

## TRADITIONAL SHRINE: A PLACE FOR ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN IGBO LAND

*Nwachukwu, Chikaodili Clementina*

*Department of Religion & Human Relations  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra, Nigeria.  
mail.chikanwachukwu@gmail.com*

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### **Abstract**

*Shrine is one of the most important aspects of every religion, a holy place used for the safe keeping of sacred objects, the abode of the deities and a place where humans commune with spirits. In African traditional religion, the relevance of shrine goes beyond a place of worship and sacrifice; it is also a place where peace, justice and equity can be obtained. Traditional shrine is the highest stool of authority in the pre-colonial era in Igbo land but in recent times, because of exposure to the Whiteman's way of life most traditional shrines have been destroyed and their relevance in resolution of conflicts forgotten. This paper therefore showcased the place of traditional shrine in conflict resolution and in doing this, primary and secondary methods of data collection were adopted. For the primary method, interviews, and questionnaires were used. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed and two hundred and ninety were collected. Textbooks, journals, magazines, and internet materials were used for secondary method. From the findings it was deduced that there are chaos, anarchy and war between and within communities and even among siblings due to lack of an effective and lasting means of conflict resolution in Igbo land. Finally, the relevance of traditional shrines should be highlighted and brought to the limelight especially in the area of conflict resolution in Igbo land.*

**Keywords:** Shrine, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Igbo land

### **Introduction**

In traditional Igbo society just like any other society, dispute is inevitable and part of everyday life. Dispute has always been part of human societies and as long as there are interactions amongst individuals or societies there are bound to be disputes and this is as a result of the fact that interests among individuals and societies vary. Dispute can be destructive and constructive depending on how it is handled so it is pertinent to understand the nature, causes and sources of dispute before it can be resolved. According to Burton (1990), dispute is a short term disagreement that can result in the disputant receiving some sort of resolution and for Garner (1999) dispute is a controversy especially one that has given rise to a particular law suit and can be intra or inter personal or intra or inter group and are encountered in everyday life either in the home, church, village, community and within or between friends. It can occur over resources, psychological needs (esteem) and values (Maslow 1970). In Igbo, it is an anomaly for there to be an unresolved dispute in families, villages or even between communities this disturbs the peaceful coexistence and must be resolved through the

appropriate channel. Dispute in Igbo land can be resolved through any of these mechanisms depending on the nature of the dispute; shrines, *Umuada*, *Nwadiana*, *Umunna*, Age grade etc, in all these traditional mechanisms, shrine is the highest place where justice and equity can be obtained, a sacred place which is treated with fear and respect and the abode of gods.(Arinze,1970). Deities are consulted and dispute of all kinds taken to them for settlement in the shrine even in recent times with the influx of modernization, Christianity and globalization, traditional shrines are still effective places for alternative dispute resolutions among the Igbo people both young and old.

### **The Study Area**

The Igbo people are found in southeastern Nigeria and have many interesting customs and traditions. With a population of around 40 million throughout Nigeria, they are one of the biggest and most influential tribes. Igbos are well-known for their entrepreneurial endeavors, both within Nigeria and around the world. In Nigeria, Igbo inhabit an area referred to as Igbo land, which is divided into two sections along the lower River Niger. They live in most or all parts of five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, as well as minor parts of Delta, Rivers and Benue states. Small Igbo communities are also found in parts of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.( Adeboyejo,2018).

The Igbo have a common border with the Igala and the Idoma on the Northern part of Nigeria, the Ijaw and Ogoni on the South, the Yako and Ibibio on the Eastern boundary and the Bini and Warri on the West. The principal rivers are Niger, Imo, Anambra, and the Uasi River. The Niger divides the Igbo into two uneven areas. The bulk of the population lives east of the Niger, with heavy concentration at Okigwe, Orlu, Owerri, Onitsha, and Awka. The other part of the Igbo group lives west of the Niger. (Nwoye, 2011)

Politically and socially, the traditional Igbo society has no centralized form of government thus the saying *Igbo Enwe Eze* Traditional Igbo political organization was based on a quasi-democratic republican system of government. In tight knit communities, this system guaranteed its citizen's equality with the exception of a few notable Igbo towns such as Onitsha, which had kings called Obi and places like the Nri kingdom and Arochukwu, which had priest kings; Igbo communities and area governments were overwhelmingly ruled solely by a republican consultative assembly of the common people. In Igbo society, religion and law are intertwined to the point that their social, economic and political life is profoundly influenced by a pantheon of supernatural powers which operates within the human sphere in various ways. (Anyasoda, 1975).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Nonviolence Theory**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2 October 1869 – 30 January 1948), often considered the founder of the nonviolence movement, he spread the concept of ahimsa through his movements and writings, which then inspired other nonviolent activists. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist, and political ethicist, who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British Rule and in turn inspire movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Other major nonviolent resistance advocate Henry David Thoreau, Te Whiti o Rongomai, Tohu Kākahi, Leo Tolstoy, Alice Paul, Martin Luther King Jr., Daniel Berrigan,

Philip Berrigan, James Bevel, Václav Havel, Andrei Sakharov, Lech Wałęsa, Gene Sharp, Nelson Mandela, and many others. With Gandhi, the notion of nonviolence attained a special status. He not only theorized on it, he adopted nonviolence as a philosophy and an ideal way of life. He made us understand that the philosophy of nonviolence is not a weapon of the weak; it is a weapon, which can be tried by all. Gandhi understands violence from its Sanskrit root, "*himsa*", meaning injury. In the midst of hyper violence, Gandhi teaches that the one who possess nonviolence is blessed. Blessed is the man who can perceive the law of *ahimsa* (*nonviolence*) in the midst of the raging fire of *himsa* all around him. The more adverse the circumstances around him, the intenser grows his longing for deliverance from the bondage of flesh which is a vehicle of *himsa*.

Nonviolence is the personal practice of being harmless to one's self and others under every condition. It comes from the belief that hurting people, animals and/or the environment is unnecessary to achieve an outcome and it also refers to a general philosophy of abstention from violence. Nonviolent action always has positive results and it is the theory that reflects the importance and need of alternative dispute resolution in settling disputes in Igbo land since the motive behind ADR is for maintenance of peace and social cohesion.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Shrine**

The word shrine is derived ultimately from the Latin word *scrinium*—meaning box or receptacle, as in containers of sacred meaning and power (Courtright, 1987). Referring the shrine to box is on the basis of its function in incubating divinities. It is at this place that the divinities manifest their unseen presence to man through their emblems. Van Binsbergen in Ezenweke and Nwachukwu (2017) defined shrine as an observable object or part of the natural world, clearly localized and usually immobile. In view of this, the shrine could be adjudged a cultural institution encompassing both tangible and intangible cultural material of the community. Within the fabric of this building lies the tradition of the land. The traditions of various communities including their identity are fostered through shrine activities.. Generally, shrine is a place regarded as holy because of its associations with a divinity or a sacred person or relic, marked by a building or other construction. Shrine can be a holy or sacred place, or a small area or monument dedicated to someone, or a place known as the site of a religious occurrence or a historical event. It is also a place in which gods or spirits live or have manifested themselves or where their statues, symbols, holy objects, or relics are enshrined, an abode of the gods.(Arinze,1970). In Ezenweke and Nwachukwu, (2017), traditional Shrines regardless of their varying topologies still serve unique functions and purposes in the traditional African society which include protection, provision, guidance, revelations, and also dispute resolutions. These unique functions have attracted much audience and veneration to these shrines as found in the traditional African society.

Bruce (2011) identifies different types of shrines allocated within buildings and in the temples designed specifically for worship. Household shrines can be found in homes. Small household shrines are very common among the Igbo where they keep their *Chi*, these shrines are usually small structures or a setup of pictures and figures dedicated to a deity that is part of the official religion, to ancestors or to localized household deity, a shrine is usually the center of attraction in the building or place and it is given a place of prominence.. There are also yard shrines; shrines that are found in people's compound. Religious shrines are found in most

religions. Nwankwo and Agboeze (2016), posits that shrine from the secular point of view, can be categorized into typologies according to their ownership and functions. This includes family shrines, community shrines, religious shrine, individual shrines, village shrines, state or national shrines, festival shrines, etc.

### **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)**

The term alternative dispute resolution or ADR is often used to describe a wide variety of dispute resolution mechanisms that are short of, or alternative to, full-scale court processes. The term can refer to everything from facilitated settlement negotiations in which disputants are encouraged to negotiate directly with each other. According to Best(2006), ADR is an application of non-conventional peaceful methods of settling disputes and resolving conflicts situations using the least expensive methods and ways that satisfy the parties as well as ways that preserve relationships after a settlement might have been reached. ADR serves as an alternative to the official conventional litigation and the counts with preference for non-violence. It is a wide range of dispute resolution processes and techniques that act as a means for disagreeing parties to come to an agreement short of litigation, it is any means of settling disputes outside of the courtroom. ADR includes early negotiation, conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. For Brown, Cervenak and Fairman (1996), alternative dispute resolution is a wide variety of dispute resolution mechanisms that are short of, or alternative to, full-scale court processes. And according to Agarwal(2001), the main features of ADR includes proceedings takes place in private, thus they ensure confidentiality for initiation of alternative dispute resolution methods, an agreement between the parties is an essential requirement.. Alternative dispute resolution methods may be less adversarial, less formal and a more flexible process and he further posits that alternative dispute resolution methods offer the conventional advantages like less expensive and dispensation of quick justice, including choice of venue for the resolution of disputes. Alternative Dispute Resolutions are alternative methods; are independent, objective and impartial, in this method, the third party makes the parties of the legal dispute to reach an agreement about the dispute by bringing them together and communicating with each other processes such as arbitration, collaborative law, and mediation are used to resolve potential conflict between and among individuals, business entities, governmental agencies,

### **Methods of Alternative Dispute Resolution**

The methods of performing dispute resolution in the traditional Igbo society are as follows: mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation and according to Ajayi and Buhari (2014), It also includes employing extra-judicial devices and usage of legal maxims to persuade or convince the disputants about the implication or otherwise of their behavior. These methods have been effective in traditional Igbo society and they are;

**Negotiation:** The most common form of dispute resolution, negotiation is the process by which the parties voluntarily seek a mutually acceptable agreement to resolve their common dispute, negotiation allows the disputants themselves to control the process and the solution. For Owasanoye (2001), negotiation is a voluntary and informal process by which the parties to a dispute reach a mutually acceptable agreement .In negotiation; the parties seek out the best options for each other which culminates in an agreement. And at their option, the process may be private. In this process, they may or may not use counsels and there is no limit to the argument, evidence and interests, which may be canvassed. According to Morris (2008)

negotiation is a process in which two or more participants attempt to reach a joint decision on matters of common concern in situations where they are in actual or potential disagreement or conflict. Negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between at least two parties who are faced with conflict situation or in negotiation, both parties realize that they have a problem, and both are awarded by talking to each other they can find solution to the problem – Negotiation brings a lot of benefits because in the process the interest of both parties must have been taken care of. (Onu, 2009).

**Conciliation:** A process in which a third party meets with the disputants separately in an effort to establish mutual understanding of the underlying causes of the dispute and thereby promote settlement in a friendly, unantagonistic manner. Conciliation is the process by which one or more independent person(s) selected by the parties by mutual consent, either at the time of making the agreement or subsequently when a dispute has arisen between them, to bring about a settlement of their dispute through consensus between the parties by employing various persuasive and other similar techniques. (Agarwal, 2001) It is a process of confidence and faith. Conciliation just like mediation is a voluntary, flexible, confidential and proceeding where the parties involved are free to agree and attempt to resolve their dispute. The process is flexible, allowing parties to define time, structures and content of the conciliation is a process that involves building a positive relationship between the parties of dispute, they further write that conciliation tries to individualize the optimal solution and direct parties towards a satisfactory common agreement. Conciliation is used in traditional Igbo society preventively, as soon as a dispute or misunderstanding surfaces.

**Mediation:** an informal and confidential way for people to resolve disputes with the help of a neutral mediator who is trained to help people discuss their differences: A voluntary and informal process in which the disputing parties select a neutral third party (one or more individuals) to assist them in reaching a mutually-acceptable settlement. Unlike a judge or arbitrator, the mediator has no power to impose a solution on the disputants; instead, the mediator assists them in shaping solutions to meet their interests. Mediation benefits both parties because it allows discussion to take place in a friendlier environment than arbitration or litigation. It allows for both parties to attempt to meet their individual needs without lengthy investigation and arbitration or litigation (EEOC, 2011). Until the point where an agreement has been made and agreed upon by the parties the mediation can be terminated and the process made during the mediation is considered nonbinding. Mediation is far more cost effective than litigation costing an average of one-tenth the cost of litigations (EEOC, 2011). Mediation method prevails in Igbo dispute resolution and was an art adopted to intervene in a conflicting situation and environment with a view to bringing about friendly disposition and restoration of order to both parties to the conflict and the society at the end of the intervention. (Amoh 2007). In Igbo land, mediation has restored peace and harmony in the atmosphere of rage and fury and had facilitated social justice and development. Amoh (2007), mediation simply means the process of resolving conflict in which a third party assists the disputants to resolve their own conflict. He also pointed out some advantages of mediation as; the process is non adversarial, less expensive, confidentially impartiality and neutrality is assured non legislative, fast and very flexible.

In the words of Zartman in Best(2006), traditional African mediation is the agent armed with personal characteristics such as wisdom and integrity but without the means for providing inducement and sanctions a moral mediation rather than a mediator with muscle, or standard times, a mediator with formulator but not as manipulator. The mediator functions much as an

ombudsman, intervening between authority and citizen, tempering justice with mercy and sentence with reintegration.

**Arbitration:** Arbitration is one of the oldest methods for the resolution of disputes between the parties. It has existed, in one form or the other, in every country at all times. Arbitration as a process of dispute resolution offers many advantages to both the parties. It is referred to as a unique way of resolving dispute in traditional Igbo societies. Arbitration method had produced great level of trust, confidence and mutual understanding in traditional Igbo societies..It is dispute resolution process in which one or more arbitrators issues a judgment on the merits (which may be binding or non-binding) after an expedited, adversarial hearing, in which each party has the opportunity to present proofs and arguments. Arbitration is procedurally less formal than court adjudication; procedural rules and substantive law may be set by the parties. In court-annexed arbitration, one or more arbitrators, usually lawyers, issue a non-binding judgment on the merits after an expedited, adversarial hearing. The arbitrator's decision addresses only the disputed legal issues and applies legal standards. Either party may reject the non-binding ruling and proceed to trial; sometimes, cost sanctions may be imposed in the event the appellant does not improve his/her position in court. This process may be mandatory or voluntary.

**Adjudication:** It is a process of reaching and concluding decision on issues of conflict. It is a systematic approach to pronouncing judgment of conflicting situation. In Igbo society, adjudication was not so much of pronouncing judgment and declaring the guilty party but it was the kind of judgment where punishment was not the ultimate even though found desirable. Igbo traditional adjudicatory process was mild and reassuringly restorative of peace and harmony in the society..According to Cook (2016), adjudication is a process in which a neutral third party will give a decision on a dispute. For Cook, adjudication is a quick process which is designed to ensure peaceful settlement of dispute and according to Howard (1969), adjudication is a method of peaceful conflict resolution in which parties present arguments and evidence to a neutral third party for a decision in their favour according to established procedures and rules of law. According to Howard adjudication is a child of conflict Martz (2007) in Olele (2018) posits that the main aim of adjudication is to bring parties on a table and agree on the terms of resolution.

### **Indigenous Mechanism for Alternative Dispute Resolution in Igbo Land**

Indigenous methods of dispute resolution refers to the various types of dispute resolution used for settling dispute traditionally. For Osi, (2008), indigenous dispute resolution processes are intuitive, time tested and pre-colonial forms and systems of dealing with community problems by coming up with a consensual, communal solution. Igbo indigenous methods of dispute resolution places emphasis on the community and parties to the dispute and uses local actors and traditional community based judicial and legal decision making mechanisms to resolve disputes within or between communities without resorting to state-run judicial system, police or other external structures. (Berhe, 2012). Nowlise (2001) in Kpae (2018), asserted that the goal of traditional mechanism was on retribution, the intent is to restore harmony among the disputant and also provides a means of restitution through apology and compensation (Kpae, 2018). In traditional Igbo judiciary system fines or damages are not usually awarded, the utmost aim is to restore peace by settling disputes amicably Dengen (2007), posits that Indigenous societies have varied institutions and personnel that function as agents of alternative dispute resolution in their locality and of them are;

Kings and Chiefs  
 Women Guide  
 Masquerade  
 Age grades  
 Council of elders

### **Kings and Chiefs**

Igbo traditional Kings play very significant roles in conflict resolution, the king is the father of the kingdom and he is at the apex of a royal hierarchy of chiefs and statesmen, he is the sacred representatives of the supernatural on earth and the personification of his kingdom. The King according to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) brings about change. New ideas and peace in their community. In Igbo society, the kings were regarded as active adjudicators, judges and reconciliators in their various domain. The King in Igbo land is popularly known as the *Eze*, *Igwe* or *Obi*, he is higher servant and leader of the people, the King in Igbo society is normally an absolute monarch advised by Council or Chiefs or Elders who he appoints and according to Opune (2011), A king is recognized by his subjects as their spiritual leader and chief custodian of tradition. For Opone, (2012), the *Eze* (King) is a leader who is physically and spiritually strong and can protect and fend for his people. The chiefs are respected member referred as Lieutenants to help in various capacities especially in the area of dispute resolution. When a dispute is brought before the King for settlement, the King summons his chiefs who are selected carefully from all parts of the community to help him deliberate on the matter at hand. The chiefs are also members of *Igwe-in-Council*. Though the king and his council are seen as the highest authority in Igbo tradition but in dispute resolution the shrine and deities are the final place for settlement of dispute.

**Age Grade;** Nwankwo (2018), defined Age grade in Igbo society as a group that performs economic, judicial and social political functions, they resolve disputes between age mates and they achieve social control of members by making good behavior a pre-requisite for benefiting from her social welfare service. The age grade association plays a significant role in the process of dispute resolution and ensuring mutuality and harmony in the society

**Elders in Council:** The elders is revered not only that he is the eldest but that he is the channel of communication with ancestors This position of controlling the channel of ancestral communication earns the elders an enormous respect and indeed a being worthy to be listened to in every communal matter (Chidili, 2012). Ezeogidi (2019), referred to the council of the elders as *Ama-Ali* and *Ndi Okenye*. In various parts of Igbo land, elders in council is a very rentable source of conflict management mechanisms, being elders representing different families and wards they command very high respect from people and are highly regarded in the village assembly where general matters concerning the entire village are discussed.

According to Akuluru and Enyioko (207-2016) the council of elders usually consists of more than one elder and thus acts as a firm of third party collegiate dispute resolution system. In some communities, 'elders have positions of authority to resolve disputes among the members of the communities, clans, ethnic group or tribes. Igbo elders had the capacity to facilitate peace and harmony, settle dispute and initiate development thus is an evidence that elders have been imbued and endowed with the art of dispute resolution. According to Igor (1971), elders are regarded as living ancestors in African societies and were the instruments of transition of knowledge and experience of conflict resolution in Africa.

Other indigenous mechanism for alternative dispute resolution includes the masquerade groups, secret societies, the family etc.

**Masquerade group;** In traditional Igbo society, masquerade is referred to as *mmonwu* or *mmanwu* and they are believed to be the ancestral spirits who interest in their affairs of their living descendants compels them to visit the community (Nwankwo, 2018) and according to Akubor (2016), masquerades are ancestral spirits who periodically visit their living forbearers in masquerade forms. Their visit are regarded as spiritual interventions to the world of the living and as a result are highly venerated. Nwankwo (2018) pointed out that masquerade as dispute resolution and social control agents, the masquerades were unchallengeable, they intervene in disputes and their decisions were accepted because they are regarded and believed to have the power of life and death.

**The family:** is also an indigenous method of dispute resolution in Igbo society – the family is the smallest unit of a society and it is where a child is nurtured and tutored on how to be a respectful and responsible member of the society. In Igbo traditional society extended family structure is the ideal family type because of the community consciousness of the Igbo people. Orjiekwu (1983), posits family as a conflict resolution mechanism and agent of social control which uses both training and restraining methods and according to Ebbe, in Onyeozili and Ebbe (2012), justice was primarily a family affair, the deviants acts of his wives or children were dealt exclusively by him, if there is any dispute he would act as an arbitrator or a mediator in ensuring that peace and harmony returns to his home.

### **The Umunna**

The *umunna* (kinsmen); in traditional Igbo land, family leadership was based on attributed power handed on as patrilineal birthright. The *umunna* is a kins based unit which subdivides into compounds and is made of a number of extended families. (Ezenagu, 2017). The *umunna* acts as the care takers of the family traditions, promoting peace and stability within their kin. Literally, the *umunna* means the children of the father, the father determines the level of the closeness of the kingship. The *umunna* operates at the level of mutual understanding and consensus, they take care of any form of dispute that might arise. The utmost concern of *umunna* is to ensure peace and stability in the different extended families that makes up the unit, they settle dispute within and among the kins

**Secret Society;** According to Wedgewood in Onunwa (2005), is a voluntary association whose members by virtue of membership are possessed of some knowledge of which non members are ignorant of. Although the secret societies may go by different names in various communities in Igbo land where they exist, they bend to serve similar purpose and one of these purposes is the resolution of dispute. Dispute resolution demands maturity on behalf of the facilitators and great sense of history and these are attributes of the members secret societies before the colonial rule. Secret societies in Igbo land devised the extra-judicial means of seeking to resolve an almost difficult dispute and it usually involved ritual performance, oath-taking and administration of ordeals.

### **Women Guild**

In Igbo society, women played very important role in conflict management especially in such dispute that are not in the capacity of men to settle. Such women are organized in different guilds. Notable among the guilds are *Umuada* or *Umuokpu* and *Ndiyom* or *Ndiunwunyedi*.



### ***Umuada***

The *Umuada* usually achieves success due to sincerity and tenacity or purpose. They believed that as women, who were married they will have the duty to see peace reign in their father's home. These *Umuada* came from different homes and so when there are issues, the women would direct their members from whose father's home the issue emanated. According to Nwankwo (2018), the *Umuada* is an association of women married outside their natal home. The *Umuada* enjoy profound respect even in recent times and their verdict in all matters is meticulously adhered to.

### **Ndinwunyedi**

They are women married into the kindred. For Ezeogidi (2019) *Ndiyom* or *ndi Nwunyedi* are powerful especially on issues concerning families and child abuse, wife abuse, they can stage a protest and threat against the men and according to Obasi and Nnamani (2015), *ndinwiuyedi* settle matters concerning market, cleanliness of village square and shrines and other issues pertaining to daughters. The powers of *Ndiyom* are extensive and relevant and they include the right of arbitration settling of quarrels concerning political, economic and ritual matters.

### **Shrine: A Place for Alternative Dispute Resolution in Igbo Land**

Shrines have existed in Igbo land in the colonial past and they fulfill various functions, due to the political nature of the Igbo people in the pre colonial day's shrine provided institutions of conflict mediation between local communities, they also serve to create trust by oath taking between members of different communities. In Igbo land, shrines more are than just spiritual vessels or points of worship, they are powerful symbols of ethnic solidarity, group cohesion, and knowledge about the landscape. According to Dawson (2009), shrines are vessels, they can act as containers in literal sense for the spirits of ancestors and deities who must be regularly placated and petitioned for blessings, request for intercession, justice and divine sanction. The spirits or deities must be venerated and sacrifices offered. Spiritual intercessors from ancestors and deities are sought from the shrine for reasons including but not limited to; justice, birth, protection, against evil. And Ojiekwe (2014) posits shrines as places of consultations with esteemed extra human forces esteemed extra-human forces to answer unanswerable questions in order to allay fear and provide a way out to resolve problem. Shrines therefore, remains one of the important sacred places which are significant in promoting justice, peace and social cohesion in various communities..And for traditional Igbo society, shrine is the highest place of appeal for justice and settlement of disputes. In Igbo society, shrine is a place where all forms of alternative dispute resolution methods take place; arbitration, mediation, conciliation and even negotiation, the disputants are more at ease and confident in the outcome of the resolution knowing that it was done in the presence of deity and are ready to carry out their own quota for peaceful resolution and this in line with Ireogbu (2009) who defined Shrine as a sacred which inspires awe and elicit reverence because of what they stand for and no one dear go against the verdicts of the deities for the fear of being killed or infected by a strange illness..Uchendu (1965) in onyeozilu and ebbe (2012) asserted that the highest court of appeal in the oracle (deities) and their verdicts are unquestionable.

The disputants can decide to consult the deity on their own or with their mediators, arbitrators or any person(s) who is aiding the process of alternative dispute resolutions and can they can be; the family heads, village councils, elders in council, diviners or the king and his council of chiefs. In the shrine, alternative dispute resolution can take the form of oath taking, (*inu- iyi* or

*Idu-Isi*) and it is a mechanism in the traditional justice system and is believed to be a reliable means of ensuring peace and justice in Igbo land. The chief priest was the custodian of the indigenous shrine and the link between the people and the deities and he or she oversees the oath-taking which is usually done in the presence of the deity while the deity acts as both the witness and the executor of the terms of the oath, to justify the truth or punish the one telling lies. In Igbo land, oath-taking consists of external and internal actions, the external action is the physical ones performed when carrying out the ritual and it is what the observers see but the deity sees both the external and internal dynamics (Onunwa, 2005). Oath-taking according to Ekhator (2019) is a very important part of any customary arbitration process in Nigeria. It is a method of ascertaining veracity of evidence in traditional Igbo dispute settlement proceedings. An oath is a solemn promise which invokes a divine being, in dispute resolution in traditional Igbo society and the essence of a divine oath is to call on divine agency to be a guarantor of the oath taker's own honesty and integrity in the matter in question. By implication, this invokes divine displeasure if the oath taker fails in his or her sworn duties. Oath-taking is done in the name of any deity that has a cult and a shrine such as includes; gods of the hills, water, rock, caves, snakes and crocodile and other objects that are believed to have magical powers or are symbols of deities are; tripod stand, guns, machetes, farming implements and *ala* (earth) which is believed to be the chief object of oath-taking.

In resolving issues in with oath taking in the shrine, care must be taken by the mediator or the person settling the dispute to ensure they employ the services of truthful and honest chief priest and a powerful and a just deity whose shrine is truly sacred, care should also be taken to ensure that the parties to the dispute are not with *Ndabuiyi* (charm) that will negatively affect the efficacy of the oath being taken. *Igba-ndu* (covenant) is a covenant established between one party and the other and it is enacted with an oath and in effect, involves more than oath taking. In covenant enactment according to Onunwa (2005), oath taking forms an important feature. *Igba-ndu* among the Igbo is understood as the strongest bond that could exist between individuals, it can be used in ending serious disputes and in the establishment of peace between, within and among communities.

Another way of settling dispute in the shrine is by divination; it is the practice of consulting deities and supernatural forces to explain what and how a dispute can be settled. Divination is a means of seeking to discover the unknown and future by manipulating some supernatural means and seeking guidance from supernatural sources. It is used to unearth any mystery surrounding the causes and possible ways of settling disputes. Through divination, reasons for age long disputes are uncovered especially where the initial parties to the disputes are no more.

## Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the importance and the place of shrine in dispute resolution in both pre-colonial and contemporary Igbo society. The Igbo relied on their deities for resolution of disputes and communities took their problems to the deities. It is evident that the indigenous mechanism of dispute resolution has remained strong and effective in settling dispute in Igbo society even in recent times and among this indigenous method is the shrine which has proven to be a potent place for the eradication of dispute and restoration of peace and harmony in the society. Finally, indigenous dispute resolution offers not only alternative means of resolving dispute but an entirely more efficient way of peaceful co-existence in traditional Igbo society. In view of this, it is recommended that:

Indigenous mechanisms of dispute resolutions should be encouraged and incorporated into the modern methods to achieve better and more reliable results and laws should be enacted to validate the use of these indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms and make their pronouncements more authentic, the relevance of traditional shrines should also be highlighted and brought to the limelight especially in the area of conflict resolution in Igbo land.

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