

# **DISLOCATED SUBJECTS: A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE OF THE PLIGHTS OF PRE-COLONIAL YORUBA AND CONTEMPORARY LIBERIAN REFUGEES**

BY

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## **Extended abstract**

### **FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES RAISED BY THIS PAPER**

#### **1) Demographic Dislocations**

The most striking consequence of the internecine wars of the nineteenth century Yorubaland was demographic dislocations. Apart from Fulani menace, the mutually ruinous wars fought by the Yoruba in the country contributed largely to the upsurge of refugees. Notable among these were the Owu and the Egba wars; Ijaye and the Ekitiparapo wars. The Owu war in particular, which was a contest between Owu and the Ijebu, was fought with utmost acerbity. This resulted in a grand alliance of Ijebu, Ife and Oyo refugees against Owu. In the aftermath, Owu was destroyed and the allied soldiers invaded the territory of the Egba who were forced to concentrate in new town called Abeokuta in c. 1831 (Adegbulu, 2004:279). The Egba had hardly settled in Abeokuta when they invaded their Ijebu neighbours. In the process, the Egba destroyed many Ijebu-Remo and Egbado towns. These towns included, Ofin, Makun, Epe, Oke-Agbo, Iwoye and Ojowo Ilaro, Erinja, Ilobi and Eyo, among several towns and villages destroyed in Egbaland.

Naturally, refugees were produced by the upheavals which resulted from these wars. These refugees fled to places where they felt their safety could be guaranteed. For instance, Ijebu-Remo refugees took refuge in Ikorodu, an already existing town relatively unaffected by the Egba ravages. It was under this circumstance that some of them founded new towns such as Ijebu-Igbo and Sagamu. Similarly, the Egbado refugees founded a town called Oke-Odan.

The rivalry between Ijaye and Ibadan culminated in war in which the former was destroyed. The Ijaye survivors fled to Abeokuta, Lagos and other parts of Yorubaland, (Oguntomisin,

Falola,1998:281).The aftermath of these wars made Ibadan, *ipso facto*, the dominant power in Yorubaland until 1878 when the Ekiti-parapo alliance was formed. The war that ensued attracted other Yoruba groups such as the Ijebu, Egba, Ife and even the Fulani-led forces of Ilorin all of which teamed up with the Ekitiparapo against Ibadan. So devastating was this war that within sixteen years of its duration, it caused considerable demographic dislocation particularly in the besieged towns and those towns and villages situated in and around the centers of military engagements. Some of the affected towns were, Imesi-Ile, Igbajo, Iresi, Ada, Agba, Ikirun and Offa.

The coastal towns had their own share of population dislodgement. The most prominent of these was the chieftaincy disputes in the Awori kingdom of Lagos. The dispute began in the reign of Ologun Kutere in the first decade of the century and erupted into civil wars in the 1830s and 1840s. It all began when in 1836 Adele, one of the contestants to the throne, was driven with some of his supporters to Badagry. This was followed by the dispute between Akintoye and Kosoko over the throne of Lagos in 1845.The latter was victorious and succeeded in ascending the throne as king of Lagos while Akintoye and his supporters fled to Badagry. It took the intervention of the British, who bombarded Lagos, to drive Kosoko away from the kingdom. Kosoko and about 1,500 supporters were forced to flee to Epe, a lagoon town in Ijebu-Ode kingdom (Smith,1978: 15).

## **2) The Place of Refugees**

As stated in the abstract, the main discourse of this paper is to note the striking difference between refugees in pre-colonial Yorubaland and contemporary refugees. It should be noted that though refugees were generally strangers, but in Yorubaland, they were not that strange as to be deprived of means of livelihood. They were not only accommodated and integrated by their host towns, they were provided with land on which to farm. Second, they raised families-populated and dominated their environment, and since they understood the economic system of their host communities, they did not wait for hand outs and donations to meet their daily needs. Third, they owned means of productions and contributed to the economic development of their host communities. Fourth, politically, they rallied round their obas (leaders), for important political issues. Perhaps, it should be added that refugees in pre-colonial Yorubaland were strangers who were more powerful than their host towns. This is because most of them were first class warriors who for one reason or the other, found themselves in their present predicament

Unlike the glowing picture painted above of the refugees in pre-colonial Yorubaland, conditions of Liberian refugees at Oru camp are exactly opposite. Their lives of squalor and how they live like sheep without a shepherd, living at the mercy of human predators, are well articulated in my main paper.