

CHAPTER 7 STATE FORMATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Objectives

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- define the term “state formation process”;
- define the term, centralized societies or states;
- identify certain factors that influence the process of state formation in centralized states;
- define the term non-centralized states;
- identify features of non-centralized societies.

Introduction

This chapter deals with the views of historians, political scientists, archaeologists and cultural anthropologists about the origin of political institutions and administrative structures of different empires, kingdoms and ethnic nationalists that make up the socio-political entity called Nigeria. The study of how early African states emerged, as well as the complexities associated with their political organizations and the splendor of their court ceremonies, will help us to reject the hamitic myth which formulated a baseless argument. The argument states that ideology and organization must have been imported into Negro Africa by non-Negro invaders from either Egypt or the Middle East.

7.1 Conceptual Meaning of State Formation Process

State formation process can be seen as the different factors, processes and stages that led to the emergence of empires, kingdoms, and nation states currently situated in the area referred to as Nigeria. In short, it demonstrates how different socio-political and cultural entities started to exist as political entities with the ability for self-government and leadership. These include the Hausa states, Bornu Empire, The Jukun kingdom or Kwararafa, the Igala kingdom, the Old Oyo Empire, the Tiv state and the Segmentary village democracies of Igbo nation and Efik societies.

7.2 Meaning of Centralized Societies or States

Centralized states or societies means socio-political units that cover large territorial areas. Most times these exist under a strong central authority that is controlled by a powerful ruler who could be referred to as a king. These kings or potentates wield a lot of executive, legislative and judicial powers and are, most times, seen by their subjects as semi-divine kings. Kings of centralized societies take their titles according to their local languages. For instance, A Hausa king was addressed as Sarki while a Kanuri king was called a Mai.

A centralized state, besides having a central administration, also has provincial administrators who administer the provinces on behalf of the King. There were also district/village administrators who maintained law and order and collected taxes on behalf of the king in their areas of jurisdiction.

In the Northern part of Nigeria, large centralized states included the Kanem-Borno empire and Hausa City states like Kano, Zaria, Gobir. There were also centralized states which were not as extensive as the afore-listed centralized states but still evolved sophisticated political structures headed by a powerful ruler. Such centralized states include Igala, Nupe and Egbira kingdoms.

In Southern Nigeria, the Old Oyo Empire and the Edo Empire of Benin can be regarded as large centralized states because of the territorial size of their empires and their enviable administrative structures. There also existed smaller centralized states such as the Yoruba kingdoms, Itsekiri kingdom, Agbor kingdom, etc.

Before 1800, centralized societies used their armies to embark on wars of expansion. These wars or military campaigns helped these empires and kingdoms to annex weaker states which paid them tributes as vassal or tributary states.

A cursory analysis of all centralized states in Nigeria shows the uniqueness of the political organization of the Old Oyo Empire. The Oyo constitution remains one of the greatest legacies bequeathed to the world by the black civilization. The Oyo empire practice constitutional monarchy which was based on checks and balances.

7.3 Factors that Influenced the State Formation Process in Centralized States

Many factors accounted for the rise of states in pre-European Africa. These factors are analysed below:

- (i) **Geographical factors:** Centralized states across Nigeria are always strategically located along trade routes. Both the Trans Saharan and Trans Atlantic trade routes greatly influenced the rise and expansion of empires like Kanem-Borno, Hausa city states like Kano, Katsina and Daura, Igala, Nupe and Old Oyo Empire. While the Chad Basin encouraged agricultural activities and economic contacts in Kanem. Borno empire, the grasslands of the Northern parts of Nigeria helped centralized states like Borno, Kano, Nupe to expand their frontiers through military conquests aided by Calvary Soldiery. Thus, environmental factors like fertile soil, presence of rich mineral deposits and flat terrain can lead to the formation of centralized societies, environmental hazards like drought, famine, pestilence can also lead to the disintegration of extensive empires.
- (ii) **Economic factors:** Centralized states were easily established when states monopolized economic activities within a particular geo-political entity. For instance, the Kanem-Borno empire became very prominent because their economic prosperity helped them to raise up strong armies which defeated frontier states and annexed them into already existing empires or kingdoms as tributary states.

(iii) **Warfare:** Most times, menacing threats of large empires like Songhai, Kanem-Borno could force small independent but weak communities to forge military alliances. Also, they could force large political unions in order to ward off alien invasion. For instance, Borno's constant military threats on Hausa city states made communities in Hausa land to come together as larger states in order to checkmate the imperialistic designs of Borno neighbours.

Equally, in the southern forest belt region, the military threats posed by Benin to her Western Igbo neighbours led to the formation of centralized states like Agbor, Asaba, Ugwashiukwu and Onitsha. These communities needed large political organization and energetic leadership to ward off incessant military assaults from the Benin empire.

(iv) **Voluntary cultural borrowing:** Most times, non-kingly societies were always fascinated by the splendid and exotic political culture of centralized states. They were always perplexed by the hierarchical structure of authority that existed in the political organization of centralized states. The complex mysteries and splendor of court ceremonials that spiced up the office of the king, most times, won the admiration of non-centralized states. A case in point could be seen in the manner many Ika communities of western Niger, adopted most of the political rituals that are associated with the Benin monarchy.

7.4 Meaning of Non-Centralized Societies or States

A non-centralized state or society refers to a segmentary or non-kingly society whose social and political organization lacked centralized administration with a powerful monarch (that is king) or paramount ruler who wields executive, legislative and judicial powers at the head. In other words it refers to a group of people who believe in a representative democracy whereby laws that govern the behavior of the members of such a society are made by the village assembly through the principle of consensus.

A non-centralized society does not mean 'stateless society' as non-professional historians of the colonial era would want us to believe. 'Stateless societies' did not exist because there is no society in pre-independent Nigeria that was unable to put in place instruments of social legislation as well as institutions that helped her to enforce law and order amongst its indigenes. Ethnic groups in Nigeria today that are categorized as non-centralized states include, Igbo land, Ibibio, Efik, Tiv, Isoko, Urhobo, Idoma, the Birom and Angas etc.

Non-centralized societies don't believe in monarchical governments and where they adopt monarchical styled governments, what prevails is constitutional monarchy as is the case with western Igbo monarchies in Agbor, Ugwashiukwu and Asaba etc.

7.5 Features of Non-Centralized States

Non-centralized societies have certain features that make them very unique. These features include:

(i) **Effective use of Consultative Assemblies:** Non-centralized states used Consultative Assemblies to make laws that guide the conduct of her citizens. For instance, in Igboland

Consultative Assemblies operated at different levels such as village, lineage and sub-lineage levels. These assemblies were always presided over by the oldest surviving male member of a particular community, village lineage, sub-lineage. Consultative Assemblies had representatives like Ofo-holders, or village heads, Ndi Ichie, titled men like Ndi Nze Na Ozo, warriors, all adult males, representatives of secret societies like Ekpe, Mmanwu and representatives of age-grades (Otu Ebiri). Consultative Assemblies were also gender sensitive as they ensure that the women groups are represented by the oldest surviving married woman.

Different levels of consultative assemblies made laws and settled both intra and inter village disputes through the process of constitution (Igbaz Izu).

Efik and Ibibio societies also practiced consultative assembly system of government at the village lineage and sub-lineage levels.

- (ii) **Effective use of socio-political institutions that serve as instruments of social control:** Non-centralized states evolved socio-political institutions such as secret societies and age grades which served as veritable instruments of social control at both the sub-lineage, lineage, village and village-group Assemblies. Secret societies maintained law and order during village assembly sessions. They also enforced laws made by different levels of consultative assemblies. Examples of these secret societies are the ‘Ekpe’, ‘Mmanwu’, Okonko and Akang societies etc.

Another important socio-political unit that helped in community development and the enforcement of societal laws is the Association of age grades. The age grades, guarded public morality through the censorship of the behavior of their members. Age grade associations in Igbo land, Efik, Ibibio and Ijo societies carried out ‘police duties’ through the formation of ‘vigilante’ groups to guard the lives and property of people in the villages or lineages.

- (iii) **Institutionalization of gerontocratic leadership/governance:** Non-centralized states have great respect for the elderly class. Reverence given to men who are grey-haired with knowledge encouraged a gerontocratic approach to governance. In short, non-centralized states operated a gerontocratic system of government. A proof of gerontocratic governance is evident in the socio-political organization of the Igbo, Efik, Ibibio, where all the consultative assemblies were headed by the oldest surviving members of the village, lineage or sub-lineage groups. Gerontocratic leadership doesn’t confer presiding members of these consultative assemblies dictatorial powers rather the political culture in non-centralized states was that the will of the majority of the people must prevail. The gerontocrats were mindful of the rights of the people. These democratic ideals or culture gave room for the adoption of policies or programmes that always met the aspirations of the people.

- (iv) **Encouragement of participation of women’s group in the art of governance:** Non-centralized states that practiced representative democracy believed that, in spite of too much attachment to the cultural values of pre-colonial societies, there was the need to encourage female participation in the art of governance. This belief made societies in Igbo land, Efik and

Ibibio to give room for female representatives in the consultative assemblies. In Igboland, non-centralized states also allowed women, especially the married ones to form their own associations referred to as Married Women's Forum (or Otu Umu nwanyi Luru Di). The Married Women Forum settled disputes amongst married women and promoted peaceful living amongst nuclear families. Certain cases that were beyond the jurisdiction of the women forum were referred to either the Amala-council, the lineage assembly or the sub-lineage assembly.

- (v) **Creation of opportunities for competition and improved economic opportunities:** Non-centralized societies believed in the equality of every person before societal laws. It did not bestow undue privileges to its members as was obtainable in centralized societies. The philosophy that guided non-centralized states was that, through hardwork an individual could move from one social class to another without any inhibition. This philosophy engendered or encouraged spirit of competition amongst its members. The phenomenon of equal economic opportunities paved the way for the Igbo man's dominance in the spheres of trade, craftsmanship and farming. For instance, Okonkwo in Achebe's Things Fall Apart broke away from the abject poverty status of Onoka, his father, to become a prosperous farmer and a reputable Umuofia warrior through dint of hardwork.

Conclusion

The democratic ideals that prevailed amongst non-centralized societies as well as the creation of economic opportunities might be responsible for the roles her indigenes played during the struggle for the emancipation of Nigeria from colonial bondage. For instance, the Aba, Efik and Ibibio women who declared war on the British colonial administration in 1929/30 did so because of the democratic political culture that prevailed in their societies. Prominent nationalists in the Nigeria who challenged British colonial activities in Nigeria all hailed from non-centralized societies. Nigerians can never easily forget the heroism demonstrated by Nnamdi Azikiwe, M.I. Okpara, Akanu Ibiam, Margaret Ekpo, Eyo Ita, Dr. K.O. Mdadiwe. These crop of heroes and heroines believed in the democratic ideals of equality of every individual and, as such, saw no justification for colonialism.

Economic opportunities that availed in non-centralized states made it possible for Sir Louis Odumegwu to become one of the first Nigerian millionaires during the colonial era.

Summary

- State formation process simply tells us how pre-colonial societies in Nigeria evolved complex and organized political institutions, as empires, kingdoms or segmentary societies where consultative assemblies reigned.
- Centralized states were large territorial units ruled by kings.

- Smaller states forged themselves into centralized states to enjoy certain benefits associated with economic prosperity, invincible army and opportunities provided by factors of geography such as control of trade routes, fertile soil and grassland regions.
- Non-centralized states were segmentary societies that believed in democratic rule and detest monarchical leadership.
- Non-centralized states had a democratic political culture that recognized institutions like secret societies, women fora, etc. It also created equal economic opportunities and spirit of competition amongst its members.

Revision Questions

Objectives

1. _____ is an example of a large centralized state in Northern Nigeria.
 - A. Jukun
 - B. Igala
 - C. Nupe
 - D. Kanem-Borno
2. _____ is an example of small centralized state in Northern Nigeria.
 - A. Igala
 - B. Kanem-Borno
 - C. Tiv
 - D. Jukun
3. _____ is a false claim that state ideology and organization were imported into Negro Africa by non-Negro invaders from Egypt or the Middle East.
 - A. Oduduwa myth
 - B. Bayajidda myth
 - C. Hamitic myth
 - D. Egyptian myth
4. _____ is an example of a centralized state in pre-colonial Southern Nigeria.
 - A. Itsekiri
 - B. Agbor
 - C. Old Oyo Empire
 - D. Benin
5. _____ used their armies to fight wars of expansion and annex weaker states which paid it tribute as vassal states.
 - A. Non-centralized states
 - B. Acephalous societies
 - C. Segmentary societies
 - D. Centralized states

6. _____ refer to societies that resents leadership by an all-powerful monarch.
- A. Centralized states
 - B. Nation state
 - C. Acephalous state
 - D. Non-centralized states
7. Consultative Assemblies in non-centralized states are noted for _____
- A. making of harsh laws
 - B. enthroning dictators who oppress their subjects
 - C. leads their community to fight unjust wars with their neighbours
 - D. makes laws that govern their society through the principle of consensus (Igba-izu)
8. Gerontocratic leadership refers to _____.
- A. leadership by the elderly class
 - B. leadership by the wealthy class
 - C. leadership by members of the Ekpe secret club
 - D. leadership by women
9. _____ enforces laws made by consultative assemblies.
- A. Village heads
 - B. Titled men like Nze na Ozo
 - C. Okpara
 - D. Secret societies such as Ekpe, Okonko, Mmanwu
10. Age grades were important instruments of social control in non-centralized societies like Igbo land due to their roles as _____.
- A. priests
 - B. diviners
 - C. vigilante groups' that guard lives and property of people in the villages, lineages and sub-lineages.
 - D. law enforcement agents

Essay Questions

1. Define the term ‘Non-Centralized’ and ‘Central states’.
2. State two factors that influenced State Formation process in centralized states in Northern and Southern Nigeria.
3. Write concise notes on any two of the following concepts in Igbo history:
(i) Secret societies (ii) Age grades
4. State five main features of Non-centralized societies in Nigeria.
5. Do you support the argument that the state formation process in Africa was influenced by Non-Negros who migrated from Egypt or the Middle East.