THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG OKIJA PEOPLE

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Abstract
Similar to the concept of culture, resolving disagreements is also a way of life. Prior to colonial rule and the establishment of a regular court system in Nigeria, Okija had a method of dispute settlement that was deemed simple, inexpensive, and amicable. Therefore, the specific objective of the study was to identify traditional institutions for conflict resolution in the Okija peace processes among Okija people in Ihiala local government area of Anambra state. Purposive sampling method was adopted to select four community leaders or chiefs from each of the four communities that covered the study location, making a total sample size of 16 for the study. The selection of the leaders was based on their expertise in Okija's traditional dispute resolution procedures and institutions. A qualitative technique, the in-depth interview, was used in the study to garner the primary data. The study found that the traditional institutions for conflict resolution included the Ezi (the family), Okpara (elders), Umunna (men who are born into the clan), Umuada (women who were born into a clan), or NdiInyom (married women), Amala (the council of elders), Traditional Religious Approach (OgwugwuAkpu, OgwugwuMiri, Urashi, Akpunama, Osuajana), Secret societies, or the Masquerades. This study recommended the greater inclusion of these traditional institutions in conflict resolution among people instead, as they are closer to people at the grassroots than the formal institutions for conflict resolution in the contemporary period..

Introduction
The vast majority of institutions of conflict resolution are deficient in their ability to engage in conflict whenever it presents itself. Even in areas where such mechanisms are available, the inefficient methods are unable to provide any assistance in the handling of intricate situations (Osimen& Rufus, 2021). In addition, there are not enough people who meet the requirements to act as resource persons for the many conflict management tasks that need to be completed (Bekelcha&Sefera, 2019). The majority of conflicts that have occurred within communities have been caused by internal difficulties, resulting in the halting or failure of numerous community development initiatives. Underdevelopment and poverty both worsen when communities cannot afford to manage their internal problems properly. Peace is crucial to the successful implementation of initiatives and the continuation of development.

More so, the key to achieving peace in Nigeria is healing damaged relationships and restoring equilibrium. The elder's capacity to achieve consensus and make decisions publicly in front of the community lays the foundation for mending broken relationships. The community's role in the conflict is that of a witness, and the community has a moral obligation to uphold the elders' choices (Osimen & Rufus, 2021). However, in contrast, colonisation, interference from the

government, among others, has over time posed challenges to the contribution of elders towards conflict management. During Nigeria's colonial era, the country's traditional beliefs and techniques for sustaining peace were deemed outmoded and obsolete (Sogade, 2016). They imposed Western peace and peacemaking ideals and tactics, such as "surrender and redemption," and formally recorded peace treaties, which led to the invasion and looting of indigenous peoples and their resources. The colonial powers' lack of cultural awareness was the reason for imposing these views and practices. They left off the understanding that maintaining peace in traditional societies is predicated on the moral necessity of communicating across cultural divides. This is due to the fact that excellent communication is one of the most crucial components in healing a conflict-damaged relationship. In the process of dispute settlement, Nigeria's traditional community is more concerned with the necessity for continuing connection(Aliwa, 2019). This is in stark contrast to the "one-time exchange" prevalent in modern court conflict settlement practice. To make sure people live and society grows, it's important to fix broken connections and create a healthy balance.

It is well known that the Igbo, like all pre-colonial African societies, had hidden secrets of peace-making and conflict resolution within their customs and traditions prior to colonial invasion and the introduction of Christianity (Ezenwoko&Osagie, 2014). While Igbo society was not always peaceful, it did have well-structured social and political institutions that made it easier to resolve disputes in the period before colonisation. It was the Igbo people's pre-colonial governmental structure that allocated responsibilities in society to everyone: elderly and young, men and women of title and common, as well as men and women of wealth and privilege. The conventions and traditions that must be observed in order to control human activities such as cohabitation, family relationships, and community interactions serve as the foundation for maintaining peace and order. People's traditions and cultures provide an avenue for conflict resolution when an individual's or a community's peace is threatened. Tensions and open physical battles have erupted at many points in history, including now (Ugochukwu, 2006). Property disputes, inheritance, marriage, religion, and cultural activities are some of the concerns that cause widespread misunderstanding among people, families, and communities (Umezurike, 2016). Thus, this study investigated the traditional methods and institutions of conflict resolution, with a particular emphasis on the Igbo traditional technique of conflict resolution, especially among Okija People in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria.

Research question
What are the traditional institutions of conflict resolution among Okija people in the Ihiala local government area of Anambra State?

Research objective
The objective of this study was to examine traditional institutions of conflict resolution among Okija People in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria.

Literature
Resolution of a conflict is the process by which two or more parties involved in a disagreement come to an amicable agreement on how to proceed (Rafferty, 2017). The techniques and processes that are used to bring about a peaceful resolution of conflict are important. Also included is the use of peaceful resistance by conflicted parties in an effort to support a successful resolution of the conflict. In African society, the overarching purpose of dispute resolution was to maintain and encourage peaceful cohabitation among and amongst members of the community at all levels of

society. Conflict is an inherent feature of all human societies (Ezenwoko & Osagie, 2014). Conflict is certain to arise whenever two or more individuals are gathering in one interaction or another. Conflicts, in most instances, arise as a result of ideological, political, social, and economic differences, which typically manifest themselves through rivalry and competition. Conflict resolution is the process of restoring social harmony through the repair of broken social links, the performance of rituals, and the delivery of apologies or reparations in order to restore the status quo prior to the conflict. Pre-colonial Igbo society cannot be claimed to be distinct, as people and communities interacted in one way or another, a scenario that occasionally resulted in violence (Ezenwoko and Osagie, 2014). Igbo peace academics agree on the reasons for conflict in Igbo territory, which include marital, inheritance, chieftaincy, land, and territorial boundary disputes.

The struggle for and possession of land has always been the primary source of strife in Igbo traditional society. Not just for food agriculture but also for the exploitation of aquatic and other goods, land is regarded as a precious resource. Land plays a significant role in human affairs, and everything humans do on it has an effect on the land, whether it is used to raise food and cash crops, extract natural resources, or provide a home for its residents. Thus, land speculation is a significant source of communal conflict in the modern era (Charles, 2016). Geographically, the Igbos in southern Nigeria face land scarcity. Subsistence farming continues to be a significant element of their occupation. As a result, conflict over the small amount of available land is rampant. Additionally, the majority of the bitter territorial conflicts have erupted between communities that have been connected by close relationships for centuries. Charles (2016) also cited a well-known land border battle between Aguleri and Umuleri as an example. These two communities are related ethnically, are neighbours, share a common ancestor (Eri), are located in the same local government region (Anambra East), and are located in the same state (Anambra). They had been coexisting, cultivating, and intermarrying long before the white man arrived. The primary source of the battles, which have lasted over thirty (30) years, is a piece of land known as 'Otuocha.' Since 1920, the two villages have been in court, but no lasting peace was made until 2000, following the 1999 battle that killed many lives (Ebisi, 2016).

Land conflict is a particularly lethal source of conflict in Igbo civilization. This is why Nwolise (2004) asserts that "it was pressure on land brought about by a combination of expropriation, monetization of land by colonial masters, rising population density, degradation, and the resurgence of pre-colonial communal competition that elevated land to a primal "casus belli" in rural areas." Thus, land is a prize worth fighting for and dying for. There is excessive demand on the little cultivable area, which results in violence between individuals, particularly during the farming seasons. Land is a finite resource that, when combined with population growth, will result in conflict.

Another important source of contention in Igbo family settings is the division of the deceased's inheritance or property between the living children and other family members. This source of contention can arise between the deceased person's living children or between the deceased person's brothers and his wife or children. In Igbo society, a man's property is inherited by his sons, whereas a woman's property is inherited by her daughters (Ezenwoko & Osagie, 2014). This is where the struggle between the deceased's brothers and the wife occurs, particularly when the father dies childless or the children are still young. Because a woman cannot inherit a man's property, the brothers come for it.

On the other hand, during the pre-colonial period, the manner in which a monogamous family divided its property differed from the manner in which a polygamous family shared its property. When a family's leader dies, his eldest son inherits entirely his personal "ofo" (symbol

of authority) and other objects of worship. Additionally, the eldest son received sole possession of his late father's Obi (the house in which he lived and died), a distinct plot of land known as "alaisi obi" or "aniisiobi—a parcel of land reserved exclusively for the family head, furniture, and clothing (Nwogugu, 2014). The remainder of his property, which included farmland, farming implements, economic trees, and cattle, was divided among his male offspring (Chubb, 1912). The eldest son owed allegiance to his brothers. He was required to notify his brothers, who were also stakeholders, if he intended to sell or lease any of the plots of land. However, family inheritance caused significant tension in Igbo society since some eldest sons turned portions of their father's property, particularly landed property, into their own by growing economic trees, such as palm trees, on it. Other brothers' attempts to regain such property from their elder brother frequently result in confrontation.

Mechanisms for conflict resolution

A popular belief is that cousins rarely genuinely clash with one another since "blood is thicker than water." Individuals that share familial and other social ties could make statements such as "We all belong to the same village, the same ethnic group, and are all Africans." These partnerships were founded with the purpose of preventing conflict and promoting or healing relationships that may have been harmed by the dispute. In the event of a disagreement between different groups or communities, the initial step should be to heal and nurture the strained relationships. However, the clan brings together distant relatives by fostering a spirit of mutual solidarity in all clan-critical problems. The family group included all blood-related persons, such as a man, his wife or wives, their children, grandkids, and great-grandchildren. The age-grading system that aimed to unify and consolidate the entire tribe in all of its activities further strengthened kinship bonds.

Joking relationships are prevalent social phenomena in Africa. Through verbal exchanges, attitudes, and behaviours, these relationships are employed to avoid conflict between neighbouring ethnic groups. Sometimes these jokes involve the words "violence" and "aggressive," but they are always delivered in a humorous manner. In the majority of communities, they were a daily occurrence, a type of "accord" between the various ethnic groups that sought to prohibit anger and hatred, the root causes of war. This action was taken to prevent conflict. As a way of expressing "no more war" following societal conflicts or wars, humorous links were developed in certain instances. This action was taken to facilitate a peaceful resolution. As a result, those attempting to resolve conflicts may cite these ties to demonstrate that there were established contacts and hence no need for war. Consequently, in the language of contemporary conflict resolution, cracking jokes can be an effective method for addressing ideological conflicts that cannot be resolved through discussion. Because they are based on forgiveness and tolerance, joking relationships would be helpful in minimising and resolving such problems because they constitute their foundation. In addition, they grant the mediator authority, influence, or control over the conflicting parties and ensure that the disputants maintain decorum due to their community ties. This suggests that the third party in the African context had more access to resources that could be utilised in the dispute settlement process.

Another way is known as the consensus approach, which entails making decisions through a consensus mechanism as opposed to a winner-take-all strategy. Consensus-based outcomes were regarded with the utmost respect since they generated confidence and gave partners control over the process. Consequently, the elders' judgement was valid, permanent, and irreversible. As a type of social contract, a consensus-based agreement may be disclosed to the entire community and

subsequently validated through a ceremony. This was done to communicate the information that the conflict resolution procedure had been performed successfully.

The age group as a framework for the organisation of social life Igbo culture is not taken lightly because it is considered to be one of the key strategies for dispute resolution. The principles of social obligations are reemphasized within the age groups; this, in turn, ties those of the same status together in links of unshakeable devotion and dedication. It is considered a very serious crime for an Igbo man of the same age group to cause injury to another Igbo man. As a direct consequence of this, membership in the several age groups necessitated a commitment to upholding the standards, responsibilities, and rights of their respective communities. As a result of the members of the age group respecting one another and adhering to the rules, altercations between members of the age group were rare because they were regarded as inappropriate. It was expected that the parents of the children who were the same age would serve as mediators in any conflicts that arose between their children or relatives. A number of existing studies have examined various means of conflict resolution in Africa; however, the novelty of the current study was to investigate a variety of traditional institutions for conflict resolution in Igbo land in southern Nigeria to complement the modern conflict resolution institutions in the contemporary period.

Methodology
This study was descriptive and cross-sectional. The study location was Okija, in the Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, in southeast Nigeria. The population for the study consists of prominent residents, chiefs, members of the Council of Elders, and officers from the Department of Lands from the major areas in the Okija. Purposive *sampling method was adopted to select four community leaders or chiefs from each of the four communities that covered the study location, making a total sample size of 16 (key informants) for the study. The selection of the leaders was based on their expertise in Okija's traditional dispute resolution procedures and institutions. A qualitative technique, the in-depth interview, was used in the study to garner the primary data.* Throughout the duration of the study, the informants' were aware of the study's purpose as their rights and anonymity were safeguarded. None of the informants was coerced or compelled in any way to provide information pertinent to the investigation. The gathered data were recorded, transcribed, and manually analysed using content analysis. The results were presented by theme.

Study Findings
(a) Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents
There were sixteen (16) informants, comprising ten (10) males and six (6) females, whose ages were between 35 and 70 years. The majority of the male community members were married, while all three were widows or widowers. The majority of the victims also had secondary school certificates; some of them had post-secondary school certificates, which included Masters and PhDs. Also, the respondents were Christians and traditional worshippers, with the majority of them being Christians. The members of the community respondents were categorised into 2 groups based on their occupations (self-employed, private staff, and civil servants), and the majority of them were self-employed.There were seven community leaders interviewed, who were all male. The ages of the community leaders were within the age range of 50–82. The community leaders were majority Christians. The duration of the leadership of the community leaders was within the range of 10–27 years of leadership. Also, 2 agencies were selected in this study, and respondents from all 2 agencies were female, with leadership duration ranging between 3 and 25 years.

(b) Traditional institutions for conflict resolution among Okija people

<u>*(i) The family:*</u> As an institution, the family has always played a significant role in the process of conflict resolution. Within the Okija culture, a family consists of the husband, his wife, and their offspring. The husband's position as household head and the legality of his power are beyond doubt. He is in charge of the family and property, the inheritance, and any land disputes that may arise. Okpara is the eldest person in the family. If *Okpara*fails to resolve the issue, he will invite *Umunna*.

> *I personally believe conflict resolution starts from home. Though many of the issues in the family may be domestic in nature, nevertheless, we have witnessed those that are very fatal. Let me give you an instance; land issues or inheritance. I have witnessed where family members started killing each other over ownership of land* (**IDI, Female, Chief**).

The extended family, which may include elderly parents, in-laws, and other dependents, is the primary socio-political institution and consequently takes the lead in the conflict resolution process. For example, in Okija culture, the extended family was viewed as the primary institution for settling disputes. For the Okija people, the extended family and the community in general function as institutions for conflict resolution, and they are able to mediate disagreements that go beyond the framework of the nuclear family.

> *In general, the traditional African ways of preventing, managing, and solving conflicts worked, and everyone respected them. A big reason for this was that "a person's identity is tied to that of his or her family, and families are made when marriages are accepted." Here, the importance of the family unit and the role of chiefs, elders, and family leaders in preventing and solving conflicts were emphasised* (**IDI, Male, and Chief**).

<u>*(ii) Age-set/Age-grade:*</u>Age-grade is another formidable organisation capable of mediating and resolving problems in a remarkable way. They are a unique group of people who share paternal and maternal links with the disputing parties. Tradition prohibits parties who are in conflict with one another or who disagree with one another from attacking or harming one another during mediation. They work to settle issues concerning adolescents.

> *As was just said, Okija have always given a lot of weight to things like age, gender, and social status. This has been happening for a long time. Age-grade have always been a big part of who people are and how they grow, both as a society and as individuals* (**IDI, Male, Community Member**).
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> *When a person is born into a culture, they learn that part of growing up is finding a place in that culture where they can feel like they belong, where they can get social support, and where they can find meaning in their lives. No matter how long someone has been a member of an organisation for a certain age group, the activities and programmes that group offers will always be interesting and significant. This is because the group is meant to only last for a*

> *certain amount of time. Same applies to their activities in terms of conflict resolution. Each age-set have jurisdiction of issues they can handle, depending on their age set (**IDI, Male, Chief**).*

When a person achieves maturity in Okija culture, it is a momentous occasion that serves as both a significant step in the progression of the social order and a rite of passage. Due to the fact that siblings belong to the same age group, it is reasonable to expect them to conduct themselves in accordance with a predetermined set of ethical principles. The fundamental objective of this age group is to keep order and, if necessary, to discipline those individuals who behave in an inappropriate manner. As a consequence of this, in traditional communities, age groups play an essential role in the prevention of behaviour that could potentially cause conflict.

> *Every organisation for a certain age group knew how important it was for a person's growth to take part in society, feel like they belong there, and feel like they make a difference (**IDI, Male, Community Member**).*

In addition, the age-based system provided the Okija with a highly successful method for resolving problems. For the Okija, the mediation panel consisted primarily of age-appropriate leaders. These people were chosen as leaders when they were young, and they stayed in their jobs for the rest of their lives.

> *Let me give you instance, let assume, someone offends, the victim of the crime will make contact with the offender's age group leader in order to report the incident. The leader would then bring the person responsible for the offence in front of the rest of the group. It would then be up to those of the same generation on both sides to assist in reaching a compromise that would satisfy both parties. After being found guilty, the offender will be required to apologise and stop violating the complainant's rights. If the individual disregarded this caution, his contemporaries would seize him and bring him before the elders, who would then decide on an appropriate punishment for his actions (**IDI, Male, Chief**).*

This approach to resolving conflicts deserves praise because it was founded on the recognition of the significance of preserving relationships within the community, and the decisions that were reached were respected. This structure, in one form or another, has been present within the community for a great many centuries.

(iii) Umuada (Daughters of the Land) and NdiInyom (Married Women):
This is a group of women who were born in the town, and it includes women who are married outside the community as well as those who are married within the town, as well as women of childbearing age who are not married. Their decisions are regarded with the highest regard by the general populace, particularly by women. This organisation resolves domestic disputes connected to women and marriage. *"Ndiyom"* (married wives) are not the same as *"Umuada"* (daughters of the land), which is a distinct category. Okija women are traditionally divided into two groups based on their level of involvement in the economic, political, religious, and social lifestyle. *Umuada*

evaluates the power of finality in order to make choices in matters involving women and family, the community, and problems that males are unable to resolve.

> *The presence of female leaders was essential to the successful resolution of disputes, particularly those conflicts that could not be settled by men. There are many different environments in which one could come with girls of this type. There are many who call Umuada by the name Umuokpu, while others call Ndiyom or Ndinwunyedi by that name. Within a certain clan, the name Umuada is reserved for women who have already tied the knot (**IDI, Female, Community Member**).*

> *Umuada are very influential in Okija and other indigenous Igbo societies and have the power of persuasions that cannot be easily ignored by the elders and the entire community, The Umuada usually intervene when conflict appears to be escalating to prevent the conflict from reaching the stage where the deities and the spirit of the ancestors may be invited. The Umuada hardly fail in resolving conflicts in the community, but when they are unable to successfully settle the issue, the Ohaneze may be invited to settle the conflict (**IDI, Female, Community Member**).*

In most instances, the *Umuada* are able to attain success due to their honesty and tenacity. They believed it was their responsibility as married women to maintain harmony in their father's home.

> *Due to the fact that the Umuada hailed from a variety of households, when a dispute arose, the women would inform their peers as to whose father's home the matter was initially raised in. If they suspect that a certain person is the source of the problem and is perhaps profiting from it, they will send a delegate led by the person's immediate sister. If the troublemaker continues to cause problems, the umuada will administer a final penalty, which may include social exclusion (**IDI, Female, Community Member**).*

*NdiInyom*have significant influence on their own, notably in problems pertaining to families and the mistreatment of children. They can take action against a man who is notorious for assaulting his wife and take advantage of the situation. In most cases, they are able to lodge complaints and issue threats against the man..

(iv) Council of Elders:
The Council of Elders in Okija is a very reliable dispute resolution institution. In other parts of Igboland, this body is also called *"Ama-ala," "Ndichie,"* and *"NdiOkenye."* They command a great deal of respect from the general population because of their roles as elders representing a variety of families and wards, and they are highly valued in town assemblies, which is where matters that affect the entire town are discussed. They functioned as a court of appeal for those individuals who had been given an unsatisfactory judgement by the head of their household.

> *Minor conflicts between people were normally resolved in private or in the presence of a small number of ward leaders. A person*

> *always has the option of appealing their case to the Ama-ala, also known as the Council of Elders, if they continue to believe they have been treated unfairly (**IDI, Male, Chief**).*

> *When a dispute is brought before the Council of Elders, both parties are given an opportunity to voice their opinions on the matter. Following their statements before the Council, those individuals who are in opposition are requested to leave and to return at a predetermined time. During the period of the withdrawal, the Council would inquire about its members' states of mind. At the conclusion of what each member has to say, everyone reaches a decision or a resolution that they all agree upon. The judge will announce the judgement, who is at fault, and the amount of money that each party is responsible for paying at the predetermined time. This step is taken at the conclusion of an in-depth investigation into both sides of the argument (**IDI, Male, Chief**).*

Age, positions, inheritance, acquisition by achievement, elections, and titles Red Cap Chiefs and High Chiefs are typically the determinants of seniority. *Obis* and *Igwe* are elected or inherited, and chief priests select the deity. Diverse types of leaders maintain peace by always expressing the truth, believing that lying causes death and evil to the people/land. Depending on the nature of the offence, disputing parties typically pay fines, with the defaulter losing the fines. Obviously, witnesses are used to support cases.

> *Most of the time, you become an elder because of your age, your job, an inheritance, something you did, an election, or a title you hold, like "Red Cap Chiefs" or "High Chiefs." The Chief Priests are in charge of choosing the Deity. The Obis and Igwe, on the other hand, are chosen through elections or by inheritance. They think that lying kills people and brings bad luck to the country. To keep the peace, leaders of all kinds always tell the truth. When two people fight, the person who broke the rules is the one who has to pay the fine. Cases are decided based on what witnesses say. This shouldn't be a surprise (**IDI, Male, Chief**).*

(v) Traditional Religious Institution (Oracles - OgwugwuAkpu, OgwugwuMiri, Urashi, Akpunama, Osuajana):
The data indicated that Okija contains a total of four shrines, one of which is located in the heart of the hamlet and the other three in the surrounding woodlands. According to respondents, *Ogwugwu-Miri* is the least well-known of the four among Nigerians; the other three are *Urashi, Ogwugwu-Akpu,* and *Akpunama*. In popular usage, however, the four shrines are referred to collectively as *Alusi-Okija*. According to legend, the god *Urashi* is the progenitor of all other Okija deities. The shrine is located in *Nkwor-Okija*, the town's market square. *Urashi* is thought to have inspired the other three gods; as a result, these gods are subservient to *Urashi* and obey its commands. In contrast to the *Urashi*shrine, which is located in the centre of the market square, the other shrines are located in the thickly forested heart of the evil forest. There is a widespread impression that shrines are compassionate and merciful, yet when it comes to protecting their

people, they are strong warriors. Those who pay attention to their instructions and carry them out correctly are rewarded with success, output, and fruitfulness, so goes the saying.

> *The highest and final stage in conflict resolution in the indigenous in Okija and in Igbo society, is the invitation of the deity, the spirit of the ancestors in conflict resolution. Parties in dispute will appear before a shrine and swear that their claim is truthful, honest and just. The party that tell lies is expected to be punished by the deity. The invitation of a deity, involves swearing or taking of oath, and covenanting in the shrine. This is solemn invitation of the deity to witness that disputants are truthful in what they say and that the people in conflict sincerely intend to keep the terms of agreements reached to resolve the conflict. The invitation of the deity or the spirit of the ancestors have dire consequences to the entire family or the village, for it is often very difficult and costly to appease the gods, and once the deity is invited justice is served when the guilty dies in a mysterious manner* (**IDI, Male, Chief**).

Throughout the course of Okija's history, the shrines served as various points of resolution for people who had been wronged in business dealings, land disputes, and other things. For example, they sought solace at the *Ogwugwu* shrine because they believed it was capable of administering justice in favour of the disadvantaged. This continued until the establishment of the current democratic regime, at which point politicians started going to the shrine where the so-called political godfathers demanded that candidates for political office swear devotion to them if they were elected.

> *The indigenous Okija society recognizes that conflict is dynamic and changes over time and therefore invented stages of intervention to prevent conflicts from degenerating to violent ones. The successful resolution of conflict on its progression depends on the effectiveness of the measures employed to settle the dispute. Self help is prohibited in conflicts in Okija. It was the common practice to punish parties that allowed their conflict to degenerate to physical fighting. Usually the parties are fined, and upon the successful resolution of the issues, the guilty party will be expected to reimburse the other party the fine he or she paid. At times , the parties were made to forfeit the fines paid as deterrent for not using the traditional laid down mechanisms for conflict management* (**IDI, Male, Priest**).
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> *In rare cases, the Council of Elders might suggest that the two sides go to the temple of an oracle and take an oath (Inu-Iyi). As part of this ritual, both sides would go to the shrine of the oracle. They would all tell the truth about what happened. In the temple, people who fell after telling the truth were punished for lying. To avoid more fighting, retaliation, or revenge, both sides may be asked to promise to forgive each other* (**IDI, Male, Chief**).

The major objectives of the shrines are to mediate peaceful resolutions to disputes and, if that is unsuccessful, to mete out severe punishments to the offenders. On the other hand, the specifics of the punishment are spelled out. Interviewees revealed that some of the problems that are oftentimes brought to the temple are cases of deception, fraud, unpaid payments, property disputes, and unfair commercial practises. The shrine offers assistance to those who have been deceived in some manner, in particular, in an effort to help them overcome their predicament.

(vi) Secret societies or the masquerades:
Another organ that has a part in the peaceful resolution of disputes in Okija society is It is believed that they are representatives of the spirit world, hence their designation as spirits. They are so mysterious and terrifying, and society fears them because it is believed that their words reflect the thoughts of the deceased. It is stated that they are everywhere, as they are able to listen in on intimate conversations, even in a closet. People who are not members of the organisation feared that their identities would be disclosed and they would be reprimanded if they voiced their opinions about the masquerades. The only way to join this masquerade group is by undergoing a night-time initiation ceremony.

> *When everything seems to be falling apart, people often look to the disguise as the ultimate judge. Before the beginning of the colonisation process, masquerades were incredibly effective means of government administration (**IDI, Female, Community Member**).*

When it comes to social control and the resolution of conflicts, one of the key functions of this group of principal masquerades is to enforce community-wide norms and regulations, or bye laws, that are legally binding on all community members. It is acceptable for them to engage in any contentious dispute without being asked, and it is also acceptable for them to render a verdict. In the majority of cases, repeat offenders and women who committed crimes such as poisoning were expelled from society by the command of masquerades. This action was taken to safeguard the neighbourhood.

> *Masquerades perform the functions of the police and also serve as the secret agency for indigenous Okijasociety. The masquerades intervene in certain cultural disputes and their decision is final in such issues. It must be noted that whatever conflict resolution mechanisms adopted in resolving conflicts in Okija, the objective is non-violent conflict resolution through mediation, negotiation, conciliation and arbitration (**IDI, Male, Priest**).*

Discussion of Findings
In addition to traditional institutions' functions in the monitoring, prevention, and management of conflict, these institutions were also responsible for the building of peace, the prevention of conflict, self-improvement, peacekeeping, and the enforcement of peace. This is in accordance with the social control theory of Hirschi (1969), which admits that every society has agents of control and mechanisms already in place. More so, according to Nnonyelu (2009), societies are held together by coercion, limitations, or the presence of similar roles, standards, and most especially structures and entities, such as the elders and age-grade, among others.

Findings in relation to the first objective revealed the following as the traditional institutions of conflict resolution: i. Ezi (the family), ii. Okpara (elders), iii. Umunna (men who are born into the clan), iv. Umuada (women who were born into a clan) or NdiInyom (married women), v. Amala (the council of elders), vii. Traditional Religious Approach (OgwugwuAkpu, OgwugwuMiri, Urashi, Akpunama, Osuajana), vii. Secret Societies or the Masquerades TheOkija people equally made use of outside parties as a means of dispute management. These were mostly elders from nearby villages or towns and supernatural forces like gods or oracles.

Evidence from the research revealed that in Okija, the Council of Elders was referred to as "Ama-ala". Due to their responsibilities as elders representing various families and wards, they command a great deal of respect from the general populace, and they are highly esteemed inside the village assembly, where issues affecting the entire community are debated. They served as an appeals court for anyone who had received an unsatisfactory verdict from the head of their household through approaches such as mediation, arbitration, negotiation, reconciliation, and adjudication. This is in accordance withOkoro(2019), who claimed that a person might always appeal their case to the Ama-ala, also known as the Council of Elders, if they continued to believe that they had been treated unfairly. When a dispute is brought before the Council of Elders, all parties concerned have the opportunity to present their case. Following their comments to the Council, the disputing parties are instructed to leave the area and return at a later date. Prior to the withdrawal, the Council would need member input. After all members have contributed, a choice or resolution is reached upon which everyone agrees. After the allotted time has elapsed, the judge will render a judgement and inflict any penalties and fines. Once both sides of the problem have been carefully looked at, this step is done.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the findings of the study, there are various existing traditional institutions for conflict resolution among Okija people. These include the Ezi (the family), Okpara (elders), Umunna (men who are born into the clan), Umuada (women who were born into a clan), or NdiInyom (married women), Amala (the council of elders), Traditional Religious Approach (Ogwugwu Akpu, Ogwugwu Miri, Urashi, Akpunama, Osuajana), Secret Societies, or the Masquerades. To promote conflict resolution among Okija people as one of the ways to enhance the steadiness, unity, and camaraderie of Okija cultures, the current study recommended:

(i) taking into cognizance the importance of promoting traditional methods of conflict resolution because they are approachable and cost-effective for the parties involved in the conflict and since disagreements are unavoidable;

(ii) treating the elders with the highest respect and reverence in order to facilitate the maintenance of peace and safety through the early detection and resolution of potential points of contention; and

(iii) future study with the focus on the limitations and challenges faced by elders and other traditional institutions in conflict resolution processes in Okija, Igbo Lands, and Nigeria as a whole.

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