

# Ghana's Deer Hunt Festival

by J.B. Siribou, a graduate student in Dalhousie's African Studies Department



Some of the white missionaries who came to preach christianity, considered West African traditional festivals as sinful and subsequently sought ways to obliterate them. Despite many attempts by these missionaries the festivals continue to be celebrated in West Africa and have gained many admirers from both home and abroad. West African christians no longer have apathetic attitudes towards these festivals but participate fully in them.

Festivals are occasions for mourning the dead, of relaxation for enjoyment and worship. The festivals are of different kinds. Some of these are harvest festivals celebrated to mark the beginning of the harvest season. Such festivals are the yam festival of the Ewe, the yam

festival at Aburi (Odehuro), the Homowo or "hooting at hunger" of the Gas, the Bakatue of the Edena (Elmina) people and Ifejoku of the Ibos of Nigeria. During these harvest festivals, sacrifices are offered to the deities to thank them for keeping them and their families to see another season and to ask the gods' blessings for the ensuing year. Other kinds of festivals deal with the honouring of the ancestors and the commemoration of the great events of the state. For example, the Odwira festival of the Akwamus is a time for the remembrance of their great ancestors who helped to establish the state but it is also a period of thanksgiving to the gods and the ancestors for their protection in the subsequent year. They also pray to their

gods for health and strength to enable them to enjoy bumper harvests in the new year. The Aday festival of the Akans deals mainly with the propitiation, solicitation and veneration of the ancestral spirits.

One of the most popular festivals in Ghana is the "Aboakyer" which is celebrated by the Effutus of Winneba. It is an annual festival, during which the state god "Penkye Otu" receives a yearly sacrifice of a "deer" from his subjects. It is a time of great jubilation and enjoyment and people from all walks of life throughout the country attend this festival.

The date of the festival is reckoned by an old woman who is attached to the shrine at Ankunam, the drummer's house. The weeks are calculated by making knots of the fibres of a new sponge and placing them in a container one after the other every week. The festival is celebrated when the fifty-second knot is added. It is normally celebrated on Saturday, this is because the Effutus found a suitable place of settlement at their present place, when the first sacrifice was made to the Effutu god, Penkye Otu. This tribal god was brought with them at the time of settlement. Some people hold the view that the god was taken from the people of Apa whose original name was "Sekum Apa" but later changed to Penkye Otu. Others also claim that this was the original god of the Effutus which helped them in their tribal wars and acts as the protector of the state to the present day.

Originally, Penkye Otu demanded human sacrifice

from the members of the royal house. Most people from the royal house were sacrificed to their great god Penkye Otu. To prevent



the possible extermination of the whole of the royal family, Penkye Otu agreed through invocation and incantations that a leopard caught with the bare hands should be substituted for a member of the royal family.

The Dentsifo Asafo Company was divided into two companies to make the catch more enthusiastic and competitive. This leopard hunt went on for about ten years, when it was later abandoned as it took away many lives and many others sustained serious injuries during the hunt. Another consultation was made and Penkye Otu agreed to accept a live deer caught with bare hands as a substitute. The god accepted the deer as a substitute because of the stripped skin of the deer which resembles that of the leopard. Others think that the deer was accepted because the Effutus regard the leopard and the deer as

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Rum flavoured. Wine dipped.

**Crack a pack of Colts along with the beer.**

## Africa Night

by Judy Pelham

Africa-disco, homemade African cooking, traditional dancers, costumes, poetry and dramatization are just part of the fare of the African Studies society's Africa Night. A disc-jockey will play contemporary African music, and the members of the society will be doing the cooking themselves. It is all part of the society's aim to promote awareness and understanding of the African culture, according to the society's president, Paul Kwakyi.

Kwakyi says the society does not take a stand on any political issues, but hopes to

promote discussion among African students and in the Dalhousie community. To do this the society holds meetings, sponsors guest lecturers, and has functions such as Africa night.

Most of the sixty to seventy members of the society are African, some on student visas, some landed immigrants or citizens. Kwakyi says when the society hears of an African student coming to Dalhousie they contact the person in advance, so the student has someone to reach on arriving in Canada. He says all Dal students are eligible to join, and all interested people are more than welcome.