

Reconstructing Conflicts and Incorporation in Pre-18th Century Yorubaland: A Research Agenda.

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ABSTRACT

Reconstructing a lost past is, no doubt, a herculean task for historians. In this article, I examined possible ways historians, most especially of Africa's past can access and reconstruct events of the past before written records. Among other things, the essay suggests the questions historians must ask if they are to reconstruct meaningfully the past as it occurred in the past.

I. Introduction

The history of the Yoruba-speaking people, especially from the eighteenth, nineteenth to the twentieth century, has received considerable attention. As the avalanche of literature on different themes explored by scholars during these periods have shown, academic historians alone were not the only chroniclers of events during these era, different Yoruba elites, most notably Samuel Johnson, John Olawunmi George, E.M. Lijadu, Otunba Payne, and Mojola Agbebi, have offered themselves as worthy chroniclers of their age. While academic historians have rendered their works in English and a few in French, these worthy chroniclers of Yoruba's past wrote in English Language, Arabic and in their mother tongue, Yoruba. The few Arabic writings have contributed immensely to the Islamic historiography of the century. The contributions of both groups of authors are immense. Whereas the 19th, and 20th centuries had chroniclers, the centuries before these, especially not-too-distant past from say, 15th to the 17th centuries, could not boast of one chronicler let alone any substantial work regarding these epochs in African history.

Many are the reasons for these historiographical deficits. The most obvious being the direction of Western historiography handed down to African scholars from the 1940s. Western historiographical orthodoxy could not conceive as historical writing any writing not based on the written texts. And since most, if not all, historical events in Africa during the pre-18th century

remained locked-up in oral literature; they were regarded as darkness, to use Trevor Roper's famous word, and therefore not subjects of history.

Arising from this Western historiographical grandstanding, most written histories about Africa were histories based on records, which were written and kept by colonial officers with varying degrees of educational background, but with skills that were adequate enough to write letters; make entries in diaries; and report on their activities and experiences in Africa. The most talented among them wrote books and copious reports. A great deal of their writings survived and is today widely used as complementary primary sources to reconstruct the history of the period. As the earliest African academic historians later demonstrated, these colonial histories are incorrect, biased, overtly Eurocentric and, as a result, a disservice to Africa's rich historical past. To demonstrate the richness of Africa's historical past, the likes of Kenneth Dike, Tekena Tamuno, Ade-Ajayi, to mention just a handful, invested much energy to historical writings based on the oral texts. In fact, the entire Ibadan School of History and such other institutional efforts in Africa aimed at attaining just this. Academic historians at Ibadan and other centers in Africa successfully demonstrated that Africa had histories, although outside the purview of the written texts. Confronted by the evidences, Western historiography dismantled its obtuse high altitude and ceded the ground for oral sources as veritable and dependable sources of history, not just African history.

Notwithstanding this great achievement by the African academic historians; much of their reconstructions have dealt with periods between the 19th and 20th centuries. African history therefore remains histories of the 19th and 20th centuries. What happened before these periods and where are their histories? Although archaeology, ethnography and linguistic have yielded up enormous data to suggest that a lot about the periods before the 19th and 20th centuries remained unknown, academic historians, almost in all cases, have treated these periods like a void and are yet to come up with reconstructions capable of shedding lights on the happenings during these periods.

Having succeeded in demonstrating the fact that Africa had history before the European contacts, African academic historians, rather than continuing to unearth Africa's past, moved away from this very important task to examining and establishing linkages between the various

reconstructions already done and current events in Africa. The current situation is more like competing with the West, as various theoretical imperatives that dominate Western scholarships have suddenly found their replicas in Africa. While there is nothing wrong in this, as it shows the currency of African academic enterprise, it nevertheless steers attention away from much more important development in African history. The gap between what is known and what remains to be known is made deeper daily by a host of other factors. Besides the fact that death is daily decimating the number of direct and indirect witnesses to some of the events needing reconstruction, Western cultural hegemony has succeeded in demonizing, and thereby rationalizing them to death, some roles that would have helped the historians in their reconstructions. For instance, Western education has decimated the number of griots, bards, palace jesters, etc through rationalization that places much more importance to wealth generation and accumulation rather than knowledge acquisition. With increasingly decreasing number of these traditional historians and custodians of the high cultures in Africa, academic historians are faced with the onerous task of seeking out for alternatives, where little or none exists.

There is no gainsaying the fact that academic historians of Africa need a new research agenda for the future: the need to delve into the great void, the need to think backward into periods that preceded the 19th and 20th centuries. The focus of such agenda should be to unearth Africa's pasts which still remains buried and codified in memories, songs and other oral texts. This new agenda, as of necessity, must be to shed lights, not on over-flogged issues but on, for instance, finding solutions to Africa's problems. Using the example of Yorubaland, this study examines the phenomenon of conflicts and incorporation in the pre-18th century periods.

II. The New Research Agenda

Historians, as Toyin Falola had noted, are always in love with periods, events, and personalities with accessible sources¹. This overt fascination for events with accessible sources has dangerously affected African history as most of the reconstructions have been limited in their reach. For instance, most reconstructions about Africa did not go beyond the nineteenth century, especially the second half. The reason for this is that, before this point in African history,

¹ Toyin Falola (1988) 'A Research Agenda on the Yoruba in the Nineteenth Century' in *History in Africa*, Vol. 15, p. 212.

accessible sources are limited. Because the nineteenth century witnessed the advent of missionaries, emigrants from Sierra Leone and officials of the British government, literature of different kinds have since emerged. Majority of graduate students' essays as well as works of most of their professors have not found any convenient starting date other than the nineteenth century, since the preceding centuries provided only scanty and controversial sources.² The fascination with the nineteenth century results from the various wars of the period. Other attractions to the period include the spread of Christianity, the emergence of the new elite, British conquest, etc.

One of the problems created by this shift in the direction of historical scholarship in contemporary Africa is perhaps the obvious lack of synergy between the nineteenth century African societies in relation to the societies in the preceding centuries and to the contemporary societies. For instance, how much of the conflicts that engulfed Yorubaland in the 19th century could be traced to events of, say the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th centuries? How did the Yoruba societies in these periods (15th, 16th, 17th and 18th centuries) mediate in conflict situations? If the 19th century conflicts derived from the preceding periods; how much of the mediation and incorporation methods used in the preceding periods survived till the 19th centuries and why did these mediation and incorporation methods failed to stave-off conflicts in the 19th centuries? Undoubtedly, answers to these and many other questions would serve the course of conflict resolution as well as enrich our understanding of the events in the 19th and 20th centuries. Unfortunately, knowledge of how the past interfaces with the present is lacking in most literature about the 19th and 20th centuries. While the fact remains that many of the events of the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th centuries may appear lost, it must be stated that a lot could still be unearthed if we could know those culture, customs, traditions, and institutions that survived from the earliest periods and were affected by the revolutionary changes of the 19th and 20th centuries. The void could still be traveled if this important knowledge about the period before the 19th centuries is attainable. For a fact, without understanding the preceding centuries, what we know about the 19th and 20th centuries would remain mere conjectures.

² Following after Samuel Johnson's History of the Yorubas, other history books on the Yoruba people as well as subsequent other commentaries and critiques of sources of Yoruba history have concentrated on the nineteenth century. See, amongst others, S.O. Biobaku (ed.), Sources of Yoruba History (Oxford, 1973).

Two methodological approaches could be used to get out of this problem. The first is to acknowledge the fact that the pre-1800 periods need more research. As currently is, academic historians could not do the work alone. There is the need for academic historians to cooperate with other disciplines, such as anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics, if the problem must be solved. Just as the founding fathers of African history worked with oral texts; contemporary academic historians must make use of cultures, customs, traditions, and institutions for their reconstructions. For this to be successful, concerted efforts must be made by academic historians to understand and use methodological and data collection tools of other disciplines.

The other methodological approach derives from the first. There is the need for a thorough investigation and understanding of the existing cultures, customs, traditions, and institutions as well as the changes they have endured over the years. While it must be acknowledged that these cultures, customs, traditions, and institutions are not static, it must be emphasized they, by their individual nature, contain a nucleus and the periphery. More often than not, the nucleus, which is the soul of the cultures, customs, traditions, and institutions, is resilient and, in most cases, remains unchanged while the periphery changes almost imperceptibly. My suggestion therefore is that extrapolation is possible both at the level of data which refer to the nineteenth century but which can yield useful information on the pre-1800 era; and at the level of understanding the transformations that took place during the nineteenth century. While the former is a familiar research method for academic historians who have collected traditions and oral accounts to reconstruct the history of pre-colonial Africa, especially 19th and 20th centuries histories; the latter method of extrapolation is unfamiliar to historians.

The import of this endeavour is to arrive at an understanding of the various processes of change as well as the factors underlying them to an extent that we can ascertain what indeed survived from the preceding centuries. The first generation of academic historians used these methods in their treatment of the impact of colonialism. Among other things, they emphasized continuity and resilience of African cultures and institutions and therefore isolated what changed from what endured and remained even after the nineteenth century.

III. Conflicts and Incorporation in Pre-18th Century Yorubaland.

In this and the next section, I shall attempt an application of this research agenda to the issue of conflicts and incorporation in Yoruba history. Extant literature have adduced conflicts in Yorubaland to problems of authoritarianism, land/boundary disputes, economic dependencies, integration, legitimacy, instability, and other factors associated with development at the global level. These problems, as argued by academic historians, Africanists and researchers on Africa, are colonial heritages. More often than not, researchers and commentators have presented African states, before the European intrusions, as some kind of a paradise, devoid of conflict, rancour or chaos. They, therefore, described and explained problems of political instability, ethnicity, and socio-economic backwardness as simply colonial heritages, which were alien to Africa and Africans before the European intrusion. But there is no gainsaying the fact that the wars and cut-throat rivalries among the subgroups during the 19th century reveals a certain weakness in the general notion that, prior to the European contacts, Yoruba peoples were united.

This study adopts a post-modernist perspective to deconstruct such obtuse fascination to a pristine, glorious and heavenly Yorubaland where conflict was an anathema. By looking at the economics and government policies of Yorubaland before the 18th Century, the study interrogates how variables such as motives and opportunities have interacted to produce, amongst other things, conflicts within Yorubaland and between the Yoruba and their neighbours. The position adopted here conforms totally with Ikime's (1985: 16) observation that colonial rule is something of a paradox, which, amongst other things, capitalized on and intensified already existing differences as well as introduced new ones.

As already stated, extensive works have been done on different aspects of the 19th century African societies. However, it must be stated that much of this attention has been devoted to the 19th century, as Falola had noted, because of availability of materials (Falola, 1988), both in written and oral forms, on the period. Other periods, for which there is a paucity of materials, have been treated, at best, as appendages to contemporary history. Given their influences on modern-day politics and intergroup interactions, a closer and more in-depth attention is needed on periods before the 19th century. Perhaps, to wriggle a way out of this dilemma, the first research agenda is to analyze the significance of the nineteenth century in relation to the preceding centuries and to contemporary Nigeria. Following this is the need to engage the old themes already explored to see

the extent to which they have been treated in relation to the significance of the century, in relation to the preceding periods, and also in relation to the comprehensiveness of data and analysis.

To illustrate this with the Yoruba society and history, Bolanle Awe examined the wars between Ibadan and Ijaye (1860 to 1862), Ibadan and Kiriji (1877 to 1893); Smith and Ajayi examined the Ijaye war while Akintoye extensively deliberated on the Kiriji war. On their own part, Falola and Smith focused on diplomacy, and Smith individually pursued further studies on the different ramifications of war. Oguntomisin and Falola together examined warfare, displacement and refugee crisis, Akinjogbin examined the war and its consequences. On the impact of the wars, Biobaku's pioneered a study is on the Egba, Pallinder-Law has extended the frontier of knowledge on Abeokuta by examining the role of the educated elite in the administration of the town, Babayemi has written a doctoral thesis on New Oyo founded by Atiba, Oguntomisin has studied Ijaye while Awe and Falola have studied Ibadan. Several other notable scholars have examined, in no small measure, the different dimensions of the 19th century Yoruba war. This emphasis on the war is capable of giving false impression about the century itself. Was it a whole hundred year of fighting and no respite? What about the peace periods even within the war years? What about trade and commerce? How did trade and commerce fare during the war years? Besides all these questions and issues around which they were built, we have not studied the impact of the war on several minor communities in Yorubaland and on contiguous neighbours to Yorubaland. For a fact, the focus has been on the major wars, especially those that revolved around the fall of Oyo and the need to build the successor states.

What this implies is that, for ignoring the periods before the 19th and 20th centuries, we risk a total loss of meaning, as most of the issues we engage in the 19th and 20th centuries have long and equally interesting historical past, some dating as far back as the 13th and 14th centuries. As far as this study is concerned, any effort to go back into the great oblivion constitutes the new research agenda contemporary academic historians should engage. This is necessary if we are to fill the yawning gaps in the existing knowledge even about the 19th and 20th centuries that we have written so much on. While this is not to say that new theme are not welcome at this stage, but to underscore the importance of the past in the present. To, among other things, reinstate the fact that we need to move beyond establishing the fact that Africa has its own history, but also to

demonstrate this history as going beyond the period shortly before the European contact. For instance, while extensive work has been done on the 19th and 20th centuries, most of these works have concentrated attention on the major groups. In the case of the Yoruba, emphasis has rested primarily on the Oyo-Yoruba region or, where it is not, on the impacts of the political events in this region on others. Studies on trade with Europe and missionary activities have added the coast and the immediate hinterland (notably Abeokuta) to the list of favoured regions. As Falola, already cited, availability of sources serves as the main reason for the choice of this region. So, what happened to other Yoruba societies in, for instance, the northeastern, eastern, and southwestern Yorubaland? Even on the major regions; how much do we know beyond late 18th and the whole of 19th and 20th centuries? Are these issues and geographical locations or regions without the benefit of sources?

In the remaining part of this study, I shall devote attention to how academic historians could unearth considerable information about events and happenings that occurred in distant past using indigenous culture, customs, traditions and practices. To my mind, indigenous culture, used here to encompass both culture, customs, traditions and practices, could be used to reconstruct Africa's past beyond the current scope of academic attention. The example used here deals with one event that occurred at the outset of the 19th century Yoruba war and one that remains contentious even till date. This deals with the determination of the intention of Ooni Abeweila, the Ooni of Ife who established Modakeke in the 1800. A caveat is important here: while the events occurred in the early 1800, the practices to which it applies went back in time to the beginning of the Yoruba people on the surface of the earth. Hence, this effort should not be seen as repeating what it has earlier criticized in the previous section.

IV. Reconstructing Contested Histories Using Indigenous Culture: The Ife-Modakeke Example (1830-2000).

The term 'indigenous culture', used in its broadest sense, refers to all customs and traditions, socio-economic and political frameworks peculiar and common to a particular group of people. This also includes institutions and structures that give aids to the expression of a people's entire way of life, their worldviews, customs and traditions and how these are transmitted from one generation to the other. In a narrower and more precise sense, indigenous culture refers to specific

sets of phenomena that give expression to the total way of life of a people. A peculiar thing about indigenous culture is that it was not formally learnt but is nevertheless indigenous or common-knowledge among the people of a particular area. Among the Yoruba, for example, proverbs and their various interpretations, hidden meanings and expressions are 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.

In this narrower sense, this paper examines the use of cultural practices, traditions, customs, idioms, proverbs and anecdotes in conflict resolution, especially among the Yoruba. It is a trite knowledge that, whether in continental Africa or in the Diasporas, these important practices characterized the Yoruba world. They are the specific elements that form the Yoruba identity and help in sorting the Yoruba out among other groups. It encapsulates and gives meaning to their entire world; it is an integral part that cannot be separated from the entire whole. In everyday living as well as in different other life-forms and expressions; the Yoruba employs indigenous culture as a concise way of giving 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 would say, '*Owe l'esin Oro, Oro l'esin Owe, B'Oro ba sonu, Owe la fi n wa*'³. The meanings and interpretations associated with this saying are not limited to the occasion it was used but also associated with the associated time loop⁴. 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*

³ (lit.) Proverb is the horse of issues, when conflict arose; it is proverb that aids its resolution.

⁴ 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.

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*’⁵ as against ‘*Omo Oju*’. A rather preferred interpretation would look like: *Proverbs are the horses of issues, when conflict arises; 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 others 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 conflict arises; 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 connotations⁶. 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 cumbersome⁷. 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 underscored 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.⁸ N.A. Fadipe’s classic, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*,⁹ Karin Barber¹⁰, and Samuel Johnson¹¹ made some

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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*, CMS, 1921.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Oyekan Owomoyela, *Yoruba Proverbs*, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

⁹ N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1990).

efforts to copiously 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*¹². 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*¹³’.

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

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 23.

¹² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 24.

¹³ Miss Mopelola Ogunbowale, a student of Redeemer’s University recounted her personal experience in an oral presentation on erosion of African culture, July, 2006.

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.¹⁴

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.

V. The 19th Century Yoruba War: Migration and Displacement Nexus.

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 it may, the development in the 19th 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 19th 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

¹⁴ 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.

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 19th 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, Ogbomosho, 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 heredity¹⁵. Aside from this constitutional modifications and adaptations, the period witnessed gradual erosion in the long-held social and political traditions and culture of the Yoruba¹⁶. 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 people¹⁷. Conducts, previously considered unbecoming of a true-born Yoruba soldier, became virtues to be rewarded and applauded. One such conduct 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.¹⁸ 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 to, but also must, on no account, be made to suffer any

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Deng M., Francis, “*The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*”, United Nations Document E/CN.4/1996/52 Add.2 of Dec. 1995.

bodily harm. They were regarded as state-visitors and, as such, must be accorded with the same respect accorded to 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 19th 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, who could 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 indeed 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.*¹⁹” 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 solutions²⁰.

As I had noted in other works²¹, Ife-Modakeke conflict is but a fall-out of the prevailing 19th 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 Ijesha 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, 000²² 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

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

²⁰ Works on the consequences of the 19th century Yoruba wars are many. Some notable ones are Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th 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.

²¹ 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.

²² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 234.

and protected persons should under no circumstances be exposed to the dogs of war²³. 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 markets²⁴. 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 Yoruba²⁵. 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 relations²⁶. As told by Johnson, Okunade was an irritable terror who hated and never pretended to have loved the Oyo in Ibadan. It was 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 Ibadan²⁷.

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

²³ Onigu Otite and Albert I.O. (eds.), *Community Conflicts in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: John Archers, Ibadan, 2000), 15.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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 longue duree approach to the interrelationship between the Ife and the Oyo before the wars and subsequent displacement of the Oyo-speaking people.

²⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 300.

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 power²⁸. 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 begun to reject Ife's overlordship over them²⁹, 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 Abeweila³⁰.

Scholars of the Yoruba history, especially contested histories relating to identity issues, they 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

²⁸ J. F. Ade-Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, (Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1971), 23.

²⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 239.

³⁰ 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.

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, 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 areas³¹.

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 borders³². In the same way, the physical boundaries peculiar to modern state was a little fluid in traditional times³³. 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 external 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.

³¹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 213.

³² A good example is the Alaafin of Oyo whose influence during the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th 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.

³³ In the real sense, African states and kingdoms have no frontiers and no physical boundaries as modern states and nation-states.

Primary and secondary sources abound testifying to the fact that both Ife and Modakeke had strictly different power-repository personages³⁴ and clearly demarcated city walls as at 1836³⁵. 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 separation³⁶, 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.

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 sharing, land allocation and gift, etc negate these views and submissions of some scholars, politicians and

³⁴ Ooni of Ife, for the Ife kingdom and people and the Ogunsuwa of Modakeke for the town and people of Modakeke.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ Onigu Otite and Albert I.O. (eds.), *Community Conflicts in Nigeria*, (Nigeria: John Archers, 2000), 67.

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 Mimú*” 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 sale³⁷.

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 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

³⁶ Oral Interview, Chief Okanlawon Afolabi and Reverend Ezekiel Adebisi Oyeniyi.

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 one⁴². 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 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 place³⁸. 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.

³⁷ Oral Interview, Chief Ola Aresa of Iresa Adu, Ogbomosho.

³⁸ Reverend Oyeniyi 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.

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 features³⁹

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 the same⁴⁰. 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 family⁴¹. 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

³⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 90.

⁴⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 91.

⁴¹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 93.

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 to 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 treason⁴². 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*⁴³’. 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 land⁴⁴.

Cultural methods or practices 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, and 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.

⁴² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 89.

⁴³ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (Lagos: CMS Books, 1921), 90.

⁴⁴ 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-defense.

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 oil⁴⁵. As oral accounts at Ile-Ife and Modakeke had it, this was intended to appease the wrath of the Ife's.

⁴⁵ 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.

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.

VI. By Way of Conclusion

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that 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 life expressions. As the case of Ife-Modakeke conflict has shown, lessons of culture, whatever their inadequacies, are time-tested lessons that must not be ignored. In relation to conflicts like any other issues that academic historians have engaged themselves, 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 human-hood. These are two important landmarks that could help in resolving intra-ethnic conflict in Africa. Conflict resolution efforts must emphasis 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.

Although the example used here deals with the Ife-Modakeke conflict, especially the determination of whether Modakeke was established as a ward in Ile-Ife or a separate town entire

of Ile-Ife,⁴⁶ the analysis could be applied to any aspect of African lives irrespective of the period and issue under study. As shown in the study, more than already known, culture holds the key to unlocking histories of Africa, especially those that deals with contested events and issues where written records are lacking and/or are contested. The same could be said of those seemingly ‘dark periods’ where records are lacking and most academic historians therefore shied away from.

Analyses of the kind of information, explanations and the kinds of questions academic historians must ask in order to make culture, customs and traditions useful tools in explaining, reconstructing, and understanding a people’s past are limitless and so also answers to them. Questions, answers and explanations, potentially, could go back in time even far into the past than previously thought.

⁴⁶ Although several issues are involved in the Ife-Modakeke conflict, none is as important to the two groups other as the determination of whether Modakeke was intended to be a ward, like others, in Ile-Ife or it was intended as an independent polity, entire of Ile-Ife.