

***MYTHS, INDIGENOUS CULTURE, AND  
TRADITIONS AS TOOLS IN  
RECONSTRUCTING CONTESTED  
HISTORIES: THE IFE-MODAKEKE  
EXAMPLE.***

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## MYTHS, INDIGENOUS CULTURE, AND TRADITIONS AS TOOLS IN RECONSTRUCTING CONTESTED HISTORIES: THE IFE-MODAKEKE EXAMPLE.

### Abstract

*Customs and traditions continue to be an invaluable source of information for historians of the African past. A vast amount of information and explanations on complex African issues can be found in these aspects of African culture. This paper deals with the Ife-Modakeke conflict, especially the determination of the main contending issue in the conflict i.e. the determination of whether Modakeke was established as a ward in Ile-Ife or a separate town entire of Ile-Ife. It examines the function of Yoruba customs and traditions in the reconstruction of the intention of Ooni Abeweila, the Ife king that established Modakeke, and the various interpretations given his intentions during and after his reign. The paper analyzes the kind of information and explanations cultural practices like Ogun-Pipin, (inheritance sharing), Ile-Mimu, (division or sharing of lands among family members) Oko-Yiya, (division or sharing of farmland among family members), Ise-Yiya (division or sharing of occupation among family members), etc, could offer when the event that led to the establishment of Modakeke occurred, and in secondary sources, on the Ife-Modakeke conflicts of the later days. Finally, the paper considers the kinds of questions historians must ask in order to make customs and traditions useful tools in explaining, reconstructing, and understanding a people's past.*

### I. Introduction

This paper advances three basic arguments. First, the paper argues that cultural practices, tradition, folklores, mores, etc are strategic ways through which a people remember their pasts. As it is generally held in historical studies, all historical writings aim at recovering a people's past. The second argument that this paper addresses is that all histories are contested histories. Histories, whether of trade and commerce, warfare and diplomacy, Imperialism and Pan Africanism, etc, are contested either by the major actors or by others within the historical space. These contests are daily constructed and reconstructed in various ways through the works of historians, political scientists, etc. The third argument, and no less important, is that all histories, including modern historiography, are mythologies. In advancing these three arguments, the paper aims at presenting African historians with another tool in their efforts to piece together the historical truth of events and phenomena that have been subjected to repeated debates. This tool is indigenous culture, which inexorably cannot be dissociated from mythology.

### II. Mythology, Indigenous Culture and Contested Histories in Africa

Simply defined, mythology refers to a body of folklore, myths, legends, etc that a particular people believes to be true about themselves, the world around them and the general course of events. These folklore, myths, legends, etc often entails the interpretation and explanation of nature, natural events, human course of action, etc through the supernatural rather than the scientific lens. Myths, it must be noted, are borne-out of real events. They encapsulate a people's historical realities that possess symbolic meanings, which, through regular use, have become transformed and embodied in concrete genres. When such events are carried over from one generation

to another generation, they assumed the force of customs, traditions, cultural practices, etc. A notable example, with respect to the Yoruba people, is the general belief in *Ori*<sup>1</sup>, which can be found in the *Ifa*<sup>2</sup> corpus and generally embodies what the people believe about human destiny or what they called *Ako se ja'ye*<sup>3</sup>. Similar thing could be said of the institution of kingship, which remains a hallmark of the Yoruba people even till date.

Understood in this way, mythology is unarguably a general phenomenon that is not culture-bound or peculiar to any group, race, geographical location, etc. It is a general practice that is found both in the developed as well as the underdeveloped societies. Mythology, as a general phenomenon, aims primarily at explaining things, events, and phenomena of everyday life in an emotional, more spiritual as against the scientific manner.

Indigenous culture, on the other hand, refers to all customs and traditions, socio-economic and political frameworks that are peculiar to or common to a particular group of people. These include all institutions and structures which gave expression to a people's entire way of life, their worldviews, etc and how these are transmitted from one generation to the other. One general characteristic of indigenous culture is that it is not formally learnt. It is nevertheless popular and subscribed to by the entire population of a particular area. For instance, among the Yoruba, proverbs, idioms, epigrammatic expressions and their various interpretations, hidden meanings and expressions are mostly unlearned but are generally acquired in the process of growth. As a normal Yoruba child develops, the child acquires these cultural expressions as integral part of his or her identity as a Yoruba person.

From the above, mythology is an integral part of a people's culture, which defers in no way from traditions, customs, idioms, proverbs and anecdotes. They are both endogenous and exogenous to humans. They grew from people's interactions with themselves as well as with their environment. In so far as these remain inalienable qualities of these phenomena, they could be regarded as strategic ways through which a people's past is preserved. In other words, myths, traditions, indigenous practices, etc, in so far as they embody a people's way of life, can be regarded as records of their histories. They are therefore a pool of vital resources for historical reconstruction, especially where written or oral testimonies are lacking or subjects of controversies.

Sadly, the use of myths and cultural practices have eluded scholars, as majority considers mythology, indigenous practices, etc as nothing more than mere gyrations of barbaric people, which should not have any place in historical reconstructions. While this is not to say that indigenous cultures, myths, etc have not been used in historical reconstructions, it is however to underscore the fact that their usages have, so far, been limited. For instance, earlier in the development of African History, Kenneth Dike, Ade-Ajayi,<sup>4</sup> and others pioneered the use of oral accounts to establish the existence of history in Africa before the colonial intrusion. Even at this time, oral accounts rather than cultural practices as a whole remained the focus. Indigenous culture like mythology, cultural practices, etc were never considered as

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<sup>1</sup> *Ori*, literally means a head, but connotes human's destiny or sometimes luck, among the Yoruba.

<sup>2</sup> *Ifa*, according to Sophie Oluwole, 76 years old and an emeritus professor of African Philosophy, is a philosophical belief of the Yoruba, which is in corpus and verses and is indigenous to the Yoruba people.

<sup>3</sup> Yoruba for human destiny.

<sup>4</sup> These are the pioneers of African historiography in Nigeria. Numerous scholars of similar bent are all over Africa.

crucial to historical reconstructions and where they were, they were treated as adjuncts to either written sources or archival records. The general practice was to regard anything not found in the records as of any historical value. After the pioneer efforts of Kenneth Dike, Ade-Ajayi, etc in the 1960s and the 1970s, the use of oral accounts in historical reconstruction has gone into disuse. This is more obvious in the general trend of undergraduate and graduate long essays, dissertations and thesis, which tends to glorify written records in an obstinate manner.

This has impacted negatively on the utility-factor of historical reconstruction, especially in Africa, as the role of historical scholarship in nation-building has receded to the background that there were concerted efforts to remove history as a subject of study in most schools. More often than not, histories so far reconstructed have been submerged in fresh controversies that are challenging the initial efforts at their reconstructions. It is in respect to this last argument that this paper asserts that all histories are contested histories. The contests, in most cases, have involved class, gender, ideologies, etc. For instance, how many times have we heard that the pyramids in Egypt were built by the Pharaohs? How many times have read that the wealth and the administrative sophistication of the Alaafin built the old Oyo Empire? How many such histories abound today and are being passed to generations after generations? In actual fact, neither the Pharaohs nor the Alaafin actually did any of such things arrogated to them or their offices in the literature. The historical truth is that the ordinary citizens of Egypt and Old Oyo performed these tasks. Among other things, we should ask why these noble developments were arrogated to the rulers and not the masses that actually performed these tasks. Again, who were these people and why are histories silent about them? What are the views of these men about these historical realities? Now that death has closed their eyes in eternal slumber, how do we reconstruct their roles in the building of either the pyramids or the Old Oyo Empire? Can we, indeed, reconstruct these histories?

As Jonathan Friedman<sup>5</sup> had brilliantly noted, the construction of a history is the construction of a meaningful universe of events and narratives for an individual or a collectively defined subject. How then do one make a meaning out of a past long gone and of whom nothing is remembered? Can we construct a meaningful universe or hazard a narrative for a collectively defined subject in a complex web of claims and counter-claims? How can we do any of these where written records are lacking?

Cultural practices, myths, etc as strategic ways through which a people's past is preserved are unintended, never lying, and mute witnesses to historical realities. Hence, as unintended witnesses, they reflect the historical truth as perceived by the people at the time of the events. Although mute or dumb, they could serve in reconstructing events whose truths have long been submerged in contested renditions over time. Cultural practices therefore are vital historiographical tools and are chief technique for remembering the past in a more reliable way. When used in conjunction with other sources, they could help in reconstructing contested histories.

### **III. The Social Dynamics of Indigenous Culture**

Like other human activities, cultural practices are dynamic. Hence, to use them for any historical reconstruction, the user, irrespective of disciplinary requirements, must understand that a practice has both a nucleus and the periphery. More often than not, the nucleus remains the core of the practice. This core, on the one hand, is unnoticed

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Albert I. O., "Data Collection and Interpretation in the Social History of Africa", in John Edward Phillips (ed.) *Writing African History*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 287–307.

and hidden to sight. Being thus, the core takes enormous time to yield to changes. On the other hand, the periphery is open and yields to change unnoticeably. One way of conceptualizing this process is to view it as a person travelling a long distance with lay-over at different points on the journey. As the traveller progresses from one lay-over point to the other, what he thinks, feels and says about the journey takes on progressively greater historical significance thus rendering what occasioned the journey in the first place as less important. By the time the wayfarer reaches the end of the journey, the story has taken on a life of its own and the facts of the original event have become almost irrelevant. This is not at all different from a football match. The ultimate aim is to score goal. However the goal comes may be a story for another day, but no coach would tolerate a player who left the task of scoring goals for the task of dribbling others, although one inexorably leads to the other. Understanding the core of any cultural practice would therefore lead the researcher into understanding the primary purpose of the practice.

As the example of the Yoruba used in this study shall show, indigenous culture, like other human phenomenon, could be affected internally as well as from its environment. For instance, change in any culture could result from its internal mechanisms as well as could be as a response to external contacts. European contacts in Africa had a long historical root, but both slavery and colonialism have impacted on Africa in a myriad of ways. Some of the changes wrought by both experiences are both endogenous as well as exogenous.

In relation to the Yoruba, to consider another example, the nineteenth century Yoruba war not only led to the incorporation of Yoruba nations into the vortex of colonialism, but also affected valued Yoruba cultures and institutions that gave expressions to these cultures. Political control became challenged and there arose societies in Yorubaland that evolved new political arrangements that had no historical roots. Also, indigenous practices like human sacrifices, pawnship, etc gave way as colonial administration instituted rules that considered such practices as obsolete and not amenable to its system. In all these, changes were wrought within the system through internal as well as external factors. In essence, cultural practices are dynamic, but the cores of their values remain.

#### **IV. Indigenous Culture and the Yoruba People**

Among the Yoruba, there were and are important practices that characterized the Yoruba world, whether in continental Africa or in the Diasporas. They are some of the specific elements that formed the Yoruba identity and help in sorting the Yoruba out among other groups. They encapsulate and give meanings to the Yoruba world. They are integral parts that cannot be separated from the whole. In everyday living as well as in different other life-forms and expressions, the Yoruba employs indigenous culture as a concise way of given air to their views, expressions, preferences and interests. As such, multi-layered meanings and interpretations of these cultures abound within the Yoruba world. In most cases, these meanings and interpretations are mutually understandable and/or intelligible only to the Yoruba. Hence, as a language of expression, Yoruba is not just a language; it is equally a tool, something of a lens, through which the entire Yoruba world can be viewed.

As the Yoruba are wont to say, *'Owe l'esin Oro, Oro l'esin Owe, B'Oro ba sonu, Owe la fi n wa'*.<sup>6</sup> The meanings and interpretations associated with this saying

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<sup>6</sup> (lit.) Proverb is the horse of issues, when conflict arose; it is proverb that aids its resolution.

are not limited to the occasion it was used but also associated with time loop.<sup>7</sup> In the Yoruba corpus, cultural practices, customs, traditions, words, proverbs, idioms and issues have more than the meanings and interpretations imposed on them by the circumstances surrounding them. Yoruba world imposes both an immediate and a futuristic meanings and interpretations on words, proverbs, idioms and events. In the proverb above, the etymological meaning would read something like: Proverbs are the horses of words, when a word is lost; proverbs help in finding it. Any Yoruba person that offers this as an interpretation and meaning of the proverb is likely to be regarded as ‘*Omo Enu*’<sup>8</sup> as against ‘*Omo Oju*’. A rather preferred interpretation would look like: Proverbs are the horses of issues, when a conflict arose; proverbs help in its resolution. This negates the popular position that words have no meanings outside the occasions surrounding their usages. To an *Omo Oju*, i.e. one who understands body languages and expressions as against the other who cannot demonstrate any understanding unless of the spoken words (*Omo Enu*), the interpretation and meaning of the proverb would look like this: Proverbs are the horses of issues, when a conflict arose; proverbs help in its resolution. Just as ‘*Omo*’ in the above identity tags is translated as any individual irrespective of age, as against the child that the word connotes, so are Yoruba words, idioms, proverbs, issues, phenomena, etc; they are capable of different interpretations, meanings and connotations.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, the most obvious meanings and interpretations are not always the intended ones. As Johnson had noted, the Yoruba were fond of ambiguous form of speech making, which, to the untutored, imposes a great danger as Yoruba becomes unintelligible and the process of learning it becomes cumbersome.<sup>10</sup> But for a truth, the difficulty associated with making meanings out of the skein associated with the Yoruba words and world is limited to the non-Yoruba, but to the Yoruba themselves; the richness of the language is underscore by this peculiar characteristic.

In such a tangled web of meanings, interpretations and hidden intentions; how do historians, especially in an age where western values dominated and demonized the richness associated with other languages, make sense of the Yoruba indigenous culture? Among others, Oyekan Owomoyela of the University of Nebraska did an interpretative work on Yoruba proverbs.<sup>11</sup> N.A. Fadipe’s classic, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*,<sup>12</sup> Karin Barber<sup>13</sup>, and Samuel Johnson<sup>14</sup> made some efforts to copiously

<sup>7</sup> Time loop simply refers to the general conception of time is necessarily ingrained with the past, the present and the future. In the Yoruba world, events have not only a relation to the past and the present but also to the future; hence, the Yoruba people see events within the three time sequence. In fact, it can be described as a perception that sees events not as a snapshot but like an interlocking chain.

<sup>8</sup> An *Omo Enu* refers to an idiot who never learns unless under constant direction. In contrast, *Omo Oju* simply refers to a self-starter who understood even the unspoken words and needs little or no prompting to know what the best is in any given circumstance.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Johnson claimed that the Oyo-speaking people of what is now known as Oyo State are gifted in the ability to weave words in this manner, especially in such a way that words appear ambiguous whereas it in real sense are not ambiguous but having deeper meaning that are intentionally concealed. See Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921).

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921).

<sup>11</sup> Oyekan Owomoyela, *Yoruba Proverbs*, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Karin Barber, “Documenting Social and Ideological Change Through Yoruba Oriki: A Stylistic Analysis” in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol., 10, No. 4, (Nigeria: Impact Publishers, June 1981).

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 23.

document some forms of interpretation and guide, not to the understanding of the Yoruba world, but to understanding some of the cultural practices, customs, tradition, proverbs and idioms collated in their works. Aside from these few works and one or two dictionaries of Yoruba words, no other work is as yet known that could serve as an eye-opener to understanding the Yoruba world. As I have always argued, only the Yoruba intelligentsia can remedy this problem but it is unfortunate to say that most of the men and women belonging to this category of African scholars understood nothing of the Yoruba language. They can be described, with apologies, as hybrids with neither a pride of ancestry nor a hope of posterity. They have failed to yield to the call by Samuel Johnson who asked that they imbibed the *patriotic motive, that the history of our fatherland might not be lost in oblivion, especially as our old sires are fast dying out*<sup>15</sup>. It is equally sad that their children can neither make sense and meanings of the Yoruba world nor say an intelligible word in Yoruba. The educational system in most African countries, especially Nigeria, is also not helping matters, as no conscious effort is made to preserve local languages. Teachers, in most cases, discourage and punish students and pupils from speaking indigenous languages. They have daubed these invaluable tools as ‘vernacular’<sup>16</sup>.

For all occasions, the Yoruba have matching words, idioms, proverbs, cultures and customs that gave expressions not only to their views but also their preferences. In life matters as well as rite of passage, corpus of customs and traditions exists giving expressions to the Yoruba world. These are mutually intelligible to all Yoruba peoples irrespective of location and dialectical variances. For example, animism as a form of worship used to be a popular practice and the same gods and deities were, while it lasted, worshipped in similar ways. The same is true of practices like marriage, christening, inheritance sharing, war, peacemaking, etc. Operating under this generalized form, the Yoruba world became uniform in cultural practices even if there are different kingdoms and states within the Yoruba country. In a way, this uniformity of cultural practices helped in control and administration, as a Yoruba person who found him or herself in another Yoruba town was not a total stranger; ignorant of the ways and practices of this new environment. The Yoruba world, as a result of these popular cultural practices, was a mutually intelligible world.<sup>17</sup>

Just how popular are indigenous cultures? The simplest response to this is that they are simple, fundamental and universal laws applicable to all Yoruba in general although subject to regional variations according to local exigencies. It must be noted that this is not a flaw but a strength as it allows for adaptation to local needs.

#### **IV. Ife-Modakeke Conflicts and Indigenous Yoruba Cultures**

From the Neolithic to the modern age, the history of mankind has been one of migration and displacement. Mankind is either willingly migrating from one life zone or unwillingly and unpreparedly displaced or forced to migrate or flee to other life zones in his search for food, shelter and security. Displacement therefore is a constant human experience and cannot be said to be a new thing amongst mankind. Be that as

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 24.

<sup>16</sup> Miss Mopelola Ogunbowale, a student of Redeemer’s University recounted her personal experience in an oral presentation on erosion of African culture, July, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> This view is corroborated by Paul Lovejoy, ‘The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade’ in Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (eds.) *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, (New York: Indiana University Press, 2004). See also, David Eltis, ‘The Diaspora of Yoruba Speakers, 1650-1865: Dimensions and Implications’ in Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (eds.) *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, (New York: Indiana University Press, 2004), 204.

it may, the development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba history serves as an important landmark for the analysis and understanding of some of the developments of the period as well as of the later age. A good example of such development is conflict, conflict resurgence, and escalation.

From the numerous wars of Chaka de Zulu in South Africa, the Buganda and Bunyoro wars in Uganda, to the numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba wars in Nigeria, etc the various African peoples and kingdoms have witnessed a period of widespread, forceful, and unplanned flight from their different places of habitual residences, in particular, as a result of the need to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disaster whether within their respective countries of birth and habitual residence or in neighbouring ones. The ricocheting effects of these wars and the attendant displacements have been, among other things, the origin or foundation of new communities, new dynasties, and sometimes entirely new forms of interrelationships between the existing kingdoms and states and the newly established ones. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the widespread violence and its attendant displacement have led to the sudden rise to prominence of hitherto unheard of states like Ibadan and Ijaye, the emergence of new ones e.g. Modakeke, Ogbomoso, and the reconfiguration of old ones to adopt entirely new look and feel e.g. Osogbo, Abeokuta, etc.

One of the unique things about these newly emerging states and kingdoms was their outright deviation from known Yoruba traditions, especially in relations to socio-economic and political control. In the case of Ibadan and Ijaye, political control ceased to be repository in kings, as political leaders, and became subset of ascription rather than heredity<sup>18</sup>. Aside from this constitutional modifications and adaptations, the period witnessed gradual erosion in the long-held social and political traditions and culture of the Yoruba<sup>19</sup>. As age-old traditions gave way to the exegesis of the period, human relations assumed different meanings and countrymen sell fellow countrymen as slaves at the coast. In addition, total war became, for the first time, enshrined in the unwritten codes of conduct of the Yoruba people<sup>20</sup>. Conducts, previously considered unbecoming of a true-born Yoruba soldier, became virtues to be rewarded and applauded. One such conducts is the treatment of the victims of wars and conflicts i.e. the displaced persons.

Displacement, as earlier noted, is the unplanned and forceful flight of persons or group of persons from their homes or places of habitual residences, in particular, as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.<sup>21</sup> In traditional African society before the colonial intrusion, the displaced persons, called 'Olu wo' among the Yoruba, were protected persons who must not only be accorded respect and be catered for, but also must, on no account, be made to suffer any bodily harm. They were regarded as state-visitors and, as such, must be accorded with the

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<sup>18</sup> J.F. Ade-Ajayi and S.A. Akintoye, "Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century", in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed., O. Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), 23. See also Aribidesi Usman, "Crisis and Catastrophe: Warfare in Precolonial Northern Yoruba", in *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran (NJ: Africa World Press, Inc. 2005), 345.

<sup>19</sup> The period witnessed raids by various powerful individuals who styled themselves as 'Ogo Were' and led by Adegun of Ikoyi and many others whose names are now lost to history.

<sup>20</sup> Owu War blazed the trail in the lists of towns that suffered the effects of total war, as it was razed down and was placed under an interdict that it might not be reconstituted again.

<sup>21</sup> Deng M., Francis, "The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement", United Nations Document E/CN.4/1996/52 Add.2 of Dec. 1995.

same respect accorded the king. As part of the traditional etiquette of war, wars must be declared and fought faraway from human habitation, in this way, traditional Africa protected its habitations, non-combatants and a class of protected persons like women and children, the elderly, and visitors were regarded as protected persons and must not be exposed to the dogs of war. Such was the unwritten code of war subscribed to by all African communities. With the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial intrusion, all these changed and not only were total wars fought for the very first time in Africa, but also protected persons were not only maltreated, but also considered as spoils of war, which can be deployed as the victors may see fit. This transformation not only reconfigured the entire Yorubaland, but also helped in reshaping and redefining socio-economic and political relationships between groups within the entire Yoruba race today.

One of the unfortunate and enduring legacies of the colonial intrusion is the seed of discord it sowed among the various African peoples. Among the various groups that made up Nigeria today, newspapers are awashed with stories of in-fighting, recurring or resurging conflicts, which pitched one community against the other. Hausa-Yoruba, Izon-Itsekiri, Urhobo-Itsekiri, etc are today pitched against one another in an unending orgy of violence and conflict. One cannot but wonder why these conflicts, especially when one considers the fact that the people have been mutually interacting before the colonial intrusion. Among these ethnic groups, pockets of in-group fighting exist today defying resolutions. Among the Yoruba, Ife-Modakeke conflict remains a sore-spot on the entire Yoruba race. The fact that the Modakeke were the displaced peoples from the ruined old Oyo Empire is a direct challenge to the myth that Ile-Ife is the *Orirun* i.e. source or the cradle of the Yoruba race and that the various Yoruba nations are joint heirs in the estate of Oduduwa. This is so because if in deed these are true, then it applies also that no Yoruba person is to be regarded as a stranger in Ile-Ife, because all Yoruba peoples have Ile-Ife as their common home. It is therefore wrong to regard the Modakeke, whether displaced by war or not, as strangers or refugees in or at Ile-Ife; rather, they were but returnees or internally displaced persons who were forced by circumstances of war and conflicts to return to their ancestral home after a long sojourn abroad.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. The displaced, although well received at the initial stage, soon became articles of trade at the coast and, as Samuel Johnson describes it, “...they became hewers of wood and drawers of water and were treated no better than... dogs.”<sup>22</sup> This is in complete negation of Yoruba culture, customs and tradition, especially in relations to the treatment of a sojourner. The only plausible explanation one can give for this is that the Ife people must have been affected by the wave of the socio-political and economic changes the colonial intrusion introduced, which ushered in revolutionary constitutional adaptations in governance, economy, and interrelationships. Whatever explanation one gives, it ushered in a new form of socio-political relationships (revolutionary constitutional adaptations) between the displaced people and their hosts. The effect of this new relationship was incessant conflicts and war, which, in the case of the Ife and their Modakeke guests, have lasted two centuries and are still recurring, seemingly defying all solutions<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 234.

<sup>23</sup> Works on the consequences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba wars are many. Some notable ones are Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1971), 98.; J.A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980), 74.; G.O. Oguntomisin, *The Transformation of a Nigerian Lagoon Town: Epe 1852-1942*, (Ibadan: John Archers, 1999), 70.

As I had noted in other works<sup>24</sup>, Ife-Modakeke conflict is but a fall-out of the prevailing 19<sup>th</sup> century wars, especially the displacement of the peoples in the Yoruba proper area. While it lasted, the wars caused a number of socio-economic, political and demographic changes all over Yorubaland so much so that new societies operating under altered or completely new socio-economic and political structures emerged. For example, Osogbo and Ibadan, respectively Ijesa and Egba towns, changed to purely Oyo in nature, look and feel. Other new towns like Sagamu, Modakeke, Abeokuta, were formed etc. In these new and old towns, altered or completely new forms of social relations developed substituting existing ones.

While other Yoruba towns and cities were adapting their constitutions to meet with the new challenges imposed by the war and the resultant displacement, Ile-Ife remained encrusted in its traditional forms; putting the over 600, 000<sup>25</sup> displaced people under the control of Obalaaye, a ward chief. The unwritten code of conduct in war among the Yoruba was that unarmed war victims and protected persons should under no circumstances be exposed to the dogs of war<sup>26</sup>. In a similar sense, even if Baales are not so much regarded, Obas are regarded as higher in position and prestige than a chief. In Ile-Ife during the period, some of these cultural practices were discarded and the displaced people in Ile-Ife soon became sacrificial totems at shrines and articles of trade at the slave markets<sup>27</sup>. The Obas and Baale among them were forced to serve the chiefs.

As noted elsewhere, the lure to Ile-Ife, during the wars, was premised on its geographical advantage as well as the traditional conception of Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba<sup>28</sup>. Hence, peoples who ran for shelter in the traditional birthplace of Yoruba culture soon found out that the war had eroded all vestiges of culture and customs and that the cradle itself had been eaten up by the termites of the wars.

The Ife soon began using the displaced people; a people tradition regarded as protected persons, as farm-hands on the field, as war-boys serving on the sides of various Ife chiefs, as articles of trade at the slave market and as sacrificial animals before Ife deities. In reaction to this, the displaced people became aggressive and riotous. The removal of Maye Okunade as Baale in Ibadan marked the beginning of open conflict in the Ife-Modakeke relations<sup>29</sup>. As told by Johnson, Okunade was an irritable terror who hated and never pretended to have loved the Oyo in Ibadan. It was

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<sup>24</sup> Oyeniyi, Bukola Adeyemi, "Problems of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria: Origin and Causes of Ife-Modakeke Conflict" in Akinwumi, O., Okpeh, O. O., Je'adayibe, G. D. (eds.) *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publisher, 2006), 719.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 234.

<sup>26</sup> Onigu Otite and Albert I.O. (eds.), *Community Conflicts in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: John Archers, Ibadan, 2000), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Olaniyan R.A., 'The Modakeke Question in Ife Politics and Diplomacy' in Akinjogbin I.A. (ed.), *The Cradle of a Race: Ife from the Beginning to 1980*, (Port-Harcourt: Sunray Publishers, 1992), 345.

<sup>28</sup> Oyeniyi, Bukola Adeyemi, "Problems of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria: Origin and Causes of Ife-Modakeke Conflict" in Akinwumi, O., Okpeh, O. O., Je'adayibe, G. D. (eds.) *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publisher, 2006), 734.

<sup>29</sup> Works on Ife-Modakeke conflicts have always situated the conflict, *ab initio*, as a fall-out of the loss of hegemony over Ibadan and the eventual death of Maye Okunade in the subsequent Gbanamu war, but mine scholarship deviated, for the first time, from this celebrated views to a longer duree approach to the interrelationship between the Ife and the Oyo before the wars and subsequent displacement of the Oyo-speaking people.

this hatred for anything Oyo that led a minor quarrel between one Amejiogbe and an Oyo man into a war between Okunade and the entire Oyo in Ibadan<sup>30</sup>.

As the story goes, Okunade did not bother to know what the quarrel was about; rather, he brandished his sword and beheaded the Oyo man. The rest Oyo soldiers rallied together to protest the cruel way their countryman was treated and in the process Okunade was forced to leave Ibadan. He died in his efforts to reclaim Ibadan. The Oyo who took over from him ruled Ibadan to the detriment of the Ife and some of the Ife in Ibadan had no other choice than to return home.

This came at a time when Ife was about reasserting itself as a great power<sup>31</sup>. It was therefore a sad Ife that received the body of their illustrious son, Okunade, and other returning soldiers to Ile-Ife. This event, coupled with the fact that the Oyo people in Ife had began to reject Ife's overlordship over them<sup>32</sup>, weaned a bitter hatred for the Oyo and open conflict soon ensued. Although, as I have demonstrated in many earlier essays, the history of hatred between the Oyo speaking people and the Ife antedated this event and to date Ife-Oyo relations, in relations to the hatred that snowballed into what today is known as Ife-Modakeke conflict, is somewhat self-serving. Be that as it may, since 1835 when this happened, Ife-Modakeke relations have been characterized by wars and conflicts that have destroyed invaluable property and lives with impunity. Efforts at resolving this conflict have met with limited or no success. This has led to a view that the issues in conflict may not have been addressed or addressed adequately.

The history of the conflict reveal that the determination of whether Modakeke was intended to be a part of Ile-Ife or a separate entity of itself but not without some form of relations with Ile-Ife. While Ooni Abeweila, who established Modakeke, left no written records to say what his intention was, the way the Ooni was killed by the Ife could explain why Ife's tradition may not be a trustworthy source that can wholly explain the mindset of Abeweila<sup>33</sup>.

Historians of the Yoruba history, especially contested histories relating to identity issues, are therefore left with either making informed guesses based on their reconciliation of available oral and documentary sources in making whatever positions they subscribe to or leave the matter to commonsense. To resolve this and related historiographical problems, the use of indigenous culture recommends itself as a veritable tool in understanding not only the mindset of, say Abeweila, but also in ascertaining the prevailing situation during the period. This is premised on the belief that kings were and still remain custodians of a people's customs and culture. In a similar breath, the limitation associated with oral tradition is hereby healed as the use of indigenous culture takes care of whatever vested interests kings, chiefs, peoples,

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 300.

<sup>31</sup> J. F. Ade-Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, (Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1971), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 239.

<sup>33</sup> There are contradictions on who killed Abeweila. Ife tradition maintained that he became mentally unbalanced following a curse place on him by a certain Ife herbalist, Lokore. On the Modakeke side, we got the impression that the Imole court, the highest court in ancient Ile-Ife did invited Abeweila to answer questions on why he allotted land to the displaced Oyo people. When he countered that, as the king, he has unchallengeable right to all land. The Imole therefore decided that he be killed and that a date was actually set aside for killing him, but the plan leaked and the king rallied the Modakeke to prevent his death by the Ife. A battle ensued and Lokore was said to have killed the Ooni. The grain of truth in all these is that Abeweila was murdered for his treatment of the displaced people.

etc may have over contested issues. On the Ife-Modakeke conflict, the question of what vested interests Abeweila had over the Ife-Modakeke imbroglio is laid to rest with the fact that the question of explaining the tradition is not put to Abeweila, the Ife or the Modakeke; rather, to the very culture where the various actors have the life-experiences that produced the conflict. Indigenous cultures therefore remain an unbiased and infallible witness to events and go a long way to giving a balanced judgment on disputed issues.

Indigenous cultures are many and multidimensional. How then do we determine which of these numerous cultures to use? The answer is relevance. The most relevant and the most related of the indigenous cultures should be the guiding post upon which historians should construct their arguments. In determining relevance in the Ife-Modakeke conflict, the issue of relevance poses another problem: relevance to what? Is it relevance to the specific issue or subject in question, say the Ife-Modakeke conflict, or the Yoruba wars that serves as the harbingers of displacement or the numerous problems associated with displacement generally? The answer is likely to be found in the subject under examination, the context in which the subject is set, as well as the historians' dexterity in knowing which position better answers the questions imposed upon the historian by the subject under examination.

In determining the intention of Abeweila on the position of Modakeke, the question goes beyond the one imposed by the subject to include those necessary to shed useful lights on the vexed issues of Ife-Modakeke conflict. Or how do we measure the intention of Abeweila when we already knew he was born of the displaced woman earlier given to Ooni Akinmoyero? How do we determine the intention of the Ife when we already knew that some other Oonis were killed or caused to commit suicide for their friendly relations with the displaced population? These are complex questions that can only beget equally complex answers. It is in complex situations like this, that indigenous cultures remain the only veritable tool available to historians if we must get answers to complex questions.

Students of politics would agree with historians that clearly defined geographical boundaries and power, as encapsulated in a distinct head that is not subordinate to any other power for his/her domestic relations, are some of the criteria of an independent state. In pre-colonial Africa, the concept of states existed in somewhat different version as we have it today. States existed that were independent but with filial relations with other states. This situation was not to undermine their existences as corporate entities but to ascertain reciprocal relationships between the states. Among the Yoruba, the saying is rife that Alaafin owns all land, but this is not to say that all land in Yorubaland belongs to the Alaafin of Oyo. It is rather to underscore the primacy of Alaafin over all Yoruba kings, especially in the Oyo-speaking areas<sup>34</sup>.

As such, the concept of state is somewhat different, although slightly, from its much modern connotations. Be that as it may, the traditional African states recognized that the powers of their kings were limited to their respective domains while their prestige may not be bound by physical borders<sup>35</sup>. In the same way, the physical

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 213.

<sup>35</sup> A good example is the Alaafin of Oyo whose influence during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century covered three modern African countries. In a similar vein, the influence of the Ooni and Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba race has become limitless over the years reaching as far as Cuba, Brazil, USA, etc.

boundaries peculiar to modern state was a little fluid in traditional times<sup>36</sup>. Although there were no physically demarcated borders but some form of demarcation existed among the people that helped in identifying a state's land from those of others. It must be stated that walls were constructed to delimit a city and not a state's entire land area. Hence, a city wall was a form of protection against externally attack and not a boundary demarcation. Beyond the walls of a city lies the entire land area available to the inhabitants to farm and, for the most daring, to hunt games. While modern states do not need and therefore do not fence their cities and towns, there exist internationally recognized state boundaries. This is but a colonial invention in Africa that was not obtainable in pre-colonial times.

Primary and secondary sources abound testifying to the fact that both Ife and Modakeke had strictly different power-repository personages<sup>37</sup> and clearly demarcated city walls as at 1836<sup>38</sup>. In the case of Ile-Ife, it was on record that after Abeweila had earmarked a portion of Ife land for the displaced people, whom he named Modakeke, he enclosed Ile-Ife in a second hearth wall. The obvious reason for this may not be unconnected to the prevailing animosity between the Ife and the displaced people now called Modakeke. While we can argue that his intention to give a separate town to the displaced people must be to quell the rancour through physical separation<sup>39</sup>, can we possibly say that the new establishment on Ife's land was actually made to be separate and independent but with filial relations to Ile-Ife? What was the intention of Abeweila on the identity and power relation of Modakeke vis-à-vis Ile-Ife? The answers to these questions have generated so much heat that not only the Ife and Modakeke have since been consumed in its flame, but the entire Yoruba race and Nigeria.

This paper aims at providing answers to these and other related questions in succeeding sections of this paper.

### **Indigenous culture as a Tool of Analysis in Conflict Situation**

As noted above, the major issue in the conflict is the determination of whether Modakeke was created to be a separate community or an appendage to Ile-Ife. While the Modakeke people were unequivocal in saying that their land and town were given to them as a separate corporate entity and not as a ward in Ile-Ife, the Ife left no one in doubt that the land on which Modakeke is staying or situated is part of their land. Most of the conflict has since been on the identity of Modakeke vis-à-vis Ile-Ife. Committees and Commissions Reports have reaffirmed that Modakeke was created to be a ward, just like other wards, at Ile-Ife. However, it must also be noted that Yoruba indigenous cultures, especially customs and institutions relating to inheritance

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<sup>36</sup> In the real sense, African states and kingdoms have no frontiers and no physical boundaries as modern states and nation-states.

<sup>37</sup> Ooni of Ife, for the Ife kingdom and people and the Ogunsuwa of Modakeke for the town and people of Modakeke.

<sup>38</sup> Chief Okanlawon conducted me round the defunct Modakeke city wall on Nov 25, 2004. Agbaje-Williams, 'Yoruba Urbanism: The Archaeology and Historical Ethnography of Ile-Ife and Old Oyo' in Akinwumi Ogundiran (ed.), *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2005), 389. Here Babatunde Agbaje-Williams gave us an insight into ancient Ile-Ife and the second city-wall erected by Abeweila after the creation of Modakeke. It baffles logic how this fact, Modakeke city-wall escaped the attention of past scholars on Ife-Modakeke conflict and one wonders why they neglected this important fact in their consideration of the intention of Abeweila in establishing Modakeke.

<sup>39</sup> Onigu Otite and Albert I.O. (eds.), *Community Conflicts in Nigeria*, (Nigeria: John Archers, 2000), 67.

sharing, land allocation and gift, etc negate these views and submissions of some scholars, politicians and opinion leaders who believe that the separation from Ife and the eventual creation of Modakeke was not for Modakeke to be a separate settlement but as a mere appendage to Ile-Ife.

Unfortunately, available literature is silent on the traditional mechanisms and methods used, not only in preserving peace and in resolving conflicts, but also that could guide us to ascertain how traditional Yoruba community uses and creates new towns, as either means of devolving excess population, or a conflict mitigation technique. Such knowledge would help us to determine whether Modakeke was originally created as a separate entity independent of Ile-Ife or as a mere appendage.

Although no written records exist to substantiate the wishes of the Ooni Abeweila, however, there are bodies of laws, customs, culture and practices that could serve as useful doorways into the mind of the monarch on whether Modakeke was created as a separate entity or not. For example, customs and practices like “*Ile Mimu*” or “*Ile Yiya*” (separation or creation of separate household) and “*Ise Yiya*” or “*Oko Yiya*” (demarcation and/or apportioning of occupation or farm) point that whenever and wherever land, occupation, properties, etc. were divided or separated for whatever reasons, among two or more groups or individuals, each has unhindered control over his property, land, occupation, etc and could do with its portion whatever suits its fancy except outright sale<sup>40</sup>.

As noted during oral interviews and supported by Johnson, land could be divided among individuals and groups for two reasons: death of parents, especially fathers and when situations warranted two groups to separate from one another. If the first was the case, the man’s farms and other inheritances were inherited by his children, and so from father to son in perpetuity. The most senior man or the family head will call all family members together and the inheritances of the departed would be shared among his children. In relations to land and houses, only male children were given house and land but if the children were females, the property passes on to the male relatives, unless the females are capable of maintaining the inheritances. This is clearly against the feminist’s arguments that the Yoruba was gender-insensitive. By and the large, the practice is to keep the man’s inheritance in the family line and not in any way a conspiracy against females. In case the children were minors, the male relatives were given the inheritances for safe keeping until the children had grown up to a stage when they are capable of directing their affairs. This is called *Ogun Pipin*.

When there is a need to separate two or more people, the division is somewhat different, but on a general scale, almost the same. In Iresa, one of the ancient Yoruba towns, because kingship title is preserved in the male-line, a certain king who had a set of twins realized that the choice of who to succeed him might pose serious problems after his death. He therefore divided his territories equally between the two brothers, relocated some of his people and invested one of the twins as Aresa of Iresa Apa (Head of Iresa who is fair in complexion) and the other as Aresa of Iresa Adu (Head of Iresa who is dark in complexion). Although each of the towns and their respective heads preserve their corporate independence, they nevertheless regard both their towns and themselves as one<sup>42</sup>. This is called “*Ilu-Yiya*”, meaning dividing a town.

When relationship between two people or even communities totter on the brink of collapse, or land scarcity or epidemic, etc threatens the corporate existence of

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<sup>36</sup> Oral Interview, Chief Okanlawon Afolabi and Reverend Ezekiel Adebisi.

<sup>37</sup> Oral Interview, Chief Ola Aresa of Iresa Adu, Ogbomoso.

a people, group of people; community in pre-colonial Yorubaland, the affected person or persons is resettled on another land or at a different location. This new location is usually called “*Araromi*” (meaning I am comfortable here) or by any other name that refers to their plight before coming to the new place<sup>41</sup>. Modakeke was, in the same vein, resettled and named after the noise made by “*a nest of stock, on a large tree near the site*” of the town, meaning, “I am quiet here” or “I am at peace here”. Some believe that the name was got from the pecking on wood by some birds. Which one we choose to believe, this practice is common among the Yoruba and it was called “*Ile-Mimu*” or “*Ilu-Mimu*” or “*Ilu-Yiya*” (land apportioning or town/village apportioning).

As a youngman’s apprenticeship is considered completed upon his coming to manhood by marriage and independence, a new community is believed to have been created as soon as it is separated from the mother community and a leader is invested with office and title to rule over it. In spite of its socio-political independence, the new town, just like the young man, still owes allegiance to the mother community, as a son remains his father’s in spite of his independence. Although some variations may exist from one place to another, this practice is also common to all villages and towns in Yorubaland.

Samuel Johnson, commenting on community formation among the Yoruba, intoned;

*... perhaps a halting place for refreshments in a long line of march between two towns. In any case it is one individual that first attracts others to the spot; if the site be on the highway to a large town, or in a caravan route, so much the better; the wives of the farmers ever ready to offer refreshments to wearied travellers, who render the spot in time as a recognized halting place, the more distant from a town, the more essential it necessarily must be as a resting place, if a popular resort, a market soon springs up in the place, into which neighbouring farmers bring their wares for sale, and weekly fairs held; market sheds are built all over the place and it become a sort of caravanserai or sleeping place for travellers. As soon as houses begin to spring up and a village or hamlet formed, the necessity for order and control becomes apparent. All Yoruba towns, with very few exceptions are built on this uniform plan, and the origin of most of them is more or less the same, and all have certain identical features<sup>42</sup>*

He explained further that in special cases, like the outbreak of epidemics, conflict situation, over-population, etc ‘*an influential personage with a large following deliberately build a town, and is from the beginning the recognized head of*

<sup>41</sup> Reverend Oyeniya E.A, a renowned farmer and hunter, claimed in an interview that names given to such communities are usually euphemistical and / or derogatory. In the specific case of ‘Araromi’ he asked: “*Nje eni ara ro, a ma gbe eyin odi bi?*” (Can a comfortable person live in the outskirts?). In a way, this may be true in the case of Modakeke, as oral accounts claimed that the name - Modakeke was derived from the noise made by “*Eye Ako*”, which were said to be many near Iraye where Modakeke was then. Hence, the name “*Modakeke Ako Iraye*” and the annual celebration of “*Iraye Day*” in commemoration of Modakeke’s independence till today. Hunters claimed that *Eye Ako* used to peck on tree-barks, searching for ants and soft edible barks.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 90.

*the same*<sup>43</sup>. He explained that in whatever the case, the new village or town is answerable to the mother town from where it sprang.

In the patrilineal lineage system— *Idile* - system, a male child continually stay in his father's employ from cradle till the day of his marriage. Such a child is considered to be in apprenticeship under his father; a state he retains until his father considers him old enough to take care for his own family<sup>44</sup>. As a custom, a year or more to this period, a dog was presented to the young man to take care of. Unknowingly, he is continually watched in his relationship with the dog. The intention behind the present of a dog is to note the young man's reactions to the mood-swing of the dog; as if a woman is like a dog that wags his tail at you a moment and barks at you the next moment. If the young man passed this test, a young girl is secretly sought for him and the young man is considered to have completed his apprenticeship the day his father called him to show him the portion that belonged to him out of the family farm. He is given a house or rooms of his own and other basic household and farming items. A week or two after this, a new bride was brought him to begin his own family with. This is called "*Ile-Yiya*" and "*Ise-Yiya*".

In all these cases, the basic rule is that land and house must not be sold. It can be transferred from one hand to the other but never a commodity to be traded away. Almost as a general principle, land once given is never taken back except in cases of treason, which renders the grantee an outlaw and the land confiscated. Even at that, the land must be left untilled once there is a mark of a previous occupation on it. Should the need arise to employ the land in some form, the entire community must come together to discuss the possibility of seek out alternatives, if any.

In case the land was given as a gift, the gift is given eternally; barring treason<sup>45</sup>. In spite of this condition, the grantee is only allowed to harvest plant food crops and not tree crops met on the land. Although he was allowed to plant such crops that met his fancy, crops like palm trees, and kola nuts, etc are regarded as belonging to the landowners unless it was the grantee who planted them. Hence the adage '*the grantee is to look down not up*<sup>46</sup>'. Land remained the most vexed issue among the Yoruba. In fact the Yoruba can conciliate on all matters except land. This is because land was regarded as the only inheritance that links the living with both the dead and the unborn; hence, efforts must be made to ensure that the family, as well as the state, preserves its land<sup>47</sup>.

Cultural methods like *Ile-Mimu*, *Ile-Yiya*, *Ise-Yiya*, *Ogun pipin*, *Ogun-Jije*, etc were common among the traditional Yoruba communities as means of, among other things, wealth redistribution, family recreation, decongestion of over populated communities, prevention of overt conflict behaviour, and mitigation of conflict, etc. When Ife-Modakeke conflict is viewed from the standpoint of any of these cultural practices, one notices that many of the views expressed by the various commissions, politicians, scholars, etc took no notice of any of these avowed practices.

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 91.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 93.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 89.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 90.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 99.

From the above, it is gratifying to note that Modakeke must have been given as a gift, which was not intended to be taken back unless on condition of treason. What is not clear is whether the internal scuffle that necessitated the granting of the land to the displaced people was bad enough to qualify as treason. There is nothing in oral history to suggest the possibility of this. Commonsense also suggests that if it was bad enough to qualify as treason, the king would not have deemed it fit to grant them such a land.

As a counterpoise, it may be argued that because the king has a blood relation with the displaced people, he may not have regarded their actions, especially as it was favourable to him, as treason. No matter how sound this may be, it must as well recognize the fact that if the king did not consider an action as treason, then it cannot possibly be one. This is because treason can only be committed against a sitting head of government; hence, we can conclude that the problem was not bad enough to qualify as treason. It can also be safely argued that the judgment of the *Imole*, the highest ruling court at Ile-Ife, that Abeweila erred in granting out the land qualified as treason, as it directly challenged the power of the Ooni to land. Hence, it is against the prevailing Yoruba custom to request the land from the Modakeke and to wage war against them in order to achieve this. As one wrong cannot justify another, Modakeke's reaction cannot amount to treason; rather, it qualifies as self-defence.

When these informed views obtainable from indigenous culture are juxtaposed with others like those provided by archaeology, one gets the position that Abeweila never wanted Modakeke to be a ward under Ife-Ife. On the contrary, he wanted it to be a separate and an independent town like Ipetumodu and other Ife's satellite towns. To buttress this fact, aside from fencing Ile-Ife, the new settlement, Modakeke, was equally invested with a Baale, the Ogunsuwa of Modakeke, as well as fenced round about to serve as a demarcation as well as to help repelling external aggression. One curious thing about Modakeke fence that must not escape a mention is its constituent elements. Instead of being made with the usual mud admixed with water, it was mixed with palm oil<sup>48</sup>. As oral accounts at Ile-Ife and Modakeke had it, this was intended to appease the wrath of the Ife's.

The peculiar nature of the Modakeke wall must have been such an important and popular thing that its details were preserved and remembered, even in oral rendition, till date. The fact that no other ward in Ile-Ife has a wall delimiting it from others defeated the position that Modakeke was meant to be a ward in Ile-Ife. All evidences, not minding their inadequacies, point to the fact that Modakeke was meant to be like Ipetumodu, Apomu, Ikire, and other satellite towns surrounding Ile-Ife and not a ward dependent on Ile-Ife.

It must be stated that, till date, government reports, court proceedings, committee and commission reports have always argued that Modakeke was meant to be a ward in Ile-Ife and that allowing it to have an independent status is like dividing a town into two. No mention is as yet made as to why other wards in Ile-Ife, during this period, were not fenced. Until this error in judgment is corrected, we may not get as near as resolving the Ife-Modakeke conflict.

## **Conclusion**

Culture has been defined as a people's total way of life. If this is so, it is incontrovertible that lessons of culture, whatever their inadequacies, are time-tested

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<sup>48</sup> Oral interview with Chief Fashogbon, a notable Ife chief and historian, which has since been waxed into an album by one Ologun Dudu, an Ewi Exponent and native of Ile-Ife.

lessons that must not be ignored. Undoubtedly, African indigenous cultures are rich in two important elements: the tradition of family or neighbourhood negotiation facilitated by elders and the attitude of togetherness in the spirit of humanhood. These are two important landmarks that could help in resolving intra-ethnic conflict in Africa. As the case of Ife-Modakeke conflict has shown, conflict resolution efforts must emphasize these two fundamental factors, which are ably represented in indigenous culture, if it must relate with a people's world. Indigenous culture evolves from repeated actions and experiences. Therefore, it cannot possibly go out of the people's cultural milieu. An understanding of a people's culture will definitely assist in solving knotty issues associated with human or inter-group relations.