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Gender, storytelling and peace construction in a divided society: A case study of the Ife/Modakeke conflict

Olakunle Michael Folami^{1*} and Taiwo Akanbi Olaiya²

Abstract: Storytelling has become a peacebuilding tool used by both men and women following the protracted conflict between Ile Ife and Modakeke in the Ife Kingdom in Osun State, Nigeria. Prior to the use of storytelling, various methods of conflict resolution had previously been attempted without success. The inhabitants of the two communities used storytelling to construct symbols, signs and gestures that supported a lasting peace. This paper uses Symbolic Interaction theory to explain how storytellers communicate peace through interpretative understanding. The study area comprised the towns of Ile-Ife and Modakeke, and data collection entailed qualitative interviews with 28 participants across the two communities. It was found that storytelling is a powerful tool for building peace between these two communities. It has healing power and can bring peace, security and stability. It is concluded that governments should provide support to help storytellers become professional peacebuilders.

Subjects: Development Studies; Politics & International Relations; Social Sciences

Keywords: storytelling; peacebuilding; symbolic interaction; gender; conflict

1. Introduction

The Ife Kingdom is the cradle of the Yoruba race. The Kingdom is located in the South west of Nigeria. It preserves the Yoruba culture, tradition and heritage (Asiyanbola, 2007). The Ife Kingdom is

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Storytelling is not a new method of peacebuilding among the inhabitants of the Ife Kingdom. It has been a method used traditionally to resolve conflict. The unique point is the way it was used to achieve peace in the modern day where there are hybrid peacebuilding mechanisms available. The study generally was about a protracted conflict in the Ife Kingdom between the people with the same history, progenitors, culture and tradition. In this study, men and women used storytelling but women's stories show capacity for enduring peace than men. The study would provide the readers the opportunity to see how gender is approached in a community hitherto known for patriarchy. The study places the region historically before the readers in terms of race, people and location. It demonstrates the importance storytelling as a method of enduring peacebuilding processes and gender positions in it.



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reserved as the traditional home of the Yoruba and protected from internal and international aggressions through oral peace agreement among the various warrior groups in the region. Modakeke became refugees in Ile-Ife following the Fulani Jihad war that led to the collapse of the old Oyo Kingdom in 1836 (Manning, 1979). The Ife/Modakeke crisis, which started in the nineteenth century, was a product of identity recognition, acceptability, inheritance protection and property rights (Oladoyin, 2001). The Modakeke inhabitants did not want to be seen as part and parcel of Ife-Ife. They rejected the supremacy of Ooni, the traditional ruler of the Ife Kingdom and wanted “Isakole” payment over land to the Ife to be stopped (Oladoyin, 2001). External factors including political elites and rivalry between the Oyo and Ife Kingdoms have made the conflict intractable (Laitin, 1986).

After the protracted conflict that has now lasted over a century between the people of Ile-Ife and Modakeke (Asiyanbola, 2007), storytelling has become an instrument of peacebuilding in the efforts of the inhabitants of the Kingdom to come to terms with the past. The inhabitants of the Kingdom use storytelling in different ways such as folktales, moonlight tales, songs, drama and entertainment. Storytelling is a double-edged sword: it can be used negatively, to reawaken a dormant conflict; and, positively, as a method of transition from conflict to a sustainable peace. This paper focuses on the positive aspect of storytelling as related to the gendered construction of peacebuilding, and is based on the premise that women’s stories contribute in a more meaningful way to peacebuilding processes than men’s narratives. The stories that men or women (actors) share have an effective way of constructing the minds of the listeners to the extent that the actors determine the subsequent course of action through the sharing of meaning with the listeners.

This paper, therefore, sets out to examine the gender narratives that could contribute to peacebuilding processes. It examines the ways in which men and women have adopted storytelling to construct peacebuilding in a post-conflict society. The paper identifies the gendered aspects of storytelling that contribute positively to the peacebuilding processes in the Ife Kingdom.

The Kingdom, as presently constituted, is divided between the Ifes, the Origbos and the Modakekes. This paper, however, focuses on the conflict between the Ifes and the Modakekes. The conflict has been described as the longest intra-ethnic conflict in the history of the Yorubas in the south-west of Nigeria (Albert, 1999, p. 145) and a detailed discussion of its origins is presented later in this article. The article is divided into eight main sections: Section 1 is an introduction to the main argument of the study; Section 2 provides an explanation of the context of the study; Section 3 is conceptualising storytelling; Section 4 is storytelling, peacebuilding and gender; Section 5 is the theoretical framework of storytelling and symbolic interaction; Section 6 explains the methods of researching gendered storytelling in the Ife Kingdom. Finally, Sections 7 and 8 set out the findings and conclusions of the study. The article’s conclusion builds on W.I. Thomas’ realist approach to the definition of situation, namely that women’s definition of conflict situation is a positive one in terms of building a sustainable peace in the Ife Kingdom. Keeping this in mind, the authors discuss the root of the conflict and then conceptualised storytelling as an important aspect of peacebuilding.

2. Context

The history of the creation of Ife Kingdom is unknown because there was not documentary evidence. Oral history describes the first occupiers of the Kingdom as mystical creatures that have become gods today such as Orunmila, Oluorogbo, Moremi, Wumonije, Obatala, Ogun, Yemoo and Olokun. Oduduwa was said to descend from heaven to join the legions. Another oral history had it that Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba descended from heaven with a bird, which was placed on the ocean to spread dried sands to create the World that we live in today, and Ile-Ife derived its name from this (Agbe, 2001). The Yoruba land covers the entire South west of Nigeria bounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the South, the Republic of Benin in the West, the Igbo in the East and Nupe in the North.

As noted in the introduction above, there is no written evidence of the period during which the first Kingdom in the Yoruba land was founded (Afolayan, 1998). Oral history accounts recognised Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yorubas and the “source of civilisation” (Afolayan, 1998, p. 15). The Ife Kingdom is headed by the Ooni, Arole Oduduwa. The stool of Ooni is revered and held sacred until the modern times (Agbe, 2001). Oyo is another major Kingdom in the Yoruba land after Ile-Ife. The Kingdom was founded by Oranmiyan, the son of Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba race (Johnson, 1921). The head of the Oyo Kingdom is the Alaafin. The Kingdom enjoys independence and autonomy from the Ife Kingdom. Johnson (1921) says that, the first four Alaafin as identified, were probably mythical figures. Sango, the fourth Alaafin, is still worshipped as the Yoruba god of thunder. The Sango cult has a great political influence in the Oyo Kingdom. Sango, the god of thunder was born by a Nupe mother and a Yoruba father. Oyo-Ile, where Sango ruled with a weird power lies in the far north of the Yoruba land, not far from the Bariba and Nupe enclaves in the North of Nigeria (Manning, 1979).

In the precolonial era, the inhabitants of Yorubaland engaged in territorial expansion through war with other ethnic groups in the region (Albert, 1993). Ajayi and Smith (1971) claim that the Yoruba are culturally homogenous; but that since they engaged in intra-tribal conflict over supremacy and control of their empire which led to the emergence of different Kingdoms such as the Ijebu, Egba, Ilaje, Awori, Ikale, Oyo, Ondo, Akoko, Benin, Ekiti, Egba, Ijesa and Kuotu in the Republic of Benin (Smith, 1988). The regional wars over kingdom formation and expansion created hostilities; with consequences for the unity of the Yoruba in modern Nigeria (Akinjogbin, 1992). Many of the Yoruba kith and kin have been geographically and politically ceded to other regions such as the north central, and the south south region of Nigeria. For example, the Okuns and the Ekitis are Yoruba-speaking people; but they are no longer considered as part of the people from the Southwest like other Yorubas. These groups of Yoruba-speaking people are geopolitically dumped in Kogi and Kwara State in the north central region. The Yoruba-speaking people can also be found in Edo and Delta State in south south Nigeria. There are also Yoruba-speaking people in other countries like Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Republic of Benin, Togo and Ghana.

The drive for Kingdom expansion led to external war. The Yoruba Kingdom extended beyond the River Niger to the North of Nigeria (Albert, 1999). Yoruba territorial expansion was truncated, however, by the Fulani Jihad Movement led by Utman Dan Fodio in the nineteenth century (Akinjogbin, 1992). The internal wrangling created unhealthy rivalry between Alaafin Abiodun and Oyo Mesi, the Oba-in-council (Manning, 1979). The Fulani Jihadists capitalised on this; they supported a belligerent group; overthrew the Yoruba monarch and replaced him with a Fulani Emir (Manning, 1979). Subsequently, a number of Yoruba settlements and towns were attacked and conquered by the jihadists. The inhabitants of those towns were driven southwards to towns like new Oyo, Lokoja, Ikirun, Ilorin, Ile-Ife and many other towns (Oladoyin, 2001).

In the nineteenth century, the Oyo people were displaced by the Fulani’s internecine conflict (Asiyanbola, 2007). They relocated to Ile-Ife after they were rejected from other cities and towns such as Ibadan, Abeokuta and Ijebu. The Ife people accepted the refugees from Oyo as their visitors and they remained and multiplied in Ife land (Agbe, 2001). Their settlement within Ile-Ife generated bad blood, however. This led to the creation of separate quarters for the within a close proximity to Ile-Ife in the Ife kingdom (Albert, 1999). They assumed another identity known as *Modakeke*, named after the cry of a nest of stork on a large tree near the site (Akinjogbin, 1992). No sooner than the Modakekes became permanent members of the Ife Kingdom, they craved a different identity.

The first intra-community conflict between the Modakekes and the Ifes broke out in 1835 (Oladoyin, 2001). To negotiate peace, a ceasefire was brokered in 1886 through the efforts of Samuel Johnson, a historian, and Charles Phillips, the Bishop of Ondo (Toriola, 2001). The parties signed a treaty in Lagos, the former Federal Capital of Nigeria with Governor Maloney. The treaty provided for the evacuation of the Modakekes from the Ife Kingdom (Toriola, 2001). The Modakekes later returned to the Ife Kingdom on the condition of peaceful living and respect for the authority of Ooni,

the paramount ruler of the Ife Kingdom. The 1940 judicial pronouncement made it mandatory for the Modakekes who wish to continue to live on Ife land to pay tribute (Asiyanbola, 2007).

The inhabitants of Modakeke were not satisfied with the resolution of the conflict, however (Ogbara, 2002) and the conflict resurfaced in a vicious cycle in the 1960s until the 1990s (Albert, 1999). In the 1980, the inhabitants of Modakeke demanded recognition from the Ooni for their self-appointed traditional ruler, the Ogunsua of Modakeke and creation of a separate Local Government Area (LGA) and a stop to the payment of “Isakole” royalty to the Ife land owners (Laitin, 1986). The major contention of the 1990s conflict was the creation of LGA. Issues on chieftaincy and payment of royalty had earlier been settled by successive governments in the region. The Ogunsua of Modakeke was upgraded to third class Oba and the Inhabitants of Modakeke stopped from paying royalty on land. Various commissions and panel of enquiries were established to resolve the conflict, namely: Honourable Kayode Ibidapo Obe’s Judicial Commission, Chief Alex Akinyele Committee of Enquiry and Commodore Olabode George’s Committee that led to the final peaceful resolution of the conflict in 2000. The committee makes the following resolutions:

- Change in the Modakeke status. A prefix “Ife” should be added to the name “Modakeke” to become ‘Modakeke-Ife.
- Ife East LGA office should be created for Modakeke in Oke DO.
- A Mobile Police Training Institution should be created in Ile-Ife.
- Police buffer zones should be created in conflict flash points (see Commodore Olabode Gorge Ife-Modakeke Committee Panel Reports, 2000).

Other forms of resolution by previous committees included resettlement, relocation and peace education. For example, Judith Asuni organised a peace education programme for youths in both Ife and Modakeke in 2000. Also, Professor Olawale Albert provided third party initiatives through media campaign activities, separate community training, joint training on forgiveness, reconciliation and transformative leadership in the two communities, and finally, the Ife/Modakeke inter-community peace advocacy committee (Albert, 2001). Today, there is no open conflict between Ife and Modakeke but its trauma lingers on (Olayiwola & Okorie, 2010). As noted above, the concern of this paper is the examination of peacebuilding through storytelling by men and women in the Ife Kingdom.

3. Conceptualising storytelling

Storytelling can be understood as narrative, folktales, culture and their history. Storytelling is interactive; it involves the use of language, action such as vocalisation, physical movement and/ or gesture. Storytelling encourages the active imagination of the listeners (National Storytelling Network, n.d.). Oral storytelling is a story spoken to an audience. Oral storytelling has taken many forms including songs, poetry, chants, dance, masks and so on. A good story is at heart a seducer, with the storyteller and audience building a unique dialogue and interaction as they participate in the creation of living art. Traditionally, a storyteller has been associated with a healer, a spiritual guide, a leader, a cultural secret keeper, an entertainer and a jester, and the storyteller can either seek to console or amuse (Gentry, 2013). In some settings, storytelling is dramaturgically underpinned. Propp (1968) states that a story (especially a folktale) is composed of three stages: first, peaceful society; and, second, break-up of the community, often seemingly caused by a villain figure. Also, Campbell (1949) states that a story (especially a heroic legend) is composed of how the hero/heroine goes on a journey, obtains a sacred object; and third, returns to the community with the sacred object, thus revitalising the community. Carl Jung’s Theory of Psychological Integration, which he often called “individuation”, states that stories are composed of two stages: first, elements apart; and second, elements integrated (Miller, 1996). In the Golden Age of Modern Western Drama, according to this theory, stories revolve around conflict: (1) exposition (situation background); (2) conflict develops; (3) crisis; and (4) resolution (Miller, 1996). According to Sogol (2014), storytelling can serve as a cost-efficient advocacy tool to amplify the voices of the marginalised and ensure their

representation in discussions on issues that impact their lives. It can also transcend borders. Storytelling can work as a mechanism of change, for example, in the slums of India, the Favelas of Brazil or the rural villages of Uganda (Sogol, 2014).

The inhabitants of Ife Kingdom share the same language, culture and tradition. They also share symbols and gesture (Laitin, 1986). The inhabitants of the Kingdom use folktales, story by moonlight and songs. Storytelling in the Ife Kingdom is culturally accepted (Laitin, 1986). It is a form of communication among the people. It remains an important aspect of the Ife Kingdom's culture (Zewde, 2008). It remains a "cultural capital" in the Kingdom with the advent of electronic communication, such as the Internet, satellite TV, social media and smart phones. The questions the study seeks to answer include why storytelling survives as part of peacebuilding mechanisms in the modern era in the Kingdom? How storytelling is used to achieve peace in the Kingdom. Whose narratives support peace (that of men or women)?

4. Storytelling, peacebuilding and gender

Storytelling has become a method of peacebuilding and an acceptable tool among academics and professional peacebuilders (Zyl, 1999). Storytelling is therapeutic (Kalisa, 2006). It assists victims and communities in transition to come to terms with the past. Storytelling has been described as a part of transitional justice mechanisms that has assisted in the area of truth finding, prosecution, accountability and reparations (Golebiewski, 2014). Storytelling has been found to be a useful peacebuilding tool in deeply conflict rooted communities; it has been experimented with in a number of countries moving from conflict to peace or those becoming free from totalitarian authorities in the last two decades. Examples of countries where storytelling was used included Timor-Leste, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Mozambique, Israel and Palestine, and South Africa (Guthrey, 2015). The most publicised case was the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Storytelling provided a form of psychological healing for victims of the Apartheid era (TRC, 2005). According to the TRC (2005), the objectives of the commission are "to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts of the past by examining the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights that were committed during the apartheid period including the rights of the victims and the responsibilities of the persons that committed the violations, the granting of amnesty and accountability for the fate or whereabouts of victims, and by restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims".

Peacebuilding through historical narratives grows out of the knowledge that in the periods of intractable conflict, storytellers tend to teach their listeners their own narratives as the only correct one, while completely ignoring their enemy's narratives (Chaitin, 2003). If they do include the enemy narrative, it is always presented as being wrong and unjustifiable. These ideas, which also include community-legitimised knowledge such as murals, days of commemoration, memorials and statues, convince the listeners that there is a necessity to remember the victims of the conflict (Chaitin, 2003).

Stories, narratives and storytelling are central aspects of all cultures (Chaitin, 2003) and they play key roles in de-escalation of intergroup conflicts (Agosin, 1996). In order for the storytelling to be effective, it must engage the self and others, and provide a narrative that is both cognitively and emotionally compelling (Hancox, 2011). While denigrating myths of the other and self-aggrandising myths of self can refuel the winds of hate, the open and honest recounting of one's life story, and the willingness to be an empathic listener for the other, even if this other has caused the group suffering and pain in the past, can open the door for peacebuilding and coexistence (Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005).

Gender differences in the way stories are shared is not a matter of biological or psychological make-up. It has to do with gender perspectives and experiences (Daemrlich, 2003). Storytelling "remains unquestioned as the marks of being human" (Daemrlich, 2003, p. 21). According to Camus (1989), men's stories tend towards "blood narratives of adventure and quest", while women

share “milk narratives” (p. 12). In other words, women’s aspect of storytelling is more subtle (Minchin, 2007). Georgeakopoulos (1995) supports the claim that there are gender differences in storytelling in respect to theme, content and presentation. According to Georgeakopoulos (1995), women’s stories mainly contain self-deprecation, while men’s stories display pride and competitiveness. Men tell longer stories while women tell fewer stories, but these are appropriate to the worlds in which they live. Most often storytelling includes stories of failure, loss and unhappiness. Daemmrich’s position is quite different, according to her, women, unlike men, do not seek praise and admiration; what they hope to hear are mirror-stories (2003). Women’s narratives throw the physicality of the hero into relief against their own more passive role, in the home and with the family. Males always direct the mind of their audience to the subject of discussion, female narrators are as enticing and rhetorically adept, shaping their auditors’ imaginations for better and (more often) for worse. There are dramatisations of fantasies by and about women, fantasies born of female experiences, fashioned and circulated in the oral realm.

It can be concluded in this section that gender aspects of storytelling may explain the differences between men and women in relation to peacebuilding in terms of context, sharing and expectation. Sogol (2014) claims that storytelling has become an important tool of peacebuilding. It has contributed to healing processes in Northern Ireland, South Africa, between Palestinians and Israelis, and between descendants of Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators (Sogol, 2014). The next section examines the nexus between storytelling and symbolic interaction.

5. Storytelling and symbolic interaction

Symbolic interaction, like storytelling, is an interpretative understanding of human behaviour. Both depend on sharing of meaning, and the use of symbol and gesture. In this study, symbolic interaction provides a macro-sociological explanation to the understanding of peacebuilding processes from gender perspectives. Storytelling and symbolic interaction provide ontological understandings of behaviour by “getting inside” the reality of the actor, although substantial divisions remain within these perspectives (Ritzer, 2009). The epistemology of sharing of meaning could be traced to the work of W.I. Thomas on the *definition of situation*, which states that: “if situations are defined as real by the actors, they are real in their consequences”. The main idea of symbolic interactionism is that human life is lived in the symbolic domain. Symbols are culturally derived social objects to share meanings that are created and maintained in the social realm. George Herbert Mead work on *Mind, Self and Society in Action* had a profound influence on what was to become known as symbolic interaction. The term symbolic interaction was coined by Herbert Blumer, one of Mead’s students. Blumer who did much to shape this perspective, specified three basic premises: (1) Humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them; (2) the meanings of things derive from social interaction; and (3) these meanings are dependent on, and modified by, an interpretive process of the people who interact with one another. The focus here is on meaning, which is defined in terms of action and its consequences (reflecting the influence of pragmatism).

Symbolic Interaction as a social theory refers to a pattern of communication, interpretation and adjustment between individuals. Both the verbal and nonverbal responses that a listener then delivers are similarly constructed in expectation of how the original speaker will react (Ritzer, 2009). Symbolic interactionism looks at individuals and groups constructing meaning out of a situation, focusing on human action instead of large-scale social structures. The interpretive process entails what Blumer refers to as role-taking: the cognitive ability to take the perspective of another. It is a critical process in communication because it enables actors to interpret each other’s responses, thereby bringing about greater consensus on the meanings of the symbols used. Most concepts of symbolic interactionism are related to the concept of meaning (Esposito & Murphy, 2001). Meanings and symbols give human social action (which involves a single actor) and social interaction (which involves two or more actors engaged in mutual social action) distinctive interpretations (Esposito & Murphy, 2001).

The interpretation of meanings also depends on negotiation, that is, on mutual adjustments and accommodations of those who are interacting (Esposito & Murphy, 2001). In short, meaning is emergent, problematic and dependent on processes of role-taking and negotiation. Social action explains how the individuals are “acting with others in mind”. In other words, in executing an action, actors simultaneously try to gauge its consequence on the other actors involved (Hewitt, 2002). Although they often engage in mindless, habitual behaviour, people have the capacity to engage in social action (Ritzer, 2009). In the process of social interaction, people symbolically communicate meanings to the others involved. The others interpret those symbols and base their responding action on the basis of their interpretation (Esposito & Murphy, 2001). Symbolic interactionism is not a homogeneous theoretical perspective (Layder, 2014). Although interactionists agree that humans rely on shared symbols to construct their realities and on the methodological requirement of understanding behaviour by “getting inside” the reality of the actor, substantial divisions remain within this perspective (Layder, 2014).

Narratives are not shared by actors for intrinsic purposes alone, but for the extrinsic value that the listeners attach to it, which subsists with what symbolic interactionists described as meaning, action and inaction, self and perspective. According to Esposito and Murphy (2001), storytelling provides a mechanism through which meanings are shared with the listeners through symbolic interactions which include symbol, gesture and language. There are two sources of storytelling: stories can be told from the perspective of the evaluator who writes down her experiences and the stories she has collected from the participants; or, the evaluator asks the participants themselves to write down their stories (Kansteiner, 2002). Oral narratives often present variations, subtle or otherwise, each time they are told (Fludernik, n.d.). Narrators may adjust a story to place it in context, to emphasise particular aspects of the story or to present a fact in a new light, among other reasons (Blommaert, 2005). Through multiple telling, a story is fleshed out, creating a broader, more comprehensive narrative. Should listeners ever recount the narrative elsewhere, they would likely alter it to some degree to reflect their understandings of events and to better apply the story to its present context (Miller, 1996). In some instances, precision may be crucial: both precision and contextualising have their place in oral societies.

The gender definition of situation through storytelling emphasises that listeners act in a situation on the basis of how they are defined. The listeners tend to follow “subjective” meanings of actors, even when such is at variance with reality; especially when the sources of information are linked to personalities, religious, political or traditional authorities in the community. For example, when making references to Obafemi Awolowo, the former Nigerian Western region Premier and Alafin of Oyo, the rule of Oyo Kingdom. People have different ways of sharing their stories because language, cultural norm, class, status, experience and gender perspectives affect the way stories are told (apc-women.org). Often, also, there are experiences that are difficult to share in a straightforward manner. Conclusively, the relationship between storytelling and symbolic interaction is not linear. The nexus between the two concepts is largely determined in the process of interaction by actors and listeners. Next, the paper discusses the empirical methods used for data collection.

6. Method of researching gendered storytelling

In this section, the authors present the study location, sampling method, methods of data collection and method of data analysis.

6.1. Study location

The study location was the Ife Kingdom. As noted above, the Ife Kingdom is the cradle of the Yoruba race (Ajala & Olayiwola, 2013). It was founded by Oduduwa, the father of the Yoruba. Oduduwa had a child called Okanbi. Okanbi had seven children, namely; Olowu of Owu, Olupopo of Popo, Orangun of Ila, Onisabe of Sabe, Oba of Benin, Alaketu of Ketu and Alaafin of Oyo. The old Oyo and the Benin Empire were founded by Oranmiyan, Okanbi’s last child (Smith, 1988). As mentioned earlier in this paper, Modakeke was part of the old Oyo before it was dislodged by the Fulani Jihad of the nineteenth century. In the modern era, the Ife Kingdom is divided into four LGAs, namely: Ife Central, Ife

East, Ife South and Ife North. Here, we attempt briefly to give a description of the two divided communities within the Ife Kingdom.

6.1.1. *Ile-Ife*

Ile-Ife is the traditional headquarters of the Yorubas. It is located in Osun State, Nigeria. The city has two LGAs: Ife Central, and Ife East. Ife Central has 10 political wards while Ife East has 8 wards: Ile-Ife 5; and Modakeke 3. Ile-Ife shares a boundary with Ifewara in the South, Ifetedo in the East, Osu in the West and Ipetumodu in the North. The population of the two LGAs, Ife Central and Ife East, according to the 2006 National Census, is 167,254 and 188,027, respectively (Osun.gov.org., n.d.).

The majority of the inhabitants of Ile-Ife are farmers, traders and artisans. Others work in the government institutions, such as Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife Teaching Hospital Complex and Ife East and Ife Central Local Government administrative headquarters. Ile-Ife inhabitants speak the Ife dialect. The dialect is a primitive Yoruba language. Ile-Ife controls the commercial and farming activities in the Kingdom. The control and distribution of farmlands are in the hands of the inhabitants of Ile-Ife (Ajala & Olayiwola, 2013).

6.1.2. *Modakeke*

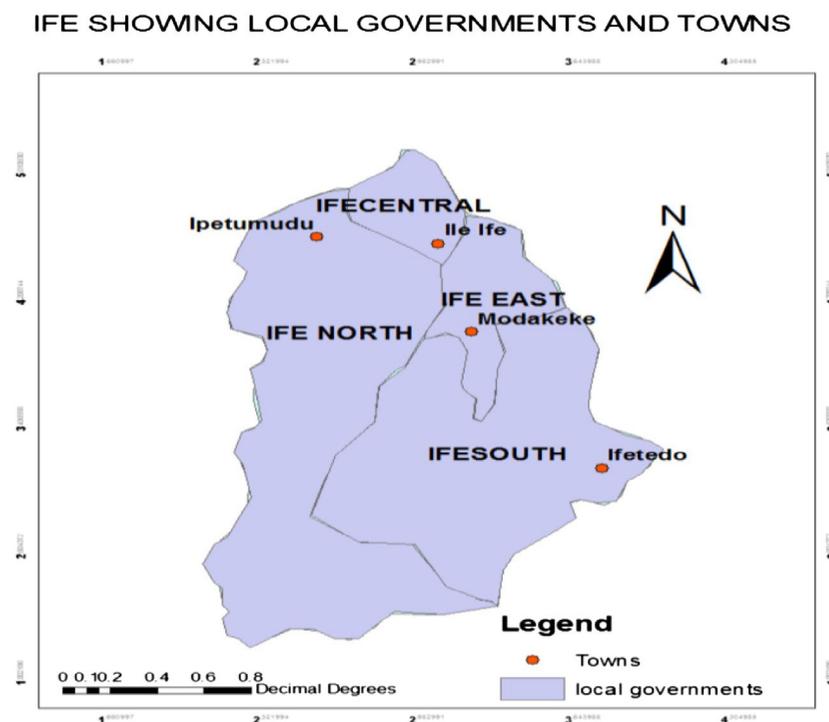
Modakeke is situated within the Ife Kingdom. Modakeke has a total population of 119,529 (Population List, 2014). It is located in the Ife East, with an Area Office in Oke D.O. The Area Office is divided into three wards (Osun.gov.org., n.d.). The inhabitants of Modakeke are farmers and artisans. Like the inhabitants of Ile-Ife, many are working in government institutions like Obafemi Awolowo University and Ife East Area Office. The inhabitants of Modakeke share the same market and farms with the people of Ile-Ife (Figure 1).

6.2. *Sampling method*

A qualitative sampling method was used in this study, and a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. Equal sample sizes were obtained in Ile-Ife and Modakeke. In both communities, it was easier to get female than male storytellers to participate. The total sample of participants

Figure 1. Map of the Ife Kingdom.

Source: Ajala and Olayiwola (2013).



was 28: women 18 and men 10. The researcher contacted traditional figures in both communities to obtain a list of participants that were known to be versatile in storytelling. The researcher collected the names and addresses of storytellers from the traditional figures and later selected 14 participants each from the 2 communities from the available 21 storytellers in Ile-Ife and 16 in Modakeke. The researchers sampled equal number of participants from the lists from the traditional figures by themselves for the purpose of eliminating the gatekeepers' influence on the data.

6.3. Data collection

Grounded Theory Methods (GTM) of qualitative data collection were used. GTMs are rooted in symbolic interactionism. The assumption of grounded theory is that people order and make sense of their world. They share common circumstances and common meanings about the social world. In-depth interviews were conducted in the two communities, Ife and Modakeke, among 28 participants purposively selected. Data were collected with a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide designed by the researchers contained questions about participants' experiences, consequences and resolution of conflict, storytelling and gender narratives that support peacebuilding positively. The researchers did not ask questions related to ethnicity because memories and trauma of the latest conflict were still fresh in the minds of the people.

The consent of participants was formally obtained after reading and explaining the reasons, relevance and purposes of the study, as contained in the information sheet given to the participants. The contents of the information sheet were translated into the Yoruba Language for those participants unable to read English. The participants were asked to sign the consent forms before the commencement of the interviews. Those that could not write were asked to provide a thumb-print. Three participants withdrew their participation because they were directly affected by the conflict. The researchers successfully selected additional participants from the lists collected from the traditional figures in the two communities to replace the participants that stood down.

The confidence of the participants was built through a series of visits to the two communities by the researchers. The first visit was arranged to familiarise with the community and discuss informally with key informants and opinion leaders in both communities. The second visit concerned contacts and familiarisation with participants. The researchers returned to the communities when it was clear that informal consent had been provided by the participants. Impartiality of the researchers, coupled with the declaration of the research purposes and intentions, made the study more acceptable to the participants. It is important to state that the researchers assumed an outsider role throughout the study. The researchers showed his identification card to the participants before they agreed to participate in the study. The letter of information and consent form approved by the main researcher's institution of affiliation, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria helped to obtain the confidence of the participants.

The participants' names and addresses were collected from the contact persons in each community but not mentioned during the interviews. The contact persons were opinion leaders in their respective communities. The researchers adopted a flexible method to engage the participants in in-depth interviews. The researchers went to the house of individual participant to conduct the interviews. The interviews were conducted at a period conducive to and selected by the participants. Some participants refused to grant interviews during the first contact. They only allowed the researchers to conduct interviews after trust and confidence had been established. The researchers spent approximately two months in both communities. The participants selected were adults between their 50s and 80s. The participants' names were not used throughout the interview. Assurance was given that their names were not going to be featured in the final draft of the study. The researchers assured the participants that the executive summary of the findings would be sent to them and their communities.

6.4. Analysis of data

The choice of GTMs of data analysis used in this study was informed by the theoretical framework. Concepts such as meaning, action and interaction, self and perspective are themes in symbolic interactionism which are synonymous with GTMs of initial coding, axial coding and theory (Glaser, 2001). According to Chamberlain-Salaun et al. (2013), interaction with data changes previous meanings and generates new ones. It is a process in which previous codes converge into present analysis to advance the developing theory. The process of ascribing meaning to data corresponds to the essential GTMs of initial code and intermediate code. Continually reassessing meanings in the data is demonstrated in the essential GTMs of constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). GTMs are a salient form of qualitative analysis. Theory construction through GTMs is an “evolving process” Charmaz (2000), beginning with finding key phrases or words in documents. Throughout the in-depth interviews, the participants discussed concepts relating to conflict, resolution, gender, storytelling, using their culture and experiences of storytelling in peacebuilding. Data collected were coded and categorised. The codes and categorisation led to the formation of themes. The themes were generated from the literature, memos and field reports, and were formed into narratives. The following themes, categories and subcategories were obtained:

Meaning: The Conflict

- Identity
- Land
- Tributes/rent
- Politics

Action: Consequences of the conflict

- Family disintegration
- Economy ruin
- Destruction of life and property

Action: Resolution

- Government efforts
- Community efforts

Self-Symbolic methods of storytelling

- Folklores
- Folkways
- Gestures

Three themes such as meaning, action and self were put together with subthemes and perspectives were used to group 13 items and to link them with essential GTMs. It should be noted that the symbolic interactionism themes such as action and interaction are features of all the assumptions. Interaction with participants, data and one’s self are key activities in GTMs. These themes and categories are formed into narratives through a method called focus coding in order to integrate the contexts of the participants and create narratives of their individual issues. In the next section, women’s storytelling is found to support peacebuilding positively compared to that of men, in contexts such as divided communities and conflict transformation.

7. Findings

This section of the article examines concepts like conflict, resolution, methods of storytelling and gender based on GTMs and symbolic interactionism themes such as meaning, action and inaction, self and perspectives.

7.1. Meaning: the conflict

In the analysis, the storytellers are taken as actors. The storytellers shared the same meaning with the listeners on the roots of the conflict. According to Blumer, human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have to them ... The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellow ... These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person dealing with the things he encountered. It is important to understand the reasons why inhabitants of the Ife Kingdom were in conflict in order to examine the importance of storytelling in the Kingdom. The participants in the interviews said that Ife/Modakeke conflict has been in existence from the time immemorial. Many of the participants could not provide the actual date when the conflict started, but evidence from the literature shows that Ife/Modakeke conflict started in 1845 (Agbe, 2001). Many participants in the study explained the reason why the two communities in the Ife Kingdom were fighting. The researcher asked the following question from the participants: *Why there was a conflict between the Ifes and the Modakekes?* The symbolic interpretation of conflict has different meanings to the participants. A male participant from Ile-Ife said:

The conflict between us and the Modakekes predated Nigerian independence. We own the land. We allow them to live with us. Since their arrival here, we know no peace. They waged war against my forefather, they war against my father and now they engage my generation in a protracted war. Who can predict what will happen to the future generations? Who knows what will happen to our land in the future ... We did not say they should not have access our land, what we asked them is the payment of tokens in return for our lands and they should respects our traditional heritage. Tradition protected Ile-Ife from other Yoruba warriors. This is so because Ile-Ife is the ancestral home of the Yorubas.

A participant from Modakeke looked at the conflict and interpreted it in from dominance, equality and fight for separate identity. He claimed:

The Ife people continue to see us as strangers. They exploit us. Why do we need to pay tribute over the land? They are our hosts, we know this. But we work for them on lands. We till the ground for them. They exploit my father; I will not allow them to exploit me. This is modern time; any form of tribute payment, subjugation and over control must stop. We have waged wars against them for close to a century now, yet our demands have not been met. We need a total emancipation from the Ifes. The lands must be given to us freely without condition.

Politics is another meaning the conflict has to the participants. The participants said that the modern conflict is politically motivated. The participants further said that the conflict between the Ifes and the Modakekes is more of political recognition and the creation of local government headquarters. A participant from Ile-Ife explained that the 1979 conflict was about political divisions between the two communities. The National Party of Nigeria used the Modakeke as a launch pad to control South west Nigeria politically. The party winning at Modakeke makes them extend their winning formula to other cities like Ibadan, Akure, Iwo and others. The involvement of political parties in the life of an already divided society created deeper division and hatred among the people. According to the participants, the 1980s conflict was about the creation of a separate local government for the Modakekes. The struggle over political independence and separate identity led to the creation of an "Area Office" with three wards in Modakeke. Many participants in Ile-Ife said that political agitations by the Modakekes continue until now. A male participant from Modakeke interpreted the conflict thus:

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

The views of women participants were different from men. The need of action towards the resolution of the conflict was mentioned by the participants. The major concern of women was a permanent end to the conflict. The women participants said that the conflict has affecting family relations, the economy and mutual benefits in both communities. A participant said:

We are ready for a lasting peace. I have relations in Ile-Ife; we are divided by the conflict. My husband has farm on Ife land; we cannot farm. What are we fighting for? He asked.

The Ife women's opinion is closed to that of Modakeke women about the resolution of the conflict. The roots of the conflict in the modern era have a clear meaning from the participants' explanations. The conflict was about land, power and identity. Identity politics occupies today's social justice thinking (Fraser, 2007). Based on an interpretative perspective, there are gender angles to the roots of the conflict in the Ife Kingdom. Men talked about power and land distribution while women's concerns were family and economy.

7.2. Action: the resolution

As noted above, the symbolic interactionism themes: action and inaction are essential features of storytelling. The stories shared by the actors (storytellers) determine the action or inaction of the listeners (the community members). The action or inaction of listeners determines the extent of enduring peace in the Ife Kingdom. The participants said that the recent conflict between Ile-Ife and Modakeke lasted three years, between 1997 and 2000. They said that former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo set up an investigative panel to resolve the conflict, but it lingered until the two communities found a traditional method of resolving the conflict through storytelling. The explanation of action provided by the participants demonstrated the relevance of storytelling to the resolution of the conflict. People interpret each other's behaviour and it is these interpretations that form the social bond. A participant from Modakeke said:

Government announced the creation of Ife East Area Office for us. We hope to have a full-blown Local Government Area in the future.

The symbolic meaning of the government action share by the actors (storytellers) is for the listeners not to take further action. A participant in Ife said that the resolution of the conflict created opportunity for reintegration, common identity, unity and social bonds. He said:

Government asked the Modakekes to add a prefix "Ife" so that the name of their community would be known as Modakeke-Ife. This was gazetted. This singular attempt makes us to open our market, farm and facilities to them.

A total reintegration of Modakeke and Ile-Ife can provide permanent peace in the region. The creation of a separate political administrative office could only bring temporary peace to the two communities. Participants from Modakeke were asking for the creation of a separate LGA. The creation of a separate LGA solely for the Modakekes implies the transferring of Ife land; a position which participants from Ile-Ife described as an abrogation of property rights naturally given to them. The Ife people want undeniable access to their land for farming, since the people in the region are predominantly farmers and their livelihoods largely depend on farming. According to the participants, action on integration processes in the Kingdom should be adequate. Integration provides a possibility of bringing unity and a sense of joint ownerships to the inhabitants of the two communities in the Ife Kingdom.

7.2.1. Symbolic methods of storytelling

This subsection explains why the inhabitants of the Ife Kingdom accepted storytelling as a method of peace construction. The action is in the definition of the situation that people created. Storytelling is a potent remembrance of an individual's or a group's integrity in the society. Traditional methods of storytelling are still relevant to the people of the Ife Kingdom. Participants in both communities

revealed the used of folklores, folktales, “under the tree gist” and town hall meetings as methods of storytelling. Another participant in Ile-Ife explained how memorialisation used to create peace and it tells the victims that they are not forgotten. The woman participant said:

Look around the city ... there are murals, busts are mounted around the city. These tell us the heroic contribution of the fallen heroes and heroines. These are a potent remembrance of our integrity and our place in history has far as peace is concern.

Modern methods of storytelling as a perspective originated from subthemes in the analysis. The participants in the interviews said that storytelling has taken a new dimension as a result of the advent of new technology. Many stories about the war were tape recorded, and stored on social media such as “YouTube”. The tape-recorded stories are always played in the open, in public places where people usually gathered to listen. At the gathering, opinions are formed, sentiments are flared, sympathy aroused and plans for future decisions are formed. The researcher asked the participants the following questions: *What keeps the conflict until this modern time?* A male participant from Modakeke said:

... I believe in the power of storytelling. I can't read or write. The best way to share my experience and escapades in war is by storytelling. Human beings don't forget easily any fact that goes with story. I share stories about where we are coming from, where we are presently and the future of our community. I share most of the stories at night after retiring from farm. I have over twenty listeners on the average.

A male participant in Ile-Ife revealed how he used modern technology in storytelling.

My own storytelling style has gone scientific. I share tape-recorded stories and it has wider dissemination and reach.

The participants in both Ife and Modakeke were asked the frequency by which they share their stories. They said that storytelling takes place as and when it pleases them. There is no professional storyteller. They said that they provided storytelling services for free. The participants went further to say that they can make storytelling a profession if government could support them by providing funds. They told the researcher the advantages and importance of storytelling to peacebuilding and the healing power in storytelling. A female participant in Modakeke said that:

I love to make storytelling a profession but for now, it is a hobby. There is no money in it. Anyway, I enjoy sharing my stories because it makes me well known in the community.

A participant in Ile-Ife said that storytelling has become his profession because he shares stories on radio and other media:

I will die a storyteller. I share stories everywhere. This makes me well-known and I have become a Master of Ceremonies as a result. Many people are encouraged to see storytelling as a profession. Their story should be for peace, justice and development.

Men and women participants in the two communities identified two methods of storytelling. These are through traditional and modern techniques. They stated that the methods include tales by the moonlight, tape recording, social media and other form of modern communication.

7.3. Self: gender and peace

Self is a product of interpretation of storytellers' action by the listeners. Just as Cooley (1998) sees the self-looking glass as a mean of action and inaction, storytellers are mirrors through which the listeners see the society. The interpretation of an actor's storylines determines the need for peace. Storytelling is common among men and women in the two communities. Men and women used storytelling to create awareness and to serve as information repository. Women used storytelling

positively to sustain peace. The language they shared in their storytelling usually end with we, us, our while men talk about their heroism and escapades in war and usually used language such as they, them, their. Women tell their listeners stories that heal wounds and trauma. At times, the participants said that they used storytelling to provide support for victims by appealing to listeners.

A question about sustainable peace was asked from the participants. *Can you tell me the way by which peace can be sustained in this Kingdom?* A female participant said:

Storytelling is a wonderful tool of quenching conflict. I remember the story I shared over the radio station opened up discussion about the need for peace in the two communities.

A male participant said that peace can be sustained by given compensation and justice to various abuses that happened during the conflict:

I think justice is the major thing. Government should compensate those who farms and house were destroyed. They should remember the widows and orphans.

Another female participant in Ile-Ife looked at the conflict from an accountability perspective. She claimed:

Yes, I enjoy storytelling. I share stories to reveal the truth about the conflict and make accountability because many people have disappeared in this community without clues. Storytelling is a powerful tool of knowledge deposit. If you failed to share your story it is dangerous to the corporate existence of your community. I have up to thirty-five listeners at times. They comprise both old and young.

Gender aspects of storytelling are very important to the understanding of the protracted conflict between Ile-Ife and Modakeke people. Men and women explore storytelling to express their views about the conflict. When it comes to stories about the conflict, men share stories that would eulogise and promote their masculinity. Women found sharing the stories that would promote coexistence and diffusion. For example, South African women that appeared before the TRC instead of explaining what happened to them; they reported what happened to their husbands during the apartheid (Rubio-Marin, 2009). The participants said that men's form of a storytelling is not personal and lacks healing power. Self-understanding surfaced in women's interpretation of stories of how to entrench peace in the community. Women shared their personal and emotional experiences as related to economic loss, loss of husband, children and relations during the war with the listeners, while men will discuss their escapades in war, the root of the conflict and their thinking about the resolution of the conflict. Self-understanding also surfaced in men's storytelling, which centred largely on issues like socio-economic frustration and political alienation, identity problems, recognition of traditional figures, local government creation and land dispute/land tribute. Women talk about justice and accountability, what happens to their loved ones. They want apologies and peace. The participants' position in this subsection supported the proposition that women's form of storytelling has greater capacity for peacebuilding than men. A female participant shared her story thus:

I tell the story of how Modakeke people got here; how we gave them our land; how we show kindness to them, how we allowed our children to marry them. Why we don't need to fight again because of affinity and that we are from the same progenitors.

A female participant was asked the kind of peacebuilding process she employed in her community. The question was asked as follows: *How do you employ storytelling to build peace?* The female participant said that she usually begins with the difficult aspect of the story and concluded with reasons for enduring peace.

I share stories mostly at night with my listeners about my experience of the war. How I lost my six children, how my source of income was destroyed, how our farmlands were attacked and crops set on fire and how Ife people nicked named such as “Modakeke n wo lo”, “Oyo orioko”, and others ... In my own opinion, I believe peace is important. I tell my audience that after each fight, government usually called both parties together and settled the problems between us. What I want now is to live in peace with Ife people, to go to market with them and attend social functions with them.

A female participant also shared how she used storytelling as a weapon of peace and how she thought that durable peace is desirable. It leads to development, unity and stability. A female participant posited:

I hate sharing stories about killing of people or destruction of houses with my listeners because it creates hatred and trauma. I tell my listeners how compassionate we are and the need not to fight senseless war. Imagining, Modakeke and Ife cannot inter-marry again. We don't need to lead that kind of life in Ife. We should protect our children and property. Peace! Peace!! This is what we need. I don't want our children, husbands, wives to be killed any more.

The participants disclosed how it is easy to share stories with children by women. A female participant from Ile-Ife said:

It is very easy to share stories by women than men because of their closeness to the children. The motherly skills and flexibility provides women with easy accessibility to children. I witnessed four successive conflicts between us and them. I told my listeners to be prepared for the future. I told children to see peace as a heritage and they should work toward strengthening relationships between the two communities. I often showed them statues of heroes and heroines in the community and murals to remember those who dedicated their life for this struggle.

Another male participant provided a story that could reignite the conflict.

I tell them, no winner, no vanquish. Ife people are not our enemies but reintegration must be in place. We don't have access to land. They are in control of everything. We are no longer strangers; the land belongs to both of us ... I tell my listeners to stop fighting and follow the path of peace until we achieve total peace and have access more to each other, until we are one, until we achieve equity and until we are allowed to create a better identity.

The findings demonstrated the historical relationship between the Ife and Modakeke people in the Ife Kingdom. Factors that led to division revealed in this study include land sharing, identity, political differences, fear, protection of heritage and confinement of ownership. The two communities used storytelling as a method of peacebuilding following the commissions and panels of enquiry established by government to resolve the conflict. The participants revealed how storytelling has brought sustainable peace, unity and security to the Kingdom in the last decade.

8. Conclusion

The study has been able to identify how storytelling can be used to construct peace in a divided community. The study looks at peacebuilding processes through storytelling from gender perspectives in a divided community in the Ife Kingdom. Various attempts at resolution were identified in the study including peace training, community reconciliation, judicial commissions and panels of inquiry. Although these methods have contributed to conflict resolution in the region, they have failed to lead to sustainable peace in the Kingdom. The Ife/Modakeke conflict had lasted a century before peaceful resolutions were obtained in 2000 and the peace processes are on-going. The study found that storytelling has contributed significantly to peacebuilding in the Kingdom.

The theoretical underpinning used in this study centred on symbolic interaction. The study examines the relationship between symbolic interaction, storytelling and gender. Symbolic interaction

makes use of language, symbol and gesture for sharing of meaning. Storytelling uses sharing of meaning to pass information across to the listeners. The storytelling mechanism in this study builds on the “definition of situation” propounded by W. I. Thomas. The study therefore concluded that if man or/and woman defined a situation as real, it is real in the consequences. In other words, if storytellers either man or/and women defined a post conflict resolution as satisfying, the listeners would see it as such.

The study also examines the gendered forms of storytelling that promote enduring peace in the divided Kingdom. The study followed the GTMs and concludes that men’s historical dialogue tends to produce negative consequences for peace in the two communities; in that it may rejuvenate the interest of the younger generation in the conflict. This was found to contribute to a circle of conflict in the two communities. The study found that women would share their personal and emotional experiences with their listeners including loss of sources of income, husbands, children and relations during the war, while men will discuss escapades in war, causes of the war and also talk about the resolution of the conflict which usually centred on themes like socio-economic frustration and political alienation, identity problems, recognition of traditional figures, local government creation and land dispute/tribute “Isakole”.

The important aspect of storytelling in conflict resolution is justice. This conclusion is based on the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which believes that human action must base on interpretative understanding. The understanding of actors’ stories by the listeners must be related to justice narratives that are acceptable to both sides in conflict, that is, the Ile-Ife and the Modakeke inhabitants. Storytelling would be helpful to peacebuilding if the resolution of the conflict is based on unveiling the truth, accountability and Justice. Oral stories that end with justice always encourage enduring peace more than the ones that end with imbalance and injustice narratives. Conclusively, women’s forms of storytelling appeared to be more favourable to peacebuilding than men. Storytelling should be encouraged by government and international actors. Women storytellers should be supported by becoming professional storytellers and involve in a large scale storytelling in the public space.

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