



## TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTIONS: THE CASE OF THE OLD OYO EMPIRE

Ajayi Olalekan Ezekiel<sup>1</sup>,

Issa Abdulraheem<sup>2i</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Student,

Department of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship,

College of Humanities Management and Social Sciences,

Kwara State University,

Malete, Kwara State,

Nigeria

[orcid.org/0000-0003-4346-6970](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4346-6970)

<sup>2</sup>PhD, Department of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship,

College of Humanities Management and Social Sciences,

Kwara State University,

Malete, Kwara State,

Nigeria

### Abstract:

This study looked at traditional African conflict resolution methods, specifically in Yoruba-speaking communities in Nigeria's western region. The Old Oyo empire used traditional conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, adjudication, and reconciliation, as well as cross-examination, to offer a chance to interact with the parties involved, promote consensus building, reconstruct social bridges, and enforce order in the society, according to the paper that fully explains the resolution of disputes and justice dispensation. The study used an exploratory research approach, focusing on the history and Yoruba literature, academic journals on the internet, blogs, government publications and records, a variety of research reports, and individual research. The Western world regards these methods as superior for promoting peaceful coexistence. The traditional method of conflict management and resolution is thus recommended because it is less expensive and friendlier, and further national research into the causes of the 16-year-long inter-border war Ekiti-Parapo, popularly known as the Kiriji War, is also recommended for further finding.

**Keywords:** adjudication, mediation, negotiation, Old Oyo empire, reconciliation

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [lekan.ajayi20@kwasu.edu.ng](mailto:lekan.ajayi20@kwasu.edu.ng), [abdulraheemissa@yahoo.com](mailto:abdulraheemissa@yahoo.com)

## 1. Introduction

When two opposing ideas or ideologies come into conflict in the Old Oyo Empire, the result can be either a victory or a defeat for the individual involved. Conflict resolution, change, and management, on the other hand, can lead to win-win situations. The covenant mark of truth must not be overlooked by those involved in a dispute. In today's Yoruba Race, no one cares about the truth. For the Yoruba Race to put the pieces back together, they'll need a return to their roots (Johnson, 1921)

Even though conflict is a natural part of life, many people believe that it is a waste of time. Africa is the only place where the conflict is seen in such a unique light (Toshio and Albert's, 2001). Definition of conflict is that it is a battle for ideas and claims to scarce status and power, and resources, when the opponents' goals are to neutralize or destroy their adversaries. However; conflict is inevitable whenever two or more activities that are incompatible are taking place. In some cases, conflict resolution, change, and management can lead to a mutually beneficial outcome.

## 2. Literature View

### 2.1 Conflict Management

Africa has a wide range of conflicts, but it's important to highlight that the Africans themselves don't know how to characterize it. When it comes to networking, enthusiasm appears to be a part of the deal, whether good or bad. This leads to a wide variety of conflict types, from small-scale family feuds to large-scale wars, uprisings, and other forms of mass unrest. Chieftainship and border conflicts are also included. In Africa, these wars are widespread (Olaoba, 2005).

The concept of conflict as a social phenomenon has been characterized in a variety of ways. According to some authors, conflict arises when two or more parties cannot agree on a particular topic. Governments and nation-states may not be the only parties involved in such a war. When there are conflicting national interests, each nation-state pursues its own goals, including gaining territory, gaining access to markets and markets for goods, and overthrowing an enemy government (Omotosho, 2004).

Conflict studies in Africa have often overlooked the need of taking into account the interplay between local and international elements in the development of conflict amongst African countries. Even if it can be described, African warfare cannot be predicted. Even in ties between conflicting cultures, overt expressions of conflict seldom last indefinitely (Robert, 1981).

When two or more countries or groups inside one country engage in a conflict, it is characterized by hostility or tension that manifests itself in subversive economic or military conflicts (Quincy, 1971). To characterize conflict, it is necessary to understand that an identifiable human group, whether it is a group of people from a certain tribe or ethnicity or a group of people from a particular language or religion, is in deliberate opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups. Much more crucially,

conflicts are caused by persons with conflicting goals, in which the capacity of one actor to achieve his or her objectives, relies to an important degree on the choices and actions of other participants. Depending on the conditions, a conflict may be violent or nonviolent, resolvable or insolvable (Omosho, 2004).

If there is an unfair distribution of resources and cultural and political imbalance amongst communities, conflicts are inevitable, there are several factors to consider while dealing with conflict that goes beyond merely physical violence, such as those related to institutional and cultural violence (Adam, 2000). Our ability to manage conflicts and resolve conflicts is nearly completely based on our good understanding of the conflict's structure rather than its symptoms (Kotze, 2000).

Albert (2001) posits on conflict was that it is a vital mechanism by which individual and community objectives and ambitions are expressed; it is a route for the formulation of creative solutions to human issues and a method of developing a collective identity. People, groups, communities, states, and nations all have repercussions from wars, even if the dispute is over. When it comes to resolving conflicts between countries, disagreement may either help or hurt. Even after a battle is over, the repercussions might last for some time (Robert, 1981). While African wars are often regarded as chaotic or deserving of some vague sympathy or humanitarian concern, Wadinga argued that they are seldom the subject of any in-depth political investigation. A divide-and-rule strategy used by the colonial authorities kept ethnic groups submissive and thereby protected them from the threat of uprising (Wadama, 2013).

## **2.2 Conceptualization of a Plan of Action**

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising between individuals or within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict pertains to the opposing ideas and actions of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

## **2.3 Types of Conflict**

When it comes to the definitions of conflict, there are many different ways to think about what it means to be involved in a conflict. Teachers are hesitant to follow regulations or accept additional work, and they don't seem to get along with their administrators. There are many sorts of conflicts in schools. Additionally, principals use an authoritarian style, such as requiring instructors to work uninterrupted throughout school events. Consequently, instructors and school principals are constantly involved in acrimony at any given moment. As a result of their frequent interactions, people in institutions are prone to conflict. Antagonism and understanding amongst staff members may be shown in the form of conflict. All things considered; conflict may be divided into four categories:

- Interpersonal conflict refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another.

- Intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological and involves the individual's thoughts, values, principles, and emotions.
- Intra-group conflict is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intra-group conflict
- Inter-group conflict takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. In addition, competition also contributes to the rise of intergroup conflict.

Other factors fuel this type of conflict and some of these factors may include a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which establishes their own identity as a team (Donohue & Kott, 1992). In addition to this category, Jehn and Mannix (2001) have proposed the division of conflicts into three types: relationship, task, and process. Relationship conflict stems from interpersonal incompatibilities; task conflict is related to disagreements of viewpoints and opinions about a particular task and process conflict refers to disagreement over the group's approach to the task, its methods, and the group process. Even though relationship conflict and process conflict are harmful, task conflict is found to be beneficial since it encourages diversity of opinions; care should be taken so it does not develop into the process or relationship conflict (Denohue & Kott, 1992). Amason & Sapienza (1997) differentiate between affective and cognitive conflict, where cognitive conflict is task-oriented and arises from differences in perspective or judgment, and affective conflict is emotional and arises from personal differences and disputes.

### **3. Principle of Conflict Resolution in Traditional African Societies**

In the pre-colonial days, there were many principles guiding conflict resolution in traditional African societies. Those who want their conflicts resolved must have confidence in the tribunal that would resolve the dispute. These include elders, chiefs, priests, priestesses, secret cults, etc. The disputants must have confidence in them. They (disputants) must be ready to submit themselves to the constituted authorities. These conflicts could be interpersonal conflicts or inter-communal conflicts. These may range from person – person to person – community, nation – nation (Poku, 1998).

#### **3.1 Truth**

This is the major significance of conflict resolution. How would the other opponents know that there will be no partiality? Both disputants must be truthful. The mediator, arbitrator, and judge must also be truthful, the presence of the ancestral forces is a factor; some may collapse or be forced to say the truth because of the ancestral forces. The mediator, judge, and arbitrator must be well prepared because the truth is not static. Truth is also a covenant logo disputants or parties in conflict must not miss. For one of

the conflicting parties to have come to the tribunal, it means that the party is ready or agreed to settle or resolve the dispute, although this is not always the case.

### **3.2 Levels of Conflict Resolution among Some Selected Ethnic Groups in Africa**

In traditional African societies, the law enforcement agents, traditional police and courts were responsible for ensuring compliance with the laws of the land. Disputants often take their cases to elders and neighborhood mediators who can be depended upon to resolve conflicts with dispatch in the local language, using the familiar standard of behavior. For practical purposes, two ethnic groups in African societies shall be examined.

## **4. Yoruba History**

Indigenous law in the Yoruba community is mostly based on customs and traditions. Verbal art and remembering were intrinsically linked to literacy, not only in the written word. Even though the Yoruba's legal traditions were primarily unwritten, they were kept alive and well-known by performing them. In nutshell, the Yoruba people relied on the wisdom and traditional knowledge of their ancestors, which were constantly dramatized, as their source of adjudication in traditional society.

Elders in traditional culture are a source of order and decorum because they gather beneath a tree and speak until they agree. This shows that in Yoruba culture, the wisdom and knowledge of the elders are the most potent source. Olaoba (2001) in the past, passersby would intervene to mediate conflicts between teenagers and young people, ensuring that peace and harmony were restored. Various communal organizations and guilds were charged with ensuring that the operations of the marketplace were free of theft, debt, and fraud.

It is also uncommon for the spirits of deceased ancestors and gods to be summoned, and those summoned serve to warn everyone present—especially the disputants—of the consequences of not speaking the truth. The spirit of the palace (court) may be found in the marketplaces. The spirit might be evil or good (Olaoba, 2002). In Africa, there were three stages of conflict resolution: inter-personal or family, extended family, and village or town level conflict remedies (chief in council). Community members are represented by these layers of government. Bale heads the Idle (Nuclear family), the smallest unit. Second is the Ebi (extended family) led by Mogaji, who is the most powerful person in the Ebi. There is no limit on the number of members of one's extended family.

The Baale (chief-of-ward/quarter) is in charge of the quarter, which consists of multiple family compounds and includes the man's personal family of wife or wives and children (Albert, 1995). Cases that Bale has handled include those involving his children, his foster children, and his children's truancy, as well as street fights involving his children and those of his foster families. Minor confrontations may be resolved quickly by scolding the troublemakers and apologizing to those who were offended.

Bale must go to the person who was insulted and praise them for embracing a peaceful settlement. Bale has a responsibility to summon his family and tell them to stop causing any more problems. A fine was not issued by the court. There are, however, appeals that may be filed from the district-chief court to the second district-chief court (Ile-ejo ijoye Adugbo). There were civil cases argued in this court.

A preliminary inquiry of a criminal matter might be conducted by the court of the monarch (Ile-ejo Oba) before it could be tried in court (Oguntomisin, 2004). The connection between Baale (chiefs) and members of his family is likewise controlled by the Baale (chiefs). The whole lineage or ward might be at risk in these situations. Afterward, the focus shifts to how to maintain good neighborliness after the issue has been settled. Conflicts over land ownership, adultery by a woman, and conflict over inheritance are the most prevalent in this group. However, in Yoruba territory, the Chief-in-Council (Igbimo Ilu) was the highest traditional institution for resolving disputes.

Before colonization, any criminal brought before a pre-colonial council may be executed by the council itself. The king's court was the most important. The Ogoni court was likewise the last appeals court, although it looked to be the final appeals court between Egba and Ijebu (Oguntomisin, 2004). Unless the chief asks her permission to rise, a lady is supposed to remain on her knees and provide the ceremonial pleasantries. When meeting someone, a male must first bow his head, which is a form of customary courtesy.

Regardless of what is said, it is accepted. Damage awards from the mediators in civil trials are uncommon in Yoruba land's traditional justice. Peaceful resolution of disagreements is the primary goal. In other words, in the ancient court system, restoring peace is what was most important. As a deterrent to some anti-social conduct, however, mediators may give minor penalties. Local gin, or kola nuts, may be used as a kind of payment for this service. As a manner of commemorating the end of the fight, kola nuts are cracked and distributed to everyone. Everyone is given a sample of the drink. Water may be used in place of gin or palm wine if they are not available.

The emancipation of the gods and ancestors of the persons engaged in a conflict is often symbolized by the pouring of palm wine or gin. As a result of these acts, the period of reconciliation has been extended. Igbo traditional society's deterrent to certain types of anti-social conduct is next on the list of topics to be examined. Kola nuts or local gins, both of which have ceremonial importance, may be requested as payment. As a manner of commemorating the end of the fight, kola nuts are cracked and shared among the group. Everyone is given a sample of the drink. Drinking water may be substituted if gin or palm wine is unavailable. The emancipation of the gods and ancestors of the persons engaged in a conflict is often symbolized by the pouring of palm wine or gin. As a result of these acts, the period of reconciliation has been extended.

## **5. Methods Engaged in Resolution of Conflict in Old Oyo**

The methods of performing conflict resolution in the Old Oyo Empire are as follows: mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration, and negotiation. It also includes

employing extra-judicial devices and the usage of legal maxims to persuade or convince the disputants about the implication or otherwise of their behavior. These methods have been effective in the Old Oyo Empire in the Western Part of Nigeria.

### **5.1 History of Gonja-Nawuri Tribes in Ghana**

The origins of this conflict can be traced back to colonial times in the early nineteenth century when the Gonja and the Nawuri fought over ownership of Kpandai land. The conflict lasted in various stages from 1935 to 1992 (Mbowura, 2014). According to Yahaya (2016), the conflict between the two ethnic groups occurred in the years 1935, 1990, 1992, and 1994. The primary source of contention was over who owned the Kpandai land. Mbowura (2012) confirmed this claim when he stated that the Nawuri-Gonja conflict in Kpandai District was about determining who was the rightful owner of the land in Alfai.

To facilitate their rule, the colonial authorities implemented an indirect rule, a policy system in which the Gonja was given precedence over the Nawuri. This sowed discord between the two ethnic groups, and they have never been on good terms since. Mbowura (2014) expressed a similar viewpoint, stating that the indirect rule system introduced in the Northern Ghana administration in 1932 allowed centralized states to consolidate their power over subsumed ones, resulting in the Nawuri, for example, losing their sovereignty. The Gonja claimed allodial rights to Nawuri lands as their overlords. Since 1932, the two ethnic groups have been at odds in Alfa, disputing jurisdictional authority and allodial rights.

If the two ethnic groups are still dissatisfied with the resolution, the issue will be referred to the Alfa, the war chief, and invariably to the chief. This is accompanied by a request to form a separate mat association, which effectively separates from the leader whose conduct is the subject of the complaints. The dissatisfaction is expressed tactfully to the chief in public (Rucherts, 1990). The proceedings in the chief's court are formal; the emphasis is no longer on mediation and reconciliation but on the relationship between proven testimony and the sanctions imposed by a headman's court. The difference between the lower court (Mat association) and the court of the chief is nothing more than mutual trust.

### **5.2 Mediation**

Mediation is an old method of conflict management surrounded by secrecy. It involves the non-coercive intervention of the mediators(s), called the third party either to reduce or ... go beyond or brings the conflict to a peaceful settlement. Olaoba (2005) described mediation as a method of conflict resolution that had been so critical to traditional society. The mediators usually endeavored that peace and harmony reigned supreme in the society at whatever level of mediation. This is also usually couched with the dictum of no victor no vanquished as buttressed by the maxim (Isurmona, 2005).

To assign responsibility to the guilty party, the other party must also be held accountable. The parties involved in the dispute look for mediators inside their groups or civilizations. All across Africa, elders are regarded as trustworthy mediators because

of their acquired knowledge and experiences. They play different roles depending on the circumstances, customs, and personalities that surround them. These tasks include pressing, providing recommendations, giving evaluations, transmitting proposals on behalf of the parties, underlining important norms and regulations, imagining the scenario if an agreement is not achieved, or reiterating the agreement already established (Bright-Brock, 2001).

### **5.3 Adjudication**

In traditional African society, adjudication involves bringing all disputants in the conflict to a meeting usually in the chambers or compounds of family heads, quarter heads, and palace court as the case may be. The dialogue was linked with the adjudicatory processes in traditional (Olaoba, 2005).

### **5.4 Reconciliation**

This was the most significant aspect of conflict resolution. It is the end product of adjudication. After the disputants have been persuaded to end the dispute, peace was restored. This restoration of peace and harmony was always anchored on the principle of giving a little and getting a little. This idea buttresses the idea of the disputing parties giving concessions. A feast was usually organized to confirm the readiness of the conflicting parties toward reaching points of compromise. At least, as characteristic of African traditional society, the conflict resolution method is the use of arbitration. The reconciliation function is practiced by an authority figure that mediates between conflicting parties but is empowered to make binding judgments. The purpose is not to render a judgment in law but to reconcile the conflicting parties and their norms. The relationship between the authority and the community is cushioned by community representatives who advise the authority (William, 2000).

### **5.5 Negotiation**

In negotiation, the secret is to harmonize the interests of the parties concerned. Thus, even when the conflict involves a member against his or her society, there is an emphasis on recuperation and reinsertion of errant members back into their place in society. The recovery of a dissident member can just as well be seen as the restoration of the harmony and integrity of the community, as the assertion of value consensus and social cohesion, so that the management of the conflict favors the concerns of both parties. In traditional Yoruba society, peace was negotiated. Apology for wrongs done to individuals and the entire community was a feature of negotiation. A such apology was channeled through Yoruba elders, compound heads, and chiefs of high caliber in the society. It is done on the representative level or quasi-representation. The Babaogun (patron) played the role of a representative in the sense of conflict resolution (Olaoba, 2005).



## 6. Importance of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned, with the hope of at least reducing the scope, intensity, and effects of conflicts. During formal and informal meetings, conflict resolution exercises permit a reassessment of views and claims as a basis for finding options for crisis and divergent points of view. Those who organize conflict resolution exercises or meetings usually constitute the third party in a triangular arrangement and consist of traditional rulers (King, Chiefs, etc.). Conflict resolution in plural societies can be quite complex, principally because of the determinate effects of culture and language symbolism. Onigun & Albert (2001) affirm that it is quite dangerous to relegate culture to the background in conflict resolution. Although culture is a marker of social differences, it should be regarded as an obstacle to conflict resolution in multi-ethnic or multi-cultural societies.

Conflict resolution performs a healing function in African societies. It provides an opportunity for the examination of an alternative positive decision to resolve differences. Failure to resolve the conflict over access to commonly valued scarce resources, and over divergent perceptions of socio-political situations, has the high potential of degenerating into genocide or fratricide as it occurred among Ife-Modakeke in Yorubaland 37 and Tis-Jumen of Nigeria, and the Hutu-Tutsi of Burundi and Rwanda (Punier, 1995) Conflict resolution promotes consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions, and the re-enactment of order in society. Conflicts hardly break up societies (Otite, 2001). For conflict resolution, the obvious implication is to view conflicts as non-isolated events in their social context. Such perspective is not narrowly focused on a conflict and its resolution. It takes into account the cultural setting and the social context. It looks at the history of preceding events that have led to the conflict concerned. And while concentrating on the conflict itself and the process of resolving it, it takes possible implications for the future seriously. A wider look is taken than one which just includes the disputing parties, and possible consequences for others in their families and social network are also taken into consideration. Potential effects on relationships and interests are envisaged. Cross-examination was an important mechanism employed in the process of conflict resolution in traditional African society. It was a means of weighting evidence through cross-checking and corroborating the facts of the conflict (Olaoba, 2000).

In the Yoruba maxim, a good sense of justice is associated with cross-examination which is expressed as follows:

*“Consequently, in traditional African societies, particularly, Yoruba land, in conflict resolution undue favor to the disputants was discouraged.”*

In traditional African Societies, extra-judicial methods were employed in conflict resolution. These took the form of ordeals and the invocation of supernatural forces to expose all sides to the conflict has shown quite clearly that oath-taking which was one of the extra-judicial methods usually assisted the judge or adjudicators to locate areas of

weakness in the conflict. Aside from the iron object (sacred to the god of iron) used for oath-taking, the Yorubas also use *apasa* (weaving instrument) and *iru* (chiefly scepter), and royal shrines or religious sanctuaries are also used. The wrath of the gods is used for eliciting facts of the dispute. Such gods as Sango (God of Thunder), Yemoja (goddess of the river), and Ayelala (guardian of social morality) are used to ascertain the veracity of the story told by disputants (Olaoba, 2001).

## **7. The Objective of the Study**

Investigate and analyse the positive and negative contributions of conflict management and resolution in the old Oyo empire.

## **8. Assimilation Theory**

For the paper, Assimilation theory was adopted and defined as the interpenetration and fusion of people or ethnic groups to obtain the sentiments, memories, and attitudes of other people or ethnic groups to share their experiences and history by incorporating a common cultural life. Among those who have contributed to this theory are Charles Hirschman and many others.

Assimilation theory, according to Hirschman (1978), has been a major sociological research theoretical framework for tribal and ethnic inequality. The author stated that the lack of convincing substitute theories is the reason for this theory's dominance. A major sociological analyst questioned whether European out-migration was a major catalyst for global societal restructuring. Intergroup contacts, according to Park, typically go through phases of the race relations cycle. According to the author, fundamental social forces such as out-migration because of recurring cycles in intergroup history, the race relations cycle, which includes contacts, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation, appear to be progressive and permanent. The author emphasized that migration and explorations bring people together at the contact stage, resulting in economic competition and a new social organization. As a result of contact, competition and conflict emerge between the host and migrating groups. According to Park, accommodation is a critical condition in the cycle of race relations. It entails a migrating group forcing itself to adapt to a new social environment. Park saw accommodation as involving relationship stabilization, including the possibility of permanent caste systems. The author also stated the race relations cycle inevitably leads from contact to assimilation. However, he and the majority of scholars in this tradition have questioned the long-term trend of assimilation of subordinated racial and ethnic groups in modern societies.

## **8. Methodology**

The study used an exploratory research approach with a focus on literature in the fields of business administration, entrepreneurship, internet academic journal, blogs,

government publications and records, a variety of research reports, and individual research.

## 9. Conclusion and Recommendation

When it comes to dispute resolution, individuals of different races and ethnicities have different approaches. Pre-colonial cultures in Africa, on the other hand, depended on oath-taking and divination for criminal detection rather than the police as is the case in Europe. Some countries still use these practices, although on a much smaller scale, to elicit confessions from suspects during interrogation. As a result of this focus on lawyers and judges in the Western world, traditional Africa has a variety of methods for resolving disputes and distributing justice.

These include councils of elders and king's courts, people's assemblies (Nwolise, 2005). Conflict in Africa, on the other hand, comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. From an African viewpoint, war does not have a single meaning. It might be a kind of societal upheaval or a strained relationship. This has resulted in an enormous number of confrontations that range in severity from small-scale disputes to all-out wars.

Traditional African civilizations are rife with these types of disputes. In a Nutshell; it was brought to Africa by the slave traders and colonialist encroachment that tainted the Africans' techniques of avoiding and controlling conflict. Africans, too, have their unique methods for promoting peace, developing trust, and fostering cooperation. Colonialism, including psycho-war, has wiped out these unique and very effective approaches.

This resulted in a lack of stability and slowed growth. Elders and other more peaceful institutions like age grades, and highly esteemed societies have been supplanted by police actions. Military 'peacekeeping' activities, and protracted court hearings in various disputes between disputants today. As the phrase goes, people are as good as dead and forgotten if they do not live out their culture and heritage and rely on it for self-confidence, independence, growth, and stability.

A civilization can't be self-confident or self-reliant if it does not recognize the importance of its history for its present and future (Nwolise, 2005).

Moreover, in the traditional African States, the essence of dispute settlement and conflict resolution is to remove the root causes of the conflict, reconcile the conflicting parties, and ensure harmony, and this required getting at the truth; to set the right milieu for societal production and development; to promote good governance, law, and order, and to promote peace; and conclusively, to provide a framework for the development of the economy. These are in contrast to the current state of affairs, in which no one cares about the truth. If Africans are going to put the pieces back together, they'll need to rethink their fundamental principles.

Based on the study findings the researcher recommended; the need for further nationwide research on the causes inter the border war between the Ekiti-ijesa parapo popularly called Kiriji war that lasted for 16 years.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study recognizes the excellence of supporting of the Yoruba history journal and especially the Ekiti-Parapo peace point in between igbajo via Oke-imesi township located in Osun State, Nigeria, West Africa where the longest inter-tribal war was resolute and student of conflict management at all levels and my PhD supervisor in respect of associate professor, Issa Abdulraheem of Department of Business and Entrepreneurship, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

### **About the Authors**

**Ajayi Olalekan Ezekiel**, Assistant Lecturer, PhD Student, Kwara State University, Nigeria. Research interests: Conflict Management, Marketing and Strategy Management, [orcid.org/0000-0003-4346-6970](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4346-6970)

**Issa Abdulraheem**, Associate Professor, PhD, Kwara State University, Nigeria. Research interests: Human Resource Management, Change Management, Diversity Management, Entrepreneurship Development.

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