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# **LASU Journal of Humanities (LASUJOH)**

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## A Critical Appraisal of Yoruba Conflict Resolution Methods in the Self-determination Agitation in Southern Nigeria

Oluwatobiloba Lawal

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### Abstract

*The Nigerian state is confronted with multiple agitations of self-determination and secession from the southern part of the country. These agitations, which started from the South-East region, have seen renewed and aggressive push for the declaration of Biafra Republic by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the call for Yoruba Nation in the South-West by Ilana Omo-Oodua. The agitations have been justified on the grounds of marginalization, bad governance and maladministration, and insecurity. In response, the Nigerian government has weaponised the instrumentality of force and state power to frustrate these divisive forces, tendencies and agitations. While the instrumentality of force may have found attraction because of the need to protect the territorial integrity of Nigeria, its effectiveness *viz-a-viz* the need to protect the people's rights continues to generate controversies. The question therefore is, can the Nigerian government achieve national cohesion and integrity in the wake of self-determination agitations without the use of force? Are there alternative dispute resolution strategies that could achieve same goal without collateral damages? This study, using a qualitative research methodology; content, historical and cultural analysis, posits that the Yoruba traditional conflict resolution methods offer significant prospect as an effective, sustainable and reproducible alternative mode of conflict resolution to the current stratagem. In addressing the problem of self-determination and secession in Nigeria, the study recommends a cocktail of measures which combine dialogue with other traditional disputes resolution methods.*

*Keywords: Agitation, Dispute Resolution, IPOB, Secession, Yoruba Nation,*

## Introduction

THE DISCOURSES ON THE UNITY AND POLITICAL STABILITY OF THE Nigerian state have endured due to several separatism and self-determination agitations from several parts of the country, particularly from Southern Nigeria. The existential threats of self-determination agitations, much like its underpinning discourses, have been reinforced by Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition. Mimiko and Adeyemi (2005) described the Nigerian state as a union of diverse largely autonomous ethnic nationalities that had existed under distinct political arrangements like empires, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city-states and caliphate. These ethnic nationalities operating on their unique cultural tradition and ideologies existed successfully and autonomously before the forceful marriage called amalgamation facilitated by the British colonial administration in 1914. The colonial masters failed to seek the consent of these ethnic nationalities before coercing them into the forceful marriage hence the fragile unity between the groups (Odum, 2018). However, many other multi-ethnic nations across the world have exploited the legacies of colonial rule especially challenges inherent in multi-ethnicity to forge and strengthen national growth and development. Indonesia and Belgium have enjoyed relative stability despite their multi-ethnic composition. The fragile unity existent between the multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria can be attributed largely to the failure of the political actors to foster national cohesion upon amalgamation. Historically, the multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria coexisted peacefully and interrelated efficiently before and during the colonial rule. This however does not repudiate the fact of conflicts and hostilities among these groups in such atmosphere of cooperation.

Secession is not alien to the Nigerian state as it has always been a recurrent issue since amalgamation. In 1949, Nnamdi Azikwe threatened the secession of the Ibo from Nigeria on the grounds of marginalization and the excesses of the European imperialists (Blackpast, 2009). Also, in 1956, Ahmadu Bello threatened the secession of the North citing the South's ambitious agitations and what he termed 'hurried demand' for independence (Gambari, 2016). Post independence, the Nigerian state was rocked with secession crisis when Col. Ojukwu declared Republic of Biafra which culminated in the Nigeria Civil War of 1967-1970. The inability of the Government to find a lasting solution to the feeling of marginalization necessitated recent self-determination agitations for the Biafran state by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Yoruba Nation

championed by Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Adeyemo (Igboho) respectively. Overtime, the Federal Government has adopted a forceful approach in preserving the unity of Nigeria with the use of military powers and extreme force in responding to self-determination agitations and silencing secessionists. Odum (ibid) stated that Nigeria fought a civil war in the name of preserving her unity following the declaration of Biafra; though the government initially went through the path of dialogue and peaceful settlement in handling the problem, she eventually made a swift turn around and resorted to force as an instrument of national cohesion. Fifty years after the Nigerian government rejected the path of dialogue which she had hitherto embraced, and embarked on the war of "unity", there are strong indications that the unity of the country still exists only in rhetorical terms and has failed to sink into the minds of the different peoples of Nigeria. The arbitrary approach of the Federal Government is not effective as shown by history and recent happenings in the country as it has failed to resolve the impasse. Apparently, there is need for a more effective approach capable of providing a sustainable solution to the crises of secession. This study sets out to provide a more efficient and result-oriented approach in the Yoruba traditional conflicts resolution methods capable of bringing an end to the secession crises of the Nigerian state as well as preserving the unity of the country.

## **Literature Review**

Extant literature have investigated secession and self-determination agitations on the prism of ethno-religious conflicts, the right to self-determination of minority groups under the provisions of international law, the implication of the reoccurring secession agenda for national unity and political stability etcetera. Odum (ibid) investigated the agitations for separation and the non-negotiability of Nigeria's unity stance of the Government. He noted that just like other African states that went through colonial experience, Nigeria's inability to forge national cohesion is partly a reflection of her colonial experience and its inherent contradictions. Hence, the troubled and fragile national unity and continued ethnic discordance several years after the amalgamation of 1914, dawn of nationalist movements and formation of political parties. The Northerners dominated the Northern People's Congress (NPC) led by Ahmadu Bello; the Igbos dominated the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikwe and the Yorubas populated Action Group (AG) led by Obafemi Awolowo. In his opinion, the Nigerian leaders at independence took

further steps that dampened the fragile unity established by amalgamation by failing to develop the spirit of oneness and pursuing selfish and ethnic interest. The study established that the Government initially employed the use of dialogue but backtracked and adopted the use of force on the secessionist without addressing the root cause of the agitations. The study concluded that the Federal Government should consider a better and effective approach in addressing the issues of secession noting the importance of addressing the root causes of the agitations.

Chukwudi et al (2019) using a survey design approach, investigated the activities of IPOB in selected areas (the group's target area including Abuja) and the responses of the federal government with premium on the implications for political stability. The study examined the relationship between the responses of the Government and the agitations of the secessionist group. The research holds that the response of the Government is hinged on police actions and use of force failing to address the issues surrounding the agitations. The study finds that the continued agitation for secession and the increased activities of IPOB has serious implications for the political stability and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study concludes that positive responses such as inclusive governance and federal character principles in the allocation of projects and interventions would mediate in this conflict and determine the activities of IPOB moving forward.

Igwe et al (2020) examined the right to self-determination of minority groups under contemporary international laws whilst beaming the searchlight on its applicability in Nigeria. They affirmed that ethnic groups domiciled in Nigeria before colonization and amalgamation were independent and autonomous and were not consulted on whether they wanted to be part of Nigeria. The study holds that British colonial administration succeeded in the amalgamation of Nigeria but failed in the unification of the diverse groups of the geographical location to be known as Nigeria post amalgamation. The study noted that the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides that Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation, but the indivisible nation has been under the threat of collapse from the activities of IPOB, MASSOB, MEND and Niger Delta Avengers. It is important to state that the activities of these groups have received attention from the Government with clear intention of nipping them in the bud. The Nigerian government of President Umaru Yaradua initiated a 'peace-buying' strategy or a carrot and stick approach-an alternative conflict resolution mechanism- in addressing the challenges of agitations and secessionist

movements in the Niger Delta. In the South-south, the agitations of the secessionist groups are hinged on marginalization and injustice associated with the exploration and exploitation of oil in the region. The study found that minority groups have a claim and right to self-determination under international law but municipal law does not favour their course. The study concludes that the legal framework of Nigeria should be reworked to accommodate the right to secession of willing minorities whilst urging the Government to promote fiscal federalism to address the issues of marginalization.

Lawal (2021) explored the traditional disputes resolution methods in the Yoruba cultural milieu. He affirmed that the Yoruba people rely on proverbs, idioms and folktales using the traditional institutions in resolving conflicts peacefully without damaging the existing relationship between the warring parties. The Yoruba proverb *ka dpbal\_e fun arara, ko sp pe ka maga* which translates to softening one's stance and allowing peace to reign does not take away one's superiority, can be likened to the peace-buying conflict resolution strategy employed by President Yar'adua in the face of secessionist agitation from the Niger Delta. The philosophy canvassed by the proverb was leveraged by the Government to maintain peace in the region, strengthening the unity of the country.

These studies have undoubtedly contributed to knowledge but there is yet a significant gap in theory and practical manifestation on the reality of the existentiality of the secessionist and self-determination movements. The significance of this research comes in two folds; First, to contribute to the discussion using the traditional techniques of the Yoruba in resolving disputes and conflicts in the society and second, flowing from the above, is to close the gap between theory and practice by applying Yoruba traditional conflicts resolution mechanisms to the problem of secessionist and self-determination agitations in Nigeria. Similarly, the study examines the recent agitation for Yoruba Nation from the South-West which has seen little or no consideration in the historiography of secessionist and self-determination agitations in Nigeria.

## **Foregrounding Self-Determination Agitations in Southern Nigeria**

Self-determination is a right enlisted in Article 1 of Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter of 1945 (UN Charter, 1945). This principle recognizes the right of a marginalized group in a heterogeneous nation to seek her future and secede from such nation. Even when the Charter goes further in Article 2 to provide a

caveat that the integrity of the state is paramount, the principle of self-determination as enshrined in Article 1 guarantees that people, based on respect for the principle of equal rights and fair equality, have the right to freely choose their sovereignty and international political status with no interference. This legal conundrum implies that the right to self-determination is not absolute. Weller (2009) sees self-determination as the people's right towards the freedom of determination of the state of their politics and at the same time follow up with the evolution of their economy, social well-being, and their culture. Weller's postulation indicates that the need for sovereignty and autonomy with regards to social, economic and political state of affairs necessitates the demand for self-determination. On the contrary, An-na'im and Deng (1996) view self-determination as it is related with the right of people in the areas colonized to attain independence; but many ethnically or religiously based internal conflicts indicate pressures to extend the principle to ethnic, religious and linguistic areas. These scholars noted that the principle of self-determination is basically for nations under colonial rules but recognizes the fact that ethnic or religious groups in sovereign nations have resorted to the principle of self-determination to become a sovereign state on their own. This is the reality of the situation in Southern Nigeria. The Igbo and the Yoruba are agitating for self-determination from the Nigeria state whilst not being under colonization. It may be argued that how true is it that the Yoruba are agitating for self-determination considering the population of people involved in the agitation. This study opines that previous agitations such as MEND and IPOB equally did not enjoy the support of the entirety of the citizenry. The fact that the Nigerian Government has at different times engaged the agitators by deploying some peace-keeping initiatives emboldens the claim of the reality of self-determination among the Yoruba people.

The agitation for Biafra republic can be traced back to the end of the First Republic when the then Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared Republic of Biafra in 1967 severing ties of the Eastern Nigeria from Nigeria. Igwe et al (2020) reported that the Eastern Region Consultative Assembly had prior to the declaration, and on 26th May, 1967, mandated Colonel Ojukwu, to declare the Republic of Biafra. This declaration came on the heels of irreconcilable differences emanating from the massacre of officers of Hausa/Fulani origin in the January 15, 1966 coup which culminated in the massacre of Igbos in the North between May and

September 1966 and the massacre of Igbo military officers in the retaliatory coup of July 29, 1966. The annihilation and perceived oppression of the Igbos informed their desire for secession. In the declaration speech, Lt. Col. Ojukwu pointed out key rationale behind the declaration of Republic of Biafra. He stated thus;

Aware that the people of Eastern Nigeria can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any Government based outside Eastern Nigeria; Believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves; Unwilling to be unfree partners in any association of a political or economic nature and determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Federal Republic of Nigeria (Blackpast, 2019)

The declaration of Biafra Republic by Ojukwu led to the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970 where the Federal Government opposed the secession bid, took on the secessionist and succeeded in coercing them to remain with Nigeria. Thereafter, the unity of the Nigerian state remained wimpy with further agitations (MASSOB, MEND and BZM) at different times since 1999 threatening the unity of the country. The agitation for Biafra republic resurfaced through Radio Biafra and IPOB in 2009 and 2012 respectively. Radio Biafra was established in London and operated by Nnamdi Kanu to inform, educate and advocate for the actualization of Biafra Republic whilst criticizing and condemning activities of the Nigerian Government negating the establishment of Biafra republic. In the same vein, Nnamdi Kanu founded a group codenamed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to lead the agitation for the actualization of Biafra Republic. Henry, Obiora and David (2020) adjudged that IPOB is a recreation of Biafra Republic conceived by Ojukwu. Conflict causative issues such as insecurity, social injustice and marginalization behind the declaration of Biafra republic in 1967 subsist and informed the formation of IPOB. Therefore, the birth of IPOB and the renewed agitation for Biafra Republic can be said to be the implication of the failure of the Federal Government to address and resolve issues surrounding this separatist movement. Since 2015 till date, IPOB has been an active voice condemning the inactions of the Federal Government

(corruption, insecurity, social, economic, and political discrimination, and marginalization of the Igbo) and aggressively campaigning for the promulgation of Biafra Republic. The group has deployed both peaceful and aggressive strategies (call for referendum, protest, sit-at-home order etc.) in actualizing her mandate.

Agitation for the rights of the Yoruba race can be traced back to the establishment of different pressure groups in Yorubaland. Pressure groups like *gb\_e Qm9* Oduduwa (1948), A(eni)ere (1966), Oodua Peoples' Congress (1995) were established with the sole intention of defending, promoting and advocate the socio-cultural viz political right of the Yoruba race. At first, the Yorubas were interested in true federalism hence the rationale behind different calls for restructuring at different times while the easterners were pursuing self-determination. Major twists and turns in events necessitated the call for self-determination and secession of the Yoruba people to be identified as Yoruba Nation from Nigeria. Gbadamosi (2017) reported that following a series of murderous attacks on Yoruba farming communities allegedly by Fulani herdsmen, as well as the kidnapping of a prominent Yoruba politician, Olu Falae, supposedly by same group, notable Yoruba leaders rose from an emergency summit held in Ibadan and issued a secessionist threat, affirming the determination of the Yoruba people to review their status in the Nigerian federation. Issues ranging from political marginalization in guise of lopsided appointment in favor of the North, bad governance and maladministration, corruption, inequitable allocation and distribution of resources and most recently insecurity fuelled the desire of the South-West to secede from Nigeria. Emeritus Professor Banji Akintoye led the very first major discourse of Yoruba secession through a pressure group called Yoruba World Congress. The Akintoye-led group call for self-determination was anchored on diplomatic processes devoid of any form of confrontation. Letters and petitions were sent to the United Nations (UN) to recognize the right to self-determination of the Yoruba people and facilitate the declaration of Yoruba Nation. Over the years, Akintoye has led different strategic moves through different groups and coalitions seeking the secession of the Yoruba people from Nigeria. His current group, Ilana Omo Oodua is a coalition of different self-determination seeking groups on behalf of the Yoruba people.

Aladeokomo (2021) posits that the agitation for Yoruba Nation heightened to the boiling point consequent on the unreasonable terrorist attacks

on the Yorubaland by terrorists believed to be of Fulani/Hausa extraction. The Yoruba people were subjected to different attacks on their own land and found themselves at the mercy of terrorists. These terrorists raided and destroyed their farmlands, kidnapped and raped their wives and daughters, abducted families for ransom and arbitrarily killed anyone who posed any form of resistance. The failure of the Government to live to her responsibility of protecting the lives and properties of her people informed the ferocious agitation for Yoruba Nation by the South-westerners. There are misconceptions in several quarters that the Federal Government supports the activities of these terrorists because of her failure to take stringent actions against them, and allegations are rife that arrested terrorists were released by the Government with no action taken against them. Anon (2021) holds that the secession lull among the Yoruba became prevalent from 2017 during the time of the Buhari administration over what was rightly or wrongly perceived as their marginalization by President Buhari and his alleged failure, refusal or neglect to allow the law to take its course against the Fulani herdsmen who had been alleged to have been kidnapping, maiming, raping and killing at Yoruba farms. This therefore informs that the failure of the Nigerian Government to protect the Yoruba people gave birth to the rise of several secessionist group and activism including the near-radical activism led by Sunday Adeyemo (Igboho). Olaniyi (2021) posits that after series of attacks on Igangan Community in Ibarapa North Local Government of Oyo State, Sunday Igboho, an indigene of Oyo, on January 15, 2021 visited the community to issue a seven-day ultimatum to Fulanis, to leave the area on the account of being responsible for the criminal activities in the community. He reported further that at the end of the ultimatum, Igboho led a group of youths and supporters to forcefully evict them from the community. Igboho's activism received cheers and commendation from a sizeable number of people in the South-west. This therefore informs that the desire to secede from Nigeria is a popular decision amongst sections of the Yoruba race. The agitation for Yoruba Nation took a new dimension with the involvement of Sunday Igboho, with the agenda coalescing into a movement with support from all states in the region. Different structures such as Yoruba Koya Liberation Movement, Yoruba World Congress, Yoruba Self-Determination Movement etcetera teamed up to pursue the self-determination agenda of the Yorubas under the leadership of Professor Banji Akintoye with Sunday Igboho as a vocal point. The diplomatic processes were undertaken by Akintoye while Igboho led the radical front. Ultimately,

corruption, nepotism and ethnic dominance, untrue federalism, terrorism allegedly enabled by the Government of Nigeria culminated in the decision of the South-westerners to secede from Nigeria.

## **Nigerian Government Initiatives Against Separatism and Self-Determination Activism**

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria empowers the Government to maintain and strengthen the unity of the country. Section 2 (1) states that "Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria." Thus, the concerns and actions of the Government in addressing issues of self-determination and secession as they surface at different times. Over the years, the Nigerian Government has deployed different strategies in preserving the unity of the country. These strategies viz response to separatist agitation can be categorized into two; diplomacy and coercion. However, a quick look at the reality points to coercion as the main strategy employed by the Government as little convincing efforts have been made on the prism of diplomacy in addressing issues relating to self-determination. The response of the Government is majorly dependent on the use of force to silence these agitations as reported in history and evident in recent happenings in the country. At the first mention of Biafra Republic in 1967, the Gowon-led federal government after few dialogue backtracked and went to war with Ojukwu to forcefully quench the agitation and retained the Easterners as part of Nigeria against their own will. At the rejuvenation of the agitation for Biafra republic in 2012, the Federal Government has deployed series of coercive strategies to subdue the secession movement. The leader of the pro-Biafran group, IPOB; Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in 2015 and charged with treasonable felony. He was detained until April 2017 when he was released on bail on medical grounds. Relying on a court order, the Government also declared IPOB a terrorist organization whilst directing security agencies to treat the organization and her apologists as terrorists. Though, the activities of IPOB are not strictly driven by ideology, which is a critical defining attribute of terrorist organizations, the Federal Government justifies the terrorist appellation on the ground that the activities of the organization bear significant semblance with those of ISIL and Al Qaeda, among other terrorist organizations. The resultant mixed reactions which the Government's position has generated especially those vehement in their condemnation of the government's appellation and

subsequent proscription of the organization should not invalidate the reality of existential threat IPOB constitutes and its descent to a regime of terror. Military operation codenamed Operation Python Dance (One and Two) was a total clampdown on Biafra agitators. Adonu (2018) reported that Biafrans were taken away and killed in cold blood without any cause at the time of September 2017 operation's Python Dance. Ogbonnaya-Ikokwu (2017) corroborates the aforementioned noting that the Nigerian army invaded Nnamdi Kanu's home hours after it announced the commencement of its operation Python Dance (Part Two) in the South-Eastern states resulting in the death of a few IPOB sympathizers and incarceration of several others. The Nigerian Government after series of covert operations re-arrested Nnamdi Kanu in Kenya in June, 2021. He has since been in custody, refused bail and remanded in the custody of the security services. Obasi (2017) holds that the use of force by the Nigerian Government in responding to the IPOB's agitations has not been productive as it inflames passion and increases people's sentiments on separation. Doubtlessly, the continued agitation even after the prosecution of Kanu, arbitrary actions on Biafrans, the popularity and acceptability of IPOB amongst the Easterners underlines the ineffectiveness of the methods of the Nigerian Government.

Agitators of Yoruba nation have also received a fair share of Nigerian Government initiatives aimed at gagging their activities in the demand for self-determination. Through State Governments and security outfits, the Federal Government has continued to frustrate activities of Ilana Omo Oodua, the apex group of Yoruba self-determination organizations. The Nigerian Police and State Governors across Southwest withheld approval for rallies geared at galvanizing support for the self-determination bid of the group. Ultimately, the Federal Government through her secret security agency, Department of State Services (DSS) launched an attack on Sunday Adeyemo (activist leader of Yoruba Secessionist group) who fortunately escaped the raid on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Two persons were reportedly killed and thirteen arrested during the attack on Igboho's residence (Oyero, 2021). Several reactions trailed the attack on Igboho's residence. All of these represented three interests: Pro-Nigerian Government, Pro-Yoruba Nation and general social reaction. Reactions in favor of agitation for Yoruba Nation alleged that the attack was geared at cowing and silencing him for being a vocal voice for the secession of Yoruba from Nigeria. Rising from the attack, Igboho was forced into exile and consequently arrested on July 19, 2021 on his way to Germany in Benin Republic. There are several insinuations that

the Nigerian Government tactically influenced his arrest. The clampdown on Igboho reduced the heated campaign across the south-west for self-determination of the Yorubas. However, the desire for self-determination amongst the Yoruba persists with the activities of Ilana Omo Oodua led by Prof. Banji Akintoye. Notably, the group sent a correspondence to President Muhammadu Buhari informing him of the desire of the Yoruba race to officially leave Nigeria. The correspondence is yet to receive any official reply from the Nigerian Government.

Unarguably, the subsisting and recurring self-determination agitations infer that the response of the Federal Government is ineffective or rather not entirely effective as the crisis lingers and continue to pose a threat to the political stability and unity of the Nigerian state. As such, it becomes necessary to seek alternatives in addressing issues of self-determination.

### **Yoruba Traditional Disputes Resolution Methods**

The Yoruba clan is a very organized and principled race with philosophies and ideologies guiding their engagements and interactions in the society. Yoruba boast of principles of government, marriage, trade and economy, conflicts resolution and etcetera even before the advent of civilization and colonialism. The organization and administration of the Old Oyo Empire is a testament to the existence of these philosophies and principles. Taking cue from her philosophy presented in the axiom *a ki { de lati k.o.o'tu ka sp'r.e* meaning *we cease to be friends after going to court*, the Yoruba seek civil mode of resolving disputes in their society hence the doctrine of Yoruba traditional disputes resolution methods. Lawal (ibid) avers that the hallmark of Yoruba traditional disputes resolution methods is the sustainability of harmonious relationship during and after conflicts resolution. The traditional conflicts resolution methods of the Yoruba sets out to resolve differences and altercations necessitating the conflict whilst maintaining the existing relationship between the parties involved in the conflicts.

The doctrine of traditional disputes resolution among the Yoruba is centered on the principles of fairness, equity, justice and truth. Warring parties in line with the ethics of the Yoruba race are expected to be sincere in their agitations and differences to facilitate a peaceful resolution accepted by the parties involved in the conflict. These principles are applied through the methods and institutions set aside for conflicts resolution. Lessons are also taken

from proverbs, idioms, axioms and folktales to add experience and societal convictions to the conflicts resolution techniques for credence and ideological purposes. (Lawal *ibid*, Olaoba 2006)

The Yoruba traditional disputes resolution methods is centered on four techniques; *if<;mjwer9* (*negotiation*), *ipari 9a'* (*mediation*), *I'pitusiuiw9* (*reconciliation/peacemaking*) and *idaj9* (*arbitration*). The significance of these conflicts resolution methods is that it is a predicated on establishing a common ground, deploying equality strategies and initiatives capable of providing a lasting solution to the conflicts whilst maintaining existing relationship between conflicting parties ultimately in the interest of national unity and cohesion. The methods underscore the need for a peaceful resolution of conflicts by employing peace-building strategies within the Yoruba cultural milieu in the interest of ensuring continued relationship and peace between warring parties and particularly forestalling the reoccurrence of such conflict. The first three are most prominent and deployed in the event of any conflict while the final one is only applied as a last resort in the case of ineffectiveness of the first three techniques or perhaps when settling a critical conflict necessitating the use of minimal force or authority. *If9r9wer9* involves setting out to resolve a conflict by facilitating a common ground where the warring parties are treated equally with a view to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This method entails listening to both parties, establish the issues behind the conflict, and examine how to resolve the conflict permanently in win-win situation for both parties forestalling reoccurrence of such conflict in the future. *ipari i;a'* requires finding a mediator who is interested in the harmonious relationship and peaceful coexistence of the conflicting parties. The mediator relying on customs and social norms points out the demerits of the conflict and seek the resolution of the underlying issues causing the conflict. *Ipitusaaw9* encompasses interfering in a brewing conflict to prevent it from degenerating into a cold or full-blown crisis. This technique embraces seeking the resolution of the conflict by addressing conflict causative issues using soothing words to mitigate the effect of the crisis while restoring peace. *ida;j9* calls for the appointment of a judge to preside over the trial of the warring factions. The judge painstakingly and without bias listens to both parties to ascertain the foundation of the conflict, determine the right and wrong, apportion blames and consequently give a judgment which is binding on all parties. It is important to state that this technique is civil in nature; minimal force and insignificant fines are imposed on

necessary parties to serve as deterrent to others unlike the court arbitration obtainable in the western culture.

Indigenous important personalities in the political structure of the Yoruba are engaged in deploying these strategies for conflicts resolution. These personalities include; *olori-ebi* (family head), *oloye a'dugbo!olori* (province head), *baali*: (district heads), *?gb? ati awo* (community associations and secret societies) and *9ba ati awpn ijoye* (king and chiefs). The *olori-ebi* is involved in resolving conflicts within the family context and is expected to report same to the province head for onward transmission through the chain till it gets to the king; the paramount ruler of the society. The *oloye adugbo* sees to the resolution of brewing conflicts in his province which is beyond the family heads whilst bringing it to the notice of the district head after a successful resolution for his information and onward transmission to the king. The *baali*: represents the King at districts level and exercise as much authority as the king in their districts. The *baali*: makes concise effort to resolve disputes in his district upon unsuccessful attempts by the family head and province head. The district head specifically see to conflicts involving different province under his leadership. At the end of the resolution, the district head notifies the king of the conflict and the process of resolution. *J:;gb? ati awo* are pressure groups who take part in the conflict resolution process in the Yoruba cultural milieu. They resolve conflicts that occur in socio-economic gatherings like market, village square, recreational centers etcetera in the interest of peace and orderliness in the society. Oba ati awpn ijoye sits at the apex of the socio-political unit of the Yoruba and are equally responsible for conflicts resolution in the society. The king together with his chiefs sees to the resolution of all conflicts and crisis under his jurisdictions. The king takes report of all conflicts from the family, provinces and districts. The king acts on underlying conflicts requiring immediate attention particularly in cases of the inability of the family, province and district head to resolve such crisis. The king conducts a trial for the conflicting parties and gives a judgment which is final on the parties. All conflicts regardless of the peculiarities and difficulty get resolved by the king.

It is pertinent to state that conflicts resolution is a matter of relationship, peace and social order among the Yoruba. They are particularly interested in fostering peace rather than determining who is right and wrong. As a matter of fact, they leave no stone unturned and go as far as employing extra-judicial means such as *epe* (laying curses) and *ibura* (oath-taking) to seek resolution of

crisis threatening the unity and prosperity of the society. Ultimately, the basics of the traditional conflicts resolution methods of the Yoruba is to identify underlying issues causing the crisis, foreground the disadvantages associated with the crisis, seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict such that both parties are satisfied and forestall reoccurrence of such crisis.

## **Yoruba Traditional Conflicts Resolution Method as A Panacea to Self-Determination Agitations in Southern Nigeria**

Certainly, the crisis associated with the self-determination agitations in Southern Nigeria is worrisome and worthy of concern for all. Undeniably, the Government has taken series of actions and deployed several strategies which can absolutely be said to be ineffective with the reality of the situation and intermittent agitation. This therefore calls for a more strategic approach equipped with processes capable of finding a lasting solution to this lingering crisis. Positively, the Yoruba traditional conflicts resolution methods tick the boxes and can provide an effective viz long-lasting solution to this imbroglio.

Yoruba conflicts resolution methods places premium on truth and sustainability of harmonious relationship between conflicting parties whilst making efforts at resolving conflicts. This approach assures warring factions equity particularly justice and set underway a peaceful resolution of such conflicts. Unarguably, the Nigerian Government has shown insincerity in handling some of the issues associated with self-determination agitations. The Government is perceived to encourage terrorism and insecurity by failing to prosecute herdsmen apprehended for different criminal and terrorist activities which are a critical subject matter in the discourse of secession. This same Government is intolerant of peaceful demonstration geared at the actualization of self-determination and exercises no constraints in waging war against the agitators; thousands have been reported to have been killed. The insincerity of the Government is to a large extent responsible for renewed agitations as agitators feel betrayed and cheated by the actions and inactions of the state. Certainly, a sincere response from the Government where terrorists are dealt with; made to face the wrath of the law to serve as deterrent to others would assure the agitators a level playing field raising their interest in the negotiating with the Government. Also, the Nigerian Government must halt the assault on the agitators as it is clearly shows insensitivity to their plights. As suggested by the Yoruba methods, the Government should employ a civil approach in

negotiation where agitators are treated respectfully and sincere discussions on reconciliation and restoring the national order are canvassed.

The Nigerian Government specifically needs to take cue from the first process in the Yoruba traditional conflicts resolution methods; establishing and understanding the underlying issues behind the conflict and addressing same. The Yoruba at the very beginning of addressing any conflict, pay attention to the conflict causative issues and try to eradicate this to put an end to the conflict and prevent future reoccurrence. The Nigerian Government has failed to understand and take into consideration the underlying issues necessitating the agitations for self-determination. The failure of the Government to address this is responsible for the continuous agitation and threat to national unity. In-all-lielihood, concise and sincere effort to address issues of nepotism, insecurity, corruption and maladministration will appeal to the agitators and give them reasons to believe in the Nigeria project and forsake secession as their concerns are already addressed. Ensuring equitable distribution of material and financial resources, adhering strictly to the principles of federal character in political appointments and aggressive action against terrorist tormenting the Southerners will assuage their feelings and soften their stance on separation. The understanding and addressing of conflicts causing issues as exemplified in the Yoruba traditional conflicts resolution methods presents a better and more effective way of handling self-determination issues other than the arbitrary approach of the Government.

The involvement of indigenous important personalities and relevant stakeholders of the society in the process of conflicts resolution has worked wonders for the Yoruba. These personalities serve as mediators and play an invaluable role in ensuring the peaceful resolution of conflicts within their realm and reach. The status accrued to these personalities by their ancestral heritage empowers them to intellectually guide the actions and thought of the parties of the conflict thereby resolving the conflict. In Yorubaland, a conflict presided over by the King is considered resolved as no true son of the soil can disobey the king. As regard the Nigerian situation, the two leading agitators for secession; Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho as at different times shown regard for their traditional institutions, this therefore informs that they remain committed to the socio-cultural ethics of their society. Against this backdrop, the Government can leverage on the socio-political relevance and capabilities of the traditional system specifically the indigenous personalities to set underway a negotiation process

capable of resolving the conflictive issues between the Nigerian state and the self-determination agitators. It is believed that with a committee or panel with diplomats, government officials and traditional leaders, a discussion and negotiation capable of resolving the differences and proffering permanent solution to the intermittent crisis and agitation can be reached. Particularly, the traditional personalities will play a huge role in getting the agitators to soften their stance and be realistic with their demands by pointing out the demerits associated with the conflict which will pave way for the peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The traditional conflicts resolution methods of the Yoruba seeks the resolution of issues viz conflicts without bias and through the most civil means while ensuring that the sustainability of the harmonious relationship existent between the conflicting parties. This is achieved by facilitating a common ground where both parties are availed equally opportunity to argue their case, establishing the cause of the conflict to get to the root of the issue, underlining the disadvantages of the conflict at an individual and a societal level and consequently leading the discourse to find a solution to the crisis while obviating the reoccurrence of such conflict in the future. If this notion and strategies are adopted in addressing the separatist agitations in Nigeria, the unity of the Nigerian state will be preserved by addressing the grievances of the agitators and restoring the national order through true federalism, restructuring and good governance.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated the recurring self-determination agitations from the Southern Nigeria which dates back to the first republic with a view to determining the rationale behind the intermittent agitations and proffering a solution to prevent further agitations in the interest of unity and political stability of Nigeria. The study noted that issues bothering on political marginalization, corruption, maladministration, and insecurity are responsible for the secessionist agitations. The response of the Government to these agitations is far from convincing and progressive as no significant progress have been made in resolving the conflict, restoring peace, and maintaining the national outlook. It holds that the failure of the Government to address these topical issues is responsible for the renewed agitations at different times. The study view the Yoruba traditional conflicts resolution methods predicated on

seeking peaceful resolution of any conflict through discussion and negotiation viz maintaining neutrality and equity while identifying conflict causative issues, proffering solution to same and preventing future occurrence as a viable strategy worthy of consideration in efforts at addressing and resolving self-determination agitations in Nigeria. It is believed that by being attentive to the plights of the agitators, negotiating with them to ascertain conflict causing issues and making concise sincere efforts at addressing these issues will rescue the situation and prevent subsequent agitations. This paper decries the use of force and recommends the use of negotiation and addressing conflict causing issues to put to bed the discourse on self-determination and strengthen the unity of the Nigerian state.

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