

Igbo and Tiv Traditional Justice Systems: A Comparative Study of Consensus, Elders' Mediation, and Communal Harmony in African Conflict Resolution

Ngozi Mercy Nwali

Department of Peace, Security and Humanitarian Studies, State Secretariat Road, Agodi, Ibadan, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide a comparative analysis of the Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems as indigenous models of conflict resolution within African societies. The analysis will focus on issues like conciliation, mediation by elders and community reconciliation. Both systems present conflict not simply as an infraction but as a breach in interpersonal relations that needs healing through atonement, appeasement, apology and the restoration of good relations. While Igbo and Tiv societies have different social structures, they both turn to elders, relatives and community meetings for resolving disagreements with a view to maintaining peace and social order. Furthermore, the paper also outlines the core tenets of these systems of justice, which include reliance on tradition, respect for Elders and authority and the emphasis on restorative rather than punitive justice. The paper also examines the weaknesses inherent in these traditional forms of conflict resolution, particularly the insufficient link with state law, gender discrimination, and challenges in mediating conflicts that are multi-ethnic and scale is large and ends with an emphasis on the fact that both forms of traditional justice remain vital sources of lessons for modern African hybrid approaches to justice and conflict resolution.

KEYWORDS

Igbo, Tiv, traditional justice systems, consensus-building, elders' mediation, communal harmony

I. INTRODUCTION

The place of traditional systems of justice is vital in the African concept of settling disputes, as they rely on culture and tradition in arriving at solutions. Indigenous forms of resolving disputes based on reconciliatory procedures rather than punishment mechanisms exist in many African communities. Nigeria is no exception. The Igbo and Tiv communities have vivid traditional forms where elders, age grades and communities' assemblies are empowered to address conflict resolution and societal order. They are neither a substitute to the state system, nor just alternative avenues where formal state law fails; they are an integral part of their cosmological beliefs, ancestral worship, community values and customary laws. The traditional systems are still held in high esteem by most local people in Nigeria, regardless of the presence of the state system. Building on Dr Afatakpa's discourse that there is a need to harness indigenous African knowledge in conflict resolution and peace building, this paper

places the Igbo and Tiv indigenous institutions within the African paradigm of cultural conflict resolution.

In the Igbo community, the traditional justice system is not centralized but decentralized around age groups. The age grades serve the purpose of adjudicating disputes, restoring peace and harmony to communities, through village meetings and family conciliation among elders and chiefs who enjoy both religious and ritual authority. Their method is inclusive as it depends on the community at large, to bring disputing parties before them for adjudication. Proof of dispute in this context usually involves taking oaths or performing some ordeals to ascertain the truth, while penalties involve restitution, fines and apologies rather than the punitive mechanisms.

In the Tiv traditional society, the administration of justice rests with council of elders in every clan, family leaders and the Tor Tiv. Resolution is mostly attained through negotiation, apology and compensation.

A. Background of the study

Traditional justice systems form an important part of conflict resolution in many African societies as indigenous systems based on the concept of reconciliation, harmony and community togetherness rather than punishment or retributive justice. In the case of Nigeria, with its diverse ethnic communities, the Igbo and Tiv traditions of traditional justice systems have elaborate and complex indigenous institutions where elders, the lineage system and community meetings play a central role in mediating disputes and re-establishing social harmony. Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems are not merely customs but also deeply entrenched normative structures based on distinct understandings of justice, personhood and normal way of life. This study therefore, uses both Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems in a comparative context and to fit into the debate of African conflict resolution and analyses the impact of Igbo and Tiv traditions in harmonizing local conflicts.

In Igbo society, the village assembly (amaala), family meetings and the respected elders (ndichie) exercise both spiritual, moral and traditional authority in resolving disputes, establishing truth and determining appropriate sanctions which aims at social harmony and reintegration into the community rather than segregation or exclusion. They impose sanctions such as fines, restitution and public apologies aimed at restoring the offended and offender to an accepting harmonious social community. Scholars have argued that the system which includes mediation, oaths, conciliation and compensation is "more result-oriented in conflict resolution than the modern/western culture of litigation settlement in law court" and "promotes the sense of community belonging and peaceful co-existence among the people."

Similarly, in Tiv society the clan councils (tortu), family leaders and the chief of the village employ negotiations, compensation and ritual means to solve conflicts among the people. Tiv culture identifies Offences like theft, adultery, witchcraft, homicide, etc., as a threat to their society (tar) as it violates peace, family unity (ityo) and spiritual equilibrium (akombo) and

as such, sanctions were devised in the Tiv tradition to achieve restorative balance, peace maintenance and security of the people.

The study seeks to contribute to the discourse on African peace-building, ADR approaches and restorative justice. It also aims to provide practical guidance for policy-makers, community leaders, and others endeavouring to use cultural sensitivity in the practice of modern conflict resolution and justice systems.

B. Statement of the Problem

Though traditional justice systems are integral to conflict resolution in Africa, relative research on how the Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems achieve consensus, elder mediation, and communal harmony remains sparse. While several existing studies are descriptive rather than comparative, detailing how the Tiv and Igbo traditions handle conflict management, Mezie-Okoye (2016, pp. 22-29) offers a broader insight into the subject by undertaking a comparative study on their respective conflict resolution systems. Such analysis directly closes the relative gap, informing about how decisions are reached, elders' roles, and the establishment of communal harmony within the two societies. The dearth of information thus leaves decision-makers, legal reformers and community peace workers with no direct, evidence-based basis for comparing the value each system places on consensus, areas of intersection/difference in elders' roles, and, effectiveness in maintaining community cohesion and peace. Secondly, discussions on restorative justice and elders' mediation globally often highlight either the Western and generic African concepts, with the Igbo and Tiv justice systems often largely omitted.

The present study will examine Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems in the context of African conflict resolution, with particular reference to their respective traditions concerning consensus, elders' mediation and communal harmony in the study "Igbo and Tiv traditional Justice Systems: A Comparative study on consensus, elder-mediation and communal harmony in African conflict resolution".

C. Research Objectives

The study will pursue the following three main objectives:

- To compare the way in which consensus-based decision making operates both in the organisational and practical manner in Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems.
- Determining the role of elders as mediator, source of authority, moral compass and so on, with regard to dispute resolution, pointing out the similarities and differences in the Igbo and Tiv systems.
- Determining the contribution of the Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems to community peace by testing how the systems affect reconciliation, social cohesion, and prevention of recurrent conflicts.

The study argues that despite the importance of consensus-based decision-making, the role of elders as mediators and moral arbiters and the achievement of communal peace as the overarching goal in both Igbo and Tiv traditional systems, they achieve them in diverse ways. The Igbo system makes use of bottom-up assemblies and discussions, involving age grades. The Tiv system on the other hand relies on more centralized but consultation-based clan councils and symbolic settlements. Through comparison, this thesis suggests that these strengths of Igbo and Tiv systems, that is their emphasis on dialogue, restitution and reintegration can be synthesized to provide a stronger and culturally contextualised system of African conflict resolution.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies published of recent on the resolution of conflicts have been about African indigenous methods and western legal systems. Igbo and Tiv judicial systems in Nigeria, it would be suggested, are a paradigm for the elders' led, consensus and harmony based approach to justice, in contrast to the Western individualistic and punitive systems. This literature review is a synthesis of studies made about African and Western systems, focusing on the elders, elders' mediation and the system of consensus in both Igbo and Tiv justice systems.

A. African Conflict Resolution Philosophies

African conflict resolution is often described as being restorative, communitarian, and totality. This indicates that the main goal of conflict resolution is not necessarily about assigning legal guilt and demanding retribution; instead, it is about re-establishing social relationships and the overall social equilibrium. Most African societies consider conflict as a break in a relationship which needs to be rebuilt with dialogue, restitutions and rituals (African Traditional Justice Systems, 2018). Elders, age-group leaders and assemblies are usually responsible for mediation, are considered moral guardians, as well as social order keepers, and employ indigenous knowledge, social values and history to negotiate disputes.

Proponents of these approaches agree that indigenous African conflict resolution emphasises truth-telling, reconciliation and the offender's preadaptation into the community. This focuses on restoring relationships rather than on the punishment of an offender. Traditional methods of conflict resolution such as family consultation, oaths, rituals, and payment of compensations, are considered to be a more lasting solution compared to Western court procedures as they aimed at ensuring the maintenance of relations rather than the declaration of a winner (An Appraisal of Igbo Traditional Method of Conflict Resolution, 2016). Similar to the restorative principle of Western criminal justice, research reveals that elderly mediation in Africa is grounded in reconciliation, respect, humility, and tolerance, the central values of African communities, which help foster restorative justice (Conflict Resolution by Elders in Africa, 2018; Roles of Elders in Alternative Dispute Resolution, 2022). This is particularly well-documented in the Igbo case, which has been widely described as a "bottom up" mechanism grounded in consensus-building principles around the ama-ala (village assemblies), ndichie

(elders) and umunna (extended kinship group). Disputants were expected to take their cases before their assemblies, where evidence and witnesses are presented and considered before an elder and others debate and agree on a settlement that had to be approved by the assembly.

The Igbo method of dispute resolution, studies have also shown, as participatory and restorative through the use of various sanctions like compensation and symbolic apology to help reintegrate offenders into the society (Ume, 2016). Indeed, a comparative study carried out in 2016 argued that Igbo system emphasizes agreement and compromise between parties rather than adjudication by an authority (TIV and IGBO Conflict Management Mechanisms: A Comparative Study, 2016). For the Tiv, the central goal of dispute resolution was the discovering of truth, negotiated compensation and rituals which were done publicly to restore the damaged relationship between two parties, as conflict was conceived as disrupting the social order and the integrity of *ofar* (peace) and *idityo* (kinship harmony).

Tiv method of conflict management involves the mediation by elders, family and ritual leaders in social conflict issues rather than legal practitioners (Mkuho, 2024). There exist various Tiv ways of resolving conflict ranging from forceful means like feuding, peaceful agreements via covenants or intermarriage to reconciliatory measures such as peace making ceremonies, all aiming at restoring relations and maintaining peace (Conflict Resolution in Tiv Society, 2024). Research indicate that while the two systems use elders, compensation and reconciliation ceremonies to resolve disputes, the latter's system of decision-making are more hierarchical and focused on clan members while the Igbo system involves more flexible and public decision-making using assembly and kinship structures (TIV and IGBO Conflict Management Mechanisms: A Comparative Study, 2016).

B. African versus Western Conceptions of Conflict Resolution

The different conceptions of conflict resolution between African and Western cultures is an accepted one. Comparable analyses indicate that African conflict resolution processes are community-oriented and restorative whereas Western approaches are adversarial and individualistic. Western processes involve the rights, formal rules and punishment resulting in compensation and state enforcement. They generally result in winner/loser situations leaving underlying social problems in existence. African processes such as those of the Igbo and Tiv, conceive of conflict in relational terms not legal ones and they seek sincere apology, compensation, and rituals to make peace.

A number of writers note that the borrowing of Western-style court systems in African states has led to many communities revisiting elders' forums, as the formal legal system has failed to bring about peace in the society and as they do not correspond with local cultures and norms. Younger people and urban dwellers on the other hand will prefer formal law systems rather than communal settlements due to modernisation and an increased legal pluralism challenging the credibility of elders' courts. In both Igbo and Tiv societies, elders clarify the facts, recommend remedies, ensure apologies are given and lead rituals in a way that demonstrates peace restored. Writings on elders' mediation also show that this kind of

resolution is successful when they possess credibility, community trust, and cultural norms and has a high rate of compliance and reconciliation due to its ability to generate broadly acceptable and morally endorsed solutions. Western-style dispute resolution does enforce legal rights, but they neglect the symbolic and relational aspects important in African harmony.

C. Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Present Study

While a great deal of literature examines African versus Western approaches to conflict resolution as well as the systems present in the Igbo and Tiv, there appears to be a lack of literature that relates consensus, elder's mediation, and communal harmony together within the Igbo and Tiv contexts specifically. Comparative studies such as the 'Tiv and Igbo Conflict Management Mechanisms' paper do examine the structures and functionalities which these two systems have in common but they do not detail how consensus itself has been conceptualized, elders' mediation tactics nor the comparative effectiveness of these systems in providing long-term peace. On a macro level they also do not offer a comparative analysis of these systems within the realm of elders' mediation, consensus and communal harmony. As such this study has both a theoretical void and a practical one. Theoretically, it is insufficient how each system has encoded consensus into the culture and its institutions. Practically, policymakers have no blueprint for a Western-compatible and hybrid approach to designing a more effective and inclusive hybrid justice system based on the Igbo and Tiv models.

It is in addressing these voids and examining Igbo and Tiv traditions within a comparative context of African and Western conflict resolution that this study will build upon previous works. I will explore how the Igbo and Tiv systems in particular incorporate and reinforce African themes concerning elders' mediation, consensus, and community harmony. I will further build upon the research of the two aforementioned studies to argue how and why they might inform the design of restorative and contextualized conflict resolution in both the Nigerian setting and broader contemporary world.

D. Conceptual Framework

The Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems exhibit an African communitarian approach which views conflict as relating to a relationship, where balance must be restored and order is preserved. There are three main themes evident in these traditional justice systems which are analogous to modern restorative justice, peace building and reconciliation: consensus; elders' mediation; and communal harmony.

The traditional Igbo justice system operates on a communitarian philosophy where justice is understood as social repair, as opposed to establishing legal culpability. Through the ama-ala, or village assembly, elders, kinship groups, and disputing parties engage in a restorative and consensus-building process that includes free and open discourse between all parties. This is intended to restore a sense of harmony within the community (Ume, 2016; Pentland, 2024). This is highly analogous to theories of restorative justice which emphasize restorative

dialogue and repair. The Tiv traditional justice system relies similarly on relational values and conceptions of tar (peace), toy (kinship harmony) andakombo (spiritual order) to conceptualise justice. Wrongdoing is seen as a disturbance to the moral and spiritual equilibrium. The goal is restorative; punishment comprising fines, ostracism, oaths and ritual cleansing are implemented to create moral equilibrium, prevent subsequent wrong, and guarantee security of life and community (Mkuho, 2024; Punishment and Social Order in the PreColonial Tiv Society). The traditional Tiv justice system resonates with Durkheim's theories of social regulation and general African restorative justice frameworks, where punishment serves to reinforce common morality and social unity. For both groups, consensus is not merely a formality but an outcome which the traditional justice systems strive to achieve. The ama-ala, in Igbo communities, fosters consensus-based decisions with the inclusion of community members, whereas for Tiv the tortu councils and lineage elders use hierarchical structures for consultative decision making (TIV and IGBO Conflict Management Mechanisms: A Comparative Study, 2016). The model used is similar to the democratic paradigm used within conflict resolution theory, which argues that legitimacy derives from collectively held decisions and not necessarily central authority, or in the Tiv case, a top-down authority.

Elders' mediation is the key process by which these traditions are put into practice. Within the ama-ala for the Igbo elders preside over the restorative processes, ensure the execution of oaths and oversee the restitution. Tortu elders and lineage elders of the Tiv control compensation negotiations, ritual mediation and reconciliation. These mediators are an integral component of the restorative justice and peacebuilding literature. This model serves to establish trust, rebuild relations and promote lasting reconciliation.

Overall, communal harmony is the objective pursued by both systems. For the Igbo people, it means preserving order (igwe) and balance (nche) through restorative practices, facilitating peace and peaceful cohabitation. For the Tiv, tarandityo, describe a dynamic social and spiritual whole that requires ongoing nurturing and maintenance. Conflict is perceived by these communities as a disharmony and rupture in relations (both social and cosmological), requiring healing and not punitive measures, echoing concepts of restorative justice, peace building and reconciliation.

III. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative and comparative study seeks to address Igbo and Tiv traditional justice system's reliance on consensus, elder mediation and communalism as approaches to conflict resolution in Africa. The design involves philosophical analysis, case study and comparison. Each of these analytical perspectives provides an interactional complement to the Igbo and Tiv approach as well as contrasts the traditions with Western conflict resolution methods.

The philosophical analysis explains the normative framework of Igbo and Tiv justice systems; personhood, communal responsibility and nature of justice in each system. For Igbo justice, the philosophical exploration of omoluabi, a morally upright individual who values and contributes to the community, are examined through legal-philosophical and ethnographic

descriptions that show that "sanctions and penalties were introduced not primarily for the vindictive purpose but for controlling what the society may have regarded as unbecoming behaviours" and restoring peaceful coexistence. Tiv concepts like Tar(peace), ityo (kinsip harmony), and akombo (spiritual order) are utilized to analyse offences as breaches in the social and cosmos order and sanctions as restorative means to restore security within the.

A comparison of the Igbo and Tiv traditional methods is carried out using adversarial state courts as a countermeasure of western conflict resolution model. Both Igbo and Tiv are described as 'relational,' 'restorative,' and 'communal cantered', and their means of conflict resolution 'mediation, oath-taking, reconciliation, and restitution are more result-oriented than the Western culture of litigation settlement in law court (An Appraisal of Igbo Traditional Method of Conflict Resolution, 2016, p.1). The Western method is studied and interrogated as an individualistic, rights-centred, and punitive mechanism. The comparison includes their philosophical grounding, institutional framework (amaala and tort Vs. Judge/Prosecutor/Defence) and nature of dispute resolution (restorative Vs. Punishing and stigmatising).

Ethical considerations are upheld through the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to local conventions, while triangulation of case study findings with academic texts is employed to establish validity. Overall, this methodological approach provides a theoretical and empirical study through analysis of philosophical bases of Igbo and Tiv justice systems, examination of traditional modes of dispute resolution through case study and comparing both traditional systems of justice with the formal adjudication and litigious model present in Western countries.

IV. ANALYSIS

The Igbo and Tiv systems are two distinct but interrelated models of the African tradition, reflecting different approaches to conflict through consensus, elders, and harmony. While separated by ethnicity, these two systems demonstrate similar underlying principles of African customary law; both seek to maintain relationships and community peace rather than assigning blame or punishment. By comparing and contextualising these Igbo and Tiv approaches within larger frameworks of African justice, the strengths and weaknesses of each can be assessed more critically.

In traditional Igbo society, conflict resolution processes revolve around the amaala (village assembly), where the Ndichie (elders) bring the parties, clan, and kinsmen together to negotiate. This negotiation focuses on reaching a universally agreed-upon solution between the parties involved rather than relying on the judgment of an impartial outsider. According to An Appraisal of Igbo Traditional Method of Conflict Resolution, the traditional system is "more result-oriented in conflict resolution than the modern/western culture of litigation settlement in law court" because it combines a number of resolution methods: "mediation, oath-taking, covenant, adjudication, reconciliation, cross-examination, negotiation, sanction, and compensation". The concept is in line with African customary systems of justice, which

focus on cooperation, communitarianism, strong group coherence, social obligations, and consensus-based decision-making.

The Tiv system operates in a similarly consensus-oriented way, although through a hierarchy of clan-based structures, involving tortu councils and lineage elders. The desired outcome of Tiv justice is communal acceptability, marked by rituals and public display of restored peace or Tar and Kinship harmony or Ityo. African traditional law places the community, not individuals at the center. In relation to this, Traditional justice systems: "exist at local or community level to manage and resolve disputes. They are deeply embedded in African customary laws which reflect traditional African norms and values." The consensus that underlies the justice process in Igbo and Tiv systems ensures the compliance of all parties and reduces the possibility of recurrent conflicts as justice is derived from the shared agreement of all involved rather than an imposed order.

Elders play the central role in enforcing consensus in both Igbo and Tiv systems. Elders are seen as the keepers of law and tradition; in Igbo society they preside over amaala, mediate disputes, and help negotiate restitution, in a manner described by scholars as enhancing "conflict resolution among indigenes in the context of Nigeria". Similar processes occur in Tiv society; the tortu, acting on behalf of the community, interrogates parties, negotiates restitutions, and publicly oversees acts of reconciliation. Across many African societies, elders are key participants, often found at "elders' councils, age-grade organisations, and religious leaders."

There are both strengths and weaknesses in elders' mediation. Strengths include the ability of elders, through their authority and familiarity with the system, to persuade conflicting parties to accept compromises that benefit social harmony. In many parts of the continent, this is also often faster, cheaper and more relationally sensitive than formal legal proceedings, especially among rural and disadvantaged communities. The main weaknesses of elders' mediation is its patriarchal structure: men and elder generations have authority over younger members of the family and community, women and youths can be marginalised, and women's consent may not be free of influence or compulsion. In cases involving severe offences like rape and murder, the priority may be on social peace and familial harmony at the expense of accountability. This is a limitation of traditional systems which some scholars see as undermining individual rights as seen with Mezie-Okoye (2016) in relation to sex offenders.

Communal harmony is also an important value of justice in both the Igbo and Tiv traditions. In Igbo cosmology, there is a need to restore unity (Igwe bu ike) and balance and not necessarily to punish; therefore, it is aimed not at inflicting pain on the offender but at restoring spiritual equilibrium. Ritual cleansing, public confession, restitution, and communal sacrifices serve the restorative purpose of appeasing Ala and reconciling the offender with both the community and the unseen world.

In Tiv society, harmony is restored by compensatory exchanges and ritual performance, which seal the restoration of harmony or iityo. The African tradition values this form of justice for

its ability to reduce tribalism, foster understanding, and ensure reintegration into the community.

The concern for communal harmony also comes with the drawback of potential repression of truth or downplay of offenses, and the overriding of personal dignity or individual well-being. In the Afikpo society, for instance, victim centred justice prioritises individuals rather than the dictates of an enforced harmony or forgiveness. In the multi-ethnic, modern state context, community harmony might also not reflect the will of all the minority tribes and ethnicities that are represented within such a state.

Compared to the Western tradition, the Igbo and Tiv systems represent systems that prioritize communal cohesion over individual justice and that seek restorative outcomes over punitive ones. Throughout Africa, similar principles of restorative justice were applied in systems of indigenous law among many societies; for example, in Yoruba land, Nupe, and Rwandan Gacaca, and the council of elders in many other traditions throughout the continent. The benefits of these systems include: cultural legitimacy, community involvement, relational justice, and capacity for social healing. The disadvantages of elders' mediation, however include its potential to entrench hierarchical structures and inequality in terms of gender and age, and the danger of neglecting individual rights when social order is valued above all.

While philosophically coherent, both Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems operate within specific historical, cultural, and structural contexts, requiring critical analysis and potentially adaptation to address human rights issues and the realities of the modern state.

V. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Beyond the resolution of local disputes, the Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems provide relevant resources-conceptually and practically- for peace building in contemporary African states, community-based conflict resolution in multicultural contexts, and the debates on restorative justice and reconciliation. They serve as examples of how culturally based mechanisms for achieving and sustaining peace can be useful in complementing state institutions.

Igbo and Tiv mechanisms are good examples of grassroots approaches to informal peace building in most African states, given that formal justice systems are often overworked, inaccessible or viewed as distant from local realities. The use of consensus-based decision-making in Igboama-ala assembly and Tiv tortu council reinforces social solidarity and averts the escalation of simple disputes to larger conflicts. The importance of community mediation, customary courts and inclusive decision-making mechanisms has been seen to play "a critical role in fostering unity and consensus building while at the same time preserving cultural identity in Africa" shahidihub international journal of theology & religious studies).

In most African states where you have various ethnic groups, generation gaps and differing religious faiths co-existing, Igbo and Tiv examples show the role that dialogue-inclusive platforms can play in the process of conflicts, mediated by people respected by members of

the society. Such approaches are rooted in principles of reciprocity, accountability and forgiveness, which are critical factors in their acceptability by people more than state courts. Studies of African Traditional Justice point out that, 'community-level justice systems are established to manage and resolve disputes', and 'can play a vital role in promoting justice, reconciliation, and a democratic culture,' even in combination with formal state justice institutions (Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict, 2020, p.1). Therefore, Igbo and Tiv cases are replicable models for community-based peace building throughout Africa.

A. *Community-Based Conflict Resolution in Multicultural Societies*

Igbo and Tiv practices also inform emerging forms of community-based conflict resolution in increasingly pluralistic and the modern African society. In these contexts, traditional practices of the Igbo and Tiv envisage innovative approaches that promote ethnic, religious, and generational boundaries. A general characteristic of both systems is the involvement of elders as mediators, belittling the value of trusted intermediaries with moral authority, extensive life experience, and a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics in facilitating meaningful dialogue. Community-focused mediation efforts in Africa emphasise that "community mediation, customary courts, and inclusive decision-making, not only preserve cultural heritage but also promote social cohesion" among diverse populations.

In multicultural environments, where formal legal systems may exacerbate divisions by prioritising adversarial processes and individual rights over relational healing, conflict-resolution methods inspired by Igbo and Tiv traditions present a compelling way out. These approaches emphasise consensus-building, public apologies, restitution, and ritual closure, this help in restoring social trust and reduce the risk of vendettas or continuous hate, malice and resentment. A comparative study on community-level mediation in Africa notes that such frameworks not only "resolve disputes" but also "encourage dialogue, enhance social cohesion, and enables peace at the grassroots " (Ifeoluwa Olawole, Tog Gang & Maurice Amollo Community-Level Mediation Strategies for Peace & Security in Africa, 2026, p. 1). The traditional justice systems of the Igbo and Tiv has assisted in developing community-based conflict resolution models, particularly in urban areas marked by diversity and competition for resources. The central role of elders' mediation in both systems highlights the importance of trusted third parties who combine moral authority, experiential wisdom, and cultural fluency to facilitate dialogue. Community-level mediation strategies in Africa also emphasise that "community mediation, customary courts, and inclusive decision-making... Uphold cultural heritage while fostering social cohesion" across diverse groups.

In multicultural contexts, where formal legal processes may intensify social fragmentation by privileging adversarial procedures and individual rights over relational repair, Igbo- and Tiv-style mechanisms provide an alternative framework. Their focus on consensus, public apology, restitution, and ritual closure facilitates the rebuilding of social trust among individuals and groups, thereby reducing the risk of intergroup vendetta or resentment. A comparative analysis of community-level mediation in Africa notes that such approaches not only "resolve disputes" but also "foster dialogue, promote social cohesion, and support peace at local levels".

B. Informing global Debates: Restorative justice and Reconciliation

In addition to their significance in Africa, Igbo and Tiv systems offer an important contribution to the current global discussions on restorative justice and reconciliation. Restorative justice scholars suggest that many African societies had "restorative justice" before colonialism and it is an approach which "promotes healing and restores relationships between offenders, victims, and community much better than the western adversarial system" (GlobaLex, 2025, p. 1). Igbo ritual performances of oath taking, public apology and restitution bear some resemblance to components of restorative justice as encounter, reparation and reintegration while Tiv punishment involving compensation and ritual cleansing fulfil similar objectives to mend moral wounds and reintegrate people into their community.

Global restorative justice literature argues that these traditional methods can be "revived and re-conceptualised" to support formal justice mechanisms, since they place greater emphasis on victim involvement, community participation and relational healing over punitiveness (Restorative Justice Around the World, 2005, p. 1, Ishola, Afatakpa & Adedigba, 2022). Therefore, Igbo and Tiv traditions are not just mere "local customs," but are used as material for the theoretical project to reconceptualise justice as a procedure aimed at re-establishing broken relationships, recognising offenders' wrongs and achieving reconciliation. In post-conflict societies and reconciliation processes, traditional African mechanisms such as elders' mediation in Igbo and Tiv traditions, symbolic rituals, and compensatory sanctions have been increasingly recognized as useful instruments of truth-telling and community healing. In one comparative study of traditional justice and reconciliation mechanisms after violent conflicts it was observed that despite some limitations, traditional methods can also "efficiently and effectively complement conventional judicial systems" through "reconciliation, accountability, truth-telling, legitimacy and reparation" (Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict, 2020, p. 1). Igbo and Tiv systems are thus central to the African experience in placing it at the heart of global conversations of how to reconcile justice, healing and community.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has argued that Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems focus their conflict-resolution practices on consensus, elders' mediation, and communal harmony. However, they express these values in distinct ways shaped by their respective social structures, histories, and cultural worldviews. The Igbo system relies on participatory village assemblies (amaala), where elders (ndichie) and kin groups negotiate collective agreement. Respectively, the Tiv system relies on clan-based councils (tortu) and lineage elders who mediate disputes within a more hierarchical yet inclusive framework. Aside it being their "custom," these systems embody a relational, restorative, and community-oriented philosophy of justice that stands in sharp contrast to the adversarial, individual-rights-centred logic of many Western legal systems. By comparing Igbo and Tiv practices, this study demonstrates that their emphasis on dialogue, restitution, and the absorption of offenders brings about a culturally grounded, socially sustainable alternative and a potential complement to formal state-based justice in contemporary African states.

In Igbo and Tiv system, consensus-seeking enhances the potency and compliance with decisions because people experience the resolution as a shared moral commitment rather than an externally imposed verdict. Elders' mediation, meanwhile, emerges as the core institutional practice. Elders do not automatically give verdicts; they guide truth-telling, facilitate apology, and oversee material and symbolic reparations, drawing on their social legitimacy, spiritual authority, and deep knowledge of customary norms. The ultimate purpose of both systems is communal harmony: the restoration of social balance (igwe and nche among the Igbo; tar and ityo among the Tiv) so that the community can continue to function without enduring cycles of vendetta, resentment, or mistrust. Rather than focusing primarily on punishment, these systems emphasise forgiveness, restitution, and symbolic closure, such as public apologies, fines, and ritual cleansing, which publicly signal the end of conflict and re-establish relational balance.

Areas for further research is comparative research across other African societies, such as the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, Nupe, and Rwandan gacaca, to identify common ways and variations in restorative justice and to construct a more robust, Africa centred theory of conflict resolution that can speak both to local contexts and to global debates on restorative justice, peace building, and reconciliation. In this way, the Igbo and Tiv traditional justice systems not only illuminate the richness of African philosophical and institutional traditions but also offer valuable resources for imagining more humane, relational, and inclusive forms of justice in an increasingly interconnected and conflict-prone world.

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