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Migration, Identity, and Belonging in Nigeria: The Ife-Modakeke Example

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Abstract: The Ife and Modakeke conflict has, between the mid-19th and the early 21st centuries, witnessed a series of reoccurrences, peacemaking efforts and textual documentations. Nevertheless, more than two decades after the last outbreak of a violent conflict, the nature of the Ife and Modakeke relation has continued to oscillate between concord, contests, and in certain instances, the outbreaks of violent skirmishes associated with divergent identities with consequences on land ownership and territorial autonomy which appear to be emerging ferment for a renewal of the crisis. Therefore, this study was conducted to interrogate the place of migration, identity, and land conflict in the Ife and Modakeke relations. This study adopted a descriptive historical research method, and data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. The findings of the study revealed how the crystallisation of identities among these groups has intensified disputes over land ownership both in the Ife metropolis and farmlands, which, after the outbreak of the last conflict in 2001, has become a source of contention. Furthermore, in addition to the dispute escalating into significant tension and violence at several points over the years, it has continued to push the Ife and the Modakeke populations to the brink of another round of violent conflict. This article concludes that addressing the question of identity and land ownership requires concerted efforts from both the government and stakeholders to foster integration, promote shared values, and ensure justice for the concerned parties. Recommendations include leveraging shared cultural practices to smooth cleavages and promote communal harmony.

Keywords: *Migration, Identity, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Sense of Belonging, Ife-*

*Modakeke Relations, Land Conflict***Introduction**

The Ife and Modakeke crisis has been extensively studied. Apart from its history (Olomola, 1992, p. 51-61; Adediran, 1992, pp. 77-95), artifacts (Frobenius, 1910, pp. 265-318, Eyo, 1970, pp. 45-87) and contributions to Yoruba culture (Johnson, 1921, pp. 1-25), Ile-Ife also appears to be exceptionally prominent as a consequence of its relations with non-Ife migrants who would become known as Modakeke – a new identity created from a merger of migrants from disparate Yoruba towns (Alao, 2004, p. 14). The nature of the inter-group relations between both groups, which began between 1770 and early 1800 (Johnson 230), has undulated through peace (Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 1-18), violent conflicts (Johnson, 1921, p. 230) and recurring tension (Fatile, 2009, pp. 486-499, Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 1-18). While the Ife and the Modakeke migrants initially coexisted peacefully, the cordiality between both groups would appear to have ruptured in the 1830s (Johnson, 1921, p. 230). The factors surrounding the collapse of the peaceful co-existence between both groups have not been exhaustively examined. However, certain studies have suggested that the dominance of Ibadan, which the Ife lost to the Oyo-speaking migrants, disrupted the hitherto amicable inter-group relations (Albert, 1999, pp. 142-183). At any rate, the antagonistic state of interactions between both groups elicited the fabrication of Modakeke as a new identity that commonly unified the migrants of a hitherto disparate background (Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 1-18).

Furthermore, to perhaps establish administrative independence and a non-Ife identity despite occupying a geographical area regarded as the domains of the Obawirin, Iraye, Oke Awo, and Ijugbe (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711) lineages within Ile-Ife, the Modakeke have, at several times, made effort to assert territorial autonomy and emphasise a separate identity from that of the Ife (Alao, 2004, pp. 14). Interestingly, as this study will show, not only have these factors lingered through the episodes of violent conflicts between both groups, they have also continued to linger and engender contentions two decades after the resolution of the last conflict between both groups. Thus, while numerous studies have examined the trajectory (Okuda, 2019, pp. 98-140, Albert, 1999, pp. 142-183, Oyeniyi, 2010, pp. 308-329), causes (Asiyanbola, 2009 pp. 81-100), resolutions (Ogbeide and Olatunji, 2014, pp. 1-18, Okuda, 2019, pp. 76-97) and impacts (Albert, 1999, pp. 142-183) of the conflict between the Ife and Modakeke, not much considerations have been accorded to the roles played by identity-making and the contest for land as drivers of the lingering tensions between both groups. Therefore, using a descriptive historical research method, this paper examines identity formation and territorial autonomy as key drivers of conflict in Ife-Modakeke relations. The primary and secondary sources used, which were subjected to qualitative analysis, include archival materials, newspapers, and oral interviews, as well as monographs, book

chapters, journal articles, and unpublished materials.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the imagined communities and ethnic boundary maintenance theories, the proponents of which are Frederik Barth (1969) and Benedict Anderson (1983), respectively. The theory of imagined communities posits that, rather than the content of a culture, ethnic boundaries are socially constructed through interaction and group distinctions. In addition, the theory of ethnic boundary maintenance suggests that nations, in the sense of ethnic identity, are not natural but imagined as limited and sovereign. The former is thought of as having "finite boundaries, outside of which lie other nations," the latter, as having the created identities associated with a defined territorial space, is considered sovereign. In the context of the theme of the study, these theories further illuminate the implications of identity for the Ife and Modakeke relations. In the reflections contained in this study, the immigrants who had hitherto cohabited with the people of Ile-Ife developed a collective identity through social experiences with emotional significance that would serve as a unifier. In the expressions of Hüsamettin İnaç and Feyzullah Ünal (2013, pp. 223-232), identity-making leads to an emphasis of the distinctive features and a disregard for the shared denominators, which leads to "hostility, contradiction, and discrepancy as well as denying, humiliating, and negating the 'other'... it is also an exclusive process with the elimination of other identities." Therefore, the emergence of a new identity rather than integrating into the broader Ife identity appeared to have created a phenomenon of otherness, which has formed a vital part of the contestations and has continued to widen

the gap between the Ife and the immigrants that have adopted the Modakeke identity – thus, posing as an impediment to the integration of peoples with a series of intergroup relations spanning over a century.

The Modakeke in Ife: Migration and Identity Making

Extant studies generally agree that the collapse of the Old Oyo caused waves of migration from the northern region of Yorubaland to the south (Akinjogbin, 1966, pp. 449-460). These waves of migration, partly caused by the threat of political instability and insecurity (Atanda, 1971 pp. 477-490; Law, 1970, pp. 211-222), led to not only the emergence of new towns (Olomola, 1998, pp. 371-380, Smith, 1962, pp. 329-349) founded by migrants but also the pursuit of refuge in several pre-existing Yoruba towns within which the migrants settled (Oguntomisin and Falola, 1998, pp. 381-398). Ile-Ife, which falls within the latter category, was not exempt from the influx of migrants. In *The Ebi System Reconsidered*, Akinjogbin (1979, pp. 1-25) extensively explored the position of Ile-Ife among the Yoruba. Indeed, the concept of the *ebi* system, as put forward by Akinjogbin, rests upon a tradition that suggests that Oduduwa was an Ife king from whom every other Yoruba king descended. While it is not particularly clear if Akinjogbin was aware that certain verses of Ifa explain the origin and progeny of several Yoruba towns and contradict the popular traditions, his theory about Oduduwa and the idea that Ife is the *orirun* (source) remains a mainstream ideology that has continued to feature strongly among the Yoruba.

In the migration process, the non-Ife migrants settled within the metropolis of Ile-Ife and cohabited with the natives of Ile-Ife (Ojo, 2003, pp. 37-75, National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof 1 Vol II 1929).

However, these migrants did not identify as a body. Instead, they appeared to have recognised themselves as different groups or individuals pursuing trade and crafts among others in Ile-Ife. Ooni Aderemi sufficiently described the circumstances surrounding the presence of the migrants in Ile-Ife in a letter he wrote in 1947, when he stated that Your forefathers did not come to Ife at the same time or from the same place in the same circumstances. At the time Ogunsuwa quarter (now Modakeke) was established, Wingbolu, whose Ife title was Ogunsuwa, was the strangers' leader. His contemporaries were Akinrinlo, Are Giriloso, Ajayi, Ayanleye, Sorinlolu, Oyeku, Apanla, Meminuro, Emuoje, Aleshinloye, Ayangede, Ajuwon, Igiyadina, Lagbege, to mention a few. The, to mention a few. Most of your fathers came from Ejigbo and Ogbagba, distant towns from the Ife Kingdom of the time. Others are from Owu, Igbomina, and Oyo towns of Oje, Ola, Ofa, Ikoyi, etc. (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof 1, Vol II 1929).

Nonetheless, despite the disparity in identities of the migrants, the Modakeke have, over time, jettisoned their disparate origins and united under a uniform identity known as Modakeke. Before the rupture of the peace between the Ife and the Modakeke, it would appear that both groups enjoyed some cordiality and peaceful co-existence, as is the case with several groups recorded to have migrated from other towns to Ile-Ife at several points in time (Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 1-18). Citing the letter written by Ooni Aderemi, who, while describing the circumstances surrounding the migration and settlement of the Modakeke in Ile-Ife, retorted that They were received with open arms, them, most of whom were subjects of the Oni and have full citizens' rights. Each of

these leaders lodged with his friend in Ife, and those who had no friends in Ife were given land in Oke Atan, Odo Adeji, etc (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof 1, Vol II 1929).

In addition, some notable instances of integration of the migrants into Ile-Ife include cases such as that of Wingbolu of Oko, who was allotted a space to settle at Iyekere. Others include Ojo-Bada from Aragberi, settled in Ijugbe; Ogungbe of Ojoo settled at Oke Owu; Adefajo, settled at Lagere; and Ajombadi of Ijaye, settled at Oke-Esho (Alao, 2004, p. 14, National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof 1, Vol II, 1929). It would appear that the inter-group relations between the Ife and the migrants were amicable, such that the migrants easily engaged in economic activities of their choice. For instance, Wingbolu, a blacksmith by trade, was given land in Iyekere to facilitate the mining and smelting of iron ore at Ileru, otherwise known as Ago Elewure (National Archives Ibadan Ife Div. 1/1, File 26, CMS (Y) 4/1). The extent of this integration was perhaps further shown by the indigenous political title accorded by the Ife natives and the Ooni to Wingbolu, who was conferred with the title of Ogunsua, a title which initially belonged to the Ojugbede family, who were natives of Ife and known blacksmiths (Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 1-18).

The amicable co-existence and integration between the natives of Ife and the migrants lasted several years until the 1830s. As stated earlier, the exact factors responsible for the degeneration of relations between both groups are clear. However, it has been ascribed to the grievance from losing the political influence of Ife over Ibadan (Alao, 2004, p. 17; Johnson, 1921, pp. 239-242). Due to the change in the attitude of the Ife, the non-Ife migrants coalesced to identify as Oyo (Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 1-18). It can,

therefore, be suggested that friction with Ife intensified from the creation of the new identity by the non-Ife migrants. Several studies have demonstrated its extent (Johnson, 1921, p. 525), which was reflected in the demonstration of the superiority of the preservation of the state over the sacrality of Ife kings (Fatile, 2009, pp. 486-499). Furthermore, during the height of the fall-out between both groups, one of the Ife kings of the period resettled the non-Oyo out of Ife to a temporary settlement from where they were expected to relocate to their respective towns (May, 1860, pp. 212-233, Elugbaju, 2018, pp. 21-35). Indeed, many returned, but others did not (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof 1, Vol II 1929). However, the latter group eventually created a new identity, which emerged from the earlier one. The new identity created by the migrants who refused to return to their respective towns is what would become known as Modakeke. A. J. Phillips, a Colonial Administrative Officer during this period, commented in an annual report that "despite having no plans to return to their original homes like other strangers in Ile-Ife, the people of Modakeke maintained a separate identity in Ife" (National Archives Ibadan. 39 Annual Report, 1949).

Contextualising Identity as a Problem in the Ife-Modakeke Conflicts

The outbreak of conflicts between the Ife and the settlers, who, following their relocation ordered by the proclamation by Ooni Abewela, had assumed an identity different from that of the Ife. The extent to which this identity precipitated the post-evacuation conflicts is hard to pinpoint. However, it would appear these conflicts, which have been discussed in greater detail elsewhere, played a role in indurating the disposition of otherness in the identities of both groups leading to the

outbreak of a civil war in Ile-Ife (Akinjogbin, 1992, p. 154; Alao, 2004, p. 21; Johnson, 1921, p. 147). Ibadan emerged as the most important Yoruba town during this period due to its military expansion. Thus, it would facilitate the resettlement of Ile-Ife and its emergence as a vassal state to Ibadan, which superintended it and Modakeke as separate towns (Oyeniya, 2010, pp. 308-329, Akanji, 2008, p. 205). Daniel May visited Ile-Ife a few years after this war (May, 1860, pp. 212-233). In his journal titled *Journey in the Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858*, he provided a report describing the events in the town at the time. In addition to providing a short but seemingly vivid description of the consequences of the war, Daniel May identified that the area known as Modakeke was a section of Ile-Ife rather than an unoccupied virgin forest on the outskirts of the town (May, 1860, pp. 212-233). In addition, May's account showed in his narrative that the Ibadan had an *Ajele* in Modakeke, which also had a chief (May, 1860, pp. 212-233). Thus, this highlights that the settlement of the immigrants had some form of indigenous political leadership and that Ibadan administered Modakeke as a separate town through an *Ajele* (viceroys). At any rate, after the conflict had been resolved through the intervention of notable individuals in Ibadan (Oyerinde, 2019, pp. 993-1002), an attempt was made to blur the identity differences by integrating the leaders of the Modakeke group into the indigenous political system of Ile-Ife. In specific terms, Ojo Akitikori and Ajombadi, leaders within the Modakeke community, were appointed as chiefs into the Ooni cabinet, as the Jagunosin and Ejesi, respectively (National Archives Ibadan File 29829 CSO 23/3).

Ile-Ife and the Modakeke settlement

remained vassals of Ibadan for several years until the outbreak of the Yoruba fratricidal wars (Akintoye, 1971, pp. 53 and 156). Perhaps, during the several decades of Ibadan overlordship, the incompatibility of distinctiveness in the identities of both groups seemed not to have found an avenue for expression until the outbreak of the Ekitiparapo War, otherwise known as the Kiriji War (Oluwafemi, 2023, pp. 67-76; Usman and Falola, 2019, pp. 177–201). In the events leading to and prosecuting the war, the Ife and the Modakeke pursued opposing policies that reflected the contrasts in their identities. The objectives pursued by the Ife included addressing the imposition of Ayikiti (Oyediran, 1973, pp. 373-86), dislodging the military power and overlordship of Ibadan (Oyerinde, 2019, pp. 993–1002), and sacking the Modakeke settlement (Ojo, 2003, pp. 37-75). Meanwhile, the Modakeke opposed the disposition of the Ife and threw their support behind Ibadan (Onipede, 2019, pp. 75-85), a town with a similar sub-ethnic group as that of the migrant groups of Modakeke (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof 1, Vol 1, 1929). Earlier studies examining the Yoruba internecine war have shown the contestations between the objectives pursued by the representatives of Ile-Ife and Modakeke and their respective allies. As such, an effort will not be made here to go into further analysis. Nevertheless, Johnson (1921, p. 452) highlighted the interplay of identities in the contestations surrounding the conflicts and negotiations when he remarked that "the position of Modakeke to Ife is analogous to that of Belfast to the south of Ireland; the Modakekes are Oyos of the same tribal affinity with Ibadan, with which their safety is linked." The internecine wars that engulfed the Yoruba for several years were brought to an end in 1894 with a series of treaties

(Akintoye, 2014, pp. 323-325), including that which was signed by the Ife and the Modakeke, whose identity has, by this time, become separated from that of Ife, despite intermarrying extensively and cohabiting within the same territorial space (Johnson, 1921, p. 646). While the issues concerning the treaty will be discussed in the subsequent parts of the work, the study will examine the nature of the relations between both groups in the immediate post-war years here. After the treaties had been signed and the wars ended, the belligerent parties returned to their geographical spaces – including the Ife and the people of Modakeke (Omosini, 1992, pp. 171-173). However, if the interactions between both groups pre-1894 undulated between integration and separation, the nature of the post-1895 relations crystallised the formation, separation, and incompatibilities of the identities of both groups. After the resettlement following the 1894 armistice, it would appear that the people of Modakeke settled in the Ife territory. However, no known matter of contention with Ife was recorded or highlighted in extant sources. Perhaps there were contested issues between both parties that could not be fully expressed in the usual manner of violent conflicts due to the effects of the extensive internecine wars and the presence of the British in Lagos, with the capacity to enforce peace (Omosini, 1992, pp. 171-173). Nevertheless, several issues that seemed to have induced tensions were highlighted in a series of letters written by Ooni Adelekan Olubuse, who reigned between 1894 and 1910.

Some of the issues raised in the letters written by Ooni Olubuse included what he regarded as the instigation of the people of Modakeke against Ife by specific individuals listed as Oke, Akerele (otherwise known as Ifawole),

Dada, Efunliyi (Aghalino and Elugbaju, 2022, pp. 21-35) and Ogunngbe (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). The Ooni indicated that not only were Oke and Akerele disrespectful towards two Europeans sent to Ife for particular assignments, but Oke was also described as the headman instigating the rest of the people within Modakeke settlement and the Ibadan against Ile-Ife Ibadan (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). In his remarks, Ooni Adelekan Olubuse stated that these individuals were his greatest enemies (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). Perhaps, taking a more exact approach, in another letter, the Ooni indicated that the Modakeke "claimed my ground without my knowing and share them for their use." Going further, the Ooni echoed and emphasised the identity of the Modakeke as not being Ife when he stated that "the Modakeke had their father's land at old time when another town fighting these men, they ran one by one to Ile-Ife. They are not Ife people..." (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). In addition to highlighting a series of issues described as the offences committed by the Modakeke against the people of Ile-Ife, the Ooni concluded his letters with a comment concerning the probable methods for lasting resolution of the contests between both groups. These were that the Modakeke would return to vacate the Ife territory upon which they had settled or relocate to the metropolis of Ile-Ife and settle among Ife upon the lands they had initially been occupied (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711) before the relocation effected by Abewela. The documentation of the responses of the people of Modakeke concerning the

complaints made by the Ooni would have provided a robust understanding of the issues in contention. However, source materials for this appear unavailable. Nonetheless, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary in Lagos, R.J.B. Ross, the Colonial Acting Resident Officer of Ibadan, provided a more precise analysis of the problem between the parties and the perspective of the Modakeke people. In addition to the comments about the boundary adjustments between Ibadan and Ife, the Acting Resident Officer recorded that "the Modakeke, more particularly during the last three years, had been in the habit of encroaching on people's farms" (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). this led to the "many cases of land stealing which had been brought before successive Residents of Ibadan." the Acting Resident Officer recorded that "the Modakekes confessed that they were trespassers and pleaded only for a friendly arrangement on the grounds of their long occupancy and intermarriage with the Ifes. In addition to the land acquisition and tenure is the issue of identity" (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). It was further stated by the Ooni that "with the support of Ibadan, the Modakeke have established an independent and unfriendly government of their own in juxtaposition to his town of Ife" (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). And this has culminated in the actions of the Modakeke who have persistently ejected the Ife "from their inherited farmlands" (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711). The report concerning the contestations between the Ife and Modakeke in Ross's letter to the Colonial Secretary is far more detailed. However, when the excerpts highlighted are

synthesised with the preceding analysis, it becomes observable that while both groups coexisted within a similar geographical space and intermarried extensively, the differences in identities, which were, perhaps, latent, would become apparent.

Identity and Land in the Post-1997 Conflict

As shown in the preceding analysis, identity formation between the 1840s and 1894 had crystallised. This leads to the sense of otherness that is imagined and operated by both parties. Perhaps the evacuation policy pursued by Ooni Olubuse could have been the lasting solution to the contentious relationship between the two groups. However, in the 1920s, Ooni Ademiluyi advocated the return of the Modakeke to Ile-Ife Ibadan (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof I, File 1929 Vol. 1). The terms upon which the Modakeke could return were worked into the agreement. As reported in the source material, "Oni and the people of Modakeke must fully understand that the new Modakeke quarter is to be known as the Modakeke quarter of Ife and is not to be regarded as a separate town" (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof I, File 1929 Vol. 1). As rightly observed by Oladoyin, the terms of remigration and resettlement of Modakeke in 1923 lasted for about two decades (Oladoyin, 2001, pp. 195-223). It would appear that in the 1940s, recourse would no longer made to this agreement when the Modakeke people began to exploit several measures to establish a dichotomy which would lead to the reinvention of the hitherto "Modakeke quarter of Ife" as an independent settlement (National Archives Ibadan Oyo Prof I, Vol II 192). This was expressed in the plethora of issues both groups had to contend with for most of the second half of the 20th century. These, among others, have been discussed

elsewhere, including the demands for a separate central mosque and Imam, protest against farmland tenancy rents, and most importantly, the demand for a separate Local Government Council (Fatile and Awotokun, 2009, pp. 486-499). The latter issue, perhaps, marked the apogee of the series of agitations initiated by the people of the Modakeke community.

Of the several agitations initiated by the Modakeke community, the demand for a separate Local Government Council appears to define the dichotomisation of identities associated with a geographical space differentiated from that of the Ife. In a study conducted by Olakunle Michael Folami and Taiwo Akanbi Olaiya, a Modakeke interviewee related that

We are highly politically sensitive here. We follow any political party that is ready to do our bidding. A political party that is ready to give us a local government headquarters. Thank goodness, we fought Ife over tribute, we won. We don't pay any tribute again. We know that ownership of a local government area confers land ownership. We want recognition; we want free access to land (Folami and Olaiya, 2016, pp. 1-19).

While this view may not represent the position of the Modakeke community as a whole, it does indicate the construed benefits associated with the acquisition of Local Government. Interestingly, citing relevant legal data, Okuda has shown that according to the five types of legal land ownership in Nigeria as outlined by the Supreme Court, the people of Modakeke owned the land they have lived on for several years, but as settlers, they would need to confer with the Ife to outline the extent of the spaces that constitute Modakeke (Okuda, 2019, pp. 121-122). This perhaps informed several reactions to this agitation, one of which was

attributed to Professor Ade-Ajayi, who stated at the Ibadapo Obe Judicial Panel that the people of Modakeke were migrants and that they occupied a quarter within Ile-Ife and did not have a separate town of theirs (Albert, 2009, pp. 142-183). At any rate, for most of the 1980s, the demand for a separate Local Government Council had become central to the demands of the Modakeke people, who have, over time, appeared to have concluded that they do not share a similar identity with the Ife and as such, wanted a separate geographical space upon which they had administrative autonomy. As shown in extant texts, diplomatic measures were employed to pursue this demand, but so was the extensive use of violence (Toriola, 2001, pp. 21-29). Consequently, violent conflicts were recorded in the 1980s when the Local Government Council demand surfaced extensively between 1997 and 2001, when it was hotly pursued among several other demands (Albert, 2009, pp. 142-183).

Certain scholars have analysed the extent of violence extensively employed by both groups in settling disputes as a "form of the liberation struggles and self-determination" for the Modakeke (Okuda, 2019, p. 110) and that of defence for protecting "people and property being wantonly destroyed" for Ife (Oladoyin, 2001, pp. 195-223). Whatever the case, what appears to be central to these conflicts is land, which, to the Ife, constitutes the heritage of specific lineages that must be protected and to the Modakeke, a resource to which they should have unbridled access. This gives

credence to the assertion made by Okuda, who, citing Turner, a conflict sociologist, related that "groups with different status positions will always conflict because the superior group strives to maintain its status while the inferior group seeks liberation from an inferior position" (Okuda, 2019, p. 218). In the pursuit of liberation through the creation of the Local Government Council, the Modakeke community, seeing the impossibility of recording notable concessions from the people of Ile-Ife concerning the outline of the extent of what should constitute Modakekeland (National Archives Ibadan CSO 12/23 9 File 587/1904 Vol. CSE/1/1/711)¹, have resorted to a self-help strategy in of the geographical areas that comprise what has been regarded as a town (Akanji, 2018, p. 213), as opposed to being a quarter within Ife. In a paper presented by the Ife community to the Federal Government in 2001, an outline of what was considered to be the expansionism of the Modakeke community was presented. For instance, the report indicated that, like several other non-natives, individuals of Modakeke origin acquired lands within the metropolis of Ifeland. As further related in the document, "if fifty or more non-indigenes, including say, two or three Modakekes, have buildings on a road or street, the Modakekes among them will erect signposts in front of their buildings indicating that the street or Road is Modakeke." The report proceeded further to highlight areas where this phenomenon has occurred. These include "Ife-Ondo Road, Ife-Ibadan Road, as well as Akarabata, Isale-

¹ In one of his letters to the colonial administrators, Ooni Adelekan Olubuse emphasized the ownership of the land upon which the Modakeke

people settled when he stated that "Also if the Modakeke deny, send for Iraiye, Ijugbe ad Oke Awo's people in which you will believe me."

Agbara, Oke-Eso, Koiwo, Apalara, Ijedu, and various other areas which the Modakekes now claim as part of Modakeke in their bid to surreptitiously and illegally annexe Ifeland" (The Entire Ife Community 3).

Furthermore, the report highlighted additional cases of expansionism when it reported that "the Modakekes have been changing the original names of a number of places in Ile-Ife and renaming such area(s)." The basis for this change was given to be "just because a few of them have buildings in such places. This they do without holding consultations with the others who are in the majority, talk less of such people's knowledge and consent" (The Entire Ife Community, 2001, p. 4). The report listed

(a) Ilojo: which belongs to Woye Asiri Family of Ile-Ife has been renamed Ola Layout, Modakeke. Late Ola was a Modakeke. (b) Obawinrin Layout: owned by Obawinin family of Ile-Ife has been renamed Oke-Ola, Modakeke by the Modakeke. In this area Modakeke houses are fewer in number than the ones built and resided in by Ifes and non-Ifes from various parts of Nigeria - Yoruba and non-Yoruba. (c) Akarabata Layout, Lines 1, 2, 3: This Layout was the brainchild of Sir Adesoji Aderemi (of blessed memory), the erstwhile Ooni of Ife. Of all the not less than 100 buildings on the layout, only five belong to the Modakekes, yet they refer to this place as Modakeke. (d) Sigidiri: owned by the Obalaave of Iraye, Ile-Ife, is now renamed "Egbedore, Modakeke" by the Modakeke. (e) Oronna Layout: This layout also belongs to the Obawinrin of

Ile-Ife. (f) Ata Ayinde: Belongs to the Ayinde Ajilu family of Ile-Ife. This village, the Modakekes have renamed Famia. (g) The surrounding areas (of Ata Ayinde) like Idi-Iroko, Riraloya, etc., belong to Ife families, e.g., Fegun Awoyelu, Akile, Moku, Latale, Gbonkaa, Ayorunbo, etc. The Modakekes have now changed the places to Okuu-Omoni and other names at their whims and caprices (The Entire Ife Community, 2001, p. 4-7).

The report showed that the acquisition of spaces did not preclude the use of violence.² As reported by Kabir, there has been an absence of a large-scale conflict between both groups since the last outbreak of violence in the year 2000. However, Olarinoye and Abubakar have, nonetheless, highlighted a renewal of the encroachment of Modakeke beyond its original extent, or, as otherwise reported, the growth and expansion of Modakeke as an independent town (Akanji, 2008, pp. 213), appears to have set the stage for the slow but gradual renewal of the conflict which has sporadically broken out in the urban areas, villages and farm settlements where several cases of tension have been reported. One such instance of tension between both groups, as indicated by Bamigbola, surfaced in the year 2021 when five people, reported to have been natives of Modakeke, were killed along Toro village. Similarly, Lawal in the Daily Post newspaper reported the murder of certain natives of Ife on March 19, 2024, which has generated specific comments, particularly those describing the nature of the intergroup relations between the Ife

² For instance, Ooni Sijuwade Olubuse appointed one Chief Adegoke Olajolo as the Baale of Akarabata, a community established

by Ooni Aderemi with expertise advise of the Colonial Senior District Officer, J. H. Bailey. However, he was murdered during the 1997/1998 crisis.

and the Modakeke people in recent times. In addition to making comments about the natives of Ife who had been killed, Kolawole Jimoh Oladipo further revealed that

Modakeke has forcefully taken over nothing less than one hundred Ife villages in recent times by terrorising, killing, maiming, and kidnapping the ancestral owners of those farmlands and thereby scaring the survivors out of the villages. This unchecked affront of the Modakeke bandits gave them the insolent audacity to launch further attacks on Toro, Yekere, and Alape villages and to illegally annexe and rename them as belonging to Modakeke in successive order between October and December 2023. The village heads and royal highnesses of groups of villages installed/crowned by the Ooni, including Olu of Toro and Oloyere of Oyere, were sacked from their ancestral domains of authority. All attempts by the ancestral owners of those farmlands to lawfully repossess them with the police, who have at various times accompanied them there to enforce court judgments, have been flagrantly and forcefully resisted by the Modakeke miscreants who have illegally taken possession of the farms cultivated and nurtured by Ife farmers (Emmanuel, 2024).

In an attempt to, perhaps, shed further light on the question of land ownership and identity formation between both groups, Emmanuel (2024) recorded Kolawole Jimoh Oladipo to have remarked that.

Apart from Modakeke sticking to their gun on being a separate town from Ife, they have gone on clandestine Ife streets renaming as Modakeke. This is obvious on IBEDC bills with regard to places like Lagere, Akarabata, Ijedu, Urban-Day Grammar School area, Aderemi Road, Isale-Agbara, just to mention but a few. As part of measures to consolidate this

land-grabbing agenda, a new market was established at Akarabata on Saturday, March 23, by the Modakeke people named "Arowolo Market, Akarabata, Modakeke" in an area with an Ife Baale installed by the Ooni. This is clearly the rebellious agenda of Ogunsua Toriola playing out. Emergence, before he emerged as Ogunsua, the then Chief Toriola had offered as his own "solution" to the Ife-Modakeke perennial crisis that for peace to reign, Ife must accept that everything to the right coming into Ile-Ife from Oduduwa University roundabout along Ife-Ibadan expressway is Modakeke and whatever is to the left is Ile-Ife. All the places being illegally renamed as Modakeke are on the right side of the road, including Ife Central Local Government secretariat.

The "solution" highlighted in the excerpt quoted above may have gone into operation. This is that, as observed during an exploration, certain settlements hitherto regarded as being a part of Ile-Ife on the right side of the Ife-Ibadan Road appear to have now been identified as Modakeke, as reflected on signposts. Be that as it may, as recorded by Showunmi (2024), these revelations elicited comments from notable personalities within the Modakeke community who, in addition to indicating the recently recorded conflicts in the farmlands could be an instance of misunderstanding between individuals rather than a case of conflict between the two communities and encouraged harmonious relationship between both groups.

Interestingly, the outbreak of violence and the consequent cases of deaths recorded in the farms and villages have been primarily described as a recurrent phenomenon associated with the period of harvesting crops (Adeyemi-Ale, 2018, pp. 87-90) rather than a reflection of an existing contention between the Ife and

Modakeke groups. In any case, Gabriel Ale-Adeyemi shed further light on the crisis in the farm settlements. In addition to tracing the root of the crisis to the aftermath of the most recent violent conflict between both parties between 1997 and 2000, Ale-Adeyemi equally related that farmlands occupied and cultivated by the indigenes of Modakeke were seized, burnt, militarily occupied, and re-allocated to new farmers by the Ife (Adeyemi-Ale, 2018, pp. 87-90). Furthermore, Ale-Adeyemi reported that when the conflict ended in 2000, the Modakeke farmers tried to return to these farmlands. As a result of the unyielding disposition of the landlords, the intervention of the state and federal governments was sought through petitions, which led to a series of meetings and committees set up to resolve the imbroglio (Adeyemi-Ale, 2018, pp. 87-90). However, the failure of efforts and interventions sought to facilitate the reoccupation of the farmlands by the Modakeke farmers led to the self-help position assumed in 2018 "that as long as Ife landlords would not allow the Modakeke farmers any free access to their farms in Ife dominated areas, they too will disallow Ife farmers from operating in Modakeke dominated areas" (Adeyemi-Ale, 2018, pp. 87-90). At any rate, it would appear that recurrent violence, which has resulted in deaths, is being used to enforce claims to lands both for farming and residential spaces.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study is to interrogate the place of identity and land in the outbreak and sustenance of tensions, violent skirmishes, and contestations between the Ife and the Modakeke groups reflects the dynamics of indigene and settler relation in Nigeria which is often characterised by contestations for resources and political

representation among others. Indeed, in theory, federalism, which is the mode of government practiced in Nigeria gives room for diversity of identities within the context of according it political representation and the existence of socio-cultural practices. However, this has also been known to facilitate the exclusion of migrants and settlers at the state and local government levels where identity cleavage exists. Thus far, the research has shown that the crystallisation of identities elicited the demand for spatial delineation specific to the identities created, and not only has this initiated contestation concerning ownership of residential areas and farmlands, but it has also contributed to the sustained tensions and disputes, sometimes expressed in the form of intense violence, between both groups. Therefore, with identities formed, the struggle for land ownership could, perhaps, be resolved by the government and the concerned stakeholders to prevent outbreak of another large-scale armed conflict through the delineation of the extent of the Modakeke area within Ile-Ife, which currently appears hazy and as such, exploited. Furthermore, the integration of both groups through the exploration of shared values, such as marriages, ancestral relations, ensuring justice for farmers and families who have lost farmlands within both groups and encouragement of political participation within Ifeland, among others, form ingredients necessary for the attainment of lasting peace between both groups.

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