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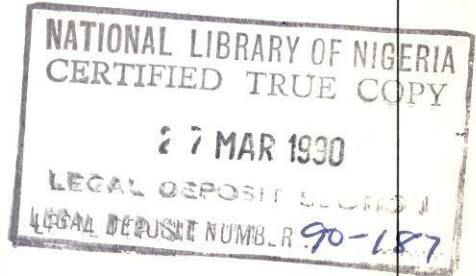
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People of NIGERIA

KNOW NIGERIA SERIES

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People of Nigeria

People of Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is an embodiment of unity in diversity. Its land area spans over six ecological zones ranging from the swampy coastal main forests of the south to the semi-arid but fertile fringes of the north. Similarly its over 100 million people are separated by more than 200 languages and dialects and yet united by history, culture, national aspirations and developmental goals.

The amalgamation of the northern and southern parts of the country in 1914 saw the birth of Nigeria as a nation-state with shared political, economic and social aims and objectives. Before then, Nigeria or what came to be known as Nigeria, was a vast land inhabited by sub-national ethnic and other groups with diverse languages, dialects and cultures. The amalgamation did not destroy the sub-national or polyglot languages, dialects and cultures. Instead, it welded them into one admirable conglomerate known as Nigeria today. The making and makers of this impressive conglomerate form the theme of this unit in the "Know Nigeria" series.

The 1979 constitution approved the use, in the legislative houses, of four widely spoken languages in the country. These are: English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba out of the over 200 languages identified by linguistic scholars, whose value-systems affect the tongues and thoughts of millions of other Nigerians.

Ethnic groups in Nigeria range in size from those with a few thousand people to others with millions, each group speaking a separate language. The variety of customs, language and social organisation is bewildering, as do similarities brought about by centuries of economic, political and cultural interactions.

In this first part in the series on Nigeria, efforts have been made to focus on the ethnic groups in terms of present location, origin, migration, settlement, social organisation and their interactions with one another; it is these interactions that unite them as people of the same country. The ethnic group examined here are by no means exhaustive but their selection has been determined by their relative contributions to the mutually beneficial ethnic and tribal interactions that, despite their diverse origins and cultures, unite the peoples of Nigeria as a one nation.

The Urhobos

The Urhobo speaking people of Nigeria with a population of over 1.13 million, occupy mainly four local government areas in Bendel State. These are Okpe, Ethiope, Ughelli and Burutu. Speakers of the language can also be found in large numbers in Warri, Bomadi, Isoko and Oredo Local Government Areas of the State. For many years, the Isoko people were grouped among the Urhobo-speaking people, an arrangement that the Isoko people strongly opposed, until 1963 when the Mid-West Region was created and they became recognised as a separate ethnic group. Culturally however, the Urhobo and the Isoko people speak variants of the same language.

Oral history has it that the Urhobo people migrated from Benin in different waves about the 13th Century. Some of the early settlers were compelled by the quest for land or sheer spirit of adventure to leave Benin and move southwards to the Delta area where they finally settled and established themselves in various areas that they today inhabit with the Izoos, the Itsekiris, and the Isokos of the Delta.

The Urhobo people inhabit the upper Delta area of the rain forest and swamps of the south and are mainly farmers as a result of their geographical environment. They are producers of such food crops as yam, maize, cassava, cocoyam, sweet potato and vegetables. Cash-crops produced include rubber, palm oil, palm kernel and cocoa but the production has been adversely affected by the discovery of oil in the area, especially in Ughelli and Kokori Inland. Commercial activities are also important in towns like Sapele, Efurun, Warri and Amukpe where piggery and poultry farming have become very important. The people also engage in fishing, pottery, mat-making and boat-building.

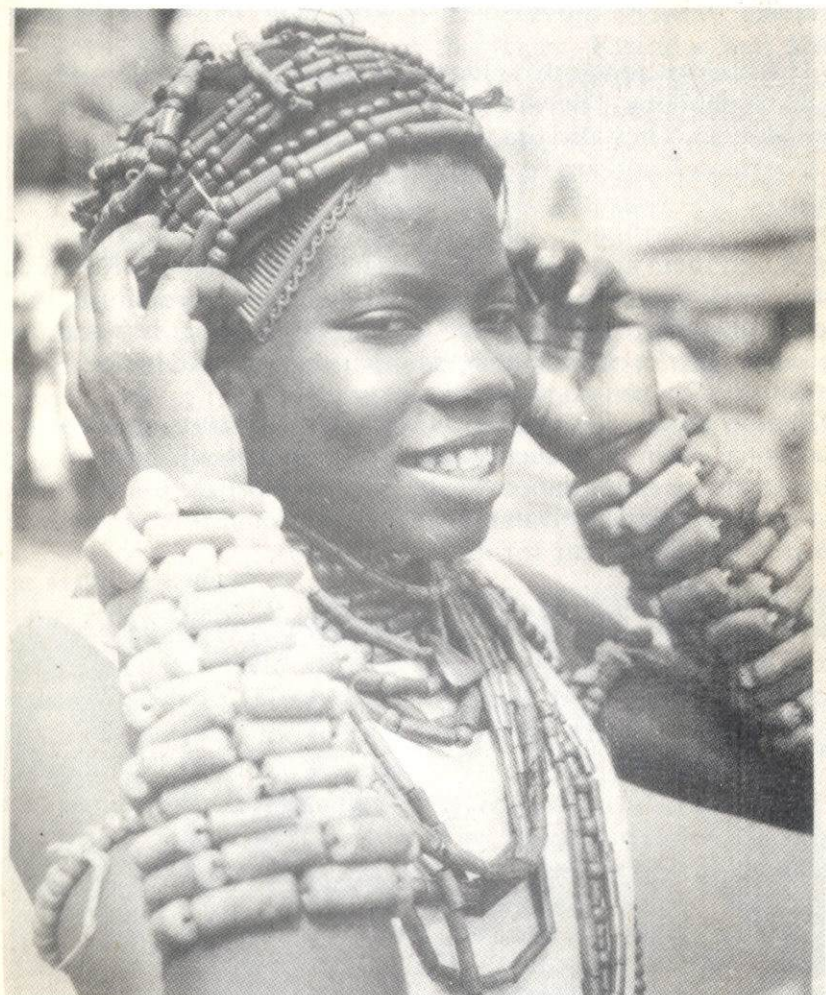
The Urhobo people have contributed immensely to the cultural richness and splendour of Bendel State. Dancing and music drama are some of the features of the cultural life of the people.

The Itsekiris

The Itsekiri people inhabit the western lower Niger Delta area of Bendel State, an area marked by difficult terrain of mangrove swamps. They occupy Warri, Burutu and Bomadi local government areas with greater concentration in Warri and Burutu.

Oral history holds that the Itsekiris like the Urhobo people, migrated from Benin and founded a settlement in what is now the Warri local government area. Their leader was Prince Iginuan or Ginuwa I who was the son of Oba Olua of Benin of the second dyn-

asty. Ginuwa's son, Ijijan, later founded Ode-Itsekiri (Big Warri) which became the headquarters of the Itsekiri people. The original settlers described Ijijan's people as **Ogbowuru** (mammoth crowd) because of their delight in boat armada. **Ogbowuru** is one of the nick-names of the Olu of Itsekiri until today. The Portuguese traders who first came to the area called it "Iwere" or "Ourre" kingdom which meant happiness or success or good fortune. Warri, with the largest concentration of the Itsekiri people can be said to be a



A young girl bedected with coral beads, a type of adornment associated with the Idos, the Itsekiris and Urhobos.

corruption of "Iwere" or "Ewere", used today to describe not only the Itsekiri people but also Warri kingdom.

The Itsekiri language is a mixture of Yoruba and other languages, all having affinity with the Edo language. Apart from the migration of Ginuwa from Benin, there was also contact between the Itsekiri and a group of people who now inhabit Gborodo, Omadino and Ureju and claimed to have come from Ode in Ijebu, once a Yoruba kingdom. The Portuguese traders who came to Itsekiri land in the Delta equally left a mark of their language. Thus the Itsekiri speak a language with a combination of Edo, Yoruba and Portuguese roots.

The Itsekiris almost dress like the Urhobos and the Isokos who are their neighbours. The women wear silk or damask wrappers over lace blouses. They also use gold and coral bead ear-rings, bracelets and necklaces, and are regarded as one of the best dressed in Nigeria. The men wear long-sleeved white or colourful shirt over a rich embroidered wrapper. They wear straw hats with a feather (*ilele*) stuck into them and long coral necklaces (*ugbaghala*), wristlets and carry walking sticks. The Olu and his chiefs are much more colourfully attired. The throne of the Olu of Warri is **hereditary**, and although the eldest son stands a chance to succeed his father, any son of the Olu can be chosen.

The people are famous for their music and dance, performed at traditional ceremonies such as birth, marriage, death and initiation. The regatta or canoe dance usually involves more than one hundred fast moving boats. Festivals take place in various areas and at different periods of the year for different purposes.



The Olu of Warri, Oba Godwin Emako Atunwase II, performing some of the traditional rites at his installation and coronation as the new Olu of Warri at Ode Itshekiri flanked by his chiefs.

The Ijos (Izons):

The Izons constitute a linguistic group in Nigeria. The word, originally spelt "Ijaw" or "Ijo" was changed to Izon in 1981. Geographically, Izon people live mainly in the riverine area of the Niger-Delta and, for most part, build houses on water due to lack of land. They are to be found in both Bendel, Rivers and Ondo States.

They occupy the lower reaches of the Niger Delta and all of its length from west to east as well as over the territory running northwards to the confluence of the Niger, Forcados and Nun rivers. Dr. E. Alagoa, in his article (Ijo origins and migrations published in **Nigeria Magazine** No. 91, Dec. 1966) states that a "number of early Ijo migrants were established before refugees from the Itsekiri kingdom of Warri arrived and in time seized religious and political control of the state." Other traditions claim Ile-Ife, another part of Nigeria and Egypt as the origin of the Izon people.

Like the Itsekiris, kingship has been a long tradition among the Izon people, with King Jaja Opobo occupying a prominent place in that tradition. The people believe in ancestral worship such as **Onyoma**, one of the founding ancestors, whose shrine can still be seen at Nembe. The Izons share many cultural traits such as rituals, music and dances with their neighbours.

The Isoko People

The Isokos live in the western delta and have as neighbours the Ndokwa people to the north, the Urhobos to the east and the Izon people to the south. The whole of the area is situated in the ever-green forest, south of the country with the oil palm as the dominant vegetation. There are numerous rivers, streams and creeks which richly reward the people's almost universal preoccupation with fishing, canoe-building and cultivation of both food and cash crops. The food crops cultivated are yams, cassava, maize, rice, vegetable, potato, while cash crops include palm oil, palm kernel and rubber.

The Isoko historian and researcher, Prof. Obaro Ikime (**The Isoko people: A Historical Survey, 1972**) states that the Isokos are among the least known people of Nigeria due mainly to the relative remoteness of their territory, until the late fifties when crude petroleum was discovered in some parts of the area. The Urhobos

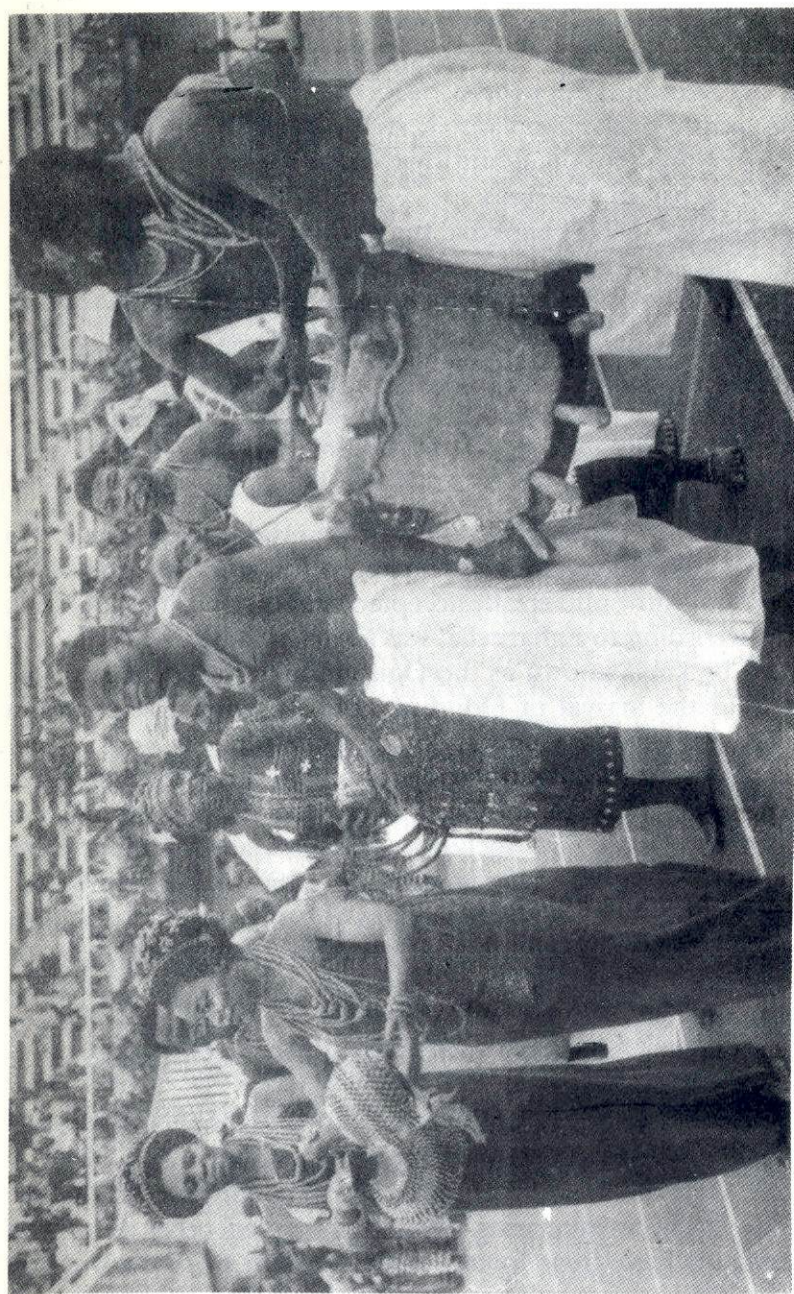
and Isokos have a lot of things in common even though they have distinct languages. With the creation of the Midwest (now Bendel) state in 1963, the Isoko people were granted a separate administrative division which, under the new structure, has become a local government area.

If the origins and migrations of the Izon people present many debatable points, historians and scholars seem to agree on the origin of the Isoko people. Since the Urhobos and the Igbos respectively live in the west and north of the Isoko territory, two traditional claims exist. Some members of the Isoko claim Igbo origin (Umeh, Enwhe, Egbide and Emede) while others claim Urhobo origin (Olomoro from Olomu clan in Urhoboland). The general claim to Bini origin is lent its weight because of the powerful influence exerted by the Bini kingdom over its neighbours, including the Isokos. In **Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830 - 1855**, the late Professor K. Dike spoke of a third migratory wave generally accepted to have occurred about the 17th century. This may account for the lack of historical uniformity of the Isoko clans.

Age is the basis of the political and social governance among the Isoko people. **Ekpado**, the highest governing council of the people is usually constituted by the eldest of the people. Christianity came to Isokoland between 1896 and 1911, but its influence did not stop the worship of ancestral gods and goddesses. The people of Isoko are lovers of music, dance and festivals which feature masquerades.

The Edos

The Edo-speaking people presently occupy Benin City and its environs and have as their neighbours the Urhobos, the Isokos, the Itsekiris and the Itons in the south and the Igbos of Aniocha, Ika and Ndokwa local government areas to the east. The people are mainly farmers, growing cash crops such as rubber, oil palm, cotton and cocoa. Food crops include yam, cassava, cocoyam, potato, maize, beans, rice, fruit and vegetable. The ancient Bini empire flourished in "slave trading". Bronze and brass sculptures were finely executed even before the arrival of the Portuguese, first in 1472, and later from 1485 in search of trade in pepper, skins, ivory and palm-kernel in exchange for goods manufactured in Europe. Today the area is still famous for brass and bronze casting and sculpture as well as



An Edo Cultural Group

blacksmithing. Cloth-weaving, pottery and woodwork provide gainful occupations alongside other commercial enterprises.

Although Benin-City is the acorn that sprouted the oak that formed the Edo-speaking people, historians seem to have problems as to the origins of the Binis who constituted the core community. Oral history holds that the Benin area was inhabited by some people before the arrival of the Binis.

According to Jacob Egharevba, the historian, "many, many years ago, the Binis came all the way from Egypt to found a more secure shelter in this part of the world after a short stay in the Sudan and at Ile-Ife... before coming here, a band of hunters was sent from Ife to inspect this land and the report furnished was favourable. Tradition says that they met some people who were in the land before their arrival. "These people are said to have come from the Sudan originally."

Although John Hatch believes that "the origins of the Binis who formed the core community were indefinite as those of other West Africans", it is now universally accepted that the empire of the first dynasty, according to Egharevba, was founded about 900 A.D. and was ruled by kings known as the Ogiso. This political system continued until the arrival of Oduduwa and his people at Ile-Ife in Yorubaland about the 12th Century A.D.

The central authority in Benin has always been held by the Obas. There were 36 Obas from the reign of Oba Eweka to the reign of Oba Oghamwen. This included two usurpers - Ozuere and Ogbabo - as recorded by Egharevba. In a bid to avoid civil war, bloodshed and unnecessary destruction of property, sons of Ogisos migrated to different areas outside Benin-City. As a result, the early settlers of Ishan, Etsako, Afemai, the Igbo-speaking peoples of Ika and Aboh, the Urhobo, the Isoko, the Itsekiri, the Izon as well as the people of Onitsha on the east bank of the River Niger claimed to be migrants from Benin.

Ancestral or traditional worship is still very strongly observed by the Bini people in spite of the advent of christianity and Islam.

In fact, christianity was introduced in the Bini Kingdom in the 15th century by missionaries who accompanied other European merchants to these areas for the main purpose of converting the people including the members of the Bini royal family to the new religion.

The Igbos

The Igbos are a group of autonomous communities who speak a common language which forms part of the Kwa group of West African languages. Their territorial distribution covers the Niger/Cross River area extending to parts of the present-day Akwa Ibom and Cross-River States to the east, the Izos to the south, the Edo-speaking people to the west and the Igala/Idoma-speaking peoples to the north.

The oral history of the origin of the Igbos is controversial. Some oral historians claim that the Igbos have been living in their present location for at least five thousand years while others believe that the Igbos migrated to their present abode from areas around the confluence of the River Niger, in other words, Igala, and hence the socio-cultural similarities in the characteristics of the Igbos and the Igalas.

Some anthropologists have divided the Igbo race into five cultural groups. These are: northern or Onitsha Igbos, southern or Owerri Igbos, western or Bendel Igbos, eastern or Cross River Igbos, and the north-eastern Igbos. The Niger Igbos are part of the riverine groups of Western-Igbos often called **Olu** because they live along the bank of the river. They are small communities bound by a common culture but politically autonomous, each constituting a small kingdom and resisting domination by any neighbouring group.

The Igbos live in mainly the tropical rainforest and marginal savannah areas of the north and have similar cultural affinities with their neighbours in the west, in the east and in the north. Until communication links with the rest of the country improved, their main occupation was agriculture in addition to fishing in the riverine areas.

As agricultural people, land is the basis of the Igbo material existence. Communities and their sub-divisions are very largely defined in terms of ownership of land which is governed by three cardinal principles:

- (a) that land belongs to the community and cannot be taken away from it without its consent;
- (b) that within the community the individual shall have security of tenure for the land he requires for his compound, his gardens and his farms; and



A graceful Ibo lady

-
- (c) that no member of the community shall be without land.

The seasonal farming activities determined the people's festival calendar. Most of their annual festivals are held after the harvest and before the next farming season begins. This period is used for taking chieftancy titles and for other social and ritual activities in the community. In appearance, the Igbos are generally sturdy, agile and seldom wear tribal marks except for **ichi** title holders. This practice is gradually dying out.

The Igbos are highly industrious and resourceful. These are evident in their vigorous struggle for personal achievements. The Igbos are said to be individualistic and egocentric. Among them age is respected but achievement is revered. It is this zeal to achieve and gain respect and recognition in the society which leads the Igbo into every conceivable occupation and to all parts of Nigeria, Africa and the world. The Igbos are known for their quick adaptation to, and interest in, other cultures. They easily learn the languages of their places of sojourn and easily integrate with most communities. The Igbos have very high regard for strangers and are generous to them.

Their religion before the coming of white missionaries was animistic. The name of their supreme god was and is still **Chukwu** or **Chineke**.

Society and morality are bound together by their cosmogonical concepts and the social organisation of their institution is sustained by their metaphysical views about life and the universe. Their polytheistic religious belief provides support for law and order, and in particular **Ani (Ala)** the deity of the land - sustains the supreme moral sanction.

The Ibibios

The Ibibioland, located in the mainland part of the Akwa Ibom State, is the sixth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Evidence of the origin of the Ibibios and their migration is scanty and speculative. There are however testimonies, based on the antiquity and continuity of this group, of long time existence of the Ibibios in their present location, just like other major linguistic groups of southern Nigeria. In fact, the Ibibios are acclaimed to be the most ancient descendants of the semi-Bantu people in Nigeria.

Population movements and migrations into the areas might have involved small groups of people trickling in through the forest belt over a long period of time, before the expansion of the Bantu-speaking people. While there is a strong view that the Ibibios came from the east around the Nigeria/Cameroun border, others main-



An Ibibio lady



An Ibo family at a reception

tain that they came out of Ibom in Arochukwu (Imo State) and spread to other parts of Akwa Ibom and the Cross River States. The only variant to these is the claim that the Ibibios came from Ethiopia and migrated through the Camerouns to Nigeria. This source claims that Ibibio is a corruption of a Hebrew name, but this version seems no more than a dim reference to a still largely debatable historical migration of many ethnic groups of Nigerians from the east.

The Efiks:

The Efiks, like the Ibibios, are believed to be of Bantu origin. The history of their origin is speculative but like their kith and kin in the Akwa Ibom State, they have a long history of residency in their present abode. Some even believed that the Efiks came from Israel around 1200 AD.

Fishing and trading activities on the Cross River were dominated by the Eiks, a notably sophisticated ethnic group whose principal city, Calabar, eventually grew into a major trading metropolis with the development of early trade contacts between Nigeria and Europe. This early contact which was the source of strength and wealth popularized the Efik language among the other ethnic groups of the region.

The tradition and language of the Efiks and the Ibibios are related to those of other ethnic groups of the Cross River State. Other similarities among the various groups in the area are secret societies, music, dance, dress and mode of traditional worship.

The cultural life of the people has been influenced by the early Christian missionaries. As a result, many of the most cherished aspects of the Efik culture either went underground or underwent some cosmetic mutation that denied them their ancient mystery and awe.



A young Efik man from Calabar, the principal city of that ethnic group.

The Yorubas:

The Yoruba-speaking people can be found in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo and Kwara States. They trace their origin to Saudi Arabia. Legends however has it that the ancestors of the Yorubas came directly from heaven and settled in the city of Ife. Ile-Ife therefore became their first political, religious and cultural headquarters. It is from Ile-Ife that adventurers among the Yorubas, including members of the royal family, went out to found Owu, Oyo, Ketu, Ila, Benin, Ondo, Ijesha and Ekiti.

The political organisation of the Yorubas is based on the existence of kingdoms, each under an **Oba** who rules with the aid of the council of chiefs, an elaborate military system and age-grade organisations. Each Yoruba town has its own crowned king or **Oba**.

The Yoruba have a patrilineal system and inheritance is passed down from father to son. This is however changing with the modern society. A universal characteristic of the Yoruba-speaking people is the belief in the strong bond of kinship. Communal solidarity and mutual inter-dependence are an ingrained element of Yoruba social life, with the result that in traditional Yoruba society even the very poor is never totally neglected. Everybody - man, woman or child - has a very important role to play in the society. Elderly people occupy an important position in the Yoruba socieity. They are highly respected and regarded as the repository of wisdom. They are believed to possess near spiritual powers as they are seen to be closest to the dead ancestors. They thus traditionally provide the all-important link between the living and the dead.

The Yorubas are a proud, cheerful and friendly people. Most of them are farmers, fishermen and traders. Besides these occupations, there are also a good number of professional artists and craftsmen who are skilled in the art of casting, carving and pottery as exemplified by the world famous terra cotta and bronze heads of Ife, known to be about 800 years old. The Oyo wood crafts as well as the gaily decorated leatherwork, calabash, gourds and carvings for which Oyo town is renowned all testify to the high quality of craftsmanship of the Yorubas. The Yoruba farmers grow yam, cocoa, groundnut, cassava, kolanut, maize and rice, to mention just a few crops. The key elements in the traditional religion of the Yorubas are ancestor worship and an adoration of divinity. Christianity and Islam have however taken firm roots and are fast displacing the traditional mode of worship.

It may be said as a general rule that among the older peoples, more attention is paid to the spirits of the dead and less to the gods. Much



Yoruba women dressed in Asoke outfits.

ancestor worship, as well as many mystery cults will be found embedded in the ritual of their secret societies.

Among the Yorubas it is traditional that a child should receive the name given it by the oldest male member of that family, parents and relatives, at birth. It is not uncommon for a Yoruba child to have many names, but only about two or three of these are used. The rest are usually forgotten. In the course of the ceremony it is customary that small quantities of food such as sugar, salt, kolanut, dried fish, aligator pepper, palm oil, water and gin will be made to touch the child's lips as a symbolic starting point of its journey through life.

Among the Yorubas, tribal marks was originally meant to help identification especially during the Yoruba inter-tribal wars. Cicatrization usually takes place before marriage. The operation is performed on men at the age of puberty or at the entrance into the first age-group. The cicatrices are either allowed to heal naturally or are aggravated so as to form broad deep marks.

The traditional attire of Yoruba men consists of a long and wide gown extending beyond the knee and reaching both wrists; it is called **agbada**. It can be intricately embroidered around the neck, and down the front. The robe is worn over a pair of trousers called **Sokoto** which are similarly embroidered around the ankle and a jumper called **Buba** or **Dansiki**.

Yoruba women wear a blouse known as **buba** which is tucked into a wrapper or **iro** which is usually wrapped round the waist and a third shoulder piece called **iborun**. There is also a head tie to match. The **iro** reaches down to the ankles. Next to the Hausa-Fulani and the Igbos, the Yorubas are the most populous race in Nigeria.

The Hausas:

The Hausa race in Nigeria is found mainly in Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Bauchi, Katsina and Sokoto States. Hausa, as a language, however, is widely spoken all over the northern parts of the country.

Historically, the Hausa occupied seven states, namely, Kano, Rano, Zazau (Zaria), Daura, Gorbir, Katsina and Zamfara. As Joseph Smaldone observed in his book, "Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate" "the original Hausa states emerged in a small triangular enclave about 200 miles square, midway between the Niger bend and Lake Chad in the north central part of Nigeria."

The origin of the Hausa people, like that of most other major ethnic groups in Nigeria is shrouded in uncertainty, speculations and debate amongst historians and non historians. It is said that written records which should have helped to determine accurately the origin of the Hausas were destroyed during the Jihad of Uthman Dan

Fodio. What remains of the mainly oral historical accounts of the origin of the Hausas indicates that the original Hausa states were founded by the offspring of a certain prince of Baghdad and the queen of Daura.

The Hausa States at the early stages of state formation lacked a central authority that saw to the daily running of affairs of each autonomous state. However, by about the 14th century, there was a remarkable transformation of these small kingdoms into state organisations as a result of major contacts with the outside world and the unifying influence of Islam.

Like other Nigerian communities, the family forms the unit of social organisation in the Hausa societies. There is strong adherence to the extended family system. Marriages, births and deaths are events that involve the entire family. The Hausa is very religious and his religious beliefs affect every aspect of his life.

The Islamic religion allows a muslim to marry up to four wives if he can love and provide for them equally. Descent is patrilineal and inheritance is by male heirs which holds closely the principle that family property must be maintained. Some of these traditions are changing with contacts with other outside influences.

The Hausas are excellent farmers. The main crops grown in the north are millet, sorghum, maize, guinea corn, beans, onions, groundnut and spices.

The Hausas are also known to be astute in all aspects of trade as well as being skilled craftsmen with reputations for textile weaving, leather works, iron smithing and calabash carving.

The big gown (Baba Riga), similar to the Yoruba "Agbada" is the traditional wear among the Hausa males while the women wear dresses also akin to those of the Yoruba woman. The men's big gowns are unique all over Nigeria for their elaborate embroidery.

The Jukuns

The Jukuns are among the ethnic groups in Nigeria that are often referred to as the powerful minority. They live in Gongola State, occupying the town of Wukari and its environs. They can also be found near the river Benue, close to the Abinsi area of Benue State.

The Jukuns are believed to be part of the migratory movement from the Sudan. An account by anthropologist C.K. Meek says that "Jukuns of Wukari were a backwash from Zaria, a state founded by the eastern people (orients) who entered the Western Sudan by way of Wadai and established themselves at the Benue river valley." But to the Hausas, the Jukuns are considered to be one of the seven illegitimate sons of Biram-the Hausa "Banza Bokwai."



Hausa men in their rich outfits (Baba Riga) for which they are noted.

The basic fact however is that the Jukuns moved into their present location at about 14th century and established an empire called Kwararafa. This empire disappeared at about the end of the 17th century, prompting the transfer of the capital to Wukari which remains till today the biggest Jukun centre.

The Jukuns have an extensive social and political organisation which enables them to exert their political and cultural influences far and wide. Towards the end of the 16th and early 17th centuries, the influence and power of the Jukuns influenced not only the kingdoms in their immediate neighbourhood but also far beyond. Such kingdoms included Keana, Doma, the autonomous Alago entities and even the dominions of the Atta of Idah. Both the Borno and Hausa states for about two centuries felt greatly the power and influence of the Jukuns which were ranked fourth in the Chad basin.

The bedrock of this powerful people was the kingship institution which was basically anchored on a theocratic system of government. The Aku was not only the political head of the Jukuns, he was also a spiritual head. He was looked upon to meet the welfare needs of his subjects, and was supported in this heavy task by a council of state whose functions ranged from making sure that the affairs of state were properly handled, to implementing the will of the Aku. Also, they ensured that the Aku operated within the limits of his authority, since anything to the contrary would earn him instant repudiation by the gods and, by implication, the people.

The Jukuns, apart from being very good farmers and fishermen, also engage in other economic activities such as local and long distant trade, hunting, and have of recent made a significant in-road into the nation's public and private sectors of the economy.

Jukuns are strong believers in the supreme being and serve him within the context of the traditional African religion which emphasises conformity to certain rules and regulations within the society as well as the observance of certain taboos that provide the checks and balances upon which a disciplined and happy society thrives.

The Kanuris

Like the Hausas and the Fulanis the Kanuris share the conventional belief that people of northern Nigeria came in groups from North Africa and the Middle East. The deep cultural similarities between the Kanuris and the Arabs are often used to confirm the claim of origin of the Borno State Kanuris. This north African influence is clearly observable in the Kanuris' early contact and adherence to Islam. As far back as the 11th century, Islam had been established



Kano City, one of the major cities of the Hausas of Nigeria.

within the Borno empire. Becoming islamised at such an early stage of state formation gave rise to an organised central authority as well as the functional state. The Kanuris challenge the notion that it was the Fulanis who introduced Islam into Hausaland. They believe that they were the first to sell islamic beliefs to the Hausa at about the 14th century, since by then, some Hausa states were already paying tributes to the Mai of Borno.

The Kanuris have a complex but well-organised political structure rooted in the feudal system. As Falola and Adediran stressed in their book: **A New History of Nigeria**, "as early as 9th century the Sef dynasty had established hegemony over the area, first in Kanem and later in Borno." It is believed that this dynasty lasted for centuries until 1846 when it was replaced by the El-Kanemi dynasty. The Kanuris successfully resisted the Fulani Jihad in 1809 and were able therefore to maintain their traditional feudal administrative set up. As one of the 21 states of Nigeria, Borno is now governed under the same constitution as the other states.

Economically, the Kanuris are very active people and are engaged in several activities in tune with their environment and natural disposition. While many are farmers growing crops such as millet, guinea corn, maize, and sugar cane, others take to fishing and trading in different commodities. Many Kanuris are also bigtime cattle owners and employ the Fulanis as herdsmen.

In many respects, the Kanuris and Hausas are similar. The Kanuri, like his Hausa counterpart, is noted for the elegance of his apparel. He loves music and dancing, and he is a respected horseman.



A group of Kanuri Women performing at a cultural show.

The Fulanis

Tracing the origin of these most resourceful Nigerians must be anchored on J.O. Agbo's observation in the **Nigeria Magazine** that "interpretations of the present society are made to justify the beginning of a state. Thus each generation re-interpretes its myth of origin to fit present realities, giving up to the problem of telescoping in dates as to when states emerged within this area."

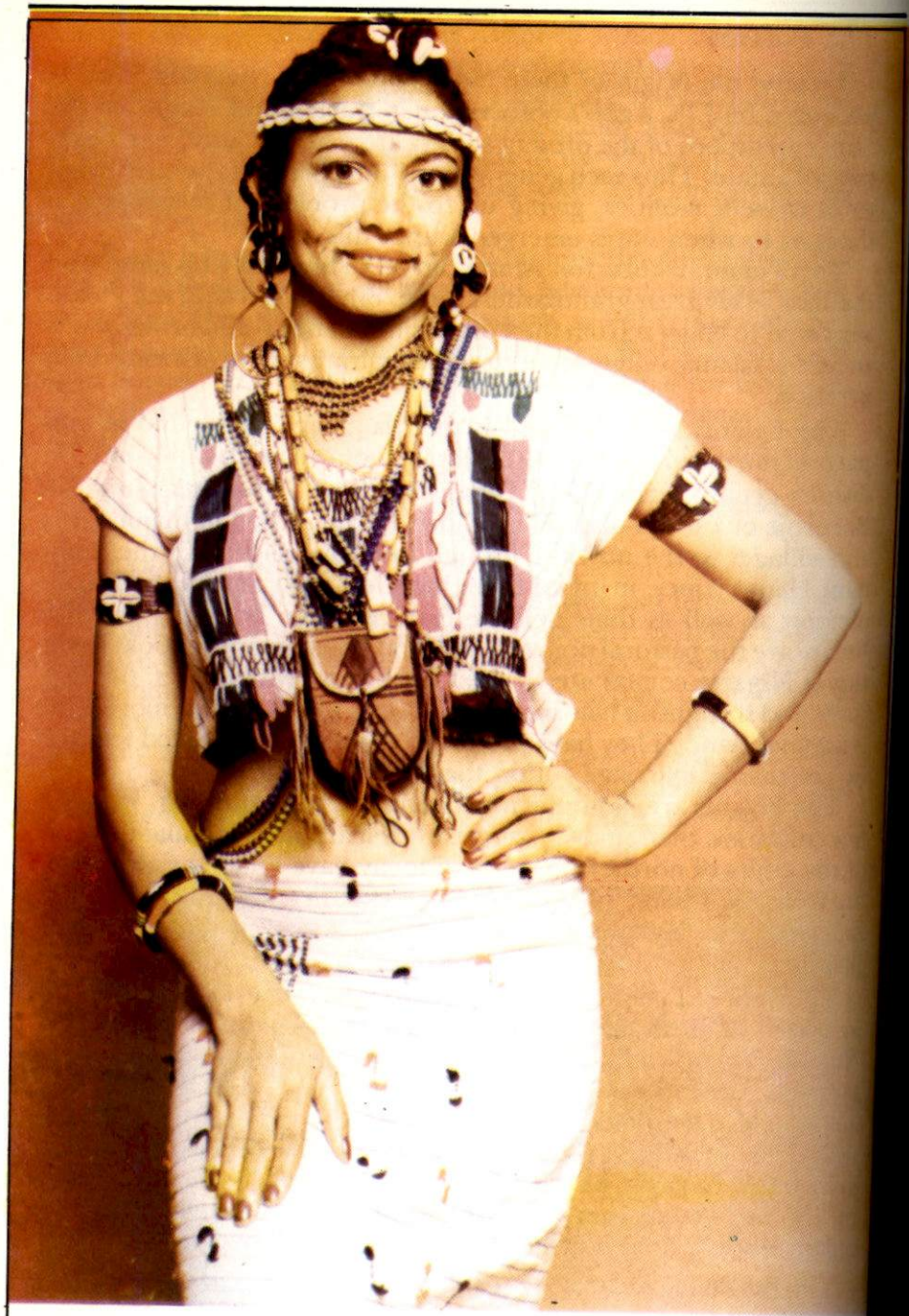
To a Fulani, Ukuba Ibn Ahmir, an Arab by birth who came from the East, is his great grandfather. But to other Nigerians, the Fulanis migrated to Nigeria from the Futa basin in Senegal and brought with them the Islamic religion as well as the emirate system of local administration.

The Fulanis, with Fulfulde as their language, are found in most parts of northern Nigeria. As a people, they can be classified into two distinct groups, namely, the Gidan Fulani or Town Fulani and the Bororoje or cattle Fulani. The Gidan Fulani settled in major towns and villages in the north. Through inter-marriage with the dominant Hausa tribes, many of them have lost their natural light complexion as well as their delicate features. The Bororoje or cattle Fulani are the pastoral nomads. As Colin Latchem in his book: **Looking at Nigeria** commented, "their light skins, wiry bodies, thin features and straightish hair suggest that their blood may be more Arab than Nigerian." They have preserved these finely chiselled features by restricting marriage within their ethnic group.

The Fulanis are naturally intelligent and hard working. Within a few centuries, their impact was greatly felt all over Hausaland. Many of the emirs of northern Nigeria of today have Fulani origin resulting from the Islamic Jihad of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio in 1804 who replaced the conquered Hausa Kings with his fellow Fulani Jihadists.

The sight of Fulani youngsters driving the cattle through the bush in search of fresh pasture and water is very common in northern Nigeria. The town Fulanis engage in farming and other commercial pursuits. The Fulani woman, with the decorated calabash of fura and nunu (milk and guinea ball) on her head on a market day is a familiar sight. Acknowledging the resourcefulness of the Fulanis, E.D. Morel in his book: **Nigeria, its peoples and its problems**, noted that "while the Hausa woman spins and the Hausa man weaves cotton, the Fulani woman does both the spinning and the weaving."

The nomadic Fulanis are the main cattle rearers in Nigeria while the town Fulani have distinguished themselves in Islamic education and administration, having provided the impetus for the 19th century Islamic jihad which created widespread change in Nigeria.



A Fulani girl.

They produced aristocratic elites that rule dynasties in most of the northern emirates of Nigeria today.

The nomadic Fulanis have carefully preserved many of their customs and traditions including the **sharo**, which is a test of manhood by flogging, that determines the maturity of young men for marriage. Basically, these youths have to pass through this ordeal to enter manhood. The process of initiation demands that they must be beaten with long rods. The initiates are not expected to express visible fear or pain as the cane descends on their bare body, watched by spouses and close relations. Even at the sight of blood, the Fulani man must not flinch. Among the watching crowd, the Fulani girls with their ornaments glittering like gold are excited as they watch their future suitors stand up gallantly to the whipping and the accompanying agony. At the end of the endurance test, participants resort to loud drumming, dancing and singing that go on late into the night.

The Fulani moslem's marriage, births and deaths are governed by the injunctions of the Holy Koran. He accepts life and its joys and sorrows with total submission to the wishes of God. To millions of Nigerians the fatalism of the Fulani makes this uncertain world certain and even denies death its awe.

The Tivs

The Tivs, said to have migrated from the Far-East, speak a kind of "Bantu" language. They represent the largest ethnic group in a region of great tribal fragmentation. They occupy the valley of River Benue and the narrow strip along its northern bank. They have the basic social unit of extended family with patrilineal descent and are mainly traditionalists. They are subsistent farmers practising shift cultivation and growing root-crops like yam, cassava and cocoa yam and grains like sorghum, corn and millet. Every Tiv has a right to farmland sufficient to feed his immediate family.

The administrative unit of the Tivs is the family group, a structure which the early British colonisers did not find comfortable because of its fragmental nature. The Tivs recognise the age-group system, but accord it only social and economic functions but not political significance.

The origin of tribal marks among the Tivs was to distinguish them from other tribes, particularly in times of war. **Swange** form of dancing is a social art the Tivs have perfected and now receive international recognition. It is a great dance that involves a lot of body movement

Today, the community of Tiv people are under one traditional head known as the **Tor Tiv** who is based in Gboko. The Tivs are also politically very conscious, and have recently taken Gboko as their formidable political headquarters.

The Beroms

History has it that the Beroms migrated from somewhere in the Far-East to settle in the Plateau areas of Nigeria. The early settlers were mainly farmers with long historical co-operation with the cattle Fulanis.

The largest single ethnic entity of Beroms is in Jos, capital of Plateau State. The Beroms are traditionally animists and ancestral worshippers, but in recent times, many of them have embraced christianity. Before the advent of tin mining in the area, farming and hunting were their chief occupation. They are now found in virtually every sphere of public and private businesses.

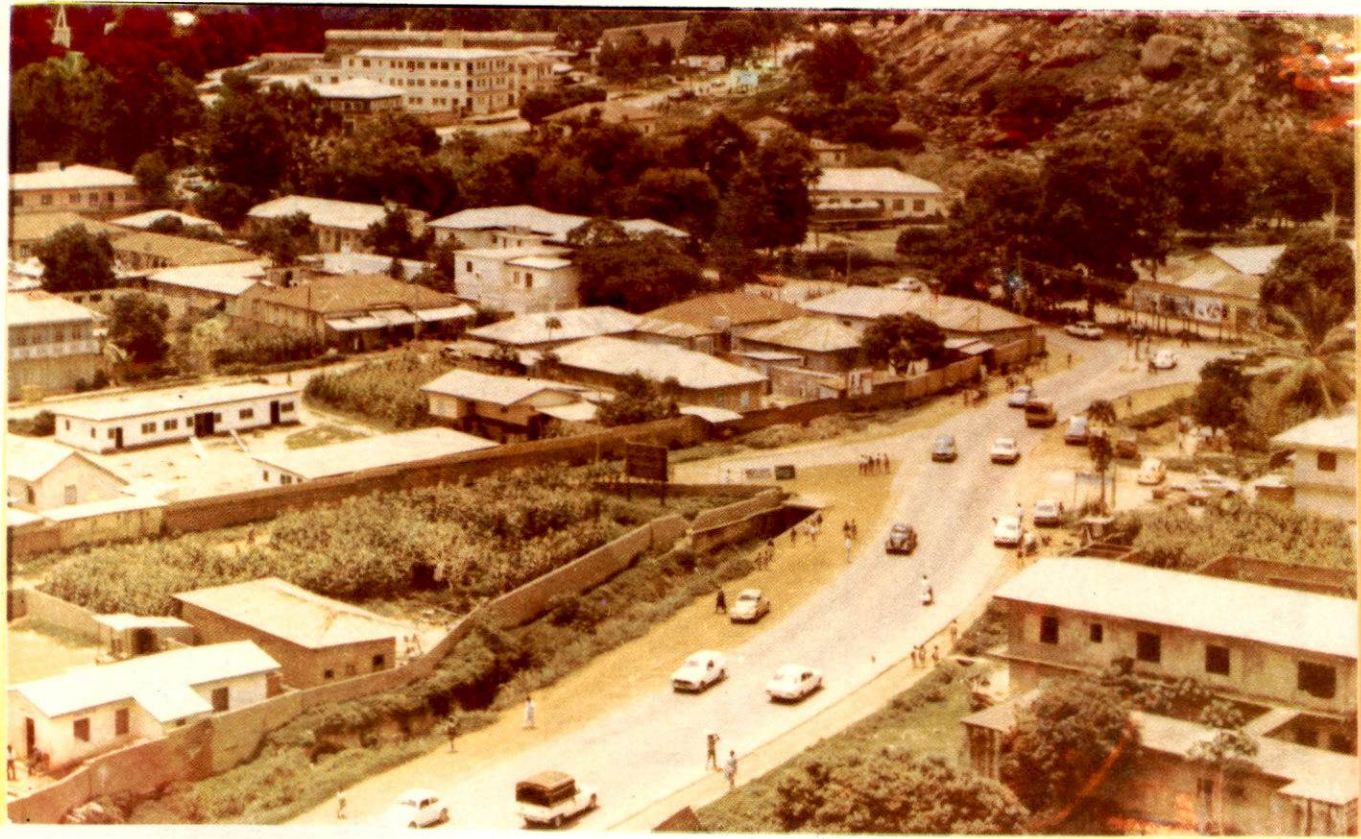
Story telling is a very important social art among the Beroms despite the impact of western education. Story telling, to them, is a powerful medium of imparting knowledge of the people's historical origin, social organisation, religious belief and ancestral wisdom.

Writing on the "Social and Ethnical values of story telling among the Berom of Plateau State" in the **Nigeria Magazine**, Abu Abarry maintained that being a repository of Berom values and world view, the storyteller clarifies social attitudes and promotes national pride, group cohesion, and cultural continuity. Their form of marriage is quite similar to that of most tribes in this area of the country. They have patrilineal form of descent while inheritance is through male heirs.

The Nupes

During the fifteenth century, what is now Bida, a town at the confluence of the Niger and Kaduna Rivers, was ruled by Nku. The people were all subjects of the Atta of Igala at Idah, and paid tributes in the form of one male from each household.

Oral history had it that the hunter son of the Atta of Igala was in the Nupe country on his hunting expedition when he came across the widowed young daughter of Nku who had a son, Tsoede, for him. Later, the prince was recalled to Idah on the death of his father. When Tsoede was 30 years old, he was sent as a slave to Idah. However, his father recognised him from the special ring he was wearing. This ring was left for him by his father when he was yet unborn. This therefore earned him a fair treatment from his father, but angered his other brothers. He was advised by his father to return to his



An aerial view of Jos, capital of Plateau State where the largest single entity of Berons can be found.

mother's home and was given a lot of gifts to take with him to Nupeland.

Even though his brothers tried to kill him, he escaped into Nupeland, attacked the nearby village of Nupeko (Great Nupe) and killed the chief. From there, he attacked his uncles' town in 1531 and made himself the ruler of the country with the title of "Etsu" or king. His 30 years sojourn at Idah enabled him to acquire the knowledge of silver-smithing, glass-making and canoe-building, all of which have made the Nupes famous today. He waged successful wars against the Yagba, Bunu, and Kakanda and died in 1591.

Nupeland of today has gone through a lot of historical changes. The title of **Etsu** for their king is still maintained. Their historical connection with the Igalas is still evident in their similar facial tribal marks. Among the Nupes are to be found muslim and christians while the traditional faith is still widely practiced.



A Nupe woman

The Igalas

The Igala kingdom ruled by the Atta, occupies the bank of the Niger just below its confluence with the Benue River. The history of the kingdom is believed by historians to have started with the coming to the throne of the first Atta, the traditional father of the Igala people, in the 12th century. Abutu Ejeh, the first Atta, emigrated from Wukari in the present Gongola State to Idah. He established his authority over a large expanse of land inhabited by the Igala farmers. After him were such other Attas like the fabled Ayegba-Oma-Idoko, the father of the legendary daughter Inikpi, who was buried alive with all her paraphernalia at the bank of River Niger at Idah, to upset the war plans of the Jukun warriors who had planned to overrun Idah.

The Inachalo River and the Inikpi statue epitomise today the heroic struggle to safeguard the Igala kingdom. The influence of the Atta was felt far into the hinterland at Lokoja and Nupe kingdom in the present Niger State. The story of Tsoede who later took the title of **Etsu** of Nupe is one of such histories about the powerful Igala kingdom and its past rulers.

The Atta's impact was also felt in the coastal fringes among the Ebu people of the present Bendel State who share similar social and cultural life with the Igalas. Oral history has it that the Ebu people were Igalas who, after spending some days fishing on the bank of River Niger decided to pitch their tents permanently at Ebu.

The Igalas who share similar features and the same tribal marks with the Nupes of present Niger State and the Jukuns of Gongola State, are predominantly farmers, growing maize, cassava, yam, millet and groundnut. They dress like Hausas because of the long historical connection between the two tribes, but the language shares a lot of common phrases with the Yoruba-speaking people.

Again, like most tribes in the middle-belt of Nigeria, the Igala people have the patrilineal descent and practise the extended family system. But for the coming of the christian and islamic religions, the Igala people might have continued as ancestral worshippers.

Since 1914, Nigeria has taken a series of giant strides in its march towards the political, economic, social and cultural development of its people. The country has moved from the state of being a collection of ethnic and linguistic groups to become a nation State, virile and purposeful in its resolve to remain one strong and united entity. The amalgamation in 1914 of its two parts remain, today only as a historical watershed.

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Editorial:

R.O. Ikiebe - Co-ordinating

O.O. OddeIm

Stella Arah (Mrs.)

Ezenwa Ogbonna

Joe Obodeze

Olu Lipede

Consulting Editor

Nelson Ottah