

Research Note

Notes from Field Work on the Ìjemò in Abéòkúta

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Abstract

Until recent times, the vast part of the history and traditions of the Yorùbá people existed in Oral Traditions (OT) and Other Oral Traditions (OOT). On the one hand, OT consists mainly of eyewitness and orally transmitted accounts of events, developments, and traditions. On the other hand, OOT which consists of creative oral arts that form the basis of their norms and cultural practices that lays credence to history, is by the turn of time running into a nebula of obscurity because of modern developments in space and technology. This study discusses the challenges researchers in the collection of these traditions could face, using the Ìjemò community in Abeokuta as a case study. It is elementary that the composition of the postcolonial Nigerian state is a fusion of multiple nationalities, people of different cultural and historical backgrounds. For various reasons related to political contestation and reproduction of historical traditions, these entities preserved their animated past from the historical abyss. Notes adumbrated in this study consist of accounts that take the history of Abeokuta beyond the Sodeke era in the third decade

of the nineteenth century. These notes came from various oral bases collected for three months in the city of Abeokuta. Further study related to the historical study of the city could pick on the limitations of the current research to reconstruct a comprehensive account of the people.

Keywords: Oral traditions, Abẹ̀òkúta, Egba History, Ìjemò, and Sodeke.

But it is our history, we can say whatever we want.¹

In a way, this statement represents a common attitude of cultural groups across Africa when attempts are made to reconstruct their preliterate past. This attitude towards the traditions of this preliterate past is even heightened when such intellectual endeavor aims at some clarity that unfortunately makes the researcher appear to be an interrogator and the informant or subject, an accused. Meanwhile, this misconceived interpretation of the scene by the informant might have been different had it not been for the political currency of this past in the present and its insurance value for the future.² It is this expediency that brings the world of the researcher working on the origins of cultural groups in Africa and that of the in-group member³ relied upon for information in acute contradiction, at one point or the other, during the research. Researchers want the scientific truth; at least in the relative sense of it⁴, informants want the “mythical truth” that appeals to their

1 A sign of frustration in a casual discussion with Chief Salami Ajisafe, Surveyor (Apẹ̀nà of Ìjemò), 62, Òkè-Ìjemò when questions for the purpose of clarity over some inconsistencies and irrationalities in the traditions of origin of the Ìjemò were consistently raised by the research team.

2 A. I. Asiwaju, “Political Motivation and Oral Historical Traditions in Africa: The Case of Yoruba Crowns, 1900-1960,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 46, No. 2 (1976): 113-27; Insa Nolte, “Chieftaincy and the State in Abacha’s Nigeria: Kingship, Political Rivalry and Competing Histories in Abeokuta during the 1990s,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 72, No. 3 (2002): 368-90; Olufemi Vaughan, “Chieftaincy Politics and Communal Identity in Western Nigeria, 1893-951,” *The Journal of African History* 44, No. 2 (2003): 283-302.

3 An in-group member is defined by Tajfel to mean one that belongs to a certain group identity acknowledged by others to be a platform for possible relationship with out-group members— i.e. those outside of the group. Indeed, belonging to this group requires emotional investment as well as attachment which are the basic essentials that hold this identity together and ensure its reproduction. For more on this and how in-group identities are formed, see Tajfel Henri Tajfel, “Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations”, *Annual Review Psychol.*, Vol. 33 (1982): 1- 39.

4 Scientific truth is referred to as rational information derived from data that could stand the test of empiricism and juxtaposition with other available data on the on subject matter and/or related to the subject matter. Among other things, owing to the transient value of this truth in the face of new evidence that could readily thwart the conclusions earlier made; and the limited extent of the objectivity of the historian in assessing and

emotions, sentiments, and sociopolitical leanings. On this course, both parties become skeptical about each other, sometimes to the level of mutual suspicion, none of which is healthy for a successful fieldwork as the researcher must have certainly hoped. Also, in a bid to safeguard the political currency and social value of history, it is not uncommon for researchers to be told conflicting and irreconcilable accounts. This could be referred to as the making and remaking of identities in and through oral traditions. Hence, Keinsteins concludes that "...our crises of memory are concomitant with crises of identity."⁵ Bringing this phenomenon into common light, Blier wrote in her study of the *Batammaliba* that

In short, the *Batammaliba* genesis account reported to me by Lalie was not seen by him to be a fixed form but rather one open to later clarification. The changes he made did not seem to reflect an error in telling or a memory lapse but rather suggested his realization that the ideas presented in the earlier telling no longer fit the material evidence of the situation. As Lalie thought about the world and the cosmos, he apparently saw contradictions in the first version and altered his account (the theorem) to reflect this new knowledge. Whether viewed primarily as scientific exegesis, political charter, or origin myth, *Batammaliba* perspectives on genesis suggest how complex many of these stories can be.⁶

The production of collective memory, through which the construction and reconstruction of history of preliterate societies is primarily anchored is subject to various factors and considerations.⁷ Foremost is the interest factor, which determines the value of events, including how they are remembered, emphasized, and forgotten. In the case of the ̀̀jemò, their major drive for historical reconstruction resides within the infamous 1914 ̀̀jemò Massacre committed by the British colonial government. The event is widely believed by informants to have been the cause of the current marginal position of the

interpreting the data, Carr postulated that historical truth, which also passes for a scientific truth can only be relative. E.H Carr, *What is History*, edited by R.W. Davies (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

5 Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41, No. 2 (2002): 184.

6 Suzanne Preston Blier, "African Creation Myths as Political Strategy," *African Arts* 37, No. 1 (2004) 41.

7 Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 179-197.

community of Ègbàland.⁸ Although the Lagos Weekly Record publication about two years after the incident related it to the crisis in the British colonial estate in Ceylon in 1916, the parallel is hard to draw aside in the adequate attention given to the Ceylon crisis in the British Parliament and by the Colonial Office, and compensation drawn to victims of injustice perpetrated by the British colonial government in the colony.⁹

This informed their interest in the sociopolitical developments in Abeokuta before and after the 1830s—a period that marked the migration of the larger population of Abeokuta as it is known today, under the leadership of Sodeke. The task before the community becomes how to convince the historian interested in their traditions and origins that indeed the inglorious massacre of their people in 1914 eroded their historical development. The Ìjemò massacre could thus be seen to be central to efforts at reconstructing the traditions of the community, ostensibly owing to the magnitude of damage it caused the people and the political collateral of this damage.

Given their historical leverage as one of the few earliest settlers in Abeokuta—a position echoed by many in the city, including the Alake, Oba Adedotun Gbedebo—the people argue that they deserve a better position in the scheme of things in Ègbàland. This interest shaped the oral traditions and knowledge. Most of the traditions collected during the course of the fieldwork centered more on the affirmation and authenticity of the account of their earliest habitation in Abeokuta before the coming of the Sodeke-led group and others around 1830 and the 1914 catastrophe. Attempts to get more detail accounts revolving around these traditions, particularly as related to the former, were not productive. This does not imply that the collected oral data do not give any insight into the matter of migration and settlement, but inadequacies surface in the details. If this were to be the case in the aspect of their history that interest them and germane to the political visibility they seek, one could only wonder what would be of other aspects of their history that do not speak to these needs.

Any attempt to bring the preliterate past into the present for better understanding of how it has affected the present as well as its role in defining the future is a daunting task for historians to contend with. These traditions are lost to oblivion and the task of reconstructing the precolonial past in Africa is becoming more and more difficult, particularly with the process and

8 Interview with Justice Kolawole Omotosho, a Federal High Court Judge, age 53, Mafaro-Abeokuta, 31st of March, 2019.

9 *The Lagos Weekly Record*, Vol. XXVI—27, November 4 & 11, 1916; *The Lagos Weekly Record* Vol XXVI—27, “Proposed Duty on Palm Kernels, Debate in the House of Commons, August 3, 1916, Extracts from Official Report, Vol.85—No.81,” December 23-30.

hydra-headed effects of modernization on the society. Reconstructing the history of the people of Ìjemò in Abeokuta, like other Yoruba polities, is even more tasking since no authoritative work had been conducted on the early history and formation of the community. The ambiguities in this study transcend, *inter alia*, collection of oral traditions on the accounts of migrations, settlement and evolution of the political morphology of the people. Nevertheless, it is believed that some worthy level of sense could be made out of the following accounts collected on the field. Primarily, this covers the pre-1830 history of the people.

Methodology and Limitation

To enable us concentrate on specific periods in the trajectory of the community and for the purpose of clarity which we seek, the collection of data was divided into three sections: origin traditions up to 1830, the expansion of Abeokuta and the evolution of Ègbáland in the century between 1830-1960, and lastly, contemporary developments. Going to the field with this strategy enabled us to know the magnitude of information at our disposal on each aspect of the evolution of the community and its people. This also helped in discerning, early enough during the field work, where the interest(s) of the informants was and our ability to properly guide the interview sections from diversions that we considered unnecessary. Taking back the interview sections from informants we consider necessary so as to ensure that we have enough data on each aspect of the evolution of the community that might not seem necessary to informants. Whereas, some of the information required for specific period could still be found in others as informants drew references where they thought necessary. With the methodology adopted for the collection of this data, they were given exclusive attention under each period in which they fall.

The limitation of every study informs the depth of its methodology. The same is true in this case. The project was originally conceived by the elders of the community in their bid to give to their community, and most importantly, to pass-down to their younger generation, what they thought would be a dignifying gift, i.e. the truth about how long the community has come, especially in the current political structure in Abeokuta. As mentioned earlier, idea emerged from a feeling of marginalization from the polity and the need to reinforce their history as the currency for the future generation. To achieve this, “we need an authoritative voice whose submissions cannot be refuted by anyone.”¹⁰ This led the community to contact me for this purpose. As it is not

10 This was made clear by Dr. M.O. Omidiji, the chairman of the project committee, at the first meeting held between the research team and the community at the Ìjemò town

in my professional conduct to collect fees for intellectual projects, I declined their proposal to pay me. And since it's impossible for me to be on the ground to collect this data, I employed the service of two postgraduate students to do this part on my behalf with the agreement that the community would take care of these research assistants vis-à-vis their accommodation, feeding, transportation, allowances and other logistics needed to facilitate the project.

At the same time, this place certain limitations on the methodology adopted for the project. For one, all of this meant that the community was deeply involved in what was said and unsaid and consequently, what we know and do not know from the oral data, which is the key of this project: Among the members of the project committee on the side of the community, a team of four individuals were selected to anchor the research team. This team did their job well in this regard, but also restricted the flexibility of the methodology and data collected. This was particularly the case through undue interruptions during some of the interviews, mostly as a result of their personal schedules and limited knowledge about the ethics of historical research, which some of them took for granted. Through this committee, the research team met their informants. Since they were the anchor, the research team could not move freely outside of the preselected informants so as not to create a false image of intent in the mind of the committee meant to oversee the project. The committee members rotated the task of taking the research team around among themselves and the choice of who to meet was decided based on their knowledge of the person as one of the custodians of their traditions and history. As such, those interviewed within the three months period which the project lasted were mostly people between the ages of 50-90. Some of these elderly-men and women are chiefs in the *Ògbóni* cult of the community, while others were not. Three members of the anchor-committee are also chiefs in this institution.

Since members of this committee were present during the conduct of most of the interviews, sections were more or less in the form of group interview. In this way, questions were posed to the main informant, while the committee or any of its members that followed the researchers to the informant, often voiced their opinion on comments made; helped the main informant in retrieving information from his/her memory; and/or simply continue the response from where the main informant stopped. The research team was supposed to visit the *Alake* and *Ketu*, in the present day Benin Republic where parts of their traditions believed they migrated to the present-day Abeokuta, but this did not materialize until they left the town of Abeokuta following the end of the first three months.

Hall, *Ìjemò*, on the 8th of March, 2019.

In order to properly facilitate the project, the praise poem of the community was collected and interpreted. Also, the research team were taken around the community, and specific places in Abeokuta. The purpose of this was to acquaint the researchers with the geographical spread of these areas so as to be able to picture the events related well. Indeed, this worked in explaining, properly, some of the events related to us. On some occasions this was the main purpose of going out and on others, this was done during the course of visiting an informant.

In addition to some written texts, most of which were secondary in nature, pictures of strategic places and sites visited were also taken to corroborate the collected oral data. They were also used to widen the knowledge of the research assistants on the subject matter and consequently strengthen the inquiries to be made. The written texts consist of works on the history of the Ègbá, the Ìjemò massacre, the chieftaincy institution in Abeokuta, pamphlets that contain the traditions of origin of the people, and general texts on the Yoruba people. Primary texts like newspapers and several documents of different proposes and contexts also proved useful. Before the research team was mobilized to the field, they searched the internet for information concerning the people of Ìjemò and found little aside from the Ìjemò massacre. However, this indicated a good start for the project.

As the research began in March, 2019, the research team retired to their hotel rooms after each day of oral data collection, where they transcribed the collected data. This not only enabled them to document the recorded information in written text, it enabled them to also follow-up on the work done for the day and prepare further questions for the next outing. Transcribing hours of interviews is not an easy task; therefore, the process of transcription could take more than a day to complete, especially in cases where the team had met more than one informant with long hours of interviews during their last outing on the field. The transcription of oral data also served as the medium through which the research team kept me updated on the progress of the project. This was often transmitted through email, after which I provided further instructions. Considering the need to update the community on the progress made in regards to the project and at the same time, to corroborate the collected data for each week, the research team met with the community at the private residence of the Oluwo (the head of the Ogboni institution) of the community every weekends. These meetings were often held before the transmission of the weekly updates to my email in order for me to have a comprehensive briefing of the happenings during the week.

After the first three months, the research team prepared their final report on my instruction. A copy of this was given to the community together with the interviews as it was not certain the information which the community

thought to be sufficient for the project was going to be enough for me to produce an “irrefutable” book as they earlier thought. Regardless of our differences on this, I decided to compensate the community for the sacrifices made so far during the project with the publication of this note, which was drawn from my final report on the project.

Why the Note?

This note is considered important in informing social archaeologists about the widely unknown first settlers of the popular Yoruba city, Abeokuta. Before now, it is generally believed that Sodeke and his fellow Ègbá migrants established the town as virtually all history books on this aspect of the history of Abeokuta, and Yorubaland in general, often isolate the question of those who accommodated these migrants or those they met on the ground.¹¹ Against this popular understanding, whenever mention is made of this pre-1830 Abeokuta, the picture of a vast forest of hunting field without organized people, polity or culture, is painted. Such is the case in the publication that follows the coronation of Oba Adedotun Gbadebo, where the author made the following remark:

It was revealed that an Itoko chief named Idowu Liperu had earlier been living in the settlement. He crossed the Ogun River and settled on his farmland where the three hunters, namely: Jinulu, Oso and Olu-nle joined him. Unlike Liperu who created a house with the assistance of the then Olubara, Laafa, the three hunters lodged in some caves inside Olumo Rock, as such they told the Ègbá delegates who came to take soil sample about the “under-stone” (Abeokuta).

Later, Adagba and others moved to the place to join Liperu and these three hunters who had been living there. Adagba was a brave man who had his farmland located very close to the Olumo rock. The settlement was then called Oko Adagba (the other name for Abeokuta) ...

The site of the town was, as earlier said, the Orile of Ìjemò, Itoko and Ikopa township of Ègbá Alake...¹²

11 See, among others, Oluwatoyin B. Oduntan, “Elite Identity and Power: A Study of Social Change and Leadership Among the Egba of Western Nigeria 1860-1950” (PhD Thesis: Dalhousie University, October 2010); Saburi Biobaku, *The Egba And Their Neighbors 1842-1872* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

12 L.A.K. Ogunwoolu, *Oba Adedotun Gbadebo and Egba History: A Commemorative Coronation Historical Book* (Abeokuta: Educom Ventures, 2005), 6-8.

Robert Smith who is among the few scholars that bothered to make reference to this period in their work, described this as “a small party of Ègbá hunters who they found living under an outcrop of rock near the east back of the Ogun...”¹³ It is this seemingly distortion of history that partly informed this project in the first place on the part of the community; and of course, fascinated my interest. In the course of this research, the role the people of Ìjemò played in the amalgamation of Nigeria would also be explored. Although this role has been mentioned in some history books,¹⁴ it has usually been treated as a footnote in the history of colonialism in Nigeria, hence, the scholarly neglect. Basically, this note is meant to breathe a new perspective to the evolution of Abeokuta from critical engagements with the collected accounts from the field. Of course, this can only come with a critique of the collected data in corroboration with secondary and other available primary data. Therefore, in this note, dominant issues in the collected data were raised and scrutinized, giving room for the rational and irrational to be distilled.

It is expected that the intellectual community of historians is updated on the trend of oral tradition collection, while at the same time, inform our history students on how to go about research in this area of historical research — oral traditions and the traditions of origin. In a somewhat similar way, this note is fashioned to propel further research into the history of Abeokuta and to facilitate current research on this popular city. Put simply, it is hoped to be the basis for further discussion on the town in general and the Ìjemò community in particular, in the future. Of equal importance here is for us all, including the policy makers, to take micro history seriously because it is through this knowledge that peace, unity and development could be enhanced in our fragile society.¹⁵

Both macro and micro histories share the same elements and could learn from each other. If historians are finding it difficult to access the past of these communities due to the dearth of information, which itself is caused by the break in the chain of the process of passing these traditions down to generations and the dwindling condition of the memory of those expected to be informed in this respect, among other issues of impediment, what the future holds for historical research of this nature is palpably glooming. If these traditions are to be saved from extinction, the time is now. The following will focus on issues that revolve around the traditions of origin of the Ìjemò, putting aside events outside this, with the exception of reference making or

13 Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: Methuen), 158.

14 See, among others, Ajayi Kolawole Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta* (Abeokuta: Fola Bookshops Press, 1998).

15 Ayodeji Olukoju, “Oral Traditions and the Political History of Oka-Akoko,” *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 249-62.

substantiation of related information. This way, we dwell not on the Ìjemò massacre as it already has ample documentation.¹⁶

History of the Ìjemò

But in many communities it is newcomers who gain a sense of roots through involvement in local history.¹⁷

Presently located on a rugged hillside, the Ìjemò community in Abeokuta shares its northern boundary by the Olúmọ Rock with the Ìtokò and Ògùn rivers to the west. On the eastern flank, its boundary stretched to Aké, Oke, Lántóró, and Ajébo, while the likes of Sodeke and Ìtókú bound it on the southern side. When facing the Ogun State Broadcasting Station, Ìjemò is situated by the East and Ìtokò to the West.¹⁸ But this is not the first place of residence for this community. The people, in a common trend found among other Yoruba settlements, had moved from at least two different locations in the place later known as Abeokuta before finally settling here.

It is a general consensus among historians that the traditions of origin of communities across Africa, like elsewhere, are weaved in accounts of migrations.¹⁹ Consequently, understanding the migration pattern allows for a clearer understanding of the trajectory of the people, their sociopolitical and economic formations as well as other aspects of their traditions. When this important aspect is lost in necessary details, the historian is left with less imagery to connect with the past. More so, most accounts of migration often come with a brief mention of the occurrence of events that necessitated the migration of a people. Importantly, the meaning of the Ìjemò given to us by some informants, the nature of their political composition, and the general accounts of their migration, suggest that the Ìjemò are heterogeneous. The name Ìjemò translates to “consensus.”²⁰ A particular informant suggested that the bond that ties the Ìjemòs to remain united in their decisions all through their

16 See, among others with the mention of the event, Harry A. Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Uprising: The Demise of Egba Independence* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 54-67; Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Watch: Early Life and Military* (Lagos: Prestige, 2014), 71-78.

17 Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

18 Interview with Chief Salami Ajisafe, a surveyor, who is also the Apèná of Ìjemò, age 62; with contributions from Chief Olusegun Kujooro, a Businessman, also the Lisa of Ìjemò, at the Ogoni Council Hall, Òkè-Ìjemò, on the 18th of March, 2019.

19 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

20 Cf. Interview with Justice Omotosho, with contributions from Chief Olusegun Kujooro and Chief Salami Ajisafe

migrations.²¹ This bond is said to have informed their migration from Ketu where they are thought to have originated from, to Gbore; Gbore to Ogbe; and from Ogbe down to their present location known as Òkè-Ìjemò in Abeokuta. This begs the question about the basis upon which this consensus was reached, among other issues that revolve around their migration from Ketu.

Three common stories explain this trajectory across Africa: one is about power tussle for a kingship and the loss of a particular prince who later established his own sovereign space in this bid to form another party; another tells of a brave hunter, usually a prince from a powerful kingdom, who got the blessing of his father, the king, to go establish a settlement in a different territory neighboring his kingdom; in the final analysis, the story could center around the eruption of a major crisis which led the people to flee for safety under the leadership of a dominant figure, this time not necessarily a prince, but a warrior or clusters of leaders. Such crisis could be induced by natural disaster, common among which is famine, drought, and flood, or man-made. The second example cited is strategic to the security of the dominant kingdom. Among other things, it ensured that the dominant kingdom is protected from direct attack by an adversary without adequate time to prepare. Extending from this is the need to stretch, capture and occupy as many lands in that area as possible and the assurance that settlements that surround this dominant territory are loyal to its authority. Hence, aside princes getting the blessing of their fathers to establish new territories, hunters and warriors, who were not related to the royal household, also had this opportunity.²² This partly explains why Ife was considered the sacred home of the Yoruba people until the late nineteenth century.²³ The dangerous terrain the society existed upon made warriors and hunters the most revered members of their societies and their skills, the most recognized.²⁴

As a political animal, even when people of different settlements or historical heritage came together in times of crisis to relocate as a sovereign people elsewhere despite their different factions and leaders, but this is still often done under the leadership of a dominant figure selected among the factions. Because of the role this dominant figure in the evolution of this new group of people, his name animates their praise poems, rituals and all, and recalled from generation to generation. Scholars are of the view that the recurrent

21 Casual discussion with Mr. Gbobaniyi at Kunjo Hotel, Olokemeji, Abeokuta, March 15, 2019.

22 Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: Css Press, 2009).

23 I. A. Akinjogbin, *The Cradle of a Race: Ife from the Beginning to 1980* (Port Harcourt: Sunray Publications Ltd, 1978).

24 S. Adebajji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar: Amalion Publishing, 2010).

dominance of this figure in the present is linked to the fact that the past justifies the present in the quest for power and prestige; and comfort for the future.²⁵ Traditions are therefore the realization that humans have more past than the future.

But this particular aspect of the past could not be found in the case of the Ìjemò. Every attempt to get this area cleared was met with more complications. Not only are we left in the dark in regard to the person of this figure and his exploits, the political evolution of the people remains obscure. Another exception to the image of migration and state formation painted above can only be found in autochthonous communities where a dominant group can unite a centralized political structure.²⁶ Even among these autochthonous communities, there is nothing that suggests to us that they did not have such traditions other than the fact that history tends to focus on the traditions of origin of later migrants—the unifying group. In the few cases where attempts have been made, it is not uncommon for the people to insist that they migrated from nowhere other than their current location.²⁷ This way, there is no account of migration. Also, as in the case of Badagry, even though a dominant figure is not mentioned, each of the groups that form the polity retains its old traditions, and through this, they share the political power that constitutes and governs the polity.²⁸

As previously mentioned, it is a common knowledge that understanding these traditions is instrumental to understanding their sociopolitical institutions and economic pattern. Societies are built on traditions and traditions are formed through narratives about the personality who governed the migrations and their advisers, the elders. When it evolves away from that which had been established, the old elements are often recalled for their strength or deficiencies in pursuit of the contested claim. After all, the basic principle of political organization in Yorubaland is premised on the notion of *ìdálúú ni ìṣẹ̀lú* which speaks to the formation of a polity in accordance with its history.

Since no detailed account of this origin exists in the instance of the Ìjemò people, it is hard to know how the community has evolved historically. Nevertheless, names provided by Chief Soluade's brief history of the Ìjemòs,

25 See among others Toyin Falola, *Alternative History: The World of Yoruba Chroniclers* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Mpublishing, University of Michigan Library, 1993); Karen Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in A Yoruba Town* (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

26 Ulli Beier, "Before Oduduwa," *Odu: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* 3 (1956): 25-32.

27 Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba*, 27-28.

28 Robin Law, "A Lagoonside Port on the Eighteenth-Century Slave Coast: The early History of Badagry," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, No.1 (1994): 32-59.

together with other evidence from the descendants of some of these individuals suggest that the first migration and settlement of the people away from Ketu could be dated to around late 1600s and the latest, around the 1800s, the same period other Ègbá migrated.

It bears mentioning that accounts of the political structure of the people, particularly in regard to the issue of Obaship are, at best, vague. Currently, the community is headed by an Oluwo, the principal head of the Ogboni cult—the sole political institution of the community, outside the central government of the Alake. Traditionally, the Ogboni cult, though the most powerful political organ in Yoruba towns and kingdoms where they existed before the colonial era, were (theoretically) subjected to the king.²⁹ Therefore, efforts were made to know when this tradition evolved to its resent structure where the Oluwo acts as the political head the community. The account of the demise of kingship tradition, as provided in the collected oral data, appears to be a replica of the myth contained in a particular *Ifá* grapheme where a king was deposed and exiled for committing sacrilege.³⁰ The king in this account, as in the *Ifá* verse, decided to disclose the *Oro* (bullroarer) ritual to his wife who had pressured him. All other information contained in respect of this account are similar, only that in one of the Ìjemò versions, this ended with the “suspension” of Obaship among the people and in another version, this only led to the “suspension” of the crown of this particular Ìjemò king and not the Obaship itself.³¹ Further complicating the matter is the name of the king at this time and the family which he came from: At least with a kingship tradition, there would laid-down principles and procedure of succession.

Even though the name of the king is not often mentioned, or even known, it is often said that he was a scion of the Nlado family. When long pressed, an informant, apparently frustrated, came-up with the name *Poké-bí-owúlà*.³² In the same interview, another informant referred to this mythical figure as Nlado.³³ Meanwhile, *Poké-bí-owúlà* happens to be one of the many names used in

29 F.I. Soluade, *Egba Chieftaincy Institution* (Ibadan: Ayobami Hasfab Graphic Printers, 2002).

30 Interview with: Chief Babatunde Abereifa, Araba of Iragbiji, Age 55, Boripe-Iragbiji, June 8, 2019.

31 Interview with Chief Akande Akintunde, a Traditional Doctor/Oluwo-Ifa of Egbaland, age 92, at Òkè-Ìjemò and Chief Ijaola Oni, a Traditional Doctor /Abore of Ìjemò, age 83, with contributions from Chiefs Salami Ajisafe and Olusegun Kujooro, 18th of March, 2019.

32 The Abore, Chief Ijaola, particularly responded to this during the group interview at chief Akintunde's house.

33 Chief Akande Akintunde.

reference to the Supreme Being in Yorubaland.³⁴ On its own part, the identity of Nlado is a mixed one, lacking in any form of clarity. Therefore, one of the controversies surrounding the origin traditions of the people remains in the area of their political structure, more importantly, the Obaship and the title of the stool. Whereas, away from this position, some informants have noted that Nlado is a name of a compound and also a chieftaincy title in the Ogboni cult, others, allying with the earlier position made by Chief Akintunde, the Oluwo-Ifa of Ègbáland, are of the view that Nlado is the Ìjemò kingship title and also a compound name. In these conflicting claims, it remained to be seen how significant this family is in the history of a community where kingship, according to Chief Akintunde, is said to be decentralized and without royal families.

While this position is evident in other polities like Ibadan, Modakeke and those made up of clusters of groups with different historical heritage or without a dominant group with recognized royal heritage, another account attempts to explain this by expressing the view that the emergence of Nlado in Ìjemò is linked to a man from the Nlado family, Dendu, who took charge of the last migration due to the illness caused by old age of the then Oba whose name is unknown.³⁵ It might go without adding that this position comes in light of the record made by Chief Soluade in his pamphlet;³⁶ an account we have noted above to be much recent, the eighteenth century.

It bears noting, therefore, that this explanation does not allay the controversies surrounding the name, but rather feeds into what Weber in his examination of ethnic identities described as “common memories of political destiny.”³⁷ For one, other informants hinted that the title of Nlado is not peculiar to Ìjemò, but a chieftaincy title that also resides with other groups in Abeokuta; meaning that the title or the name might not necessarily originate from the people of Ìjemò.³⁸ So, when Biobaku said: “At the time of the Treaty of Friendship in 1893 the Ègbá were ruled by a triumvirate of Osundare, the Nlado, Sorunke the Balogun of the Ègbá and Ogundeji, later the

34 Phone Interview with Akintunde Ifatunde, Traditional Doctor, Age 40, Ibadan, April 3, 2020.

35 Akogun Taiwo Soriola, Businessman, age 66, Isale-Igbein., April 11, 2019.

36 Olusegun Soluade, *History of Ìjemò Abeokuta, Ogun State* (Abeokuta: Government Printer).

37 Max Weber, *From Max Weber* quoted in Tony Waters, “Assessing the Impact of the Rwandan Refugee Crisis on Development Planning in Rural Tanzania, 1994-1996”, *Human Organization* 58, No.2 (1999): 148.

38 Interview with Chief Awodiran Sounde, a Traditional Doctor, /Lukotun of Ìjemò, age 70, Bode Olude, Abeokuta, 31th of April, 2019.

Bashorun...,”³⁹ one could have been at loss as to the particular Nlado he was referring to, if not for the publication of Chief Ogunwole that made it clear that the Osundare in reference was actually the Nlado of Kemta.⁴⁰ Further removing this from the name of a particular compound, the current Oluwo of Ìjemò community in Abeokuta was formerly installed as the Nlado of Ìjemò before he was supposedly elevated to the rank of Oluwo of Ìjemò.⁴¹

Dendu could not have been the first Nlado of Ìjemò going by Chief Soluade’s account documented in a small pamphlet that passes him as the Samuel Johnson or the Ajisafe of the Ìjemò people in his own little way, as the first and only text yet published on the traditions of origin of the people. In this short text, the newly introduced chieftaincies were noted by the chief, however, Dendu, like the Ifa priest in the account, was not noted to be the first Nlado.⁴² Instead, Dendu was only one of the Nlados that had been installed in the past, but in what capacity is what we do not know, not even the present Oluwo who was last installed in this capacity could explain to us the position and role of this chieftaincy in the hierarchy of chiefs in the community. This, according to the Chief was as a result of the circumstance that led to his installation in that capacity, which then informed protests for proper recognition of the community in the politics of Ègbáland and not necessarily for the reinforcement of the historical identity of this seat.⁴³

Of equal importance in these cloudy traditions, *inter alia*, this time noted in Chief Soluade’s pamphlet, is the Onìjemò Ketu from Orile, whose son accompanied the rest of the Ìjemò leaders to their new settlement, later known as Oke-Ìjemò. Getting a clear picture of these issues is important for us to start to understand the history of Ìjemò. For instance, what can the title of Nlado tell us about the relationship between the people and the later migrants who arrived in the 1830s since the title seems to have been in existence in

39 Saburi Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Egba at Abeokuta (1830-1980)* (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies), 7.

40 L.A.K. Ogunwoolu, *Oba Adedotun Gbadebo and Egba History*, 17.

41 Interview with Chief Oluyinka Kufile, Business Magnate/Oluwo of Ìjemò, age 70, Presidential Hill Top, 23rd of March, 2019.

42 For instance, among the firsts of the chiefs mentioned was the Balogun. Olusegun Soluade, *History of Ìjemò Abeokuta*. This Balogun, the Apènàn of Ìjemò refuted as the first as he claimed the Ìjemòs have always had a Balogun before the last migration. Other informants also corroborate this position. However, in all, the common view of this might be based on what is known of the norm of the political morphology of Yoruba communities, rather than a vivid historical knowing. Group interview with Mr. Emmanuel Sogbeinde, a Traditional Doctor, age 75; Mr. Ebenezer Sogbeinde, a Farmer/ Baale of Agbadu Village, age 85; Chief Salami Ajisafe, at Abule Agbadu, 9th of April, 2019.

43 This is another intriguing matter that need not delay us further. Interview with Chief Oluyinka Kufile.

Ìjemò before this time and also existed among these other groups? Did they evolve this title on their own differently or incorporated it into their system through earlier contact? Further to this would be the role of the OnÌjemò Ketu in the history of the people and why the title is no longer in existence? Does this say anything about their link Ketu? This, therefore, presents a question about the relationship between the Ìjemòs and the Ègbá before their migration to Abeokuta.

The praise poetry and anthem of these traditions were also collected. A review of these two important sources illuminates the trajectory of the people, their occupation, proclivities, traditions and description of their present location and ironic position in Abeokuta, among other things. Whereas some linkages could be made from these sources which could as well be referred to as Other Oral Traditions (OOT) to the existing Oral Traditions (OT)⁴⁴ collected, other grey areas subsist. For instance, “*Ìjemò Ará Itàké*” suggests that the people came from or had a link with Itake, but this part cannot be established from the oral data gathered for this project. A review of these sources, particularly the praise poem, brought back to light the issue of Obaship in Ìjemò. The lines which read thus: “*omò onilẹ̀kùn mọ̀kàndìnlógún*; the one with nineteen doors, *ìyí Òyéwò n kàn*; the one knocked by Òyéwò, *ẹ̀sán inú*; nine inside, *ẹ̀sán òde*; nine outside, *ọ̀kan yi kù ní bodè Òyéwò*; the last one at the abode of Òyéwò”, appear to be hinting on the Obaship tradition among the people. However, as stated earlier, this could not be proven from the reviewed data. Although, an informant tried to relate the Oyewo noted here to the previously mentioned sacrilegious king, it remained to be seen how such a figure out of all the supposed past kings could be picked to be glorified in this panegyric.

Therefore, when accounts of the demise of kingship, noted to be a myth founded in an *Ifa* grapheme, is placed side-by-side with the identity of the king that supposedly committed sacrilege and the title of Ìjemò kingship, what we have is a clear case of what Afigbo once referred to as mishmash of historical irrationality⁴⁵ that leads the historian to nowhere near a clear picture of the political history of the people. The above have not only shrouded the pre-1830s political history of the people of Ìjemò in several uncertainties that seem to undermine their claim to earlier residence in Abeokuta, but their socioeconomic history also follow this pattern.

44 For more discussion on this, see, Mike O. Odey, John G. Nengel and Okpèh O. Okpèh (eds.) *Historical Methodologies*, in *History Research and Methodology in Africa: Essays in Honor of Professor Charles Creswell Jacobs* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007).

45 A.E. Afigbo, “Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography”, *Nigeria Magazine*, FESTAC Edition, Nos. 122-123 (1977): 86.

The nineteenth century crises in Yorubaland that began in the twilight of the previous century and lasted until the late nineteenth century had pursued several groups of villagers and peoples away from their homes in an area known as the Ẹ̀gbá forest.⁴⁶ Within the length and breadth of this forest, various settlements and villages had forged a collective identity under the banner of the name Ẹ̀gbá and the leadership of Lisabi, essentially to wrestle them from the imperial pursuit of the old Oyo empire.⁴⁷ Sacked from their farms and villages by Ife, Oyo and Ijebu forces, some of these people took refuge in other villages while many others were taken as war captives. Among these captives were Lamodi and Sodeke, the two men that later led the people out of Ibadan where the allied forces resided. This encompassed the Ẹ̀gbá forest which was later built into a dominant town in the Yoruba country. Ibadan, as the location became known, was home to the best and largest army of warriors in Yorubaland and consequently, one with the largest concentration of slave population as part of the war spoils.⁴⁸

46 Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964); I. A. Akinjogbin, A. A. Adediran, and G.A. Adebayo, eds., *War and Peace in Yorubaland 1793-1893*, Selections from Papers Presented at the Conference on the Centenary of the 1886 Kiriji/Ekitiparapo Peace Treaty held at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 21-28 September, 1986, 695.

47 Indeed, as expressed by Sotunde, "little is certain about the origin of the Egba as a nation... the origin of the Egba is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty or probability." F.I. Sotunde, *Egba Chieftaincy*. Identifying this root has eluded historians and even the Egba people for a long time as discussions have always shifted away from this area. Nonetheless, given the history of the people, this could be taken as a collective identity by autonomous polities in the areas later known as the Egba forest, for sociopolitical considerations, and not necessarily one that came about as a result of a blood relation. The unifying figure in this regard would be Lisabi, who around the late eighteenth century formed a communal structure called Traditional Mutual Aid Society (Egbe Aaro) which was later transformed into Egbe Olorogun at the time the Egbe Aaro was militarized for the purpose of resisting Oyo imperialism through violence. This communal structure brought the people in the area known as the Egba forest closer to one another and was enough to create for them a new collective identity, Egba, regardless of their differences and, at times, rivalry. The etymology of the word Egba might remain in obscurity, but from the brief trajectory provided above, it cannot be out of place to think of the name as a reference to one seeking assistance from a group of people or an individual, which was significantly the essence of the Egbe Aaro meant to boost agricultural production among the people so as to pay their tribute to Oyo and still have enough to fall back on for private and commercial purposes; as well as the Egbe Olorogun which was meant to ward off Oyo's imperial influence around this place. Historically, Egba thus suggest a collective destiny. As in the case of the term "Yoruba," this has been used to refer to the people regardless of the time of reference, before or after the late eighteenth century when the identity most likely emerge.

48 B. Awe, "The Ajele System: (A study of Ibadan Imperialism in the nineteenth century)," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, No. 1 (December 1964): 47-60;

Due to the inconsistency in the year the Owu war was fought, it is difficult to tell the exact year the Ègbás were sacked, but it possibly occurred between 1817 and 1821. The fall of the Ègbá forest and homes to the Ibadan forces took place almost immediately after the fall of Owu to these same allied forces, as a form of punishment for their non-involvement in the war. However, the period in which this war was fought has been subjected to debates that offer dates ranging from c.1812-c.1817, to c.1817-c.1821 and others within the range of c.1812-c.1821. When this date is put side-by-side the period the people escaped out of Ibadan under the leadership of Sodeke, around 1830, the Ègbás must have been stranded in Ibadan under the lordship of the allied forces for approximately a decade. Different accounts painted their flight from Ibadan as a disguised mission that beats the imagination of Ibadan forces, leading to the death of one of their leaders, Lamodi, in the hands of the Ibadan chiefs.⁴⁹ Given the circumstance of their flight, the best they could do was to leave Ibadan with little quantity of food to last them for the first few days on their journey. It is therefore expected that, together with their kinsmen said to have been migrating to this location since their displacement, the Ègbá migrants were received by the people of Ìjemò.

While it might be tempting to think of the Ìjemòs as part of the scattered peoples from the Ègbá forest that came to occupy Abeokuta in the aftermath of the fall of Ègbá towns and forest before the arrival of Sodeke-group, more so given that the Chief Soluade's account earlier referred to talked about a period of migration we have identified as one taken in the nineteenth century, this position is contested by many parts of the traditions of the people which establish their presence in this area centuries earlier. Curiously, virtually all scholars that have worked on the history of Abeokuta would delve into the troubles of forming a new community of people in that location without a mention of the roles played by the Ìjemòs, their earlier settlers.⁵⁰ This role will be hard to elude these latter migrants who must have added it to their traditions, or the researcher, who must have been curious about how a vast group of people survived a place without readymade farms or food. The implication of the silence about the hospitality of the Ìjemò people and their ability to share their harvested crops with the refugees suggests that these migrants actually waited until their newly cultivated farms began to produce harvest or bought all they needed as food while waiting for their harvests. In the case of the latter, the Ìjemòs must have gained so much economic advantage over the rest for one reason: according to the traditions, it was based on their

Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-Colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1984).

49 Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*.

50 Saburi Biobaku, "The First 150 years of the Egba."

vast portion of the land that majority of the new migrants settled, including Sodeke. But this was not the case as it is often the practice that economic advantage brings about political power, both of which the people lacked during this period. This brings into question the economic structure of the Ẹjemòs before the migrations of the 1830s and its impacts on the post-1830 Abeokuta. However, from extant literature, what we do know about this period in Abeokuta is that the society survived mainly through raids, especially of western Yoruba communities then under the political control of Dahomey which had been encroaching this region following the crippling of Oyo.⁵¹ But the question still remained how they recuperated before they were able to organize to the degree of organizing raids and invasions.

Even though the collected oral data gave us access to the traditional geographical stretch of the Ẹjemòs in a somewhat vivid picture—and which as it would be seen anon, somewhat justified their claim of earliest settlement in Abeokuta—it provides us with no evidence of relations between the Ẹjemòs and their earliest neighbors, like the Itokos, Ikopa, and others in Yorubaland or beyond at the time. The only area of relation noted in this data survives in the realm of myths, but conspicuously absent in the scientific. Asked about the relationship between them and the earliest neighbors, various informants claimed ignorance of this aside the fact that when they came to their present location at Oke-Ẹjemò they lacked the means of making fire to cook and do other things, but only had water sourced from a pond called Kekere Owu which now falls within the Ẹjemò territory. The traditions then continued by saying that the Ẹjemòs later saw a flame of fire in a far distance which they traced to the Ẹtokòs. In their own end, the Ẹtokòs had no water. So, the Ẹtokòs gave the Ẹjemòs fire, while the Ẹjemòs gave the Itokos water. It is elementary that there were no matches during the period under construction here to make fire, so what exactly were the Ẹjemòs deprived of then that the Itokos had in making fire? And more importantly, how have they been cooking and warming themselves centuries before moving to Oke-Ẹjemò where they met the Ẹtokòs? Beside these, it could be taken that the pond in question served both communities at a time in the history, and this myth is nothing but an attempt to establish a sense of brotherhood, or long existing relations, among these earliest communities. A good ploy to ensure unity between the two.

The question of the relations of the Ẹjemòs with other villages and towns around them is imperative in gaining access to their economic structure, and

51 I.A. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours 1708-1818* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967); A.I. Asiwaju, "Dahomey, Yorubaland, Borgu and Benin in the Nineteenth Century," in *General History of Africa: VI Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s (Abridged Edition)*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi (ed.), 699-723 (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1998).

some other aspects of their existence as a people in that area. Yet, none came forth during the fieldwork aside from the insights provided us by a common saying among the people, which goes thus: “*kékeré Ìjemò alápe, àgbà Ìjemò Alápe.*” This is in reference to their ancestral specialization in pottery-making.⁵² Meanwhile, a little explanation could be alluded to the silence of other parts of their OTs and OOTs on the subject of trade, and trading relations. Looking at the present location of the people in Abeokuta, it is surrounded by hosts of communities whose population only migrated with the post-1830 migrants, and hills and a body of water, which makes them appear to be the most secure of all the communities in Abeokuta.

Sodeke’s compound himself is located at the backyard of the people, and it is on record that this location was given to him, just as the rest were purposely settled in their locations to provide security for the Ìjemòs. If not deliberate, this will only be a matter of coincidence for the Ìjemòs to be securely located in a place where they are shielded by the rocks that characterize the city more than any other group, and at the same time, geographically protected by stronger communities. Now, if all the communities that surround Ìjemò were populated by post-1830 migrants, we only have the Ìtokòs left in that area who have stayed long enough to have some form of relations with the Ìjemòs. However, as a small community of people which these earliest settlements— Ìjemòs, Ikopa, and the Ìtokòs— must have been before the 1830 migrations, it could be argued that both were sufficiently catered for by the vast arable lands that they were surrounded by. In this, their situation will not be peculiar from historical developments in other places, as in Ijebu and Bariba, for instance. In both cases, it took a major defeat of the existing structure in battle to be recalibrated; the former from the British in the nineteenth century and the latter from the Songhai Empire in the seventeenth.⁵³

Talking about vast arable lands, the topography of Abeokuta is such that provided for a decentralized society even before the 1830s. Rocky and muddy in some parts, traditions among the Ìjemòs attest to the fact that the people

52 Recorded note by Dr. M.O. Omidiji, Chairman of the Ìjemò History Project. This is further reinforced by other documents and interviews. A statue, named, Iya Alape, has since been constructed at the junction leading to the town hall of the community.

53 Although these polities had economic relations with other people, this was restricted to the outside as trade did not flourish within their walls. Meanwhile, their involvements in outside trade can only be seen as part of the implication of the growth of their polities. This could further explain the itinerant nature of Ijebu traders. Adekunle O. Julius, “Borgu and Economic Transformation 1700-1900: The Wangara Factor,” *African Economic History* 22 (1994): 1-18; E.A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland 1850-1950: Politics, Economy, and Society* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Plc., 1992); B. Sofela, *Egba-Ijebu Relations: A Study in Conflict Resolution in 19th Century Yorubaland* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited, 2000).

moved from different locations in the territory today known as Abeokuta before finally settling at their present location in a place known as Oke-Ìjemò. The journey from Gbore to Ogbe, according to the accounts, could not have been unconnected to the question of topography. In all of these migrations, the Ìjemòs have been able to maintain their pottery-making tradition.

That said, in light of the fortification their presence at Oke-ijemo provides them, settling on a hillside with less space for farm cultivation cannot be adduced to the need for arable land, but security.⁵⁴ But then, all these details are conspicuously missing in the traditions gathered during the field work. If the Ìjemòs had settled at Oke-Ìjemò before the coming of Sodeke-led migrants, what necessitated their choice of this auspicious location? Many scholars have done a great deal of work on post-1830 Abeokuta, which has become the typical starting point of accounting for the traditions and development of the city, and the condition of its people. Shedding some insights into what living in Abeokuta during this period meant, Asiwaju explained that:

In the 1850s and 1860s, an important target was the new Ègbá-Yoruba state of Abeokuta whose rise was viewed in Agbome as a threat to the independence of Dahomey. This danger became real with Ègbá military activities and associated political expansion into the areas of western Yorubaland where Dahomey was also conducting its raids. The clash between the two in the Awori town of Ado-Odo in 1844 and the eventual defeat of Dahomey, sowed the seeds of future acrimony between the two. Although the two direct attacks that Dahomey conducted against Abeokuta in 1851 and 1864 met with resounding failure, the punitive expedition against Ègbádo allies of the Ègbá led to the destruction of Isaga in 1862 and the attendant devastation of the surrounding area.⁵⁵

To take it from the general formation of Abeokuta, it is a norm for each group to have a farm-home and city-home settlement. The idea of home in Abeokuta is such that the people navigate between these two homes as the former feeds the latter. Considering this formation, and the fact that Oke-Ìjemò is located at the heart of Abeokuta surrounded by other communities like Ake, Kemta, Ijaiye, Ijako, Ago-Oko, Ikija, Ijeun, Itoko, Ijoko, Iporo Sodeke, Eruwon, Ikopa and others, this location must have been purposely chosen for the protection of the Ìjemòs at the same time others took their

54 This view was in fact shared by the Apèná and Agogun Soriola during one of the interview sessions the research team had with them on different occasions.

55 A.I. Asiwaju, "Dahomey, Yorubaland, Borgu and Benin in the Nineteenth Century," in *General History of Africa: VI Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s (Abridged Edition)*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi (ed.), 710.

positions upon their migration around 1830. According to Chief Soluade, “It is the only township bounded by the greatest number of other townships...”⁵⁶

This is not to refute the claim that the people had been coming to that area for hunting and other purposes before 1830s, and by virtue of this, entitled to the claim of ownership of the forest as it was the practice then. However, the choice of that location for their city-home is less likely to have been facilitated by events before this time, especially since there is no evidence of a dire security challenge at Ogbe. In fact, a saying among the people goes thus: *Ìjemò re’le, Oba re’Ko* (Ìjemò is our home, while Oba is our farm). According to the Apena of the community who is knowledgeable about the land and geography of Abeokuta, after the Ìjemòs left Gbore, for Oke-Ìjemò, the space was occupied by the Oba people in Abeokuta: “So when leaving Igbo-Ore (also known as Gbore) which was later inhabited by the Oba people, the Ìjemòs would say they were going home, and going back they would say they were going to the farm.”⁵⁷ Gbore is surrounded by the likes of Ibara, Onikolobo, Sodunbi, and Adigbe, and all of these locations according to the traditions were given to this communities by the Ìjemòs. In any case, some of the people of Ìjemò stayed back at Gbore. Ostensibly, after distributing farmlands to the later migrants, the Ìjemòs were still left with about 162 villages that have grown over the years into the largest of all the communities.

Since the methodology of this study didn’t permit us to take accounts of the Itokos, we are left to believe, and which is probable even without an account from this community, that in addition to putting the people in a far more naturally protected location than the rest, Sodeke, the mighty warlord, was stationed at their backyard where they call Iporo Sodeke; a compound which still exists today. It is not necessarily that this location, which is a stone throw from Oke-Ìjemò, was mandated or instructed by the Ìjemòs, but the goodwill of Sodeke in addition to other considerations like its proximity to the symbolic Olumo Rock now worshiped by whole community in Abeokuta. It should be recalled that this was the period when security was dire as a result of the threat of Ibadan and Dahomey, and one of the primary measures often taken by precolonial states was the settlement of communities in close clusters. This arrangement in the town—Abeokuta— is such that lays credence to the Ìjemò story of earlier presence, even though the traditions have failed to fill-in the details. In view of this, the account of migration in Chief Soluade’s pamphlet could have been in response to the need to bring all the polity within a close cluster.

⁵⁶ Soluade, *History of Ìjemò*.

⁵⁷ Group interview with Chief Salami Ajisafe; Chief Olusegun Kujooro; and Chief Isiaka Bamigboye, age 73, a Transporter/Oluwo Oke-Ilado in Kemta, at the Ogboni Council Hall, 18th of March, 2019.

Of course, as the history goes, if Sodeke was the abhorred visitor of the Ìjemòs, then he was a powerful visitor that the people anchored their fate on. Not only were they assured of security under his protection as the invasion of their enemies, especially Ibadan and later, Dahomey, was imminent. At the time the need to structure the administration of the new settlement became vital, the Ìjemòs were put under the Ake quarter/section. Is it then a coincidence that they fell under the administrative unit of Sodeke's kinsmen, and the most politically powerful of all the other three sections? This drives one to think of some sort of special relations between the Ìjemòs and the people of Ake. It is on record that the people of Ake own their historical root to Ketu, the same place where the Ìjemòs claimed to have originated. Although we couldn't visit Ketu nor confirm the Ketu origin of the Ìjemòs during the fieldwork, the tradition of origin presented by Chief Soloude which alluded to one OnÌjemò of Ketu, noted above to be another title and figure of obscurity in the history of the people, keenly attests to this possibility. Could this have been responsible for the choice of Sodeke who heard of the presence of some of his kinsmen from Ketu in Abeokuta, to direct the Ègbá people to this location, and the warm welcome of the Ìjemò which made them loose authority to the Akes without contestation? Other sections of administration in Abeokuta include the Gbagura, Oke-Ona, and Owu, with each having pockets of communities under their structure and each community with its villages and farmlands in Abeokuta.

In the same manner, the Alake, Oba Gbadebo, was once quoted to have related that "Ìjemòs own Abeokuta." Again, one can only consider the popular saying that goes thus: No Ìjemò, no State Capital; No Ìjemò, no Ogun State."⁵⁸ Both remarks are attributed to their contribution to the permanent residence of the Sodeke-led group and various others in Abeokuta by way of giving out lands for farming and settlement. The question could be asked at this junction if the Ìjemòs were so powerful that they could resist a forceful takeover of their lands by the Sodeke-led migrants. The simple shuts to this come in two ways: the circumstance of the Sodeke-led migrants which readily deprived them of making more enemies if they had wanted to find a lasting settlement and face whatever comes for them either from Ibadan, Dahomey, or Ijebu; and secondly, the friendly relations that existed between them and the people they met here. Given these circumstances, the Ìjemòs are credited to have contributed tremendously to the city of Abeokuta, mainly by way of donating the vast land upon which it has built the modern government edifices like the Cathedral of St. Peter, the Centenary Hall, Ogun State Government Office, House of Assembly, Government Reservation Area, Water Corporation, Ogun

58 Soluade, *History of Ìjemò*, 7.

State Broadcasting Corporation Studio and Office Complex, the secretariat and many others.⁵⁹ Yet, “of all the 143 townships in Abeokuta today, Ìjemò covers the largest land area stretching from Iporo Sodeke on her West to Ijaiye on her East—a distance of not less than one mile crow-fly.”⁶⁰

The worship of the symbolic and popular Olumo rock is said to be presided over by Ìjemò and Itoko priests who share the laps and the arms of the sacrificial cow each year. In the Ìjemò traditions, Olumo rock had always been worshiped by Itoko and Ìjemò people as a common deity and the celebration was only expanded with the coming of the rest of the communities in Abeokuta, thus the leading role they play in its veneration. This follows the common logic of administration in Yorubaland where clusters of autonomous villages are transformed into a single entity, mostly for security reasons. Put in another way, most Yoruba traditional polities that survive today grew as the accumulation of several sovereign polities, some of which are entirely subsumed by the larger and most powerful of them all. Although under a different circumstance, this was the case in the creation of Ife, and evident in the emergence of Ekiti, Akure, Owo, Ondo, Ijebu and other Yoruba towns and kingdoms.⁶¹ In these places, as in Abeokuta, the first settlers are given the privilege to be in-charge of the principal deity of the community, even when they are not visible in political matters.

With this historic essence granted to the Ìjemòs in Abeokuta, one can only be left curious, owing to the limitation of the methodology, about the roles of the Itokos, said to have arrived that location the same day with the Ìjemòs in a tradition that could imply the same period, and Ikopa, another earliest community of people in Abeokuta, in the development of the city. The Ìjemòs, like these communities, must have been greatly impacted by their visitors. For instance, the history of the Ogboni cult, which remains the traditional ruling body in the community, like the rest of the Ègbá communities, cannot be located in any period hitherto the coming of Sodeke. The story of “*Poké bí owúlà*” previously refuted as a farce, was conceived to mythologize the transition of Obaship in Ìjemò to the use of the Ogboni cult with the coming of the Ègbás. From all indications, the Obaship system among the Ìjemò, if it ever truly existed, was a weak institution that must have been operating what the Yoruba referred to as the *Ajewo* system: A system in which the Oba-elect rules from his personal home, in lieu of a central palace, and prominent among small towns and villages with less sophisticated political organization.⁶²

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 See, Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba*, 26-27.

62 G.J.A. Ojo, *Yoruba Palaces* (London: University of London Press, 1966).

Laying credence to this is that no ruined or living edifice points to the palace of the king of Ìjemò before the position was subsumed by the Ogboni structure. And neither is there any crown or surviving object that stands to symbolize this revered institution. In any event, Obaship in Yorubaland is a sacred tradition that is hard to erase from the culture of a people. Having dismissed the *Poke bi owula* context of the demise of kingship tradition among the people of Ìjemò, the only reason that could explain this part of their tradition is the loose nature of rulership among the people because of the absence of a dominant royal line and constitutional structure of succession. It is in this way that structuring the polity around Ogboni rulership does not appear as a threat or distortion of their heritage, history and traditions, all of which are invariably protected, jealously, in every polity. Explaining the above clearly from the general trend in nineteenth century Yorubaland, Asiwaju wrote that:

The new situation made for the emergence of warriors as the dominant class and the eclipsing of the pre-existing monarchical class. This is particularly true of the Yoruba area where the obas lost control to the baloguns or warlords. The experiments with military dictatorship in Ijaiye under Kurumi, federalism in Abeokuta under Sodeke and constitutional monarchy in Epe under Kosoko illustrate the efforts in nineteenth-century Yorubaland to fashion new constitutions appropriate for the political management of the new society generated by the wars.⁶³

All of these effectively truncated the Obaship tradition in Ìjemò, and the less celebration of this tradition by the people explains the quagmire of explaining this tradition. Events from the period the Sodeke-led groups and others fled to Abeokuta onward, was met with rapid changes in this territory. The location not only became one of the three hotspots of military prowess and warriors in Yorubaland, it witnessed rapid modernization at the rate in which only those at the center of the changes benefited from the transformation in terms of political and economic power. None of these favored the Ìjemòs. Adding to the military prowess of the Ake community, on the other hand, was the reverse migration of freed slaves from different locations in the Atlantic world. Many of this population who resided at or belonged to the Ake section became the vanguard of the transformation of the town into modernity. As put by Ajayi:

The reverse migration of emancipated slaves from Cuba, Brazil and other places back to their original home along the coast of the Mono-Niger

63 A.I. Asiwaju, "Dahomey, Yorubaland, Borgu and Benin," 710.

region became an important fact in the spread of Christianity, western education and skills and the modernization process generally.⁶⁴

At this point, every member of the town struggled to take part in this transition so much so that those who could have revived the Obaship tradition looked elsewhere. This is more so that its supposed insignificance to the evolution of the community and its traditions as well as that of the larger town (Abeokuta) that was responsible for its demise in the first place appeared to be extant. With the support of the emancipated slaves, the status of the Alake was reinforced, leaving others, including the original inhabitants (i.e. the likes of Ìjemò, Ikopa, and Itoko) under his central watch. Buttressing their claim of earliest settlement, the Ìtokòs are also in the same Ake section with the Ìjemòs, along with others like Ikopa, Itoko, Irowo, Adao, Abaka, Erunwon, and about twenty more communities. Aside Ìjemò, Ikopa, and the Itoko, these were communities of later migrants, led into Abeokuta at different times by their leaders. Together, they became known as Ègbá Èkún (a sub-section of the Ègbá Ake).

The term “È kún,” according to the Ìjemò traditions, and somewhat backed by literature on Abeokuta,⁶⁵ is in reference to the fact that other Ègbá groups paid this group of communities homage when they got to the location because they had settled earlier; “È kún” being a form of salutation among the Yoruba which could be given in different contexts. This is more so especially when we consider the context given by the Ìjemò traditions which described *ẹ kún* as the shorter version of *ẹ kú ilé*, a salutation used in welcoming one to a place among the Yorubas.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, *ẹ kún* on its own could imply the Oyo Yoruba manner of salutation in any given situation. Either of the interpretations further speaks to the migration pattern of the groups that occupy Abeokuta today.

The likes of Ibara, Igbein, Ilewo and others who were the last set of refugees that fled to this location belong to the Ègbá Agbeyin section of the town; *A gbè yìn* implying those that came last (late arrivals). Those that fall in-between this are known as the Ègbá Àrin, i.e. those at the middle; Ake itself belong to this sub-section, implying that the migrant communities noted in the *ẹ kún* sub-section migrated to Abeokuta before the Sodeke group. Expressly, we have Èkú, Àrin, and Agbèyìn to describe the trajectory of the Ake section of Abeokuta polity. Curiously, however, not only were the Ìjemòs ignored in the political structure of the town, Abeokuta, their historical currency is far

64 J.F. Ade Ajayi (ed.), *General History of Africa*, 289.

65 L.A.K. Ogunwoolu, *Oba Adedotun Gbadebo*, 42-45.

66 Group Interview with Justice Omotosho, Chief Olusegun Kujooro, and Chief Salami Ajisafe.

waned in the sectional administration of Ake. For instance, none of the five principal chiefs in the Ake section, that consists of twenty-five townships, is from Ìjemò.⁶⁷ It cannot be out of place to suggest that this arrangement was in-line with the preference now given to military prowess than any other consideration in the political formation of Yoruba towns following the fall of Old Oyo. This was the time military talent supplanted royal blood or tradition of first residence.⁶⁸

If there is any part of the collected traditions of the people that could be regarded as fairly full enough to be developed upon, it is the aspect of their religion and festivals. Even with this, this area still needs to be reexamined together with the observations above. According to the collected oral data, the Ìjemòs celebrate about five festivals, viz: Ọdún Ifá, Ọdún Aláṣe, Ọdún Aremọ, Ọdún Orò and Ọdún Egúngún; in fact, one informant mentioned Eluku among these deities. But of all these five, only two were elaborated upon in the reviewed data— Ọdún Orò and Ọdún Egúngún. Perhaps, a careful observation of the performances, objects, poems and other symbols of ritual linked to these traditions could help illuminate further information about some of the many obscure areas of the traditions of origin of the people.

Conclusion

The inclusion of the earlier settlers and other townships like Ibara and Gbagura, which hold a different tradition from migrants who came from the Ègbá forest, in the Ègbá identity and the attempt to include the Òwus in this classification attests to the elasticity of the Ègbá identity and its sociopolitical role. Instructively, as in the fears that led to the formation of the identity in the Ègbá forest, the circumstance of their existence in Abeokuta was such that made this identity and the history behind it readily relevant to their free, peaceful and prosperous existence in this location. The invention of a common etymology to describe a group of people with an independent polity but related traditions and given a collective identity is not even peculiar to the Yoruba people but transcends this space to other civilizations and cultures. While others function under the name Ègbádò (some of which are now part of the Ègbá sections), Ìbòlò, Ìgbómìnà, Okun, and others, in Yorubaland,

67 Ibid

68 The law of first residence demands that all that find their way to a particular territory that has been settled or used as area of farming and hunting by another, regard these others as earlier settlers with political authority over the given space. Invariably, the first settlers formed the royal line once the territory is transformed into settlement of fairly large community of peoples with a political structure. Yakiban Mangwat, *A History of Class Formation in the Plateau Province of Nigeria, 1902-1960: The Genesis of a Ruling Class* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2013).

an instance of this could be seen in the designation of the term Phoenicians which was used in the ancient times to describe the various autonomous cultures around the Coast of the Levant in the eastern Mediterranean. The term became known as the confederation of maritime traders rather than a defined nation of people.⁶⁹

The complications in the history of Ìjemò is emblematic of the hurdles of reconstructing the pre-literate past of communities and peoples in Africa. The relegation of the traditions, and suppression of the structure in which they are transmitted to generations is primary among these obstacles. Although we couldn't locate many parts of the history of the Ìjemòs in Abeokuta, the deductions made so far from available data at this time have revealed some salient points that could be built upon by historians in the future. Contrary to the view of Oduntan which relates that:

To affirm for instance that the Alakeship is a late 19th century creation rather than of ancient origins does not undo its present reality and the powers by which it enforces its historical imagination and legitimizes its authority. Indeed, these conceptions have become the dominant underpinning of elite formation and current political organization. This brings to question the relevance and potency of historical enquiry and scholarship: What value is there in rocking the boat? -- is a question which many historians of minority groups and displaced identities have had to respond.⁷⁰

It can only be expected that traditions will always be contested in the face of perceived political injustice or marginalization. This much, Sheriff's realistic conflict theory explains in regards to intergroup relations.⁷¹ Since traditional politics are dictated by traditions, the best that could be done is to keep these traditions in check of the political evolution of the polity. This is why, in what has been a common conclusion among many anthropologists and historians, Ajayi opined that:

The past was also regarded as having an essential continuity with the present and the future. This assurance of continuity provided a basis of

69 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History Essays: Phoenicians (1500-300 B.C.)," Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art (October 2004), Available at: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phoe/hd_phoe.htm.

70 Oluwatoyin B. Oduntan, "Elite Identity and Power," 350-351.

71 Melody Eileen Mutezo, *Exploring the Value of Realistic Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory for Understanding In-Group Giving in the Minimal Group Paradigm* (Masters Dissertation: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, 2015), 11-12.

stability and has proved one of the greatest sources of resilience to African Societies in meeting the changes and chances of human existence. . . . A knowledge of family genealogy and history established for the individual his identity within the larger community. It enabled him to assert his rights over the family land, his right to hereditary office within the community and the proper role and relationships within that community. With rights went duties, and his training in lineage history included a knowledge of the functions that were appropriate to his position within the community.⁷²

Setting aside the possibility of an obsolete kingship tradition among the people of Ìjemò, which has remained very murky, if anything rational could be taken from the political traditions of the Ìjemò community in Abeokuta, it is that the existing polity the Sodeke-led migrants and others met in Abeokuta was amorphous without a defined central structure of political authority that went beyond the family/lineage level. In this system, different lineages contribute their elders to the administration of the larger community under different titles. This way, decision making is decentralized with no single lineage or family claiming a superior authority. This, added to the relative peace enjoyed by these pre-1830 communities in Abeokuta, which must have weakened their military institutions, combined to characterize the current position of the Ìjemòs in Abeokuta. Meanwhile, political morphology and military strength became the instruments through which political power was contested in the post-1830 politics of the emerging town. Lacking in this form, and being chased into the colonial government of Lugard during the 1914 Ìjemò massacre, dealt the final blow on the historical heritage of the people.

Consequently, while the description of the involvements of different communities in Abeokuta in the Ègbá wars and the honor this brought to their chiefs are on record,⁷³ none could be found in the case of the Ìjemò. Tellingly, no tradition of origin in Africa, as in elsewhere, is complete without reference to the military valor of an ancestor, as they constitute elements through which prestige is drawn from the past. This certainly featured in the case of the Ìjemò, However, none was in reference to any of the wars fought by the people of Abeokuta which contributed significantly to the arrangement of the town. At any rate, the absence of a defined central government and military prowess does not presuppose the absence of a political form or recognition

72 J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Historical Education in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 8, No. 1 (December 1975): 4.

73 See, for instance, in the case of the Owu, Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Watch: Early Life and Military*, 16-17.

of an existing tradition in a given area.⁷⁴ The implication of this in all cases, is in the degree to which such a polity is recognized in the newly formed structure of administration. Like others, this has been the predicament of the Ìjemò traditions.

⁷⁴ See I. A. Akinjogbin, *The Cradle of a Race*, on how this was resolved and shaped the current political structure and dynamics of traditional politics in Ife.