Integrated Education: An Instrument for Resolving Ife-Modakeke Conflict in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Ife and Modakeke communities in Southwestern Nigeria have engaged in protracted communal violence. The conflict has grown and matured to the extent that it is no longer a physical battle alone. Its psychological dimension has reached the extent that both parties are in cold war. Efforts of informal social networks and formal community institutions put in place to address the conflict have not produced lasting peace. Education is an instrument of achieving social change by identifying sources of conflict and resolving them. Thus, this paper examines the intensity of the crisis, strategies to curb the violence and why these strategies have failed. It therefore proposes an integrated education premised on contact theory to resolve Ife-Modakeke conflict. It is argued that integrated school as it operates in USA, Northern Ireland, and Israel is a peace initiative. It involves educating children from communities that have suffered from prolonged communal conflict in an integrated school environment to enhance better cross-community relations. It therefore concludes that contact between communities within an educational setting would reduce intolerant attitudes and lead to better intergroup relations.

Keywords: Integrated Education, Conflict, Ife, Modakeke, Contact

1. Introduction

In a society suffering from prolonged conflict (religious, ethnic or communal), the integrating of cultures (people, customs, mores) through education seems to be a hopeful and lasting initiative for conflict resolution. Ife and Modakeke are neighbouring communities in Osun State,
Nigeria, which have engaged in protracted communal violence and intra-ethnic conflict. Asiyabola (2007) asserted that so far, there had been seven major wars between the Ifes and Modakekes, that is- 1835-1849, 1882-1909, 1946-1949, 1981, 1983, 1997-1998, and 2000. Based on this, the conflict appears to be the oldest intra-ethnic conflict in Nigeria because it has been going on for more than a century. Also, Augsburger (2002) and Omotayo (2005) concluded that the conflict has become its own raison d'etre; its own self-empowered, and self-fulfilling, as it had since detached from its original cause.

The conflict has grown and matured to the extent that it is no longer a physical battle alone. Its psychological dimension has reached the extent that both parties are in cold war. Asiyabola (2007) concluded that women that are married to the other community and particularly their children have identity crisis in the sense that some see each other as strangers and enemy, although quite a percentage of the respondents see each other as kinsmen. Therefore, it seems there is existence of segregation between the two communities in terms of marriage and even schooling most especially among the youths. Education is often used as a tool for achieving social change in the society. Hence, there should be an educational setting in which children from Ife and Modakeke communities would attend school together. This would ensure contact of not only the pupils at school but also the parents in the management of school.

This paper examines the intensity of the crisis, strategies to curb the violence and why these strategies have not produced lasting solution. It also considers an integrated education as a peace initiative based on contact theory according to which Ife and Modakeke communities should be brought together in the same school setting in order to overcome their attitudinal differences.
2. Historical background of Ife and Modakeke Communities

The Ife and Modakeke are Yoruba towns of Osun State in Southwestern Nigeria. Going by mythical stories, Ile-Ife is the cradle home of Yorubaland. And since the history of Ile-Ife is shrouded in mystery such that even the Yoruba legend-Oduduwa met Ife Aborigenes when he arrived at the ancient city, no one can say about the origin and the year Ile-Ife was created (Agbe, 2001). Afolayan (1998: 14) asserted that “the primacy of Ife in the socio-political evolution of Yoruba people is generally admitted in the extant traditions of the various Yoruba kingdoms... Ile-Ife is regarded in extant Yoruba traditions as the ‘orirun’ or fountain head of the Yoruba people”. With this assertion, all the Yoruba kingdoms have always been traceable to Ile as their origin. The Ooni of Ife is the traditional head of the Ife kingdom such that Ooni’s palace being located at the centre of the city is being surrounded by city sections. Each section of the city has a traditional chief who is in charge of the affairs of the area for better administration (Agbe, 2001).

It was during the 19th century that the socio-political as well as economic deterioration of Ile came to its nadir. Akinjogbin (1992) identified three factors responsible for such. These are internal weaknesses, collapse of Yoruba institutions and the collapse of the Oyo empire. These factors led to different wars between Ifes and other Yoruba kingdoms. Also, these series of wars in Yorubaland led to disintegration, formation and relocation of towns in Yorubaland. This was aptly noted by Albert (1999: 143) “the nineteenth century was a watershed in the history of Yorubaland. This was a period when several powerful Yoruba kingdoms collapsed leading to the founding of several new ones ... These two historical events, that is the collapse of the Old Oyo empire and the subsequent wars that occurred up till 1893, led to mass movement of Oyo refugees to different parts of Yorubaland”.

But history has it that the Modakekes migrated to Ile-Ife from Ibadan in particular and different locations in general. Agbe (2001: 15) maintained that there are many judicial evidence to show that the Modakeke people migrated at one point in time or the other to Ile-Ife from different
locations of Yoruba kingdom at the end of the Yoruba inter-tribal wars. They took refuge in Ile-Ife. In the same vein, Albert (1999) posited that the Modakekes, who are refugees to Ile-Ife were received based on the appeal of the Apetumodu to the then Ooni of Ife, Akinmoyero Odunlabiojo to help him decongest his town by accommodating the refugees. Albert (1999: 145) citing Johnson (1973) and Akinjogbin (1992) noted that around 1840, “the Ooni created a separate settlement for those Oyo refugees who had no home to return to. The settlement was named Modakeke after the cry of a nest of storks on a large tree near the site. The leader of the Oyo refugees was given the title Ogunsua”.

3. Historical Overview of Ife-Modakeke Crisis

A critical study of the history of the Ife-Modakeke crisis has revealed that the bloody clash has occurred several times in different period. The causes of this crisis are many and varied in terms of cultural identity, economic and politics. The hostility has been an age-long one. Asiyanbola (2007) claimed that at the initial stage, the relationship between the Ifes and Oyo refugees was very cordial to the extent that Ife Chiefs throw their doors open to more Oyo refugees because they are good allies in moments of warfare and in farm work. Specifically, he posited that the Oyo refugees provided military support to the Ifes during the Owu War of 1825 and various Ijesha invasions. As at when the Modakekes were accepted at Ile-Ife in a separate settlement by the then Ooni Abeweila, the Ifes started regretting such action. This was because they lost political and economic dominance over Modakekes.

Albert (1999) citing Akinjogbin (1992) posited that Ooni Abeweila was poisoned around 1849 and denied royal burial by the Ife people as a result of his cooperation with Modakekes. After the exit of Ooni Abeweila, Albert (1999) reported that Ifes attacked Modakekes twice and were defeated at both times. To be precise, Albert (1999) and Oladoyin (2001) posited that the first Ife-Modakeke crisis occurred between 1835 and 1849. These authors reported that an Ife Chief, Okunade, the Maye that settled in Ibadan in the early 19th century; though a brave warrior, was an
autocrat. He had so much influence in Ibadan politics that the Ifes started to see Ibadan as an extension town. By 1835, Okunade’s autocracy was challenged by some Oyo citizens in Ibadan; he was consequently expelled from the town. Later on, he was killed and the Oyos took over the political leadership of Ibadan to the utter exclusion of their allies. Therefore, Albert (1999) asserted that the Ifes responded by venting their anger on the Oyo refugees in their town. Furthermore, in 1882 during the Ibadan and Ekitiparapos war, while Ifes aligned with Ekitiparapos to fight the Ibadans, the Modakekes on the other hand teamed up with Ibadans to fight the Ekitiparapos. Once again, the Ifes lost the battle (Albert, 1999).

In 1946, there was a resurface of this age-long crisis during the cocoa boom. The Ife landowners started demanding for more tribute (Ishakole) than what they bargained before. Albert (1999) reported that Ife landowners started asking the Modakekes to pay them Ishakole as much as 10% of the harvested cocoa. The Modakekes opposed it and took it as an exploitative measure and reported to then Ooni Adesoji Aderemi. This crisis extended till 1949 which the Modakekes lost based on judicial rulings. Before the West African Court of Appeal hearing on this case, conflicts broke out in May 18, 1949 at Modakeke and this led to different factions among the Modakekes themselves (Albert, 1999). As a result of these factions, they became confused and later reversed to suggestion made by Egbe Omo Oduduwa that the Ishakole should be collected based on the number of harvested cocoa trees (Albert, 1999). However, this Ishakole system was cancelled following the Land Use Decree of 1978 by the then Federal Military Government of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the political dimension of the conflicts came into full-blown in early 1980s. This started in December 1980 during a fund raising ceremony organised by the Modakekes. In the process, the ceremony was disrupted by the policemen which the Modakekes blamed on the then Ooni of Ife despite informing him. The position of Ooni was that Modakeke is not a separate town and by implication had no right to raise any fund for town development (Albert, 1999). As a result of this, the Modakeke started agitating for their own separate local government council. Contrary to
their expectations, when the new local government was announced in April 1981, there were placed under Ifes as usual. In a bid to woo the Modakekes, the rivalry political party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to the ruling Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led government in Oyo State assured the Modakekes a separate local government if elected in the next election in 1983. This therefore led to a political fracas between the Modakekes and UPN campaign team in July 1983.

Another political dimension is related to the creation of a new council (Ife East) in 1996. There was problem on the location of the headquarters with the Modakekes arguing that they have been dominated because they are at minority and therefore deserved a new local government. The Ifes were of the view that the Modakekes being immigrants to Ifeland did not deserve to have the council headquarters. At the end, the government had to announce that the headquarters of Ife East Local Government has been relocated from Modakeke to Oke-Ogbo in Ife. This announcement was a great embarrassment to the community of Modakeke and they protested (Toriola, 2001). This crisis including secret killings lasted till 1998. The most recent and brutal crisis occurred in 2000.

4. Attempted Solutions to Curb the Crisis

The first attempt to resolve the crisis was made by Ooni Abeweiia in 1847 to find a new settlement for the Modakekes. This situation did not work because segregation hardly solves the problem of a plural society; it rather compounds it (Albert, 1999). And also in 1886, when the Anglo-Yoruba Treaty was signed, the Modakeke leaders refused to be part to it because they felt cheated and neglected by the 1886 peace treaty. This was because the clause 5 of the treaty stated the reconstruction of Modakeke town to a land lying between Osun and the Oba rivers (Balogun, 1985). This treaty was implemented by Ooni Adelekan Olubuse in 1909 which led to the relocation of some of the Modakekes, although they later returned after his death. Once again, this attempt failed.
Committee system has always been used to proffer solutions to this recurring crisis. This system has only produced ‘temporary’ or ‘cosmetics’ solutions. For instance, committees such as Chief Alex Akinyele-led committee, Honourable Justice Kayode Ibiadpo Obe’s Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Commodore Olabode George’s led committee, the peace initiative of the traditional rulers in Osun State and host of others have come up with similar recommendations. Their recommendations bother on the status of Modakeke, the position of Ooni, the location of council headquarters as well as the significance of farmlands. It is also pertinent to mention that some religious groups, international bodies, and peace volunteers fought assiduously in providing lasting solution to the violent clash.

But amidst all these, the problem has not been totally solved. In most cases, it is either the recommendation of the committee is implemented or either of warring group would accuse the panel of being one-sided or not conceding anything to their own side. Sequel to this, the recommendations failed to achieve the required goal. Again, on a close look, the attempted solutions do have some problems associated with it. Example is the issue of relocating a particular community to a new site, may not provide a lasting solution to the crisis. What happens to their psyche, the attitude of their mind? To a large extent, the recommendations could not work because the committees concentrated on the physical implications and goals of the solutions thereby undermining the psychological undertone of the war as well as the role it should play in conflict resolution or management.

Moreover, another major significant and landmark attempt to find a lasting solution to the age-long conflict between Ife and Modakeke was done by a third party intervention of USAID/OTI under the leadership of Dr. Isaac Olawale Albert (Albert, 2001). This took place between 1999 and 2000. The intervention processes employed according to Albert (2001) were: media campaign activity; separate community training activity; and joint training on forgiveness, reconciliation and transformative leadership of the two communities. At the end of these, a formal inauguration of the Ife-Modakeke inter-community Peace
Advocacy committee took place at Oduduwa Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria on 16th September, 2000. There is no doubt that this initiative made a tremendous achievement in restoring peace between the two communities and members of both communities kept to their promises of upholding peace. But this only ends the physical dimension of the conflict. This manifests in the fact that there is no physical battle or confrontation occurring till date but the psychological bitterness still lingers. Hence, both parties are in cold war.

5. Alternative Instrument for Ife-Modakeke Conflict Resolution

In Ife and Modakeke communities today, there is no physical conflict or crisis in the area. But, the psychological trauma still exists among them. They still do not see themselves as one. It must be noted that this crisis as earlier mentioned, started in the 19th Century, and also reappeared in the 20th and 21st Century. Asiyanbola (2007) conducted a study on the perception of 390 community members drawn equally from the two communities’ members as regards whether the conflict is resolved. He reported that 34.4% of the respondents agreed that the conflict is not resolved, while 22.1% concurred that they still expect crisis again between the two communities. The result of his correlation analysis showed a negative relationship between perception of the conflict and social interaction. This implies that the more people perceive the conflict, the less is social interaction with the people of the other community. Hence, there is a need to seek for a way to stop this ugly and sad trend of generational transfer of conflict to another.

Based on Asiyanbola’s (2007) empirical findings, he suggested policies that encourage social integration which could enhance the attainment of sustainable peace among the people. Therefore, the argument of this paper is integrated education as one of such policies for resolving the conflict.

Education is an instrument of achieving social change by identifying sources of conflict and resolving them.
McGlynn and Bekerman (2007: 689) defined integrated education as “the education together, in equal numbers, of children, who are more usually educated separately in countries that have suffered from protracted ethnic or religious conflict and which provides opportunities to develop, respect and understanding for alternative cultures”. This means bringing equal number of Ife and Modakeke children together in the same school environment would transform communal relations and change their hearts and minds towards each other. Albert (1999: 168) had earlier noted that “had the Modakekes been allowed to integrate into the Ife society rather than be segregated in a particular settlement, they would have by now mixed so much with the Ife population that it would be difficult for them to lay claims to any separatist identity. The ownership of buildings in the city would have been mixed in the area that now constitutes “Ife” or “Modakeke”; more Ifes and Modakekes would have been inter-married and no part of Ife would have been “underdeveloped” as the Modakekes now claim.

It would be recalled that between 1910 and 1930, there was a peaceful co-existence during the reign of Ooni Ademiluyi Ajagun. This was because the Ogunsa of Modakeke was incorporated into the native administrative system of Ife. Integrated schooling is an educational process which allows pupils to recognize fundamental similarities between themselves, breaks down the barriers of bigot. The idea is that to eliminate communal differences and create an integrated society, it should be premised on number of theories. One of the theories is the contact theory. There should be contact between the social groups in a divided society. The rationale is that contact between divided groups within an educational setting can reduce intolerant attitudes and lead to better intergroup relations.

The contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000) in integrated education emphasizes that intergroup conflict can be reduced by bringing together individuals from opposing groups. According to Allport (1954), four conditions need to be met for such contact to be successful. They are: equal status between the groups in the situation; common goals; no competition between groups; and the contact situation should be legitimized through institutional support. It is only in a school setting that these conditions
can be met. For example, Dixon and Rosenbaum (2004) investigated the effects of whites’ contacts with blacks and Hispanics in different interactive settings. They found that prior contact in a school environment was the primary factor in reducing racial prejudice. In other words, when Ifes and Modakekes exchanged contacts in school, there would be better cross-community relations and changing opinions about accepted and acceptable patterns of cross-community interaction.

Integrated education according to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) (2004), it is the bringing together in one school pupils drawn in roughly equal numbers from both the protestant and catholic traditions along with young people from other cultures. It emphasizes on respect, tolerance and conflict resolution that teaches children to live as adults in a pluralist society, recognizing and accepting their similarities and differences. The type of integrated school advocated here for Ife and Modakeke is the planned one incorporated into the Universal Basic Education programme. This means that it would be officially recognized and funded by the government. The first integrated school in Northern Ireland was established in 1981 at Belfast. Today in Northern Ireland, there are over 60 integrated schools making progress to peace and reconciliation efforts among the Protestants and Catholics. Irwin (1991) conducted a study on integrated education in Northern Ireland. He found an increase in the number and duration of inter-community friendships amongst current pupils and those who had recently completed their education. Also, McClenahan (1995) suggested that cross-community friendships were increased by inter-group contact.

This planned integrated school would ensure contact between the Ifes and Modakekes in a controlled and recognized school environment so that they will not develop hatred or fear for one another. This would go a long way in changing their erroneous orientation towards each other in the school and invariably influence the attitudes of parents towards each other. Children would also be able to cultivate healthy beliefs about each others in the school setting. McGlynn (2003) argued that the school environment of integrated school promotes or fosters understanding between
two groups and overcome negative stereotypes. This planned integrated school should differ from other schools in terms of admission of pupils and staff, management of school and also actively encourage pupils to think about, discuss, and celebrate the range of diverse backgrounds in the school.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the communal violence between two neighbouring communities in Osun State, Nigeria. The historical background of Ife and Modakeke crisis was discussed as well as the attempted solutions proffered to the crisis. Despite these recommendations, peace is still eluding the two communities. The paper therefore argued for integrated education as an alternative instrument for the conflict resolution. This tool is premised on contact theory. It also argued that integrated school should be incorporated into the Universal Basic Education programme in the area. This would be effective in bringing peace, social and attitudinal changes only if positive relationships and inclusive cultures are developed within the school.

This integrated school would serve as a long-term approach targeted at children/ youths in resolving the conflict. It is based on the idea that children/ youths are the future leaders of the communities.

References


