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PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA:
THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Isaac Olawale Albert
Institute of African Studies
University of Ibadan
Nigeria

AFRICANA

PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE PAST IN THE PRESENT*

by
Dr. Isaac Olawale Albert
Research Fellow in African History,
Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Nigeria.

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Introduction

It is the boast of historical materialism that the present is best understood in light of what has taken place in the past. The future too is considered to be a logical product of what has happened to both the past and the present. It is against this background that this paper seeks to explain some contemporary problems of democracy in Nigeria in light of the nation's pre-colonial and colonial antecedents. The motley of issues to be examined here will include the nature of the Nigerian society in the precolonial period; the extent to which one could consider the political system in the pre-colonial Nigerian kingdoms, empires and states to be democratic; the process through which colonial rule was established and implemented in Nigeria; whether or not the colonial masters who introduced Nigeria to western democracy professed to be democrats themselves. These and many other issues will be dialectically examined with a view to explaining why things are the way they are in Nigeria today.

Pre-colonial institutions

Before the British began to pursue a colonial policy in the country during the ineteenth century, the geographical expression now known as Nigeria was made up of a multiplicity of independent kingdoms and empires each of

which had complex political systems sufficient for the needs of the people. There was the great Kanem-Bornu empire; the Hausa states; the old kingdoms of Oyo, Ife and Benin; the Jukun, Nupe and Igala kingdoms; the decentralised Igbo speaking polities and many others.

Rather than attempting the dispensable task of examining the socio-political set-up of all the kingdoms, empires and states discussed above to determine their democratic content, the present effort shall be essentially limited to the Hausa states, Yoruba kingdoms and the segmentary Ibo society. The political framework of the other states could therefore be used as related examples where found necessary as these three major groups had such political characteristics easily comparable to the ones developed by the other states. For example, the political system in Haussland at the dawn of the Nigerian colonialism could be found in virtually all parts of northern Nigeria, down to Ilorin in Yorubaland. The political system in Yorubaland during same period was closely related in most of the kingdoms. The Igbo-speaking people have also been noted not to be isolated in their practice of segmentary political system. The Tiv and some people from the Niger Delta area practised the same system of administration.

Politically, the administration of the Hausa states in the pre-colonial era centre around the personality of the Sarki who derived the legitimacy to his political power by royal descent. For the Sarki to maintain an effective control of his people, however, he had to depend upon a feudal system in which he mobilised a large army of supporters to serve his personal interests in return for material and political rewards.[1] The most important of the king's supporters were usually the fiefholding officials most of whom derived their chieftaincy titles through feudal relationship with the Sarki. In some cases, some members of the exclusive royal lineage called Yan Sarki were also appointed as fiefholders.[2] These officials served as the agents of the Sarki in revenue collections and general administration, most especially in wealth producing territories. To this end, political power in most Hausa states was usually a product of functional balance between the interests of the Sarki and his fiefholders who of course were trusted members of the society, as far as the assessment of the king could go.

The Hausa political system around this time recognised the sharp division of the society into two major classes - the rulers (masu saranta) and the subjects (talakawa).[3]

But for the feudal system that made it possible for a talakawa to be rewarded with a fiefholding office through his military prowess or other social achievements, it would have been impossible for a subject to enter the ruling class in view of the limited number of people that could claim royal descent in the states.[4]

The Sokoto Jihad which took place between 1804 and 1809 established islamic religion as a new source of political power in Hausaland. So much was this that the pre-existing Habe rulers were replaced by the islam professing Emirs. With the defeat of such Hausa states as Kano, Kazaure, Zaria, Katsina, Daura, Gobir, Zamfara and many others by the Jihadists led by Usman Dan Fodio, the Hausa rulers who now had to operate under a colonial system headed by the Caliph in Sokoto could no longer operate as the supreme commanders of their territories as did in the pre-jihad years. What more, the vassal states formerly under the Habe rulers now found new freedom in the Caliphate system under which their lost independence became regained. Under the new arrangement, the Emirs were expected to acknowledge the authority of the Caliph, the head of the Sokoto Caliphate. Though the Caliph allowed the Emirs to exercise a high degree of autonomy at

administering their territories, there were certain occasions when the Caliph through his lieutenants had to intervene in the affairs of some territories by bringing erring Emirs to order, especially when the issue concerned had to do with the violation of the established islamic principles of government in the Caliphate. The Caliph had the unchallengeable and unchallenged power to appoint and dismiss Emirs.[5]

All the emirs were expected to visit Sokoto from time to time as a sign of allegiance to the Caliph. They were expected to pay annual tributes to him. In return, the Emirates looked unto Sokoto for military support in time of wars. The Caliph was held in high esteem as the "Supreme judge of the Sharia". Though the Caliphate system retained certain Hausa institutions, the Emirs were expected to rule according to the islamic law.

The observation has however been made that though the Emirs in the post-Jihad era were under the Caliph in Sokoto, the Caliphate system conferred on them a greater power than their predecessors the habe Sarkis) enjoyed in the pre-jihad years. According to Abdullahi Mahadi,

> The Jihad movements in Kano and elsewhere in Hausaland was a typical example of a revolution without transformation of the pre-existing structures of the social

> system. What the Jama'a succeeded in doing was the removal of the rulers from power leaving intact the very well established state structures and institutions which the new rulers simply accommodated and even enlarged. The control of the major means of production, namely, land and labour by the Sarauta state was more than ever before geared towards satisfying the material comfort of the rulers and greed of the bir attajirai, two groups in the society whose interests were increasingly becoming intertwined. In the process the other members of the society were relegated to the position of mere supporters of the privileged groups.6

When carefully considered, it would therefore be discored that the Jihad was a far-cry away from the needs of the common man, the talakawa, in the affected areas. The talakawa in the emirates could not have been much affected by the colonial relationship between the Caliph and the Emirs but for the islamic education which now started becoming widespread away from the courtyards where it was earlier confined by the Habe rulers. More than anything else, the Jihad helped to weld Hausaland and the other polities under the Caliphate system (the present day northern Nigeria) together.

Like the Sarki in Hausaland, the Oba in the pre-colonial Yorubaland exercised a far-reaching political influence but under a monarchical system of government.

The Oba worked in concert with some state officials as Oyomesi in Oyo, the Olori Ilaru in Ado-Ekiti, the Ewese in Ilesa etc. The Yoruba Kings (Oba) whose traditional titles varied from one kingdom to the other were divine rulers. The king was seen as alase ekeji orisa (the second in command to the gods). The extent of the Oba's power is still testified to by the Yoruba maxim: eni ba f'oju d'oba awowo a wo (he who tries to under-rate a king would be crushed in the process). The Oba was assisted either directly or indirectly in administration by Ifa oracle diviners[7] (Babalawo or Aworo in some places) and members of the Ogboni society.[8]

The pre-colonial Yoruba people had a relatively centralised political system in which the Oba had political representatives in the villages and vassal states. Such a representative is titled Baale, Asojuoba, Ajele etc depending on the affected kingdom. He charged and collected taxes, tolls and tributes on behalf of his principle Oba.

Within each of the kingdoms, the Oba was assisted in administration by supporting chiefs representing various interests in the state. The council of state was made up of chieftains representing the royal interests, commoners' interest as well as religious interests.[9] In most of the

kingdoms, the political system was designed in such a manner that both the Oba and his chiefs had specific constitutional roles to play in the administration of the state. Most especially in the Old Oyo, the Oba could not exercise any totalitarian or tyranic power in the state as there were various constitutional methods of preventing such. For example, the Oyo Mesi who were recognised as the "watch dogs" of the people's liberty in the Old Oyo empire could depose a tyrannical king and thereby force him to commit suicide. This right was exercised on various occasions during the 17th and 18th centuries to the extent that its abused usage contributed in no small measure to the eventual fall of the Oyo empire.[10]

Despotism in the pre-colonial Yoruba kingdoms was also checked through some divine limitations on the power of the Oba. According to Akinjogbin and Ayandele,[11] such limitations called eewo (taboos) which varied from one Yoruba kingdom to the other were usually recounted to the Oba as part of the initiation ceremonies into the kingship. A violation of the eewo by the Oba was usually visited with heavy penalties. It could lead to his deposition. The larger society also had various eewo, a violation of which could invoke the annoyance of the gods on the entire society or the particularly concerned person.

The Oyo empire fell due to internal dimensions and to the pressure mounted by the Sokoto jihadists from Ilorin in the 1830s. The leadership vacuum created in Yorubaland by the fall of Oyo served as a catalyst to a large scale warfare that characterised the 19th century Yorubaland.[12] Many of the states wanted to occupy the leadership position vacated by Oyo. Prominent among the warring Yoruba states were Ibadan, Ijaye and Abeokuta. With the completion of these different wars which tilted the balance of power away from Oyo towards the above mentioned states, especially Ibadan and Ijaye, the political organization of some Yoruba states became changed. Both Ibadan and Ijaye who had now become the military power in Yorubaland rejected the monarchical kind of government that was popular among the Yoruba people. They established a new political system based on military achievements.[13]

Despite all these changes in the power base of the Oba, Ajayi and Akintoye have noted that the degree of influence that the kings still had on the people never changed. The people still saw them as representatives of the gods. As a result of the general insecurity that the 19th century wars in Yorubaland generated, the common man man in view of their threatened personal liberty had to submit themselves to the whims and caprices of the leading

warriors to buy dignity and security for themselves.[14] The new leaders in these new states, especially Ibadan also got rid of the Old Oyo practice whereby the powers of the Oba was curtailed by certain palace officials such as Oyomesi. The traditional ruler simply became more autocratic.

The third major kind of political experience in the pre-colonial Nigeria was the segmentary system of government practised by the Igbo, Ibibio, Tiv and other politically decentralised people in the Nigerian society. These people had no elaborate state system or kingdoms comparable to those of the Hausa and Yoruba people. Here, village groups constituted the political units. Rather than practising a system whereby political powers were concentrated in the hands of an aristocratic group, the Igbo for example had an elaborate age-grade system that made for gerontocratic rule.[15] This provided for a constitutionally established demarcation between the socio-political functions of the elders and young adults. Describing the structure of this society, Robin Horton noted that:

> ... young adults are responsible for the actual labour in public works, for the brunt of active operations in war; for the expression of dissatisfaction about the state of village life; for the continual suggestions of solutions to village troubles; and for starting most quarrels.

> Elders, on the other hand, are advisers on the conduct of war; moderators having the last word in village affairs generally; and settlers of the quarrels provoked by the young. In the village assembly, the two groups sit opposite one another; and for the western observer familiar with parliamentary institutions, their behaviour is superficially reminiscent of that of "government" and "opposition" in debates ... both are well aware of their mutual indispensability ... the matter at issue tends to be tossed back and forth until a compromise is reached upon which both can agree.16

Under this egalitarian political structure, the elders and a headman constituted the political authority in each village. They were indirectly helped in administration by members of some secret societies who performed veiled executive and judicial functions in the society. These secret societies whose membership was made open to all mature and trustworthy members of the society, settled cumbersome inter-village feuds. All deliberations and execution of the societies' decisions were usually kept secret to preclude any undue interference or influence from members of the public.[17] The secret societies ensured that sectional interests were not allowed to overshadow equalitarian justice within the communities.

Oral traditions in Igboland and archaeological evidence from Igbo-Ukwu have shown that the earliest centralised political authority known in the pre-colonial

Igboland was that of Eze Nri, the spiritual "king of the Umueri clan of the Igbo". Though the Eze Nri did not wield the kind of political influence arrogated to the Yoruba Oba and the Hausa Sarki, he however commanded such moral and spiritual respect[18] among the people, to the extent that the Eze Nri is best presented as an authoritarian in Igbo literature. The influence of Nri gradually spread to the other parts of Igboland until it was rivaled in the 18th and 19th centuries by the oracle-based institutions of the Arochukwu people.[19] For the first time in the history of political development in Igboland, the Aro people and their oracles provided a political-cum-economic system under which a violation of the societal ideals by the people was punished by enslavement or death. The militarist posture of the Arochukwu made the people to recognise and feel the impact of the "centralising" authority. The influence of the oracle spread as far as the Niger Delta and its hinterland. The Arochukwu priests and oracles had to be totally dislodged by the invading British forces on 24th December, 1901[20] before British influence could be firmly established in Eastern Nigeria.

Comparative Analysis of the Political Systems

A comparative study of the socio-political institutions in pre-colonial Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other Nigerian societies readily show that the rulers of these places derived their political powers from popular customs and traditions. The right to rule was restricted only to the generally-acknowledged aristocratic class. Except in Igboland and some other segmentary societies, the kings were appointed from the ruling aristocratic lineages. One could argue here therefore that the Oba and Sarki derived the legitimacy to their office by the generally acknowledged customs of the people. To this length, their rights to office could be said to be democratic. This is a democracy of general consent, if not clinically subjected to the litmus test of the modern-day parameters of democratic principles.

In the use of their political power, however, the Oba, Sarki, Caliph have been found to be authoritarians. Though in most of the kingdoms institutional machinery existed to curtail the power of the rulers, most of these kings still appeared no less than absolute rulers whose orders could hardly be challenged. Most of them personalised political power to such an extent that their subjects look unto them

as infallible gods. The modern-day requirement of "freedom of speech", "freedom of movement," "freedom of conscience" and the democratic "fundamental human rights" could not have meant much to any of them. In Yorubaland, the people addressed the Oba as Kabiyesi (we dare not question him). The Hausas Sarki was mal duniyan (the owner of the world) or Zaki (lion). It was only in Igboland that the people saw their traditional rulers as mere human beings. Even then, this must have excluded the Arochukwu priests, who could sentence one to slavery or death at will. The Yoruba Oba could forcefully marry any girl that pleased him, levy any amount of tax or tribute and unilaterally dismiss any of his chiefs. The picture in the old northern Nigeria was similar. According to the reports of al-Mullallabi about the Mais of Borno (a situation applicable to most parts of northern Nigeria "... the people exhalt and worship (the king) instead of God ... and believing that it is (the king) who bring life and death, sickness and health".[21] Even in the post-Jihad Hausaland, the Amirs as the sole agents of the Amir-al Mu'munin (commander of the faithfuls) in the emirates could only be said to have wielded higher political power than the Habe rulers. Therefore, except in Igboland where

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decision-making were usually made a product of open debates, the ordinary man under the pre-colonial situation, could hardly have been qualified to challenge any king or raise a dissenting voice against him.

Probably the only input that the common man made to decision-making during the period under review was the constitutional checks exercised by the chiefs in certain parts of the country against their monarchs. In the Old Oyo empire the Oyomesi could constitutionally dethrone a despotic Alaafin or force him to commit suicide. In the Benin kingdom, the Iyase (the senior town chiefs) could publicly oppose an Oba,[22] and the Uzama could also exercise some ritual influence that could serve as a check on the king; in Igala kingdoms, the Igalamela shared political power with the king.[23] Professor Atanda has argued that the checks exercised by these chiefs against their kings could be interpreted to be the collective checks of the people on the monarchs. This is based on the premise that the chiefs by nature of their appointments were representatives of different "lineages, age-grade sets and titled societies that formed the fabric of the society."[24] Plausible as this argument seems, it fails to take into deep consideration the fact that the constitutional checks

of the chiefs on the monarchs cannot be strong enough to displace the voice of the individual which democracy seeks to protect. But despite all these checks, the fact remains that the kings were still symbols of the established order under which the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the state were combined in the hands of single individuals.

It is instructive to state that the authoritarian influence of these rulers derived from the cosmological beliefs of the people. This easily made them to be pliant subjects of authoritarians themselves.

The social stratification of most these societies was such that the priests, kings and elders were believed to have the final say in any matter of state concern As everybody aspired to also become old and consequently attain the status of an elder, he made efforts to recognise the words of elders as laws. The family was headed by a male head who unilaterally dictated how things should be done to members of his household. He was answerable to nobody for the action taken within his family. Women were regarded as minors and so were only seen but not heard. They played little or no roles in decision-making. The entire communities viewed the king as the father of all and the worldly

representative of the gods. This concept of paternal and personalised authority prevented a large section of the people from opposing whatever the traditional head of their environments did or said. This has been partly responsible for the political aparty and docility of a large section of Nigerians which President Babangida's Directorate of Mass Mobilization (MAMSER) tried to address to no success some three decades after the nation's independence.

The failure of MAMSER consisted largely in the non-commital of the Babangida administration to any dramatic social change. The regime promoted large scale social, economic and political corruption. It soon collapsed on 27th August, 1993 amidst its too many contradictions. The new military regime in Nigeria headed by General Sani Abacha is a more confused one that the ones that preceded it. It lacks any sense of direction and relies only on the use of force, deceit and manipulation.

Commenting generally on the level of ignorance, superatition and fear of the unknown that characterised the precolonial Nigerian society, Chief Obafemi Awolowo once noted that:

> ... the myths created by the dominant group enjoyed indubitable credibility, and were accorded unquesting and unreflecting obeisance in all things, and at all times. It would appear that the more awesome and more gruesome the demands of the gods and spirits, through the priests, and the more arbitrary the dictates and ordinances of the kings were, the swifter and moreddevoted the people were in their response and obedience.25

The contemporary experience in Nigeria is not different from the picture painted by Awolowo in the above quotation.

Western Democracy and the British Colonial Interests in Nigeria

Western democracy was introduced to Nigeria through the colonial relationship between the country and Britain. Yet, to relate the idea of democracy with colonialism is another exercise in non sequitor as the two stand in sharp contrast to the other. While democracy is more interested in making it possible for the citizen to govern himself, colonial rule is stinted towards the protection of the narrow and selfish interests of the colonial master. What more, colonialism is often established through the use of force. The most important question in the political development of Nigeria is how could Britain, a colonial interest have been able to impart democratic culture on Nigerians. Yet, the fact remains that Nigerians could not have learnt

about the western ides of democracy but from its erstwhile colonial master - the British.

The colonization of Nigeria by Britain can be dated back to the early 19th century when the British who had long been competing with the other European merchants along the coastal states of Nigeria began to show interest in the political control of Lagos. A dynastic feud between Akintoye and Kosoko provide the British with enough excuse in 1851 to intervene in the political affairs of Lagos. For the support given him against his opponent, Akintoye in 1851 was lured into signing a document which placed the entire Lagos under the British "protectorship". In 1861, the British annexed Lagos under Dosumu, a new ruler of Lagos. In 1885, the area became known as the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos with another signed treaty with the Alaafin of Oyo which placed Yorubaland under the British protection. During the same year, a protectorate of Oil Rivers which was later expanded in 1893 as Niger Coast Protectorate was formed. The colonization of northern Nigeria was through a long process of commercial activities. When it became clear that colonial rule could not be established here by peaceful means, Lord Lugard had to resort to military expeditions especially against Sokoto and Gwandu which were the Islamic power

base of northern Nigerians. Therefore, the Sokoto army was defeated by the British on 4th March, 1903. A new Caliph was appointed to replace Attahiru Ahmadu who had earlier fled but was later arrested and killed.[26]

During the short but historical installation of the new Caliph, Muhammadu Attahiru (1903-15), Lord Lugard unilaterally announced the demise of the Sokoto Caliphate and the birth of the British hegemony in northern Nigeria;

> The old treaties are dead, you have killed them. Now these are the words which I, the High Commissioner have to say for the future. The Fulani in old times under Dan Fodio conquered this country. They took the right to rule over it, to levy taxes, to depose kings and to create kings. They in turn have by defeat lost their rule which has come into the hands of the British. All these things which I have said the Fulani by conquest the right to do now pass to the British. Every Sultan or Emir and the principal officers of state will be appointed by the High Commissioner throughout all the country.[27]

By the time Lord Lugard finished with the North, it became obvious that all the imperial exploits of the Caliph and the northern Emirs were now subservient to the political dictatorship of the British. Then Lugard turned his attention back to Southern Nigeria.

In 1906, Lord Lugard created the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. On January 1, 1914, he

almagamated the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. On January 1, 1914, he almagamated the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with that of the North giving birth to the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Lord Lugard thus became the first Governor General of the country.

As evident in the foregoing exposition, the British concentrated most on the subjugation of the Nigerian kings and chiefs rather than the people. This was based on the thought that once a king (highly revered by the people) was conquered, his subjects would easily realise the political strength and wisdom of the conquerors. This greatly helped the British invaders. Even after the conquest of the entire country, the British still used the traditional rulers to control the people under the 'Indirect Rule' policy. The summary of this political system was published in 1920 in Lugard's "Almagamation Report".

> The system ... had been based on the authority of the Native chiefs. The policy of the government was that <u>the chiefs should govern their people, not as independent but dependent Rulers</u> ... The taxes are raised in the name of the native ruler and by his agents, but he surrenders the fixed proportion to Government, and the expenditure of the portion assigned to the Native Administration, from which fixed salaries to to all Native officials are paid, is subject to the advice of the Resident, and the ultimate control of the Governor.28
>
> (emphasis mine)

To a large extent, the indirect rule system was designed to meet the selfish ends of the colonial masters. It also had little to do with the general interests of the people.

In view of how the British colonial rule was established in Nigeria and the administrative policy of the colonial master, Professor Dudley has argued that a colonial rule is a military rule and therefore cannot be democratic. According to him, "whatever legitimacy, if one could talk of legitimacy in such a context, the colonial authorities possessed derived not from any set of agreed rules, but from the monopoly of the means of violence".[29] The level of military and para-military violence of the British against the Ijebu people, Arochukwu priests and traders and some Emirs in the Sokoto Caliphate probably suffice to support Dudley's thesis. The argument is better appreciated in the words of Lord Lugard himself:

> Whatever happens we have got the maxim guns and they have not.[30]

Just as the channels through which British rule was established over Nigeria could be said to be undemocratic, the administrative policy adopted by the regime was itself an abuse of democratic processes. It is in fact responsible for some of the problems of democratic politics

currently faced in Nigeria. The British policy of Indirect Rule was not uniformly implemented in the country. The system is responsible for the current North-South dichotomy in the country. Under the indirect rule, the powers of the Sarkis and Obas were increased as they now had the backing of the colonial masters for their actions. In Yorubaland for example, the Obas were given such political powers that the traditions of the people never recognised. In Oyo for example, the Oyomesi could no longer check the Alaafin, but the colonial master that issued orders to him. Though the people were answerable to the kings in matters relating to the payment of taxes, the latter was only answereble to the British overlords about the generated revenue.

In Igboland and other segmentary societies where there were no recognised "traditional rulers" other than the elected elders of the respective villages, "Warrant Chiefs" were created by the British to perform the type of functions carried out by the Yoruba Obas and the Hausa Emirs. The appointment of these artificial chiefs did not go down well with these loosely organised people. It was one of the factors that led to the Aba women riot of 1929.[31] It is also necessary to note that at this time, the Sarki, Oba

and Warrant Chief made no contribution to decision-making of their environment. They were rather in office to implement the policy of the colonial masters. This completely alienated them from their subjects and the people began to look unto the colonial administrators as the judicial officers of the last resort to whom their cases could be brought.

In Kano for example, Dr. Ubah noted that various complaints were made by members of the commoner class, the talakawa to the British administrators against the Emirs and their officials.[32] Many of such complaints went as far as the colonial headquarters at Kaduna. These people largely shifted their confidence to the colonial headquarters at Kaduna. These people largely shifted their confidence to the colonial administrators who were also recognised as Zaki (lions), to defend them against any abuse of power by the traditional rulers.

Very vital to the political culture that later emerged in Nigeria at independence was the protest movements of the educated commoners in the Nigerian society against the colonial authority. They argued vehemently about their ostracization, from the political process and the relative

excessive use of political powers by members of the traditional elite. They posited that the traditional rulers should be ammenable to the people they ruled and that the masses, much of which had been alienated from the political process should be given better role under the colonial government. For example, while commenting on the depressive condition of the common man, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa noted in 1950 that:

> ... in practice their view have never been sought, their welfare seldom regarded and their helplessness shockingly abused. And in the Native Authority Ordinance they hardly find a place. Far from the Chiefs having well-defined duties, one of the biggest defects of the system is the complete ignorance of everyone from top to bottom about his rights, his obligations and his powers ... The illiterate mass of the people recognise no change in their status since the coming of the British. They are still ruled by might, and administration is still none of their concern.33

The protest movements spearheaded by the educated elites (later turned political elites) made the masses of the people to begin to look unto them for leadership. This gradually resulted into a further loss of influence by members of the traditional ruling elites who were now viewed as accomplices of the British administration.

During the nationalist movements however, the bone of

contention was not on how to ensure the practice of democracy in Nigeria but rather how the political power enjoyed by the colonial administrators will become transfered to the emergent Nigerian ruling elite. The nationalists could hardly be said to have understood what democratic government stood for more than the change of political mantle, from the colonialists to Nigerians. The British which never professed to be democratic during the colonial exploits in Nigeria could not have claimed during this time to be interested in the development of democracy in Nigeria. Even if the British colonialists had any plan of planting the seeds of democracy in Nigeria, it was the traditional elites rather thanthe political elites who had any modicum of training for such a venture. For most part of the colonial era, the British administrators distanced themselves from the educated elites in the country. Yet, these were the people to whom political power were entrusted at Nigeria's independence. The traditional rulers who were used by the British now have no constitutional roles under the Nigerian system of democratic governance.

The first three political parties that competed for power in the mid or late forties were more or less ethnic associations who also found it necessary to exploit religious differences to better their political opportunities. Each of them

represented one of the three administrative zones created for the convenience of the British in their practice of Indirect Rule. The parties were the NPC (Northern Peoples' Congress) which stood for the North, the AG (Action Group) for the West, and the NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, after 1961, National Council of Nigerian Citizens) in the East.[34] These three political parties prepared the foundation for ethnic politics in Nigeria which has since been a major bane of the Nigerian democracy. The "political class" created by the parties still control political activities in Nigeria today the past "effort" of the Babangida administration to create "newbreed politicians" notwithstanding. Professor Dudley considered the three parties to be products of coalition of the educated and commercial elites whose sole objective was to monopolise political power to the disadvantage of the peasantry and the urban working class.[35]

Most Nigerian politicians have also found it too difficult to break away from the authoritarian and dictatorial characters of the pre-colonial and colonial institutions. Most of them still see themselves as "traditional rulers" who should not only be perpetually left in office but also treated as kabiyesi (we dare not question him) or Zaki (lion). This they demonstrate in the use of their political powers. Some of them, most especially

the military class, behave like colonial conquerors. Therefore, they grossly abuse the fundamental rights of their subjects and opponents, they falsify election results, engage in capricious distribution of wealth to their followers etc. Yet, most of these leaders still describe themselves as democrats. This is a problem that cut across many African nations. The so-called Democrats have always been found to be enemies of what they profess. Discussing the general character of such leaders, Arthur Lewis has noted that

> Men who claim to be democrats in fact behave like Emperors. Personifying the state, they dress themselves up in uniforms, build palaces, bring all other traffic to a standstill when they drive, hold fancy parades and generally demand to be treated like Egyptian Pharaohs.36

The cultural practice in most parts of Nigeria which makes it an anomaly for one to challenge the elders in the society has helped to sustain the authoritarian influence of the political actors in the country. To this end, the youthful politicians wait patiently for the "old breed politicians" to take their exit from the political scene before making their own impact felt. The annulment of the June 12, 1993 election by President Ibrahim Babangida has however enlightened Nigerians the better that the oppressive class, whether civilian

or military, has to be forcefully dislodged for the enduring democratic system to be instituted in Nigeria.

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