PEACE STUDIES AND CONFLICT

RESCLUTION IN NIGERIA:

A Reader

Edited by Miriam Ikejiani-Clark

Chapter 27

IFE-MODAKEKE CRISIS

Jacob Olufemi Fatile, PhD

Department of Public Administration Lagos State University, Lagos and

Professor Kunle Awotokun

Department of Local Government Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

Introduction

Certainly, Ife-Modakeke crisis can be regarded as one of the significant events in the history of Yoruba. It led to an enormous loss of lives, destruction of properties, and serious demographic destruction. The causes of the crisis can be seen as multifarious and complex, but some notable ones have been identified as the immediate and remote causes of the crisis. The inquiry of the crisis has shown that repeated violent confrontations were a cyclical reincarnation of yesteryears' mutual attack and attempted liquidation.

The course of the crisis can be seen as one that showed man's inhumanity to man; it also saw successes and failures of man. The impact of the crisis led to series of human miseries and it eventually led to a temporary hill in man's quest for supremacy over another.

The objective of this study is to examine the historical background of Ife and Modakeke crisis, the cause and course of the crisis and the

consequences of this landmark event in the history of Ile-Ife and Modakeke, and to proffer remedies in order to avert future occurrence of the crisis.

Historical Background

Ile-Ife is the ancient capital city of Yorubaland. It is situated in the tropical zone within longitude 4.60E and latitude 7.50N. Ile-Ife is about 2.75 metres above the sea level and about 78km North East of Ibadan in Oyo State, Nigeria, which have classified 83 urban areas with a population size of 148,141 according to the 2006 census (FGN Official Gazette, 2007). According to oral traditional history, Ife was the first created living place and the original home of all things. Obatala, otherwise known as 'orisa nla' the chief artist, was regarded highly by the ancient Ife people as the greatest of all Yoruba deities. Traditionally, the city of Ife was divided into five quarters—Iremo, Okerewe, More, Ilode and Ilare; within each quarter, there are compounds; within each compound, there are many lineages. Another quarter named Modakeke quarter was later created to absorb the Oyo people who were forcefully displaced from their home by the fanatical Muslim Jihadists from the north of the country (Yoruba League International).

Modakeke is next to Ife in size, population and location (the second largest town in Ife Division) in the former Oranmiyan Local Government Area of old Oyo State (now in Osun State). According to the 2006 census, she has a population of over 96,033 (FGN Official Gazette, 2007) well distributed throughout Modakeke wards. Driving from Mayfair Hotel junction Ife and branching to Ondo Road to pass through Modakeke High School/WEMA Bank Road through Sijuade Estate down to Osun State College of Arts and Science, on the road to Ondo State, one is actually passing through Modakeke Township which is about 3 kilometres in breadth and 6 kilometres in length. The town runs parallel to Ile-Ife on the southern part with 'Agbara' stream effectively demarcating the two towns from the eastern direction up to halfway before flowing through Modakeke. The inhabitants are Oyo with Oyo culture of Ibadan, Ogbomosho, etc, and traditional facial marks of Pele,

Abaja, Pele-Oba and Gombo, etc (Oladiran, 1989).

The historical relationship between Ile-Ife and Modakeke has been a constant source of tension and friction. Ile-Ife occupies a central position in the history of Yoruba, as the mythical home of the Yoruba. The major Yoruba rulers traced their descent from Oduduwa, the mythical founder of Ile-Ife. But the nineteenth century was a watershed in the history of Yoruba. This was the period when the old Oyo Empire collapsed, and this led to mass movement of Oyo refugees to different parts of Yorubaland, especially Ile-Ife. This might be as a result of the historical image of Ile-Ife as the aboriginal home of the Yoruba race. Then, there was a cordial relationship between Oyo refugees and Ife, which made Oyo to provide military support to Ife, especially during the Owu war of 1925. This, however, paved way for Oyo refugees to come in great number without restriction from Ife (Oyo State Official Document, 1981). Ajulo wrote:

According to an historical account given before Commissioners H. Higgins and Oliver Smith of age, ancient Oyo provinces mostly from Isundunri, Iragberi, Irawo, etc. He was a body in 1834 at the time of settlement. The main reason for summoning him was to rebut the story that Modakeke were slaves to Ife.

(One either buys a slave or captures one in a battle. He did not mention any battle where Oyo were enslaved neither could any name a slave market Oyo in which refugees being pursued by Fulani Jihadists were sold to Ife).

When these fleeing Oyo refugees got to Ile-Ife between 1770 and 1800, they were received by Ooni Akinmayere (alias Odunle), had no problem with Oyo until disaffection began towards the end of his reign.

Ooni Gbamilare (1800-1823) who succeeded Akinmayere showed kindness to the Oyos but the Ifes did not like the situation and was followed by the mysterious death of Ooni Gbamilare.

Ooni Gbadegesin (1823-1835) was very hostile to Oyo. He reviewed all forms of animosity from Ife to Oyo and that bitterness was a significant point.

Ooni Winmolaje (1835-1839) was kind to Oyo and he exploited his friendliness with Oyo to repel Ijesha aggression and incursion into Ife territory. The Ijesha believed that Ife was to be under Ijesha's administration through the Lowa—an Ijesha administrator of Ife territory who appointed 'Oluwo ni (coined to Ooni). To show appreciation to Oyo's services, Ooni was kindly disposed to them, but the hatred and malice of Ife citizens generally was so strong that not even the well disposed Ooni could curb the virulence of the opposite party.

A pretext was soon found again for murdering the well disposed Ooni Adegunle who succeeded Winmolaje. He was of Oyo descent on the mother's side and was an Oyo benefactor all his days. Before accepting the crown of Ife, he made Ife chiefs to swear to oaths not to find pretext for murdering him as they did his predecessors but would allow him to die a natural death. They readily agreed to his request.

Ooni Abeweila (1939-1945) ascended the throne of Ooni of Ife and acquired arms and ammunitions of war to ward off attack from his detractors in the populace. He was not warlike but a seasoned farmer hence his nickname (*abeweila ghagada ghagada*) meaning whose okro leaves are broad. In disregard to the oath, Ife attacked Abeweila who ably defended himself and saw that Oyo under Waigbolu's leadership did not join the detractors. He decided to emancipate them.

Ooni Abweila appointed a place at Parakoyi's direction, south of Ife (where Oranmiyan left for ancient Oyo) to the Oyo settlers under the leadership of Waigbolu (a smelter of iron and Ogun worshipper) who adopted the title Ogunsuwa (one whom birds were singing) MO-DA-KE-KE and named the place while living peacefully and quietly breeding undisturbed.

By royal proclamation, all Oyo in Ife were to leave Ife city in 1939 for the vast area of land outside Ife city gates and accordingly the settlement grew rapidly. The new arrivals everyday included refugees from Oyo empire's strongholds in the semi-savannah regions of Ijeru, i.e. Ibudo Oje, Iressadudu, Iressapupa, Ifon, Ede, Offa, Olla, Erin, Oko, Isundurin, Iwo Iragberi, Ile Ogbo, Igboho, Ajase Ipo, Ipapa, etc, many warriors of the empire found their way back to Ile-Ife when

Oyo Empire fell. Modakeke grew rapidly so much in 1884 and was between 50,000 and 60,000 inhabitants.

Causes of Ife-Modakeke Crises

Today, Ile-Ife and Modakeke are two neighbouring communities in the present Osun State. These two communities are so close together that it is said to be difficult or even impossible to delimit a clear-cut boundary between them. Despite this closeness, both communities have a long and surprising history of mutual antipathy and spasmodic crises and violence. The crisis in Ife-Modakeke is one of the oldest intra-ethnic crisis in Nigeria, which has recorded over 2000 deaths and several more injuries in the last two decades (Sayo and Shittu, 1997). The historical relationship that has generated the recurrent violent antagonism is conditioned by the mutual resentment that has resulted from the antipathy, which the two communities have developed towards each other.

The genesis of Ife-Modakeke feud was the outbreak of Kiriji war in 1878. During the war, both Ife army and Modakeke army had Ibadan army as ally and overlord but while Ife sympathy at home with Ekiti caused Ife ally on Ibadan side to decamp, the Modakeke ally remained loyal to Ibadan and halted an attempted attack on Ibadan from the rear by Ife army in collusion with Ibadan's enemies who were enroute Ibadan via Gbongan.

According to Oyeleye (1988), the Kiriji war had its immediate impact on the relationship between Modakeke and Ife. The former understandably joined Ibadan against Ijesa and Ekiti 'parapo', while the latter after a short stay with its benefactor joined the enemy camp. This led to the most destructive attack on Ife by Modakeke. He stated further that during the second major confrontation in 1882, the sacred city (Ile-Ife) was burnt down, the inhabitants driven out, and many sold into slavery. Those who escaped went to live in the surrounding villages of what was left of Ife territory. It was not until the British colonial administration interfered that the Ife were able to return home in 1894. The Treaty of Peace of 1886, which ended the Kiriji war had one of its

principal clauses in the evacuation of Modakeke from Ife. Olaolu Ajulo in his book titled *Brief History of Modakeke* wrote:

Prior to 1909, Jujus were usually placed all over Modakeke, which probably was responsible for the Balogun to disagree with the Baale, i.e. Ogunsua. Several attempts made by the Modakeke to make the District Officer (DO) caution the excesses of Ife against Modakeke such as kidnapping, raping, stealing, assault, etc proved abortive. The DO did not intervene to stop the atrocities committed against them (Modakeke) or did anything even when he saw those bad deeds himself. His felonious silence was very significant. The Modakeke saw and realised that a higher power and some supernatural forces were behind the whole conspiracy. No matter how much they tried, they would have no redress for all the injustices they were suffering. Thus, on March 27th 1909, i.e. 23 years after the imposition of the Treaty, the people of Modakeke started to evacuate their town (with reference to obnoxious clause 5 of the 1886 Treaty).

After the return of Modakeke in 1922, the first major crisis started as a religious issue. Modakeke Muslims protested that they were deprived of religious rights as permitted by the Holy Qur'an, they therefore built their own mosque and appointed their own Imam separate from that of Ife. While Ife saw the attempt by Modakeke as a desire to become independent of Ife, both religiously and administratively, and Modakeke realised that Ife was stronger than before, they (Modakeke) agreed that there should be a sub-mosque at Modakeke and Ife Imam was recognised as their Chief Imam.

The payment of 'Isakole' is another remote cause of the crisis. The boom in cocoa prices immediately after the end of World War II changed the traditional landlord and tenant relationship between Ife and Modakeke because the latter benefited more from the cocoa price rise. Instead of the token payment, the Ife landlords demanded ten per cent of the cocoa produced on all land cultivated by the Modakeke. The latter resented what they called the conversion of 'a gift into a legal debt' (Oyeleye, 1988). The Modakeke on their part argued that they

have for years recognised the Ooni of Ife as their suzerain but since 1938, they have been subjected to unwarrantable demands of 'isakole' (land rents by individual Ife people. Every acre of land in peaceful possession of a Modakeke farmer; and for which his ancestors paid rent to any individual has been claimed by one or the other Ife man for them (Ife) to pay them 'isakole' on the customary tenancy of the land which they occupied – in some cases by written agreements. The Modakeke who used to pay 'isakole' resented being 'harassed' and 'insulted' by the Ife landlords who have refused to accept the former's interpretation of the Land Use Act and insisted that payment of 'isakole' should continue (Oyo State Official Document, 1981).

For Ile-Ife, therefore, the basic problem appears to be the desire to recapture and regain the superiority over Modakeke and the land given to them in view of the equality and right claimed by Modakeke—she could not be expected to sit idly by while Modakeke seized the legitimate owners' right, and in addition posed a serious threat to her leadership status. It is within this setting of supremacy that led to the crisis on the part of Ife. On the other side, Modakeke's ambition and fighting for freedom as rights was seen by Ife as an attempt to create different government within the same system (Oladiran, 1989). As stated by Jefferson (1776) and quoted by Akade (1999) thus:

We hold this truth to be self-evident, that all men are created equally; that they were endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that amongst these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

It is in line with the above assertion that made Modakeke to fight for freedom from Ile-Ife. The crisis was again sparked off when Modakeke from demanded a separate local government of its own. This demand provoked Ife and opened new wounds on land ownership tussle between the two communities. While Modakeke focused their attention on having their own local government which was not granted under Ife dominated politics, and that the leadership of the ruling party (Action Group) then was not in support of the aspiration of the

Modakeke. This was evident in Chief Obafemi Awolowo's statement:

Ife town was one town and the request for a separate local government council for Modakeke amounted to an attempt to divide a single town (Akinboyewa, 1997).

Due to the fact that Chief Obafemi Awolowo had been solicitor to Ile-Ife in various cases between both communities, he was regarded as permanent enemy of Modakeke. The commencement of party politics in 1979 also contributed to the resumption of hostility between the two communities. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) saw the crisis as an opportunity to score a political point agenda and therefore cashed in on this development to improve its political image and promised to give Modakeke their local government which will make them independent and ceased to be an appendage of Ife. Modakeke saw the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) as a friendly party if they wanted to be independent of Ife. This refusal of Oyo State House of Assembly to create separate local government for Modakeke and the announcement of a new local government on 2nd April 1981 by Chief Bola Ige, which once again placed Modakeke under Oranmiyan Local Government resulted in full blown violence on 14th April 1981, where several people were killed on both sides and several houses burnt.

The 1997 crisis is the aftermath of what can be regarded as 'Killing the Dreams of a Promised land' on the part of Modakeke (Akinboyewa, 1997). The crisis is as a result of seeming indecision on the creation of Ife East Local Government without answering the question of landownership and boundaries, which have always been the bone of contention between Ife and Modakeke. The military government created Ife East Local Government with headquarters located at Enuwa in Ile-Ife. But on March 3, 1997, the headquarters of Ife East Local Government was changed from Enuwa in Ile-Ife to Modakeke. The arrangement was strongly opposed by Ife and due to intense pressures from Ile-Ife, on August 14, 1997, the then military Administrator of Osun State announced the decision to change the headquarters again

from Modakeke to Oke Igbo with the intention that the crisis will be laid to rest. But Modakeke saw Oke Igbo as part of Ile-Ife to which Enuwa belonged. This was immediately followed by full-blown violence, which resulted to prolonged war between the two communities from 1997 to 1999.

The Course of the Crises

In 1845, King Abeweila died and he was denied a royal burial by Ife. He was buried like a common man, all his slaves seized and the Oyo amongst them moved as a body to Modakeke. The Oyo guards prevented Abeweila's body from being ridiculed. Modakeke was soon besieged by Ife but they were repulsed with a heavy loss. Modakeke captured 12,000 of them and released them for Abeweila's sake but with the last serious warnings.

The counterattack on Modakeke was thirty days after one Ogunmakin, an Ife Chief, receiving reinforcement from Oke Igbo, attacked Modakeke but again, Ife was badly defeated and were pursued right home and the city of Ife was taken by an assault and as deterrent, Ife were sold into slavery while others fled to Isoya and Oke Igbo in exile.

The third attack of Ife on Modakeke was with the Ijebu allies; Ife was defeated in 1849 and there was no Ile-Ife between 1849 and 1854 when the Ibadans were engaged in the Ijebu Ere war. Chief Ogunmola of Ibadan – a Modakeke ally — negotiated terms of peace and brought back Ife so as not let the cradle of Yoruba remain deserted and gods not worshipped. Ogunmola's enforced oath was that whoever first provoked a fight and used Ogun (gun or cutlass) should suffer heavy losses and lose the battle. Cat and sheep were sacrificed under the Ori tree, and the act is still in force till today. The Ibadan overlord enthroned Degbi Kumbusu as the Ooni, and between 1854 and 1878, Ife and Modakeke coexisted happily exchanging commerce and intermarrying which is significant. Modakeke and Ife had peaceful coexistence under the supervision of impartial overlord until the outbreak

of the Kiriji war of 1878 when the whole Yorubaland was dragged into war.

The unfortunate disturbances of April 1981 have taken a heavy toll in terms of lives and properties. Hospital records showed that 26 people were killed, while 64 were admitted for gunshot wounds; 6 for machete cuts, 10 for multiple injuries and 1 for burns. The records did not contain even half of the casualties as investigation revealed that many were killed that were never taken to hospital while not all the injured reported to either the police or any of the hospitals in the area. The Memoranda of Modakeke Community and Ife Action Council showed that 16 known Modakeke and 6 Ife were killed, while 64 Ife people were missing. Lives lost could not have been less than 100. Properties lost in the disturbances run into millions of naira. In fact, houses and vehicles burnt/destroyed were 185 (Oyo State Official Document, 1981).

The aftermath of the recurrent crisis over the creation of local government in 1997 led to violation of lives and properties. The crisis made thousands of people internally displaced while thousands of deaths and injuries were recorded. Narrating his ordeal, a victim has this to say:

When they caught me, they told me that I should be taking them to the houses of the Oyo. I told them that I didn't know. So one of them who I identified shot me. But due to the rain on Sunday morning, which helped me to be revived from the bush, I managed to escape. Honestly speaking, it's God that saved me (Adeoye, 1997).

During the crisis, there was free use of sophisticated weapons by both sides, weakening police efforts to restore peace. Sporadic attack lingered in the interior areas. For instance, the combatants touched no fewer than 200 houses, while the bodies of victims were deposited at the Obafemi Awolowo University Hospital Complex (OAUTHC) Morgue on the part of Ile-Ife and on the part of Modakeke indigenes, at the Ogunsua's Palace (Sayo and Shittu, 1997). Worse hit in the bloody confrontation were the Modakeke, who could not even take their injured

to the hospitals as such hospitals were located in the heart of Ife consequently, some of those who received serious injuries bled to death due to lack of prompt and proper medical attention.

When the recrimination over the communal warfare persisted. Prince Leke Adeyela, Ife East Council Vice-Chairman said, "they (Modakeke indigenes) are refugees and should be made to realise this fact, whether they like it or not." While Ogunsua of Modakeke on his part said, "no we are not refugees, we own the land together. This is our home; and we are not going anywhere". Gekameh (1997) observed that the crisis led to the exodus of people from Modakeke to their families outside Ile-Ife for refuge until peace returned to the area. Some of the people sold their belongings at giveaway prices to get transport fare to their destination. While families resorted to labelling their houses as protective seal to ward off arsonists.

The state of the crisis was epileptic between September 1997 and December 1998. The two sides killed each other freely. Prominent among those whose properties were torched were Ooni of Ife, Oba Sijuade. It was during the crisis that the popular Sijuade Estate in Modakeke was burnt, Pa Adeyinka (a retiree of Ife Local Planning Authority) his elegant storey building located at Akarabata line One Area was also burnt, while it was a double tragedy for one Mrs Ogundido whose bungalow house was first torched by Modakeke in 1981 and her new two-storey building was burnt again, just to mention but a few. More than two years after the least active clash between both communities, about 53 houses were totally destroyed and remained to be rebuilt or rehabilitated. As a result of the crisis, Ile-Ife known for religious fundamentalism and street violence respectively was increasingly becoming known on the social map of Nigeria as a violent city that might find it difficult in future to attract external support for its development efforts (Agekameh, 1997).

Also, the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife might not be able to attract the best calibre of staff and students in the near future for security reasons. Lastly, as a result of the crisis, several inter-marriages involving both communities broke down.

Conclusion/Recommendations

There were no conflicts in Yoruba history, whether in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times, which were as dangerous and destructive as that of Ife-Modakeke communal conflicts. One is surprised that no sustainable solution has been found to this crisis which started since the 1830s.

Olawale Albert in his paper titled "Community Conflicts in Nigeria" observed that various panels of inquiry were set up to look into the 1981 and 1997 incidents. None of the panels came out with a permanent solution to the problem. With the publicity given to and resources pumped into the Ibidapo Obe panel of inquiry in 1981, the peace initiatives of the traditional rulers in Osun State in 1997, and the NARECOM visits to Ile-Ife in 1997, he concluded that the impact of any of these panels was yet to be felt. Following the above observations, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- The security system in both communities should be strengthened and the existing police in the area should be adequately staffed and equipped. It is important that a new security network should be set up through other security agents to complement the activities of the police force. There should be constant and continuous vigilance and the leadership of both communities should be part of agents of peace in order to avert future occurrence of such violent clash.
- A reconciliation committee should be set up between the two communities, and a non-partisan third party supported by Osun and federal governments to settle the age-long crisis between the two communities. And each community should be given deep and fair consideration. Issues like creation of separate local government for Modakeke, the citizenship of Modakeke in Ile-Ife and the political and religious relationship between the leaders of both communities should be explored. This would invariably bring about permanent peace to both communities.

- Government should address the problem of youth unemployment in both communities because most of the problems were caused by the youths and they formed the bulk of the arsonists.
- Also, various conflict management training workshops should be organised by the government for youths in Ife and Modakeke because they witnessed the tussle so that some of them would not develop into a generation of avengers.
- Government should organise enlightenment programmes within the two communities to see themselves as having equal rights to life and property. The age-long appellations of 'refugees' or 'stranger elements' are anachronistic and should be discouraged.
- Finally, there should be the establishment of Consultative Committee between the two communities to handle disagreement that may occur and make recommendations to the government for prompt actions.

References

- Adeoye, Seun (1997). "Four More Die in Ife, Modakeke Clash", The Guardian, Tuesday, September 2, pp1-2.
- Agekameh, Dele (1997). "Blood from the Source", Tell Magazine, September 1, p23.
- Ajulo Olaolu, "History of Modakeke" quoted in Oladiran Ajayi (1989) "Modakeke towards the Promised land". A lecture delivered on July 15th, in a Special Commemorative/Mid Year Lecture to mark the Creation of Ife North Local Government Area.
- Akinboyewa, Olu (1997). "Destruction Trails Ife, Modakeke Feud" Daily Times, September 25, p3.
- Alade, Charles A. (1999). Our Ever Changing World: Diplomacy, Politics, War and Peace, Lagos; Ken-Anibaba Publications.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, No. 24, Vol. 94, 15th May, 2007.
- Johnson, O. (1921). The History of the Yorubas, Lagos: CMS Bookshops.

- Oladiran, Ajayi (1989). "Modakeke towards the Promised Land". A lecture delivered on July 15th, in a Special Commemorative/Mid Year Lecture to mark the Creation of Ife North Local Government Area.
- Oyeleye, Oyediran (1988). Essays in Local Government Administration in Nigeria, Lagos: Project Publication Ltd.
- Sayo, Ifedayo and Shittu Sola (1997). "Killing, Arson as Violence Flares Again in Ile-Ife" The Guardian, Wednesday, September 24, p2.
- Sayo, Ifedayo and Shittu Sola (1997). "Death Toll hit 30 in Ife Crises" The Guardian, Thursday, September 25, p 2.
- Views of the Government of Oyo State on the Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Communal Disturbances in Oranmiyan Local Government Area of Oyo State, Oyo State Official Document, No. 1 of 1981.
- Yoruba League International (www.idpproject.org) Nigeria.