**WEEK 3**

**DIFERENCES THAT EXISTED BETWEEN CENTRES OF CIVILIZATION IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA.**

In our previous topic, we noted how different centres of civilization in pre-colonial Nigeria related with one another until the white men came and changed the system of interaction.

The Nigerian societies were quite diverse and each ethnic group protected and preserved its values, independence and identity. We will look at the dissimilarities of the political structure, culture, customs and religious beliefs of some the early groups or kingdoms.

**A POLITICAL STRUCTURES**

**i. NORTHERN POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

The political structure of Nigerian societies reflected the pre-colonial traditional systems. As early as 5th century B.C, the Nok society included Benue, Plateau, Niger, Abuja, Katsina – Ala and Kaduna that had some signs of organized political structure and mixed economy. They had well trained military warriors armed with iron technology. There were coordinated farming, arts and crafts and religious worship. There was centralized leadership that directed the norms, values and prevailing economic systems. This gradually, with time extended and expanded with landmass which developed into centralized political authority with a sarki or monarch completely in-charge in the north. It resulted in the emergence of the king-in council. Executive powers were given to the king. The council officials performed administrative functions which enabled the king to take control of the expanding territory. The Sarki and his council controlled the kingdom in the city enclave while the subordinate district and village heads managed the interiors.

**ii. WESTERN POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

On the other hand, the societies of the western Nigeria such as lle-ife, Kwara, Oyo, Ibadan, Benin and Lagos has similar political structure with the North. However, in most of these western societies, the king (Oba, Olu, Ooni, Baale and others) never enjoyed absolute powers. They were more or less constitutional kings (Monarchs)who depended on certain powerful officials before they took and enforced decisions (in Oyo empire, there was the Oyomesi and in Benin empire, there was the Uzama). This was exactly what was done in Britain. The centralized states of the west were structured exactly the way those of the North west organized. The slight difference being that the Sarki or Emir had absolute powers, was the head and was in-charge of the religion particularly Islam. In the west, the Oba’s power was based on the council (Oba-in-council) while the Oba was the head of the government, there was usually a chief priest in – charge of the religious activities.

**iii. EAST AND NIGER DELTA STATES POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

The political organization of the Igbo and the Niger Delta states followed the same pattern. In some area like Nri,Onitsha, Agbor, Warri, Calabar and Oguta, there were prominent traditional ruler such as Eze, Obi, Olu, Obong and Igwe.These rulers had only ceremonial powers when compared with what obtained in either the North or West. Their influences were more on moral and religious matters. However, they helped in the organization of their societies. They represented spiritual and cultural symbols and therefore, were respected and obeyed. The office of the chief priest associated with their kingship enhanced their relevance and authority over the people.

However, there were still matters which only the adult males could decide. Most communities generally relied on the unquestionable authority of the Umunna which comprises all the adult males in a given community. Leadership was basically followed on family basics where the ‘diokpara / Okpara (the first son of the family) leads his family and make up the council of kindred leadership. The Umunna is led by the head of the first family that made up a kindred (a cluster / group of related families). There were the women groups made up of two sub-groups; the married women, and the adult daughters of the land (Umuada) who may or may not be married, the age grades; the Nze na Ozo and the title holders. Those groups have specific functions in the governance and matter concerning the communities. In this case, there was no centre figure who has absolute powers but every decision was based on dialogue and consensus. The binding force was tired around the gods as everyone was subject to the gods of the land.

**ASSIGNMENT**

State the dissimilarities of the political structures of the Hausas and the Yorubas in pre-colonial Nigeria.