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AN PREPARATION OF INDOOR GAMES IN GHANA

INDEPENDENT STUDY PROJECT (FALL)

GHANA: CROSSROADS OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

SUBMITTED BY

JEREMY FISHCHER

DECEMBER 8, 1998

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ABSTRACT

For many Ghanaians, the playing of games is a daily activity. By playing games often and usually at a high level of skill, Ghanaians participate in a process that is of great significance to their own culture. This paper is an exploration of the games culture, as it exists in Ghana. The category of game addressed in the investigation is indoor games. These games serve as a mode of stimulation, entertainment, and interaction for a large portion of Ghanaians, especially men. You, the reader, are about to enter a world of excitement, hierarchy, communalism, sexism, and intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

Ghanaian games are often classified as being either of the indoor type or the outdoor type. Outdoor games, such as football, require a good deal of running and the expenditure of physical energy. *Ampeh*, an outdoor game popular with young girls, involves singing, clapping and dancing. This study examines the playing of indoor games: most notably *Oware*, *Ludo*, *Dam* and *Spy* (a popular card game). Indoor games require less physical movement than outdoor games, and are often competitions of intellectual capacity.

Before moving on any further, it is helpful to provide a brief background on the mechanism of playing each of these four games. The description of each game is followed by a photographic illustration at the end of this introduction.

Oware:

Oware is a game that is normally played by two people, but can be played solo – or by as many as six participants. It is played using forty-eight marbles and a board containing twelve circular spaces. The spaces are set up in two rows, with six spaces in each row. The game begins with four marbles in each space and each player performs a turn by removing all marbles from one space on his/her own side of the board and placing all of these marbles into every space proceeding in a counterclockwise direction until all of the marbles have been used up. At such a juncture the player's turn is up and his/her opponent gets to play. The object of the game is to "capture" as many of the marbles as one can – as the player who is holding the most marbles in the end has won the game.

There are two methods of play that are popular in Ghana. The first method, *Anenam*, is a game of chance in which a player's turn is not over until he/she "sows" his/her last marble into an empty hole. Until that time, a player continues his/her turn by taking all of the marbles existent in the space into which he/she places the last marble in his /her hand. As the turn progresses, all groups of exactly four marbles in one space are collected. Groups of four marbles are collected by the player on whose side the space containing the marbles is located. The only exception to this rule occurs when a player sows his/her last seed into a space on his/her opponent's side that already contains three marbles. Thus, the player is creating a group of four marbles within the space owned by his/her opponent. The player who sows this final marble is only allowed to take this group of four when it ends his/her turn. The final end to a game of *Anenam* comes when eight marbles are left on the board. At that point, the player who went first in the game collects the remaining eight marbles.

The second popular method of play is called *Abapa*. *Abapa* is considered more of a game of skill and calculation than *Anenam* because it only allows one movement of marbles for each turn. Thus, moves must be calculated and planned thoroughly. For description of the rules of *Abapa* I shall turn to Kofi C. Agudoawu's Rules For Playing Oware abapa version:

RULES IN BRIEF

1. 4 seeds are placed into each of the 12 cups
2. Each player moves in a counterclockwise direction, leaving the original cup empty.
3. When the last seed is placed into an opponent's cup containing 1 or 2 seeds, the player captures those seeds as well as any adjacent cups containing 2 or 3 seeds on opponent's side.
4. When the opponent's cups are empty, the player must feed the opponent cups if possible. If he/she cannot do this then he/she captures all the remaining seeds on his/ her side.
5. A player must not place any seeds into the original cup from where he/she removed the seeds, such as a heavily loaded cup that makes more than one revolution on the board.
6. Each player gains the remaining seeds in his/her territory when they cannot be captured.

(Except for beginners all calculations on strategy should be performed mentally.)¹ One final note about *Oware* is that it does not even require the ownership of a board as village children are known to dig holes in the ground and play using dried palm nuts.

Ludo:

Ludo is a game played by as few as two and as many as four participants. Players are represented by a colour, red, blue, green or yellow. Each participant has four pieces, of his/her colour, that he/she attempts to move safely around a board containing seventy-two spaces. Each move is performed by advancing a piece of an amount of spaces coinciding with the number reached by the roll of a die. A player who rolls a six gets to repeat his/her turn.

The eventual destination of each piece is the "home space" in the middle of the board. A player can only place his/her pieces into the "home space" after they have successfully made a complete lap around the board. Players can frustrate the attempts of opponents to complete a lap when a player lands his/her own piece onto a space that is already occupied by an

¹ Kofi C. Agudoawu. Rules For Playing Oware abapa version. (Kumasi: Kofi Tall Enterprise, 1991). 19

opponent's piece. At that point, the piece that was first at the space is forced to return to the starting point of the game. A player cannot remove his/her piece from the starting point until he/she rolls a six. The first player to safely land all four of his/her pieces into the middle "home space" wins the game.

Some rules for the playing of *Ludo* vary according to locations and participants. For example, some people play a method that employs the backward movements of pieces in order to knock off the pieces of an opponent. In Cape Coast, *Ludo* players in the Oguaa² Indoor Games Association asserted that they would be unable to contest a *Ludo* match against players from Saltpond because rules for each town differ greatly.³

Dam:

Two participants, on a board made up of one hundred squares – fifty dark squares and fifty light squares, play Dam. The design is identical to the design of a chess or checkers board (if you know what that is). Each player begins the game with twenty pieces set up in four rows of five pieces each, leaving one space between each piece. The shape of their pieces distinguishes players – one set is square and the other is circular.

The object of a game of Dam is to capture one's opponent's pieces. This capturing is done when one "jumps" his opponent's piece. Jumping is done in a diagonal manner, as all moves are made on a diagonal line. One is able to jump on opponent's piece when the space behind that piece is left open. Multiple jumps, in which a player captures more than one of his opponent's pieces in a single manoeuvre, are possible when coinciding pieces are left unprotected from an opponent's "jump". When a piece reaches the side of the board opposite from its origin it becomes "kinged" and is able to move continuously on a diagonal. Pieces that have not been "kinged" can only move on space for each turn.

Spy:

Spy is a game contested by two players employing a standard deck of fifty-two playing cards. Each player is dealt five cards with which to play a hand. A player deals a hand by giving three consecutive cards to his opponent, then taking three, and then following the same pattern with only two cards. The player who did not deal begins the hand by playing any card he/she wishes. In turn, the other player must play a card of the same suit if he/she has. Whoever lays down the card that is of the highest value of the suit first laid takes the round. For example, when the first card laid is a ten of diamonds: an opponent could defeat that card

² Oguaa is the Fante word for Cape Coast

³ Cape Coast, Saltpond and Winneba are all in the Central Region of Cape Coast. None of these towns is more than a two hour drive away from the others.

with the queen of diamonds, but the opponent would lose the round if he/she laid down the king of hearts against the ten of diamonds. The player who wins the last round of a hand wins that hand.

In order to win a full game of *Spy*, a player must attain an allotted amount of points. Before beginning a game, players decide how many points one must amount in order to win the game. For every hand that one player wins, he/she gains a point.

There are two exceptions to the standard scoring system. The first exception is that a player earns three points when he/she wins the last round of a hand by playing a Six in a round in which he/she leads off the action. The second exception is that the winning of a round in the same conditions as just described above, but with a Seven instead of a Six, a player earns two points.

Now that the background of the games' mechanics is established, it is important to note that this study is not about the games themselves. Instead, it is about the culture of game playing and the significance that the playing of games has for these who participate in such recreational activities.

Originally, I began this study with the intention of studying only *Oware* and its history and cultural significance. The idea actually came in a spontaneous moment of thinking, "Hey, wouldn't it be fun to study games?" Well, after some serious wavering, I began this study (three days late) looking to gain all available knowledge about *Oware*.

The focus of the study shifted as various gaming elements came my way. One of the more tangible recreational artifacts to be noticed was the existence of locations designated solely for the purpose of play. These locations include: CNN International in Cape Coast and Kalama Base in Winneba which are spots for the playing of *Dam*, Penkye in Winneba where *Oware* is played, and Anafo Street in Cape Coast where young boys play fooseball⁴ and table tennis. Since I found myself unable to ignore the existence and significance of such gaming establishments, I expanded the scope of the investigation to encompass the culture behind the playing of various indoor games.

The bulk of information gathered pertains strictly to males. This is because the games culture as it exists in such established locations is a male dominated world. Some attention is given to the playing of games by women. In fact, the chapter on Gender Specifications of Games was written with the intentional purpose of paying worthy attention to women's activities. However, even this inclusion does not change the fact that the majority of information presented describes exclusively male activity.

⁴ Fooseball is played on a table by using men attached to metal rods in an attempt to score a goal by sending a ball into an opponent's goal. Essentially, it is table football. For a photographic illustration see Figure 6.

FIGURE 1 AND 2



Figure 1: Players and spectators show a keen interest in an Oware contest at Penkye in Winneba.



Figure 2: An overview of a Ludo board as a match proceeds. The man on the left side of the board has his arm cocked before rolling the dice.

FIGURE 3 AND 4



Figure 3: Two men play Dam at CNN International in Cape Coast. Others observantly follow the action as they await their turn.



Figure 4: Two men enjoy the card game Spy in a Cape Coast hardware store.

METHODOLOGY

Much of my research was performed on an informal basis. I relied heavily on casual meetings with those people who I observed participating in games. In this manner, my contact with the men who play *Oware* at Penkye, in Winneba, was established when I approached a game already in progress. Contacts at Kalama Base in Winneba and CNN International in Cape Coast were created in the same way. I attempted to blend into the crowd around the game as much as possible, although this was not normally very possible. Occasionally I would play with those competing at these sites, but I tried to research through watching and casually asking questions as much as possible.

Another informal research method that I employed was the active solicitation of games of *Oware*. I found that virtually any person who I asked to play was very willing to participate and would normally beat me. One day I played a match outside of the Harris School in Cape Coast with Kofi, a twelve-year-old student. A crowd that seemed to me like it encompassed the entire student body crowded around to watch. On another day, I played for over thirty minutes with Adwoa, a seven-year-old girl who sat selling *kenkey*⁵ by the side of the road. We were unable to speak to each other, but just the act of playing with her provided me with useful information.

Several formal interviews were pursued in this research process. My first interview occurred on November 12, 1998 with Mr. Ishmael Otoo at the Center for National Culture in Cape Coast. Second, I interviewed Mr. Ambrose Ntkodua at his home in Jukwa, but came with no prepared questions. I then followed up the interview with Mr. Ntkodua with an interview of Mr. Yaw Essuman on November 15 at Mr. Ntkodua's home. My fourth interview was with Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo at his office in the English Department of the University College of Education in Winneba. My fifth interview was conducted at a meeting of Oguaa Indoor Games Association's Executive Committee on the evening of November 20, 1998. The meeting was held upstairs at Kiddimart on Jackson St. in Cape Coast. I concluded my interviewing with a discussion with Mr. Kweku Baffoe in Winneba. All questions from these interviews are listed in Appendix A. However, the questions that I prepared for each interview were never complete. Each interview covered much more material than I had known it would ahead of time.

Analysis of data was normally performed on a comparative basis. My main interactions with various people provided me with proper data to weigh against information

⁵ *Kenkey* is a popular Ghanaian food that one will frequently find being sold by women.

that I had gained from other sources. Therefore, the bulk of analysis comes from first hand experience of the consistencies and differences of Ghanaian indoor games.

A significant limitation of this study was a lack of time. Four weeks is not very long when one is attempting to do a comprehensive field study – especially since I frantically began my research three days late. Another factor that inhibited my ability to gather information was an obvious language barrier, as my “*Fante kakra kakra*”⁶ only took me so far.

A final element that proved a limiting factor of my research was an occasional discomfort that I experienced during the research process. Unexpectedly entering into an informal gathering with a camera and a notebook puts one in a strange position. For this reason, there were many times when I chose to only observe instead of actively researching every nuance of activity.

⁶ *Kakra Kakra* is a popular Fante expression meaning small-small, or a little bit. I used the expression “*Fante kakra kakra*” to indicate that I could speak “*Fante small- small.*”

CHAPTER ONE

INDIGENOUS AND IMPORTED GAMES

Games are invented through the creative expression of an individual's imaginative mind. Culturally, games serve to enrich people and further the development of the character and cooperation of a society. This chapter will explore the origins of the four aforementioned indoor games, namely: *Oware*, *Ludo*, *Dam* and *Spy*. Special emphasis will be placed on the design of materials for games. Additionally, we shall explore the purpose and significance of names for the understanding of games.

Kofi C. Agudoawu dedicated the rulebook for the playing of *Oware's* Abapa version to, "... Africans who are engaged in the formidable task of reclaiming their heritage."⁷ The dedication points to an assertion that *Oware* in Ghanaian society is almost universal. However, it is not the only game that one can find in many Ghanaian environments. As Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo, lecturer at the University College of Education in Winneba noted, "Especially in the village setting you'll find three games: *Oware*, *Dam* and *Ludo*."⁸ The playing of these games is also extremely common in both Cape Coast and Winneba. However, *Oware* is the only one of the three considered to be of traditional African origin.

Original designs of *Oware* boards were in the shape of a stool. The stool is a shape of extreme significance to Ghanaians because it is associated directly with chieftaincy, the traditional ruling office in Ghanaian society. The Asante people feel that the spirit of their society is contained in the "Golden Stool" that is the most important object in Asante culture. The presence of the stool shape for *Oware* boards along with Kofi C. Agudoawu's statement that:

There is a legend in Twi, the language of the Asante people of Ghana, that *Oware* began when a man and a woman played the game on end. To always be together and someday end the various games, they married. Hence its name *Oware* or *Wari* which means he/she marries.⁹

supports a statement made by Mr. Ishmael Otoo, researcher at the Cape Coast chapter of the Center for National Culture that *Oware* is a "Purely Asante indoor game."¹⁰ In fact, little evidence could be found to support the notion of origin within Asante, but this serves to solidify *Oware's* stance as an indigenous African game.

⁷ Rules For Playing *Oware* abapa version. (Kumasi: Kofi C. Agudoawu (1991))

⁸ Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo, interview by author, 18 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

⁹ Rules for Playing *Oware* abapa version (Kumasi: Kofi C. Adudoawu (1991)). 1

¹⁰ Mr. Ishmael Otoo, interview by author, 12 November 1998, Cape Coast written notes possession of author.

Oware is the game that one would be most apt to find in a traditional setting. According to Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, “Because it is a traditional game the traditional people more associate with this (*Oware*).”¹¹ This would explain why many people said that they learned to play *Oware* from their grandparents, as it is often elders who pass on tradition to the youth.

One informant, Mr. Kweku Baffoe, explained that he learned to play *Oware* from an old man in his neighbourhood to whom he referred as “Papa”. According to Mr. Baffoe ‘Papa’ travelled all along the shoreline as a fisherman playing *Oware* and nobody could beat him.¹² While it is impressive to think that he was unbeatable, what is of true significance is that ‘Papa’ was able to travel all along the coastline and find people with whom to play, again asserting that *Oware* is a game indigenous to, and common throughout the area.

Oware finds great significance in Ghanaian history as an important element of the transfer of hegemony in a large portion of Ghana from the Kingdom of Denkyira to the Asante Kingdom in 1701. In that year, the Asante defeated Denkyira in a decisive battle during which Ntim Gyakari, king of Denkyira...” was surprised and beheaded when playing the game of *Ware* in his camp with the wife of his general commander...”¹³ Thus, it is apparent that *Oware/Ware* has a long history in Ghana.

The defeat of Denkyira at the hands of the Asante cannot be understated in its significance. Historian F. K. Buah wrote, “At the height of Ntim Gyakari’s power the Denkyira Empire commanded an area, the extent of which was only to be surpassed by Asante.”¹⁴ This statement testifies that the shift of power when Asante king Osei Tutu defeated the army of Ntim Gyakari was of enormous significance. The Asante kingdom maintained a strong hold on much of Ghana until suffering defeat at the hands of British forces in 1831. By freeing themselves from their prior status as a vassal state under Denkyira, the Asante’s gained direct access to the coast, and the ability to trade with European merchants that went with that access. Eventually, the Asante kingdom became one of the major slave trading states in West Africa. Such an enormous endeavour would not have been possible had Asante power not expanded with the defeat of the Denkyira kingdom.

The significance of Ntim Gyakari’s playing *Oware* while his army was in battle has not been lost throughout the years. When the Asante forces surprised the Denkyira king they beheaded him and made off with both his head and his Golden *Ware* board on which he was playing. The successor to Osei Tutu, Asante king who defeated Denkyira, was named Opoku *Ware* I indicating that he is Opoku – keeper of the *Ware* board. In contrast, the people of

¹¹ Interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998 – parentheses is my insertion

¹² Mr. Kweku Baffoe, interview by author, 24 November 1998, Winneba, written notes possession of author.

¹³ F. K. Buah. *A History of Ghana*. (Hong Kong: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1980) 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 10 -11

Denkyira will never again name a child after Ntim Gyakari because, as Jukwa resident Ambrose Ntkodua mentioned, "...the moral of the story is that the chief was a careless chief."¹⁵

The present chief of Denkyira was unable to speak with me about this issue because discussion would have required the slaughtering of a sheep and the pouring of libation. Such is the case because the issue of a loss as great as Denkyira suffered on the day of its defeat is painful and extremely significant to the Denkyira state. Additionally, in matters of extreme importance, the people Denkyira swear by a sacred oath that continues to mark the remembrance of their defeat. The oath, *Meka Efida Denkyiraman*¹⁶, translates into "I swear by Denkyira's fateful Friday," marking forever the Friday on which Denkyira lost its rule.

Ludo maintains a significantly common presence in contemporary Ghanaian society. However, one can see simply from looking at a *Ludo* board that it is not an indigenous game. Pictures on the board are often of European cities and Caucasian people. One board that was used by the Oguua Indoor Games Association contained a picture of a Canadian street corner. Another board employed by four women in Winneba Junction was made by Evanco - a seemingly Christian company. In the middle of the board was a picture of an open Bible with the words "Trust and Obey". This combination of gaming with religion is also a combination of two foreign influences that have effectively been absorbed by Ghanaian culture. These influences are foreign games and Christian religion. Another point that illustrates *Ludo's*¹⁷ foreignness is that it, "...could be made here, but it's not natural so we know it's not indigenous." This statement refers to the fact that the board and pieces used for *Ludo* are made of plastic, a material that must be industrially processed before production.

Dam, in its straight edged design, has a very western feel to it. In fact, various informants asserted that "the white man" brought it over. The large dissemination in Europe and North America of checkers and chess, two games played on a board identical to *Dam* boards, lends support to this notion. However, no evidence was available to definitively place *Dam's* origin outside of Africa. For the sake of this study, it is most significant to note that many Ghanaians consider *Dam* to be historically from Abrokyir.¹⁸

One would not find a chief and his linguist playing *Dam* because it is a game that often involves insulting and teasing. This point was substantiated by the assertion of Mr. Kofi Mensah that at Kalama Base, "If you want to play (*Dam*) you have to brag."¹⁹ Such bragging

¹⁵ Mr. Ambrose Ntkodua, interview by author 13 November 1998. Jukwa, written notes possession of author.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998

¹⁸ *Abrokyir* is the Fante word for all locations outside of Africa

¹⁹ Mr. Kofi Mensah, informal discussion, 24 November 1998, Winneba, written notes possession of author.

often involves degrading the ability of one's opponent as much as inflating one's own ability. In fact the *Nkasafua Nkyerekerease* Fante-English Dictionary defines *Dam* in two ways: madness, and the playing of *draughts*.²⁰ *Draughts* is another name for the same game. The fact that it is also referred to as madness points to the uncontrolled nature of conversation during the playing of the game. One could even see this game as a great equalizer because, according to Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, "even a chief could be insulted during the game."²¹ However, this also explains why chiefs don't often play *Dam*, at least not publicly.

Spy, a game that employs the use of western made playing cards, has a strong relationship with foreign influence. The cards used bear the exact design of the same type of playing cards about which American author Mark Twain often wrote. In fact, a game of *Spy* observed in Cape Coast was played with a deck of card bearing the design of the America flag of the back of each card.

The presence of foreign influence is also noticeable in other very tangible ways in Ghanaian gaming. One establishment intentionally designed for the playing of games is adorned with the logo of an America television station. CNN International, where Cape Coast men play *Dam* derives its name, and its logo, directly from the foreign media influence. Children who play fooseball on Anafo Street in Cape Coast do so on tables marked, "France vs. Brazil '98", leading to the understanding that the decoration's inspiration came from this year's World Cup football final.

Additional evidence of foreign influence on Ghanaian gaming is the altered design of *Oware* boards. Contemporary boards are often designed to be foldable and portable. This newly developed design is often made to cater for tourists (such as myself) and is a sign of what one informant noted as the adjusting to a, "...world of mobility."²² Perhaps this only a sign of the dynamic nature of tradition, but is an undeniable sign that games, like other elements of Ghanaian culture, often contain a delicate balance of foreign and local components.

²⁰ Fante-English Dictionary, (Cape Coast: Mfantiman Press, Ltd.) 14

²¹ Interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998

²² Dr. Eric Quaye, informal discussion, 13 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author

FIGURES 5 AND 6



Figure 5: The difference in designs of *Oware* boards is displayed as the traditional stool shape stands tall on the right while the contemporary flat board conserves space on the right.



Figure 6: The foldable portability of a modern designed *Oware* board is displayed in mid-fold

CHAPTER 2

GENDER SPECIFICATIONS OF GAMES

Full understanding of a culture and its unique practices requires the comprehension of gender specific attitudes amongst the people of that society. This chapter will investigate the role played by gender. Special attention will be given to the circumstances under which women play games and how that differs from the gaming approaches of men. The role of the female in male dominated gaming circumstances will also be explored.

Traditional Ghanaian attitudes often portray women as possessing a lesser intellectual capacity than men. This was noted quite plainly when Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo said, “In our culture, traditionally we think that women are not as intelligent...”²³ The effect that this has had on gaming is rather apparent when one investigates the distinctions between the various ways of playing *Oware*. One method, *Abapa*, requires a high degree of calculation and thought. The other popular form of play, *Anenam*, is a game of chance in which players cannot calculate the full affect of their moves. Many refer to *Anenam* as the women’s way of playing because it requires little thought and calculation. Such an attitude was displayed by twenty-three year old draughtman Joseph Samuel Baffoe when he referred to *Anenam* as the woman’s game.²⁴

One informant displayed an attitude that went further than simply degrading the intelligence of women. Eighteen-year-old student Isaac Donkor explained that he plays *Abapa* and not *Anenam* because, “Women have a cheap side so they just keep playing it but as for men we calculate.”²⁵ By stating that women ‘have a cheap side’ he was referring to the moral character of women and not just their intellectual capacity. However, it should be noted that some male subjects, such as a town elder of Komenda named Kobina chose to play *Anenam* with me instead of *Abapa*. Thus, it would appear that not all men felt that *Anenam* is beneath their mental capacity.

The practical affect of gender specific attitudes on people’s gaming preferences was quite apparent during the field research of this project. By playing *Oware* with anyone on the street, I sought to attain worthy information. What I found was that every time a woman started the game we played *Anenam*. Occasionally men played *Anenam* also, but never did a

²³ Interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998.

²⁴ Mr. Joseph Samuel Baffoe, informal discussion, 18 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

²⁵ Mr. Isaac Donkor, informal discussion, 22 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes possession of author.

woman endeavour to play *Abapa*. It appears that the common attitude that *Anenam* is for women has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Some men even asserted that they don't play *Oware* because it does not satisfy their need for an intellectual challenge. Two twenty-year-old residents of Cape Coast, Kwesi and Kweku explained that *Oware* is a woman's game and *Dam* is for men because *Dam* is the one that requires real thought.²⁶ While I could go on continuously noting the differences in people's opinions, what is important to note is that distinctions between the gender specifications of games always fall along the lines of intellectual capacity and always assert that men are more intellectually able than women.

On November 20, 1998 thirty year old Hilda Panyye sat on the counter of her hardware store watching two male friends play a card game called *Spy*. Her assertion that they always play there brought up the logical question: does she play? Immediately she stated that she does not know how. When asked further Mrs. Panyye noted that as a child she played some games, usually *Ampeh*, but now that she older she does not even play that. *Ampeh*, a game of clapping and dancing, is more specifically for younger participants and Mrs. Panyye now has no time for games because, as she stated, "I cook."²⁷

Women are often relegated to the kitchen when they are not working, as insinuated by Mrs. Panyye's statement above. However, for men, time not working is time for games, as supported by Kweku Baffoe's that he plays *Oware* after work..." to relieve tension.²⁸ The distinction between time off from work for men and for women received further elaboration when Winneba resident Kofi Mensah described *Dam* as a men's game because men will play to relax after work while their wives are in the kitchen.²⁹

With all of this work to do, do women ever have time to play games? Yes, women often play when their jobs provide them with little to do. Twenty-three year old Adwoa Mansima, who works at a cloth store on Kotokuraba Road in Cape Coast, keeps her *Oware* board with her at work in order to have it handy whenever needed. Two women, Cecilia and Teresa, were observed playing *Oware* while their jobs at Singapore Restaurant on University of Cape Coast campus were not keeping them busy. A game of *Ludo* was observed outside of a beauty salon at Winneba Junction as four of the women who work at the salon sought to keep themselves busy. For women, games are often something to pursue while their jobs aren't keeping them busy. This is in contrast to men, who will often play because they have no jobs at all.

²⁶ Kwesi and Kweku, informal discussion, 22 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

²⁷ Mrs. Hilda Panyye, informal discussion, 23 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

²⁸ interview with Mr. Baffoe, 24 November 1998

²⁹ discussion with Mr. Mensah, 24 November 1998

Female presence at specific gaming locations is often very sparse, if existent at all. Kofi Mensah, who spends his time playing Dam at Kalama Base in Winneba, explained that women can find work even when there is little opportunity because, “Women can do the petty trading but we men can’t”.³⁰ Support for this was found at Kalama Base when the only woman present amongst approximately twenty men was there to sell locally made ice cream to the men who were playing the game. Thus, we see that perceptions of the sort of work available to those of particular gender directly affects the availability of time for the participation of individuals in the playing games.

Women also play games for their own intellectual challenge. One woman, Ms. Comfort Hudson, often plays *Oware* in her Cape Coast home. During her three-month leave of absence from working in the store that she owns in Kotokuraba Market, Ms. Hudson normally plays the game alone as a form of personal challenge. In fact, on November 30, 1998 she was observed keeping score in a game that she was playing alone – heightening the challenge that she bestowed upon herself.

Another woman of note in the gaming world is Winneba resident Efua Okakyi. Those who know her because of her remarkable ability to play *Oware*-the Abapa version have referred to Mrs. Okakyi as Yaa Asantewa. The reference to her as Yaa Asantewa is an allusion to the Asante woman warrior who led a rebellion against British imperial forces. This Asante queen mother gained notoriety and historical significance for her immense bravery.

Yaa Asantewa’s ferocious courage was described in this passage from A.A. Anti’s Kumase in the Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries:

Riding on a white horse, her face partly dubbed with blood and partly with black and white clay, and with an English rifle in the hand, and a chopping bowie knife in the left, Yaa Asantewa dominated the city of Kumase, and directed operations herself. The rebels rushed down the street; they danced like mad men, but with a purpose; they were mad to talk, mad to kill, and mad to burn houses; mad to attack and mad at laugh. Yaa Asantewa rolled down from one side to the other. She booed the English troops around the Fort and challenged them to come forward and suffer some kind of torture none of them had ever seen or heard of before in his life. “Where are they?” She would ask. “They are in the fort,” She would answer herself.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ A. A. Anti, Kumase in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. (Accra: Damage Control Ltd. 1996), 1667

Yaa Asantewa's nobility and refusal to surrender inspired her followers to fight to the bitter end. Unfortunately, a final decisive battle in 1900 proved too much for the Asante forces and they were forced to succumb to British rule. Yaa Asantewa and fifteen others were exiled to the Seychelles Islands. Efua Okakyi, Winneba's Yaa Asantewa is called such because she is an exception – a woman who has attained the skill of even the best men. You can be sure that she's been able to do it through much time and practice – the same as any other Ghanaian woman would if she had the opportunity.

FIGURE 7 AND 8



Figure 7: Four employees of the God Cares Beauty Salon pass the time playing *Ludo* outside Winneba Junction work place.



Figure 8: Efua Okakyi, Winneba's "Yaa Asantewa" takes on Penkye expert Kweku Baffoe in a friendly game of *Oware*.

CHAPTER 3

GAMES AS STIMULATION

For many Ghanaians the playing of games serves as a means to occupy time and thought during periods of relative inactivity. Especially in a society of high unemployment, such as Ghana, people develop ways of employing their mental capacity that otherwise would be directed toward work. Even those who are employed often find that their jobs provided them with very little tangible work and, thus, will play games while there is no work to be done. This chapter will investigate the use of games as a mental stimulant during times of little work or none at all. Additionally, we shall examine the challenges that games provide in groups congregated in a communal effort to occupy time through the playing of games. The final element of this chapter will explore the educational usage of games.

On November 24, 1998 four women sat outside the God Cares Beauty Salon at Winneba Junction playing *Ludo*. Their black and white dresses identified each as an employee of the salon. However, they all congregated outside of their work place and played this game. Twenty two year old hairdresser Amelia King Adu explained that this match was not an unusual occurrence for these women. In fact, her statement, “When there’s not work we play games. When someone comes to have their hair done we stop”³² illustrated that the game was a common part of their workday. Further questioning led to the revelation that they frequently play during the workday, sometimes more than they work. The usage of the game to pass time when a job does not provide its own stimulation can also be observed in Kotokuraba Market, in Cape Coast. In this market, where many women come to sell goods, two women were observed playing *Oware* while no customers were around. These two instances illustrate how women use games to combat boredom during the usual workday.

At the taxi rank on George Street in Winneba, drivers are provided with a shelter under which they sit when they have no patrons. Here, the men (as taxi drivers are always men) play *Dam*, a game that is normally considered to be reserved strictly for males. Kofi, a driver who left his job as an engineer because he “left that it was not a good idea to remain in the government sector,” said that the drivers play *Dam* there...” just to stay awake.”³³ Drivers must remain at the rank in order to earn a living through operating a taxi. Therefore, the playing of *Dam* provides these men with an outlet for usage of time that would necessarily

³² Mrs. Amelia King Adu, informal discussion, 24 November 1998, Winneba Junct. Written notes, possession of author.

³³ Kofi, informal discussion, 24 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

otherwise be spent simply waiting for the next customer, an endeavour that can sometimes take hours.

Those will not work at all will often play games all day long. At Kalama Base in Winneba, a location provided strictly for the use of men who wish to play *Dam*, one participant explained that he plays, “Too much”³⁴ because he is unemployed. Bernard K. Baffoe, a forty-five year old electrician, plays at Kalama Base because he has no contracts, which translates directly into having no work.³⁵ Kalama Base is not an unusual location. In fact, there are places designated for gaming all throughout the Ghanaian landscape. At another spot, CNN International in Cape Coast, thirty year old Kwesi Asamowah explained that he, too, plays *Dam* throughout the day because he has no work.³⁶

An important point of interest during my research was that intoxicating substances were not present at such gaming establishments. This came as a surprise because many societies of high unemployment often deal with inflated rates of alcohol and drug abuse. Those who are unable to flex their mind’s capacity through productive labour quite frequently will turn to substances. That population under study is not employed appear to have found an alternative in the mental challenge of recreational games. In fact, an informant who describes himself as a ‘champion’ of *Oware*, became intoxicated after he consumed one bottle of beer during an interview. His explanation, “You must excuse me. I don’t drink often,”³⁷ confirmed that alcohol was not a part of his repertoire.

Cape Coast is also home to a formalized association for the playing of games. Twinto Walker, founder and president of the Oguaa Indoor Games Association, explained that he began the endeavour in 1991 as a means of combating the municipality’s unemployment. According to Mr. Walker, “The majority of the people are not working so you’ll see them just going about doing anything.”³⁸ Kweku Alex, a twenty-year-old graduate of Cape Coast Technical School who is now unable to find steady work, confirmed such a reality and therefore does, “Nothing, just go around.”³⁹

People who play in the Oguaa Indoor Games Association do so as a member of a team from one’s own neighbourhood. The association meets on Wednesdays to play *Spy*, and Saturdays and Sundays to play *Dam* and *Ludo*. Mr. Walker asserted that the assignment of

³⁴ Mr. Charles Benjamin Akwa Sampson, informal discussion, 24 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

³⁵ Mr. Bernard K. Baffoe, informal discussion, 18 November 1998, Winneba written notes, possession of author.

³⁶ Mr. Kwesi Asamowah, informal discussion, 25 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

³⁷ Interview with Mr. Baffoe, 24 November 1998 (It was a simple bribe to gain useful information. Sometimes fieldwork requires less than conventional research methods.)

³⁸ Mr. Twinto Walker, interview by author, 20 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

³⁹ Mr. Kweku Alex, informal discussion, 20 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

certain days for the playing of games is a method to, “make people aware that they have to prepare for games.”⁴⁰ This process of preparation can encompass many things, such as practice and strategizing. Thus, one’s mind is sufficiently occupied on a mentally challenging endeavour during a time when other activity may otherwise no be available.

The nights of games competition produce a relative fervour throughout the communities where such competition is taking place. Games involve only four players and one match commissioner who is assigned to maintain proper competitive equality, yet one game of *Ludo* attracted twenty-seven spectators. At another game on the same night, an entire wooden building was filled to capacity as observers packed in around the *Ludo* game in the middle of the structure. Francis Mensah, a twenty-four year old member of Victoria Park Black Cat cards team, said that the appeal of the association is that it allows people to...” associate, kill away some boredom, make friends, and share our history.”⁴¹ Anyone who attends one of the association’s matches will see very easily that boredom is not a worthy opponent for the excitement of a strongly contested battle between experienced players.

Competition at the games is also heightened by the Association’s rewards for winning. First of all, a team represents its own residential area. Ideally, this serves to create a sense of community spirit and pride. Additionally, teams are given points according to a scoring system created by the association’s executive committee. Mr. Kojo Anaisie Yarkuh, Chairman of the cards association, confirmed the incentive provided by this point system when he said, “When you are playing on your own there is nothing at stake. When you are playing for a particular club there are points to award.”⁴² At the end of the season the full point tally is added up and the champion club for each game is provided with a cash prize. In the past, the association has been enabled to give such prizes by the sponsorship of large companies in the area. However, last year’s sponsor, Lever Brothers Company, was negatively affected by the power crisis that occurred earlier this year. Because the company had to shut down its factories for some time during the power crisis, it is not sponsoring the association this year. Currently, Mr. Walker describes financial difficulties as the association’s “big problem.”

Another way that the Oguaa Indoor Games Association provides Cape Coast with positive stimulation is through its organisation of a series of community service related lectures and gatherings. In the past they have brought in speakers from the National Population Council and local Family Planning Organisations. Mr. Walker feels that this is a fundamental way of reaching the community and providing a positive outlook on ways to combat important

⁴⁰ Interview with Mr. Walker, 20 November 1998

⁴¹ Mr. Francis Mensah, informal discussion, 14 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

⁴² Mr. Kojo Anaisie Yarkuh, interview by author, 20 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

issues that often confront the town's inhabitants. Additionally, the association has attempted to create youth interest in the community by incorporating the playing of such games alongside community projects such as town cleanup endeavours. Groups that gather informally for the playing of games also frequently play at a high level of competition. In fact, any informal designated gaming area, such as Kalama Base in Winneba and CNN International in Cape Coast, offers players its own self-contained hierarchy. At every destination there is a designated 'champion' who is known by all to be the best player who frequently attends that particular location. At Kalama Base, he is a man named Boateng. He was not in attendance during my research but all the players were willing to admit his supremacy. At Penkye, an areas in Winneba where men frequently play *Oware*, the champion is Kwame Essoun, who was described by another as an "A⁺ player."

The previous description of Kwame Essoun as an "A⁺ player" is symptomatic of another constant element of the hierarchy of each gaming location. The distinction of champion is the culmination of the ranking process that occurs for each player. Normally divisions ranging from A, as the best, to something around G rank players, who are those who need much more work. Players are not ashamed to admit where they stand, as illustrated by the confession of Kofi Idan that he is in grade D because, as he says, "I'm not very perfect."⁴³ Kofi is handicapped by the fact that his job sometimes takes away from his ability to spend as much time as CNN International as the other players. What is of great importance to note is that the existence of this hierarchy provides players with additional stimulation because mobility exists within the structure, but movement can only be accomplished through improvement. Since one can only improve through practice and effort, the hierarchal institution creates both an impetus for continued playing and an extra interest in each game.

Ranking in the usual method of A-G categories normally serves to group participants in particular age brackets. Such is the case because those of the same skill level will play together, and normally the younger players have not attained the skills of their older counterparts. The younger players, especially since they are lower in the group's hierarchy, often must wait until their elders are done before they can play. On one occasion, fourteen-year-old Kobina Afful and sixteen year old Edward Issalgate abruptly ended an *Oware* match in the middle of the competition because 'champions' Kweku Baffoe and Kwame Essoun came to Penkye to play. However, these two did not leave when their game ended. The fact that instead they stayed to watch the 'champions' match is symptomatic of the tendency of many young children to gain the ability to astutely play mentally challenging games through observations of those who are better than themselves – normally elders. Such a point was

⁴³ Mr. Kofi Idan, informal discussion, 25 November 1998, written notes, possession of author.

illustrated repeatedly through my research when informants told me that they learned through observing their grandparents. Mr. Ishmael Otoo, a researcher at the Centre for National Culture in Cape Coast remarked about *Oware*, “We don’t normally teach the children. They come around and see us playing and they pick it up.”⁴⁴

The teaching of games of intellect through observation also is a symptom of the importance that intellect plays in the impressions that people have of themselves. *Oware*, a game that requires considerable intellectual capacity, is traditionally not played between those of varying ages. When speaking about *Abapa*, a particular way of playing *Oware*, Mr. Otoo stated, “You have to calculate in order to pick up the three.”⁴⁵ If an adult is defeated by a small child in a game of calculation and intellect...” it wouldn’t speak well for the adult.”⁴⁶ In fact, on informant even said that problems of discipline could arise if a son defeats his father in *Oware*.⁴⁷ *Oware*’s distinction as a game of intellect produces this belief that children should not play with elders. Following a line of reasoning, one can see that this identifies *Oware* as a game of calculating and challenge and, thus, a form of mental stimulation.

In the book, Games and Songs as Education Media, Eustace Yawo Egblewogbe wrote, “These games (*Oware* and *Dam*) involve calculations and scheming and through them the children develop the mental powers necessary for the solving of the more complicated problems of adult life”⁴⁸ Already we have noted that children learn games through observation. This quote from Egblewogbe illustrates that the knowledge attained is more than just gaming ability. Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo asserted that the playing of calculating games teaches children reflection.⁴⁹ This reflection and thought process allows one to think more clearly and accurately both within the structure of the game and in the general daily activities of life.

Children frequently display what they have learned through observation by mimicking their elders. On November 25, 1998 four young boys sat on the ground outside of University Junior Secondary School on the campus of Cape Coast University and participated in their own form of gaming competition. The boys, none seeming over the age of eight years old, were playing a game of phone card.’ The playing of ‘phone card’ requires the usage of discharged, used Ghana Telecom cards for a rudimentary form of competition. The one hundred unit card serves as a queen and the fifty unit card is a king. Competition proceeds through the laying down of a card in front of yourself and setting it against the card that an opponent lays down.

⁴⁴ interview with Mr. Otoo, 12 November 1998

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998.

⁴⁷ interview with Mr. Ntkodua, 13 November 1998.

⁴⁸ E. Y. Egblewogbe. Games and Songs as Education Media. (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1975), 35. (parentheses is my insertion).

⁴⁹ interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 2005

The player who lays down a card of highest value wins the round, thus, taking all the cards laid down. This is an almost exact replication of the game Spy, which Ghanaian men frequently play. Therefore, one can see that these children, through their adaptation of available resources, are using their own creative ability to display and practice the skills that they have learned through watching adults.

CHAPTER 4

GAMES AS A GATHERING POINT

Games provide a social setting in which people relate to their peers on a friendly level that often allows for the development of cooperative camaraderie. Many Ghanaians view games as an appropriate way to exert energy, relieve tension, and experience their community. This chapter will examine the function of games as a method of spending time with one's peers. Initial discussion will focus on family relationships and the employment of games for the learning of lessons of cooperation. Further points of interest include the importance of the geography of gaming location, the organization of games, and how games, and how games serve to strengthen existing relationships.

Indoor games, classified as those games that do not require serious physical mobility, can offer a method of maintaining a calm environment while still keeping people occupied. As such, indoor games can be played anywhere – and virtually by anyone at all. *Oware*, an indoor game, is described as, “The game played by kings, cowherds, and presidents...”.⁵⁰ This description illustrates that indoor games are available to virtually anyone. In contrast, an old man who is unable to walk would be unable to play football, a popular Ghanaian outdoor game. In this respect indoor games serve the important function of providing a circumstance in which all who know how to play should be able to participate. Additionally, indoor games can be played anywhere and are not assigned only to indoor playing. In this way, as well, indoor games differ from outdoor games, which could not serve to provide inside recreation.

Families with a great deal of time to share can often find solace and enjoyment in the playing of games. When a child is young and learns games he will often keep them as a means of enjoyment throughout the course of his life. One informant, Mr. Eugene Taylor, explained that when he was a small boy and he and his brothers were living with his grandmother. “At night they would tell us stories while others played *Dam* and *Oware* ...”⁵¹ In this respect one is able to view the importance that games can have on the development of a family. This gathering for games and its accompaniment with story telling provides an opportunity for children and elders to familiarize themselves with the ways of each other. Children learn through the time spent with those who have wisdom to share. When Mr. Taylor's description is combined with a further assertion about *Oware* that, “It is in every community, so as a child

⁵⁰ Rules For Playing Oware abapa version. (Kumasi: Kofi C. Agudoawu (1991), back cover.

⁵¹ Mr. Eugene Taylor. Informal discussion, 13 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

you are going to learn”.⁵² One can understand that time shared over games is a valuable constant in Ghanaian society.

Playing games can also serve the important function of teaching cultural values. Egblewogbe wrote about children, “Through group play, too, they gradually acquire the spirit of teamwork and mutual cooperation...”⁵³ Of the various ways to play *Oware*, one method includes up to six players all on the same board. The presence of such a large number of participants employing one common location produces a sense of unity and patience in participants. Especially with a group as big as six people on the same board all of the players will have to willingly wait for their own turn and respect the opportunity of others to proceed in turn.

A first hand example of cooperative gaming came my way at 12:00 noon on November 21, 1998. In this situation I was sitting down to play *Oware* with Nana Yaa, my nine-year-old Ghanaian cousin. Nana Yaa began to play on her side of the board only, thus leaving my side strictly for me to use. This method of play allows for two people to enjoy the game at the same time while not invading each other’s space and taking each other’s marbles. This is in direct contrast to the description of competitive *Oware* given by Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo as a “game of conflict in which my interests are pitted against yours.”⁵⁴ Nana Yaa’s method of play provided fun and stimulation without the often necessary competition. Thus, this young child evidenced the wonders of games and the lesson of cooperation to be gained.

The playing of games among children also fosters a sense of understanding one’s self. Mr. George Akyin Taylor notified me that he played games with friends when he was very young.⁵⁵ Games among children, while not always cooperative, allow one to assert him/herself in a friendly environment. On Anafo Street in Cape Coast boys gather to participate in fooseball and table tennis. Here the games are of a highly competitive nature and involve gambling. Yet, the players still maintain a sense of communal spirit that is evidenced by their willingness to allow others to enter the game at almost any time.

Communal understanding at game sites is evidenced by the active participation that observers take in the playing of a game. On George Street in Winneba, where the older men gather to play *Dam*, anyone who disapproves of a move made by one of the players in a match will simply put a halt to the progress of the game to show what method should have been employed for strategy. The same is true at Penkye, where my own participation in a game of

⁵² Mr. Eugene Taylor, informal discussion, 23 November 1998, Cape Coast, written notes, possession of author.

⁵³ Games with Songs as Education Media (Tema: E Y Egblewogbe (1975)), 69.

⁵⁴ Interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998.

⁵⁵ Mr. George Akyin Taylor, informal discussion,, 18 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

Oware became essentially nothing more than a nominal presence as observers from the crowd dictated my moves. The ability of a spectator to assert his opinion in the playing of a game illustrates that even a highly competitive contest, such as Dam, contains the communal element that is common in the Ghanaian mentality.

Crowd participation, described above as an element of Ghanaian gaming, testifies to the fact that large groups gather for the purpose of sharing the competitive experience. This is because if a group larger than just the contest's participants wasn't gathered, there would not even be a crowd from whom participation could occur. For these groups the gathering place, such as CNN International in Cape Coast and Penkye in Winneba, provides one with location at which to congregate with other players. Nana Sam, who works at the Centre for National Culture in Winneba, explained that Kalama Base, on Victoria Road in Winneba was built solely for the purpose of gaming more than twenty years ago. Necessary maintenance to rebuild the structure was undertaken less than two months ago by the Dam players who meet there.⁵⁶

The Oware gaming site at Penkye has been in existence as long as Kweku Baffoe, one of the location's major participants, can remember. Mr. Baffoe stated about the relationship between Oware and Penkye, "If you want to learn properly you are supposed to come there every evening and we'll teach you."⁵⁷ Two important points can be ascertained from analysis of this statement. The first is that learning is an active process at such location because teaching requires the astute presence of pupils amongst the experts. The second point is that one can find players at the location every evening. Hence, one can see that Penkye is a constant gaming and gathering point for the community.

One need not wait until the evening to find gamers actively undertaking their task. At Anafo Street in Cape Coast young boys were observed competing in fooseball and table tennis at 8.00 in the morning. Kofi Idan works the night shift as a security guard at the Center for National Culture in Cape Coast. When his shift ends at 6:00 am he heads straight to CNN International where he says he's always able to find friends ready to play Dam.⁵⁸ These examples lend credibility to the statement by Charles Benjamin Akwa Sampson that, "Always I'm here,"⁵⁹ at Kalama Base. The existence of such established gaming locations provides players with a place where they know that they can always find others with whom to play.

Crowds at such gaming sites do not only include players. An example of this is seventy three year old Kobina Ata Hansen, who regularly attends the Oware contests at Penkye. Mr.

⁵⁶ Mr. Nana Sam, informal discussion, 18 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

⁵⁷ interview with Mr. Baffoe, 24 November 1998.

⁵⁸ discussion with Mr. Idan, 25 November 1998.

⁵⁹ discussion with Mr. Sampson, 24 November 1998

Hansen lives close by the site and has been frequenting the spot for the past three years. However, he does not know how to play Oware and instead will just, “Come and witness.”⁶⁰ Mr. Hansen’s frequency of attendance has established him as a fixture in the environment, thus, prompting others to assign him a job. Mr. Hansen is the official score keeper for the games, handing out the stones of defeat to each player as he loses a round.

Even the process of score keeping fosters community cooperation and attendance at the gaming locations. One example of this is the process by which Mr. Hansen distributes the stones of defeat. Each player is given a stone for each round he loses, and the first to five stones loses the match. However, this method of score keeping is relatively new to the players at Penkye. Only two years ago the decision was made to switch from a method in which a player has to win five consecutive rounds in order to defeat his opponent. The switch was made at the suggestion of Mr. Kwame Essuon because with the old system only two players could play all day long and at Penkye, “...the players are more than fifteen.”⁶¹ However, score keeping for Dam at Kalama Base follows the old method, as described by Kofi Mensah who said, “If you want to be a champion, you have to get five straight.”⁶² Requiring one to win five straight rounds in order to win a match lengthens the competition and keeps competitors at the location for an extended period of time.

The Oguaa Indoor Games Association approaches community involvement in score keeping through the organisation of an annual players’ congress every February. All players are invited to the congress to voice their opinion. There, a committee presents by-laws for the governing of competition within the association and said byelaws are discussed by the congress’s attendants. This process allows players to actively participate in the establishment of the games’ governing order. Therefore, a spirit of consensus is attained within the association.

Community interest is actively pursued through advertising strategies employed by the Oguaa Indoor Games Association. At the start of every season in early October, the association prints recruiting announcements in the local newspapers, such as the Daily Graphic and the Ghanaian Times. By doing so, the association’s executive committee attempts to create a greater community involvement in the association’s development and competition. An additional method of getting the word out” to the community is the distribution of a full schedule to every team at the start of the season. This schedule includes the location of every match throughout the season. Therefore, each participant knows where other matches are

⁶⁰ Mr. Kobina Ata Hansen, informal discussion, 24 November 1998, Winneba, written notes, possession of author.

⁶¹ interview with Mr. Baffoe, 24 November 1998.

⁶² discussion with Mr. Mensah, 24 November 1998.

occurring and is able to attend other matches of interest with full awareness of which teams will be participating.

Continuous advertisement is also pursued throughout the course of the season by the association. One example of this is the weekly announcements of the results of the past week's competition. These announcements occur on Radio Central FM 92.5 – providing the community with an opportunity to remain aware of recent action. Also, a signboard is displayed daily at Kingsway in Cape Coast announcing who is playing whom in what event. For example, the announcements on the board on November 20, 1998 contained notices that Ludo matches on Saturday November 21 would include: Gyankobir vs. Petrol, Ekyiyor vs. Django, Coronation vs. Idan Stars, and Argass vs. Brofoyedur. The availability of this information to all who are interested empowers people to attend the matches and provide support for participating teams.

Active participation in the competition of the association is a useful way for many people to interact with those in their community. The inclusive nature of team organisation is supported by Francis Mensah's assertion that, "Friends, family all come together to join a team."⁶³ In other words, teams are open to all who are interested within the community. However, one should note that teams are almost all men. Matches that I attended on November 14, 1998 did not include any female participants and only one spectator out of twenty seven at one match was a woman. Additionally, new participants can be intimidated by the excitement of experienced players. This appeared to be the case at the match on November 14 when one Ludo player was noticeably quieter than his three counterparts. When asked later why this was the case it was explained that he is new to the game and, thus, may not feel as exuberant in his participation as the others.

In all, the Oguaa Indoor Games Association is home to sixteen Ludo teams, twelve Cards teams and six Dam teams. The number of participants is still increasing, as evidenced by the fact that the association began on September 11, 1991 with only six Ludo teams. The increase in participants testifies to the momentum that the association is gaining in augmenting community involvement in the gaming process. This point makes it apparent that the Oguaa Indoor Games Association is an active proponent in the use of games as a means of involving and congregating the Cape Coast Community.

Competitive gaming in the village setting has occurred in an organized manner for quiet sometime. In fact, a village elder in Berase spoke of the prior existence of social groups within the community for the playing of Oware. However, time and outside influence have combined to lessen village interest in such activities. Instead, the informant noted that today's youth are

⁶³ Discussion with Mr. Mensah, 14 November 1998

more interested in outdoor games such as football than they are in Oware. Therefore, this village no longer has a social group for the playing of this game.

Inter-community interaction has also occurred through the mechanism of game playing. In Jukwa, Oware matches were previously promoted by a man named Darko. In these situations, the competition was heightened by the presence of a cash prize. Organisation of such events was so great that Darko himself was paid 1,000 cedis by the winner of the competition for his promoting services. Long distance travelling was occasionally a factor, as evidenced by one informant's assertion that people used to travel all the way from Shama to Komenda to challenge each other in Oware.⁶⁴

Additionally, games are normally shared by those who possess a common occupation. One example of this was a game of cards played between forty-two year old plumber J. B. Ata and twenty-one year old technical student Yaw Tawiah. The two were enjoying their friendly competition in the confines of K. B. Asante Hardware Store on Kotokuraba Rd. in Cape Coast. Hilda Panyye, whose husband owns the store, asserted that they always play there.⁶⁵ The presence of two workers whose occupation uses hardware materials in this environment was no simple coincidence. It is very usual for those of similar livelihoods to share the gaming experience and their environment for playing. Another example of this is Kweku Baffoe's explanation that Penkye in Winneba is most busy with Oware activity in June and July because that is when the fishermen who often play there have more time because fishing is scarce.⁶⁶ Thus, we see that fishermen play together, just as these two hardware workers spend game time together.

Indoor games are also employed as a mode of activity during times when people desire a serene environment. For example, attendants at a wake keeping will often compete in games such as Oware, Dam and Ludo because, as Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo explained, "they are games which foster cohesion." The sedate outlet for energy provided by the playing of an indoor game, "Maintains the serenity of the situation..." However, the continued calm of the gathering makes it so that, "... minds are not removed from the fact that there is a loss."⁶⁷ In others words the presence of games at an event such as a wake keeping allows people to interact with each other in a friendly manner – but one that is still appropriate to the solemn nature of the occasion.

⁶⁴ Mr. Yaw Essuman, interview by author, 15 November 1998. Jukwa, written notes, possession of author.

⁶⁵ discussion with Mrs. Panyye, 23 November 1998.

⁶⁶ interview with Mr. Baffoe, 24 November 1998.

⁶⁷ interview with Mr. Sekyi Baidoo, 18 November 1998.

FIGURE 9

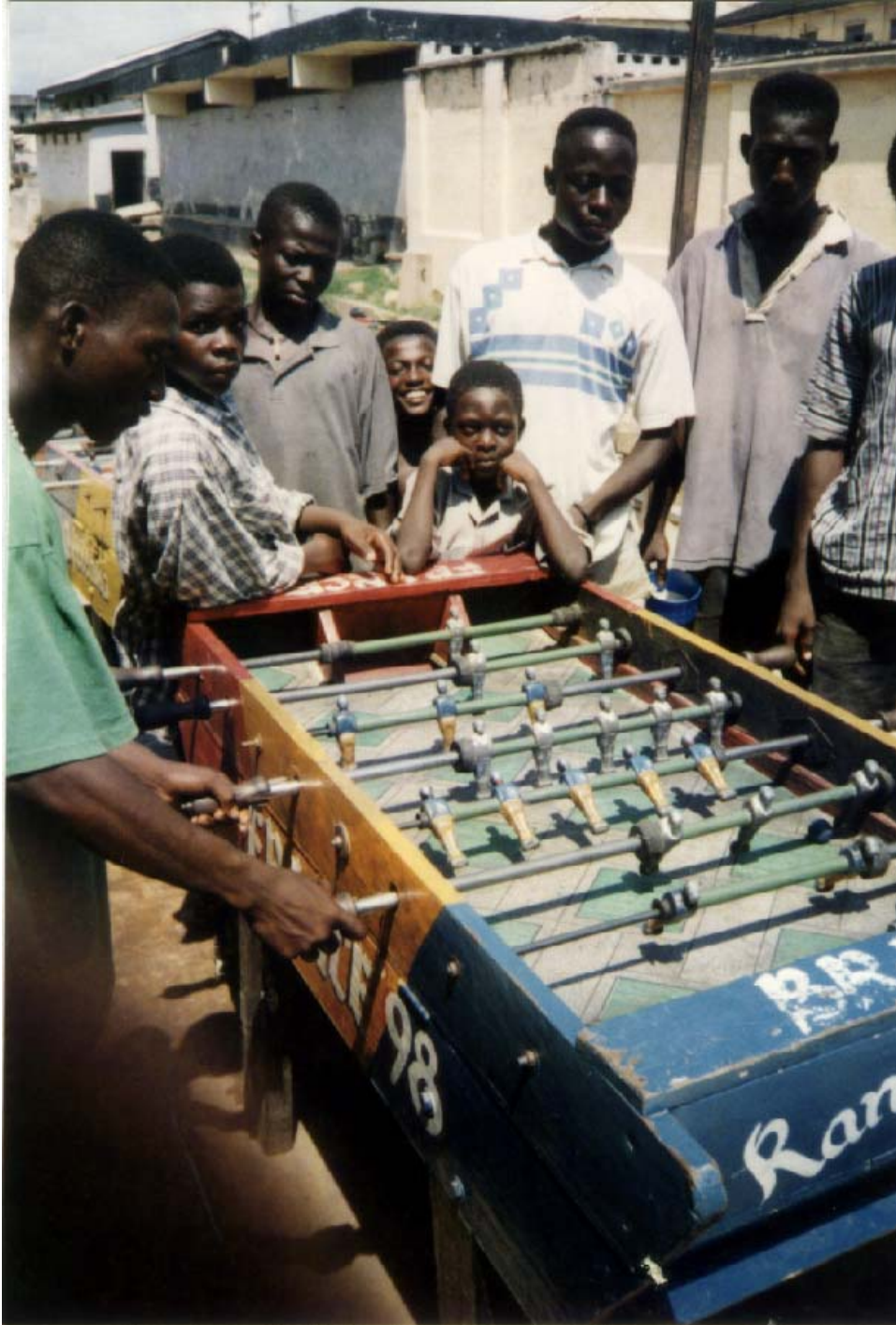


Figure 9: Young boys gather around a foosball table on Anafo Street in Cape Coast

FIGURE 10 AND 11



Figure 10: CNN International, a popular spot for the playing of Dam, in OLA, Cape Coast



Figure 11: Kalama Base, a newly renovated structure in Winneba designated for the playing of Dam. Players proudly display their opinions on the back wall.

FIGURE 12 AND 13



Figure 12: A usual gathering around an Oware board at Penkye, Winneba. Young boys and old men alike crowd around to enjoy the action.



Figure 13: “Slumber at CNN International.” For some, attendance at the site is so frequent that even sleep does not get in the way.

FIGURES 14 AND 15



Figure 14: Kobina Ata Hansen, Penkye’s official scorekeeper, looks on as Kweku Baffoe (far side) challenges “champion” Kwame Essuon.

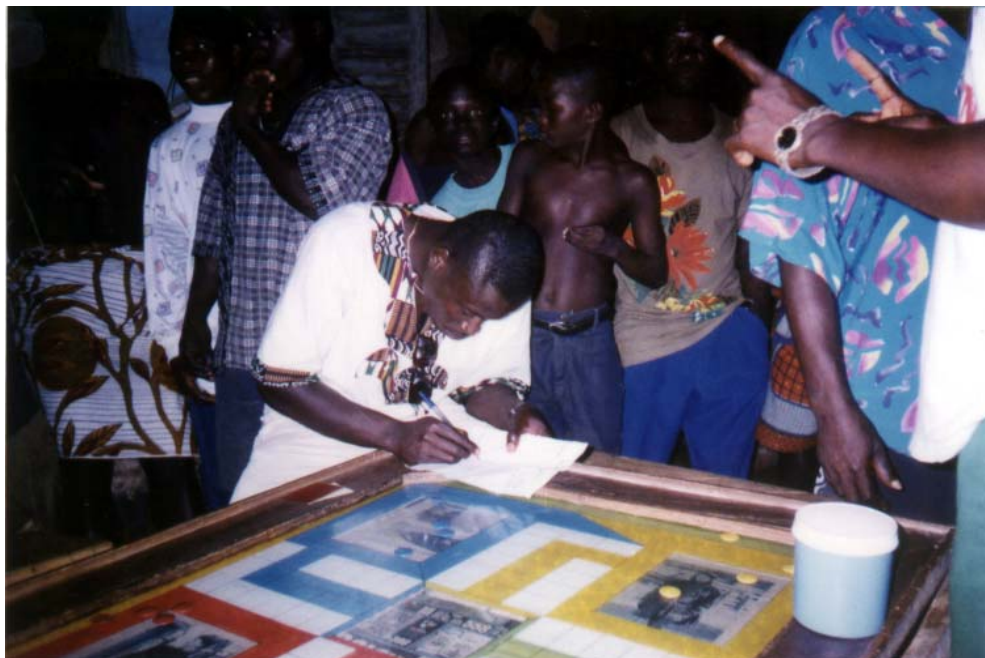


Figure 15: A match commissioner assigned by the Oguaa Indoor Games Association tallies the score on an official score card.

FIGURE 16



Figure 16: A large crowd gathers around the Ludo action of an Oguaa Indoor Games Association match. Observers watch from any vantage point they can find.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

An important reason why indoor games serve many functions in Ghanaian society is that they are a common element of the usual day. Games intermingle with other daily activities because they are an established component of the social landscape. People take to playing games when there is no work because it is an alternative that is socially acceptable. Children learn important lessons through games because they observe and participate in them often, thus, leading to the forming of habits.

Ghanaian men who attend established gaming sites do so in a social setting as well as a competitive one. By visiting a site often one begins to blend in with the scene of the environment, thus becoming part of “the club”. At such sites, there is no official club, but relationships develop over shared time. One can even join an official club for game playing, such as the Oguaa Indoor Games Association. The presence of established gaming locations testifies to the fact that games attract a crowd. These locations become an important meeting place, much like the tree in the centre of town where elders meet or the park bench in a city. Understanding and wisdom are naturally shared through informal gathering. It is a testament to the sense of communalism in Ghanaian society that people are so apt to spend idle time together playing games instead of individual pursuing their own interests.

Games are just a part of the day, like anything else. It is for this reason that they echo the lessons and sentiments of other daily activities. A look into Ghanaian games is just a small glimpse into Ghanaian life, but it will reveal a lot about a variety of things.

Time limits inhibited the ability of this study to cover a multitude of interesting fields of research. A fruitful investigation could be done on the presence of gaming sites alone. One could unearth relevant material by exploring the spatial locations and names of such locations. Additionally, a case study of the dynamic at such a location could be of extreme significance for natural understanding.

My dearth of information on women’s gaming leads me to believe that I’ve missed an enormous amount of relevant data. Worthwhile research could be pursued exploring women’s attitudes on games. This could produce a wealth of sociological material, as one could find out how women feel about the frequent playing of games by men. Such research would necessarily involve the assigning of work on a gender oriented basis.

Another subject that would be enormously interesting to explore is the relationship between work and play. Aside from the obvious exploration of the correlation between employment and game playing, one could also explore forms of play during work. Anyone

who has seen fishermen roll in a boat knows that *worksongs*, a way of turning work into play, are extremely significant. Additionally, a study of this sort should include a survey of games played by those of particular occupations. This would be an exploration of the reasons for recreational gathering while also approaching an understanding of occupational relationships.

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APPENDIX A

Questions from my interview with Mr. Ishmael Otoo on November 12, 1998:

1. Where did Oware originate? Who played it first?
2. What does the name Oware mean?
3. How many different types of playing Oware do you know?
4. What are the names of the different types of playing, and what do the names mean?
5. When did you learn to play Oware?
6. Who taught you to play Oware?
7. Do you play Oware a lot?
8. With whom do you play Oware?
9. When do you play Oware?
10. Do you have your own Oware board?
11. Who made your Oware board?
12. Did you teach your children to play Oware?
13. Can girls play Oware?

Questions from my interview with Mr. Yaw Essuman on November 15, 1998:

1. What is the origin of Oware?
2. What has its history with the people of Denkyira done to the community and their impression of the game?
3. Has possession of the Golden Board by the Asante caused problems between communities?
4. Would the people of Denkyira like the board back?
5. Are there any formal gatherings where games are played?
6. How are games associated with formal gatherings?
7. When or why would one not play a game?
8. Are games formally taught? Or are they mostly learned through observation?

Questions from my interview with Mr. Johann Yaw Sekyi Baidoo on November 18, 1998:

1. Where did Oware originate?
2. Please discuss the materials used for the playing of Oware? Does the use of certain materials often coincide with being of a particular economic status?

3. Is there particular meaning behind the certain moves and number of spaces for playing Oware?
4. What has been the affect of Oware's history as it pertains to Denkyira and Asante?
5. Are there game playing associations in Winneba?
6. What is Oware's meaning for the intellect of participants?
7. Does game playing contain a certain method of teaching?
8. What would it mean if a child were considered more intelligent than a parent?
9. Do games have special social functions?
10. Is it true that Oware is played at wake keepings? Are there any games that would be inappropriate for such an occasion?

Questions from my interview with the Oguaa Indoor Games Association's Executive Committee on November 20, 1998:

1. How many officers are on the committee? What offices are there?
2. Do you actively advertise?
3. Who sponsors the association? How was contact made with sponsors?
4. How are competitions organized?
5. Are there any rules that have been put into association games because the association requires more control?
6. What are the methods of conflict resolution? Do conflicts occur frequently?
7. What is the current status of Amafu, the team who was expelled from competition last year?
8. Is there any difference between playing on a club and playing on your own? Is one more exciting than the other?
9. How many women play in the association?
10. Are there any all women teams?
11. Are there any all men teams?

Questions from my interview with Mr. Kweku Baffoe on November 24, 1998:

1. What is your occupation?
2. How much time to you spend at Penkye?
3. Who plays there?

4. How does one get into a game?
5. Do children play? If they don't is there a place where children play?
6. Do women play a Penkye?
7. What is at stake in the games? Is there ever any gambling?
8. Do you ever play against other groups of people?
9. Do you play games other than Oware?
10. Does playing Oware have a significance for your family?
11. When did people begin to play at Penkye?
12. Do people have assigned roles at Penkye?
13. Do players employ certain tactics?
14. Do certain players have their own styles?
15. How do certain players make you change your playing style?
16. Can you tell immediately if someone knows how to play?
17. Do people from different locations play with different styles?