State and Ethno-Communal Violence in Nigeria: The Case of Ife-Modakeke

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Introduction

The cause of every violent struggle has been the quest for liberty, equality and justice, as well as contests for power, influence, resources, recognition and identity. Nigeria has been no exception. The history of Nigeria has been shaped and sustained by violence since independence. The violence has manifested itself at the State level in the form of coups, civil war, State-sponsored assassinations, judicial murder, police brutality, electoral manipulation and suppression of the Press. In civil society, it has manifested itself in demonstrations, protests, civil crimes and ethno-communal violence.

For a very long time, the Nigerian State has wielded a near absolute monopoly of violence. This now seems to be changing, as civil society has grown more aggressive and resilient, even in the face of live bullets, authoritarian rule and the divisive manoeuvres of different administrations. Violence in Nigeria can be explained from environmental and economic perspectives. It draws its origin from very harsh living conditions, exclusion from political participation and the brutal experience of ethno-communal skirmishes, which have recently become a feature of life in Nigeria. The Ife/Modakeke

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case clearly shows how the State has promoted communal violence, and it also reveals the logical contradictions of communal violence in Nigeria.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. It first argues that the Nigerian State is responsible for ethno-communal violence. The paper subsequently explains the patterns, causes and dynamics of ethno-communal violence in Nigeria. It uses Ife-Modakeke as a point of reference and draws parallels between it and other forms of violence in Nigeria. To accomplish this task, I analyse the driving political and economic as well as the historical and cultural factors that sustain violence. I also examine various abortive attempts to resolve the crisis and, hopefully, I suggest some pragmatic solutions.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section is the introductory part. The second focuses on the conceptual and theoretical background of the paper, and the third attempts to set the argument in its historical perspective. The fourth section is devoted to an examination of the Ife/Modakeke crisis, and the last section contains some concluding remarks.

The Notion of Violence and the State

Let me take my point of departure from the popular Weberian definition that the State is a politically organised society. This definition is no doubt unduly inclusive, and leaves no room to query the legitimacy of a regime or for the crucial question of State formation. It still remains a useful definition, however, for the understanding of the word 'State'. Although 'State' is an abstraction, its formation is empirical and requires the balancing of forces between rulers and ruled. In every modern State, one therefore expects a common point of reference that is a constitutional order, which guides relationships in a given organised society. The lack of such an order remains the greatest of Africa's political woes.

Most African leaders are notorious for personalising State power and paralysing constitutional procedures. The examples of Mobutu of Zaire, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi and General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, to mention a few, are indicative of this trend. These leaders misappropriated public funds and diverted them into their personal coffers. They ran the State like a private business concern. They ended up organising the State around their local and international cronies at the expense of the public.

The primary functions expected of a State — public security, welfare and facilitation of socio-political and economic activities — were either abandoned or performed only perfunctorily by these leaders (Cf. Reno 1998:3). Reno's argument complements this:

> Rulers thus would jettison all pretence of serving the interests of a public that might contain dangerous rivals or unruly citizens ...At this extreme, rulers and their associates resemble a mafia rather than a government ...Security (of the populace) is coincidental. It is dependent on the venture's profitability and the degree to which it satisfies the shared interests of members of the organisation (a foreign firm and a warlord, for example). When either or both of these conditions are no longer satisfied, security may disappear, unless the local inhabitants take it upon themselves to provide this collective good in a way that does not threaten the ruler.

The argument of Tilly (1985:171) corroborates Reno's that African leaders govern for private, not public, interests. He also argues that '...Since the repressive and extractive activities of government often constitute the largest current threats to the livelihoods of their own citizens, many governments operate in essentially the same ways as racketeers', where a racketeer is someone who creates fear, insecurity and tension, and then comes around to levy an economic charge for removing or reducing it.

The foregoing suggests that African leaders can be described as a bunch of political opportunists, whose sole objective is to use the State for their own personal and corporate advantage. These leaders, called 'racketeers' by Tilly, maintain their grip on power by extreme violence.

One thing that emerges from the foregoing is the description of the African State as having failed (Wunsch and Olowu 1995) or as having collapsed (William Zartman 1995). Others describe it as 'prebendal', patrimonial, clientelistic, weak, soft, backward, broken-backed or swollen. In fact, the list is as endless as the number of scholars writing on the African State. Through all these words, one can see that African States have clearly been unable to match their glittering and rhetorical promises with any encouraging performance or visible economic growth (Aaron Wildavsky 1973:128; Richard Cornwell 1997:15).

The foregoing demands that we put our conception of the State in a proper perspective. I therefore define 'State' in this paper as the impersonal and autonomous network of institutions that are saddled with the responsibility of governance and are sustained by a monopolistic control of legitimate force (violence), although this may vary from country to country. A State is not just a government. It is a constitutional and responsive socio-political entity. Against this background, a 'prebendal' or 'predatory' State is a misnomer. My notion of the State includes the democratic elements of equality, justice, accountability, transparency, probity and a pluralistic approach to policy formation. This notion is captured more sharply by Ajit Roy (1995:2010) in his distinction between democracy and what he calls 'ritualistic and episodic participation in engagements, viz. electoral occasions'.

This exposition is necessary in order to assess whether the Nigerian State is indeed a State or not. Nigeria falls short of obvious requirements of a State. First, the Nigerian State grows outside its people. On this first count alone, it lacks the necessary legitimacy of

a State. Secondly, the Nigerian State is not constitutional. The operators of the State rule through the use of raw violence, which is hardly open to challenge. Like any other failed State, the Nigerian State is not responsive. It has failed to guarantee for the citizens their basic needs and services, such as potable water, decent accommodation, education, primary health care, a decent and sustainable environment, safe territory, and the realisation of their cultural aspirations and identity (Cf. Eboe Hutchful 1998:11).

The socio-political and economic environment in which the Nigerian people live is one that predisposes them to violence. It is important, therefore, to examine the current discourse and application of 'violence'.

Current Discourse on 'Violence'

Apart from literature, our daily experience provides various manifestations of violence, such as wars, bomb explosions, cruise missile attacks, police brutality, rape, murder, violent community protests, genocide, ethnocide and communal uprisings. These forms of violence come within the category of what I call 'manifest violence', which other scholars (Betz 1997; Chesnais 1992:216-234) describe as 'physical or overt violence'. The other form of violence, to which I will return later, is what I call 'latent violence'. Other scholars refer to this as either psychological, covert, economic or structural violence (Robert Audi 1971; Chesnais 1992:216-234; Litke 1992:173-184; Platt 1992:185-192).

Whichever way one looks at it, violence means 'carrying force toward something' (Robert Litke 1992:173). This definition is inadequate, as it includes too many aspects. Virtually all human actions can be so described. A more restrictive definition seems to be necessary. Some key elements of violence need to be discerned and articulated before any case of violence can be successfully established. These elements are brute force, violation, disempowerment and physical or

psychological injury. From these elements, violence can be defined in any of the following three ways:

1. As the application of brute physical force that inflicts physical or psychological injury on a person (Cf. Betz 1987)

2. As the violation or disempowerment of a person with respect to his bodily capacities and decision-making abilities (Newton Garver 1972)

3. As the infliction of mental or psychological pain on a person through institutional or structural malfunctioning (Robert Audi 1971)

This paper defines violence as the act of inflicting physical, psychological or structural pain or injury on a person, through the use of either vigorous physical force or the disempowerment of persons with respect to the two basic abilities of man i.e. bodily capacities and decision-making abilities.

Moving on from definitions, let us now examine why people take the option of violence, particularly when one regards man as a rational being. This consideration is closely linked to a moral appraisal of violence. Three major arguments can be adduced for why people take the option of violence in politics. The first is because of their exclusion from the social, economic and political life of a society. People consider themselves alienated from the system of which they consider themselves to be integral parts.

The second argument follows from the first. It sees violence as an emancipatory tool from colonialism, neo-colonialism, or any repressive regime. It can help to bring about a new socio-political and economic order or identity, to reflect the yearnings of the revolutionaries and their cronies. The third argument sees violence as a corrective and demonstrative activity by all or some people, to

register dissent from a given policy of the State, with the evident intention of reversing such a policy.

The logic of the above arguments is contrary to the demonised notion of violence as counter-productive, because it inflicts pain and unleashes terror and destruction. Instead, violence can be constructive and emancipatory (Fanon 1967; Fashina 1989). For example, repressive authoritarian regimes may not relinquish power until faced with superior power, something that can only be achieved through violence. In short, violence is the last resort of the civil population in a lawless State where law and power have been usurped and personalised by a group of individuals. To divest such a clique of its hold on to power, one might have to resort to violence (See Tilly 1985; and Reno 1998).

Leaving the realm of the State and civil society, and coming down to a more local level, where strong ethno-communal affinities guide relationships and interactions, one finds a slightly different interpretation of violence. Granted that the decay of the State contributes to ethno-communal violence, it is worth examining the dynamics of and historical explanations for ethno-communal violence in Nigeria.

The Dynamics and Historical Antecedents of Ethno-Communal Violence in Nigeria

African societies had organised socio-political entities before the advent of colonial rule. Cultural and ethnic consciousness became more pronounced, however, after the introduction of colonialism. Before then, peoples from different parts of Africa travelled throughout the continent without any feeling of cultural or ethnic violation. Traders from Western Nigeria settled in parts of Northern Nigeria and lived there peacefully, without any resistance from their hosts. (Osaghae 1986 & 1994; Nnoli 1978; Ekeh 1982; Helena Jerman 1980).

Fred Riggs (1995:594) addresses socio-political formation in his discussion of traditional primary ethnicity. According to him, this form of ethnicity '... resulted from conquests, slavery, serfdom and caste systems in which status hierarchies became institutionalised'. This negates a popular assumption that traditional African societies were homogeneous and peaceful. It shows that every society is a product of its own history. The history of the formation of African societies shows hardly any ethnic or sub-ethnic group that can lay claim to cultural or ethnic homogeneity.

From this viewpoint, it can be deduced that ethnicity or communalism is more than simple cultural affinity. I consider the association of primordiality with ethnicity as a *non sequitur*. Common cultural and linguistic linkages do not fully explain ethnicity. Shibuttani and Kwan (1965:47) define the concept of 'ethnic group' as 'people who conceive of themselves as being of a kind. They are united by emotional bonds and concerned with the preservation of their type'.

Ethnicity or communalism thrives on two significant factors, 'self-consciousness and self-ascription' (Jerman 1980:52-53). The notions of consciousness and ascription come out more clearly in what Crawford (1984) calls 'we-ness' i.e. a given community or ethnic group becomes fully recognised when it grasps the meaning of 'we-ness'.

A 'community' or 'ethnic group' describes peoples of either a homogeneous or heterogeneous background-cum-interests, who only coalesce around a common objective in a specific historical period. The objective or goal around which people coalesce constitutes the bedrock of the we-ness or community/ethnic consciousness and ascription. Ethnicity is therefore not substantial or concrete. It is intangible, even though its objects may be tangible.

The psychological dimension of ethno-communalism makes it problematic in a society where it provokes a crisis. It is difficult, therefore, to dismiss ethnicity in political discussion, especially as regards

the advancement of nationalism. As suggested by P. van den Berghe (1987:353-354), '...(the) government is best which pays least attention to ethnicity'. Why this is difficult is found in the justification given by Berghe. According to him, for nationalism to be sustained, ethnicity must be disintegrated and fragmented. Since nationalism also involves the working together of various nations/ethnic groups, it is *prima-facie* fraught with contradictions. Its propensity to collapse is high. It follows that nationalism will crumble if ethnicity is promoted as a virtue, over the national interest.

Nationalism is usually promoted for the sake of grand economic ventures and consolidation. This argument is deficient, however, because it fails to account for the appropriation and distribution of economic resources, as well as the access to power structures in society. As regards Nigeria, for example, it is difficult to explain, in terms of nationalism, how a section of Nigeria can rule an ethnically plural country for more than thirty out of the thirty-eight years of independence, without evoking an ethnic conflagration.

Again, it is difficult to explain away ethnicity, when national economic resources are administered by a few, and most of the population wallow in abject poverty. In such a situation, it is rational to turn to ethno-communalism as a tool for political mobilisation against the ruling few. The politics of accumulation is so deeply rooted in Nigeria that even those few leaders who parade themselves as the embodiment of nationalism end up acting ethnically.

The development of the various nations that comprise Nigeria was seriously altered by colonialism. The subsequent Nigerian politicians took over parochial objectives. Politicians often exploited ethno-communal divisions for personal gains, instead of trying to solve those problems. This whole idea is succinctly captured by Hutchful's remark on the manipulative use of the ethnic weapon by politicians, when he argues that '... although (ethnicity was) cynically harnessed by often unscrupulous politicians, their intense appeal

seems to suggest a mass attraction rooted in popular alienation' (Hutchful 1998:5).

In spite of this problem of alienation, the common slogan usually shouted by these politicians, to justify the sanctity of ethno-communal divisions and their commitment to the ethos of nationalism, was – 'Unity in diversity' or, alluding to the former Head of State, 'To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done'. This political gimmick seems to have been only briefly effective. It is evidently inapplicable to the present-day reality of Nigeria, with its new forms of ethno-communal violence that have swept across the country in recent times in an uncontrollable manner.

Alex Gboyega (1997:152) puts the problem of ethnicity in the following painful manner:

> Whatsoever the constraints of British colonial policy and strategies, the very act of bringing together such a large number of heterogeneous people with their different languages, religions, cultures and political systems was bound to be inherently conflict-prone, whatever the agent of such incorporation. Indeed, the factors responsible for pre-colonial integration also had a disintegrative effect on Nigeria.

In almost every part of Africa, ethnicity has become a dominant factor of the crisis of governance over the last two decades. It is safe to assert that while African States are waning in influence, legitimacy and political control, ethnicity is waxing stronger in State formation, consolidation and disintegration.

Ethnicity seems to be detaching itself from 'being a cultural group symbol'. It is now being shaped by politico-economic considerations. Cultural factors are not irrelevant, but they are secondary. The second level of analysis reveals the compelling motives around which ethno-communal consciousness is built. The Nigerian case, as will be shown in the next section, reveals that

ethno-communal violence results from either a contest for power and influence at all levels of society or a contest over economic resources.

Ethno-communal violence in Nigeria may have predated colonialism, but it assumed a new form with colonialism. It led to fierce civil disorder or wars of secession. Apart from the civil war of 1966-1970, there have been several other episodes of ethno-communal violence in Nigeria. One violent incident occurred over the Federal Government's decision to create local government councils (LGCs), and the subsequent location and relocation of the councils' headquarters between March and August 1997. These new violent episodes challenged the Nigerian State's integrity, power and legitimacy, and threatened the government.

The Political and Economic Factors Sustaining Ethno-Communal Violence in Nigeria

Obviously, government decisions radically altered politico-economic relations as well as power relations among the various elements of the communities affected. In other words, beneath ethno-communal violence lies what can be described as 'situational identities', as against the 'primordial' ones, which are often brandished. Most of the available literature reveals that what we tend to describe as ethno-communal identity or consciousness is often used as a platform for struggle only when such an identity seems likely to bring gains. In Nigeria, the economic reasons for inter-communal violence vary from conflict over the control of forests, farmlands, grazing pastures, fishing waters and market sites to contests for access to mineral resources.

Because of the absence of clearly stipulated conditions laid down by the State for access to resources, the contest turns out to be one to see who is the strongest. Ethno-communal identities and problems seem to be deliberately ignored by the State, in order to

enhance advantages for the State and other political opportunists. One wonders what kind of State the Nigerian government represents when it could not take decisive action in the communal violence between Ife and Modakeke, which took over a thousand lives in two months. Again, the ethnic lopsidedness of political power relations in Nigeria makes one wonder how sensitive the government is to matters concerning political stability or disintegration.

Quite unlike the masterly way in which Tanzania, with about 114 different ethnic groups, has managed to prevent ethnicity from constituting a serious problem, the reverse is the case in Nigeria, which is regressing to a consolidation of pan-ethnic identities and boundaries through most of its policies and actions (See Osaghae 1986:161-173). Rotimi Suberu pungently argues that '...in spite of remarkable institutional and constitutional reforms (in Nigeria)...ethnicity and region still provide the basis on which political values are defined, articulated, contested or challenged'.

Judging by the frequency and attention given to ethno-communal violence, Nigerian newspapers and magazines have shown that this phenomenon is a national issue that might explode like a time bomb, sooner than expected, if it was not addressed promptly. Colonel Abubakar Umar (retired) (in *Tell* August 3, 1998:10) remarked:

> ...Whatever the feelings of the people in the North (of Nigeria), it is crystal clear that unless the (office of the President) is conceded to the South as a panacea to heal the wounds, I do not foresee peace in Nigeria.

A similar feeling was shared by millions of Nigerians, particularly after the brutal death of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the self-acclaimed winner of the June 12 presidential election.

Let us also take the statement by the late Abubakar Gumi (a distinguished Islamic teacher and protagonist of the contemporary Islamic jihadist movement in Nigeria) that it is the inalienable right of

the northern elements to always occupy the position of political power, since the economic power resides in the south. The same view was also expressed by another distinguished northerner, Senator Umaru Dikko. Sharing the same sentiment is another northerner, Saleh Michika, one time Governor in Northern Nigeria, who stated that 'Much as I personally admired Moshood Abiola as an individual, the idea of a southern president was unrealistic' (*VIVA*, Lagos, July 5, 1993, quoted from Rotimi and Ihonvbere, 1994:678).

In the same vein, another notable northerner, Alhaji Maitama Sule, comparing the natural endowments of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, observed that while the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria are best gifted in merchandise, and the Yorubas of Western Nigeria in administration, the northerners are 'born to rule the country for ever'. Such statements portray a misconfiguration of the country's political system and this is likely to breed ethno-communal violence.

The Cultural Factor of Ethno-Communal Violence

Even though I attempted to lump the cultural factor with the political and economic factors in the earlier sub-section, I consider it worth saying a little more about it for a number of reasons. This does not undermine my earlier claims, but rather strengthens them. It is true that underneath any cultural explanation of violence lies a deep-rooted question of economic resources and power relations. However, I must stress that underlying economic or political motives may be visible only to the elites or the leaders. The essential point is that the majority do not always perceive the underlying motive. They usually act for reasons such as 'cultural violation' or the 'maintenance or preservation of ethno-communal identity'. For instance, in Warri-land, an average Urhobo person will not hesitate to go to war with his Itsekiri counterpart, on the grounds that the traditional status of the Olu of Itsekiri (the paramount ruler of Itsekiri) was elevated by the State to that of the Olu of Warri-land. To an average Urhobo or

Ijaw, who believes that he has a claim to Warri equal to that of any Itsekiri — since all are legitimate occupants and consequently owners of different parts of Warri-land — the issue of a traditional title is itself a sufficient motive for going to war. This scenario is similar to the Ife-Modakeke imbroglio.

The Communal Violence in Ile-Ife

There has been an age-long communal violence between the Modakeke and the aboriginal communities in Ile-Ife. The cause of such violence is partly economic and partly political. The first crisis started between 1835 and 1849, barely four decades after the immigration to Ile-Ife, following the rupture in friendly relations occasioned by the expulsion and eventual murder of a famous Ife generalissimo, Chief Maye Okunade, the then ruler of Ibadan. It was recorded that 'Chief Maye Okunade was habitually imperious, irascible and a veritable terror. He was especially oppressive in his treatment of the Oyo refugees in Ibadan' (R.A. Olaniyan in I. A. Akinjogbin, 1992:268). It could be seen that the crisis came as a reaction to Chief Maye's high-handedness and rash use of power. His intervention in a dispute between two neighbours over a piece of land used as a common dunghill turned into a major conflict (*Ibid.*). The action of the Ibadans against Maye displeased the Ifes, who vented their anger on the Oyo-speaking Modakekes in their domain. That was the beginning of hostilities. One Modakeke native was quoted as saying:

> They were kind to us in all the Ife towns and villages till the outbreak at Ibadan, when Chief Maye, an Ife, was expelled from the town. It was then that we began to suffer all sorts of indignities from the Ifes at home... The Ooni (the paramount ruler in Ile-Ife) we met, who befriended us at first, was Odunle. The disaffection was towards the latter part of his reign (Correspondence 1887:90F).

During the ensuing 'Gbanamu war' between the Ibadans and the Ifes, the Modakekes allied themselves with the Ibadans to sack Ife in 1849 (Johnson 1969: 238-242).

Ogunmola, the then Ibadan warlord, was considerate towards the Ifes. He therefore sent messengers to the Ife camp to encourage them to return to their homestead. He deemed it disgraceful to abandon the cradle of Yorubas in desolation and leave all the ancestral deities unworshipped (M. A. Fabunmi 1985:117).

Again in 1882, during the Kiriji war, otherwise referred to as the Ekiti-Parapo war, the Ifes refused to grant passage to the Ibadan warriors who wanted to attack the Osu community in Ilesa territory. The Ibadans were infuriated, and the Modakekes once again joined the Ibadans' contingent to devastate Ile-Ife. The Ifes fled into exile on their farmlands of Isoya, Itajamo, Iwaro, Iloro, Olejoda, etc. At the end of the war in 1894, the Ifes returned home and resolved to remove the Modakekes. They executed this plan in two ways. First, they succeeded in having signed the Treaty of 1888, which stipulated that the Modakekes should evacuate Ife-land and move to a place between River Osun and River Oba. Secondly, Oba Adelekan Olubuse I., the paramount ruler of Ile-Ife in 1909, performed a sacrifice in which he took the earth of the Modakeke community and the latter mystically dispersed into places such as Ibadan, Ikire, Gbongan, Owu Iponle, Ede. The majority moved to a place called Odeomu. That episode marked the end of the history of the first Modakeke.

Between 1915 and 1923, the population of Ile-Ife was sparse, and the King of Ife consequently received a paltry stipend as salary. When the King, Oba Ademiluyi (or Ajagun) observed that his salary was not comparable with the salary of the Baale of Ibadan, he raised a query. The Resident Officer of the Province explained that the size of the salary varied according to the population of taxpayers in any community. From that time onward, Ademiluyi started thinking

about how to bring the Modakekes back to Ile-Ife. They had already been begging to return. The move was vehemently resisted by most of the chiefs. They sent a joint letter, dated 27 May 1915, to the Commissioner of Oyo Province. In spite of this resistance, the arrangement was concluded in 1922. The first batch of about 300 Modakekes came back to Ile-Ife in 1923. They were settled on the land of Chiefs Obalaaye, Fegun and Obalejugbe, with the proviso that they would constitute only a quarter of Ife town and not a separate town.

Land as a Factor of the Crisis

Owners of land in Ile-Ife had to belong to one of the five traditional quarters — Ilare, Okerewe, Iremo, Ilode and Moore. Although the Modakekes were given a portion of land in Ile-Ife for residential purposes, this did not mean having land for farming activities. For this, they had to make personal arrangements with different families. In return, they were requested to pay tributes called *ishakole*, which usually took the form of a given number of tins of palm oil, palm wine, yams or any other farm produce or money on which the contracting parties agreed.

The population of the Modakekes grew in the course of time on various farmlands. The Ife landlords were not at all enterprising, being unduly given to leisure. There used to be a popular joke about the Ifes that 'Emu ni Ife mu', meaning that Ifes are palm-wine drinkers. The Modakeke serfs' natural dislike of their arrogant treatment by the idle Ife landlords led to protests against the further payment of *ishakole* (land tribute). The specific refusal to continue to pay *ishakole* started in 1946. It then became a legal battle. In November 1946, the Lagos branch of the Modakeke Progressive Union petitioned Ooni Aderemi, the then King of Ife, about the excessive sums being demanded from the Modakeke farmers by Ife

landlords. They complained that it was an act of exploitation and should therefore be stopped.

The intervention of the Government displeased the Modakekes. The Government perceived the problem as a private matter and treated it in that light. Similarly, all the efforts of the King of Ife, Oba Aderemi, to settle the dispute out of court failed. Oba Aderemi even offered them virgin farmlands, so that they could leave the Ife farms of the landlords and cultivate their own farmlands and become landlords there. The Modakekes refused. The matter was taken to the Ife Native Court on 30 June 1948. Before the judgment, the Modakekes expressed fears about the partisanship of the Colonial Resident Officer.

The verdict was unfavourable to the Modakekes and they appealed to the Supreme Court. Dissatisfied with the verdict of the Supreme Court, they then appealed to the West African Court of Appeal – again without success. Having realised their complete failure, the Modakekes agreed to accept the Ooni's original offer to migrate to a virgin farm settlement, but the Ooni now declined to proceed, saying that the land had been acquired by the Native Authority.

This land issue, as a fundamental cause of the crisis, was given further impetus in 1978, when Olusegun Obasanjo promulgated the land-use decree, which stipulated that all land belonged to the State. The Modakekes quickly swung into action yet again. This time, they were resolute in discontinuing their payment of *ishakole* to the Ife landlords. The crisis was serious enough for them to prevent the Ife landlords from getting to their farms, particularly where they were in the majority. In this way, they forcibly acquired such large farms as Famia, Oyere, Onibambu, Olokuta, etc. The matter got worse when the new Ooni, Sijuwade Olubuse II, at his installation/coronation ceremony, declared that Modakeke would no longer be called Modakeke but – Isale-Ife. The Modakekes misunderstood the King's motive, and by April 1981, a full-blown war began. All the Ife huts and houses in the

villages and in the main town, where the Modakekes were in the
majority, were burnt and utterly destroyed. The Ifes suffered greater
casualties than the Modakekes during the war. The war ended in the
same year.

Before the war, signboards bearing the description of Modakeke
usually ended with Ile-Ife. Immediately after the war, the inscriptions
of Ile-Ife on all the signposts were rubbed off. They even started writing
Modakeke on sign posts in all the Ife areas, i.e. streets close to them
where many Ifes lived. When another war broke out again in 1983, they
destroyed more houses and drove more Ifes away from their areas of
concentration. The situation from 1983 to 1997 was pathetic for the
Ifes, who could not understand how any community could embark
on territorial annexation and expansion through violence at this stage
of history. Worse still, there were attempts to demolish any Ife
shrines and groves they found so as to rename the area and then
allocate the land to their members for development, either free of
charge or at a relatively low price. Most of the buildings erected on this
land did not have the approval of the Town Planning Authority
based in Ife.

With the outbreak of the war on 14 August 1997, once again
started by the Modakekes, the Ife youths impulsively trooped out *en
masse,* with a do-or-die resolution to drive away the Modakekes once
and for all. They sacked and destroyed their houses in about forty Ife
villages close to the main Ife settlements in the city. Although the
Modakekes recorded some early successes by burning and destroying
some Ife houses and properties, the Ifes gained the upper hand this
time, unlike the situation during the 1981 and 1983 wars. In fact, they
subjugated the Modakekes, to the extent that their Chief had to go on
the air in October 1998 to register his capitulation.

It is necessary to examine the nature of the violence. To the Ife
youths, the violence was inevitable, in that they could not watch their
people and property being wantonly destroyed by the Modakekes,

without putting up some resistance. From their point of view, it was preventive violence. To the Modakekes, the violence was geared towards a liberation struggle. They saw this as a struggle to get a safe 'place in the sun', where they could assert their 'rights and privileges in the determination of their local affairs' (Ibidapo-Obe 1981:36). The violence had a new aspect, as children were not perturbed by the death of parents (or vice-versa) as part of the ethnic cleansing process. It involved a deep-rooted bitterness similar to that of Israeli-Palestinian relations. There were other causative factors than land, such as politics, corruption and the State, which are considered in the following sub-sections.

Politics and the Communal Violence

Modern politics in post-independence Nigeria have added some dimensions to the communal violence between the Ifes and the Modakekes. Two incidents of political manipulation are particularly noteworthy. The first is the 1981 experience, when the actual war broke out on 14 April. At that time, the Ifes and the Modakekes belonged to two different parties. The Ifes supported the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and the Modakekes subscribed to the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The Modakekes capitalised on the form of politics in Nigeria, which can be best described as the politics of bitterness, calumny and belligerence, designed to exploit Federal might against the Ifes, whose political party was confined to the State. The Modakekes were thus able to get arms, mobile police vehicles and even make up mobile police uniforms, to disguise themselves as law enforcement agents — a trick which gave them easy access to Ife territory. Consequently, they were able to kill hundreds of people and destroy many properties, before the Ifes discovered that they were fake mobile policemen.

Again, during the election campaign in 1983, a contingent of NPN politicians instigated the Modakekes to take up the option of violence in their struggle for an autonomous local government council. The NPN group persuaded them that this was the quickest way to realise their dream of self-government. The leader of this political contingent was the late M.K.O. Abiola. At the end of the rally, Abiola donated a huge sum of money (about Naira 1 million) in aid of the Modakekes' struggle. Since the country was then NPN-controlled at the centre, there was a repeat scenario of the 1981 incident. During the ensuing voting, the total number of votes cast in Modakeke alone — 250,000 — was so outrageous that it exceeded the number of votes cast in Ibadan, the largest city in West Africa. This shows just how unscrupulous politicians can exploit communal divisions, to achieve their cheap political ambitions.

Corruption, State and the Ife-Modakeke Crisis

The above exposition is a succinct account of how the government can be partisan in creating and exacerbating conflict. There is another angle to the State's involvement in creating crises in the area under study. This is corruption. The latest crisis in Ile-Ife is a good case in point. Very prominent State officials, such as the Commissioner of Police in Osun State, the then Commissioner of Justice, the Secretary to the State Government and the State Governor, were publicly indicted for taking huge sums of money from the Modakekes, in exchange for promises to facilitate the creation of a separate local government council for them. At other levels, particularly during the August 1997 – September 1998 war, there were several cases of bribery and corruption, involving the two conflicting sides and the police. An eye witness account had it that the policeman beckoned to the Modakekes to advance around Lagere area of Ile-Ife, after they had driven away the Ife fighters. As a result, the first case of destruction of houses and other properties was recorded as an instance of police collusion with the Modakekes.

The Modakekes also alleged that the Ifes had bribed the policemen to fight against them. Whether that was true or not, one fact that is clear is that the local government Chairmen in the Ife councils used a lot of money to accommodate and feed police officials. After the Lagere havoc, the local government Chairmen cried out and vowed to eject the police officers from their hotel rooms, arguing that they were partisan.

There were reported cases of one side preparing food (beans, amala and rice) for the policemen. Plenty of liquor was also supplied. Several policemen on assignment during the episode were using it to mock the Ifes by accusing them of miserliness. There was even a local song to that effect — 'Modakeke Alanadanu, Ife Ahun' — which literally means 'Modakeke, wasteful spender, Ife, misers'. The policemen deployed to Ife during the period made so much money that they bought up almost all the electronic goods in the major electronic shops in Ife.

Implications of the Crisis

The implications of all crises can only be grave for any human society. 'As a result of both local and foreign wars, by the end of the 19th Century (1893), Ife was territorially dwarfed from a kingdom to a city' (M. A. Fabunmi, 1985:117). Most of the good things to be found in the big cities of the world, such as industrial estates, manufacturing companies and huge business investments, are conspicuously absent in Ile-Ife, simply because of the fear of insecurity.

Secondary and primary schools were burnt in the area during the war, and some schools were abandoned, because of their proximity to either of the warring communities. Education for many pupils was disrupted. Students from Modakeke could no longer attend schools in Ile-Ife, and vice-versa.

There was also growing fear and suspicion among members of the two communities, in common workplaces such as the University Campus in the city. The fear extended to travellers changing their routes out of the city, even when this meant extra expense.

The crisis has hindered infrastructural development in the city. Some bridges, houses, High Court buildings, schools and other infrastructures, which cost huge sums of money, were destroyed. It may be impossible to replace or repair some of them. The same applies to the installations of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and Telecommunication and Water Corporation damaged during the war.

The most striking effect of the crisis was the loss of human lives. No fewer than one thousand people lost their lives during the crisis, including several illustrious sons and daughters of the two communities. Some of them had higher university degrees while others were successful businessmen. One has to add that these people fought for a cause in which they believed.

The crisis also reopened age-old bitterness and animosity between the two communities. It severed peaceful relationships, which had taken years to build, and it shattered hopes for future cooperation. The success of integration achieved from 1966 to 1978 was thrown into the mud in 1979, with the signs of rebellion and the ultimate war.

Resolution of the Crisis: the Efforts so far

The resolution of the Ife-Modakeke crisis can be spread over six phases. The first relates to the 1888 peace treaty signed by the two warring parties under the then colonial administration. This treaty recommended that:

> In order to preserve peace, the town of Modakeke shall be reconstructed on the land lying between the Osun and the Oba rivers to the North of its present situation and such people of Modakeke who desire to live under the rule of the Baale and Balogun of Ibadan shall withdraw from the present town to the land mentioned at such times and in such manner as the Governor, his envoy or messenger shall direct after conference and such of the people as desires to live with the Ife shall be permitted to do so, but shall not remain in the present town of Modakeke, which shall remain the territory and under the rule of king and chief of Ife, who may deal with the same as they may think expedient. (Johnson 1969:529 see pp. 527-532 for the full text of the treaty of peace).

The treaty came into force in 1909, when the then Modakeke town was dispersed. Although the treaty was not implemented in full, nevertheless for once, the Modakekes completely evacuated Ife territory.

Their return to Ife in 1923 was backed by another peace agreement, which they signed under the then Lieutenant–Governor of the Southern Province on 26 November 1922. Two of the main provisions of that peace agreement Stated:

> (a) That the Modakekes should not form a separate town but should form one of the quarters of Ife town.

> (b) That they should not be allowed to return and build promiscuously over the old site but that the site should be laid out with roads and open spaces. No particular limitation, however, need be placed on the size of the houses to be erected.

The agreement was honoured for only about two decades, after which another tussle on *ishakole* began in 1946. The period from then until 1996 was marked by a series of political crises between the Ifes and the Modakekes and their allies.

Between 1966 and 1980, there was relative peace and harmony between the two communities. Then came the 1981 crisis. As a result, the Government of that time under Chief Bola Ige as the Executive Governor of Oyo State instituted the Honourable Justice Kayode Ibidapo-Obe's Judicial Commission of Enquiry into the communal disturbances in the Oranmiyan Central Local Government Area of Oyo State. The Panel's recommendations did not favour township status for the Modakeke, in spite of its acknowledgement that 'Modakeke is a large section of Ile-Ife'. Nevertheless, it condemned any attempt by the Ifes to subjugate the Modakekes. It equally condemned the feudal arrangement between the Ifes and the Modakekes as anachronistic. The Commission recommended that the wind of change', which permitted equality and co-operation, should be allowed to blow in the area (Ibidapo-Obe 1981:35–37).

The 1983 crisis was quenched when the Military seized power once again in Nigeria. There was no special resolution of the crisis by the Government. The two communities just buried their hatchets, somehow, probably for fear of the military administration of Buhari/Idiagbon and Badamosi Babangida. However, the worst violence ever recorded in the area broke out on 14 August 1997, during the administration of Abacha, and lasted for almost one and a half years.

Given the magnitude of the violence, many efforts were made to settle the crisis once and for all. These efforts can be compared to pressing the brake pedal of a battered old car, which needs to be pressed hard three or four times before the car actually stops. The first intervention was the institution by the then Governor of the State, Lt. Col. Anthony Obi, of a Royal Committee on the Ife/Modakeke

crisis. The recommendations of this Committee consisted in four main points. The first point related to the status of Modakeke. The Committee admitted that the present Modakeke is only a quarter in Ile-Ife, but added that it could assert a township status, once the community was relocated to another land area, which the Ooni (Ife paramount ruler) or the State was willing to provide. The Committee said, however, that the State had to bear a substantial part of the large financial commitment involved.

The second point covered the status of the Ooni. It Stated that the status of the Ooni was too sacred to be trampled on by the Modakekes. The Committee then recommended that 'allegiance of the Modakeke leadership and their Baale (the traditional Modakeke leader) to the Ooni should be total and unconditional' (The Report of the Royal Committee, September 1997:9). It also warned that since the Chief (Baale) of Modakeke was on the same level as some other chiefs in Ile-Ife, the implications of his elevation would ipso-facto affect other chiefs on the same level.

The third point concerned farmlands. The recommendation was that the Ooni should negotiate with the individual families owning farmlands to give some concessions to the Modakekes.

The fourth and last point related to local government. The Committee noted that since the Modakekes had begged in the first place to be resettled back in Ile-Ife, there was no just basis for demanding a purely autonomous local government council for their people, and all the more so because there were other considerations for the creation of a local government council. The Committee therefore supported the creation of another local government in the area to serve the interests of all concerned, for the purpose of development. (*ibid.*).

There was also a religious dimension to the crisis. The religious intervention involved the whole State, including the staff of the Obafemi Awolowo University. In addition, a professional evangelist was invited to offer special prayers. The former Military Administrator of Osun, Lt. Col. Anthony Obi, declared a seven-day fasting and prayer programme, which took place from Monday 16 to Sunday 22 March 1998. In the same month, Evangelist T. O. Obadare was invited to pray for the two communities. The venue of the meeting was Lagere in Ile-Ife. The two communities were present at the ceremony. Curses were poured on whoever should start another round of crisis in the area. After the programme, there were repeated attacks from both sides. The Christians at Obafemi Awolowo University organised prayer sessions on the university campus as well as in the Methodist Church in the main town of Ife. Also interesting was the widely circulated invitation for a prayer and fasting programme, which was organised by the wife of the Ooni of Ife, Queen Morisola Sijuwade, from 27 to 31 October, 1997. A large number of people turned up for the programme, which was held on the palace premises. The prayers concentrated on peace in Ile-Ife and its environs.

Another attempt to resolve the crisis consisted in a series of consultative meetings between leaders of the two communities and the Governor of Osun State and the defunct National Reconciliation Commission, led by Chief Alex Akinyele.

The last step in the reconciliation process, which seemed to have been the most effective, was achieved during a peace meeting convened by the incumbent Governor of the State, Lt. Col. Aduragbemi Theophilus Bamigboye. This meeting was held at the S.S. Peter and Paul Catholic Church at Lagere on Sunday 3 January 1999. The Ooni and the Military Administrator revealed many facts. The Modakekes were told point-blank that Modakeke was a quarter in Ile-Ife and not a town. The Chief of Modakeke was requested to prostrate himself before the Ooni of Ife as a mark of submission and to follow the

Governor to the Ooni's Palace with his community. There, they wined and dined and made peace. The Military Head of State was highly delighted at this development and he applauded his Governor for a job well done. He described the development as 'a divine intervention'.

General Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

The Ife-Modakeke crisis is certainly an age-old feud, as noted earlier. Its resolution calls for very careful consideration. Much as one would applaud the Governor of Osun State for the current level of success, there is need for a proper arrangement that would allow for discussions on other pertinent issues such as farmlands, the status of the Chief of Modakeke and the political participation of the people. Without this, the current euphoria may be short-lived.

A clearly delineated boundary between the two communities is recommended as a matter of urgency. Besides, a more permanent solution, consisting in the total relocation of the Modakekes, may have to be reconsidered. The total relocation of the Modakekes would be best for Osun State and Nigeria as a whole; but if this is not feasible, a carefully worked out programme of cultural re-integration should be urgently implemented. This would require some cultural amnesia, whereby all the ethnic consciousness hitherto brandished by the Modakekes would have to fade into oblivion with the passage of time. In other words, there should no longer be anything called 'Modakeke'. Instead, all the people there would remain as they are in their streets and enjoy all the rights and privileges of aborigines. The Ooni might have to give new names to the new compounds and wards that would be carved out in the new area.

More urgently, the Government should redesign the security network in the city and demilitarise the fighting youths completely by enacting new laws, imposing sanctions and commissioning various awareness programmes.

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