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Contemporarising *shene tene* (the Akan chief's procession) as political communication

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Abstract

This paper is about politics and communication in a Ghanaian traditional setting. It focuses on *shene tene* (the Akan chiefly procession) as a single act of non-rhetorical symbolic communication. Situated within the conceptual frameworks of public relations and political communication, the description and analysis of *shene tene* characterises its staging as image-making which communicates and projects power and authority. Through in-depth interviews, observation, and drawing on encoding and decoding of the sight spectacle, observed visual and sound elements of *shene tene* are detailed, highlighting their signification and consequential roles that combine as public relations and political communication activities. *Shene tene* is contextualised and proposed as a constructed image typology and “political language” with lessons for political communication and public relations practices.

Keywords: *shene tene*, chief's procession, image-making, public relations, political communication

Introduction

This study is an attempt to recast aspects of what is sometimes deemed moribund into life, render it active and show its relevance to today's world. The indigenous *shene tene* is an elaborate chieftaincy practice which was investigated by describing its elements as were observed for analysis that would isolate those of contemporary relevance to the practices of public relations and political communication. The analysis enabled an assessment for selection of the useful components of the procession for adoption

and mainstreaming into present day practice of public relations and political communication. Gotsi and Wilson (2001) as well as Skinner, Von Essen and Mersham (2004) and Skinner, Von Essen, Mersham and Motau (2010) consider contextualisation to be essential in articulating public relations. When contextualised, signs and symbols, as observed in *ɔhene tene*, become the roots of perception which is a fundamental aspect of public relations and political communication.

Political communication captures the relationship between politics and communication. As a concept, it tends to be influenced by the tenets of politics and communication which constitute its dual disciplinary roots (Amoakohene, 2006). This article, which is about politics and communication in a Ghanaian traditional setting, focuses on a single symbolic communication act of the Akan, the chiefly procession (*ɔhene tene*), as a non-rhetorical “political language” within the gamut of “paralinguistic signs such as body language, and political acts” (McNair, 1999, p. 3). The Akan are the largest ethnic group in Ghana and constitute about 48 per cent of the total population of the country (World Population Review, 2018). The Akan governance system works through chiefs, sub-chiefs and queen mothers whose status and prominence are denoted in public appearance by specific signs and symbols. Irrespective of their status, all chiefs and queen mothers make their public appearances in procession.

The thrust of the article is situated in the Akan saying: “*tete wɔ bi*” (the rich past) and its associate of “*sankɔfa*” (reclaiming and adoption). In the eyes of the Akan public, the chief’s¹ procession, in people, symbols and sounds, which are part of the indigenous communication systems (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005), projects an image of power and authority (Ampene, 2014). Thus, “*ɔhene*

1 Article 277 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992*, states: “‘chief’ means a person, who, hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage.” Sarpong (1971, p. 7) explains the Skin or the Stool as the symbol of the office of the chief; that with Stools “figures are carved into the middle section ... These figures in the middle section determine what kind of stool it is, who can own it, and what it is worth in terms of money and culture.” In this article, the terms “chief” and “king” are used interchangeably.

Amoakohene, M. I./ *Contemporarising the Akan chief's procession as political communication tene a, ɔtene tumi, ahoɔden, nyansa, akokɔduro, abadae, sunsum, pae-mu-ka, ne atem tenenee*" (when the chief is in procession, he projects power, authority and qualities of leadership such as fitness, strength, wisdom, courage, compassion, spirituality, forthrightness and justice). One would say it is an exercise in image construction in public relations for political gain.

Within the plethora of definitions of public relations runs the central theme of communicating to favourably position clients to earn the favour of their audiences or publics. It is about relationship-building and constructing or creating a favourable image through effective communication which every politician (both traditional and modern) seeks to achieve. *ɔhene tene* exploits imagery in relating to a public; regardless of Grunig's (1993) concern about less than useful domination of image in the articulation of public relations as a paradigm. Granting that "images are considered constructs that can be created" (Horst, 1993, p. 5), this study describes the Akan chief's procession (*ɔhene tene*) as a political communication and a public relations image construction activity. Avenarius (1993) and Hutton (1999), appropriately, referred to the public relations practitioner as an image-maker. A routine chiefly practice, the activity of *ɔhene tene* is an elaborate and deliberate design, constructed to project a positively exuding image, with characteristics and attributes that are implicit as constituents of both political communication and public relations practice.

Political communication and public relations both employ many forms, tools, channels and strategies of communication to attract and reach their audiences. These may include the staging of events such as *ɔhene tene*. Since attention-seeking is a vital goal of the strategic use of these tools and channels, *ɔhene tene* provides a useful platform to project the chief. As a composition, *ɔhene tene* incorporates people (a chief with his retinue), sounds and symbols, in motion from one location (such as a place of abode) to another (a designated venue) in a single file. The destination is usually for the conduct of business of a meeting or other. The procession is constructed to project an image of everything that the chief is and what the chief stands for. As an act and a performance, the

procession combines visual and sound images. From the chief's clothing to that of his elders and courtiers, symbols and sounds are assembled and arranged for logic, symmetry, sequence and hierarchy. An examination of the *tene* (procession) would, therefore, require evidence of the presence of these components. As public relations and political imaging, the isomorphic mental image must be a replication of the physical image for positive or negative perception.

Processions strategically display order, power and authority in politics. In Ghana, the Speaker of Parliament and the Chief Justice, for example, routinely process and recess led by identified officials, although not in an identical fashion to the chief's procession. In the religious realm as well, choirs, for example, usually herald the entry and exit of Ministers of the Gospel at church. In the specific case of *chene tene*, the component signs and symbols in projecting the image of the chief may have some lessons for political image-making in political communication. The search here is for those aspects and elements of the procession that may inform image-making of, and by, the contemporary politician who epitomises Achebe's "man of the people,"² observed as: "politicians follow where the public leads them".³ Contemporarising the chief's procession is the attempt to recast the indigenous within the context of the modern.

Image and the chief's procession as yesterday's PR

There is no known communication studies or political science course that examines in a holistic manner, chiefs, their unique practices, communication and governance systems in the training of public relations practitioners and political communicators. Neither are there programmes and courses that share Grunig's (1993) view that image is less an issue in public relations; especially when Hussain and Ferdous (2014) believe that "developing a framework of visual brand identity", is key to "gaining a higher corporate brand reputation" among key stakeholders. In the corporate

2 Chinua Achebe in his book *Man of the People*, portrays a politician character who uses his charm as a down-to-earth man to cover up corrupt practices.

3 BBC, "Big Idea" broadcast Sunday, July 15, 2018.

world, stakeholders would be defined as persons, groups or other organisations that have an interest in an organisation. These would include owners or shareholders, employees, suppliers, creditors, the community and the government. In the traditional governance system, stakeholders would include the royals, elders, courtiers, the community and the state; all who can affect or be affected by actions and dealings of the traditional state.

In comparison with the corporate world as conceptualised by Hussain and Ferdous (2014), a procession would be a formative step in creating the image of a chief. An image is an amalgam of all activities that are visually, aurally, and sensually interlinked and interplayed in response to a stimulus or a series of stimuli (Skinner *et al.*, 2010). It creates and assumes its own life to potentially affect perception. In the view of Turney (2000), image may be constructed, while for Zantides (2012), it is deconstructed. Nekmat, Gower & Ye (2014) contend that an image is also managed. The Asantehene's *Akwasidaekese*⁴ durbar, described as a "breathtaking" spectacle of "multisensory experience" and intense in its significance (Silverman, 2016, p. 12) is preceded by, ushered in and heralded by the procession.

A series of elements and actions merge into image-making to convey a message. The image constructor's concern is with how, when and why the image-formulated message would elicit a positive response. The message can be clear without a word such as when: Teacher of the Year "rebuked Trump without saying a word [by letting] buttons [she was wearing] do the talking" (Knowles, 2018). This teacher's non-verbal communication was finally verbalised and amplified in a speech she read on CNN (Bowden, 2018). Generally, the public relations practitioner or political communicator is in constant search for the attractive or pleasing image to present to us through what appears in our minds, what comes into our ears or what we see with our eyes. It is the same commitment with which the handlers of the chief strive to construct a positive image for him and his office. Both acts would be based on the gestalt isomorphic

4 *Akwasidae* is a sacred day in the Akan calendar set aside for remembering ancestors in gatherings and festivities. *Akwasidaekese* is a grand version of the *Akwasidae*.

principle that the external stimulus is replicated as the picture in the perceiver's head. They are also an exercise in what Oržekauskas and Šmaižienė (2007) describe as actualities of public image and reputation management.

Related Studies

Various works describe and analyse the position of the Akan chief as a leader. In particular, much has been written about the Asantehene, an Akan chief of kingly status described as “the supreme spiritual and political head of the Asante Kingdom” (Manhyia Palace, 2014, p. 2). Rattray (1969), though, noted that in general, an occupier of a chiefly position was “supposed to be the spiritual head of his state ... respected by all and feared by all in virtue of his close connection with the spirit world” (pp. 13, 87). Sarpong (1974), in his discussion of myths and political authority, observed that the signs and symbols projected in the chief's procession capture a mythical basis for authority: be it political, moral, or spiritual.

In furtherance of achieving all these quality expectations of the chief, value orders of society may be mythically constructed, using “ruling line's divine origin, magical powers of its progenitors,” or “imagined conquests in the past” (Sarpong, 1974, p. 128). These chiefly attributes are of interest in analysing the signs and symbols of the chief's procession. That is to look for what in the latter represents Sarpong's (1974) myths. They (signs and symbols with the myths they represent) “justify the existing order, to show that it is right for the rulers to rule and for the ruled to be ruled” (Sarpong, 1974, p. 131).

The Asantehene, as head of the Asante Kingdom, “derives his power and authority from the *Denkyemkye*” (literally, the crocodile hat but, in essence, the Asantehene's crown) with which he is crowned and which he wears “only once” in his lifetime. As part of his installation, he also “swears with the Bosomuru (warrior) Sword at Pampaso, an area in Kumasi” (the capital) (Manhyia Palace, 2014, p. 2). Elsewhere among the Akan, Hardiman (2003) has, however, observed that, in modern times, “traditional leaders

do not exercise [western-style] political power” (p. 69). She noted that during the Aburi Odwira festival, the people “honour their leader [the Aburihene], to listen to what he has to say to them, and to meet together to establish their solidarity” (Hardiman, 2003, p. 75).

As noted by Osei (2000, p. 11) in his detailed description, the Asante chief's responsibility is also to prevent: “calamities by praying and offering drinks to God, the ancestors and the deities of the land ... by pouring libation”. Furthermore, he “guides and guards the state;” as “war general of his people;” and “serves as a judge of his people” (Osei, 2000, p. 11). In addition, the “chief and his elders make laws” (Osei, 2000, p. 11). In the discharge of these responsibilities, the chief must abide by a code of conduct which “has a lot of DON'T'S to guide him. ... not be a drunkard, involved in games of chance, not flirt with other people's wives” (Osei, 2000, p. 12). As custom demands, someone should always accompany the chief wherever he goes. Violation of any of the codes is ground for destoolment. The procession is one structure that articulates the code for compliance.

Often, however, research on chieftaincy tends to dwell on the institution's structure and functions. Earlier works including Busia (1951), Bofo (1962), Kyerematen (1966), Bentsi-Enchill (1971), Aggrey (1978) and Obeng (1987) are corroborated by later works such as Osei (2000), Rathbourne (2000), Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005), Odotei (2006), Adjaye and Misawa (2006), Amisare (2009) and more recent ones such as Ampene (2014) and Manhyia Palace (2009/2014/2017). It is similar to kingly practices even beyond the borders of Ghana. Adjaye and Misawa's (2006) work on Nigeria narratively outlines the nature of chieftaincy, especially what the position of a chief is and what it does. Ampene and Nyantakyi III's (2016) work, in particular, is a glittering presentation of the signs and artefacts of the kingship, photographed in colour.

Bentsi-Enchill's (1971) analysis of the chieftaincy institution is one of the few that go beyond description to propose the “*tete wo bi*” (the rich past) and “*sankofa*” (reclaiming and adoption) of the old and its characteristics in a transformation agenda for

progress and to propose change as aligned to continuity. Similar ideas are expressed by Okoronkwo (n.d.). It seems to align with the l’Hoeste and Vila (2017) contention that the construction of image using sound and others is potentially helpful in transforming to achieve change and continuity in public relations work (Stoeltje, 2003). Grunig (1993), indeed, warns against communicating symbols alone; advocating, instead, for the “symbolic and behavioural relationships” to be intertwined for effectiveness while acknowledging the “preoccupation of many public relations practitioners with the concept of image” (p. 121).

Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016) detail and analyse all that goes into the Asantehene’s procession. Basically, it is in three clusters: an “advance group,” the “Asantehene’s group” and the “rear group”, except during the *Adaekesee* (grand Adaye) when there is an additional group called the “gold stool group”. Depending on a participant’s group, the individual wore or bore artefact signs and signifiers with the resultant/consequential signification of a chief with power, authority and wealth. The human actors in the procession manipulated the array of paraphernalia. Their positions, roles in the chieftaincy institution and job descriptions which require the signs and symbols they bore were all sources of the chief’s image and social standing. They were also expressers of verbal art forms such as musicians, flutists, horn blowers, drummers, priesthood and militarism. Many were the courtiers who provided services and bore all kinds of insignia such as headgear, anklets and necklaces.

It was all a massive exercise of encoding the power and authority of the king and all that is rich and beautiful for the people, the audience to decode, understand and appreciate. For our purpose here, chief and king are coterminous in meaning. Each of the many signs and symbols, as a piece in the procession puzzle, has its own code. They coalesce into the chiefship as an activity encapsulated in the procession during which the humans who bear these symbols of the state wear clothing and adornments to hierarchically enhance their coded appearance to signify their specific courtier statuses.

The procession

A chief's procession is an elaboration of the requirement that the chief must always be accompanied and never left alone. By far and of the greatest importance in Ampene and Nyantakyi III's (2016) account on the procession is that which focused on the Asantehene's special *Adaekesee* (grand *Adae*) procession. In principle, processions by all other chiefs would follow the same pattern but with less depth, glamour, pomp and pageantry. Two basic forms of procession emerge from their description. A procession may be with the chief on foot or a ride in a palanquin. That is, the chief walks or rides in a palanquin⁵ in procession to wherever and for whatever purpose. When an *apakan* (palanquin) is used, processions usually lead to durbar or funeral grounds; otherwise it is a walking exercise. A procession by the chief may also be in happiness, such as attending celebratory durbars or festivals or in sadness such as heading towards the funeral grounds.

A chief's procession, as an image-projecting communication activity, consolidates the verbal and nonverbal message for effective political communication. Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016) identify nonverbal messages as in the signs, artefacts and symbols of the procession and verbalised messages as by oral performers. Among the latter are messages in recitation, *kwadwom* or *amoma* (praise poetry or bard) and *nsabrane* (appellations). The co-authors also cite "Anyan (drum poetry)" (Ampene & Nyantakyi III, 2016, p. 31). Processions are colourful and intrinsically meant to initially superficially please the eye. The whole encoding system is guided by colour codes, for example, red and black for mourning and black and white for celebration; also, of different types and colours of umbrellas, first in libation prayer; and the *Nyamedua* (God's stump) symbol. "Samanka [a brass basin containing medicinal herbs] is carried on the head by Samanka Komfoɔ (*Samanka* priest). It leads the procession to spiritually sweep or clean the route, drive away

5 In Asante, chiefs are graded from Asantehene (the King), *Amanhene* (Paramount Chiefs), *Abremponfoɔ* (Kumasi Divisional Chiefs) and *Adikrofoɔ* (Headmen). The first three are *apakanhene* (palanquin chiefs) who qualify to ride in the palanquin. This means, not all chiefs are allowed to ride in the palanquin. Even then, their umbrellas are graded giving meaning to the expression, "*Ahenfo kyiniye, ebi da bi akyi*" (chiefs' umbrellas vary by status).

evil spirits and neutralize all evil intensions by adversaries ... The Samanka leads all kinds of processions, celebratory or those of grief” (Ampene & Nyantakyi III, 2016, p. 31).

In view of the above symbols, description and depiction of *ɔhene tene* as an integral part of Akan chieftaincy practices, chieftaincy, especially with its procession and other private activities such as visits to the stool house and the burial of chiefs, tends to be associated with some fetish and ungodliness. However, although modernity would so label these practices, from some official government publications, one learns about retrieving the past to incorporate it into the prevailing times or present. For example, to the National Redemption Council (NRC) military government (NRC, 1973), “it is a challenge to us – to foster our developing spiritual union; to organize and rationalize the symbols and traditions that provide the basis of our heritage” (p. 18).⁶

Study methodology

Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016) employed the observation and interview methods to gather and analyse data in their study. Both audio and video recordings were made. Moriarty (2011) believes that qualitative research methods are appropriate for collecting data such as have been assembled here as findings of the study. While Scott and Garner’s (2013) qualitative designs, methods and techniques were informative, Mulhall’s (2003) favoured “field notes on observation” techniques were instructive in the design of this study. The current study observed and documented the appearance, actions and behaviour patterns of the chief and his retinue. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight individual chieftaincy actors and functionaries. Comprehensive in-depth interviews were conducted with two commentators (Amooh, 2017), three chiefs, two courtiers (*nhenkwaa*), and a queen-mother all of whom were familiar with the system and its procession activities.

⁶ Seven billboards each with one of the seven principles of the “Charter of Redemption” were erected along the main Independence Avenue. See booklet: Charter of National Redemption [Council]: Unity and Self-Reliance. Accra: National Redemption Council (1974). The first of the seven principles was: “One Nation, One People, One Destiny.”

Data collection

Processions and some ceremonies were videotaped, and for some, copies of existing video recordings (essentially by the television station, *UTV*) were obtained from January to December 2017, a period of 12 months, for analysis. For example, to ascertain the significance of signs and symbols in the Asantehene's processions (business and ceremonial), an *ahenkwa* (a courtier) was contacted to identify all the elements in the procession. The signification of each observed activity was discussed with him and another *ahenkwa*. Later, the Akyeamehene (head linguist), Sanaahene (the treasurer) and Atipimhene (a member of the rear guard), were consulted for confirmation, authentication, verification or clarification of stated accounts and views. Contents of different episodes of the *UTV* programme "Heritage Ghana," broadcast on Saturday evenings, also helped to validate what Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016) had documented.

Results

Observed visuals (such as the colour of clothing) and sounds (drums and ululation) elements of the processions studied are detailed, highlighting their signification and consequential roles that essentially combine as public relations activities and tools for political communication. Certain patterns emerge from the data which may be summarised as: the retinue; artistic expressive performance (as in speech and dance); and signs and symbols, from the *Denkyemkye* (crocodile hat/Asantehene's crown), *Ekye mu kye* (kingly crown or hat of hats) through *sikabotire* (golden headband) to *abrafoɔ sekan* (the executioners' swords). Others were appearances of groups of people, signs and symbols packaged and projected as "the chief." Those were reinforced with rites and rituals that were strung together into mythical beliefs through elaborate celebratory gatherings in ceremonies which created the chiefly space occupied only by the chief, thereby further boosting his image. Some of them were: *Akwasidae* processions; Apemanimhene's (Apemanim chief's) Farmers' Day procession; and the funeral processions of the chiefs of Kwanwoma, Akwaboa, Toase, Bantama, as well as

that of the Asantehemaa (the queen mother of Ashanti), all within the Asante Kingdom of Ghana.

The retinue

The retinue comprised the chief and all the people who played various roles. They walked in the procession whether the chief also walked or rode in a palanquin. They bore all kinds of titles which reflected the roles they played and were clad in different types of clothing. Many stayed quiet, spoke no words, and sang no songs. Others carried swords, guns, smaller size umbrellas (*kropɔn*) or colourful *bankyiniye* (special umbrellas) to underscore the saying “*Ahenfo kyiniye, ebi da bi akyi*” (chiefs’ umbrellas vary by status). In sum, it was a processual retinue of people and artefacts which symbolised body and spirit in the person of the chief.

Artistic expressive performance

Some of the members of the procession party performed variously in artistic expressions. There were those such as the guards or executioners pushing and pulling their swords in and out of their scabbards. The *esenfoɔ* and *kwadwomfoɔ* (praise singers) sang or recited their praise poetry: “*ɔba oo, ahunuabɔbirim*” (there he comes, he of scary sight). “These are the praise singers. They are an important part of the procession”, explained an *ahenkwa* (a courtier). For the procession to funeral grounds, the *Asakra* (war song chanting) group usually chanted *asafo* (war) songs (Aggrey, 1978).

Signs and symbols

Signs and symbols dominated the processions and they were packaged to project “the chief”. They were reinforced with rites and rituals among which were the firing of musketry and sprinkling of some liquid from the *Samanka* (brass container of medicinal herbs) and the burning of incense. Everything melded together into those mythical beliefs which underscored the elaborate performances aimed at projecting the chiefly image. Together, they constituted symbolic representations of power, authority and spirituality. Items

such as *akyeamepoma* (staff of the linguists); *afena* (attendants' symbol of office), *mena* (elephant tail) borne by a courtier on grievous missions, and different types of *kyiniye* (umbrellas) including the smaller *kropɔn* (type of umbrella) for indoor or minor business outings used regularly by lower ranked chiefs and queen mothers as well as the colourful *bankyiniye* (special umbrella) for major festive and ceremonial occasions.

The *bankyiniye* was also used to cover the *apakanhene* (palanquin chief) when he rode in the *apakan* (palanquin). Either umbrella (*kyiniye*), the smaller *kropɔn* or the larger *bankyiniye*, may have a crown on it or a symbol with meaning such as a totem of the chief's clan. Or, it may be colour coded such as the Bantamahene's umbrella which is always black and the Tepahene's umbrella which is always white to match their clothing or outfit. Thus, effectively, each sign or symbol represents an attribute and value that projects a positive association with the chief. In this regard, the chief's handlers must accurately determine which one to use and at what time for maximum impact. The *kyiniye* covers the chief and protects him from rain and sunshine. Incidentally, the chief swears an oath of office which requires him to answer calls to arms or responsibility literally in rain or shine (*nsuo mu o, awia mu o*) making the umbrella a very useful tool although its true meaning or import could be that the vagaries of the weather should not hinder or impede the call to duty. In other words, there should be no excuses when duty calls.

Appearance

For the chief, as for every politically active person, appearance counts. It is a basic message of a procession which must be clear to all, especially the handlers of the event. As explained by the *Akyeamehene*, an aspect of dressing suggested that the chief was being secured in one piece to accentuate his wholeness. In this regard, strategic points of the body, "*napɔso, napɔso*" (the joints) were secured with adornments. The chiefs wore different things on the shoulder, elbow, wrist, waist, below knee (on the shin), ankle; while all fingers were adorned with rings all meant to make parts of the whole body hold together. The chief's appearance, thus,

presented an important message to the gathering, one that the *Atipimhene* referred to as *nkammom* (unity, togetherness).

Ceremonies

The chief's procession usually did not just happen. According to the queen mother interviewed, "*biribi na ede ba; na ehia ahoboa ne nhyehyee; yehyehye ne nyinaa pɛpɛɛpɛ*" (something brings it about; it needs careful planning; it is all elaborately planned). The procession was induced, invited or stimulated. As a gathering, it was usually associated with an event; where the chief appeared to grace and honour it or be honoured by it. The processions provided colour, pomp and pageantry to spice up the activities of an event. One such event was the proceedings of the Atwima Kwanwoma District Farmers' Day celebration that took place at Atwima Apemanim town on Friday, December 1, 2017. It was an opportunity for the Atwima Apemanim chief to process from his *Ahenfie* (palace) to the event grounds. He was led by his *akyeame* (linguists or spokespersons) bearing two *akyeamepoma* (staff of office) in a procession to the grounds where the Farmers' Day function was held.

Mounted on the first linguist's staff and carried by the *Akyeamehene* (head linguist) was the totem *kwaakwaadabi* (the magpie bird) of the Asona people to which the Apemanim stool belongs. On the second *akyeamepoma* was mounted a gold figure of two people eating from the same *ayowa* (earthenware bowl). By way of both processing and seating during the Farmers' Day procession, before the linguists were the *nkonwa* (stool bearers) and behind them the sub-chiefs (with elders seated in front of them) from the lowest ranked *Twafoɔhene* to the *Ntotoɔhene*, *Adɔntenhene*, *Akwamuhene*, and the *Krontihene* just before the chief. The *Gyasehene* sat on the other side of the chief with the *Kyidɔmhene* and *Ankɔbeahene* behind. After the *Ankɔbeahene*, was seated the queen mother and her entourage.

Types of procession

Observations and interviews revealed different types of processions as found by Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016). These may be broadly categorised into business and ceremonial or *apakan* ride and procession on foot. Business processions included the Apemanimhene, who resided outside the *ahenfie* (palace or stool house) moving from his private residence to the *ahenfie*. The King of Asante, Otumfoɔ, the Asantehene, was also observed to process ordinarily for business from his residence to a meeting venue, called *Asemnnie* (Court). Whereas the Asantehene's processions were with the *bankyiniye* (the colourful umbrella), the lower ranked Apemanimhene ordinarily used the *kropɔn* (the smaller umbrella), with the *bankyiniye* used only during the procession to the Farmers' Day durbar grounds.

Every constituent unit or component of a procession, person, sign or symbol indirectly or nonverbally communicated something. Both the queen mother and the *Atipimhene* pointed out that everything we see in the procession has a meaning (“*biribi biara wɔ n'asekyere*”). However, some were, in addition, instruments that were linked to direct verbal communication. For example, the chief's message sent through an *ɔkyeame* or *ahenkwa* (messenger/courtier) would always be accompanied by an *akyeamepoma* (linguist's staff of authority) or *akofena* (fighting sword) or *afena* (power and authority of an *ahenkwa*'s office). For urgent or emergency summoning, the *ahenkwa* would carry the *mena* (elephant tail), the sight of which always spelt major trouble. As noted by Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016) and confirmed by Amooh (2017), the Asantehene's emissaries would carry the *Mponponsuo* (a sword and sign of authority) to accentuate his authority and power over the other chiefs. “The swords are a major sign of authority by which the chief could also delegate” (Amooh, 2017). In procession, the Asantehene was, indeed, observed sending the *Mponponsuo* bearer with a message for a chief in the stands.

It was intriguing to observe that women were completely left out of the picture. For example, the party of priests (Ampem & Nyantakyi III, 2016) was exclusively male. There are two reasons

given to explain why this happens. First, indigenous governance is conceptualised as a military function. The display of military might is a substantial part of the procession. It is also suggested in some quarters that the woman ceded her power and authority to rule and administer because men were deemed stronger to lead wars. The only exception in Asante history was *Themaa* (Queen mother) of Edweso, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, who led the men in a war against the British in 1900. Processions are essentially battle formations. As Ampene and Nyantakyi III (2016) state, the procession has its advance party, the chief's group and rear party. Second, the queen mother has her own procession independent of the chief's. It is formed by her own assistants such as *akyeame* (who, however, bear no *akyeamepoma*) and courtiers just as in the case of the chief. Nonetheless, it was observed on a number of occasions that a woman bore and fired the *sahene* (Bantamahene's biggest gun/musket) with the loudest noise.

Discussion

Embedded in the constructed chieftaincy processions were aspects that are of importance to public relations and political communication. The adventurous public relations practitioner and political communicator may, therefore, want to find out how to draw on those image-making communicative aspects of the procession for a new paradigm of political communication that could inform their communication planning and strategising. Each procession has its own symbolic significance. For instance, as is still the practice today, the day of the week on which an event that demands a procession occurs, determines the nature and purpose of the procession such as the sacred *Fɔfie* (Friday), *Nkyibena* (Tuesday), *Awukudɛɛ* (Wednesday) (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006).

Patriotism appears to be an attribute of the chief's procession as it colourfully assembles only state paraphernalia unlike some political organisations which would rather display party colours and accoutrements than national colours and symbols of state. There is a sense of loss of loyalty to a country by political parties when they opt to troop party and not national colours. What today's political

communicators may want to consider for adoption are the unity and patriotism imbued in the chieftaincy procession. At least, there is the possibility of adapting some or part(s) of its communication potential to enrich their modern-day practices.

By design, the image-maker constructs with an intention, an objective in mind. For the audience experiencing *shene tene*, it is deconstructing the procession. As the line approaches and passes, each of the component images (image part) is assessed. The assessment continues to the end of the line. At that point, the parts become the whole. Sarpong's (1974) myths and political authority found practical expression in the signs and symbols of the procession. The position of the chief converges in signs and symbols which define his power and authority. In symbols of state such as the Sword, Coat-of-Arms, president and speaker's chairs, the modern Ghana state has adopted indigenous representations. The president swears the oath of office with the state Sword and uses the Coat-of-Arms as the official seal. There is, however, nothing specific for him to wear (such as a hat or crown) to signify the office or crowning into office.

In other practices, the Coat-of-Arms is the presidential vehicle number plate along with flying the national flag on his official vehicle. These and other symbols make the president stand out in public. Interestingly the Asantehene, like all paramount chiefs in Ghana, flies a flag. The Asantehene's flag is embossed with the *denkyemkye* (crocodile hat/Asantehene's crown). Other paramount chiefs usually emboss their clan totems on their flags. The idea of flying the flag appears to have been borrowed from political office holders in the First Republic. Then, the District Commissioner (now District Chief Executive), the representative of the President in the local governance district, flew the national flag on his official vehicle. The practice was abandoned after the coup that overthrew that republic except for representational purposes of Ghana's envoys abroad. But the chiefs have continued to fly theirs.

Points of conjuncture and disjuncture

As a political communication strategy, political parties have developed images that separate them from state symbols, unlike the unity of the symbolism of chieftaincy. In Ghana's current multiparty democracy in which political parties seek attention and endorsement in their quest for power, two main frameworks have driven their actions. These are visibility (the Convention Peoples' Party and the National Democratic Congress) and ideology as guides to their use of signs and symbols. While the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) enjoyed a one-party state in the first republic, the fourth republic has been dominated by two political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The National Democratic Congress party, for instance, chose to drape Ghana's Parliament with its colours rather than those of the state.⁷ The NDC's implementation of such strategies have been phenomenal. When in power, its colours feature everywhere including on public property such as the Accra Metropolitan Assembly's (AMA) signposts and party member businesses. The party once directed its members to wear party colours on Friday thereby challenging the Friday African wear introduced by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government to promote local textile industries.

Earlier in the First Republic, the CPP government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah wanted to make the nation the party by changing the national flag into its party colours. Barker (1969, p.33) cites an Nkrumah New Year message of December 31, 1963 that suggested "a change in the Ghana flag, making it identical with that of the CPP except for the central five-pointed black star." In that sense, the colours would change from red, gold and green to red, white and green. These colours and flags are without recourse or reference to the traditions, signs and symbols associated with chieftaincy. However, as stated earlier, some chiefs have adopted the flag and other insignia such as the Coat-of-Arms as part of their paraphernalia.

⁷ In a conversation with Vincent Assiseh (Publicity Secretary of the NDC) about decorating and draping Parliament with party colours during events, he averred that the party exploits the opportunity to enhance its visibility although that practice amounted to taking advantage of opportunities to advertise.

Expectations and recommendations

Kwame Nkrumah's fusion efforts, guided by his philosophy of the African Personality, some kind of Afrocentric renaissance, included finding political space for the institution of chieftaincy in the constitution. He created the office of the *Okyeame* (State Linguist). Then he designed the State Sword as a symbol of power and authority held when taking the presidential oath just like Southern Ghana chiefs would take their oath of office holding the *akɔfena* (sword). *Okyeame* Boafo Akuffo was the only one to have occupied the state linguist position which was abolished by the coup d'état of 1966 which overthrew Nkrumah's government. The *Okyeame's* main role was that of reciting appellations (Boafo Akuffo, 1962/1975) to precede official broadcasts. A glimpse of the traditional linguist's (*Okyeame*) role is captured in the following dialogue between a sub-chief and a head linguist during one of the observed sessions:

Sub-Chief: "I forgot a printed version, so I have scribbled it on paper and will present the printed version later."

The *Okyeame* considers this statement of the sub-chief offensive and disrespectful to the chief presiding over the meeting. He therefore reformulates the sub-chief's statement as follows:

"*Okyeame*": "Chief presiding, the sub-chief says he forgot the list at home so a messenger is on his way to bring it."

Unlike mainstream political actors who normally have predetermined terms of office, traditional rulers hold power for life. Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire had drawn on the example of "paramount chief" for life (Fitzgerald, 1997) to justify his rule for life while Kwame Nkrumah's one-party state and Acheampong's "union government" drew on similar indigenous "rule for life" sentiments. Chapter 22 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (Article 22 (1) & (2)) states emphatically that: "The institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage, is hereby guaranteed."

The guarantee extends to the fact that: “Parliament shall have no power to enact any law ... [that] in any way detracts or derogates from the honour and dignity of the institution of chieftaincy.”

It follows then that a dual system of governance, defined in part by Holzinger, Kern and Kromrey (2016) as: “‘dual polities’ [which] are governed by the state *and* organize collective decision making within their ethnic community according to traditional rules,” exists in Ghana. Unfortunately, it is an institutionalised parallel system which discourages fusion, even minimum cooperation, and is not amenable to harnessing for enrichment. Dominance of western values in the modern system of governance does not encourage researching into the indigenous for what could enrich practice. Isolating modernity from the traditional has created a cultural chasm that engenders clashes of contradiction and disabling of otherwise purely functional units of the indigenous system.

There appears to be some incompatibility in the power duality system with the creation of two polities: one rural and less literate; and the other, urban schooled digirate, with a section of netizens communicating in the digisphere. A co-existence of the western and indigenous governance systems, as institutionalised, each with its uniquely impenetrable sets of communication systems based on its own set of values, means ways ought to be found to align the systems for accelerated development to occur. This paper proposes an aspect of alignment for enhanced public relations and political communication practice. What practitioners need to do is to show interest in the indigenous, searching for its progressive elements which can then be infused into political communication for greater effect.

Risk in deconstructing the message

In the audience deconstruction of the procession formulated image, there is the risk that part or some of its parts could distort its message. To communicate, the message constructor, the chief’s image-makers, with the intent of communicating, carefully compose, arrange and choreograph the *tene* processual message

with logical sequence uppermost in the mind. Nonetheless, there is always the risk that all this will be turned upside down in the audience de-structor's eyes. In other words, a constructor's designed sequence of what should follow which, could confuse the de-structor who is untrained to appreciate the logical sequencing.

For example, for an audience member who does not take kindly to indigenous spiritualism, the sight of the *samanka* (brass basin containing medicinal herbs) will immediately lead to drawing the conclusion that chieftaincy is essentially about fetishism with no expectation of anything positive that the procession would convey. Similarly, an onlooker may think of violence (such as armed robbery) at the sight of the musket-bearing guards when the intention is to represent the chief as a warrior defender of his chieftdom. Such confusion may lead to a disconnect between common sender-receiver signification with the consequence of no signification at all. For emphasis, a procession captures qualities, roles, responsibilities and ethical expectations, to project who the chief is, what is expected of him, and his preparedness to meet those expectations. It is all about the chief and his capabilities. The procession, thus, speaks to proactive public relations and political communication with less room for reactivity or negativity.

Summary and conclusion

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana has institutionalised a dual system of governance by creating structures for chieftaincy affairs as observed in some other parts of the world (Holzinger *et al.*, 2016). The implication is that the institution is still of relevance and is, therefore, needed for good governance. Unfortunately, the design is a parallel rather than a fused system suggesting two cultural entities and paradigms. However, by contextualising its dynamics, this article projects *shene tene* as an indigenous constructed image typology, which has lessons on the power of signs and symbols for today's political communication and public relations practitioners as it focuses on image construction and maintenance which are job roles for the two practices.

If nothing at all, the transformational or paradigm shift argument here finds roots in an observation made by the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, whose chair carries various *adinkra* traditional signs and symbols to underscore their significance and importance in the hierarchy of western style power. He is reported to have said: “If the language is such that you cannot use it at the Otumfuo’s⁸ palace or the palace of any respected Chief, please don’t use it in Parliament” (JFM/Ghana, 2017). This is a profound recognition that, indeed, “*tete wɔ bi*” (the rich past); and is a sound basis for “*sankɔfa*” (reclaiming and adoption) of the past for the present and the future.

The study attempted to present *ɔhene tene*, the Akan chiefly procession, with its signs, symbols and art forms as an exercise in image construction and projection which could offer lessons for modern public relations and political communication. What those who operate predominantly within the dominant western structures, such as the modern public relations practitioner and political communicator, could learn is that there are practices within the indigenous system as exemplified by *ɔhene tene* that can be adopted to enrich the westernised practice. Indeed, contemporary politicians usually announce themselves in processions at public gatherings. Perhaps, an infusion of some unifying symbols and art forms as *ɔhene tene* presents, such as assembling state rather than party paraphernalia, could enrich those appearances and provide a rallying point for the people.

The study has been bolstered by the idea that, in many instances, technology and inventions have been informed by the underpinning principles of previous or supposedly obsolete precursors. Therefore, just as today’s social media language of the emoji and avatar, among others, seems to be reinvented hieroglyphics and their types⁹; in some kind of return to the signs and

8 *Otumfuo* is the title of the King of Asante. It means, the all-powerful.

9 Such other forms of writing in Africa include what Okoronkwo (n.d.) describes as the insibidi. The Vai syllabary and the Ghanaian *adinkra* symbols (Fianu, 2007) are others. The latter are widely adopted by the state, public institutions of higher learning such as the University of Ghana’s fern, and used even by private institutions. The Vai syllabary is the indigenous ideographic writing of the people of southeast Nigeria and southwest Cameroon with mention of Calabar and the like.

symbols of ideational scripting, so might image creation activities of public relations and political communication take some cues or lessons from *shene tene*. Overall, *shene tene* has been presented as an important activity in the Akan socio-cultural, traditional political system with recommendations for its adaptation, adoption and integration into modern attempts at image-making in public relations and political communication. The act and practice of *shene tene* may also be contemporarised within a paradigm of change and continuity assuming that political communication is most useful as a location-oriented activity.

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