

Name: Azuka scholastica ngozi

Department: Accounting

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An historical analysis of the evolution of the Nigerian state in salient issues in Government and Nigeria's politics

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the precolonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The precolonial period is the period before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era that the colonial administration was established in the country. The precolonial period consists of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. These among others, include the Borno Empire, the Hausa states and the Sokoto Caliphate in the North; The Igbo segmentary societies in the East, Benin Kingdom and Oyo empire in the West and several other identities in the Benue valley. This ethnic grouping significantly differs in their historical, social and cultural make-ups. Nigeria stretches roughly 700miles from west to east and 650miles from south to north covering an area between 3-degree and 15-degree E longitude and between 4-degree and 14-degree N latitude.

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but they are archaeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria. The evacuation of a stone age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure in Ondo State has shown more light to the earliest occupation of Nigeria.

The man who lived in Nigeria during those early years worked hard to cope with his environment by finding food shelter and clothing. Tools were made during the stone age but they were later refined during the middle age and late stone age. They were civilization in different places like Benin, Ife and Igbo ukwu.

The political system in the precolonial age of Nigeria were majorly the three ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani.

YORUBA

Before the advent of the British in Yoruba land, Yoruba kingdoms maintained an orderly and unified political system which is still in effect till today. A Yoruba kingdom (e.g. the Oyo kingdom) was made up of a headquarter (i.e. Olu-Ilu) and other local towns and villages. However, its political administration consisted of a central level and subordinate units.

The central level was headed by the Oba (king) and assisted by a handful of chiefs and other political figures in the administration of the kingdom, while the subordinate units, headed by Baales, concentrated only on the administration of the towns and villages in the kingdom. Like the Oba, the Baale also had a group of chiefs that assisted him in his area of jurisdiction.

However, the Baale of each town and village is entitled to pay annual homage (isakole) to the Oba at the central level. Any erring Baale can be relieved of his post or sanctioned to certain punishment respective of his offense since all Baales were responsible to the Oba at the central level, but this must have the consent of some offices in the administration.

The Yoruba political administration was also based on the ultimate principle of 'check and balance' which implies that each of the administrative levels can check, challenge or nullify actions of other levels irrespective of their administrative hierarchy, for example, in the political system of the Oyo empire, the Oyomesi (the 7 hereditary kingmakers headed by Bashorun) and the Are-Ona-Kakanfo (head of the army) acted as checks to the Alaafin who can be deposed by being presented an empty calabash or parrot's egg if found incompetent or guilty of impeachable crimes, for example, Are-Ona-Kakanfo Afonja, with the help of some of the Oyomesi, presented an empty calabash to Alaafin Aole signifying his rejection as the king which was to be followed by his suicide. However, it can be safely concluded that the Yoruba political system had a semblance to the modern federal system of government.

THE ALAAFIN:

The Alaafin was seen as the political head of the empire. He was chosen by the Oyomesi. It was claimed that he could only appear three times a year in public and that was only during some historic festivals.

The Aremo:

He is the eldest son of the ruling Alaafin but cannot succeed his father at his demise. He can only help his father in the administration of the empire.

The Oyomesi:

These are the seven hereditary kingmakers in the Oyo empire. Their leader was Bashroun. They were responsible for installing a new Alaafin.

Baale or Oba: Each province was administered by Ajele or Oba. They guaranteed the payment of tribute and homage to the Alaafin. There was the claim that these rulers had the power to threaten any hardened Alaafin or chief by invoking the god of thunder and lightning through the cult of Sango, a deified Alaafin.

The Army (Eso): Are- ono kankanfo was the head of the army. Oyo had for long maintained a strong army that had been used in winning different wars. It was claimed that if the army should suffer any defeat, the Are- ona- kankanfo was to commit suicide or go on exile.

The Ogboni Society: This society possesses judicial powers and was involved also in policy making. The maintenance and preservation of the cultural values of the people were also delegated to them. They influence a lot of issues in the society.

The Three Eunuchs:

They were also involved in the administration of the empire. They were:

1. **The Osi Efa:** He was in charge of political affairs; he has to die with the Alaafin. He was also called 'Abobaku'.
2. **The Ona Efa:** He was for judicial purpose
3. **The Otun Efa:** His function was to perform religious duties for the Alaafin.

IGBO

The Igbo political system may be seen as a fragmented political system. Many constitutions were in place and political authority was shared among them. For example, the Ofo title holders (council of elders), Ozor title holders, age grades, etc. were all involved in the power sharing exercise. No wonder then, that the term "acephalous" was ascribed to or used to describe the organisation of the Igbo political system.

There was the absence of centralisation of power and authority in the Igbo political system as it was more of the people's direct participation in their government (direct democracy).

FEATURES OF THE SYSTEM

1. Democratic and republican.
2. No centralisation of power.
3. Citizens played a major role in decision making.
4. Highly segmented.

STRUCTURAL ORGANISATION

1. **Kindred:** A group of families called Umunna. Headed by the eldest who has the Ofo title.
2. **Village:** Largest unit of government. Village assembly was the supreme body.
3. **Council of Elders:** Members of the village council.
4. **Ndichie (Ozor Titled Men):** Titled men of integrity that settled disputes.
5. **Age Grade:** Perform executive functions.
6. **Umuada:** Married daughters of kindred. Played major roles in settling family disputes.

ROLE OF THE IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEM

1. **Executive Function:** It was performed by the village assembly, council of elders, and age grade.
2. **Legislative Function:** Performed by the council of elders, Ndichie and high priest of deities (gods).
3. **Judicial Function:** Performed by the council of elders, priest of deities, and Ndichie.

HAUSA/FULANI

Prior to the Jihad or the Holy War of 1804, the territory now known as the Northern sector of Nigeria was ruled by the Hausas under fourteen (14) independent kingdoms. The defeat of the Hausas in the Holy War by the Fulani under the able leadership of a great Muslim leader called Othman Dan Fodio led to the abolition of the Hausa Kingdom and the establishment of the Fulani Emirates. Each emirate was headed by an Emir. Sokoto and Gwandu were made the two (2) headquarters for all the emirates.

The Emirs of the other emirates were appointed either directly by the Emirs of Sokoto and Gwandu or appointed by the local people subject to the ratification of either Emirs of Sokoto or Gwandu. All these Emirs paid allegiance and annual tributes to the Emirs of Sokoto and Gwandu.

For administrative convenience, Othman Dan Fodio divided the Fulani Empire into two (2): the Eastern and the Western section. The Eastern section included: Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Bauchi, Gombe, and Yola with Sokoto as its capital. On the other hand, Ilorin, Kotangora and Argungu with Gwandu as the capital were included in the Western region.

Mohammed Bello, son of Othman Dan Fodio, was given the administration of the Eastern section with its capital at Sokoto while Abdullahi, Dan Fodio's brother, took charge of the Western section with Gwandu as its headquarters. Othman Dan Fodio, who was installed the Sarkin Muslim (The Commander of the Faithful), retired from political life but stayed in Sokoto.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM

1. **The Emirate:** The Caliphate was divided into emirates and each was headed by an Emir. He had the responsibility of making laws, enforcing them and maintaining peace and order in the Emirate. He was expected to administer the emirates in accordance with provision of the Islamic and Sharia laws. In fact, he was believed to have divine right to rule.

However, each Emir was assisted in the administration of the emirates by a number of advisers. These were:

1. **The Waziri**
2. **The Galadima**
3. **The Madaki**
4. **The Dogari**
5. **Maaji**
6. **Sarkin Ruwa**
7. **Sarkin Fada**
8. **Sarkin Pawa**

The Emirate was divided into two (2):

1. **The Eastern Empire** which consisted of Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, Yola, Zaria, and Gombe and was controlled from Sokoto by Othman Dan Fodio's son.
2. **The Western empire** which consisted of Ilorin, Argungu and Kotangora and was controlled from Gwandu by Othman Dan Fodio's brother.

Each emirate was divided into districts controlled by the Hakimi, who in turn, appointed village heads to collect taxes and maintain law and order.

1. **The Supreme Headquarters:** Sokoto and Gwandu were the seats of the Emirs. The Emir of Gwandu controlled the Western empire while the Emir of Sokoto controlled the Eastern Empire. They appointed Emirs in each of the emirates under their jurisdiction.
2. **District Administration:** Each emirate was divided into districts for administrative convenience. An official known as Hakimi was usually appointed by the Emir to administer the district.
3. **Village Heads:** They were appointed by the Hakimi to help in the collection of taxes, e.g. cattle tax (Jangali) and for maintenance of law and order in the village.
4. **Legislative Function:** Islamic laws were the supreme laws of the emirates. The Emir had the capacity of making laws on matters which were not covered by Islamic laws.
5. **Executive Function:** The Emir was authoritarian and had absolute power. Even though he had a body of advisers, he could ignore or accept their advice.
6. **Centralised Administration:** The emirate system was a highly centralised one with the Emir holding almost all the power. He was an authoritarian ruler.

FEATURES OF THE SYSTEM

1. The Emir ruled according to Islamic laws (Sharia).
2. The Emir controlled the economy through taxes.
3. The Emir maintained law and order by issuing local orders.
4. His advisers in the discharge of his duties included:
 - Madaki (Commander of the army).
 - Waziri (Head official or Prime Minister).
 - Galadima (Administrator of the Emir's palace).
 - Hakimi (Official in charge of districts, collection of taxes, maintenance of law and order).
 - Sarkin Fada (Head of palace officials).
 - Sarkin Pawa (Official butcher head).
 - Sarkin Ruwa (River fishing official).
 - Maaji (Emir's treasurer).
 - Dogari (Chief of police).
 - Alkalis (Interpreters of the Sharia law).

THE BIRTH OF NIGERIA AS A GEOPOLITICAL ENTITY

Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were under their administration. In the year 1906, the amalgamation was taken place after the consultation of Nigerians by the British. The Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of southern Nigeria were amalgamated to form the new colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria. Tamuno (1980) observed that the 1906 amalgamation was purely economical. The amalgamation led to the production of the white elephant of a railway in need of extension since 1901. The second amalgamation was that of 1940 in January. The main aim of this amalgamation was the same with the first amalgamation of May 1906. The Northern protectorate was not as economically buoyant as the southern protectorate, so the British decided to amalgamate both protectorates in an indirect rule. Indirect rule may be defined as the system where the British rule through the local traditional rulers.