

# EXPLORING PUBLIC RELATIONS IN IGBO HOMES AND SOCIETY THROUGH NARRATIVE LITERATURE AS PRINT MEDIA: INSIGHTS FROM ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

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## Abstract

This thematic content analysis explored Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It examined how Igbo literature and culture can be used to inform, shape, and build sound public relations through cordial relationships and mutual understanding at the family level and society. The study was hinged on the frameworks of Public Relations (PR), Bowen Family Systems, and Reader-Response Literary Theory. PR theory explored the principles underlying effective communication between one character and another, or among characters as a group. It also revealed the need for effective communication and other PR principles in conflict resolution, building and maintaining sound relationships, shaping perceptions, mutual understanding, and influencing personality behaviour in the Igbo domestic and social settings. Bowen Family Systems guided the researchers to explore the nature of behaviours and relationships among the characters by providing a scientific perspective of understanding human behaviour and dealing with human problems in the home and society. The Reader-Response Literary Theory helped the researchers to understand the narrative assumptions, text structures and the underlying social contexts in the novel for subjective interpretation of motifs, actions, emotions, and meanings. Through simple random sampling, *Things Fall Apart* was selected among the plethora of similar literary texts of the same genre and thematic preoccupation. It became the sample from where we derived

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The data for thematic analysis. Findings showed that there is a relationship in the PR principles and strategies adopted by modern PR and traditional PR as practiced in Igbo society. Another discovery was that conflict resolution in the Igbo traditional society, like in the modern practice, adopted the approaches of constructive dialogue, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, social responsibility, community participation, and mixed methods. Further findings revealed the binary role of both Igbo and foreign cultures in the practice of public relations. Recommendations were proffered.

## **Introduction**

Public Relations (PR) is centered on sound relationship, mutual understanding, effective communication, peaceful conflict resolution, sustainable reputation building and management. For effective PR to take place, we argue that we should move from the grass-root (homestead) to society, and then to corporations. This is because charity should always begin at home. Anyone who cannot relate well or maintain sound relationships at the domestic level can hardly maintain cordial relationships with others outside, except the individual lives his life in pretence; but pretence is never a feature of good public relations, and sound public relations does not thrive in falsehood and pretence.

In the words of Dr. Murray Bowen (1913-1990), American psychiatrist, how an individual communicates with the members of the internal public or (his family members) largely influences his relationship with the external public (i.e. entire community). This is where this study deviates from the traditional idea of PR as a Mass Communication organ to an interpersonal or group interaction without the agency of the mass media.

Each member of the family in Igbo land does not only belong to the internal public but also an advocate because he represents the family's image and bears its reputation in the community and outside. If he fails to behave himself by putting up socially recommended and acceptable behaviours and values, he is seen as a reputable destroyer and a deviant from both the family principles and the community's group norms and values. The opposite becomes the case when the individual chooses to be well-behaved. The foregoing demonstrates the view of Valentini and Sriramesh (2024) that personal influence is considered a personal resource and, therefore, used to leverage self-influencing power.

For instance, although Unoka is a flutist who makes a name by building his reputation only in the traditional music industry, he is, among other negative behaviours, a never-pay-back borrower, an indolent man, and a habitual drinker with no saving culture (pp.3-6). In a bid to avoid being like his father, Okonkwo turns into a terror to his family (p.11). His internal

communication is not encouraging. He beats up his wives, and exhibits acts of brutality to his entire household and society. For example, he gives Ekwefi (his second wife) “a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping” (p.30).

Okonkwo extends his domestic violence to his kinsmen because he has “harsh external persona... which he has in some ways been forced to repress in order to succeed socially” (p.vi). Again, Okonkwo does “pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he used his fist” (p.3) or his cutlass because “in a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet” (p.163). Owing to his poor friendship at home, Okonkwo's public relations is indeed very poor.

Furthermore, international public relations practice and diplomacy in *Things Fall Apart* manifests in the contact between Umuofia community and the colonialist missionaries (the tolerant and compromising Mr. Brown and his opposite, James Smith). Brown is the first missionary portrayed as a respectful and sympathetic personality who attempts to learn about the Igbo culture and religion, creating a peaceful, albeit temporary, relationship with the community. On the other hand, Smith is Mr. Brown's successor. He is described as a harsh and dogmatic personality who believes the Igbo must jettison their traditional beliefs to be "saved". His approach is highly confrontational, and this intensifies the conflict between the missionaries and the natives. This conflict is the outcome of the interplay between colonial pressure and local resistance.

The white missionaries, as a PR team, promote and shape the perception of their culture. So, using cultural assimilation technique, they persuade Umuofia and other host communities to imbibe white culture and jettison their local way of life. On the other hand, Okonkwo and Umuofia elders fight to retain and maintain their traditions and cultural dominance against colonial pressure. The missionaries use their religious, formal education, and political influence to propagate their beliefs, while Okonkwo uses aggressive and traditional strategies, including violence, to defend his cultural values and uphold a specific public image of masculinity. Each PR agent (white men and Igbo traditional adherents) presents his culture as superior and persuades others to hold tenaciously to it.

Chinua Achebe disappears into his characters and plays out from within them what role he wishes them to play. He achieves this by taking “the reader into the intimacy of his characters’ mind.... We know the individual characters intimately by being privy to their thoughts that make

us harbour strong feelings towards them.” (p.vii). He does not just give roles to his characters but, like every other storyteller, imposes the roles on them. So, in Achebe’s characterisation, we discover two levels of characters - according to *appearance frequency*, and *dynamic transformation*. For example, under appearance frequency, Achebe presents *major* and *minor* characters. Major characters are those that feature more frequently than minor characters. In this literary narrative, Okonkwo is the protagonist.

Furthermore, in *dynamic transformation*, Achebe also presents two groups of characters: *round* and *flat*. Round characters adapt to change as the plot develops so as to improve their public relations. For peaceful coexistence, Obierika and Nwoye, among other similar characters, drop their African religion and embrace Christianity. Msiska writes in his introduction that “Nwoye is too trusting of the new to leave room for a possible dialogue with traditional African culture” (p. v).

Their susceptibility to compromise presents Nwoye the Obierika as having good public relations, at least in this aspect. In addition, flat characters are those characters that refuse to change but remain rigid from the beginning to the end of the narrative. Okonkwo is a flat character and staunch traditionalist who rejects with vehemence the foreign religion. This, however, stands him out, among other like-minded characters, as an uncompromising fellow without lasting public relations qualities. The end is tragic.

As a normative tradition in literature, there is character intersection in the characterisation of *Things Fall Apart*. The two groups of characters can have common interplay. That is, a *major* character (e.g. a protagonist such as Okonkwo) can also be a *flat* character. Okonkwo is both a *major* character and a *flat* character because as a chief character (under major characterisation) he refuses to metamorphose from a fastidious, choleric, and uncompromising family-head to a soft tolerant husband and father. He remains unchanged from the development of the plot to the resolution of conflicts and events. Unlike Okonkwo, Nwoye and Obierika are both *major* and *round* characters. Nwoye transforms from a believer in traditional African religion to the new religion, Christianity. Public Relations is built on mutual compromise, and this lubricates their relationship with others in the home, clan, and entire society.

Cultural activities also promote public relations by building social cohesion (Rutagand, 2024). This is done through social gathering, strengthening community bond, sharing identity and expression, and enhancing emotional wellbeing (Adebola et al., 2022; Aol, 2024; Amosco &

Galigao, 2024). For instance, during the New Yam Festival, among other festivities, there is always a high rate of social get-together and interaction amongst the natives, relatives, friends, and well-wishers. Families compete on “how many friends and relations they invited from neighbouring villages...”(p.29). Okonkwo, for instance, has three wives and, therefore, “his guests would make a fairly big crowd” (p. 30).

Public Relations is explored in the current study in relation to the novel's characterisation, plot, social life, and cultural activities in Umuofia and the surrounding communities. Insights into character traits reveal whether a character is PR-compliant or PR-resistant. Again, concerning social life, the attitude of a character in social interactions and interpersonal relationships portrays his level of public relations practice.

### **Research Objectives**

The aims of the study are to:

- (1). Explore the principles Achebe employs in his narrative to promote effective public relations in the Igbo traditional society.
- (2). Analyse the PR principles that Achebe employs for conflict resolution and management in the novel.
- (3). Explore the role of culture and tradition in public relations and relationship fostering in the Igbo traditional society.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The concept of *public* in Public Relations**

The term “public”, according to Apuke (2018), is not a mob or crowd. It is a professional parlance that refers to a type of audience with common values and interests. It comprises the staff, customers, consumers, the media, the host community, and the stakeholders of an organisation. In this study, we argue that relationship is the major motif of PR and, “if relationships are central to public relations management, then it also follows that *public* should mean something more specific than the general public” (Bailey, 2023).

In Public Relations, there are two categories of public - internal and external publics. On the other hand, the Igbo social setting, like a modern organisation, has internal and external publics whose presence and activities are important to the existence of the social setting. Public

relations' internal publics are mostly the employees whose operations and activities greatly influence the growth and survival of the company. The existence of internal PR public has given rise to internal public relations and internal environment.

The concept of PR internal public can be applied to the current study. All the members of a given family in *Things Fall Apart* make up the PR internal public in the novel. Okonkwo, in his family, is the chief executive (family head) and his three wives, children, Ikemefuna (the slave boy) belong to the internal public. Nwakibie (the renowned yam farmer) is also the chief executive in his own family; his nine wives and thirty children are also the members of the internal public.

The external public in modern PR includes the customers, consumers, the media, the government, stakeholders, and the host community. The existence of the external public has given birth to external PR and external environment. We can also apply the concept of external public to the present study. The external public in the context of our investigation includes the neighbours, kinsmen, villagers, in-laws, and foreigners (the colonialists). For example, all the members of the family of a given character form his internal public while those outside his domestic setting belong to external public.

### **Public Relations**

Public Relations (PR) is a management function which helps an organisation to build and maintain mutual relationship with its good public. Broom and Sha (2013) agree with the foregoing definition by quipping that public relations manages, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the public on whom its success or failure depends.

The social, cultural, and historic environment of the Igbo is the repletion of public relations principles and practice. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates the contextual relevance of the foregoing assertion. This is because the logical analysis of the setting, plot, characters, and thematic preoccupation show the importance of relationships, mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and individual and community reputation within the traditional Igbo society.

### **Print Media**

The print media is a collective name for all printed materials used to disseminate information, educate, and entertain a heterogeneous audience. The print media is a mass communication

platform comprising newspapers, magazines, books, journals, and newsletters. In this study, we see the literary text *Things Fall Apart* as a print medium from where we derive our data for the qualitative and thematic textual analysis.

### **Things Fall Apart**

*Things Fall Apart* (1958) is the first among Achebe's trilogy. The second is *No Longer at Ease* (1960) while *Arrow of God* (1964) is the third in the list of “critically acclaimed African trilogy” (Klein, 2007). The novel was first published in 1958 when Achebe was 28. It is a tragic narrative depicting the rise and fall of the protagonist, Okonkwo, whose tragic fall is made possible through the manipulative frustration induced by western hegemonic colonialists. Using *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe tends to promote the Igbo tradition by portraying its cultural values and proudly presenting them to the outside world. This enriches his literary artistry and renders it a multifaceted narrative.

The researchers, in the current study, use *Things Fall Apart* as a case study and print media to analyse the cultural, social, and historical contexts of the Igbo people in relation to the insights into the concept of public relations within the specific Igbo society.

### **Empirical Review**

In his *Elements of Public Relations in Traditional African Societies*, Ufuophi-Biri (2021) shows the relationship between modern PR and traditional PR by exposing their common elements. He also reveals the elements of PR found in African societies but not in modern PR. The present study is related to the work of Ufuophu-Biri (2021) in the area of findings. For example, the two studies find similar elements of PR as practiced by the Igbo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The common elements are crisis management, entertainment of guests, conflict resolution, communication, festivals, information gathering, salutation, and inter-communal marriage. However, Ufuophu-Biri (2021) fails to provide a theoretical framework, methods, and data source for his work.

Adams et al. (2023) investigate how public relations can be applied in the promotion of socio-political inclusiveness in Nigeria. They anchor their investigation on situational crisis communication and social identity theories. Using existing literature as secondary data, the researchers study the need to incorporate certain individuals into society without stigmatisation and exclusion from cultural, social, political, and academic activities in Nigeria. The Girl4Tech initiative, Campaigns Against Persons with Disabilities, Ethnic Harmony Concert Series, among

others, are the variables tested for the study. The scholars find that there is institutional weakness hampering on effective public relations and the inclusion programmes. However, like this present study, Adams et al. (2023) find PR to be very effective in inclusion programmes in Nigeria and in addressing societal gaps.

Nwanmouh et al. (2025) study Public Relations Strategies and Harmful Cultural Practices Against Widows Among the Igbos in Nigeria. They use descriptive and inferential statistics to achieve the objectives and answer the research questions. Cognitive dissonance and media dependency are the theoretical underpinnings for the study. The study generates primary data from a sample of 400 selected respondents representing the five states of Igbo land (Imo, Anambra, Abia, Enugu, and Ebonyi). The multi-staged sampling techniques are used to select the samples for the study. Findings show that, although the potentials had not been fully maximised, public relations strategies have made a significant impact on the fight against harmful widowhood practices in Igbo land.

These harmful widowhood practices hamper effective public relations in Igbo society just like some of the obnoxious cultural practices in *Things Fall Apart* (e.g. wife battery, and bridal virginity oath before some fetish deity as seen in the marriage of Akueke, Obierika's daughter). The Igbo society grants husbands excess power over their wives so that most men treat their wives as slaves, or beat them up as they would their maids. This cultural and traditional bias in gender equality and human rights accords Okonkwo the impetus on several occasions to pummel his wives for negligible offences. For example, he beats up Ojiugo for not preparing lunch on time (pp. 23-24), and Ekwefi for cutting off a banana leaf to tie food (pp. 30-31).

## **Theoretical Review**

**Public Relations Theories:** The Public Relations theories that are relevant to the study include the Excellence and Systems Theories. The Excellence Theory proposes that effective PR practice should strive for excellence through the formation of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with the public using the two-way symmetrical communication (Indianfreenote, 2020). That is, the information and relationship should be balanced, not one-sided. In *Things Fall Apart*, we see relationships towing most relationships are not only cordial but balanced, for they are based on symbiotic interactions.

Okonkwo, for instance, offers Nwakibie a gift of palm-wine while the latter gives Okonkwo yam seeds for planting; Ikemefuna tells Nwoye better versions of folklore while Nwoye offers him

protection and an atmosphere that enables adaptation to his new home. On the contrary, the tenets of the Excellence Theory are flawed when we study the lifestyles of some characters like Okonkwo and Rev James Smith. These men are too fanatical to a fault so that they defend their cultural values with unimaginable unfriendliness and aggressions.

Systems theory views an organization as a system interacting with its social, cultural, and political environments. PR practitioners use this theory to monitor the environment, elicit feedback, and make adjustments to ensure that the organisation adapts and survives.

### **Bowen Family Systems Theory**

There is an inter-play between the Systems Theory and Bowen's Family Systems Theory. Both explore human behaviour and relationships by providing a scientific perspective of understanding human behaviour and dealing with human problems in the home and society. Instead of seeing the individual as an independent entity and the basic unit of treatment, “Bowen theory says that individual functioning should be understood in the context of their relationships or the environment that they are, in such as their families” (Family Institute, 2025).

In the study, the Igbo families or society is a system that monitors and interacts with its social, cultural, and political environments while making adjustments for adaptation and survival. We see this when Mbaino kills a daughter of Umuofia. This bloody act throws the people of Umuofia into melancholy. They send a message across to Mbaino, and expect positive feedback through Okonkwo. For peace to reign, Umuofia is “asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation” (pp. 9-10). Mbaino, preferring the latter truce option, acts accordingly, and peace returns.

**Literary Theory:** Oates (2021) recommends that in a study of this kind, the reader-response literary theory is relevant. The reader-response criticism is rooted in the belief that a reader's reaction to or interpretation of a text is as valuable a source of critical study as the text itself. This school of thought in literary criticism “shifts the focus from the author or text to the individual reader's experience in creating meaning” (Munarriz, 2023).

In the study, the reader-response subjectively offers the authors the opportunity to critically explore and interpret *Things Fall Apart* according to their personal experience for adequate meaning making. Hulatt and Freitas (2022, October 12) argue that the reader-response presents the reader or critic as an active audience who refuses to dwell only on the writer's perspective. It therefore enhances literary deconstruction.

The reader-response, however, is dysfunctional because it is too subjective to a fault. It may also dismiss the text's authorial intent, and may misrepresent the writer. Since the authors of this study are also readers of *Things Fall Apart*, they may have, through literary deconstruction and subjective analysis, dismissed or misrepresented the textual authorial intent.

## **Data Presentation**

**Research Objective 1:** To explore the principles Achebe employs in his narrative to promote effective public relations practice in the Igbo traditional society

Achebe achieves viable relationships, friendship, effective communication, and trust building through many public relations strategies and principles. These enhance the practice of public relations in the local setting by managing communication and relationships within the household and society to build trust, mutual understanding, and cooperation among family and clan members. The key approaches and principles that the narrator adopts are effective communication, relationship building, family meetings, community gatherings, and conflict resolution. Others are emotional intelligence, active listening, and the establishment of clear-cut boundary setting.

### **Effective communication Principle**

Effective communication in *Things Fall Apart* involves the use of oral tradition among the characters to exchange ideas, messages, information, and nonverbal cues between individuals or groups in a concise, clear, and understandable ways. It also involves active listening, message clarity, feedback, and common frame of reference to ensure mutual understanding, enforce cultural norms and values, and maintain social cohesion.

A close attention to the plot of the novel shows that there is effective communication between Nwoye and Ikemefuna, among Nwakibie's family members, and Okonkwo's wives. On the contrary, there is lack of effective communication between the colonial overlords (especially Rev James Smith) and the host communities. This situation arises due to the culture conflict in which Smith and his group destroy Umuofia social and cultural structures while imposing the western culture and Christian doctrines on the communities; and then things fall apart.

### **Relationship Building Principle**

Most of the characters in our sample foster positive relationships among family members (internal publics), the clansmen and the missionaries (external publics) by showing mutual

understanding, cordiality, appreciation, empathy, and support. Adaptation is also a means by which they associate in a friendly way with others. For example, we are told that, Ikemefuna, the slave boy, before now, is usually “very much afraid” (p. 22) in Okonkwo's house. In addition, we also learn that “he tried to run away, but he did not know where to begin” (p. 22). However, the same boy later builds a strong relationship with other members of Okonkwo's homestead, so that he begins “to feel like a member of Okonkwo's family” (p. 27) to the extent that “his own village was already becoming remote and vague in his imagination” (p.30). His best and closest confidant now is Nwoye and the duo have become so deeply absorbed in each other.

Furthermore, there is an informal relationship built between Ekwefi and her daughter, Ezinma. It makes the two of them to see each other as being involved in “the companionship of equals” (p.61). Again, Ezinma calls her mother by her name instead of *nne* - the Igbo appellation for “mother.” This is why Achebe explains that “the relationship between them was not only that of mother and child” (p. 61) but also two friends within the same age bracket. We also see relationship building and constant communication among spirits, deities, and ancestors. We are told that *Ani*, the goddess of fertility, is always “in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan...” (p. 29).

### **Conflict Resolution Principle**

In *Things Fall Apart*, there are strategies that help the people of Umuofia and other neighbouring communities to manage conflicts constructively. They do this by focusing on finding solutions rather than dwelling on everlasting blame on offenders and culprits. Okonkwo beats his wife Ekwefi on the holy week. By doing this, he has not only defiled the land but also offended the gods and his fellow natives. Ezeani (the priest) refuses to eat kola in Okonkwo's house because Ezeani accuses him of having “no respect for our gods and ancestors” (p.24). So, to resolve the conflict between *Ani* and the community, and the conflict between Okonkwo and the village, Ezeani mandates Okonkwo to appease *Ani*, the goddess, because “it was unheard-of to beat somebody during the sacred week” (p. 24).

It is known and believed in Umuofia that making troubles during the Week of Peace desecrates the land. Consequently, *Ani* will withdraw the fertility of the land and crops will cease to do well. This is the danger Okonkwo's uncontrolled anger will cause the people, if the gods are not propitiated. This is why Ezeani visits Okonkwo. He recommends the items (a she-goat, a hen, a piece of cloth, and one hundred cowries) that Okonkwo will bring to the shrine for the sacrifice.

The next day, with the provided items, Okonkwo goes to the shrine as ordered. The gods are appeased, the conflict resolved, and peace returns to the community.

Another instance of conflict resolution is in a village meeting when Okonkwo insults Osugo, his kinsman, calling him a “woman” because of Osugo’s unsuccessful endeavours in life. This vituperative insinuation results in a situation where not only Osugo but also the entire kinsmen oppose Okonkwo. To resolve the conflict, the kinsmen demonstrate their dissatisfaction with Okonkwo's scurrilous remark in two ways. First, everybody at the meeting takes sides with Osugo against Okonkwo. Second, they mount pressure on him and he is persuaded to tender apologies to Osugo. Regrettably, “Okonkwo said he was sorry for what he had said, and the meeting continued” (p.21)

Intra-personal crisis is another aspect of the conflict in the novel. An example is the frequent cycles of deaths and births of Ekwefi's children - a spiritual scenario about children described in the Igbo society as *ogbanje* (“evil cycle of birth and death”, p.62). This heartbreaking incident throws Ekwefi into traumatic intrapersonal crisis. This conflict is resolved when Ezinma, after so many rituals by her parents, passes the age of six and still remains alive.

Okonkwo is another character tormented by intra-personal conflict. He is constantly in mental and psychological battles with the thoughts of the following (i). the shame of his father's failure in life; (ii). his having a hand in Ikemefuna's murder; (iii) Nwoye's lackadaisical attitude towards becoming a man as well as his identification with the new religion; (iv). the conflict with the colonial administrators’ new religion (Christianity) and their political and economic policies; Okonkwo's open confrontation with the colonialists. Okonkwo's tragic demise ends his intra-personal crisis.

**Note:** The strategies used in the narrative to resolve conflicts are fully discussed under research objective 2.

### **Emotional Intelligence Principle**

This strategy leverages how the Igbo should recognize and manage one another's emotions to maintain a harmonious household and social environment. Ikemefuna the slave boy is very emotional at the beginning of his stay in Okonkwo's domicile. He is always “very much afraid” (p.22). However, it is only Nwoye and his mother that allay the fears and the emotional traumas of the lad until he adapts and takes the family as his own.

Nwoye is able to control Ikemefuna's emotions and traumas through closeness, soothing words, playing with him and cracking jokes, until "Ikemefuna had begun to feel like a member of Okonkwo's family" (p.27). This is how Nwoye is able to deal with Ikemefuna's "moments of sadness and depression" (p.28). By extension, the Igbo are equally advised to apply these functional public relations principle and strategy in their daily interactions with their fellows.

### **Empathetic Principle**

Empathy is an extension of emotional intelligence. We can manage and help to control other people's emotions through empathy. By being in other people's shoes and sharing their sorrows and pains, Igbos can manage and bring under control the pains and sorrows of their fellows. Mariama Ba writes in her *So Long a Letter* that "our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain." So, empathy is an indication of concern, love, and affection through association. For instance, Ezinma, Ekwefi's only child, joins her mother to cry when Okonkwo beats the woman black and blue for just cutting a leaf off a banana tree. Ezinma, by crying alongside the mother, allays Ekwefi's heavy emotion by sharing her tears, sorrows, and pains.

### **Family Meetings and Community Gatherings Principles**

Regular family or community rendezvous helps to create an avenue for using oral communication to settle disputes, discuss important issues, set goals, and make collective decisions. These kind of meetings are organised in Igbo land. For instance, Umuofia usually calls for meetings to deliberate on important issues, settle cases, and proffer solutions to problems. A town-crier tours the community announcing that all able-bodied men should "gather at the market-place tomorrow morning" (p. 8). In the gathering, Ogbuefi Ezeugo informs the representatives "how their daughter had gone to market at Mbaino and had been killed ... The crowd shouted with anger and thirst for blood" (p. 9). Suggestions are proffered, and a solution given.

In another instance, Umuofia elders gather to discuss the killing of Ikemefuna, the slave boy adopted by Okonkwo. In the gathering, it is agreed that Ikemefuna should be murdered, and that Okonkwo must have a hand in the killing of the poor lad. Another case of local gathering is the day the *egwugwu* and the community elders gather at the *ilo* (village square) to resolve the marital conflict between Uzowulu and Mgbafo. After hearing from both parties, the *egwugwu*

decides that Uzowulu should take palm-wine and other necessary items to beg his in-laws and his wife, Mgbafo.

Another instance of a peaceful gathering in Umuofia is during the occasion of marriage. The climax of the peaceful marriage proceedings is bride price negotiations during which the parties disagree to agree. This plays when Obierika's in-laws haggle with Obierika's kinsmen over Akueke's bride price. The haggling is not only full of fun but also a display of sound public relations that demonstrates that "marriage should be a play and not a fight" (p.58). In addition, all the activities during marriage ceremonies (including the bride-price negotiation) portray the fact that, in Igbo land, women are not sold out but given out in marriage.

### **Active Listening Principle**

Public Relations practice demands that people should be involved in active listening to understand each other's perspectives and feelings. Cuncic and Morin (2024, February 12) opine that active listening does not only make the other person feel heard and valued, but also helps you "build trust and understand other people's situations and feelings. In turn, this empowers you to offer support and empathy ... The goal is for the other person to be heard, validated, and inspired to solve their problems."

In our sample novel, Ezinma is known for her puerile inquisition so that she asks about everything, and seeks to know everything. On each occasion, Ekwefi and Okonkwo pay attention to her and give her a listening ear (pp. 32 & 36). They provide answers to her queries to satisfy her curiosity, understand her feelings, and solve her problems.

### **Appreciation, Gratitude, and Homage Principles**

Expression of gratitude and appreciation for each other's efforts and contributions is a way of practicing PR in Igbo land. Delfino (2024, December 13) defines appreciation, gratitude, and homage as the recognition of the value or quality of someone, often demonstrated through thanks and or gifts. Gratitude is explained as the feeling of being thankful and the readiness to mutually return kindness. Homage is a specific form of respect or admiration, typically expressed through public acts or statements, and is a deeper, more formal demonstration of public honour than simple appreciation or gratitude.

In Igbo society, appreciation, gratitude and homage are not only paid to human beings. They are also expressed to deities, ancestors, and the gods. For example, Okonkwo goes to the "medicine

house” or shrine, and there “he worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palmwine” (p. 12).

### **Principles of Reciprocal Gifts and Offers**

The Igbo society regards gifts and offers as signs of appreciation, love, care, and affection. They cement relationships, friendships, and solidify social interactions. Chielo, priestess of Agbala, usually buys gifts for Ezinma. Achebe clarifies that “quite often she bought bean-cakes and gave Ekwefi some to take home to Ezinma” (p.39). Okonkwo pays homage to Nwakibie and appreciates him in advance for the help he seeks from Nwakibie. He offers Nwakibie palm-wine while Nwakibie releases yam seeds to him for planting.

### **Boundary Setting Principle**

In Igbo land, boundaries are limits set to avoid undue trespass and interference, initiate division of labour and responsibilities. Among family members and clansmen, clear-cut boundaries are set to maintain respect and understanding. Boundaries should not be crossed to avoid trespass and infringement of others’ rights and freedom (Nwanmuoh et al., 2021; Reid & Smith, 2025, March 13).

### **Altruism, selflessness, and Concern Principles**

In traditional Igbo homes and society, polygamy is practiced and wives who build sound relationships and promote their image do not only care for their own biological children but also their co-wives' children. This is why Nwoye’s mother is not stingy with her food. She does not only feed her biological children but also the children of her co-wives. For example, Okonkwo comes home to see that “Ojiugo’s children were eating with the children of his first wife” (p.23). In addition to caring and resource sharing, co-wives with good PR in Igbo homes and society defend their mates against possible domestic brutality and harm. Nwoye’s mother is a typical example.

Nwoye's mother is worried about what will happen to Ojiugo who goes to plait her hair in her friend's house and fails to come back in time to prepare lunch for the family. Okonkwo comes back hungry. In his hunger, he asks after Ojiugo. Nwoye's mother, applying a selfless and altruistic approach, puts up a defense for Ojiugo by telling lies to Okonkwo to resolve a conflict that is about to ensue. However, “Okonkwo knew she was not speaking the truth” (p.23).

In addition, Ezinma, Ekwefi's only child, exhibits the spirit of concern and altruism when she joins her mother to cry after Okonkwo beats the woman black and blue for cutting a leaf off a banana tree. Ezinma, by crying alongside her mother, shares Ekwefi's tears, sorrows, and pains.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Achebe's principles and strategies to promote effective relationship, communication, mutual understanding and cooperation do not completely produce the desired results. Even when he adopts a mixture of approaches, the result was still a total fiasco. This is because his efforts are equally marred by his own choice of plot, diction, and characters. He achieves this by crafting a devastating portrayal of clash of cultures, social disintegration, and Okonkwo's hubris and harmatia that mirror his downfall and the collapse of the Igbo society.

Achebe succeeds presenting as cordial the relationship between Mr Brown and Umuofia. But following the introduction of Reverend James Smith, "a different kind of man" and Mr. Brown's successor, things begin to fall apart more than they have already fallen under Mr. Brown.

James Smith "condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation" (p.147). James Smith holds a binary but polarised thought or opinion of everything. So, "he saw things as black and white. And black was evil" (p.147). Invariably, he believes that the traditional Igbo people are evil and agents of Satan because they are "black". But is Satan really black? It may be that James Smith is not describing Satan's completion here but his evil activities are what he intends to reveal as "black". But are Africans really evil?

Furthermore, through his belligerent idiosyncrasy, Rev James Smith also defiles Achebe's efforts to establish viable PR through cordial relationship, mutual understanding and effective communication between the host (Umuofia) and the missionaries. James Smith believes that the world - including Umuofia - is a battlefield and, therefore, "the children of light" (Christians) must fight to destroy "the sons of darkness" (i.e. (traditionalists)). So, with the foregoing hostile belief system held by James Smith coupled with the people's resistance, peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, friendship, and effective communication, completely disappear. What finally results is the disintegration and destruction of social order and traditional institutions.

However, the coming of the missionaries such as Rev James Smith to Igbo land should not always be misconstrued as destructive to the already existing culture and tradition of the people. Christianity and colonialism are not only destructive but they are also constructive. For instance, the traditional and cultural practices destroyed and jettisoned by the missionaries are mostly

those they believe are obnoxious and unsafe for human consumption. It is true that, in doing so, the baby is thrown out with the bath water.

Al-Ghammaz (2025) opines that the “arrival of the Europeans with their Christianity and culture marks the cancellation of the various rituals of Igbo”. In his argument, Uchegbue (2010), in a more articulated and balanced argument, counters or, better still, modifies Al-Ghammaz’s assertion. Uchegbue (2010, p.164) strongly believes that “they are either lost, given up, forgotten or being increasingly neglected while some are being reinterpreted, partially preserved, and absorbed in or interpolated with Christianity”.

The obnoxious traditional practices in Umuofia that Christianity fights against are those presumed harmful to human life; for example human sacrifice, human enslavement, killing of twins, and worshipping of (blood-thirsty) idols (e.g. the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves which orders the killing of Ikemefuna). Ikemefuna is “a lad of fifteen and a young virgin” (p.10) and a victim of slavery used as a peace deal collateral to Umuofia. Even after “Ikemefuna had begun to feel like a member of Okonkwo's family” (p.27), and despite the stern warning Ogbuefi Ezeudu issues to Okonkwo that “that boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death” (p.45), Okonkwo still goes ahead to kill Ikemefuna according to the bloody recommendation of the oracle.

Gifts and offers have been mentioned as a way of expressing appreciation, love and caring. However, they have their social dysfunctions. Paranjape (nd) has observed that in gifting, the receiver may be inundated with irrelevant gifts that have no relation to his/her needs at that moment thereby leading to extravagance and unnecessary spending of money and lavishing of resources. For instance, during New Yam Festivals, food is lavishly wasted that “no matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relations they invited from neighbouring villages, there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day” (p.29).

The funny exaggeration is that in-laws and friends have handshakes over a mountain of foo-foo a wealthy man presents to his guests. The question is whether these gluttonous gormandizers can afford to present a commensurate foo-foo when it gets to their turn? This is where reciprocity in gift exchange becomes difficult.

In addition, gifts and offers can place financial burdens and reciprocity pressures on the recipients, making them believe that

They are really indebted to the givers. Givi (2021) wonders “whether givers accurately assess how uncomfortable recipients feel when they fail to reciprocate a giver's gift for a reciprocatory occasions.”

Furthermore, many social relationship and gift experts (Givi, 2021; Liu, 2023) have argued that gifts and offers may elicit bias and imbalance in judgment and truncate the process of justice. Okonkwo's personal achievements and social status influence how some Umuofians perceive his wrongs and excesses. Ezeani refuses to be intimidated by this negative influence. So, when Okonkwo defiles the Week of Peace by beating his wife, Ezeani pays him a visit to chide him, impose some fine on him, and recommend the propitiation rituals. He refuses to eat the kola nut Okonkwo presents to him. He simply orders Okonkwo to “take away your kola nut. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors” (p.24).

**Research Objective 2:** To analyse the public relations strategies that Achebe employs for conflict resolution and management in the novel.

Public Relations is a veritable instrument for conflict resolution. It achieves this by fostering clear communication, rebuilding damaged reputations, and addressing stakeholder concerns proactively to maintain organizational harmony. Empirical studies (Kaleem, 2022; Nwanmuoh et al., 2021) have indicated that PR is used to resolve conflict in organisations, families, and society. To effectively resolve a conflict, public relations practitioners must first find out the root cause of the dispute because a problem known is half-solved. The next step is to think of the best approach to adopt having known the causal factors.

Public relations practitioners use various strategies to resolve conflicts. Some of the strategies, according to Nwanmuoh et al. (2021), are constructive dialogue, collaboration, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and mixed strategies.

### **Constructive dialogue Strategy**

This is a powerful strategy for conflict resolution and it reflects Igbo governance before the colonial intrusion and disruption of the established social order. Elders of Umuofia and other neighbouring communities apply constructive dialogue to resolve issues and restore mutual understanding, peace and tranquility in society. Umuofia community uses constructive dialogue to restore harmony in the land when Okonkwo, in his usual uncontrollable anger, defiles the Week of Peace by beating his wife.

In the constructive dialogue, Ezeani reminds Okonkwo that “you are not a stranger in Umuofia. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour ... You have committed a great evil” (p.24). So, to restore social order, Okonkwo is persuaded to carry out rituals and sacrifices. And he must respect traditions, institutions, and elders.

### **Negotiation Strategy**

In this strategy, two or more people, though they may have varied opinions, are involved in the bargaining process for a generally accepted ground. This approach is used in resolving the conflict between Umuofia and Mbaino. The two communities have varied opinions on whether Mbaino, for killing a daughter of Umuofia, will release Ikemefuna as a collateral slave to Umuofia or going into war with them. In the end, Mbaino prefers releasing Ikemefuna to going into war.

### **Mediation Strategy**

Using this approach to resolve crises, a nonpartisan, unbiased third party known as the mediator must come between the conflicting parties. Mediation assumes two aspects in the novel: spiritual and physical. In the spiritual aspect, a priest stands between the gods and the offending or afflicted mortals. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala and the priest of Ani (the custodian of the earth goddess) are the two major go-betweens communicating with divinities, deities and oracles on behalf of the people. On certain occasions, ordinary individuals become go-betweens suing for peace from the gods on behalf of the family members. Okonkwo goes to his personal shrine “where he kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children” (p.12).

Furthermore on spiritual mediation, masquerades are also public relations experts that play important roles in conflict resolution. As the spirits of the ancestors, masquerades (the masked *egwugwu*) go abroad from antholes to settle cases. For instance, the nine *egwugwu* from the nine villages of Umuofia mediate in the marital crisis between Uzowulu and his escapee wife, Mgbafo. In their resolution, Evil Forest, the head of the *egwugwu*, instructs Uzowulu to “go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman” (p.75). On the other hand, Evil Forest advises Odukwe, Mgbafo’s elder brother, to kindly accept the wine and allow his sister to go with her husband.

The *egwugwu* also mediates in land disputes. As soon as the settlement of the marital issue between Uzowulu and Mgbafo is over, the nine *egwugwu* switch over to “a great land case” (p.75)

Physical mediation involves human actors meddling in the crises of fellow humans with a view to preferring solutions. Okonkwo insults Osugo by branding him a woman because luck is against Osugo making him unsuccessful in life. Since “Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit” (p.21), he selects “woman” as the most descriptive lexical unit to mock him. All the people around immediately come in to meditate in the matter until Okonkwo apologises.

### **Arbitration Strategy**

This involves the use of a neutral party who is empowered to judge by listening to both sides of the the conflicting parties as they table their cases. Decisions made are binding. In this method, one party wins while the other party loses. A compensation may be recommended for the winner and a fine against the loser. For example, in the case between Okonkwo and Osugo, all the people present in the meeting are the neutral arbiters. They ensure that Okonkwo is made to understand his guilt and, therefore, persuaded to redress. Okonkwo, being the loser, pays the fine of “sorry” to his victim.

In the marital crisis between Uzowulu and Mgbafo, the nine *egwugwu* representing the ancestral spirits of the nine clans, are the neutral arbiters. They find Uzowulu guilty of wife battery and, therefore, ask him to “go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman” (p.75). Immediately after the settlement of the marital chaos, “a serious land case begins” and the *egwugwu* is again ready to arbitrate.

### **Mixed Methods Strategy**

This strategy incorporates more than one approach to resolve a conflict. This strategy is demonstrated in the cases below:

Achebe adopts collaboration, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and mixed strategies to resolve the conflicts that arise in the novel. He also includes community involvement and oracular consultation strategies in the settlement of the conflicts in his narrative. In certain cases, more than one strategy is used to resolve civil wrongs or social issues. The people of Umuofia consult Agbala (oracle) “when they had a dispute with their neighbours” (p. 13). Unoka, Okonkwo's father, visits the oracle to resolve the misfortune he has with the gods of crop productivity.

In most cases, before oracular consultations in which the chief priest or priestess is the mediator playing the middleman, Umuofia will first consult the elders and priests of shrines. The combination of these sources and authorities usually produces potent synergy.

Community involvement and negotiation are applied in the resolution of the conflict between Umuofia and Mbaino. Umuofia elders demonstrate the importance of negotiation and compromise in resolving conflicts within the community. The wisdom and authority of the elders help to mediate the conflict and find a solution that works for all parties. Umuofia community gathers following the town-crier's announcement the previous night. In the gathering, Ogbuefi Ezeugo informs the people that Mbaino people have killed a daughter of Umuofia. In that melancholy, they unanimously agree "to follow the normal course of action" (p. 9). Therefore, Okonkwo should go to Mbaino "asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation" (p. 10). Mbaino chooses the latter option. They prefer peace to war probably because they cannot defeat Umuofia in a war, or they have better public relations. Whichever be the case, the two communities are collaboratively involved in the settlement of their dispute.

Furthermore, the negotiations between Umuofia community and British colonizers (e.g. Smith and Brown) end in a total fiasco. No party agrees to drop their culture for another. Colonialists impose their culture on Umuofia and they (Umuofia) refuse to imbibe it completely. They therefore defend and prefer the Igbo culture to a foreign one. However, the failed negotiations between the village and the British colonizers demonstrate the importance of attempting to find a peaceful resolution to conflicts through dialogue and negotiation.

On the day of Akueke's marriage, like in every other Igbo community, there are normal haggling on the quantity of drinks, materials, and amount payable as bride price. To resolve the argument, conflict resolution strategies (negotiation, mediation, collaboration, arbitration) are employed. For the bride price, Obierika presents Ibe and Ukegbu a handful of thirty broomsticks. Ukegbu and his people go out "to whisper together" (p. 57) as tradition demands. They return fifteen but Obierika and his people make it twenty broomsticks representing twenty bag of cowries. Obierika, suing for understanding and a peaceful negotiation, admits that "marriage should be a play not a fight" (p.58). Marriage in Umuofia is always peaceful while that of Umunso lacks negotiation, arbitration, and mediation; so, "it always leads to a quarrel" (p.58). Nwabude (2022) quips that in Igbo land, "the settlement of bride-price is pervaded by humorous spirit and it involves no harshness or cantankerous bargaining of any kind."

## **Social Responsibility Strategy**

In *Things Fall Apart*, social responsibility is also a public relations strategy adopted by the Igbo natives to help them engage in positive social behaviours and contribute to the peace and welfare of their community thereby ensuring that the Igbo society is a better place to live in. Social responsibility reveals that the characters in the novel, as Igbo natives, have a moral obligation to promote general gain than personal gain and to behave in a way that benefits others.

The white missionaries on their part, teach their converts morals that will make them socially responsible. Mr. Brown adopts compromise and accommodation as social responsibility and conflict resolution strategies. In addition, there is collective efforts for community work such as cleaning a village square, building church and mending the walls of Okonkwo's *obi* (court) with the help of Nwoye and Ikemefuna.

To portray social responsibility as a relationship builder and conflict resolution technique, we should also consider the *egwugwu*, “the spirits of the ancestors” (p.71). They are really masquerades that resolve conflicts without looking for personal gain from the settlement. The *egwugwu* do not only resolve the marital dispute between Uzowulu and Mgbafo but they also teach the couple to be socially responsible - not quarrelling, fighting, and divorcing.

Again, we also see social responsibility at work when Okonkwo is exiled to his motherland the community provides for him and his family, demonstrating their social responsibility and support for each other. Another element of social responsibility is mutual support. It is a symbiotic and reciprocated gesture that involves a give-and-take relationship. For example, Okonkwo takes kola nuts and palm-wine to Nwakibie while the latter offers him four hundred pieces of yam for planting.

## **Community Participation and Resource Sharing Strategy**

All the men of Umuofia community come out in their numbers to participate in the New Yam Festival. In like manner, in the traditional Igbo society, all the natives come together to participate in festivals. This communal spirit is an evidence of oneness, unity, peace, and love. Again, in Igbo communities, there is equitable distribution and sharing of resources among the people. For instance, during New Yam Festivals in Umuofia, there is exchange of food, drinks and gifts among family members, kinsmen, in-laws, friends and well-wishers.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The strategies used in resolving conflicts in *Things Fall Apart* paint a picture on the fact that there is no perfect method without a weakness. Mvingi and Spence (2025) agree that “facilitated dialogue can provide a platform for parties to, at the very least, hear each other and get to know what the other’s concerns, hurts and desires are. It may even open the way to negotiation and mediation. But it too is fraught with challenges and dysfunctions”. They also add that “parties may have no interest in hearing the other or engaging with them. Even when parties do participate, they may do so for tactical reasons rather than commitment to resolution and furthermore dialogue takes a long time.”

To handle the above problem during constructive dialogue, negotiation, mediation, or arbitration, we suggest that if the merits seem larger than the demerits, then the strategy is adjudged feasible and adopted. Let us briefly look at the other sides of the strategies adopted by Umuofia in their attempt to resolve the social and civil conflicts that occur in their community.

According to People Potential (2025, April 14) and Roper (2004), there is usually the possibility of cognitive biases such as *fundamental attribution error* in the strategies Umuofia and other neighbouring communities adopt to resolve crises. Fundamental attribution error doctrine holds that the dialoguing parties may assume negative intent in offenders thereby imputing serious guilt on them. This is usually based on wrong interpretation of action and intention. In certain cases, the intention of the offender may be misunderstood, overstretched or taken farther than normal. For instance, Okonkwo's actions may not always represent his true intentions.

Achebe describes the situation well when he narrates that “Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children” (p.11). Having stated Okonkwo's cruel action in his house, Achebe recognises that “perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man” (p.11). This misrepresentation may have been applied to judge Okonkwo when he mistakenly calls Osugo a woman.

Conflict resolution does not support the use of violence and radicalism. This is where the traditional Igbo society and the culture of the white man get it wrong. The *egwugwu* (a masked representative of ancestral spirits) may choose to adopt a radical and reprisal approach while resolving certain conflicts. This is seen in the case when “Enoch touched off the great conflict between church and clan in Umuofia ...” (p.148). Enoch’s fanaticism pushes him into unmasking one of the *egwugwu*, which is abroad on a particular Sunday. To pacify the wrath of the gods and

placate the anger of the spirits of the ancestors, “the band of *egwugwu* moved like a furious whirlwind to Enoch's compound and with machet and fire reduced it to a desolate heap”(p.150). Afterwards, the *egwugwu* also sets the white man's “shrine” (i.e. church) on fire.

Furthermore, conflict resolution through dialogic negotiations can go wrong especially when it is built on pretentious intentions. For instance, the District Commissioner (DC), upon his return, summons the six elders of Umuofia to a meeting to discuss “what happened during my absence” (p.154). The D.C deceives them that “I have been told a few things but I cannot believe them until I've heard your own side. Let us talk about it like friends and find a way of ensuring that it does not happen again” (p.154). With the foregoing luring sweet-tongued expression, the six elders seem happily relaxed for the “peaceful negotiation.” The elders, through Ogbuefi Ekwueme, narrate to the D.C “how Enoch murdered an *egwugwu*.”

The six elders are not aware that the D.C has already arranged his men to seize them. Contrary to the elders' expectation, the negotiation turns tragic and becomes retaliatory. The elders are arrested, handcuffed, detained, starved, flogged, hair roughly razor-shaved, and fined two hundred to two hundred and fifty bags of cowries (pp.155-156). The court messengers purposely add the extra fifty bags as their own. Alternatively, it is threatened that failure to provide the fine the elders will be taken “to Umuru before the big white man, and be hanged” (p.156). The town crier with his *ogene* (metal gong) tours every nook and cranny of the town announcing an emergency meeting of “every man in Umuofia” (p.156) the following morning for the collection and payment of the fine.

**Research Objective 3:** To explore the role of culture and tradition in public relations and relationship fostering in the Igbo traditional society.

The Igbo culture encourages effective public relations while discouraging poor relationships. As seen in *Things Fall Apart*, sound relationship, reputation building, and image management are promoted through various cultural practices, and they are discussed below. However, culture and tradition have both positive and negative impacts for public relations in the novel in particular and Igbo homes and society in general. Two cultures (local and foreign) are portrayed in the narrative. Each of the cultures displays both a constructive (positive) and damaging (negative) effects for public relations practice in Igbo society.

### **New Yam Festival**

The culture of Igbo society plays a role in relationship and reputation building. Though Umuofia is an imaginary locale, it represents a typical Igbo community. The New Yam Festival is a cultural celebration in Umuofia when Ani, the earth goddess of fertility, is venerated and extolled for a bountiful yam harvest. But this appreciation to *Ani* is not the crux of the public relations through cultural ethos. The main issue is that the New Yam Festival brings together to a feast family members, friends, well-wishers, in-laws, and neighbours. They eat, drink, communicate, and interact in endless euphoria, build relationships, make new friends, and cement old ones. Okonkwo has three wives and, consequently, “his guests would make a fairly big crowd” (p. 30).

### **Presentation and Breaking of Kola Nut**

The kola nut, among other benefits, represents acceptance and friendship in Igbo land. There is no local ceremony that the kola nut is not present - marriage, burial, new yam festival, chieftaincy title, coronation, When kola nut is presented to a visitor, it shows that he is welcome and his presence highly regarded. For instance, on his visit to Unoka, Okoye is given kola nut. Accepting the wooden disc that contains the kola nut, Okoye quips that “he who brings kola brings life” (p.5).

In Igbo society, prayers are offered to the gods before kola nut is broken and eaten. In addition to the ceremony that brings people together and the presentation of kola nut, relationship and friendship are also promoted through the prayers offered before kola nut is broken.

On the day of the marriage of Akueke, Obierika's daughter, he presents kola nut to his in-laws, and his elder brother prays for “life to all of us ... and let there be friendship between your family and ours” (p.93). The aspect of his prayer where he mentions “friendship” is very relevant to public relations in Igbo society.

Furthermore, during the great famine, all the flying animals are invited to the sky for a feast. The first thing that their host presents before them is kola nut. This is not only a demonstration of friendship or welcome but it also signifies that their presence is highly valued. It therefore follows that, in Igbo traditional society, kola nut is not only highly regarded in the land of mortals but also in the pantheon of spirits and animal kingdom.

If friendship is built on the foundation of understanding, then the prayer made by the oldest man among Obierika's in-laws is very significantly relevant. The old man prays that since there is unwavering understanding between the two families, and his mother comes from Obierika's

family-line, they should continue to intermarry “because you understand us and we understand you” (p.94).

### **The Egwugwu**

The role of the *egwugwu* in dispute resolution: The *egwugwu* is a group of masked elders representing the “spirits of the ancestors” (p. 71), and it is “the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan” (p. 71). The authority and wisdom of the *egwugwu* demonstrate the importance of respected mediators in negotiation. The *egwugwu* plays a crucial role in resolving marital issues, land disputes, and negotiating settlements for all kinds of cases in Umuofia. It is therefore a public relations agent for peace and conflict resolution. The settlement of the case between Uzowulu and Mgbafo is a typical example.

Uzowulu frequently beats his wife, Mgbafo, and, as a result, she picks her children and runs to her father's house. He demands his bride price to end the marriage. Odulukwe (Mgbafo's brother) and his people refuse to release the bride price to Uzowulu. The *egwugwu* looks into the matter without bias. Through Evil Forest, leader of the *egwugwu*, it resolves that Uzowulu should “go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you” (p. 75). This is because “it is not bravery when a man fights with a woman” (p. 75). Evil Forest instructs Odulukwe to accept Uzowulu's drink and allow Mgbafo to follow her husband.

### **Ancestral Worship, Consultation, and Propitiation**

Worship and propitiation of ancestors are cultural practices that promote relationship between the living and the dead, and among the gods. The gods are appeased during cases of defilement and also when the gods need special sacrifices. Appeasing the gods or deities during periods of defilement or desecration is not a superstition but a cultural practice aimed at calming the wraths of the gods, deities, and ancestral spirits. According to the recommendations of Ezeani, the chief priest, for defiling the land by beating his wife on the Week of Peace, Okonkwo must propitiate *Ani*, the goddess of fertility. Failure to do so, *Ani* will automatically withdraw the land's productivity and render the earth impotent for crops.

### **Respect, Payment of Homage and Gifting**

Respect and homage for elders is also a cultural practice in Umuofia in particular and Igbo land in general. Okonkwo visits Nwakibie with kola nuts and palm-wine to pay him homage because “a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness” (p. 15). This show of

respect and payment of homage does not only build and strengthen the relationship between Okonkwo and Nwakibie but it also attracts favour to Okonkwo. Nwakibie does not waste time to promise that “I shall give you twice four hundred yams” (p. 17). He therefore instructs farmOkonkwo to “go ahead and prepare your ” (p. 17).

Chielo the Agbara priestess always “bought bean-cakes and gave Ekwefi some to take home to Ezinma” (p.39). In *Things Fall Apart*, gifts are presented to recipients as a sign of love, goodwill, support, and relationship fortification. At times, offers are balanced through reciprocity as seen between Okonkwo and Nwakibie.

### **Peaceful Coexistence**

Living in peace with one's family members and kinsmen without quarrels and misunderstanding is a public relations strategy that helps Umuofia especially during the Week of Peace. Ezeani, the chief priest, describes the Week of Peace as “a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows ...” (p. 24). During the holy week, Umuofia natives try as much as possible to avoid offence making and offence taking. However, out of Okonkwo's tragic flaw (i.e. uncontrollable anger) he desecrates the sacrosanct Week of Peace by beating one of his wives black and blue. He pays dearly for going contrary to the peace-seeking traditional observance. In Igbo communities, every week or day is holy because peaceful coexistence is a daily expectation as weeks or days are never polarised into peace and conflict.

### **Industry, Dignity of Labour, and Personality Traits**

Culture also plays a significant role in the promotion of public relations by encouraging the people to be industrious and eschew indolence. Many characters in *Things Fall Apart* are known for their hard work while others (such as Unoka, Okonkwo's father) are full of laziness. Respect for and promotion of hard work is a norm in Umuofia as well as in Igbo culture. Okonkwo, Nwakibie and some other characters are very industrious and they achieve success and build their reputation through personal efforts.

Okonkwo's fame and reputation, for instance, rest on "solid personal achievements", (p.3). He is not only a productive farmer but also an invincible wrestler “who had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat” (p.3). In Igbo society, one can build his public image and improve his reputation through the virtue of hard work.

However, further polarisation of the characters in *Things Fall Apart* throws more light on the level of public relations practice among Igbo natives. The polarisation and binary representation of the characters reveal their true behavioural patterns and personality traits. Indolent natives such as Unoka are offensive, useless, and they possess poor social image. Unoka has a penchant for borrowing but not for paying back, and this habit mars his relationship with others and chatters his reputation in Umuofia community.

Okonkwo is respected outside his home only because of his personal achievement and bravery, not his character. He has no friendly mien. Okonkwo's tragic flaw is hubris - a disposition that makes his personal achievement to enter into his head so that he becomes unnecessarily full of himself, arrogant, overconfident, and he treats other with disregard and contempt. At home, Okonkwo's household cannot have free conversations with him. He does not allow them the opportunity. He treats his wives as slaves and beats them up at the slightest offence. So, whenever Okonkwo is around, his family fearfully withdraws into its shell. It is said that "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his feary temper, and so did his little children" (p.11).

Okonkwo is only better than his father, Unoka, in industry. If not, both do not possess proper public relations principles. Obierika, Nwakibie and Nwoye possess the effective communication approaches that build their reputation, friendship, trust, and effective communication. Again, Mr. Brown's public relations is built on respect, accommodation and compromise while his successor, Rev James Smith, adopts a confrontational approach thereby causing cultural disruption.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Having seen the various perspectives of the Igbo culture through which public relations can be promoted, we also deem it necessary to expose the other side of the divide. There are many obnoxious cultural practices that destroy effective public relations in Igbo land, and they are discussed below.

The Igbo society operates along a patriarchal divide that confers much power on men against women, especially husbands against their wives. This bestowment of excess power on husbands subjects their wives to battery and all kinds of connubial maltreatments in the home.

Okonkwo hides under the patriarchal hegemonic power conferred on him by obnoxious culture and tradition to beat his wives black and blue. For example, Ojiugo goes to plait her hair without

cooking “the afternoon meal” (p. 23) for her husband and her children. She returns late to receive the beating of her life. Okonkwo does not mind if it is the sacrosanct Week of Peace, and “he beat her very heavily” (pp. 23-24).

On another occasion, Okonkwo pours his anger on Ekwefi (his second wife) simply because she cuts a banana leaf to wrap food. In a bid to defend the banana tree and attack the woman, “Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping” (p. 30). After the beating, Okonkwo decides to go hunting and demands that Ikemefuna should get him his gun. Ekwefi murmurs that his gun never shoots. Okonkwo angrily picks the loaded gun and aims at the direction of the wife who, by this time, has already run away. That is how the bullets miss her. So, patriarchal asymmetric relationship in the Igbo society introduces an imbalance in marital rights and freedoms.

Furthermore, Umuofia does not only involve itself in the enslavement of human beings, especially war captives, but also kill them as sacrificial animals to their gods. Ikemefuna is a slave boy from Mbaino who is a victim of an obnoxious cultural practice that reduces him not only as a scape goat but also collateral and an unfortunate exchange for the murdered daughter of Umuofia by Mbaino warriors.

The act of sacrificing human beings to the gods in Igbo cultural society is heavily criticised by the European colonialists who believe that the Igbo are barbaric and uncivilised. Ek and Posey (2023) reveal that “the values and beliefs of the Igbo people ... collide with the turn of the century European Christian missionaries' ideas of what it means to be civilized”. For example, in the judgment of the European colonial masters, Okonkwo appears barbaric for killing Ikemefuna, even after he has started “to feel like a member of Okonkwo's family” (p. 27).

However, this paper argues that the phenomenon of human sacrifice is not peculiar to the Igbo culture because even the Holy Book (the Bible) introduced by the colonial masters also tells the story of Abraham sacrificing his only son, Isaac. We therefore argue that the same way the god of the new religion demands that Abraham should sacrifice Isaac for him is the same way the god of the old religion (Igbo tradition) demands that Umuofia should sacrifice Ikemefuna. In all, human sacrifice takes away human life by reducing the victim to a mere animal. It also destroys human dignity thereby corroborating the veracity of *homo homini lupus* (literarily translated as *man is a beast to man*).

## **Summary**

We have proven that Public Relations is not only a corporate affair. The data gathered for the study and the analysis indicate that public relations, through sustainable reputation, mutual understanding, and cordial relationship is established in any place where human beings are found - the home, society and corporations.

Pinned on the frameworks of Public Relations (PR) and reader-response literary theory, three research objectives guide the study. The researchers focus on exploring the principles Achebe employs in his narrative to promote effective public relations in the Igbo traditional society; analysis of PR principles that Achebe employs for conflict resolution and management; and the role of culture and tradition in public relations and relationship fostering in the Igbo traditional society.

Through thematic coding and subjective analysis, the following PR principles are found and coded: altruism, selflessness, and concern; appreciation, gratitude and homage; reciprocal gifts and offers, active listening, family meetings and community gatherings, relationship building, conflict resolution principle, and emotional intelligence. Again, the principles that Achebe employs for conflict resolution and management are

Constructive dialogue, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, Community participation and resource sharing, social responsibility, and mixed methods are the strategies adopted to resolve conflicts in Umuofia and its neighbours.

Finally, we also expose that both the culture of the new religion and the cultures and traditions of the Igbo are both constructive and destructive at the same time to public relations practice. Even though these cultures and traditions promote PR to some extent, some of the practices and tenets destroy effective communication, mutual understanding, human rights, human sanctity, cordial relationships, sound reputation, and peaceful coexistence.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends as follows:

- 1). The Igbo literary artists and journalists should endeavour to use their writing as a weapon to criticise and condemn the aspects of the Igbo culture and tradition that promote human rights abuse, destroy human sanctity, genuine interpersonal relationship, mutual understanding, effective communication, and displace the cultural reputation of the Igbo.

- 2). The Igbo society, the stakeholders, elders, family heads and the parties involved should adopt mixed methods (e.g. constructive dialogue, negotiation, mediation, arbitration).
- 3). The Igbo literary authors and journalists should endeavour to use the three genres of literature (prose, drama, poetry) and the print media (offline and online platforms) respectively to promote the cultural and social reputation of the Igbo before the external public or world.

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