

Firing of Muskets in a Socio- Cultural Context in Selected Communities in Ghana: The Bad and the Ugly

Divine Selorm Ndah¹, Bright Essel², Kpesese Ruben³, Sophia Mayona⁴

¹Seventh – Day Adventist College of Education, Department of Creative Arts, Koforidua, Ghana

²Komenda College of Education, Department of Creative Arts, Komenda, Ghana

³Dambai College of Education, Department of Creative Arts, Dambai, Ghana

⁴Bia Lamplighter College of Education, Department of Creative Arts, Bia, Ghana

***Corresponding Author:** Divine Selorm Ndah, Seventh – Day Adventist College of Education, Department of Creative Arts, Koforidua, Ghana

Abstract: The intention of the paper was to explore the unproductive aspects of musketry phenomenon in the socio- cultural context in selected communities in Ghana. The study focused on funerals of chiefs as well as celebration of Heroes in society. The study adopted the mixed methods approach to present the findings of the study. Respondents in the study were sampled through convenience, purposive as well as snowball techniques. Questionnaire, interview and observation were some of the tools employed to collect data; which was analyzed manually through thematic content analysis and the use of the computer software. The study therefore reveals that, firing of muskets take place when there is funeral of chiefs and Heroes. In addition, muskets sometimes explode to cause injury to the audience. Furthermore, it came to light that, the smokes that emanate from the muskets pollute the environment and also are harmful to audience. Next to this, the costume put on by the musketeers are so fearful thereby causing fear and panic among the audience. It was however recommended that, musketeers should be well trained by professionals on how to handle the guns. Also, technology could be employed in firing the muskets to minimize the emission of smokes. Also, it came out that, the musketeers should be positioned at places that are a little far from the audience so as to avoid panic from the audience.

Keywords: Musketry, Funerals, Chiefs, Heroes, Traditional – events

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditions are peculiar to many societies in Ghana. Because Ghanaian hold their cultural values and ideals in highest esteem, they try to hold on to such values as and when the need arises.

In most of the cases, these cultural rites manifest through life cycle events. Firing of musket is one of such sacred cultural rites that are performed during the installation and burial of chiefs. The musket is equally fired to herald important personalities and Heroes in society.

Guns in general among the Ghanaian setting are used to show bravery, power and authority. According to Kquofi et al., (2015) Ghanaian always uphold their cultural values in the highest esteem; the very reason why chiefs and Heroes in Ghanaian communities are welcome or send off through the musketry phenomenon. Oral narratives equally have it that, during events involving chiefs and Heroes, muskets are fired to ward off believed evil spirits away from them. In some jurisdictions, the number of rounds they have to fire the muskets depend on the status of the chief or the individual involved.

If the event happens to be an installation of a chief, traditional dances are mostly performed whilst the musketeers are expected to dance to the rhythm of the dance and fire intermittently. If is perform during a funeral of a chief as well, the musketeers are supposed to dance to the rhythm of a dance whilst they fire the guns.

However, in the public discourse among Ghanaian in recent times, people are questioning the technical know-how of the musketeers who fire during events. These questions are arising of late due to incidents in the media domain where such muskets have misfired hence casing havoc to the audience. It is therefore proper for concerns to be raised concerning the guidelines of the musketeers as well as their knowledge in weapon handling so that measures are put in place to safeguard eventualities that could occur to mar the beauty of the events that trigger the firing of the muskets.

It is therefore the hope of the researchers that, this study would help to add to the public outcry over fatalities that are occurring as a result of firing of the muskets during traditional events hence help in propounding solutions to eliminate such fatalities.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The cultural values of every society are regarded as unique legacies that portray the ideals, philosophies and culture of the people. In Ghanaian culture, chieftaincy is a phenomenon that is so revered and hence accorded sacred recognition. Many cultural and traditional rites associate with the chieftaincy institution among such is firing of muskets to herald traditional leaders and other Heroes into a durbar. According to a report from ghanareport.com, muskets are fired to herald the arrival of traditional rulers during enstoolment or death rites.

In recent media reportage, at least two prominent Ghanaians have been hit by explosions from the muskets during funeral events and installation of chief respectively. During the explosions, one of the victims died whilst the other sustained a severe injury in the eyes. These occurrences have become topical discourse among Ghanaians in recent times. Unfortunately, empirical studies or investigations have not yet been conducted into the matter as of now.

It is as a result of this developments that this study is done to explore the occasions that call for the firing of the muskets as well as investigating the negative effects of the firing of muskets during public events.

2.1. Objectives of the study

1. To explore situations in which muskets are fired in Ghanaian cultural setting.
2. To investigate the negative impacts of firing of muskets in Ghanaian cultural setting.

2.2. Research Questions

1. At what events are firing of muskets Performed in the Ghanaian socio- cultural setting?
2. What are the negative implications of firing of muskets in Ghanaian socio- cultural setting?

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1. Muskets and society

Musketry refers to the use of the fire arm by the military during battle (Dziato, 2025). He describes further that, firing of muskets is a phenomenon where set or group of riffles and automatic weapons are fired targeting a specific focus. He shares further that, as part of socio- cultural activities in Ghana, muskets are fired to welcome chiefs, queen mothers and other dignitaries during funerals and durbars.

Avorgbedor (nd) as well clarifies that, musketry has become one of the rituals during funerals or festivals of chiefs. He opines that, society acknowledges the phenomom as a national salute for the Heroes. He adds that, if one is a chief or a Hero in society and muskets are not fired during such events, then such rituals are deem not to be completed.

Tengolzor Ba –am (2021) equally opines that, firing of muskets is a traditional ritual that is mainly performed by Ghanaian society. He cites an example of the Frafra people in Ghana and adds that, both the old citizens as well as the traditional chiefs are saluted with muskets during their funerals. He shares that, the muskets are shot as a sign of respect and honour.

It could therefore be inferred from the assertions of the authorities that, muskets are sacred weapons that are fired as a symbol of honour and respect during funerals of chiefs and elderly as well as during honouring of Heroes in Ghanaian societies.

3.2. Funerals of Traditional Leaders in Ghana

Funerals are among some of the essential rituals that are supposed to be performed for a deceased in Ghana. It is the believe of the people that, without a befitting burial and funerals; the deceased is not fully sanctify to enter into the spirit world. News from [https:// thebft online.com](https://thebftonline.com) reports that, among the people of Kwahu in the Eastern Region of Ghana, when a traditional chief joins the ancestors, firing of muskets is one of the prominent ritual that is perform before the chief is laid to rest. The report confirms that, during the funeral celebration of Dasebre Akuamoah BoATENG II between November 26th to

December, 6th 2023, firing of muskets were done. It came out that, the musketry took place on the Friday, 6th December, 2023. This assertion has been equally corroborated by myjoyonline news.

According to Aido (2025), during the one-week observation of the late Dassebre Osei Bonsu II at Asante Mampong, music and dance displayed in various forms as well as the firing of muskets to show the status of the late King.

Report gathered from www.modernGhana.com (2016) by the Ghana News Agency (GNA) Captured “No firing of Muskets at Okuapemhene’s funeral“. According to the report, since the firing of the musket is a pre requisite during a chief’s burial, only limited number of people would be granted accreditation by the traditional council to fire the muskets. The report therefore warns all persons in the traditional jurisdiction not to carry any gun or ammunition in the name of firing of muskets. The report further admits that, in the past, people were believed to have been injured during indiscriminate firing of muskets during Odwira festival in the area. The report clarifies that, the traditional ruler in question ruled for forty-one (41) years with its accompanied peace and development in the area; and therefore the musketry must be heard as a way of honour and recognition for a successful reign.

The same www.modernGhana.com report (2023) shared by the Citi Television equally acknowledges the fact that, the Asafoatsemei fired muskets at the funeral grounds of the late Ga Manye Naa Dedei Omaedu III. This comes to confirm the narratives among Ghanaian that, firing of muskets is a traditional salute which is observed to honour and also bid farewell to a traditional Hero such as chiefs and Queens.

According to Adjei (2015), muskets were ancient tools that chiefs were using to fight during war; but as time evolved, the guns are now used to protect or guard the chiefs ceremoniously. He cites an example of Kona people in the Asante Region of Ghana and shares that, the muskets are fired whenever the chief is carried in palanquin. He corroborates that, the muskets are fired whenever there is funeral of a chief to show his power as a traditional leader who by extension is regarded as the chief warrior for his subordinates.

Chiefs are regarded as commander- in chief of their communities and their symbol of authority is the gun (Arthur 2009). She clarifies therefore that, when the chief joins the ancestors, the muskets (guns) must be fired to show their status as such. She adds that, at the durbar or during procession, the muskets are equally fired to signal the protective influence the chief has for his subjects. She explains that, the firing of muskets occurs on three ceremonial scenes; thus when a King is being installed, when he is organizing a grand funeral for his predecessor and also when he wins a battle. She continues that, among the Asante people, when the grandmother of a chief dies, the chief is equally permitted to perform firing of muskets. Also, he fires during enstoolment to proof to all that, he is capable of defending the Golden Stool as well as the whole of the Asante Kingdom.

3.3. Demerits of Musketry in Traditional Funerals in Ghana

According to Dziato (2025), firing of muskets is losing its relevance in the current 21st century. He opines that, the phenomenon has tragically in some instances resulted to deaths and injuries of love ones. He cites an incident reported by the daily guide newspaper on 29th January, 2008, in Bono Ahafo region of Ghana where a gunfire meant to honour a fallen Police officer ended up killing two mourners. He states further that, in recent times in 2025, a Ghanaian journalist got hit in the eyes during firing of muskets in traditional funeral at Dormaa in the same Bono region of Ghana. Dziato continues that, in recent times at Nungua in Accra Ghana, a woman lost her life during such traditional events. He adds that, a similar story could be told of gospel artiste in Ghana who was also hit by a stray bullet during firing event to honour a hunter; resulting to amputation of the hand of the young artiste. He therefore, calls on the powers that be to find alternative means of honoring the leaders and the Heroes without resulting to injuries and loss of lives from the citizenry.

News footage from www.adomonline.com on April, 4th (2024) equally reports an incident at Offumasu in the Techiman North District in the Bono East Region of Ghana where a 25yr old John Davy was shot dead during a funeral in Jema. The news continues that; the incidence occurs when some persons claimed to be guards of the paramount chief were firing muskets to herald him onto the durbar grounds.

Ghana News Agency on May, 26th (2016) as well reports that, the Eastern Regional Minister has directed all municipal and district security council and traditional authorities to strictly enforce the ban on firing

of muskets during funerals and festivals. It came out that, disregard for the directive has led to loss of lives and money. The report cites an incidence where a nine year- old girl suffered musketry wounds resulting to her being paralyzed.

Collating the assertions of all the scholars above, it could therefore be deduced that, despite the good intentions behind the firing of muskets, there are situations where it could result to fatalities. Society must therefore be cautious during such events.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study been qualitative oriented adopted mixed methods approach to delve into data gathering and presentation of findings.

The population of the study consisted of Traditional leaders, Senior Citizens, Civil Society group and some individuals. The population breakdown is as follows:

Category	Accessible
Traditional Leaders	10
Senior Citizens	20
Civil Society group	10
Individuals	20

4.1. Sampling

Varied sampling methods were adopted for each category as below:

Traditional leaders were sampled using convenience sampling method. This was adopted because, the researchers wanted to sought information from the leaders at their convenience; so as and when they were available to the researchers, they were approached. In addition, this sampling method took into consideration the proximity of the researchers; thus any of the traditional leaders within the jurisdiction were approached for an information.

Senior Citizens were also consulted using snowball technique as members in the study areas re directed the researchers to those they deem fit could provide tangible information in line with the focus of the study.

Civil society groups such as teachers, cultural expertise and media practitioners were as well contacted using purposive sampling technique. This sampling was employed because the researchers wanted responses from those respondents who have a lot of influence and their voice are much heard in society; hence the adoption of this method to select them for the study.

Some twenty (20) individuals within the study areas were equally selected at random during the study.

4.2. Research Tools

Interviews, Questionnaire and observation were used to gather data. Interviews were used to collect data from the traditional leaders and Senior Citizens whilst civil society groups and individuals responded to the questionnaire.

The researchers as well being educators and cultural experts brought their observational experience and expertise on the focus of the study hence make appropriate judgements.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data was analyzed using Computer statistical tools whilst the responses from the interviews were transcribed, interpreted and manually tallied and conclusions drawn.

5.1. Analysis of Data

Ten (10) Civil Society Group members answered the questionnaire and their responses are herein discussed:

They were asked whether firing of muskets is relevant in current times, Eight (8) of them thus 80 % responded to No whilst the remaining responded in favour of YES.

On whether the respondents have witnessed firing of muskets before, all of them (100%) unanimously responded to Yes; signifying that they have all witnessed the phenomenon before.

The respondents have stated some of the occasions on which muskets could be fired as follows:

Seven (7) of them representing 70% stated funeral of chiefs, durbar of chiefs and traditional festivals. The remaining also stated installation of chiefs and procession of chiefs.

Asked whether the musketry phenomenon have negative impact on society in current days, Nine (9) of them thus (90%) responded to YES to agree that, the practice has negative effect on society. The remaining of the respondents equally stated NO; to disagree with the counterparts.

On identifying some of the negative effects, Six (6) of them (60%) stated explosion of muskets leading to casualties, noise pollution from the sounds which are mostly unregulated, inhalation of toxic chemicals from the muskets posing health risk. The other respondents equally mention explosion of stray bullets killing people, untrained gunmen handling the muskets risking chances of more casualties. In addition, they claim the muskets create fear and panic among the audience.

On how the firing of muskets is done, they describe the process as firing of guns intermittently whilst dancing to a rhythm of either Kete, Fontom from or any of the warrior musical types.

On whether the respondents would allow abolishment of muskets firing, Nine (9) of them (90 %) stated YES whilst the rest of them responded to NO. See the representation below:

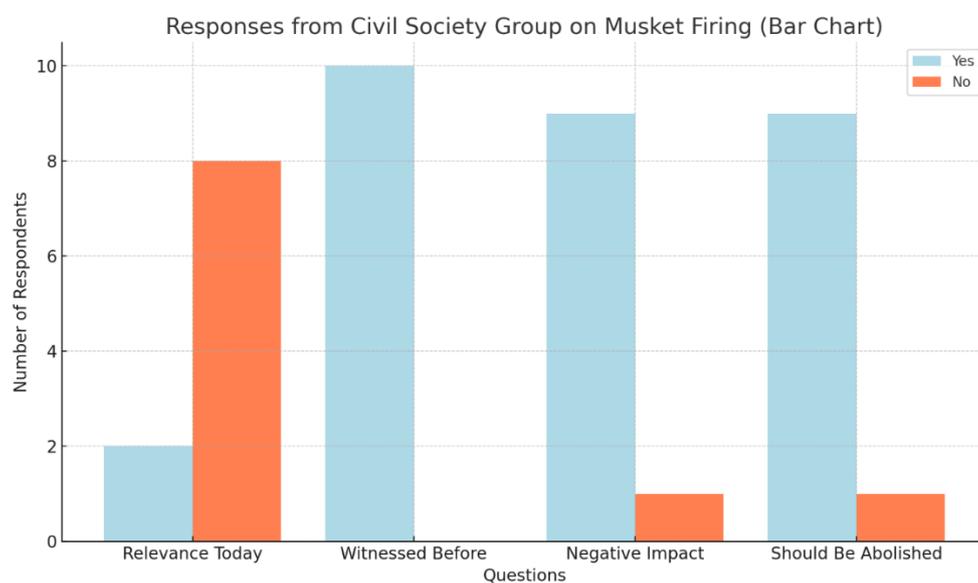


Figure 1. Responses of civil society group

5.2. Twenty (20) Individuals

They responded to the same questionnaire of the civil society group. Their responses are herein discussed:

On whether firing of muskets is relevant in current dispensation, 17 of them representing 85% stated NO, whilst the remaining opted for YES.

Asked whether they have witnessed firing of muskets before, they all responded to YES; meaning they have all observed firing of muskets before.

On the occasions where muskets are fired, 12 of them (60%) identified outdoor firing of chiefs, funeral of chiefs, celebration of festivals and the remaining also stated durbar of chiefs.

As to whether firing of muskets is having any negative impact on society, 18 of them representing 90 % responded to YES, whilst the remaining opted for NO.

On some of the negative effects of musketry, 12 of them (60%) identified explosion of muskets, injury to audience and inhalation of harmful smokes. Six (6) of them thus 30 % equally stated that, the sounds from the guns could affect hearing and also, the muskets firing could create fear and panic among the audience. The remaining respondents also stated that, the personnel who fire the muskets are not properly trained hence have high chances of causing harm to the public.

In describing how the firing is done, they describe that, the musketeers arrange themselves in files, dance rhythmically to the traditional music mostly at the background and fire the muskets.

On whether the firing of muskets to be abolished in the traditional set up, 90% of them responded to YES whilst the rest opted for NO.

The summary of the responses for *individual* category is display on a bar chart below:

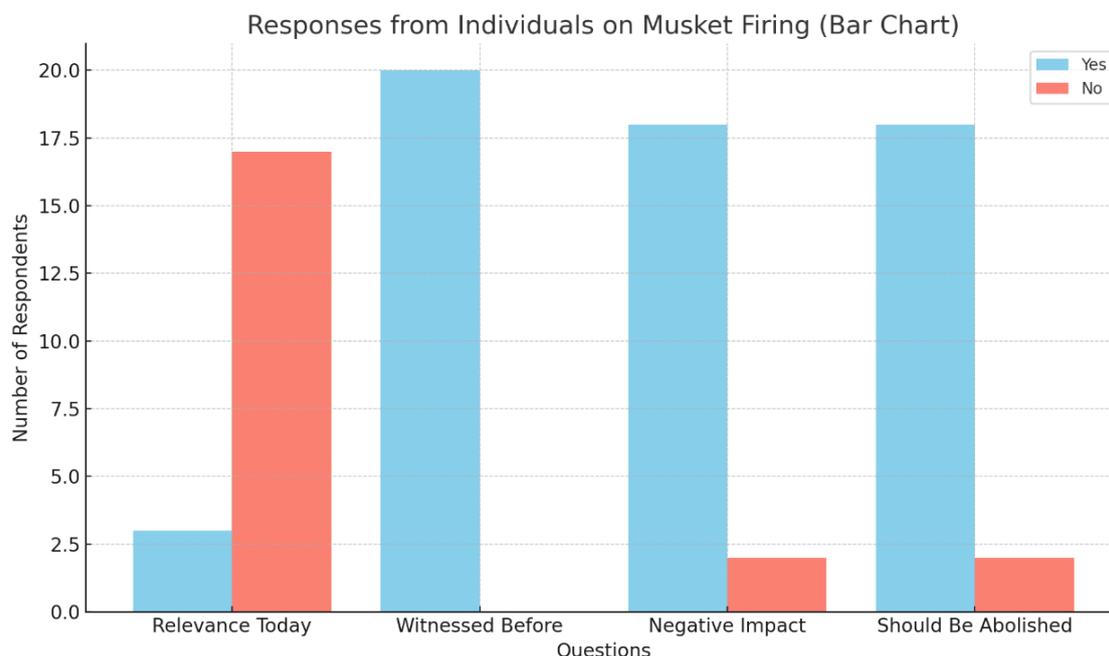


Figure 2. Responses of the individuals

Comparism of YES responses for both Civil society and Individual Category is as well display below:

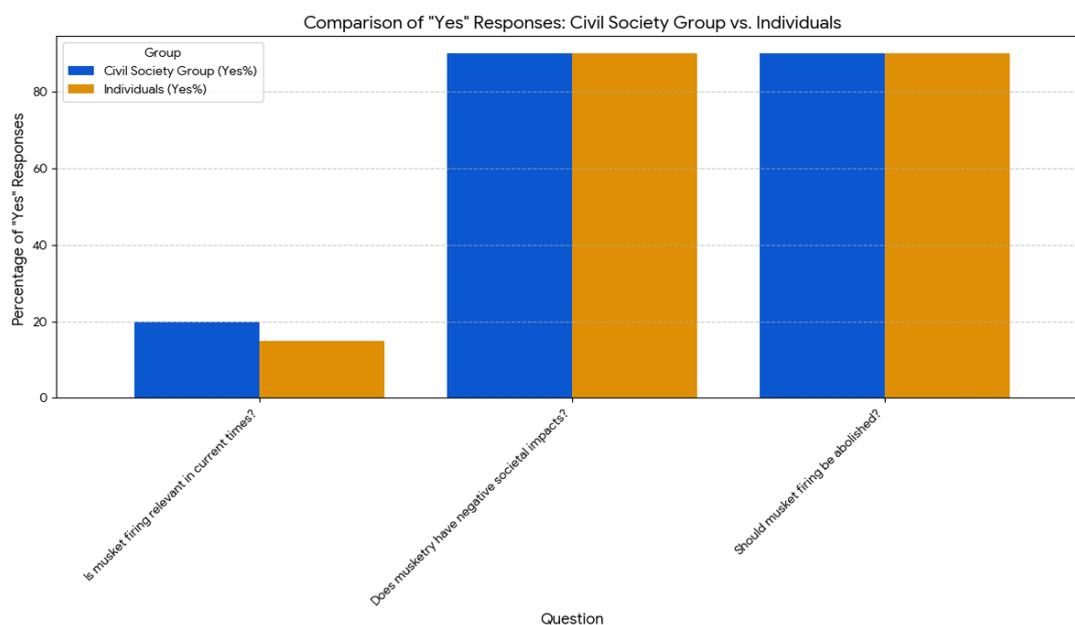


Figure 3. Comparism of YES responses

5.3. Ten (10) Traditional Leaders

In responding to the occasions on which muskets are fired, they all stated that, muskets are heard during installation and outdooring of chiefs, durbar of chiefs, traditional festivals as well as during celebration of Heroes and warriors in society.

As to whether musketry is relevant in current era, 50 % of them justify that, they are relevant and to them, once that phenomenon is part of culture, it must be preserved. The remaining respondents equally stated that, the practice is not relevant since society is dynamic; with advent of technology, other means could be resorted to without necessarily using the guns.

As to whether there are negative effects on firing of muskets, 6 of them stated that, Yes, there are some negative effects. They cited an example in recent times where some media personnel got injured in the eye by such firing in Bono region in Ghana. They equally cited an instance where a traditional ruler during an installation got killed from a gun from nowhere. Two (2) of the leaders also acknowledged the fact that, explosions could truly occur due to technical issues on the muskets. The rest of the respondents stated that, some audience who should patronize the events could retreat due to fear and panic of the muskets.

On whether the musketry phenomenon should be abolished, 50% stated that, it should be abolished completely whilst the rest equally stated that, the practice should be sustained but with little modification to reflect the dynamism of society.

5.4. Twenty (20) Senior Citizens

On the events that trigger firing of muskets, they all share that, it happens during installation and outdoor of chiefs, traditional festivals, celebrations of warriors and Heroes as well as during procession of chiefs to signal their power and authority.

Asked whether firing of muskets are relevant, 11 of them thus 55 % shared that, the practice has outlived its usefulness whilst the remaining stated that, culture and its elements must be preserved hence the phenomenon is still relevant.

On whether there are some negative effects of musketry on society, 55% again defended their stance that Yes, in the current era, there are negative effects. The remaining respondents maintained that there are no effects and that such process has been there since time immemorial.

In enumerating some of the negative effects, they identified that, people could lose their lives or get injured through explosion of the guns, the sound from the guns could cause hearing impairment and also, the chemicals use to fire the guns could pollute the air during the process.

On whether to advocate for the sustenance of the phenomenon, the earlier 55% responded to NO whilst the remaining agreed that, it should be sustained but make it better to suit the needs of contemporary society.

Researchers as well through observation as cultural and art educators observed that, muskets are truly fired during chieftaincy rites, traditional festivals as well as celebration of warriors and Heroes in society. They observed from the media reportage in recent times that, issues were reported of people who got killed and injured accidentally through firing of muskets at traditional events. The researchers also noted with keen interest how people are calling for reforms during the process of firing of muskets.

6. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that, muskets are fired during special occasions such as installation and outdoor of chiefs, funeral of chiefs, durbar of chiefs as well as celebration of Heroes and warriors. Besides, during traditional festivals, muskets are fired to herald procession of chiefs. See muskets at display during funeral of a chief below:



Plate 1: *Kete ensemble performing to motivate the musketeers*

Credit: *The researchers*



Plate 2: *A musketeer dancing to Kete and ready to fire a musket*

Credit: *The Researchers*

The study spelt it out clear that, during muskets display, there are some casualties that are sometimes recorded. It came out that, at times, the guns explode therefore injuring the audience. In addition, it was clear that, most of the musket bearers are not security trained personnel hence might not be professionally inclined to how to properly handle such weapons in public.

Furthermore, the sounds that erupt from the muskets cause fear and panic which eventually could lead to health issues among the audience especially the aged and the children.

The chemicals and the smokes that emanate from the guns are dangerous to the environment and the audience who inhale them. The chemicals as well as the smokes serve as pollutant which pollutes the fresh air within the space of performance. See the picture below

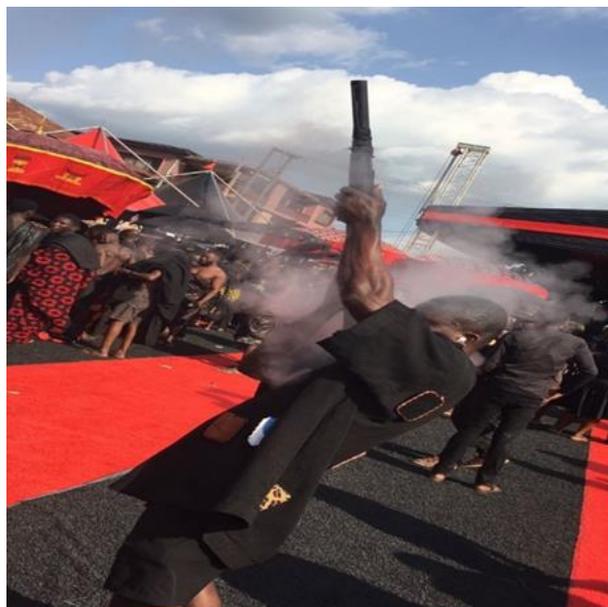


Plate 3: *A musketeer firing a musket, accompanied by smoke*

Credit: *The Researcher*

Because the personnel who handle the guns are not scientifically trained, they could over load or underload the guns during firing which may go with its hazardous consequences.

It was revealed as well that, a lot of miscreants in society could likely hide under cover of musketry phenomenon to engage in mischievous acts during the process. In addition, the costume and the make

ups of the musketeers evokes sense of fear among the audience. In reality, the general outlook and costume of musketeers are complex in such a way that, they look fearful to the public. See an example below:



Plate 4. *A musketeer in his outfit ready to fire*
Courtesy: *The Researchers*

Also, the musketeers are found right in the middle of the audience and as well, they load the guns in a hurry without taken their time and precautionary measures; and such could also trigger an accident during the musketry phenomenon.

The findings revealed above have truly confirm the assertions of Avorgbedor (nd) , Dziato (2025) and Adomonline.com news (April, 2024)

7. CONCLUSION

The study made it clear that, muskets are mostly fired during installation of chiefs, durbar as well as funerals of chiefs. Also, during traditional festivals, muskets are heard. In addition to durbars organized in honour of some heroes or warriors.

Furthermore, the study pointed out that, in modern societies, firing of muskets is losing its relevance as the old tradition has recorded some casualties in recent times during performances. It came clear that, there has been some instances where the guns exploded killing some audience as well as injuring some others.

Also, for the fact that majority of those who fire the guns are not security personnel or professionally trained; the musketry phenomenon posses more danger to the general public. More so, the smokes and the chemical emissions that erupt form the guns are harmful for inhalation.

Besides, the firing creates fear and panic among the audience, a phenomenon which could trigger health complications.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Technologically devices that are environmentally friendly could be used to create sounds in place of the real guns.
2. Musketeers must be assign to any of the security agencies for training before they are permitted to handle such weapons.
3. Musketeers must be well orientated for them to know when and how to fire the muskets during events.

4. The muskets bearers must be well position a little far away from audience; so that in case of any explosions, audience should not be affected.
5. The costume of the musketeers must not be so complex in such a way that it could trigger fear among the audience.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Selorm Divine Ndah is a lecturer in Music and Dance at the Seventh – Day Adventist College of Education in Koforidua Ghana. He equally lectures on part-time basis at the College of Distance Education of University of Cape Coast and also College of Distance and E- Learning of University of Education, Winneba all in Ghana. He has some Journal and Book publications to his credit. His research interest includes using traditional musical instruments as communication devices in Ghanaian society and also the influence of performing arts on societies.



Bright Essel lectures music and dance at the Creative Arts department of Komenda College of Education in Komenda in Ghana. He is a prolific music composer, Director and an organist. He has many publications covering Creative Arts in Education, Performing Arts and Society as well as areas in Ethnomusicology.



Ruben Kpese holds Master of Philosophy degree in Music theory and Composition from the University of Ghana. His research interests include Ghanaian art music compositions and secular music. He is a Keyboardist, a composer, and Music Director. He is credited with several choral compositions as well as Journal article publications. Currently, he is a faculty member at Creative Arts Department (Performing Arts Unit) at Dambai College of Education, Ghana.

Sophia Mayona is a lecturer at Lamplighter College of Education at Bia, in Ghana. She holds Master of Philosophy Degree in Music Education from the University of Education in Ghana and currently pursuing Doctor of Philosophy degree in Music at the University of Education Winneba. She has some publications which touched on Performing Arts and society. Her research interest covers music and society as well as music and Child development.

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