



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE IFE/MODAKEKE CONFLICTS ON INTER GROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA – A RE-ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Contemporary Nigeria presents an excellent laboratory for the study of war and peculiar problems associated with the values, principles and dynamics of crisis prevention, management and resolution. There are also fundamental shortcomings in the areas of peace building. Nigeria transited from military dictatorship to multi-party democracy on the 29th May, 1999. The country has been bedeviled by various forms of violent communal conflicts since then. Thousands of people have lost their lives, many were maimed or displaced from their communities and even lost their properties as a result of these problems. While some of these conflicts had their roots in the past, others were manufactured by the elite, seeking to stretch the liberty inherent in the new democratic process in Nigeria. All these conflicts have continued to constitute a recurrent destabilizing factors and a serious impediment to the survival of democratic transition in the country. A major of these conflicts is the Ife/Modakeke conflict which took several dimensions and years; claiming so many lives and properties. The paper however examines the social and economic implications of this conflict not only on the two groups involved, but as well as the country in general. The work made use of both primary and secondary data.

Introductory Discourse

Nigeria is a large multi- ethnic country where ethnic cleavage remains a critical problem and ethnic violence had erupted periodically.¹ Conflicts resolution in Nigeria is multifaceted in that it refers to a process aimed at resolving ethnic conflicts through constructive means. In most cases, panels and committees set up to investigate communal clashes often identify the underlying cause of the conflict and address them through solutions that are mutually satisfactory, self-perpetuating and sustaining.² Conflicts which are not well structured and handled often lead to crises which at its peak claim lives and properties. Thus, this often leads to the displacement of people. Nigeria has experienced a lot of ethnic and communal conflicts. However, majority of them since 1960s are; Hausa/Fulani/ Sawaya conflict in Bauchi since 1950s, Eleme-Okrika conflict in Rivers State, in 1990, Ogoni/Adani conflict in River State, in 1993, Itsekin /Ijaw/ Urhobo conflict in Delta State, in 1995-1997, Ife/ Modakeke conflict in Osun State, in 1997, Chamba/ Kuteb conflict in Taraba State,in1998, Ijaw/ Ilaje conflict in Ondo State, in 1998-1999, Yoruba/Hausa conflict in Shagamu, in 1999, Tiv/Jukun conflict in Wukari, in 1999, Basa/ Egbira conflict in Nassarawa State, in 1999, Zango/kataf conflict in Kaduna in 1999, Aguleri /Umuleri conflict in Anambra State,in 2001 among others.³

These conflicts have provided a pattern that makes scholars to attribute their remote causes to boundary or land dispute which is prominent amongst other causes of conflicts in Nigeria. Others are the creation of states and local government areas. A good example is the Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area headquarters in Bauchi State, initially located in Tafawa

¹ I.A. Akinjogbin, "Ife: The year of Travail 1793 – 1893" in I.A Akinjogbin (ed), *The Cradle of Race: Ife From Beginning to 1980*, Port Harcourt: Sunray publications, 1992, p.27

² S. Olayowola, & N. Okorie, "Integrated Education: An Instrument for Resolving Ife – Modakeke Conflict in Osun state" *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Science* vol 2, No 2,2010 pp 21-30

³ J.F.A. Ajayi and S.A Akintoye, " Ife – Modakeke crisis," in O. Otite and I.S. Albert (eds), *Community Conflict in Nigeria: Management Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum Book, 1980,p.30

town, but was moved to Bununu by a motion in the State House of Assembly. This act, eventually led to the Hausa/Fulani/Sawaya conflict.⁴

Thus, the greatest challenge facing the process of conflict and its resolution in Nigeria is the issue of maintaining balance between the conflicting parties by the third party preferably the Federal government.⁵ This balance however, can only be met if the causes of these conflicts are traced and treated fairly. However, going by the scope of study, the Ife/Modakeke conflicts is very significant in the history of the Yoruba and its prospect for conflict resolution in Nigeria. In the words of A.R. Asiyanbola, the Ife Modakeke conflicts of 1835-1849 remains the oldest intra-ethnic conflict in Nigeria, which makes the process for peace making a realistic one.⁶

Ife and Modakeke are both Yoruba towns of Osun State, in South Western Nigeria. According to oral tradition, both communities are descendant of Oduduwa, the perceived progenitor of the Yoruba people.⁷ The social-cultural and political systems of the two communities are essentially identical and their geographical distribution largely overlaps. As intra-related as both communities are, both have engaged in protracted conflict from 1882 – 2000. The Modakeke people are generally considered “strangers”, “tenants” and “migrants” in Ife, while the Ifes regard themselves as “landlords” over the people of Modakeke.⁸

Oral traditional account opines that the people of Modakeke migrated and settled in Ile-Ife after the collapse of the old Oyo Empire in the nineteenth century. This incident led to a refugee crisis to the South and thereafter, resulting in the occupation of Modakeke’s

⁴ J.F.A. Ajayi and S.A Akintoye, “Ife – Modakeke crisis,” in O. Otite and I.S. Albert (eds), *Community Conflict in Nigeria: Management Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum Book, 1980,p.27

⁵ National Archives Ibadan “Newspaper cutting of the Ife-modakeke dispute Oyo Prof”.

⁶ J.F.A. Ajayi and S.A Akintoye, “Ife – Modakeke crisis,” in O. Otite and I.S. Albert (eds), *Community Conflict in Nigeria: Management Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum Book, 1980,p.43

⁷ E. Eyo, “Excavations at Odo Ogbe Street and Lafogido Ife, Nigeria”, *West African Journal of Archeology*, Vol.6, 1986, pp 15-25

⁸ F.O. Alao, “Modakeke 1840 – 1923: search for political identity”, Ibadan: University of Ibadan press, 1982

contemporary location.⁹ Two distinct categories of people emerged: the original settlers or the landlords who gave farmlands to the resettled group considered as refugees (Modakeke). It is pertinent to note that the causes of the conflicts between Ife and Modakeke are many and varied. Historians and scholars notably Akinjogbin, Ade Afolabi, F.O. Alao, R.A Olaniyan trace the conflict to pre-colonial Nigeria especially during the Yoruba internecine wars of the nineteenth century. Some of the identified major conflicts that ensued between the two communities are:

- i. The communal war of December 1882
- ii. The conflicts over the selection of Imam by the Modakeke in 1934
- iii. The Isakole or land rent dispute of 1946 – 1947
- iv. The confrontation over the reception of a British parliamentarian, Rev. Sorenso in January 1949
- v. The conflict over the establishment of Modakeke High School in January 1949.
- vi. The conflict over the establishment of Olorunsogo plank market in 1980.
- vii. The request for a separate local government council which began in 1996.¹⁰

Historical Dimensions of the Conflict

Politics is as old as humanity. While generally accepting that it as a global phenomenon, played differently as an activity or a game by individual actors based on their intent and purposes, It also means the authoritative allocation of societal values, striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power either among states or among groups within a state. It is also the power to allocate powers between individuals, communities and nations. Any collectivity

⁹ R.A. Asiyabola, "Identity issues in urban ethno-communal conflict in Africa: An Empirical study of Ife-Modakeke crisis in Nigeria", *Journal of historical society of Nigeria*, Vol24, No7, 2001, p.116

¹⁰ R.A. Asiyabola, "Identity issues in urban ethno-communal conflict in Africa: An Empirical study of Ife-Modakeke crisis in Nigeria", *Journal of historical society of Nigeria*, Vol24, No7, 2001. p.63

which is bound together must regulate affairs, define its boundaries, and assign roles, rights and obligations. The dynamics for such decision making is politics.¹¹

The Ife-Modakeke conflicts started to take its contemporary pattern from 1957 when the Modakeke community began to agitate for the creation of a local government council, which would enable them to be permanently independent of Ife. The opposition to the demand of Modakeke to be independent from Ife came not only from Ife people but also from the leadership of the Action Group which was then in control of the old Western Region. Obafemi Awolowo, the premier of the region made his position clearly known in April, 1958 when he said that “Ife town is one and there should be no reason for the request for a separate local government for Modakeke”. Therefore, he stated Modakeke should continue to remain under the old Oranmiyan Local Government with Ile-Ife as the headquarters.¹²

The resumption to party politics in 1979 re-awakened the crises, with the Modakeke renewing their bid for a separate local government council. The Modakekes hoping to better their lot in the new political dispensation capitalized on the Land Use Decree Act of 1978¹³ which entrusted all lands in the country to the state government on behalf of the Federal government, and embarked on a fund raising ceremony in 1980 for the rehabilitation developmental processes.¹⁴ Essentially, it can be rightly asserted that the Ife-Modakeke crises were a victim of the dirty politics being played in Nigeria. Mediation efforts which were in the process for resolving disputes in which a third party helps the parties involved negotiate a settlement were politicized thereby, resulting into resilience, and prolongation of the crises.¹⁵

11 S.O. Babayemi, Ife-Modakeke Relationship 1800-1922. Unpublished. B.A thesis, University of Ibadan. 2003

12 The Guardian Newspaper, January 25,1997, Lagos

13 National Archives Ibadan “Papers relating to land tenure in Yoruba province 1035 – 1950.Oyo prof 1/1404”.

14 A. Adeyemi, Understanding Ife-Modakeke Relationship, Ife: Moyanjuola Publishers, 1999, pp. 30-39

15 J. Richard, Democracy and Pretendal Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999, pp.20-25

The impact of the age long crises has eaten deep into the socio-economic fabric of the two communities. From the beginning of the crises, many lives were lost at both sides, that is, Ife and Modakeke. Buildings of latest designs were razed down. Examples are, Amicable House, Sijuwade Estate, Leonard Shop, Popoola House.¹⁶ The ruins of these buildings left behind the tale of agonies of what the peoples of Ife and Modakeke were subjected to. The crises had a devastating effect on the socio-economic situation in the area. Fuel stations, shops, hotels and many commercial centres were razed down.¹⁷ The psychological effect of these crises still exists in the lives of both communities till present times.

Social Implications of the Conflict

Family and marriage were the most widely affected of the conflicts. From the era of Ooni Adegunle Abewela, inter-marriages had come to exist amongst the people of Ife and Modakeke. But with the advent of the conflict, there was a bridge in the family setting as everyone had to support his/her community. For instance, an Ife man who married a Modakeke woman would support their various communities and vow to commemorate the marriage if broken. This led to the displacement of children from their parents. Also, the family (ies) who did not want to be part of the conflict and valued the family ties, ended up leaving the community for a new settlement where no one absolutely knew them because they would be regarded by their communities as traitors.¹⁸

The interpersonal relationship between Ife and Modakeke people were really affected. Friends that had been together for a long time were forced to abandon their friendship. Friends or

16 I.O. Albert, "Ife-Modakeke Crisis", *Community Conflicts in Nigeria, Management, Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999, pp.30-40

17 B.A Oyeniyi, *The Ife-Modakeke conflict, 1800 – 2000*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1999 p.82 – 85.

18 O. Oyeniran, *Socio-Economic Impacts of Ife/Modakeke Crises*, M.A. Thesis, University of Benin, 2016

associates from the two communities were used to lure one another to be murdered. Example of such was the case of Seni Osunade, a brilliant year four Medical Student of Obafemi Awolowo University that was lured by his female friend to be abducted and eventually murdered. Ife and Modakeke as a group of people had a fair share of the impact of the crises. Till date, there still exists trust issue between Ife and Modakeke people. They both view any hand of friendship extended with great suspicion.

Education was not spared during the conflicts. The combatants on both sides, that is, Ife and Modakeke were not only bent on destroying each other, but also determined to annihilate all their schools, most especially the primary schools. Schools were closed down and national exams could not be conducted in both communities.¹⁹ Several school buildings were burnt and school properties vandalised, for example both Seventh Day Adventist High School and Primary School were burnt and vandalised. Hospitals and health centres had their own fair impact of the crises; hospitals and health centers sited at the conflict zones were burnt and vandalised, but the ones in the interior were full to the brime of conflict casualties of gunshots, machete wounds and the likes. The Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital morgue was full to its capacity and so were the other primary health centres in both communities.²⁰

Economic Implications of the Conflict

On the part of the government, extra allocation had to be budgeted for security and rehabilitation of the government properties that were destroyed. Extra detachment of Mobile Police Force was provided to ensure a stop to the wanton destruction of lives and properties.

¹⁹ S.O. Omiwole, "The Prospect of African union as peace keeper in Africa".M.A Thesis, Peace and Conflicts Studies, 2003, p. 44

²⁰ Natioanl Archives Ibadan " Newspaper cutting of the Ife-modakeke dispute Oyo Prof". see also F. O. Alao, "Modakeke 1840 – 1923 the search for political identity", Ibadan: university of Ibadan, 1982.

Also, travellers passing through Ile Ife to the East and Lagos found it very difficult to pass. There were several cases of death or injury via stray bullet fired by either community at the other community. The Federal government under President Olusegun Obasanjo, found it expedient to construct a dual carriage express road behind Ile-Ife to save travellers from the incessant Ife/Modakeke crises. Unfortunately, the little town of Osu, whose residents earned their living from the sales of the popular bean cake called “akara osu”,²¹ were rendered jobless as a result of the construction of the new Ife/Ilesha dual carriage road.²²

The effect of the crises made some richer and others poorer; reasons being that, most properties confiscated by the other group were used in enriching themselves. For instance, the Modakekes who had farms in Ife and vice versa could not reclaim back their land and other properties. The land and properties now belonged to the ruling class of the group, if in Modakeke, it belong to the Baale of Modakeke and if in Ife it belong to the Ooni of Ife.²³ The crises can also be said to be crises among the ruling houses. Presently, there is no physical confrontation between the two communities, but psychologically, the two communities are still not in agreement with each other. Thus, it can be said that both communities are in a cold war.²⁴

It is worthy of mention that the Ife –Modakeke conflicts which resulted in the loss of lives and massive destruction of properties also included other means of prosecution like abductions, torture, assault of the rights and dignity of women and children, rape, physical mutilations and murders. However, the war was majorly fought by the men and youths, while

21 Akara Osu is a unique bean cake special made by the good people of Osu in Osun state. See also O. Oyeniran, Socio-Economic Impacts of Ife/Modakeke Crises, M.A. Thesis, University of Benin, 2016

22 J. O. Toriola, The Ife and Modakeke Crisis. An insider view”, Ife Psychologia. An international journal, vol. 9, no 3, pp 21-29.

23 O. Oyeniran, Socio-Economic Impacts of Ife/Modakeke Crises, M.A. Thesis, University of Benin, 2016

24 O. Oyeniran, Socio-Economic Impacts of Ife/Modakeke Crises, M.A. Thesis, University of Benin, 2016 see also J.F.A. Ajayi and S.A Akintoye, “ Ife – Modakeke crisis,” in O. Otite and I.S. Albert (eds), Community Conflict in Nigeria: *Management Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum Book, 1980,p.30

women gathered themselves at the Ooni's palace to pray. The youths mobilized themselves into a new variety of armed ethnic guerrilla with access to increasing stockpiles of illegal surplus of arms.²⁵

Acquisition of sophisticated weapons was never an issue among the two communities. For instance, according to a traditional account, prospective grooms were asked to provide the dowry which included ammunition as part of the dowry materials, for the grooms it was never too problematic as there were arm dealers in neighbouring states or some looked up to their prospective father-in-laws who had direct access to state armoury. With the surplus weapons in the community, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ade Shinaba, confirmed that the use of sophisticated weapons frustrated their efforts at peace keeping and made it impossible for the police to have a firm control of the situation. Besides the war, rising incidents of violence including armed robbery were on the increase.²⁶

It is pertinent to note that for a long time the Ifes had never defeated the Modakekes in a battle but the 1996 conflict caused a reverse to the already proclaimed 'hardy soldiers'. The Modakekes' properties were ceased, houses burnt, farmlands destroyed and lots of other treatments were meted against them. Furthermore, the war was mainly fought by the Ife youths within the age range of 20-35, both educated and not.²⁷

The economic legacy of the war was a step back towards industrialization. As the war was in its peak, major companies and foreign investors relocated their businesses out of Ile-Ife to other areas. The community lacked industrialization and was very backward in its urbanization as most residential buildings were destroyed in the cause of the crises. Thus, a call for

25 Vanguard Newspaper, July 13, 2000. p. 16

26 Interview with Ade Shinaba, 79 years, Retired Assistant Commissioner of Police. Lagere., 21st October 2018

27 I.O. Albert and O. Otite, Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1991.

rehabilitation was heard after the conflicts. After the cause of the conflicts, the Modakekes were ready for reconciliation and a place for settlement.²⁸

During the period of peace negotiations, the youths were admonished by the Area Commander of Police to surrender their weapons to the nearest police station. Of course, not all the youths obeyed the clarion call, but those that did were adequately compensated. The Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade introduced a farm incentive programme for the youths interested in farming. To each of the youths, he gave ten hectares of land located at the forest reserve area of Osun State.²⁹ Also, reputable Ife indigenes notable Dr. Omotosho Eluyemi who works at the national museum, used his position to give employment to the educated youths and other degree holders, while those that are not educated he provided them with motorcycles, grinding machines for the women, hair dryers, sewing machines and others.³⁰ Children who lost their parents in the cause of the conflicts were rewarded with scholarships.³¹

In addition, a philanthropist also known as Aree Musulumi of Ife, Alhaji Ibikunle Lawal also admitted lots of children to his school and gave them scholarships. Also, Tayo the son of 'Apollo', a revered Ife warrior was also granted scholarship. This new wave of economic innovation aided the community to bounce back to its era of industrialization and urbanization.³²

28 J. O. Toriola, "The Ife and Modakeke Crisis: An insider view", *Ife Psychologia. An International Journal*, vol.9, No.3, pp.21-29

29 O. Oyeniran, *Socio-Economic Impacts of Ife/Modakeke Crises*, M.A. Thesis, University of Benin, 2016 see also, J. O. Toriola, "The Ife and Modakeke Crisis: An insider view", *Ife Psychologia. An International Journal*, vol.9, No.3, p. 27

³⁰ National Archives Ibadan, "Remigration of Modakeke Oyo Prof 1/1929. Vol 1"

31 J.O. Toriola, "The Ife and Modakeke Crisis: An insider view", *Ife Psychologia. An International Journal*, vol.9, No.3, p. 28

³² O. Adesina, "Sub-Ethnic identities and the Crisis of development in contemporary Nigeria: Perspectives from the Ife-Modakeke conflict" *Journal of the department of history and international studies, Adekunle Ajasin University*, Vol. 3, no.1 2004, pp.9-10.

Conclusion

Aside the location and relocation of the local government headquarters, there were still other issues between the two communities, namely; the supremacy of the Ooni and the status of the Baale of Modakeke, traditional tenancy system and payment of tributes, the status of Modakeke itself in the context of Ile-Ife and the relationship between the two communities. These further mar the relationship of the two communities and resulted into series of conflict which claimed lives and properties. It affected the social and economic lives of the people and the communities as a whole disregarding their peaceful coexistence which had existed in time pass.

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