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PALACE COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN TRADITIONAL
GOVERNANCE: A FOCUS ON THE ASANTE KINGDOM

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(MAPR 16067)

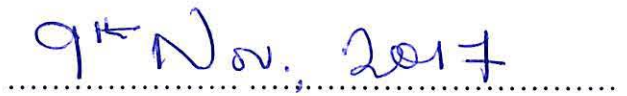

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
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DECLARATION

I, Dorigen Owusu Prempeh, the author of this study, do hereby declare that except for the reference to other people's work which has been duly acknowledged, the work presented here is the result of my own effort for the award of a Master of Arts degree in Public Relations at the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

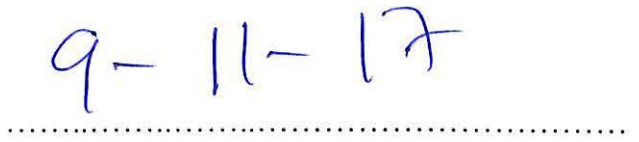
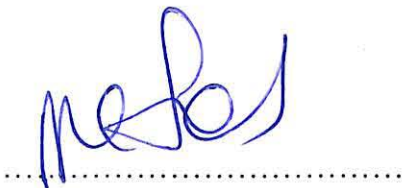
I also declare that this thesis, carried out under the supervision of Dr. Modestus Fosu, has neither in whole or in part been submitted to any institution for the award of any certificate.



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God almighty for his grace and mercies. I also dedicate it to the *Akyeame* of the Manhyia palace, especially Nana Antwi Boasiako II, for their patience and decision to share information concerning the *Okyeame* institution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Traditional governance, represented in the chieftaincy institution, remains very prominent in Ghanaian socio-political life, notwithstanding the modern Western-oriented political governance system that the country practises. As a political system, chieftaincy reflects power relations between traditional political authority and inhabitants with the seat of government being the Palace. Like every other institution, communication plays a crucial role in the administration of the affairs of the traditional society. Yet while much work has been done of the chieftaincy institution, especially in sociology, very little studies exist on how communication works in this setup and the communication dynamics therein. This is why this study, which seeks to investigate the communication roles of the *Okyeame* in the palace setup is very relevant today. Specifically, the study strives to discover whether the *Okyeame's* communication roles share a symbiotic relationship with public relations.

The study focuses on the Manhyia palace and is guided by the Systems Theory (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2002). It is supported by a qualitative research methodology that used semi-structured interviews and observation to collect data for analysis.

The findings revealed that the institution of the *okyeame* is central to the operations of the Manhyia palace. The *okyeame* is regarded as the king's wife and has unlimited access to the king. The *okyeame* used to play more roles in the past than now. He used to run errands for the king, he was the public relations officer, the human resource manager, pours libation on some occasions and is the king's representative. However, due to the expansion of the Asante kingdom and the high division of labour of the Manhyia palace under Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the *Okyeame* is now mostly seen to be a representative of the king at certain gatherings and relays information between the king and his subjects. Major public relations activities are carried out by consulted public relations firms for the Otumfuo.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Communication, as a means of sharing meaning and enacting harmony, has been a feature of societies all over the world, whether traditional or modern. It has now been firmly established that traditional Africa had and still have their mass communication systems contrary to a popular Western-induced view that African did not have such a systems before the advent of modern technologically driven means of communication. It is now common knowledge that before modern communication systems of newspapers, radio, television, and so on, Africans were engaging in mass communication through talking drums, gong gong, fires and so on. The focal point of communication in the traditional setup in Ghana has been the palaces, which serve as the seat of traditional governance, from where the chief or king rules as the leader of a society.

In Ghana, the advent of modern political governance may have diminished the force of traditional governance but has not completely obliterated the role of chieftaincy in society. This is particularly because Ghanaian societies are still embedded in neotraditional structures, even in urban areas. Contrary to a view since independence that chieftaincy would soon lose its significance in the Ghanaian society, the institution is still very popular. One of the reasons for this is the remarkable malleability and fluidity of neotraditional systems. Particularly on the local level, a considerable percentage of the population is permanently engaged in negotiations and disputes over neotraditional offices and corresponding claims (Knierzinger, 2011). For example, on 22nd August 2017, supporters of two chiefs from the Osu traditional area clashed over who had the right to sprinkle *Kpokpoi*, a traditional meal on the principal streets of Osu. Even though the number of people who are interested in traditional governance appears to be dwindling, there is still a number that crave for it. In some traditions such as the Ga and the

Akan, the means of communicating with the people is done through linguists and for others, especially those of ancient South Africa, the chiefs do that directly with the people.

This study focuses on palace communication among the Asantes of Ghana. The Asantes are one of the oldest settled groups in the history of Africa and for centuries, their traditions have stood the test of time due to their strong socialisation impulse (Asamoah-Hassan, 2011). The various forms of socialisation are mostly done through oral communication which is passed down from generation to generation. One important figure in this communication process is the *Okyeame*. Almost all messages from the chief of the Asantes to his people usually pass through the *Okyeame*. The *Okyeame* assumes the position of a public relations officer for the palace. This is because of the notion that there cannot be a foolish king. So even when a chief does not speak well, it is up to the *Okyeame* to fine-tune the message coming from the chief.

This study, seeks to investigate communication within the Manhyia Palace of the Asantehene and the communication role of the *Okyeame* in the palace. The idea is to discover whether the act of speaking after or on behalf of the chief reflects modern day public relations practice. These scenarios set the contextual basis for the study.

This study is relevant because communication is central to traditional governance everywhere, not the least at the Manhyia palace of the Ashanti Kingdom. Yet, there are few studies focused on how communication operates therein. In fact, the chieftaincy institution is one that cannot be overlooked in the socio-political fabric of Ghana. One of the central figures in the chieftaincy and traditional governance arrangement of Ghanaian traditional societies is the *Okyeame*. The chieftaincy institution is one that is recognised by the 1992 Constitution, yet little is known about the major actors that form part of it. It is imperative, therefore, to undertake a study that reflects the knowledge exposed by researchers in this field and to find out trends

that arise from the *Okyeame* institution. Using appropriate methodologies, such as in-depth interviews, it is the aim of the study to come out with new insights regarding the *Okyeame*'s communication role in the Manhyia Palace in Kumasi.

1.1 Traditional Communication and Public Relations

Communication is the exchange of information between individuals, friends, families, nations and regions. Communication plays a socio-political function. Thus mass communication inculcates in the people of all walks of life patterns of behaviour likely to help them become active protagonists in different processes of social and economic change (Lihamba, 1992).

In oral society, the conditions for cultural continuity are very much more limited than today. In a wholly oral culture, meaning in language is highly specific and local. The context of oral culture is the memory, which is the primary vehicle used to store and keep accessible what is relevant (Inglis, 1990). Oral traditions used verbal messages that are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation. The messages are oral statements spoken, sung or called out on musical instruments (Vansina, 1985).

Among the inter-personal forms of communication through which traditional societies used or rural people still use to receive and give information are the family and neighbourhood, friends and acquaintances, markets and washing areas, and festival gatherings of the village. Institutional networks involve the church or religious networks, the administrative structure, the political party, the school, police and army, and such government service agents as agricultural extension, health, and family planning among others that may operate in the village. The cultures of small-scale societies are cultures of face-to-face oral flows of meaning. The cultures of complex societies on the other hand now make use of writing, print, radio,

telephones, telegraph, photography, film, disk, and tape recording, television, radio and computers (Nyasha, 2001). Likewise, with about 75% penetration of Ghanaians in electronic broadcasting, the average Ghanaian is seen to be actively listening to radio or watching television. However, inasmuch as there is an appreciable level of using modern technologies to communicate, the respect for traditional leaders and the credibility of information from the chiefs make the institution of the *Okyeame* relevant in the midst of these technologies (Ilo, 2003).

Public relations can be defined as the “management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985: 4). The term *relationship* in public relations scholarship is defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity.” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). There are five major public relations disciplines: financial PR, consumer PR, crisis communication, government PR, and internal PR (IPR, 2012).

Within the definition of public relations as espoused by the above scholars, the various traits of public relations are also visible in palace communication. For financial PR, the communication from the *Okyeame* to the people concerning wealth of the community, when to go to fishing and or farming and when not to, the communication on purifying market places so that market women can make more profits within the traditional forms of communication. Various communication on when to harvest the new yam for the market, when to roast the newly harvested corn and other consumer related issues are also displayed within the palaces of our traditional rulers. Whenever a community is plagued with an endemic disease, the

Okyeame plays a role in making sure that the people become calm as they promise an end to such diseases. In terms of government and internal PR, most communications in the chief's palace are carried out by the *okyeame*. Communication needs to have a strong influence on the target audience for them to remain loyal towards the organization.

Systems theory, espoused by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1940's, is useful in public relations because it gives us a way to think about relationships. Generally, systems theory looks at organizations as made up of interrelated parts, adapting and adjusting to changes in the political, economic, and social environments in which they operate. This reflects the organizational structure of palace governance in general and in among the Ashantis. Organizations, like a state, have a recognizable communication structure that guides the parts of the organization to achieve organizational goals. The leaders of the organization create and maintain these internal structures.

Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) state that the systems perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their environments, both internal and external to the organization. According to the systems perspective, organizations depend on resources from their environments, such as "raw materials, a source of employees, and clients or customers for the services or products they produce. The environment needs the organization for its products and services" (Ibid).

In public relations, the receivers play a crucial role than the sender. The sender (organization) must ensure that the receivers interpret the information correctly and also give necessary feedbacks and reviews. It is really essential for the sender to understand its target audience. Public relations experts must do extensive research and gather as much information as they can

before planning any public relation activity. Public relation activities would go unnoticed if receivers do not understand it well. Public relation activities must be designed keeping in mind the benefits of the target audience for a better brand positioning (<http://managementstudyguide.com>, 2017).

While these functions of public relations appears to happen within the various traditional setups in Ghana, there is little literature on the subject regarding the relationship between public relations and traditional communication. It behoves on this study to find out the various tenets of communication in the palace and public relations and to find out the role of the Okyeame, who functions as the intermediary or gatekeeper between information from the traditional authorities to the community and vice versa.

1.2 Chieftaincy Institution within the Political History of Ghana

The chieftaincy institution has had a chequered history. Most of the chiefs at the time of the struggle for independence were against the idea of having an independent nation. Knierzinger (2011) argues that the chiefs thought gaining independence would derail the power they wielded over their people. In this, they found themselves coming up against a well-educated elite Ghanaians who had studied in the Americas and Europe calling for an independent nation. These elites also had the support of wealthy elites from the coastal belt to sponsor their activities because they felt neglected by the British government at the time. It was thus a struggle for political power. The reason for such an occurrence was inherently made manifest in a Gold Coast system that was partly racist, the belief in the birth right to become a ruler or chief, with the elite designated as ‘deracinated, anomalous and self-seeking’ (Rathbone 2000: 7-15). Most of the chiefs were illiterate and as such, they were seen as unprogressive (Ibid). Because the chiefs were more or less the middle men between the people and the British, it is

believed that they had to carry out the repressive policies of the British with little funds and as a consequence lined their own pockets if they did not exploit the population for the colonial power.

As early as 1943, the colonial power enacted a new constitution which was to guarantee a transformation towards something like a constitutional monarchy, with a majority of non-royal officials in the Legislative Council. In the coastal areas, this new Legislative Council was elected directly; in the other areas, the two most influential Councils of Chiefs, the 'Asanteman Council' (for the Ashanti Region) and the Joint Provisional Council (Eastern and Western Regions) functioned as electoral councils. The riots of 1948, which marked the rise of Kwame Nkrumah, were partly triggered by these 'elections': seven out of nine selected representatives of the Joint Provisional Council in the Legislative Council were chiefs, although the colonial administration and the modern elite advised the Councils of Chiefs to send also non-royals to the Legislative Council (Rathbone 2000: 19f).

Subsequently, the so-called Coussey Committee of 1949 was set up, which consisted of Africans only and drew up a new constitution. That was already the start of the process of formal de-politicisation of chieftaincy: in 1952 the powers of the State Councils, the most important councils of chiefs at the district level, were restricted to tasks concerning chieftaincy matters and were replaced by Local Councils where only one third of the members could be chiefs or people appointed by them (Thomi 1999/2000: 104).

The conflict between the chiefs and the modern elites, who were in fact already on their way to become the new ruling class, reached its first peak in 1949 with the separation of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) from the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), which had

previously been home to the elites. The stalwarts of the CPP were often depicted as ‘small boys’ or ‘veranda boys’ (Nugent, 1996), who were not related to the royal families and had often been fighting directly against chiefs in their areas. The former conflict between a new bourgeoisie and a ‘feudalist’ class was now transformed into a Marxist struggle for independence against the collaborators with the colonial power. Contrary to the European notion of nobility, Ghanaian royals can be found in every village. Normally, the ‘royal’ family in a village is the one said to have founded the village.

When Nkrumah was sworn in as prime minister in 1951, the power struggle between the chiefs and the CPP had already been decided at the national level. The new government was to be a diarchic regime, with its executive powers shared between the colonialists and elected Africans. Because of the striking victory of the CPP, governor Charles Noble Arden-Clarke decided to give a majority of the seats in the executive council to the CPP and only a minority to the different Councils of Chiefs (Gocking 2005: 97f). As the chiefs pushed for four ministerial posts and the governor stood firm again, the Territorial Council of the chiefs threatened to form a shadow government, “ready to be called on when the CPP failed”. Finally, Arden-Clarke agreed to give two ministerial posts to the chiefs. At that time, one could probably still speak of two systems of government, which also resulted in open hostility between the two factions (Rathbone 2000: 29f). The most famous statement by Dr Kwame Nkrumah concerning chieftaincy describes this relationship very well:

Those of our chiefs who are with us [...] we do honour [...] those [...] who join forces with the imperialists [...] there shall come a time when they will run and leave their sandals behind them; in other words chiefs in league with imperialists who obstruct our path [...] will one day run away and leave their stools. (*Accra Evening News*, 5 January 1950 (Gocking 2005: 94).

In the Volta Region the chiefs realised very quickly that it was useless to fight the government's plans on their own. Some chiefs, like the chief of Anfoega, had been able to resist the amalgamation policies of the British and were now welcomed with open arms by Nkrumah. Others became members of the Togoland Congress, a political party which fought for a united nation of the Ewe, by far the most dominant ethnic group in the Volta Region and in Togo (Nugent, 1996a: 211).

With the formation of the National Liberation Movement (NLM), the defensive reactions of the chiefs now seemed to be bolstered by a political party. However, the formation of this movement was partly a result of the chiefs being more and more excluded from national decision making and, as would especially become evident after the fall of Nkrumah in 1966, the NLM did not prove to be an effective advocate for all chiefs. It was more or less confined to what is today the Ashanti Region (Hadjor, 1988: 62).

The NLM chiefs in the Ashanti Region under the leadership of the Okyenhene also revolted. They wanted to introduce separate national flags and coats of arms for the Ashanti and the Northern Territories. Apart from the fact that the Northern Territories were not very enthusiastic about this idea, Rathbone also questions whether constructing such a nation without access to the sea would have been reasonable. He assumes that only the extremists of the NLM really believed in this idea, which for the rest of the movement was rather a bargaining exercise (Rathbone, 2000: 96f).

From 1951–1966, it was up to Kwame Nkrumah to call the tune: contrary to his initial belief in the continuity between African 'communalism' and modern communism, he eventually changed the whole structure of chieftaincy by making sure that virtually all paramount chiefs

in Ghana were party stalwarts. The next regime with K. A. Busia and Edward Akufo-Addo as the leading proponents of the chiefly elite again started a sweeping programme of conversion. In spite of the descent of these leaders, the way they instrumentalized power relating to chiefs remained the same. The long rule of Jerry Rawlings – from 1979 to 2000, with a short break from 1979-1981 – was rather ambiguous in its effects on chieftaincy. In the struggle and debates, the *Akyeame* of the various chiefs who were not in favour of the independence struggle were heavily involved in disseminating the messages of the chiefs to their people (Maxwell 1928:38). According to the assertions of Ugboajah (1979), the *Akyeame* were involved in a one-way communication process with the people and delivers the message as soon as the people gathered.

1.3 Traditional Governance and PR in Ghana

Traditional governance predates modern day democratic rule in Ghana. However, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, recognizes traditional governance by providing for chieftaincy and its institutions in chapter 22. According to Article 270 (1),

‘The institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage, is hereby guaranteed’ (1992 Constitution: 150).

Traditional governance has therefore run concurrently with democratic constitutional governance in Ghana since 1992.

Key in this traditional governance system is communication at the palace (the seat of traditional governance). Palace communication is a public dialogue which is the ethical and civil exchange of ideas and opinions (that affect the public) among stakeholders. Participating in this public communication requires offering perspectives, sharing facts, raising questions, and engaging others publicly in discussions. Civility which is the thoughtful choice and use of words and

language as well as a speaker's flexibility and ability of seeing issues from different perspectives is important in this public communication (Griffin, 2006).

The communications of the *Okyeame* was more inclusive, participatory, and universally accessible in its indigenous pre-European form (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005). The political significance of communication may be defined in term of communication and freedom to receive information. Indigenous communication systems, however, tend to suggest that they are not the kind of media that render themselves to easy monopoly, control and manipulation by a small section of the society. It is helpful here, then, to examine the role of the type of communication they generated in the political process (Ibid).

The practice of public relations in Africa goes all the way back to antiquity. For example, Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) see the beginnings of public relations in the influence from Iraq (farm bulletins), India (King's spies), Greece (*vox populi, vox dei*), England (Lord Chancellors) and the Catholic Church (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide). Likewise one can find ancient roots of public relations in this continent in the town crier, gatherings in the village square, and the rhetoric of chiefs.

Wilson (1987) again acknowledges the inherent public relations practice in the traditional forms of communication in Africa. He argues that communications within the palaces can be in the form of either chieftaincy directives, information about an important event like festivals, advertising, educating the people and public relations. According to him, public relations in traditional communication is carried out through:

(a) person-to-person or person-to-organisation basis where the individual tries to promote the image of his chief and kingdom through praise singing.

(b) performances and announcements made to enhance the progress of the community and

1.4 The Okyeame, Traditional Governance and PR

The word ‘linguist’ itself has a host of meanings. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, in Yankah (1995), ‘linguist’ could mean any of the following: 1) one skilled in other languages besides his own; 2) an interpreter or bilingual translator; 3) an eloquent person, and 4) a student of language. As Yankah (1995: 25) opines, ‘the first two meanings are irrelevant to the *okyeame*, since they concern knowledge of more than one language. The third is very relevant, but could apply as well to any eloquent person in the community. The fourth meaning, referring to the scholar of language, is not relevant either, since the *Okyeame* is a language analyst only in a very remote sense, and does not belong to the discipline of linguistics, a twentieth century discipline which was known as philosophy in the nineteenth century’.

Next to the Chief, and probably of greater significance in Akan political communication is the *Okyeame*, also called linguist in local slang. The Queen Mother or Obaapanin (literally female elder or female head), though, “had her own ‘Spokeswoman’ and her court was constituted of both men and women” (Obeng, 1988: 13-14). In a two-step communication, messages flowing from initiators or political communication such as the Chief or Queen Mother or even an Elder playing a political role, as well as messages addressed to them, are channeled through the *okyeame*. Yankah (1995) has articulated the *Okyeame* as the centerpiece of Akan political oratory.

The *Okyeame* is the most conspicuous functionary in the chief’s executive wing, performing duties in several spheres of activity – social, political, religious, and rhetorical – on behalf of

the chief. In addition to being the chief's orator, diplomat, envoy, prosecutor, protocol; officer, and prayer officiant, the *Okyeame* is also the chief's confidant and counsellor. Thus his duties require an uncommon familiarity with traditional lore, custom, and history, as well as wisdom, experience, and skills in the forensic arts, oratory, logic, diplomacy, and public relations. To command credibility in his representation of the chief, he is also expected to be the quintessence of moral virtues: sincerity, loyalty, probity, and selfless devotion should guide his behavior at all times (Yankah, 1995: 84-85).

What an *okyeame* usually does, though is to restate the message verbatim or paraphrase it. That unique position makes him or her the key instrument of the content filtration mechanism for encoding and decoding message. Understanding instantaneous "editing" of messages originating from and directed at an indigenous political authority such as the Chief, however, does not make the *Okyeame*'s role comparable to the modern newspaper, radio, and television (especially in pre-recorded programmes and prepared speeches) gate keeper or editor. With the communication transaction process contemporaneous and speeches and addresses extemporaneous, the *Okyeame* cannot enjoy the benefit and luxury of time created by the delay allowed editors in the technology-generated communication process. The *Okyeame* may consequently not have the accompanying power to slant messages and experience the constraints of its self-censorship implications. This is not to obscure the fact that the *Okyeame* is an expert of spin, being a man [person] of great eloquence and wit who would remove the sting from a gaffe made by a chief [or queen mother], or embroider his [or her] statement in a pleasing and entertaining manner (Anon. *A human encyclopedia, West Africa*, 1-7 November 1993: 1935).

In other roles, the *Okyeame* is more than a conduit pipe. For example she/he acts as a court official who normally attends to the chief and is given a variety of tasks. He is sometimes an intermediary through whom a request is put to the chief... an envoy sent to the government or other courts (Anon. *A human encyclopedia West Africa*, 1-7 November, 1993: 1935). He even has his role in judicial proceedings, in view of the fact that records of proceedings do not exist (Ibid). According to Yankah (1995), the bilingual interpreter was crucial in communication between colonial representatives and the local states. The interpreter and the *Okyeame*, both masters over language and both agents of verbal mediation, could be mistaken for each other, as indeed they have been in the literature on *akyeame*.

The role of a filter to messages originating from, or addressed to, the Chief certainly controls and moderates mistakes and errors of judgment of the Chief's final pronouncement. It also improves the richness of the language while enhancing audition. The *Okyeame*, however, is "in no sense an interpreter" (Maxwell 1928:38).

Functionaries responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs in the colonial and precolonial life of West Africa have been variously described as 'ambassador', 'messengers', and 'linguists'. The latter word was, and still remains, used for ambassadors of the Gold Coast. These functions of the *Okyeame* could best be described as modern day international relations – a subsidiary of public relations.

1.5 The Ashanti Kingdom: A Historical and Political Perspective

There are various assertions of the origin of the Asantes. Oral history states that the ancestors of the Asante nation came out of a hole at Asantemanso near Asumegya. Some say they came from Mesopotamia to Africa and settled in Old Ghana. But to avoid the influence of Islam,

they migrated to the forest area of present Ghana. They then settled in the Adanse area, probably about the 14th century (Osei, 2000).

The area called Ashanti Region in present day Ghana is surrounded by the Brong Ahafo Region to the north, Eastern Region to the east, Central Region to the south and Western Region to the west. The Region is in the central part of Ghana and has an area of 24, 389km² being the third largest region in Ghana after the Brong Ahafo and Northern Regions respectively. Its indigenes are the Asantes who speak the Twi language and are part of the larger Akan ethnic group. The area is a dense forest area, partially mountainous but with mostly fertile land. Like the country Ghana, it has two seasons, the rainy season which is from April to November and the dry season from December to March.

Most of the country's cocoa comes from this region as well as its gold (Asamoah, 2011). For most parts of the nineteenth century, the Asante had control of an area of about 550 km radius of Ghana, stretching north, south, east and west. The Asante army was strong, well equipped and organised and assuming a belief of "limitless numbers and bravery" and likened to the porcupine (*koɔko*) hence the saying that "*Asante Koɔko, wo kum apem a apem beba*" which literally means a thousand more shall come if you kill a thousand (McLeod 1981: 10). Its capital is Kumasi and it has 36 traditional councils headed by paramount chiefs who constitute the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs with the Asantehene as its 'President'. Kumasi was founded by King Osei Tutu in 1695 as the capital of the Asante State (Fynn, 1971) and it is today a major commercial centre because of its strategic location, lying in the central part of Ghana.

Early settlement was mainly around the present Manhyia Palace with a few houses scattered from there to present-day Bantama. Later on, places like Zongo quarters (Aboabo of today)

and Fante quarters (Fanti New Town of today) were added during the reign of Nana Kofi Karikari (1867-1874). The population of Kumasi was about 50,000 in 1860. Currently, according to the 2010 population and housing census, Kumasi has a population of 1.73 million people (UNdata, 2012). Kumasi was situated on a hill which overlooked river *Subin* (Ibid).

1.6 Manhyia Palace and Traditional Governance of the Ashantis

The Manhyia Palace is situated in Kumasi and is the residence of the Asantehene. The original palace which was situated close to the current site of the Ghana Military Museum was destroyed by the British in the 4th Anglo-Asante War in 1874 (Ghana-net.com).

The Golden Stool which is regarded as the soul of the Asante ethnic group also resides in the Manhyia Palace. Today, the Manhyia Palace Complex consists of the durbar ground, accommodation for attendants, Stool room, the Museum, the Court and Offices of the Asantehene and Residences of the Asantehemaa and the Asantehene.

The Asantehene is the apex of the Asante power structure and the King of Asante. He reigns over all the chiefs in Asante land in a hierarchical structure. The position of Asantehene is for life and he is crowned on to the Golden Stool, the *Sika Gua Kofi*. He is addressed as “Your Majesty” or “Otumfoo”.

The first Asantehene was Nana Osei Tutu I who reigned from 1675 as Kumasehene and from 1701 to 1717 as Asantehene. There were subsequent Asantehene. However, in 1902 when Asante nation became a British protectorate the office of Asantehene was abolished. When Nana Prempeh I who had hitherto been exiled was repatriated to Kumasi in 1926, the British allowed him to use the title Kumasehene rather than Asantehene (in actual sense he got back

his title as Asantehene because the Asantes know the Kumasehene as the Asantehene). In 1935, during the reign of Nana Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, the British officially restored the title Asantehene. Today the traditional ruler of the Asantes is still known as the Asantehene (Asamoah, 2011).

The *Sanaahene* is the head of the *Gyaase*, the Asantehene's palace staff. Traditionally palace attendants were first-born sons who succeeded their fathers. They were recruited from all over the Asante state and when they became adults they went back home and were replaced by their first born sons. One could deduce from the limited accommodation in the palace and the fact that they needed to have undivided attention when serving in the palace, that the families of these attendants did not live with them in the palace and they were either living outside the palace or even in their own towns and villages. If the Asantehene so wished, he could retain such staff when they became adults in the palace and they would serve till death. Loyalty to the Asantehene was of much importance in service at the palace. At best, it is argued that the okyeame's role within the Manhyia palace is to form the cord linking the chiefs and the people. Within the palace courts, the okyeame's lead the debates and any information that needs to be put across for the chief is done through the okyeame (Ibid).

The traditional ruler of Kumasi was known initially as the Kumasehene. As the Kumasehene, he was the leader of the Asante Confederacy and, therefore, known as the Asantehene. According to Fraser and Cole (1972), the Asantes were in history an organised complex hierarchical state that could quickly be mobilised militarily and had an effective territorial and political expansion policy. The Asantehene was the *primus inter pares* over a confederacy of paramount chiefs, who were also responsible for important religious ceremonies that strengthened the political system. The okyeame was the lead announcer of events within the township. The Asantehene used some regalia in the performance of some of his responsibilities.

He had the exclusive right to commission the manufacture of regalia such as stools, swords and others.

1.7 Problem Statement

The 1992 Constitution (Chapter 22) recognizes chieftaincy in Ghana. This is because the national council of chiefs play an important role in the peace building and preservation of culture in the society. Not only that, chiefs act as peace conduits in terms of disagreements among political parties. Palace communication within the chieftaincy institution may be incomplete without the *okyeame*. In spite of the importance of the *Okyeame* in Ghanaian cultural system in the general and the Asantehene's palace in particular, the literature is scarce on the roles of *akyeame* and the relatedness to PR in traditional governance structure of the Asantes.

Yankah (1995) examined the roles of *akyeame* in traditional governance. However, the connection between the *akyeame*'s roles and PR in his work is blur. The insufficient information on the connection between *akyeame* roles and PR of the traditional governance system leaves a critical gap in the literature of the *okyeame* and its role in both traditional and modern governance systems of societies. More research-based information is needed to justify the continuous or concurrent existence of the traditional governance system alongside constitutional governments in Ghana.

Because of the scanty literature on the subject, many narrow interpretations are given to the role played by these *akyeame* in their various palaces. This leaves a lacuna within the literature of traditional communications and public relations. It is on account of this that this study seeks to discover the role of the *okyeame* in the Manhyia palace and to find the relationship of that

role to modern day public relations practice. To do this, the study uses data from in-depth interviews with some *Akyeame* of the Manhyia Palace in the Asante Kingdom for data for the analysis.

1.8 Objectives of Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the roles of *akyeame* in palace communication within the scope of traditional governance in the Asante Kingdom. Specifically, the study seeks to find out:

1. The role of *akyeame* in palace communication in traditional governance at the Manhyia Palace of the Asante Kingdom of Ghana.
2. How the roles of the *okyeame* at the Manhyia Palace foster and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between Manhyia and its publics and stakeholders.

1.9 Research Questions

The main question this study seeks to address is ‘what roles do *okyeame*’s play in the palace and do those roles share a symbiotic relationship with public relations? The specific questions to answer involve the following:

1. What roles do the *akyeame* play in palace communication in traditional governance at the Manhyia Palace in Ghana?
2. What impact does the role of the *okyeame* have on the image of the Asantehene and the Manhyia palace?
3. To what do the functions of the *okyeame* at the Manhyia palace relate to contemporary understanding of public relations practice?

1.10 Significance of Study

Most studies in public relations and palace communication are debatably disjointed. It is public relations on one hand (Hill & White, 2000, McAllister & Taylor, 2007; Van der Merwe, Pitt, & Abratt, 2005) and traditional communication (Hachten, 1971; Ainslie, 1966; Head, 1974; Wilcox, 1975 and Doob, 1966) on the other leaving a gap that needs to be bridged in the nexus between the two. The findings of the study will be of importance to academia and research as providing adding knowledge to the field and serving as a reference point for other studies. At the formative research stage, it was realized that there is little work done in this field of study, especially the role of the okyeame and the PR function of that role. This will enable academia to benefit from the study.

1.11 Structure of the Study

This study is organized as five chapters as follows:

Chapter One is the introduction made up of the back ground of the study, statement of the problem, objectives if the study, significance of the study, scope of the study and organisation of the report of the study.

Chapter Two contains the theoretical framework and review of relevant literature on corporate social media and its impact on the public relations department and their interaction with consumers.

Chapter Three presents the methodology used collecting and analyzing data for the research. The description covers the research design, research population, sample size and sampling techniques, sources of data and instrument used, data collection procedure and data presentation and analysis.

Chapter Four is made up of the presentation and analysis of the primary data collected from respondents and discussion of results. Chapter Five conclude the study with a summary of key findings, conclusion and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter appraises previous researches conducted by scholars on the subject matter of this study. The chapter starts with a detailed explanation of the theories and concepts of the role of the linguist at Manhyia palace, the communication dynamics of the *okyeame* and to find out the public relations component of the activities of the *okyeame*.

2.1 *The Okyeame Concept*

The concept of *Okyeame* in Ghana does not exist among the Akan only. Even though it probably started with the Akan, Yankah (1995) believes that it also exists among the Ga, Adanme, and the Ewe, and evidence suggests that it has parallels among some ethnic groups in the northern and upper regions of Ghana, as well as certain parts of West Africa.

W.H. Whiteley (1964: 166) in his work on African prose refers to the Ga and Ashanti royal orators, and cautions that their oratory merits to be studied before the art is lost, or at least undermined by the written word. Significantly, the Ga and Ewe designations of spokesperson, *tsiame*, are borrowings from Akan, whence they borrowed the whole institution of chieftaincy. Verdon (1983) refers to the Ewe *tsiame* who interprets between villagers and the chief when the latter is addressed in his capacity as the *dufia*. 'A village chief cannot be greeted or addressed directly, nor does he converse directly with interlocutors. Linguists repeat requests and reply between chiefs and audiences (Ibid: 94).

Wilks (1975: 243-309) noted that in certain parts of Northern and Upper regions of Ghana, particularly among the Mamprusi, Dagomba, and the Gonja, there are clues to the existence of

royal orators – a position possibly borrowed from the Ashanti. This happened when the Ashantis extended their control to the north from the seventeenth century onwards. It is significant, though, that designations given to the institution up north are not cognates of the Ashanti or Akan term, even though other military and royal terms in their lexicon and are clearly borrowed from Ashanti.

Outside Ghana, parallels of the *Okyeame* may be found in certain groups along the west coast of Africa, for example, in Benin and parts of Nigeria. Among the Ijo of Nigeria, the *ogulasowei* is the spokesman (Alagoa, 1976). Of the Alafin of Oyo, Talbot (1926: 569) remarks that, ‘he made a speech in a low tone which was repeated aloud by the head eunuch.’ Of the people of Edo, a historian remarked, ‘whatever any person would say to the king, must first be told to the three great lords who would then report it to him and bring his answer’ (Talbot, 1926: 580).

According to Yankah (1985), while the institution of speech intermediary in Africa may have originated within the royal domain, it has spread to all communicative settings where social status and verbal exchange can be asserted for social or political advantage. Any formal, traditional proceedings in Ghana involving communication between two or more parties require the use of *Akyeame*. The institution has been adopted within *abusua*, lineage groups, who all have *abusua akyeame* (lineage spokespersons). Similarly, deities and fetish priests have *abosom kyeame*, who interpret the words of the priests to their clients. The institution was adapted from traditional to modern politics in 1962 by Kwame Nkrumah, who appointed an *okyeame* for the state and modified his original functions (Yankah, 1985).

2.1.1 Royal Distance

Chiefs are considered to have a close relationship to the spirits of the ancestors, even though they are not vehicles of spirits themselves. Because the king is sacred, care is taken to preserve his person and maintain his sanctity. These conditions naturally rules out the direct communication with the king (Yankah, 1985).

The adoption of various distancing strategies in royal presence is partly meant to preserve the sanctity of royal space. It ensures the royalty against the perils of face-to-face interaction where his person could be defiled and where speech directed at him may be spiritually potent. The royal surrogate then becomes not only a mouthpiece, but also the buffer on which all dangerous words are deflected. Through him, the potency of the incoming spoken word stepped down and rendered safe for royal consumption. Thus boisterous or undignified remarks indiscreetly made by the chief are instantly softened and passed on without retroactive damage; for, since the royal speech act is not complete until relayed by the chief's *Okyeame*, it does not take effect until that point either (Ibid).

Formal discourse within the royal domain scarcely qualifies as communication without an intermediary who smoothens out the rough edges of talk. These roughness needs not involve malicious words; they may be stylistic, structural, lexical, or thematic; for the *Okyeame* is in many cases both a master of occult science and lord of diplomacy. In the *Okyeame*'s care, royal words, whether whispered or spoken, may be paraphrased, elaborated, punctuated with history, and ornamented with metaphor, enlivened with proverbs and allegories, or even dramatized outright. Through the art of the surrogate orator, royal words are refined, poeticised, and made palatable for public consumption (Op. Cit).

2.2 The Okyeame's Public Relations Role

The concept of Public Relations (PR) in communication has many interpretations. Dominick (1993) posits that practitioners are generally agreed that Public Relations involve working with public opinion. Public Relations professionals attempt to influence public opinion in a way that is positive to the organization (Theaker, 2004). Public Relations is also interested in information gathering from the public and interpreting that information for top management as it relates to management decisions. It is concerned with communication. People are interested in what an organization is doing to meet their concerns and interests. It is a Public Relations function to explain the organization's actions to various publics involved with the organization through a two-way communication channel that pays attention to the thoughts and feelings of the organization's publics. It is a two-way conduit between an organization and its publics - internal and external. Public Relations as a management function are designed to help a company set its goals and adapt to a changing environment. Practitioners regularly counsel top management.

Public Relations involves more than the three functions outlined above. The following is a summary of what Public Relations is about.

Public Relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which serve both the organization and the public's interest (World Assembly of Public Relations). It is also important, in the absence of literature in this field, to situate the functions of the *okyeame* within the context of public relations. In this way, the study will be able to identify whether there is a link to what the *Okyeame* does and public relations.

The *okyeame* cannot skew information. This is not to obscure the fact that the *okyeame* is an expert of spin, being a man [person] of great eloquence and wit who would remove the sting

from a gaffe made by a chief [or queen mother], or embroider his [or her] statement in a pleasing and entertaining manner (Anon. A human encyclopedia, West Africa, 1-7 November 1993: 1935)

In other roles, the *okyeame* is more than a conduit pipe. For example she/he acts as a court official who normally attends to the chief and is given a variety of tasks. He is sometimes an intermediary through whom a request is put to the chief... an envoy sent to the government or other courts. He even has his role in judicial proceedings, in view of the fact that records of proceedings do not exist (Anon. *A human encyclopedia West Africa*, 1-7 November, 1993: 1935).

According to Obeng (1988), the purpose of this communication with the departed is to invoke the blessings of those elements for the living members or the community. Messengers carry an *akofena* (sword) as a symbol of authority; and the *okyeame* carries an *akyeampoma* (staff of office) for the same purpose.

Communication and information which flow within this centripetal indigenous political system worked so well in the past that the British colonial administrators described it as “a democratic government to a degree of which there is not any modern parallel in Europe” (Maxwell 1928: 34) Roberts (1976) also observed that the aggregate units of the periphery, the villages, were autonomous in their internal politics. A combination of the political and social institutional structured and process nurtured the indigenous communication patterns.

The first item is that public relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences. As the *Okyeame* is one that is supposedly graced with wisdom and an in-depth knowledge of the culture of the Manhyia palace, they are able to make predictions based

on historical antecedents. Because of the special role they play in the local court of Manhyia, they are able to make predictions about the outcomes of cases. Because they also perform certain rituals, such as the pouring of libation and communicating the spirit world, they are able to admonish the king of any miss-happenings in the future when things are not been done as they are supposed to. UNDP in its Human Development Report (1993) states that Governments of developing countries can no longer fulfill all social and regulatory services by themselves, especially in rural areas. Consulting with the people and actively involving them in making the decisions that will affect them virtually ensures the program's success.

Traditional media in this regard help the people at all levels to communicate with each other and empowers them to recognize important issues and find common grounds for action, and builds a sense of identity and motivation in order to implement their decisions.

The second tool of public relations is in the counselling of organisational leaders. This is a much known trait of the *Okyeame*. Most of his work involves around counsellor the chief. As scholars have opined, one head does not go to council, the *Okyeame* serves as the other head for the king to take cogent decisions. This is true of Health Education, Advocacy and Community HEAT Module (2014) who highlights that:

They (the communication form the *Okyeame*) are realistic and based on the daily lives of ordinary people; they can communicate attitudes, beliefs, values and feelings in powerful ways; they do not require understanding that comes with modern education in the majority of instances; they can communicate problems of community life; they can motivate people to change their behavior and they can show ways to solve problems.

The final issue in public relations is the implementing planned programmes of action which serve both the Manhyia palace and its attendants' interests. Most communications and

pronouncement made by the *okyeame*, on behalf of the king, have some effect that makes their implementation easier. Taboos and other myths coming from the *okyeame* are regarded as sacred. Hence anything the *okyeame* says, is seen as coming directly from the chief and the people are able to participate with much ease. Riley (1998) ascribes that traditional communication has helped in promoting effective family planning practices, and reduced teenage pregnancies and child abandonment among the people in most parts of Africa. This implies that oramedia over the years have proved to be a potent tool for making ruralites engage in several political activities that have changed their lives positively. In contribution, Ayantayo (2001) adds that myths, songs, and story-telling are used to emphasize moral issues like public honor, appreciation for good behavior, while condemnation, ostracization, beating, punishment, disgrace etc, are the reward for bad behaviour. The point from the foregoing is that oramedia is a vibrant communication tool in African communities. It serves as a social commentary for galvanizing African societies. It passes important information during festivities and celebrations, as well as mobilizes the people to participate in the social development of their rural areas.

2.2.1 Systems Theory

The Systems theory is useful to this study because it gives us a way to think about relationships. Generally, systems theory looks at organizations as made up of interrelated parts, adapting and adjusting to changes in the political, economic, and social environments in which they operate. Organizations have recognizable boundaries, within which there must be a communication structure that guides the parts of the organization to achieve organizational goals. The leaders of the organization create and maintain these internal structures.

Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier state that the systems perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their environments, both internal and external to the organization (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2002). According to the systems perspective, organizations depend on resources from their environments, such as “raw materials, a source of employees, and clients or customers for the services or products they produce. The environment needs the organization for its products and services.” (Ibid). Organizations with open systems use public relations people to bring back information on how productive their relationships are with clients, customers, and other stakeholders. Organizations with closed systems do not seek new information. The decision makers operate on what happened in the past or on their personal preferences.

The *Okyeame* institution is one that is characterised with the closed system where the past guides the future. This system is such that common logic comes to play in decision making. They do not really rely on the comments of the public to decide what is right for the Manhyia palace. The *Okyeame* becomes a conduit between the people and the king. The Manhyia palace needs information from the people and vice versa. The interrelations that exist have effects on the system. This either creates dissonance or harmony depending on what kind of relations they are.

2.3 Conclusion

The chapter has been able to outline the concepts of the *okyeame*, the type of traditional communication they engage in and the resemblance of such communication with modern day public relations. Because the literature on this topic is very scanty, it therefore makes the next chapter even more important because the choice of methods to exhume information about the phenomenon will have direct impact on the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methodology and procedures for data collection and analysis. The purpose of the study has been to find out the public relations functions inherent in the *okyeame's* communications in the Manhyia palace. Hence, it is relevant to use appropriate methodologies to guide in the collection of data to support the objectives of the study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), research methodology entails the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used. Therefore, the chapter continues with the research design, population, sampling as well as the data collection instruments.

3.1 Research Design

A research design provides the method and the guidelines that outline the selection process involved in getting the respondents, how data are gathered and what would be put in place for analyzing the data to derive credible findings (Babbie, 2009). This study uses two qualitative methods. These are in-depth interviews and observation.

An interview is “a purposive conversation to elicit response, information or answers to an issue” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011: 135). Bryman (2001) posited that interviews aid the understanding and explanation of meaning of occurrences and phenomena from the participants’ perspective. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) asserted:

Qualitative interviews are sometimes called conversation with a purpose and in-depth interviews are particularly well suited to understand the social actor’s experience and

perspective. The researchers usually select persons for interviews only if their experience and knowledge is central to the research problem in some way (p. 173).

This study used the qualitative approaches because the issue under investigation borders on how meaning is created in a natural setting and the interpretation accorded communicative events. The use of in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to understand the respondents' experiences and perspectives relative to the connection between palace communication and public relations. The outcome of the interviews would be expected to help identify the specific roles of the *okyeame*, and whether their communications can be seen as having semblance with some of the practices in public relations.

Observation methods are useful to researchers in a variety of ways. They provide researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997). The observation method benefits the study in a way that other methods will not. This is because it puts the research findings in the center of the happenings in the palace and makes the content very unique since it is coming from a first person observation. The observation method helped the study to read meanings into the non-verbal communication component of the *Akyeame*.

3.2 Research Population and Sample

The setting of the study is the Asante kingdom of Ghana and the people of this kingdom constitute the broad population. A population is the collection of an identified group of people or 'objects' for the purposes of a study (Koul, 2011). The specific population of the study is

made of the entire finite *akyeame* at the Manhyia Palace of the Asante Kingdom. There are fourteen *akyeame* at the Manhyia palace.

Of the fourteen *Akyeame* that make up the population, thirteen (13) were sampled and interviewed. This was so because one of the *Okyeame* had travelled outside of the country. The selected are purposely sampled due to their experience at the palace and their in-depth knowledge about the processes of communication and their potential knowledge of the Asante history.

3.3 Sources of Data and Data Collection Instrument(s)

The data source of this study is primarily coming from the *Akyeame* at the Manhyia palace in Kumasi. The collection of data will be done through in-depth interviews and observations. Recording tools such as the Sony IC recorder and a note book were used to record the interviews. For the observation, audio recordings will also be employed but the major tool here is the observations and manual recordings made by researcher and two research assistants.

3.3.1 The *Akyeame* Interviewed

The various *Akyeame* who were interviewed represent a certain group of people under their jurisdiction of the Asante kingdom. They are as follows:

Nana Nsuase Poku Agyemang III

Baffour Butuakwa II

Nana Boakye Yam II

Nana Darko Mpra II

Nana Kwesi Nsebe II

Baffour Osei Kwame

Nana Kweku Owusu III

Nana Kwame Boafo

Nana Osei Boateng

Nana Yaw Mensah

Nana Agyei Akyamfuo

Nana Yeboah Kwaku II

Nana Antwi Boasiako II

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Corbetta (2003) opines that in-depth interviews give the interviewer more freedom to pursue hunches, and he or she can improvise questions. Data collection tool employed in this qualitative study was a semi-structured interview guide. With the aid of an introductory letter from the School of Graduate Studies and Research (SoGSaR), Ghana Institute of Journalism, the researcher booked appointments with the various *Akyeame* that will be part of the interview through the assistance of a queen mother at the Manhyia palace. The researcher self-conducted the interview and recorded the interviews on a voice note using a smart phone and a Sony IC recorder with the permission of the respondents.

The semi-structured interview guide contained ten (10) questions carefully tailored for responses in line with the objectives of the study. Because the guide is semi-structured, it allowed for follow-up questions to be asked. The interview guide is attached as Appendix 1.

The questions focused on topics pertaining to the role of *okyeame*, palace communication, the history of communication in the palace and the modern communication role of the *okyeame* in the palace. These questions were aimed at eliciting responses to enable the researcher fulfil the study's objective of finding out the contribution of the *okyeame* in the palace and whether the communication procedures and public relations related. The questions were formulated before

the actual field work commenced. Some of the questions related to the evolution of the *Okyeame*, the roles and functions of the *Okyeame*. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed at a later time.

After the respondents had agreed to participate in the research, various schedules were created for the interviews based on the study's timeframe and that of the schedule of the *Akyeame* and especially with the sittings of Otumfuor.

For the observation, the researcher wrote down what she observed. These included the verbal and non-verbal aspects of cases (marital, leadership and other rituals) at the palace. After that, inter-coder analysis was ran and the common themes and those that the researchers agreed upon were used for the analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

The recorded data collected were transcribed based on the questions asked. The data were coded into themes such as 'role of okyeame, why palace communication and PR function in okyeame's communciation', etc. using the thematic analysis coding sheet to depict similarities and differences in responses. Data gained qualitatively were coded and analyzed to complement the interview data obtained for the study. The transcripts were then subjected to inductive and textual analysis. According to Koul (2011), inductive analysis refers to emergence of patterns, themes and categories of analysis out of data collected. Pattons cited in Koul (2011: 286) describes two approaches to inductive analysis:

- (i) Indigenous typology is called the 'emic' approach to analysis in anthropology. In this approach, cultural behaviour is studied in terms of the inside view of human events rather than imposed from cross-cultural classification of

behaviour...Indigenous typologies approach requires an analysis of the verbal categories used by the sample group or participants of the programme so that the complexity of reality is broken into meaningful parts.

- (ii) 'Analyst constructed typologies' approach – the researcher looks for patterns, categories and themes for which the participants of the programme do not have labels or terms, and the researcher himself constructs typologies to explain variations and contrasts in activities, participants and others associated with the programme.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical considerations were put in place to make sure the study conforms to the internationally accepted ethical standards. Not only that, the study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical guidelines in line with research at the SoGSaR. For Blumler (2009: 84), ethical considerations in research inform the positions of the general conduct 'with respect to confidentiality, consent to participate, anonymity of respondents as well as privacy'. He also argued that 'ethics requires researchers to be truthful to their subjects and avoid acts of deception and dishonesty' (Ibid: 84). Some of the ethical considerations taken into account collecting data as promised based on the informed consent solicited from the participants that information provided will be treated as confidential. Regarding this study, the necessary ethical considerations associated with the conduct of research are implemented. They were all made aware that the purpose of the interview was for academia and that it would not be reproduced for any other research work by the researcher.

3.7 Challenges

The major constraint to this work was time. The time was limited to gather not enough respondents for the interviews to take place. The interviewees also frequently reschedule the interview periods making it difficult to gather the data on time. And because the research setting is far away from the researcher, a lot of cost was also involved. This included travelling and accommodation bills.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter has outlined the specific methods used to gather and interpret data from the field. It has also been able to tell the population and sampling size of the study and considered the various ethical groundings on which the study will be built. The study setting, Manhya palace, has also been examined from the perspectives of the basic demographics of population and location. Using these methods, the next chapter seeks to apply these theoretical groundings into the field work by doing the actual data gathering and analysis of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this exploratory study and seeks to present the ideas and data gathered from the thirteen (13) *Akyeame* at the Manhyia Palace. The focus is on gaining insights into the ‘public relations’ functions of the *Okyeame* in their duties in the palace. This will set the basis for later discussion on the findings.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

The data gathered from the thirteen (13) *Akyeame* were thematically coded for the analysis. The themes that were raised include the communication role of the *Okyeame*, image enhancement role of the *Okyeame* their communication models and identification of PR functions as part of their work.

4.3 Evolution of Akyeame

The study indicated that the evolution of the institution of the *Okyeame* is blur because there is no known date to the establishment. Most references are made to the fact that the Asante kingdom is a unique one in the sense that the political institutions were established long ago before the inception of the Europeans. As a participant put it:

Research over the years till now shows that the kind of decisions taking by our ancestors are just unbelievable. It shows the deep wisdom of our ancestors (Nana Boakye Yam, 2017. Personal communication).

The respondent explained that the ancestors, upon consultation with the fetish priests, decided to have another individual who would understand the wisdom and knowledge of the Otumfuo to interpret that to the people. It is a classical issue of the God-Priest-People scenario. The king is not regarded as any other individual; he is divine. In the words of Nana Antwi Boasiako II, a respondent, 'the king does not go wrong. He is infallible. We regard this in Akan as *eti enso daye*'. This implies that the king's actions and wisdom is very deep and what he can see whilst sitting, cannot be seen by ordinary men. This called for someone who will be the link between the people and the king in communication. The king is so powerful that an ordinary person should not speak to him directly. This gave birth to the *Okyeame* institution. This power of the *Okyeame* makes whatever he says to be accepted by the King. The king does not give consent to what other people say, but that of the *Okyeame* only. Here are views from a number of the respondents:

The king only listens to the voice of the *Okyeame* and not the individual. This makes the people to regard to the *Okyeame* as the King's wife. Because it is only the *okyeame* that is allowed to see the king even when the king is asleep (Nana Yeboah Kweku II, 2017. Personal communication).

The *Okyeame* is regarded as the king's wife because aside the king speaking through him, everyone else greets the king in the open. It is the *okyeame* that greets him in a room (Nana Darko Mpra II. 2017. Personal communication).

The *okyeame* is the only one who can have unlimited access to the king. The *okyeame* is the eyes and hands of the king'. (Nana Nsuase Poku Agyemang III, 2017. Personal communication).

Whenever the King speaks through the *Okyeame*, the King makes no mistakes. So any mistake made in the communication is as a result of the *okyeame*'s. That is why the Otumfuo can never

be blamed for anything. Because it is the *okyeame*'s duty to communicate in a way that is true and pure to represent the very nature of the office of the king.

4.4 Limits of the Communication Powers of the Okyeame

Because the *Okyeame* has unlimited access to the king, the perception is that he can misuse his power. In other instances, it is arguable that by virtue of their closeness to the king, they can influence decisions made by the king. Accordingly, 'it is only the *okyeame* that can rebuke a sub-chief aside the Otumfuo' (Nana Kweku Owusu III, 2017). This necessitated elicited a question from the researcher on whether the powers of the *Okyeame* could be misapplied. The result indicted that this never happens. The respondents argued that there had never been a time that an *Okyeame* had misused his power. This is because their powers are attached to oaths sworn by them. And anything against such an oath has grave consequences for the *okyeame*. 'It is not an easy thing to do. Because you take an oath' (Baffour Butuakwa II, 2017). Everything that the *Okyeame* does is dependent on the oath *he* takes. This 'heavy thing', *ntam kesie*, is so feared that once an *okyeame* lies, they are immediately revoked. But this does not occur often because 'it is even a privilege to serve the King. No one can easily allow themselves to lose such opportunity' (Nana Antwi Boasiako II, 2017). In the words of Nana Kwesi Nsebe II (2017), 'All the gods and rivers belong in the Asante kingdom belongs to the Otumfuo. If you should take an oath, it means you are swearing by all these gods and rivers'. The honesty and integrity of the *Okyeame* is because of the oath.

4.5 Selection of an Okyeame (Skills and Training)

There is no specific clan to select an *okyeame* from. The *okyeame* can come from any of the clans. Ususally, the *Fokuoti*, head of the clan, can have someone understudy them. But this alone cannot make one a contestant for the *Okyeame* position. This is so because the position is not contestable. The *Okyeame* were asked whether divinity can make one an *okyeame*. In the sense that some people believe in the myth of the born-to-do grandiloquence. But the *Akyeame* said that is not the case. ‘The office of the *Okyeame* cannot be ‘spiritually’ determined’ (Baffour Butuakwa II, 2017. Personal communication).

The *Akyeame*, however alluded that a substantive *okyeame* should have certain qualities before the Otumfuo can choose him to become an *Okyeame*. Some of these include truthfulness, honesty, sacrificial, noble and should be a strong believer of *Sika Gua Kofi*, the Golden Stool.

Aside being honest and truthful, if you don’t believe in the golden stool, then you are not a true son or daughter of Asante. This is what makes us. Our beginning and our end is rooted in the Golden Stool’ (Nana Boakye Yam II, 2017. Personal communication).

On the same issue, this is what Nana Osei Boating (2017) has to say:

There is no school for *Akyeame*. There is no formal structure to train them. Their school is life itself. You are schooled on the job due to your relationship with the happenings at the Manhyia palace. You monitor what the *Akyeame* do and you learn from them’ (Nana Osei Boating, 2017. Personal communication).

Two other respondents expressed views such as the following:

I had to serve my uncle for many years. He was the one who thought me the things of life. I applied most of the things and I was privileged to be called to serve Otumfuo as my king. Little did I know that the little things I was doing

was appreciated. I led a sacrificial life (Nana Antwi Boasiako II, 2017. Personal communication).

No, no, no, there is no *Okyeame* that has been chosen because the God's said so. Due to what you do physically, we are able to tell whether you can be an *Okyeame*. You need to be noble in society. You cannot associate yourself with certain vices and end up being one because you feel your ancestors want you to be *Okyeame* (Nana Agyei Akyamfuo, 2017. Personal communication).

The conclusion drawn from this is that one needs to have a humble attitude and be ready to understudy the practice. No amount of the divine world can help make one an *okyeame* if such an individual doesn't show certain qualities.

4.6 Communication

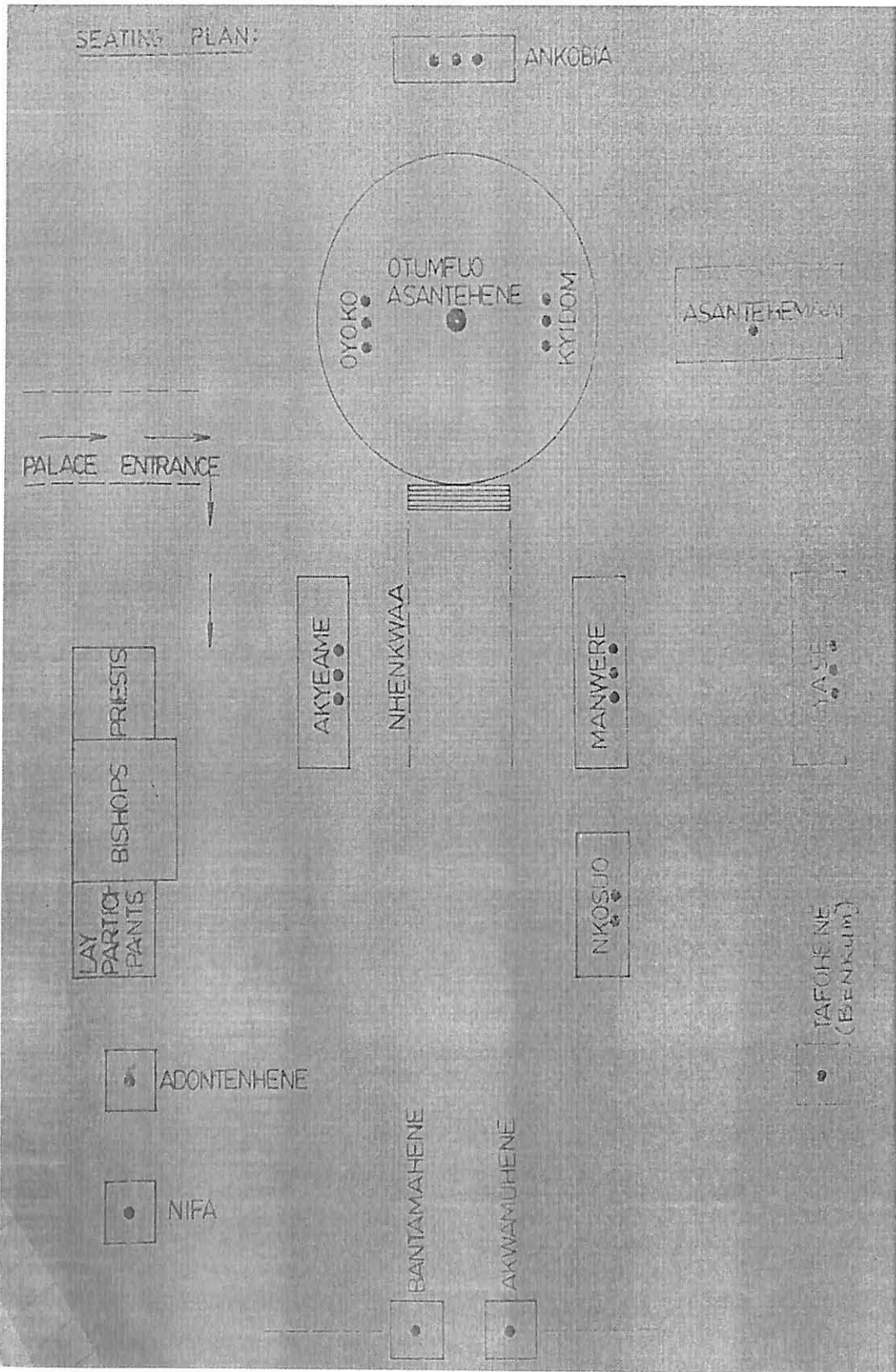


Figure 1: Sitting positions of the *Okyeame*

Figure 1 shows the various sitting positions of the Manhyia Palace. Of what is important to us is the place of the Akyeame in the sitting arrangement; they sit on the right hand side of the Otumfuo, immediately behind the *Nhenkwaa*, servants of the king. At *Asetena*, parliament of the king, it is the *Fukuoti's* that speaks. There are two types of *Asetena*. These are the Asanteman *Asetena* and the Kumasi *Asetena*. The Asanteman is a bigger parliament making up of other paramount chiefs outside Kumasi who pledge allegiance to Otumfuo including Mampong, Nsuta and Ejisu. The Kumasi *Asetena* is meant for only chiefs in Kumasi.

During a gathering for the Otumfuo to settle any dispute, the *Okyeame* moderates the communication. In certain times, the *Okyeame* has a forehand communication with the Otumfuo before the proceedings begin. Using a land dispute as an example, the *Fokuoti* in one jurisdiction pre-informs the Otumfuo about a case in their jurisdiction that will need his attention. Before the case is sat upon, the *Fokuoti* presents a fat ram to Otumfuo some days to the case. When they sit, the *Okyeame* informs the Otumfuo of the necessary rites performed and opens the door for the issue to be handled. In this instance, the *Okyeame* listens to both sides and relays that information to the king and vice versa.

Most of the things relayed to the Otumfuo are laced with parables and proverbs. On the other hand, the Otumfuo's messages are relayed in a much softer language, one which most people will understand. It is so because, the Otumfuo's depth in wisdom requires the *Okyeame* to not only relay back the information, but bring interpretation and meaning to it. According to Ansu-Kyeremeh (1989), what an *Okyeame* usually does, though is to restate the message verbatim or paraphrase it. That unique position makes him or her the key instrument of the content filtration mechanism for encoding and decoding message. Understanding instantaneous "editing" of messages originating from and directed at an indigenous political authority such as the Chief, however, does not make the *Okyeame's* role comparable to the modern newspaper, radio, and television (especially in pre-recorded programmes and prepared

speeches) gate keeper or editor. With the communication transaction process contemporaneous and speeches and addresses extemporaneous, the *Okyeame* cannot enjoy the benefit and luxury of time created by the delay allowed editors in the technology-generated communication process. The *okyeame* may consequently not have the accompanying power to slant messages and experience the constraints of its self-censorship implications. This is not to obscure the fact that the *Okyeame* is an expert of spin, being

a man [person] of great eloquence and wit who would remove the sting from a gaffe made by a chief [or queen mother], or embroider his [or her] statement in a pleasing and entertaining manner (Anon. *A human encyclopedia West Africa*. (1993). 1-7 November: 1935)

The *Okyeame* is the only person who clearly understands the king and what the king does. He knows what to say that will promote the image of the king in public.

‘No other person understands the king that way. It is the *Okyeame* that decides when someone meets the king. The *Okyeame* moderates the communication process at the palace’ (Nana Kwaku Owusu III, 2017).

4.6 PR Tools in Palace Communication

Formerly, the *Okyeame*'s role went beyond just interpreting or relaying information given by the King. In other roles, the *Okyeame* is more than a conduit pipe.

For example she/he acts as a court official who normally attends to the chief and is given a variety of tasks. He is sometimes an intermediary through whom a request is put to the chief... an envoy sent to the government or other courts. He even has his role

in judicial proceedings, in view of the fact that records of proceedings do not exist (Anon. *A human encyclopedia West Africa*. (1993). 1-7 November, p. 1935).

But now the case is different. In an interview with Kojo Yankah (2017), he argued that:

‘The *Okyeame* in the Ashanti Kingdom plays various roles. However, these roles are restricted in scope. Now, Manhyia has both internal and external relations with a lot of individuals and other bodies. This relationship is managed differently from what the *Okyeame* does as an interpreter, envoy etc. for the king. Though the king’s *Okyeame* can be present when the king entertains dignitaries from foreign lands, the management of these relationships fall outside his control. These relationships are managed by Public Relations consultants for the king’ (Kojo Yankah. 2017. Personal communication).

In that same regard, Nana Agyei Akyamfo said the *Okyeame*’s in the past acted

‘as the Otumfuo’s representative, an international relations person who relates between the Manhyia palace and the outside world, someone who manages and coordinates other people within the Manhyia palace and organizes internal and external communication activities. It was the *Okyeame*’s duty to make sure that visitors from other places have the chance to be treated well’ (Nana Agyei Akyamfo, 2017. Personal communication).

According to Nana Antwi Boasiako II (2017), for close to two centuries now,

‘the king has the *Akrakyiefuo*, elites who documented proceedings at the palace. He argued that when Otumfuo Osie Tutu took over, all proceedings have been videotaped for record keeping. Currently, the *Okyeame* only performs functions such as interpreting and performing other rituals’.

Contextualizing the function of the *Okyeame* as a PR tool, it is obvious that the current work of the *Okyeame* institution does not involve a lot of PR work. The *Okyeame* can be asked to

represent the Otumfuo in certain gatherings, but his function ends at promoting the interests of the Otumfuo. This could be a PR tool because of the conscious effort to promote the image of the Asante Kingdom. However, in terms of relating to envoys and other stakeholders, it is the role of the PR consultants hired by Otumfuo Osei Tutu. However, hitherto, these functions were played by the *Okyeame*.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings of the study refutes the hypothesis that the current *Akyeame* play integral public relations functions in their cause of duty. There is a special group of people who ran such functions upon consultation. Presenting the data alone does not add a lot of meaning to the study until analysis and interpretations are made. On this context, the next chapter seeks to interpret some of the major functions of the *Okyeame* and relate them to literature for final analysis and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter of the study concludes the research by providing a summary of key findings of the study and making recommendations based on the outcome of the study. The chapter also reveals whether the objectives that were set at the beginning of this study have been achieved.

5.2 Summary

The main objective of this study was to explore the roles of *Akyeame* in palace communication within the scope of traditional governance in the Asante Kingdom. In doing that, the study found out about the roles played by the *okyeame* in the Asantehene's palace. The study reveals that the evolution of the institution of *Okyeame* is not clear. This could be because oramedia has mostly been the mode of communication that existed in the Asante kingdom at the time, hence the inability to pass that information from generation to generation over time. The *Okyeame* is an integral part of the set-up of the kingship institution of the Asante's. The study has discovered that the *okyeame* is the closest ally to the king. He has an unlimited access to the king. The history of the Asante's reveal that *akyeame's* should be male.

Again, the study revealed that there is no training institutions for the *akyeame*. Life is their school and divinity does not have a role to play in the selection process. However, things that are sometimes considered include the loyalty, integrity and faithfulness of the person to the *Kofi Sikagua*, the golden stool of the Asante's. Contextualizing the argument raised by the *akyeama*, the implication is that the position of the *okyeame* institution is one that cannot be influenced by the chief priest of the Manhyia Palace. The Otumfuo does not consider spiritual

guidelines before choosing an *okyeame*. This is quite surprising because these are a group of people who believe in the supernatural world so much that in taking oaths and in performing other rituals and events, the oracles are consulted for direction. According to Nana Antwi Boasiako II (2017):

‘... all gods and rivers in the Asante region belongs to Otumfuo. He is a king Solomon reincarnate. This is because he sees things that the ordinary person can’t see. He is not just a human. He is part of the gods.’

In this case, it becomes surprising why an *okyeame* cannot be considered from a divine perspective.

The study also realized the importance of communication to the Asante kingdom. Most of the things that happen in the palace are all communication related. From the traditional courts, traditional parliaments (*Asetena*) to pouring of libation, communication becomes key. And this communication is done by specific people. Not everyone has the duty to communicate in a gathering. Mostly, it is the *Fekuoti* or the *okyeame* that does the speaking at gatherings. The *okyeame* mostly relay information to and from the king in a manner and style that projects the wisdom of the king.

Another important part of the objectives was to find out whether the functions of the *okyeame* at the Manhyia palace exhibit PR elements. The study revealed that at the onset of the *okyeame* institution, they functioned as the Otumfuo’s representative, an international relations person who relates between the Manhyia palace and the outside world, someone who managed and coordinated other people within the Manhyia palace and organized internal and external communication activities. It was the *okyeame*’s duty to make sure that visitors from other places have the chance to be treated well. It was the *okyeame*’s duty to listen to the people and then convey that information to the king. The *okyeame* represented the interest of the Asante

kingdom and the Otumfuo. These actions undertaken by the *okyeame* are indication of public relations functions.

However, due to the growth of the kingdom and the use of a revolutionary approach to the institution of communication at the Manhyia palace, the *okyeame* no longer performs all of such roles as receiving of guests, putting in place arrangement for international visitors and people who will want to dialogue with the king. The *Akrakyifo*, elites of the Otumfuo, see to these duties. These are consulted public relations officers who ran public relations functions for the Asantehene. The *okyeame* only play one critical role regarding the public relations functions. And that is to represent the Asantehene at gatherings that the Otumfuo cannot attend. In this way, they are able to project the image and brand of the Asante kingdom.

5.3 Conclusion

Arguably, the study has been able to achieve all the objectives it set out to do. It also acknowledges that other methods of data gathering, including a survey of what perceptions people hold about the *okyeame*'s institution, focus group discussions and longitudinal studies help in building an understanding toward a comprehensive knowledge about the *Okyeame*. In Akan culture, one typically does not speak directly to the Ohene, for the Ohene is seen as Divine. Those who would like to address the Ohene speak to the *okyeame*, who in turn relays the message to the Ohene. The Ohene gives his response to the *okyeame* and then the *okyeame* relays that response to the individual. The *okyeame* is the mouthpiece and 'linguist' of the Ohene (Asante-Fante Dictionary, 1881 ed.). Contextualizing the function of the *Okyeame* as a PR tool, it is obvious that the current *Okyeame* institution does not do a lot of PR work. Because public relations go beyond communicating to people. The *Okyeame* can be asked to represent the Otumfuo in certain gatherings, but his function ends at promoting the interests of the

Otumfuo. This could be a PR tool because of the conscious effort to promote the image of the Asante Kingdom. However, in terms of relating to envoys and other stakeholders, it is the role of the PR consultants hired by Otumfuo Osei Tutu. However, hitherto, these functions were played by the *Okyeame*. The researcher looks forward to build on this piece of work in future studies to broaden the scope of the study, and find other appropriate means of gathering and analysing data.

5.4 Recommendations

Again, even though the study employed rigorous steps to arrive at the findings and analysis, it was challenged at certain points and recommends for future studies in the field to consider the following:

1. The study employed the exploratory approach to data gathering. This approach was appropriate because the area has not been adequately looked into. However, a longitudinal approach would have helped understand the issue better. This is so because it was difficult getting the *Akyeame* on time. Some important events that would have enhanced the study's findings were not included because of the time factor. Therefore, it is recommendable that future studies use a five year period to monitor and evaluate the trends in relation to the changing functions of the *okyeame* as an institution.
2. Future studies should also include cross-sectional approach to studying traditional institutions from two completely similar and/or dissimilar chieftaincy settings to run a comparative study. For example, the studies should include either two Akan *okyeame* institutions or one Akan and another tribe's *okyeame* institution.

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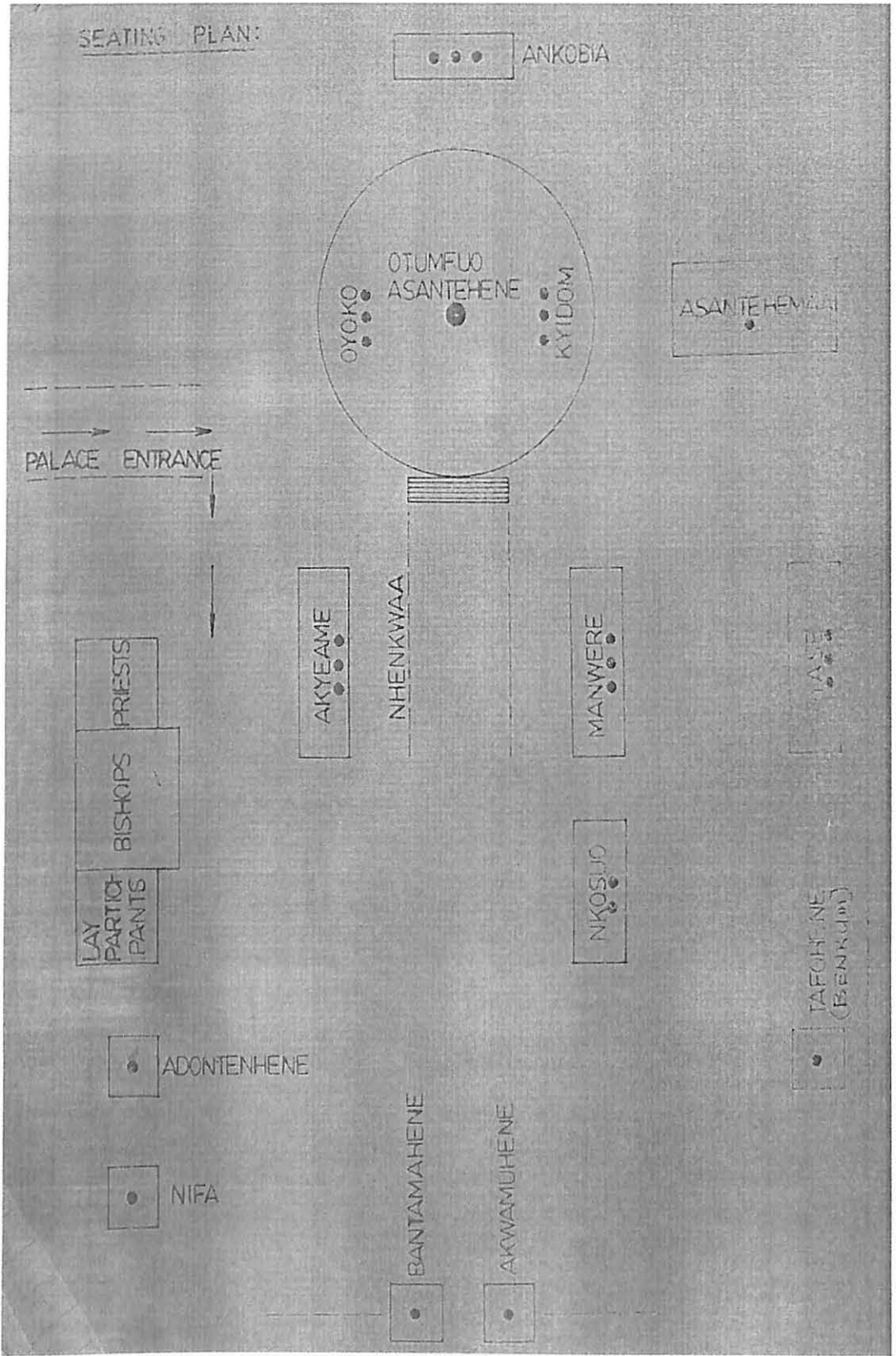
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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is Dorigen Owusu Prempeh, a graduate student of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism. I am undertaking a research on “*Palace Communication and Public Relations in Traditional Governance: A Focus on the Asante Kingdom*”, as part of requirements for the completion of my studies. I would be very grateful if you could assist me in this study by granting me interview on the topic. Please be reminded that your responses will be for academic purposes only and will be treated with the highest anonymity. You are also at liberty to stop at any point you wish if you do not want to continue with the exercise, though it would be nice to complete it.

1. When did the concept of *Okyeame* begin?
2. Why did the Asante’s decide to have an *Okyeame* institution?
3. What qualities makes one an *Okyeame*?
4. Does divinity come to play in determining the *Okyeame*?
5. What are the functions of the *Okyeame*?
6. Do you see the *Okyeame* as a PR person?

APPENDIX 2: GALLERY



Picture 1: Sitting plan of the *Okyeame* during a festivity