

**CLASS: SS2**  
**SUBJECT: GOVIC**  
**TOPIC: PRE-COLONIAL SYSTEM**  
**WEEK: 9**  
**TERM: SECOND**

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND HAUSA/FULANI PRE-COLONIAL SYSTEM**

Prior to the arrival of colonial masters in Africa, the people of Africa had their own unique system of political organization. There were structures and institutions responsible for law making, implementation, interpretation and adjudication.

Pre-colonial political system refers to the method of political administration adopted in Africa before the advent of the colonial masters.

Usman Dan Fodio led the Fulani jihad and took over the political leadership of the Hausa in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and established the Sokoto caliphate with outstanding centralized political system of government. He introduced a new system of selecting and appointing rulers described as emirs to rule the caliphate. Each of the emirs owed allegiance to Dan Fodio and his two representatives at Gwandu and Sokoto.

## **POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE HAUSA/FULANI**

- 1. The emirate:** the caliphate was divided into emirates and each was headed by an emir. The emir had the responsibility of making laws, enforcing them and maintaining peace and order in his emirate. He was also expected to administer the emirate in accordance with the provisions of the Islamic and sharia laws. In fact, he was believed to have the divine right to rule. However, each emir was assisted in the administration of the emirate by a number of advisers. These were:
  - a. **The Waziri:** He was the head of all the officials.
  - b. **The Galadima:** He was in charge of the capital territory.
  - c. **The Madaki (Madawaki):** He was the commander of the Army.
  - d. **Dogari:** he was the head of the police.

- e. **Maaji:** he was in charge of treasury.
  - f. **Sarkin Ruwa:** He was in charge of the rivers and fishing festivals.
  - g. **Sarkin Fada:** The head of the palace workers
  - h. **Sarkin Pawa:** The head of all butchers
- Note:** The Waziri was a very senior adviser and administrator. He was the Prime Minister.
2. **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.
  3. **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.
  4. **Village head:** Village heads were appointed by Hakimi to help in the collection of taxes eg. The cattle tax (Jangali) and maintenance of law and order in the village.
  5. **Legislative function:** Islamic laws were the supreme laws of the emirate. The emir had the capacity of making laws on matters which were not covered by Islamic laws.
  6. **Executive functions:** the emir was authoritarian and had absolute powers, even though he had a body of advisers, yet he can ignore or accept their advice.
  7. **Judicial functions:** the judicial administration was based on Sharia laws. These laws were administered by the alkali judges. At times, minor cases may be passed to the village heads to be settled by them. Criminal and land cases were usually referred to the emirs because Sharia laws dealt mainly with civil cases.
  8. **Centralized administration:** the emirate system was a highly centralized one, with the emirs possessing almost all the powers. He was an authoritarian ruler.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE YORUBA PRE-COLONIAL SYSTEM**

The Yoruba kingdoms are descendants of Oduduwa who originally settled at Ile-Ife. His seven sons formed the seven Yoruba kingdom, which were later split into fourteen due to incessant war among them. The seat of government moved from Ile-

Ife to Oyo, and the rulers of the seven kingdoms was regarded as the Alafin of Oyo. Oyo Empire was the prominent Yoruba kingdom when the white men arrived Yoruba land.

The Yoruba political system was large in size, but it was divided into units of government. The system operated with an in-built system of checks and balances. It prevented the Oba from becoming autocratic. For instance, the council of chiefs checked the Oba while the age grades and Ogboni cult checked both the Oba and the council of chiefs. The entire Yoruba kingdom regarded the Alafin of Oyo as their overlord and they all paid allegiance to him. But with the collapse of this ancient kingdom, the different kingdoms became independent.

### **POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF YORUBA KINGDOM**

1. **The Alafin** was a supreme king, he was chosen by the Oyomesi (seven hereditary kingmakers of the empire). The administration of the empire involved the **Alafin**, assisted by the **Aremo**, the **Bashorun** (Prime minister), **Oyemesi** and others. The Alafin ruled according to the advice of Oyomesi, but it was not under compulsion for him to accept all the pieces of advice given to him. It was the constitutional function of the Alafin to appoint the general army.
2. **The Aremo**: he was the eldest son of the ruling Alafin but cannot succeed his father at his demise. He can only work or assist the Alafin in the administration of the empire.
3. **The Oyomesi**: these are the seven hereditary kingmakers in the empire. The leader was **Bashorun**. They are responsible for installing a new Alafin, if the ruling one happen to die. They also work hand in hand with the Alafin in the administration of the empire. It was equally the constitutional duty of the council to impeach or remove any obstinate king by summoning the king and asking him to open an empty calabash or open a calabash with a parrot egg inside it.
4. **The Army**: Are-ona-kakanfo was the head of the army. Oyo had for long maintained a strong army and was involved in different wars. It was claimed that if the army suffer any defeat, the kakanfo should commit suicide. However, the empire might experience a disobedient Kakanfo who would refuse to take directives from the Alafin. For example, kakanfo Afonja rebelled in Ilorin and decided to use the army to score some political points. He later formed an alliance with Fulani and declared his independence of the Alafin.

5. **The Ogboni society:** this society possessed judicial powers and was involved also in policy making. The maintenance and preservation of cultural values of the people were also delegated to them. The Ogboni society was a secret society that influenced events in the society.
6. **Baale or Oloja:** each town village in a district was under the Baale or Oloja. The Baale or Oloja appointed chiefs who assisted him in the administration of the town or village. Minor disputes were settled by the Baale at the town level. The Baale paid annual tribute to the Oba who approved his appointment.

### **FEATURES OF THE YORUBA POLITICAL SYSTEM**

1. The size of the political system was moderate.
2. The system was a constitutional monarchy
3. There was a system of checks and balances within the political system to ensure that powers were not highly concentrated or abused.
4. There was no system of taxation. Tributes were paid in form of labour, yams, kola and animals by subordinate towns to their paramount ruler in the main town.

The Yoruba kingdoms were loosely linked with the Alafin of Oyo. The Oba did not sit with the chiefs in making public policies. The chiefs met outside the palace to discuss public issues and took decisions which were forwarded to the Oba for ratification.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Highlight the four forms Tax system in the Pre-colonial Hausa system.