

GST 103 PEOPLES AND CULTURE OF NIGERIA

THE PEOPLES OF SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN NIGERIA, AND THEIR CULTURE IN PRE-COLONIAL TIMES

Major Ethnic Groups of Southern Nigeria

We can identify among several others, at least six (6) major ethnic groups in Southern Nigeria. These are the Yoruba, the Bini, the Igbo, the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, and the Ijaw.

The Yoruba

In a nutshell, the Yoruba can be described as one of the major ethnic groups in Southern Nigeria. Of course, several members of the Yoruba race can be found everywhere around the globe. But the majority of them are found in some Western and Central States of Nigeria stretching across Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Lagos, Kwara and Kogi. They practice both Islam and Christianity but most of them are still traditionalist to the core. The Yoruba ethnic group is believed to have come into existence between 2000-1000 BC.

Origins of the Yoruba

Till today, the history of the origins of the Yoruba people remains controversial. The Yoruba, as an ethnic group still holds many versions about its origins.

- Rev. Samuel Johnson's Version: In his book, History of the Yoruba (1950), Johnson traces the origin of the Yoruba to the "East". According to him, the Yoruba originally came from the North-Eastern area of Africa. The similarities between the cultures of the Yoruba and the Egyptians in terms of religious observances, works of arts, burial and other traditional practices are enough evidence. It is from Egypt, after several years of journey that the Yoruba finally settled in Ile-Ife in Nigeria. Oduduwa is believed to be the first leader that led the Yoruba to Ile-Ife and subsequently sent his sons and grandsons to found other Yoruba kingdoms. Johnson's conclusion is worth recalling: That the Yoruba came originally from the East, there cannot be the slightest doubt as their habits, manner and

customs, etc., all go to prove. With them the East is Mecca and Mecca is the East. Having strong affinities with the east looming so largely in their imagination, everything that comes from the east with them comes from Mecca, and hence it is natural to present themselves as having hailed originally from that city.

- **The Oke Oramfe's Version:** Oke Oramfe is located in Ile-Ife. It is believed to be the centre from which the world was created. In their paper Yorubaland up to 1800, Akinjogbin & Ayandele (1980) give us a full picture of what Oke Oramfe's version is all about. According to the legend, there was a period when the world was covered by water. The Almighty God then decided to send some of his messengers to the world and they included Obatala or Orisa Nla or Orisa Alase [as the leader] and sixteen Oye [immortals]. They were given five pieces of iron, a lump of earth tied to a white piece of cloth, and a cockerel. Somewhere on their way to the world, the leader, Obatala, got drunk with palm wine. Oduduwa seized the symbol of authority from him and eventually led the party to the world. The site on which they landed is traditionally known as Oke Oramfe in Ile-Ife. On arrival at the site, Oduduwa set down the five pieces of iron and placed the lump of earth on them. The cockerel then spread its toes on the earth. Consequently, the earth was formed and Oduduwa thus became the ruler. It was from this base (Ife) that he extended his authorities to other Yoruba towns and villages.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Yoruba

Oyo is best known as the major kingdom that eventually emerged as an empire in Yorubaland. Various traditions believe that Oyo was founded by Oranmiyan, the son of Oduduwa, who is also credited with establishing the present Benin monarchy. Oyo Empire was founded in the middle of the fifteen century. A century later, it became very powerful and prosperous, extending its authority as far as Dahomey.

- **The Alaafin Administration:** Oyo Empire was very unique and exceptional in its system of government. For instance, in the sixteenth century, Oyo was one of the rare empires that had in-built checks and balances, and, this contributed to its stability for centuries. The Alaafin was the head of the empire, and was resident in the capital. He was also regarded as "Lord of many lands". The Alaafin was assisted in his administration by a retinue of officials made up of priests, officials and eunuchs. He had a well organized court as well.

Theoretically, the Alaafin was the fountain of authority and was therefore regarded as the “companion of the gods”. Sometimes, he had an autocratic tendency, but in practice, his powers were often limited and regulated by the Oyomesi, a council of seven members headed by Bashorun who acted as the prime minister. The members of Oyomesi were king makers as well. At the demise of the Alaafin, they were the ones to select his successor. The Oyomesi also had the power to remove any Alaafin especially when he appeared dictatorial or transgressed the laws of the land. Usually the deposed Alaafin was expected to commit suicide.

- The Ogboni Cult’s Administration: Apart from the Alaafin cabinet, members of the Oyomesi cult constituted another arm of government. It was a very powerful cult. It was composed of free and prominent members of the society as well as members of the Oyomesi. The Ogboni cult had a very vital position in Yoruba society. It played a mediatory role in any conflict between the Oyomesi and the Alaafin. It was a kind of counter power to the Oyomesi as well.
- The Army: The Army was another arm of government in traditional Yoruba society. It was very organized. Its head was conferred with the coveted title of Are-Ona-Kankanfo. It was made up of infantry and calvary. The Are Ona-Kankanfo was expected to live outside the capital. The Army was credited with performing important functions which included stability of the empire, expansion, as well as keeping dissident territories in check. Oyo Empire also had provincial governments. They were modelled after the central government. They were administered by princes, minor kings and baales [provincial governors]. All of them were subject to the over lordship of the Alaafin. The provincial governments enjoyed considerable autonomy. But the Alaafin had personal agents, Ilari, all over the provinces. The Alaafin used the Bere annual festival periods to acknowledge the renewal of allegiance of the provincial governors to him.

The Bini

It is obvious that the Bini, more than any other ethnic group, have played major roles in the history of Nigeria. For instance, the Bini were the first to be visited by the Europeans as early as 1472 A.D. According to Hodgkin the second half of the fifteenth century witnessed the arrival of the

first Europeans to Benin. For instance, a Portuguese, Ruy de Sequeira, arrived during Ewuare's reign in 1472 while Alfonso de Aviero arrived during Ozolua's reign in 1484. The Benin Kingdom was also the first in the West Coast of Africa to exchange ambassadors with a major European power, the Portuguese. This was between 1481 and 1504.

Origins of Benin Kingdom

- The Egharevba's Version: Just as other Nigerian peoples, the Bini have various traditions of origin. Egharevba (1968) for instance, claims that the Bini people emigrated from Egypt and in the course of their journey southward, settled at Ile-Ife before finally arriving at their present location.
- Igbafe's Version: Another tradition has it that the Bini peoples have been living in the area "from the very beginning". According to Bini mythology, Bini was the youngest child of Osanobua [the High God]. He and his brothers, who included the king of Ife, were sent to live in the world. They were asked by the High God to take whatever they wanted along with them to the world. While others chose wealth, magical skills and material wellbeing, the youngest on the advice of a bird, chose a snail shell. On arrival, they found that the world was covered by water. Following instruction from the bird, the youngest child overturned the snail shell, whereupon sand poured out of it and covered a large part of the water to form land. Thus, the first ruler of Bini became the owner of the land. Land made him powerful and wealthy as he had to sell portions of it to his elder brothers who then became his subjects.
- Ogiso's Version: The first period of pre-colonial Bini history is known as the Ogiso era. This is because their rulers were the Ogisos, which means "kings of the sky". The first Ogiso was known as Igboodo. He was succeeded by Ere who is credited with forming the guild system and laying solid foundation for the kingdom. Ere was succeeded by Orire, who himself was succeeded by a number of Ogisos among whom were women. The last Ogiso was Owodo. History tells us that Owodo was the one that clashed with the nobles and eventually became a victim of intrigues of his wives. This led to the banishment of his only son and heir apparent, Ekaladeran. Ekaladeran founded Ughoton, a port-town in Benin. He later moved to Ife through Erua, where he spent the rest of his life. Many years later, because of a serious political crisis in Benin, the nobles sent for him to come back

and rule over them. But it was too late. Ekaladeran was very old and decided to send his youngest son Oranmiyan [Omonoyan = pampered child] who came and established the Eweka dynasty. With the end of Ogiso dynasty, Benin went through a period of interregnum during which the elders established a form of republican government headed by Evian who eventually attempted to usurp the throne by nominating his son Ogiamen to succeed him. However, as Evian was not an Ogiso, the Benin people rejected his son Ogiamen. This situation led to a serious political crisis in the Bini Kingdom. During the crisis, two factions emerged: 1) the pro-monarchy and 2) the pro-Ogiamen [also known as Republicans]. This stalemate forced the elders to send a delegation to the Ooni of Ife requesting him to send somebody to Benin to rule over them. The request was granted and Oranmiyan, one of the Ooni's sons, was sent to rule the Benin people. But on his arrival to Benin Kingdom, Oranmiyan found the Bini people ungovernable. So, he decided to go back to Ife. However, on his way back, history tells us that Oranmiyan had an affair with a Bini woman, the daughter of Enogie of Ego-Erinmwinda. The woman became pregnant and eventually gave birth to a child who later became Eweka I. He is credited with establishing the present Bini dynasty. A recent version of this episode by some Bini elites maintains that Oranmiyan, who came from Ife to establish the present monarchy, was a Bini prince. According to them, Oranmiyan was the son of Ekaladeran who had earlier been banished from Benin and who subsequently settled at Ile-Ife and eventually became the ruler, Oduduwa. Before Oranmiyan got back to Ife, he said of the Bini kingdom: "the country is a land of vexation, Ile-Ibinu, and only a child born, trained and educated in the arts and mysteries of the land could reign over the people". It was this son of Oranmiyan born by a Bini woman who was subsequently "trained and educated in the arts and mysteries of the land" that eventually ascended the throne with the name Eweka I. Eweka I thus became the first Oba of Benin and his dynasty still reigns in Benin till today. The overall position of the Bini elites is that although Oranmiyan came from Ile-Ife, the monarchy which he established is indigenous to the Bini because he [Oranmiyan] was the son of a Benin prince, and his son, Eweka I, was conceived, born and brought up in Benin. There is no doubt that to them, the present monarchy is indigenous to the Bini. But more research is still needed to ascertain the veracity of this version. Coincidentally, Eweka I had a long and glorious reign. He had many children who were sent to villages as Enogies.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Bini

As earlier mentioned, the Bini kingdom was the first in the West Coast of Africa to exchange ambassadors with a major European power. This was between 1481 and 1504. At that time, the Bini kingdom was already socio-politically well organized. This is what Hodgkin (1975) who visited Benin in 1604 declared: “the town seems to be very great. When you enter into it, you go into a great broad street, not paved, which seems to be seven to eight times broader than the Warmoes Street in Amsterdam....” Bini kingdom had a unique political system, which centered on the Oba. He was the head of the kingdom and succession to the throne was by primogeniture, that is, the first surviving son succeeded his father. To Hodgkin, “the Oba was not only the civil head of state; he was also the religious head as well. He was in fact regarded as a divine person who, in himself, summed up the whole of the race... In him dwelt the divine spirit passed on to him from his forebears” (Hodgkin, 1975). The Bini society was classified into two distinct classes: 1) the nobility [Adesotu], and 2) the commoner [Ighiotu]. The nobility was organized into three [03] groups of title holders:

- The Uzama
- The Eghaevbo n’ Ogbe [palace chiefs] and
- The Eghaevbo n’ ore [town chiefs]

The ordinary people too, most especially those within the city, were organized into a number of guilds. The guilds were professional groups of the common people. There were a number of them such as those of the carvers, brass-workers, blacksmiths, doctors, butchers, etc. These guilds, most especially those that lived in defined quarters in the kingdom, had a system of administration which was the same as that of the villages.

The Igbo

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. This is because from the ancient times, they had no centralized states. Consequently, they operated a kind of government without kings. The Igbo are grouped into five sub-cultures:

- The Igbo of the eastern Nigeria

- The Igbo of the South-eastern Nigeria
- The Igbo of the North-eastern Nigeria
- The Western Igbo and
- The Northern Igbo

Generally, the Igbo are predominantly farmers and traders. Despite some cultural diversity among them, they do share a common basic culture in their language with a cluster of dialects that are mutually intelligible. They also share a common political system based on decentralization of power and delegation of authority exercised by the holders of the staff of authority, the Ofo.

Origins of the Igbo

The origin of the Igbo people is as controversial as that of the Yoruba and the Bini. There are so many versions and it is very difficult to say which is the most acceptable.

- The Middle East Version: Some believe that the Igbo peoples migrated to their present location from either the North or the Middle-east.
- The Igboland Centred Version: Others believe that the Igbo people had been in their present abode from the beginning. Therefore, Igboland is the original homeland.
- The Nri Version: Professor M.A. Onwuejeogwu (2000) regards the Nri version as the only authentic version of origin in existence in the oral tradition of the Igbo. According to Nri version, the ancestor of the Igbo, Eri, descended from the sky and sailed down the River Anambra. When he arrived at Aguleri, he met some autochthonous group of people who had no living memory of their own and settled with them. As their population increased, some groups migrated to other parts of Igboland to establish their own settlements.
- The Awka or Orlu Version: Another tradition considered Awka or Orlu towns as the center of origin of the Igbo from where they dispersed to other areas.
- The Idah Version: Some groups such as the Umunri claim to have migrated to their present location from Idah.
- The Benin Version: The Onitsha and the Igbo on the other side of the River Niger [Delta Igbo], claim Benin origin.

- **The Israeli Version:** One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of origin of the Igbo people is the one that points to Israel. This assumption is based on the so-called similarities between the cultures of the Igbo and the ancient Hebrew. Some Igbo scholars consider themselves as off-shoots of the lost tribes of the Hebrews who migrated southward. You should remember that the Igbo society has always been known as acephalous. Moreover, there were very limited professional historians as at that period. There were no equivalents of Oba, and Alaafin or of palaces over most parts of Igboland. This is why it is very difficult to reconcile all these various versions.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Igbo

Unlike other ethnic groups such as the Yoruba and the Bini, the Igbo people did not build any strong centralized states. This is mainly because Igbo society had always been fragmentary or acephalous. In traditional Igbo for instance, the village was the centre of government. This has been described as direct democracy. The village-centered administration implied that every linkage for instance, including all male adults in the village, participated in its political process.

- **The Amala Oha** You should always remember that the socio-political organization of the traditional Igbo was fundamentally based either on the age grades or age and titled societies. Amala Oha was therefore a form of general assembly in traditional Igbo society. All the male adult members usually met in this assembly to perform legislative functions. In ancient times, the Amala Oha's meetings were held in the open village square. All the decisions taken during those meetings were absolute and final. As a democratic society, the life of every individual was highly respected. More so, the recognition of an individual in the society was based on individual capability and age rather than family background. The elders formed the core of village administration. They were highly respected accordingly. Hardworking and wealthy individuals were respected and given important responsibilities in the society as well. The youth, middle age or able bodied men and elders constituted age-sets or age groups. You should remember that each age-set had its own special rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities in matters affecting the village.

The Itsekiri

Origin of the Itsekiri People

Iginuwa is known as the man through whom the kingdom of Itsekiri is said to have been established. History tells us that Iginuwa was the son and heir apparent of Oba Olua of Benin in about 1473. You should remember that unlike the Yoruba, Bini and Igbo peoples, the Itsekiri do not have many versions of their origin. According to the Itsekiri tradition, Iginuwa at a time wrongly advised his father on a particular issue. The advice was so disastrous that Iginuwa became very unpopular to the extent that his people vowed never to let him succeed his father. When his father, Oba Olua, noticed the seriousness of the anger of his people against his son, he decided to arrange a kingdom outside Benin for him. This was according to him, the best way to avoid problems in his kingdom. According to the tradition, Iginuwa was then sent with some chiefs and servants to an area by the sea to establish a kingdom of his own. On his arrival, Iginuwa met with some Ijaws who took him along with his followers by canoe to an Island where they finally settled. To most of the Itsekiri, this settlement is known as Itsekiri Kingdom till today.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Itsekiri People

The Kingdom Iginuwa founded was made up and is still made up of the Itsekiri, Ijaw and a good number of other elements. Ode Itsekiri is the capital. Other settlements such as the Forcados, Escravos and Benin Rivers surround the capital. The socio-political organization of the Itsekiri people was very close to that of Benin Kingdom. The Palace and titles for instance were modeled after that of Benin Kingdom. But in the Itsekiri case, the Kingdom was ruled rather by the Olu. He alone presided over a council known as Ojoye which was made up of seven nobles or title holders. The Olu combined in himself spiritual and temporal powers.

The Urhobo

Origin of the Urhobo People

Unlike the Itsekiri, the Urhobo people have more than one version of their Origins.

- Ughelli, Aghara and Ogo Version: According to Ughelli, Aghara and Ogo, the Urhobo people originated from the Ijaw. To them, it is very difficult, if not impossible to culturally and historically differentiate the Urhobo from the Ijaw.
- Uwherun, Abraka, Agbon, Oogun and Olomu Version: To Uwherun, Abraka, Agbon, Oogun, Olomu and many others, the Urhobo people are the product of the Benin immigrants. According to them, it is very difficult if not impossible to historically and culturally differentiate the Urhobo people from the Bini.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Urhobo People

Just like the Itsekiri, the Urhobo people are found in the Niger Delta region. However, unlike the Itsekiri, the Urhobo are fragmented and live in different places in the Niger Delta area. This may be the reason why the Urhobo people, unlike the Itsekiri and Benin, have never established a single Kingdom. Socio-politically speaking, each Urhobo Village had its own traditional institution headed by a ruler (Ovie). Just like the Itsekiri, the socio-political organization of the Urhobo people was modeled after that of Benin Kingdom. The Ovie for instance, had a court made of prominent individuals and titleholders. Moreover, just like in Igboland, the adult male members of the Urhobo society were divided into age sets corresponding with youth, middle age and elders. Of course, each of the age sets performed specific duties in the societies.

The Ijaw

Origin Of the Ijaw People

As one of the major ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region, the Ijaw people share almost the same stories of origin with their Itsekiri and Urhobo counterparts. That is to say there is no clear-cut demarcation on the history of the origin of the Ijaw from that of the Itsekiri and Urhobo.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Ijaw People

Socio-politically speaking, the traditional Ijaw did not develop any centralized system of government. For some scholars, this might be so because the Ijaw were scattered in small fishing settlements in the creeks of the River Niger. The “House System” characterized Ijaw societies.

Ijaw people were traders especially fishermen. The traditional major Ijaw states were Bonny, Kalabari, Ibrika, Opobo and Brass-Nembe.

Major Ethnic Groups of Northern Nigeria

We can identify at least six (6) major ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria. These are the Hausa, the Kanem-Bornu, the Nupe, the Igala, the Jukun and the TIV.

The Hausa/Fulani People

The Hausa people represent one of the important and politically dominant groups in Northern Nigeria. By the year 2000, the Hausa population was estimated at about twenty million. They are also one of the largest linguistic groups in the whole of Africa.

Origins of the Hausa

Just like other major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Origin of the Hausa people is not very certain.

- The Bayajida Version: Most scholars agree that the Bayajida story is the most authentic oral tradition in Hausaland that attempts to explain the origin of the Hausa states. According to the legend, Bayajida is believed to be the founder/hero of the Hausa states. He is also believed to have come from Baghdad to Kanem-Bornu and thence to Hausa land in present Nigeria. History tells us that Bayajida married the daughter of the Mai of Bornu by whom he had a son at Biran. After a while, Bayajida left Biran to Daura. While in Daura, he helped to kill a snake, which had for a long time prevented the people from taking water from a well. According to the legend, the queen of Daura was very impressed and decided to marry him. They later had a son named Bawo. Bawo had six (06) children who, together with Bayajida's other son at Biran, are believed to have founded the original seven Hausa states referred to as the "Hausa Bokwai."

The Socio-Political Organization of the Hausa

- The Sarki has always been known as the head of any typical Hausa state. He always works with a retinue of officials in a well-organized court. Sarkin Kasar, which means "ruler of

the land”, was the full title given to any effective and efficient head of Hausa State. The Sarkin Kasar combined both political and religious/spiritual functions. He was also the chief executive and judge of the State, but he was aided by a council of state. At the district level, the government was modeled after that at the national level. You should also know that between 14 th and 15th centuries, the socio-political organization of Hausa States took another shape. For instance, Islam was adopted and this gave birth to many new political institutions such as the offices of the Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Dogari, Yari Sarki and Sarki Yau. The Islamization of Hausaland also influenced its judicial system. The Sharia law started taking shape. Some new titles such as Alkali and Qadi’s (judges) became commonplace in the administration of justice.

The Kanem-Bornu People

Kanuri is the language that unites all the Kanem-Bornu people.

Origin of the Kanem-Bornu People

Kanem-Bornu ethnic group also has many versions of its origin. But all these versions are not certain. They are also known to have been exaggerated in the region North East of the Lake Chad.

- The SO Version: Some scholars argue that the So people were the first settlers in KanemBornu. According to them, the So had developed a sophisticated sociopolitical culture based on agriculture and the knowledge and use of iron technology. This happened long before the Zaghawa who later invaded the land.
- The Saif b. Dhiyazan Version There is another tradition of the history of Kanem-Bornu, which attributes the foundation of Kanem-Bornu to the great Arab hero, Saif b. Dhiyazan. This happened between 9th and 10th centuries A.D. Yazan is also credited to have established the now famous Saifawa dynasty. You should remember that the Saifawa dynasty was one of the longest ruling dynasties in the pre-colonial West African Sub-region.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Kanem-Bornu

It is very important to notice that the nucleus of the socio-political organization of the Kanem Bornu people was based on kinship. For instance, the Mai (king) was the highest authority in the political structure. His mother i.e. the Queen Mother or Magira was a very important and respected personage in the Kanem political structure as well. The King's sister was also very important. She was to assist the King in the day-to-day administration of Kanem.

- The “Nokena”: Besides the kinship oriented political system of the Kanem people, there was an imperial state council known as the council of the twelve, or the “Nokena”. The principal duty of the “Nokena” was to offer the king useful advice.
- The Maini Kanendi: The Maini Kanendi was the chief judge of the State. He played a major role in the Kanem political structure. By his position, he was the Mai's legal adviser as well.
- The Army: In the traditional Kanem-Bornu, the army played a vital role in the administration. The army was very professional. It was divided strategically into two divisions: a home division and a bush garrison.
- The Titled Nobility: The titled nobility was another institution within the Kanem-Bornu political structure. They are known to have exercised tremendous influence in the state and were assigned fiefdoms to administer. The most important of these were Galadima, Kaigama, Yerima and Meshema.
- The Servile Institution: The servile was made of slaves and eunuchs. They are known to be important in the administration of the state. They also held offices like “Mushemu”, “Yuroma” and Kachella”.

The Nupe

Just like the Hausa/Fulani, the early history of the Nupe people is not much known. What you should remember is that the pre-colonial Nupe people and state developed in the region of the Niger and Benue valleys of the Nigerian Middle Belt. The Nupe state was located on the north bank of the Niger at its confluence with the River Kaduna. Nupe land was located at the cross roads of trade from Borno to Kano axis in the Northeast, as well as Yorubaland, Ganga and Benin

in the Southwest. Gbara was its capital. It was located on the bank of the Kaduna River and was an important trading center as well. Gbara functioned as an entreport connecting Benin and Oyo trade with Nupe.

Origins of the Nupe People

Like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, the Nupe people also have various versions of origin.

- The Nupe-Centred Version: Some scholars believe that the early Nupe people originated where they presently occupy.
- The Egyptian Version: Other elites argue that the first peoples of the Nupe came from Egypt. Therefore, Egypt was the origin of the Nupe people.
- The Idah Version: Tsoede or Edegi is considered by some Nupe people as the founder of their State. And, according to Nupe tradition, Tsoede might have arrived in the early 16th century from Idah. He (Trodede) is also believed to have had an Igala father and a Nupe mother.
- The Igala Version: History tells us that the Nupe people had at a time paid allegiance and tribute to the Attah of the Igala state. To them, in the 16th century, a hero, an Idah Prince known as Tsoede re-established Nupe's independence with himself as the "ETSU NUPE" king of Nupeland.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Nupe People

The Etsu Nupe was known as the head of the Nupe Kingdom. He operated a two-level administration: central and provincial. History tells us that the Etsu Nupe enjoyed a divine status and people worshipped and respected him. His word was law. But the Etsu Nupe was not always absolute because his power and actions were regulated by a body of traditions and taboos.

- The Nobility Besides the Etsu Nupe, there was a class of powerful gentlemen called nobility. Its main task was to help the king in carrying out his duties as leader. There were nobilities such as the Shaba, Kpotuh and Maku.
- The Zitzu In traditional Nupe land, each village was headed by the Zitzu. He was an appointee of the Etsu. The Zitzu was in turn assisted by a council of elders. The Zitzu always pays tribute to the Etsu in recognition of his authority.

The Igala

Origin of the Igala

Like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, the origin of the Igala people is not clear. However, Idah has always been known as the capital state of Igala people.

- **Abutu Eje Version:** History tells us that Abutu Eje was the first personality to seriously contribute to the development or evolution of the Igala state. Abutu Eje sometimes identified as child reared by a leopard (Eje) or as a prince from Ado (Benin) or Apa (Wukari Jukun), was a foreigner. According to the legend, the sovereignty was transferred to him from an aboriginal population (the Okpoto).
- **Achadu Version:** Some Igala elites attribute the emergence of their state to one Achadu. He is believed to have come from the Igbo country. He married the Attah and later became a patron (ritual husband) and the leader of the kingmakers (Igalla-mela).
- **The Yoruba Version:** Some scholars also argue that the Igala are of a Yoruba extraction. Historical evidence exists to show that the territories of the Igala and some Yoruba speaking peoples had been contiguous.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Igala

Ayagba or Idoko is best known as the ancestor to all the Attahs. He is also credited to have founded the present Igala dynasty. History tells us that he was the one who helped the Igala people to break away from the Jukun rule. Politically speaking, each Igalla Mela was the head of any effective Igala territory. His administrative power was like that of the Uzama Nihiron of Benin or the Oyemisi of the Yoruba. The traditional Igala political structure was operated on two levels. There was the central and the provincial level of administration. The Attah was head of the centre. A council of chiefs and other officials assisted him in the local or provincial administration of the kingdom.

The Jukun (Kwararafa)

Origin of the Jukun

Again, like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the origin of the Jukun people is not fixed. The Jukun are also known as the Kwararafa. They are believed to have occupied the area between the River Benue and the River Ibi in Gongola state. Wukari was also known as the principal town of the Jukun people, and it is in that town that their King resided. The Jukun State was large.

- The Kano Chronicle Version: The Kano chronicle version was the most authentic source that could say something convincing about the Jukun history of origin. According to records from the Kano Chronicle, the Jukun people raided the Hausaland and Bornu in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This shows that although the origin of the Jukun people was almost unknown, they were at least in existence before the sixteenth century or thereabouts.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Jukun

As said earlier, the Jukun state was certainly not a small state. This is one of the reasons why Jukun was seen as a confederation of peoples who recognized the religious supremacy of the AKU UKA. History tells us that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Jukun had been well established in the middle Benue region. The Jukun people operated a theocratic system of government. AKU UKA was the head of any effective Jukun state. He was believed to be spiritually appointed and was regarded as the representative of the gods on earth. Although AKU UKA was very powerful, his system of government was not despotic. He had no absolute power over his people. There were many ways of regulating his power. According to Jukun tradition, AKU UKA was judged, for instance, by his performance (result). Since he was the symbol of the Jukun existence, a good harvest could bring in more prestige while a bad harvest could result in serious calamity, and thereafter, his unpopularity and downfall. Also, there were many taboos which acted as checks on his royal power as well. Even as the head of the executive, legislative and judiciary, AKU UKA also ruled with the advice of his nobles and subjects. Public opinion was respected in Jukun pre-colonial administration.

- Achuwo: He was the head of Aku Uka's Council of nobles. He functioned as the Prime Minister. He was seconded by the Abo Zike, Kinda Achuwo and the Aku Nako. You should also remember that these nobles were representatives of their lineages as well.

The Tiv

P. Bohannan (1953) in his book *The Tiv of Central Nigeria* classifies the Tiv people as the largest single ethnic group in the middle Benue basin of Northern Nigeria. According to him, the southern and eastern portions of the Tiv country, also called "Ityough Kiteragh", lie among the foothills of the Cameroon highlands and the Sonkwalla or Sankwura hills of the Obudu hills territory. These regions are flanked by the Alago and Jukunized group on the North, the Basta and other Cameroon groups like the Undir and Iyon on the South and South –East, with the Jukun and Chamba to the West. Of course, they presently occupy the Tiv local government areas of Buraka, Gboko, Gwer, Gwer West, Gumu, Kwande, Katisina Ala, Konshisha, Vandeikya, Ukun, Ushonyo, and Mukurdi.

Origin of the Tiv

Needless to say again that the origin of the Tiv people is not certain. What we know about their origin came from oral traditions of myths and legends and theories of migration.

- Tiv Version: According to the Tiv oral tradition, it was Tiv, as a person, that founded the Tiv ethnic group of today. So, the word Tiv refers both to the language and founding father of the group.
- Swem Version: Other traditions argue that earlier settlements of the ethnic group came from Swem down to their present location through Nwange and Ibinda, and this occurred between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Socio-Political Organization of the Tiv

Again, P. Bohannan (1953) argues that the socio-political system of the traditional Tiv was very unique. It was a classic example of segmentary or largely decentralized system of government in pre-colonial and postcolonial Nigeria ever studied.

- "Tsombor" was the name of the family group and was the largest recognized entity as well.

- “Mbavessen” (Elder) Mbavessen or elder was the head of a unit. You should remember that in Tiv traditional system, each family group was in turn divided into smaller units. You should also remember that the Tiv attached much importance to the spirit of brotherhood and mutual relations because of the belief that all of them were from one father and therefore from one lineage. For Bohannan (1953) the Tiv socio-political structure “was so simple that it was difficult to understand.” According to him, Tiv society was very much segmented. It was a hierarchical society. It started with the individual at the lowest level, the family, the extended family, the kindred, and through clan to Tiv, i.e. the whole tribe. In Tiv society, more than in any other Nigerian ethnic group, genealogical affiliation was very strong. Even today, in traditional Tiv society, it is upon this kind of genealogical framework of hierarchy that kinship relationship is organized.