

# Pre-colonial Political and Socio-economic History of the Rindre

Ja' Afaru Yusuf Dogara<sup>+</sup>

Department of History, College of Education, Akwanga, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

**Abstract.** The work is basically a political history of the Rindre people in North Central Nigeria. Their tradition of origin and migration, pre-colonial political organization and their Socio-Economic organization are also discussed in the work. The aim is primarily to reconstruct the history of the Rindre people. The researcher consulted published and unpublished materials as well as oral interview.

**Keywords:** North Central Nigeria, Political History, Rindre, Socio-Economic History.

## 1. Introduction

The *Rindre* people inhabit *Wamba* Local Government in the North-East of *Nasarawa* State. The area falls within *Nok* civilization considering the archeological findings in *Wamba* the ancestral home of *Rindre* carbonated to 500 BC. The archeological findings resemble the earthenware used up to date by the *Nok* people and in *Rindre* land<sup>1</sup>. A pocket of *Rindre* speakers in Diaspora are also found in *Akwanga*, *Gudi*, *Lafia*, *Akunza*, *Wakwa*, *Angwan Ayaba*, *Fadaman Bauna*, *Wasa*, *Maro* and *Jagindi* in Kaduna State<sup>2</sup>. Linguistic study revealed that the *Rindre*, *Alago*, and *Eggon* belong to the Benue-Congo group of languages. The Ethnic group consisted of two major sub-groups known as the *Rindre* and *Gitta*, the differences in this groups manifest in their dialect. However, the two have the same facial marks and the same culture and traditions.

In the colonial records, the *Rindre* are referred to as "Linderi."<sup>3</sup> their neighbors also called them "*Nungu*" a derivative of the *Rindre* word "*Ungu*" (an expression for someone in desperate need). The word came into being as a result of the hospitality shown to Hausa hunters who visited *Wamba* and were in desperate need of assistance. The *Rindre* showed sympathy by saying "*Ungu*" (an expression of sympathy)<sup>4</sup>.

The inhabitants are predominantly farmers and also transact petty trading which linked them with their neighbors. Hunting, weaving and pottery were among the major economic activities of the people in the pre-colonial era. The settlement of *Wamba* was founded by the *Rindre* people who claimed to have migrated from the *Kwararafa* Empire at the tail end of the twelfth century. The name *Wamba* as claimed by *Bichi* was derived from "*WABA*" meaning he did not drink. One day a suspicious stranger was passing through the area. He stopped and asked for drinking water. Instead of giving him water the people sent their magical calabash. The stranger refused and said *WABA* (I will not drink) from then henceforth the place is called *Wamba*<sup>5</sup>. Culturally the closest neighbours of the *Rindre* are the *Kantana*, *Arum*, *Buh Mada* and *Eggon*.

## 2. Traditions of Origin and Migration

The history of *Rindre* like most ethnic groups in Nigeria is faced with the problem of documentation hence there are divergent views concerning their origin. The first version is known as the *Jade Oka* Legend which traced the origin of the *Rindre* to the famous *Kwararafa*. This tradition explains that three brothers namely *Jade Oka Ubaina* and *Abro* migrated from *Wukari* during the turbulent years in search of security and farm land. On arriving river *Ariky*, *Jade* and *Ubaina* crossed leaving their brother *Abro* who proceeded West ward where he established his domain in present *Eggon* hill. *Abro* is believed to be the founder of the *Eggon* ethnic group. On the other hand *Jade Oka* is said to be the founder of the *Rindre* ethnic group. This belief seem to be confirmed by the friendly relations existing between them (*Rindre*) and their neighbours the *Jukun*, the *Gomai*, the *Eggon*, *Mada* and *Alago*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: + 08066056625.  
E-mail address: mawumisa@gmail.com.

However, from the proceedings some scholars have completely debunked the *Kwararafa* legend with very strong fact supporting their argument. For instance, *Baju* argued that the theory of *Kwararafa* origin is weak and leaves us with more plausible view that the *Rindre* belong more to the *Nok* civilization. If this is so then they came from nowhere other than *Wamba* their ancestral home<sup>7</sup>. He supported his argument with recent anthropological findings in *Wamba*, carbon dated to 500 BC. Those findings resemble in every materials particular to the earthenware being used by the *Rindre* in *Wamba* to this minute. The *Rindre* are by no means limited to *Wamba* their dispersal centre. The people spread into the valley and even the hills. They are everywhere around *Wamba* and surrounding villages as well as *Lafia*, *Gudi*, *Bassa*, *Gadabuke* in *Nasarawa* State and *Agamati*, *Jagindi*, *Kogom*, *Dogon Daji*, *Wasa* in *Kaduna* State<sup>8</sup>.

Another source that traced the origin of the *Rindre* to their present abode, was put forward in the work of *Eluwa*. He asserted that evidences of iron technology in the earliest times were found in *Wamba* and *Nok*. Terra-cotta figurine and iron slag were discovered in *Wamba* around 1939<sup>9</sup>. The figurines were carbonated to 500 BC and AD 200. *Nok* civilization is well known as the Terra-cotta heads display stylized facial features and probably belonged to a complete figure. Archeological findings indicated that iron tools and cast bronze from *Wamba* and *Nok* culture provide the earliest evidence of iron working and human existence in the area and West Africa. Generally speaking the *Kwararafa* Empire existed around the 15<sup>th</sup> century within the Benue valley. *Rindre*, *Alago*, *Gomai*, *Eggon* left *Kwararafa* because of growing insecurity and quest for fertile land<sup>10</sup>.

With time, clan and village settlement sprang up as a result of search for farmland. Farming arose at different times as early as about 9,000 years ago in some parts of Africa. Most archeologists believe that the development of agriculture was a Neolithic revolution and innovations in the history of human species. It allowed more permanent settlements much larger and denser populations, the accumulation of surpluses and wealth, the development of more profound status and rank differences within population and the rise of specialized craft<sup>11</sup>. Some archeologist maintained that population pressure or changes in environment may have forced human to find new economic strategies which led to farming and development of new settlement.

Therefore, the various *Rindre* clans migrated at different times from their early settlement (*Uguri*). Some settled at *Wamba* and some outside the locality. The clans that settled permanently in *Wamba* are *Mawu Misa*, *Mawu Luku*, *Mawu Pese* and *Mawu Sage*. On the other hand *Uchu Dogo* decided to move Northward and founded a settlement called *Wamba Ko*. And *Mawu Ungo* also established a settlement called *Ungo* near the present *Wamba*. *Gitta* clan is another sub-division of the ethnic group. The clan is divided into *Gitta Klogba* and *Gitta Maisage*. The *Gitta* clan settled at *Chumanga*, *Angwan Madaki*, *Mararaba Gwongwon*, *Ambako*, *Angwan Rimi*, *Angwan Dorowa*, *Angwan Gimba*, *Barmu Sarki* and *Barmocement*<sup>12</sup>.

The migration of the *Rindre* from *Kwararafa* Empire to their present abode lasted for more than a decade. It is important to ask the question that on arriving *Uguri* their first settlement which people or group hosted them. This is because an archeological source has it that at about 500 BC terra-cotta figurine was discovered in *Wamba*. This shows that before the 12<sup>th</sup> century people have existed in this area.

Secondly, the *Rindre* moved out of *Kwararafa* as a team but on arriving river *Arikya* one may ask, what prompted their decision to cross the river. It should also be noted that on arriving *Uguri* they migrated separately and founded various settlements. This meant that the various settlements were independent of each other. That was why there was no central political organization. In other words, every clan had a representative in the council of elders. It implies that the leaders of the families or clan were referred to as the founders of various clans. The *Oriye Rindre* which is the present paramount ruler of *Rindre* was a colonial creation. There are some instances that the British created the position of Warrant Chiefs in Southern and Eastern Nigeria<sup>13</sup>. As such the same was also created in *Rindre* land in 1898 during the (company rule) with a third class status.

### **3. Pre-colonial Political Organization**

Traditional rulers in the pre-colonial period were the centre of governance and it was carried out within the frame work of societies, empires and kingdoms. The *Rindre* ethnic group falls within the framework of a

non centralized state. The traditional institution did not just perform the roles of conflict management but also served as agents of socio-economic development and custodians of indigenous culture<sup>14</sup>. The political systems of the autonomous societies during the pre-colonial period were characterized by non existence of hereditary ruler. In the Middle Belt and Igbo land it was the principal political system during the pre-colonial times<sup>15</sup>. The political organization of the *Rindre* people during the pre-colonial period was decentralized. Every village in *Rindre* land had politically constituted autonomous unit and its own administrative machinery in the hands of the *Ochu*<sup>16</sup>. The *OCHU* sat in council with some elders and exercised judicial, religious and political power and performed the following functions:

- Ritual function
- Dispensation of justice
- Maintenance of law and order

In some societies, the *Ochu* council of elders is regarded as the highest decision making body. Also in some villages the council is seen as representative of god. Power in segmented groups is managed and mobilized through applied pressure and societal network such as family, household, kinship, clans and sub-clans. The *Rindre* like their *Eggon* neighbors during the pre-colonial times had no standing army, thus in the period of war young men were mobilized and trained by same selected elders.

Bradbury (1960) has indicated that the pre-colonial Benin political institution was organized in such a way that the village settlement is everywhere the basic political unit, within the village the male population is organized into age grades which represents the pattern of authority. In their kinship and lineage organization there is marked matrilineal bias and an emphasis upon primogeniture. In all likelihood, agricultural village communities with this features of social and political organization characterized the early *Edo* settlements and such compact communities largely autonomous in their political and economic life, still exist among them<sup>17</sup>. There was no central political institution welding power and authority in *Rindre* land before the advent of colonial rule. As mentioned earlier, the institution was created by the Europeans to perpetuate and establish the hegemony of exploitation.

Fortes and Evan argued that if all stateless societies ever existed in any part of the West Africa as rightly claimed then it was not applicable to all ethnic groups in Nigeria. What must be admitted from the onset is that prior to 1894 the *Rindre* had no central chief that controlled their affairs, but did not in any way suggest that the *Rindre* did not have their indigenous political institution. *Ochu* and the council of elders were so powerful that no member of the community questioned their authority. The council of elders comprised of clan representatives and their leader was the *Ochu*. The chronology of *Oriye* presented in most government documents were basically that *Oriye* controlled the affairs of *Wamba* as a locality. This is because as the society evolved the *Ochu* being the head of the council of elders became the *Oriye*. All *Oriye* (leaders) were autonomous as such the information presented in the programme for the installation was basically *Oriye Wamba*.

The general basis of governance was custom and tradition which was handed down for generations which were subjected to the authority of ancestors. The interpreters of such custom where the elders, they are mostly members of families or clans that were represented in the council of elders. Hence any understanding of the nature of political organization must take into account the social organization of the family and clan. The family was the basic unit of production and reproduction who lived together and traced descents from a remote common ancestor. Amongst the *Rindre* for example the council of elders was the highest decision making body.

The *Rindre* were powerful combatant that refused to be subdued by rivals, not even the cavalry forces of the Fulani slave raiders from *Lafia*, *Keffi* and *Zaria*. The Fulani slave raiders in the first half of the nineteenth century made several attempts to subjugate them but it was not possible.

#### **4. Economic and Social Organization of *Rindre* in Pre-colonial Time**

Agriculture was the dominant economic activity of the *Rindre* during the pre-colonial period. Different method of cultivation were practiced, varying from shifting cultivation, mix-cropping and bush fallowing<sup>18</sup>. The *Rindre* and most groups that settled in the plains had two types of farm namely compound and bush

farms. Compound farming is the piece of land behind the house intensively cultivated with fertility maintained by application of Manure, (compost leaves plucked as sleeping mats), household refuse and ashes. Bush farms on the other hand were far away from home and their fertility was maintained by the compost of rotten leaves of shrubs cut down during clearing period<sup>19</sup>. A variety of crops such as cassava, guinea corn, maize, *acha* and cocoyam are produced in the area. *Rindre* people also engaged in blacksmithing, pottery, soap making and making of palm oil. From available oral sources the people depended on their neighbors; *Buh* to develop the iron technology which later became a central occupation of the people<sup>20</sup>. The above mentioned arts were able to flourish because of the peaceful condition that existed in the land before the advent of slave trade. The introduction of trade in slave came with external attacks on the people; especially from *Kambari* from the South.

More so, *Wamba* developed as one of the ancient market which served as a terminus for traders from *Kulere* hills, *Eggon* hills, *Mada* land and *Alago* societies. The availability of Tin and columbite also contributed to the development of commercial activities in the area. The development of mining centres attracted labourers, buyers and sellers from different places<sup>21</sup>.

The *Rindre* belief that there was a close relationship between the material and supernatural world and the aim of interaction between the two worlds was intended to preserve peace and harmony in the society for their survival. Their world view was man centred, so man attempts to manipulate nature and the supernatural in such a way that he ensures his continual survival. Therefore, the indigenous religion provided belief system which explain the great life crises of illness and death, and which gave man the feeling that he could manipulate his environment to his advantage<sup>22</sup>. In *Rindre* land, they belief in *Kpare* as the most high and that he provides for all. The chief priest called the *Oriye Khanga* performs sacrifices on behalf of others, his shrine was usually around the corner of his house where sacrifice were offered to the ancestors. *Baju* argued that the *Gbasha* in the idyllic *Rindre* folk life represented discipline, order and good governance. *Gbasha* also responded to the season of planting and harvest<sup>23</sup>. *Khishete* was taken seriously during the process of initiating children into adulthood.

Children that are due for initiation into adulthood faced a lot of hurdles. For some it included circumcision which testified that the boy could be called upon to serve the community as a man in its hours of maximum need e.g. (war)<sup>24</sup>. Marriage ceremonies of the *Rindre* have some unusual features. In some villages on the birth of a girl, a father who required a bride for his child hurriedly put a spot of oil on the baby forehead as a sign of claim, although the girl has the right to refuse that at maturity stage. A present is offered to the girl's family to ascertain the claim, if she accepts, the courtship commence. When the marriage is to commence, a final payment of dowry is to be made in form of corn and beer to her family<sup>25</sup>.

Apart from this, naming ceremony on delivery of a baby boy was usually performed by the eldest male in the family. Bow and arrow is usually taken before the baby and different *Rindre* names are mentioned like, *Makpa*, *Kore*, *Bichi*, *Inji*, *Reme*, and if the baby smile at the name, it shows that the child accepted the name. Then the elder will submit the bow and arrow to the parents of the child to be used for hunting when he grows. On the other hand, female children were usually named through the same process. Feminine *Rindre* names like *Wamu*, *Wado*, *Wunako*, etc were called and the name the baby smile at becomes her name. Even though female naming ceremony was usually done with stick not bow and arrow.

## 5. Conclusion

The *Rindre* people are believed to have migrated from the ancient *Kwararafa* kingdom some hundreds of years ago and occupied *Wamba* during the pre-colonial times, though, the point of view of this work is that the *Rindre* migrated from nowhere rather than their present abode. They were organized politically, economically and socially during the pre-colonial period. This made it possible for peaceful co-existence among the clans and various sub-clans, and a very good relationship with their neighbors notably the *Kantana*, *Buh*, *Arum*, *Kulere*, *Eggon* and *Mada*. However, at the concluding part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century the *Rindre* people had contact with the *Hausa*, *Fulani* slave raiders and the British. This contact altered the socio-political and economic developments in *Rindre* land.

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