theater employ “repetition, simplification, exaggeration, rhythmic action, the transformation of natural sequences of behavior into composed sequences ... it is the basic function of both theater and ritual to restore behavior” (Schechner 1985:113). This repetition within performance may induce a sense of stability and predictability, for it provides a continuous temporal reference. “It has a unifying potential, or rather it provides a common denominator for actions and events. Its binding potential is what makes it particularly crucial to any collective action” (Moore and Meyerhoff 1977:17). This unification is at the heart of both *asafo* and Fancy Dress parading and competition.



4 Fante artist Donatus Archibald Acquandoh, a.k.a. Hippies, from Elmina holding papier mache masks for Fancy Dress. July 9, 2011. PHOTO: COURTNEY MICOTS

THE PLAINS WARRIOR IMAGE

Mass-produced commercial imports from North America—product labels, posters, books, magazines, and cinema—circulated within trans-Atlantic trade routes beginning in the nineteenth century, popularizing the American West and the Plains warrior image.⁹ Hollywood-generated cowboy and Indian films stimulated further adoption of the Plains warrior as a performed character. Various cultures along the routes adopted this image for different reasons. However, the Plains warrior was generally viewed as a sociopolitical figure of heroic courage in the face of insurmountable odds. Placing the Red Indian character in context with similar characters in the Black Atlantic World offers a deeper understanding of the contradictions and historical biases that were spread through the trans-Atlantic trade route and beyond.

In the Caribbean, this image was used to express African practices and to counter slavery (Bettelheim 1979:7–9). For groups in Brazil, Native American characters played out nationalist and non-white racial-solidarity themes (Fig. 9; Crowley 1984:20, 33). Black Indians in New Orleans, also on the West Atlantic Carnival circuit, are romanticized versions of a history and heritage between Native Americans and enslaved Africans, both victims of colonialism (Fig. 10; Robbins and Becher 2006:14, 147). Coastal Ghanaians used the image as a way to recruit new mem-



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5 Crew members dressed in costume as King Neptune and his court for a “crossing the line” naval initiation ceremony aboard HMS *Delhi*. Atlantic Ocean south of Sierra Leone, December 14–22, 1923.

PHOTO: IMAGES OF EMPIRE, BRITISH EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH MUSEUM

(opposite)

6 S.A.H. Sitwell, a British employee of the Bank of Bengal, poses in fancy dress as a native American chief. Probably Kolkata, India, circa 1905.

PHOTO: IMAGES OF EMPIRE, BRITISH EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH MUSEUM

7 Fancy Dress group Red Cross No. 4 in Winneba, Ghana. In their first performance in 1941, Red Cross built a large wood ship to represent the ship “Red Cross” that brought masquerading materials to Winneba in the 1930s. Characters include the ship’s captain, sailors, British officers, King George VI, Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh, an archbishop (possibly William Temple), men dressed as white women, and a cowboy.

PHOTO: COURTESY KOJO YAMOA

bers among the youth and to express their pride as warriors in past battles (Fig. 11). This latter function countered British colonialism in much the same way the image had been used in the Caribbean for centuries.¹⁰ These examples suggest that Black Atlantic cultures select and incorporate this particular warrior image and transform it into something that suits their local cultural beliefs and political aspirations. Adaptation of images or stereotypes matters because such trans-Atlantic connections inform our understanding of multicultural contact, agency, and strongly held cultural practices.

The Plains warrior image was available to Ghanaians through several venues that circulated within the trans-Atlantic route. American Westerns played widely in Christian mission schoolhouses at the turn of the twentieth century and in cinema houses located in larger towns along the Ghanaian coastline from the 1920s to the 1970s (Fig. 12). Local artists were inspired to recreate some of the popular characters, such as Robin Hood, Roman soldiers, Moses, Jesus Christ, cowboys, and Indians. Some of the specific films remembered by the many Ghanaian elders I interviewed include *Custer’s Last Fight* (1912), *Custer’s Last Stand* (1936), and the Lone Ranger series (1956). Posters advertising these films were likely on view long after the movie had left the venue and perhaps were collected and used by local artists.

Even though in most Westerns the white cowboys and/or cavalry are victorious over the Indians, it was the two older films about Custer’s defeat recalled by most of the elders. They saw themselves akin to the Native Americans, courageous warriors who struggled against the white colonizers. “We liked that they were fighting white men.”¹¹ After fighting alongside the British in the wars against the Asante in the nineteenth century and then in World Wars I and II in the early twentieth century, Ghanaians knew firsthand the military strength of the British empire. Although Ghanaians knew they could not attack the obviously better-armed British forces and win, they could protest colonial injustice through performance, as had been the case in Jamaica

about two centuries earlier. Slaves sold from the Ghanaian coast in the early eighteenth century carried with them memories of the Gold Coast hero John Conny, who fought successfully against Europeans. Shortly thereafter, lively street parades in Jamaica with masked performers shouted “John Connu” at plantation houses, perhaps in defiance according to art historian Judith Bettelheim (1979:9). “The appeal of a rebellious Indian character is quite understandable for the black masquerader who, for social or legal reasons, could not portray a rebellious black African” (ibid., p. 280).

GHANAIAN “INDIANS”

Early Red Indians were described by elders in Saltpond as wearing dress similar to those performed in the Caribbean. While this may link the first performances on the Gold Coast more closely with Caribbean and Jonkonnu traditions, it is important to note that many of the same costuming materials, like peacock feathers and small bells, as well as masks (many coming from Austria and India; Bettelheim 1979:132, Nunley and Bettelheim 1988:59, Fig. 36) were provided by the same trading vessels that sailed between the trans-Atlantic ports. Jonkonnu combined elements of African masquerade and European theater and therefore represents one of the first Carnival forms with an underlying current of resistance. By the late eighteenth century, Jonkonnu had spread to almost every island in the Caribbean. Each island cluster derived its own style of costume and performance. Varied forms of Fancy Dress-style masquerade thus spread to Ghana, at least by the 1910s.

The late nineteenth century image of the “Red Indian” or “Wild Indian” based on the Plains warrior image was being performed in (at least) Jamaica, St. Kitts-Nevis, Bermuda, the Dominican Republic, and also Brazil. By the mid-1930s this character was being performed in Ghana at the port of Saltpond. Its popularity ensured that it spread to other coastal towns. This was the same period in which growing frustrations with the British colonizer



were resulting in the development of nationalist political movements. Fancy Dress and *asafo* parades are grassroots performance events composed primarily of Fante participants from the less-advantaged classes. Performance events like Fancy Dress and Carnival, and warrior characters emanating from the lower classes, tend to negotiate power. Elizabeth McAlister, who studied Rara in Haiti, noted that when groups move in large numbers into public thoroughfares, they open up a “social space” for popular expression, “a stage for discourse under conditions of insecurity” (2002:161). Performance theorist, dance historian, and ethnographer Margaret Thompson Drewal stated that “techniques of the body should be understood as resources for negotiation that knowledgeable agents deploy critically in specific performances either for complicity or resistance” (Drewal 1991:7).

The *asafo* groups appropriated the Plains warrior image in the 1950s and often imitated the Fancy Dress character in addition to those presented in the local cinema. The *asafo* company named Tuafo No. 1 in Cape Coast may have appropriated the Plains warrior image first in 1952. In Winneba, Dentsefo No. 2 had an Indian Regiment from the 1960s to the 1980s. In Anomabo, Kyirem No. 6 had an Indian Regiment from 1964 to 2001. Tuafo No. 1 in Moree adopted the performance in 1969 and ceased in the late 1990s. *Asafo* Red Indians (Fig. 13) differ from those in Fancy Dress in several important ways.

Fancy Dress is performed during holidays such as Christmas, New Year’s Day, Easter, Empire Day, festivals, and at member funerals. In addition, *asafo* also appear during important ritual events honoring ancestors, such as Akwambo and Atranbir. It is reasonable that a military group, honoring ancestors, would wish to celebrate their past military heroes and exploits, even though *asafo* do not usually perform characters. Perhaps the character of the Red Indian allowed them to relive this history. Herbert Cole stated that the “festival ... is simultaneously real and illusionistic: a transformation of the lives and spaces of a town for the brief duration of the ceremonial period” (1975:60). The use and dis-

play of art works are an integral part of enlivening the space and activating sites of cultural memory.

Another key difference between Fancy Dress and *asafo* concerns membership. Unlike Fancy Dress, where anyone can join any group, a person is born into their *asafo* allegiance. Men and women may elect whether or not to participate but if they do so, it must be within their father’s *asafo*. Although *asafo* is widely practiced across the Central Region today, captains often complain that it is difficult to build membership among the youth. Throughout the twentieth century, young people have been admonished against joining by Christian church leaders who disapprove of the *asafo*’s polytheistic beliefs and practices. In an effort to build youth membership from the 1950s to late 1970s, exciting characters like the Plains warrior were incorporated into *asafo* performance. Today, however, Fancy Dress has captured the youth membership, leaving *asafo* with older members who often cannot perform ritual celebrations due to lack of funding.¹² This is ironic, considering early inspiration for Fancy Dress was partially derived from *asafo* performances.

In *asafo*, Red Indian characters played in groups called regiments, which perform alongside the entire *asafo* company. It is only the regiment that performs the Red Indian, and in most cases, the performance does not differ from the rest of the company. Although they may paint their faces, *asafo* performers do not wear masks. In spite of the fact that these members are not masked, *asafo* Red Indians may be spiritually transformed into the characters much as the company priests are spiritually possessed during performance. Ross called attention to the use of beads, bells, and amulets incorporated into the costumes of the flag dancers as part of their historical link to more “priestly duties” (1979:12). Diviners, shrine priests, and other religious persons wear similar assemblages. The faces of Red Indian performers among the now-defunct Kyirem No. 6 regiment in Anomabo were marked in black and white. Charcoal was used to create black; a mixture of kaolin clay and water was used to make



8 *Frankakitsanyi*, or flag dancer, for Akomfodzi No. 7 *asafo* company during Akwambo in Anomabo, Ghana. 2009.

PHOTO: COURTNAY MICOTS



9 Bloco Indio "Comanches" at Carnaval in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. 1981.

PHOTO: DORAN H. ROSS

white. Previous regiment members say the raffia ties on the arms and legs as well as facial marks were meant to emulate the image of the Native Americans, though ties and facial painting are also worn by *asafo* priests and flag dancers.

Another difference between Fancy Dress and *asafo* company costumes is that members of the *asafo* regiment wear specific attire that communicates the group's allegiance to the company (Fig. 14) whereas a variety of costumes and colors are worn in Fancy Dress. In the example of Kyirem No. 6, the *asafo* color is red, so everyone in the company wears red. Those in the Indian Regiment wore red costumes with white trim, feathered headdresses, and white body paint to be identified as a separate regiment. In some of the Fancy Dress groups outside of Winneba, members today wear costumes with certain motifs that designate belonging to the group. For example, the Elmina Holy Cities Fancy Dress group wears the motifs of either clubs or spades (from playing cards) or shells (from the Shell gas company logo) (Fig. 1).

Women in the Kyirem *asafo* regiment wore the same costumes and carried the same weaponry. Each member carried a full-size

bow and several arrows. The bow was created from a raffia palm branch and leather string. The arrows were sticks with attached iron tips. Although usable weapons, the bows and arrows were carried as an accessory for performance.¹³ Fewer historical changes are remembered for costumes used in *asafo* than in Fancy Dress, though great variety among members is apparent in headdresses and facial and body painting. Red is the color of all the *asafo* groups who adopted the Indian character, and all these groups are considered historically to have been the especially fierce warrior troop for their town. Red was defined by co-captain Kweku Amakye Dede of Kyirem's regiment as denoting a "warrior—fearless, brave, [and] very bold."¹⁴

The wild nature of this character is interpreted further in secret society performances in Freetown, Sierra Leone, by the personage of the Water Buffalo Devil performed by a group named Red Indians (Fig. 15). According to photographer Phyllis Galembo and curator Mary Pantzer, "On festival days, societies parade in the streets, headed by an individual spirit, or 'devil,' clad in a heavy costume, surrounded by costumed dancing spirits called 'Jollay'...." (Galembo, Okeke-Agulu, and Pantzer 2010:119, 147). Furthermore, Nunley suggests a link between Jolly costumes and headpieces to Alikali society devils described by Robert Wellesley Cole in Freetown in 1960 (2010:49; see also R. Cole 1960:126).

CULTURAL AUTHENTICATION

Many scholars have used the term "hybrid" to describe works of art created as a result of the mixing of peoples and cultures. The process of cultural authentication, introduced by textile



specialists Erekosima and Eicher, provides further analysis to understand how these hybrids evolve. They used the term in 1981 to examine the creative adaptation of imported materials, tools, and motifs in textiles by Kalabari women in Nigeria. The process involves four stages: selection, characterization, incorporation, and transformation. Selection refers to the appropriation of a motif, or object, without alteration. Characterization is the renaming of the motif to make it better understood within the culture that is adopting it. Incorporation involves ownership of a motif by a specific group within the community. Transformation is the creation of something new from the original motif (Erekosima and Eicher 1981:51). In practice, these steps are not always followed in linear fashion and some steps may be omitted altogether. Through an understanding of how specific motifs, forms, or technologies are selected and transformed, a culture's aesthetic preferences and motives can be uncovered. All four stages are exhibited in Fancy Dress and incarnations of the Red Indian character.

Selection is demonstrated in the borrowing of Fancy Dress from the mixture of British, Caribbean, and Brazilian resources available in port towns during the colonial period. Characterization, or the renaming of the English term Fancy Dress, is exhibited in the local Ghanaian equivalents Kakabotini, Kakabotofo, Katabotofo, Kakabotobe, and Kokoorebabaa, essentially all meaning a group that frightens (especially children). Elders and current members who were interviewed tended to use both English and local terms interchangeably, depending on the audience and context.



10 Black Indian from New Orleans, Louisiana, United States.
PHOTO: ISLANDMIX.COM

11 Twafo No. 1 *asafo* Red Indian, Cape Coast. 1975.
PHOTO: DORAN H. ROSS

The Plains warrior image was also selected for local performances. On-site, this persona was named in English as “Red Indian” most commonly, but also “Wild Indian” or just “Indian.” I was careful in interviews to ask what kind of Indians was represented—North American Indians, South American Indians, West Indians, or Indians from India. A few times respondents were confused between them. It is interesting to note that the Saltpond tailor Baiden remembered that masks with multiple faces were once imported from India. Perhaps with early “Indian” characters, the line between these groups was blurred. It seems to have been more important to portray a wild, fierce character, rather than one specifically North American or of any other ethnicity. Considering the fierce quality of the color red, it seems likely that the coastal Ghanaians arrived at the “Red Indian” label through a definition of ferocity, rather than by the supposed color of the Native North American’s skin. Thus, the English name acquired different meanings in the Ghanaian locality, characterizing it by redefining the name. This transformation is the most important stage in cultural authentication, whereby another’s cultural motif or form is made “authentic” for and by the local culture. The individuals who incorporated these



forms were those creating the Fancy Dress groups and those who performed the Red Indian in Fancy Dress or *asafo*.

Performance also demonstrates cultural authentication. Fancy Dress borrowed parading practices with bursts of intense dancing from the *asafo*, yet it also may draw from Afro-Caribbean and other African practices. Though Red Indian performance was usually similar to the entire Fancy Dress group or *asafo* company, sometimes members jumped or demonstrated the mock use of weaponry. The *asafo* company Tuafu No. 1 Red Indians in Moree carried fake axes, both the handle and blade carved of wood. They led the company through the streets, dancing differently from other members in the group. In one dance move, the Indians cut the air with their axes (in what sports fans in America would interpret as the tomahawk chop),¹⁵ imitating moves, says co-captain Simon Kofi Aponkye, that “they had viewed in the Hollywood westerns.”¹⁶ At the end of the parade, everyone gathered at a local square where the Red Indians stood as guards.

According to Dede, the Kyirem No. 6 “Indians” were “mimicking war” as part of the usual parade through the town streets (Fig. 16). Behind the *asafo* priest, the Indian Regiment would lead the *asafo* company, consisting in total of fourteen regiments of about seventy members in each (in the 1970s). These regiments were all given names: eleven had local names while three had English names (Red Indians, Americans, and Cowboys). Kyirem adopted the Indian character because they liked that the Native Americans were fighting with their “primitive weapons of bows and arrows against white men armed with guns.”¹⁷ Interestingly, when I reviewed the old movies mentioned (procured through Netflix), the Indians *were* armed with guns.

The masquerader in the middle of the Red Indian Regiment in Figure 14 wears a large headtie and a green-colored scarf covering the body. Dede identified the masquerader as an “ancestor” representing all seventy-seven of Anomabo’s *abosom*, or deities. Thompson reasoned that art and dance in Africa are partially defined as acts of “social acts of filiation,” connecting people to events in the past and their founding fathers. This repeated set of actions molds cultural values. Ancestral presence in the dance also controls the destructive force of time. To change the



12 Ruins of a cinema open at least from the 1950s to 1970s in Winneba, Ghana. 2009.

PHOTO: COURTNEY MICOTS

13 Kyirem No. 6 *asafo* company Indian Regiment performing during Atranbir in Anomabo, Ghana. 1975.

PHOTO: DORAN H. ROSS

14 Kyirem No. 6 *asafo* company Indian Regiment performing during Akwambo in Anomabo, Ghana. 1975.

PHOTO: DORAN H. ROSS

time and space of a performance area, movement, sound, and visual forms are utilized to create a multisensory environment unlike anything experienced in daily living (Thompson 1974:28). Akan festivals involve a transformation of time and space using movement, sound, and visual forms to reestablish sociopolitical balance. As social acts of filiation, Akan festivals involve rituals and dances that call to the ancestors and may invoke possession. Herbert Cole states that Akan festivals bring about “a suspension of ordinary time, a transformation of ordinary space” (1975:12). Dede stated that the costume “beautifies” or “puts glamour on the group.” This beautification was part of the visual challenge



to the other *asafo* groups in town. “Glamour [was] needed; there was no war at that time.”¹⁸ Thus, a visually striking performance as competition replaced battles where the involvement of ancestors continues to be necessary for the heightened potency of the group. Every year the costume for this character was changed for theatrical excitement. The green scarf, reported Dede, belonged to the masker’s wife and was a last-minute addition. This character can be compared more broadly to other ancestor, deity, and devil characters within Indian groups described by Baiden in Saltpond, by Brown in Winneba (Brown 2005:58), and even those described by Nunley in Sierra Leone (2010:60–61).

Parading by *asafo companies* and Fancy Dress is generally conducted throughout the town, particularly circling through the older sections. Thompson has noted that, among other African groups, circular parading has healing qualities; “... processioning around a village can mystically heal its hidden problems, can ‘cool’ the entire settlement with circling gestures of felicity and good faith” (Thompson 1988:20). It is possible that in the final act of transformation, the Red Indians served as an extra element of curing power to Ghanaian efforts to heal themselves from their colonial condition.

COMPETITION AND CONTINUITY

After Ghana achieved its independence in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah’s administration promoted several activities such as “boat racing, swimming, traditional dancing, cross country race ... and the fancy dress programme.”¹⁹ According to their brochure, the Winneba Masquerade Federation was created to oversee the groups and hold an annual competition. Possibly the idea was borrowed from Jamaican Jonkonnu competitions established in the early 1950s. Every year since 1957, Winneba masqueraders parade through town in their old costumes December 25–28 to collect funds for the annual January 1 competition. As

part of the coastal city’s New Year celebrations, groups of colorfully dressed Fancy Dress masqueraders march past the judges in the University of Education’s Advanced Teacher Training College Park (a.k.a. Advanced Park). Each group hires brass bands to play popular tunes like “Jingle Bells” in blues or highlife styles. After the march, they dance choreographed steps to slow dance or blues, highlife, and speed dance, or *atwim*. The costumes, music, and dance steps reflect the joyous occasion. The entire town gathers for the event. Many people travel from towns near and far, even flying in from outside countries, to attend. Thus, the groups are highly motivated to change their costumes, music, and dances each year in an effort to impress the judges and audience. Four groups of men, women, and children compete: Nobles No. 1, Egyaa No. 2, Tumus No. 3, and Red Cross No. 4. They perform many different characters, including stilt walkers, political figures, animals, Father Christmas, cowboys, and Red Indians. On January 2 they come to town again in their new costume—the one they competed in the day before—to dance in the main downtown streets to display their trophies and ask for additional dashes, or tips. Some members sell their old costumes to new members, those in nearby towns, or to dealers and collectors from Accra.

Although Red Cross No. 4 claims to have been the first to perform the Red Indian in the 1958 competition, now only a minitroupe of four young men from Nobles No. 1 in Winneba still occasionally play the character (Fig. 2). The small Freedom Fancy Dress group in Cape Coast performs the Red Indian. According to Captain Ekow Ackon, Fancy Dress in Cape Coast was started by five men whose first character was Chinese. A few members adopted the Red Indian in the 1940s after seeing an American cowboy and Indian film in the local cinema. This costume has not changed since its original conception (Fig. 17). Among their dance moves is a jump with one arm raised. Some of the regiment members carry knives with long, real blades or carved wooden guns. In 1990, girls and young women were allowed to join the group. Females wear the same costume as the males. In 2009, Ackon was captain over three girls and five boys. Yet only three danced the Red Indian in the 2009 Fetu Afahyɛ durbar, or parade of chiefs—Ackon, Boɔfo, and Ama David, a female.

Competitive inspiration and financial restrictions caused dramatic costume changes in Saltpond and Winneba Fancy Dress. Elsewhere the costumes did not change, for the need is to identify oneself as a fierce and courageous warrior. The Red Indian character, even one that does not resemble a Native American to Western eyes (Fig. 18), allowed coastal Ghanaians to transform into a character who colonial authorities wouldn’t feel was threatening to them, but that could act out all the aggressive behaviors and warrior-like imagery coastal Ghanaians could not



express outwardly in other contexts during colonial rule. It was continued after independence, when such imagery was needed for unity during political and economic instability. Today, during peaceful and more prosperous times, the Red Indian has faded as a popular character.

The popularity of the Winneba competition stimulated one national competition in Accra held during the week of Independence Day festivities in early March in the early 1990s. Competitions held in Cape Coast have taken place in the 2009 Fetu Afahye, an important harvest festival in early September, and on Christmas Day in 2010. Winners receive cash, a trophy cup, and bragging rights. Thus, Fancy Dress continues to grow in popularity and sometimes competitions based on Masquefest in Winneba are organized. Currently Fancy Dress extends into towns beyond the Central Region into Tema, with eleven groups in the Greater Accra Region, and Takoradi, with eighteen groups in the Western Region. More than one hundred members may participate in each group.²⁰

Therefore, the hybrids of Fancy Dress and the Red Indian character, once popular in Fancy Dress and *asafo* performances, exhibit the creative process of cultural authentication. Each has been transformed completely from the original source. In both the secular Fancy Dress and more sacred *asafo* events, the Plains warrior image was selected to express pride in the exploits of past warriors and their struggles with the British colonial oppressor as well as to build group membership. The complex reasons behind their transformation can be evidenced through the

16 Kyirem No. 6 *asafo* company Indian Regiment performing during Atranbir in Anomabo, Ghana. 1974.

PHOTO: DORAN H. ROSS

17 Ekow Ackon in his Freedom Fancy Dress Red Indian costume, Cape Coast, Ghana. 2009.

PHOTO: COURTNEY MICOTS

18 Samuel Amaning in his Nobles No. 1 Fancy Dress Red Indian costume, Winneba, Ghana. 2001.

PHOTO: COURTESY SAMUEL AMANING

examination of the process. More broadly, themes are exposed that evidence links to performance throughout the Black Atlantic—local group cohesion, colonial resistance, spectacle in place of war, and the ferocity of the warrior. Forms generated during the colonial period continue, yet they evolve. More current characters, like George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama, serve today as modern democratic warriors, replacing the Red Indian. Aspects of *asafo* performance are in the process of being replaced by Fancy Dress, which has flourished. And, in the tradition of change seen in Carnival around the Black Atlantic world, colonial resistance has become entertainment.

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Notes

1 Francis Kowdo Coker, interview by author, July 14, 2011.

2 The Gold Coast was the British name originally given to southern Ghana (Brown 2005:41).

3 See www.imagesofempire.com.

4 Nunley 2010:54, 60–61; Crowley 1989:74–86; Sam Anderson, personal communication, March 23–25, 2011. Other variants on the Carnival form performed in Africa with links to European Carnival are noted by Carlson (2010:59, n1).

5 While some of the characters in Fancy Dress

and concert parties may have influenced each other or have been simultaneously performed, the interviews cited by Cole do not indicate that Indians, of any kind, were represented in these traveling theater shows, though stereotyping was common.

6 Francis Kowdo Coker, interview by author,

October 27, 2009.

7 Ghanaians and Nigerians traveled extensively between the two British colonial countries, Ghana and Nigeria. Accra served as a capital city of "a somewhat hypothetical British east-Atlantic colony." Additionally, Lagos was part of the Gold Coast colony from 1874 to 1886 (Okoye 1995:92, n133).

8 Kodwo Antwi Baiden, interview by author, October 27, 2009.

9 Early books include James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). A two-volume work *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians* (1841) included prints by artist George Catlin, who popularized the image of the mounted warrior. By the 1850s cheap paper produced from wood pulp became readily available, and in the 1860s steam-powered printing presses made it possible to print large quantities of these types of stories along with their illustrations for mass distribution. Magazines like *Harper's Weekly*, founded in 1857, included illustrations of the American West by artists like Frederic Remington. Consumer product labels utilized the Plains Warrior image (Steele 1996:46–47). In addition, Native North Americans were included in the Ghanaian newspapers. See an obituary reprinted from *The Times* about the "Death of a Remarkable Indian," *The Gold Coast Times* (February 11, 1881), 3. Ghanaians may have been aware of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, which was vastly popular from the mid-1880s to the beginning of World War I in 1914. The shows employed real Native North Americans for mock battles in which they fought bravely, yet always lost against the whites (Buscombe 2006:57–66).

10 Ghana was a British colony from 1874 to 1957, but the coastal area was essentially a colony since the signing of the Bond of 1844.

11 Nana Kweku Amakye Dede (b. 1939), interview by author, November 2, 2009.

12 Very few youths are interested in participating and the local chiefs do not fund these performances. For example, none of Anomabo's seven *asafo* groups performed Akwambo in 2011; groups Dontsin No. 3, Iburon No. 4, and Ebiram Wassu No. 5 did not perform Akwambo also in 2009 and 2010.

13 Kweku Amakye Dede and Araba Nouma, interview by author, November 2, 2009.

14 Kweku Amakye Dede, interview by author, July 7, 2011.

15 Playing Cowboys and Indians was a worldwide phenomenon in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, yet vestiges of its impact continue today. Numerous mascots for American college sports teams are based on Native North American groups. In 2005, the Executive Committee of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) enacted restrictions on such symbols, stating that they "believe the stereotyping of Native Americans is wrong." Seventeen of the NCAA championship teams received penalties. They waived Florida State University's use of the Seminoles as a nickname and Chief Osceola as a mascot, for the college secured the blessing of Max Osceola, the chief and general council president of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. However, David Narcomey, general council member of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, stated: "I am nauseated that the NCAA is allowing this 'minstrel show' to carry on this form of racism in the twenty-first century" (Wieberg 2005).

16 Simon Kofi Aponkye, interview by author, October 28, 2009.

17 Kweku Amakye Dede, interview by author, November 2, 2009.

18 Kweku Amakye Dede, interview by author, July 7, 2011.

19 Winneba Masquerade Federation 2004. Also see

Brown 2005:59. DVDs of Winneba's annual competitions are available through Winneba's University of Education library.

20 For more information regarding Ghana's Fancy Dress and Masquefest, please see Micots (forthcoming).

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