



**THAMES VALLEY COLLEGE**  
**KM 10, SAGAMU-IKORODU ROAD, SAGAMU, OGUN STATE**

## **Class: Year 11**

**TOPIC: PRE-COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION/POLITICAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA**

### **CONTENT**

Hausa/Fulani political system

Igbo political system

#### **PRE-COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN HAUSA/FULANI LAND**

Historical background of the Hausas

The Fulani assumed the political leadership of the Habe (Hausa) states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the jihad war led by Uthman Dan Fodio. He established the Sokoto caliphate, which was highly politically centralized.

He introduced a new system of selecting rulers known as Emirs to rule the caliphate. Sokoto and Gwandu were made two headquarters for all emirates as each Emir owed allegiance to Uthman Dan Fodio and his representatives at Sokoto and Gwandu.

#### **POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION**

1. The Emirate: The caliphate was divided into emirates headed by an Emir possessing almost all powers. He was an authoritarian ruler. He made laws and maintained law and order according to Islamic rules. He was assisted by a number of advisers. These are:
  - a. The Waziri- he was the head of all the officials.
  - b. The Galadima- He is in charge of the capital.
  - c. The Madawaki- He was the commander of the army.
  - d. The Dogari- He was in charge of treasury
  - e. Sarkin Ruwa- the River fishing official.
  - f. Sarkin Fada- The head of the palace workers.
  - g. Sarkin Pawa- The head of all butchers.
  - h. Yari- Official in charge of the prisons.
2. The legislature organ: The Muslim law known as Sharia was applied throughout the emirate. The law was regarded as the law of God and supreme.
3. The Executive organ: The Emir was authoritarian in nature. Though he had a council adviser, he could accept or reject their advice.
4. Judicial organ: The laws were based on sharia laws and the Alkali judges administered them. Some minor cases were passed to the village heads to settle. Criminal and land cases were for the Emir to decide as long as Sharia laws dealt with civil cases.
5. District administration: Each emirate was divided into district headed by an official appointed by the Emir called Hakimi.

Evaluation questions

1. What were the powers and functions of an Emir in the Hausa/Fulani political system?
2. How did the caliphate begin?

## **PRE-COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN IGBO LAND**

### **CONTENT:**

The Igbo system had no central authority like the Yoruba and Hausa. Different groups shared power and it involved the general participation of people in governance. They practice a form of direct democracy

### **FEATURES OF IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEM**

1. It was decentralized and segmented.
2. It was republican. No individual had hereditary rights to political office.
3. The system was democratic as there was the principle of equality and social equality.
4. There was no centralized power. No one was a political ruler.
5. Women played a significant role in government through, the Umuada (daughters of the kindred)

### **STRUCTURAL ORGANISATION OF THE IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEM**

1. The village administration: The Igbo political system was based on the village as a political unit. Each village was made up of families. Each family head held the Ofor title and they all formed the council of elders, which govern the village. The oldest Ofor title holder was referred to as the Okpara and presided over the council of elders meeting where decisions affecting the people are taking. During village meetings every adult is expected to participate.
2. The executive: The affairs of the village are discussed by the heads (council of elders). Every adult has the power to contribute.
3. The legislature: The villagers made laws themselves. The age grade could made laws, which the elders accepted.
4. The Judiciary: Family heads settle dispute between families. Serious cases were referred to the council of elders and the Okpara.
5. The age grade: there were young men who belong to the same age group. They were involved in the administration of the village and perform public duties like clearing of parts, road etc, they maintained security and helped in the implementation of policies made by the council of elders.
6. The Ozor titleholder: Some wealthy and influential men took the Ozor title, which was very expensive. The society respected such men and they could join the council of elders to debate on issues affecting the people.
7. Women association: They participated in settling disputes as they served as a powerful pressure group. They socialized with their young ones but inculcating in the good morals, political values and norms. They stood against corruption and oppression.

### **Evaluation questions.**

1. List 5 features of Igbo political system.
2. What were the functions of the age grade in the Igbo political system?

## **ASSIGNMENT**

1. The arm of government responsible for implementing laws in Igbo pre-colonial system is? (a) The village assembly (b) Age grade (c) Ozor holder.
2. An institution which seeks to redress people's grievances against abuse of administrative power is called (a) judicial commission (b) Ombudsman (c) Civil service.
3. The body of officials who help the executive to formulate and implement policies is (a) The legislature (b) Civil service (c) public corporation.
4. Legitimacy of government simply means (a) The ability to control others (b) The rights to inherit power (c) popular acceptance of a political system.
5. In the pre-colonial political system, which of these societies practiced a form of democracy (a) Yoruba (b) Hausa (c) Igbo?

Theory

### **THEORY**

1. How is the Igbo political system different from the Yoruba?
2. What is the role of the Ozor titleholders in the Igbo pre-colonial political system?

## **TOPIC: PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL SYSTEM**

**CONTENT** Pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land

Functions of traditional rulers, council of elders, secret societies and age grade

Pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land

Oyo was a very large empire divided into different provinces. The system of government in the old Oyo Empire was like most other kingdoms and empires that existed in Africa. It was monarchical in nature and was headed by a king called Alafin.

Features of Yoruba pre-colonial political system

1. The size of the political system
2. The system was a constitutional monarch, the system was decentralized, and the Oba was not an autocratic ruler.
3. There was a system of checks and balances so that the Oba did not abuse the power.
4. The Oba only ratified the decisions taken by the chiefs.
5. There was no system of taxation.

### **POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION**

1. Political head: The Alafin was the political head of the empire. He was chosen by the Oyomesi and seven hereditary king makers of the empire. It was claimed that the Alafin only appear to the public three times a year during historic festivals. The administration of the empire involved the Alafin assisted by the Aremo, the, Bashorun, Oyomesi and others. The Bashorun (prime minister) and the Oyomesi played a key role in the administration.
2. The Aremo: He is the eldest son of the Alafin but cannot succeed the father at his demise. He only assists the Alafin in the administration of the empire.

3. The Oyomesi: They are the seven hereditary kingmakers in the empire headed by the Bashorun. Their duty is to install a new Alafin when the ruling one dies and to remove the Alafin. They also assist the Alafin in the administration of the empire.
4. Provincial Governors: (Bale or Oba) each province was ruled by Ajele or Oba. They were responsible for the collection of tributes and the payment of homage to the Alafin.
5. The Army: The Are-ona kankafo was the head of the army. It was claimed that if the army suffers a defeat, the kankafo would commit suicide.
6. The Ogboni society: This was a secret society made up of prominent diviners headed by the Oluwo. They are the third organ of government in the old Oyo Empire. They checked the excesses of the Oyomesi such as their rejection of an Alafin. They perform judicial functions. They maintained and preserved the cultural duties of the people.
7. The three Eunuchs: They were also involved in the administration of the empire. They include:
  - a. The Osi Efa- He was in charge of political affairs and customary, he had to die with the Alafin.
  - b. The Oni Efa- for the judiciary
  - c. The Otun Efa- performs religious duties for the Alafin.
8. The empty calabash: If the Alafin begins to act unconstitutionally, the Oyomesi can authorize the Bashorun to send an empty calabash, which signifies his rejections. The Alafin is expected to commit suicide afterwards.
9. Kingship: The ascension to the throne of Alafin was not hereditary but the Oyomesi was free to choose a new ruler from the royal families.

#### **FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN THE PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL SYSTEM**

1. They acted as the supreme rulers in their various communities.
2. They perform legislative functions of law making in their communities.
3. They ensure the defense of their communities.
4. They perform religious functions as high priest of some religious cults.
5. They were the head of administration in their various communities.
6. They safeguarded the lives of people in their communities.
7. They were involved in the sharing of communal wealth.
8. They served as political symbols of unity.
9. They were involved in the maintenance of law and order in the communities.
10. They planned for the progress and development of their communities.

#### **FUNCTIONS AND POWERS OF COUNCIL OF ELDERS**

1. The council advises the permanent chiefs.
2. The council of elders is responsible for the maintenance of law and order.
3. The council acted as decision making body.
4. It performs religious functions.
5. The council help to install and depose paramount chiefs.
6. The council checks the activities of the paramount chiefs.
7. The council decides whether the community will go to war or not.

## **FUNCTIONS OF SECRET SOCIETIES**

1. They helped to enforce law and order.
2. They perform both military and police functions.
3. They served as link between the members of the communities and their ancestors.
4. They protected their members.
5. They helped to educate their members and other members of the community.
6. They performed rituals to drive away evil spirits.
7. They acted as agents of socialization.

## **FUNCTIONS OF AGE GRADE**

1. The prosecution of warfare was done by the age grade.
2. They undertook social labor like construction of roads, bridges etc.
3. They perform socialization functions.
4. They perform ceremonial functions during important occasions in their communities.
5. They helped to defend their communities against both internal and external aggression.
6. They checked wrong use of powers by permanent chiefs.

### Evaluation questions

1. What were the functions of the age grade in pre-colonial political system?
2. List 5 functions of the council of elders.

## **WEEKEND ASSIGNMENT**

1. The head of Oyomesi in the old Oyo Empire was (a) Aremo (b) Oba (c) Bashorun.
2. The Igbo of eastern Nigeria in the pre-colonial era had (a) a government of chiefs (b) no central government (c) a government by age grade.
3. The emirate system in the Hausa/Fulani traditional administration was (a) secular (b) unilateral (c) hierarchical
4. Which of the following titles among the Igbo's in the pre-colonial era required substantial wealth before one could acquire it? (a) Ofor (b) ozor (c) Eze.
5. In the Hausa pre-colonial political system, sovereignty was located in the (a) Emir (b) Galadima (c) Waziri.

### **Theory**

1. Examine the features of the Hausa/Fulani pre-colonial administration
2. Mention 5 functions of the council of Elders in the pre-colonial administration.

## **READING ASSIGNMENT**

TOPIC: COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION: Comprehensive government pages 127-129, pages 130-132

: Essential government by C.C. Dibia pages 136-140.