

## INTERROGATING THE ONENESS OF NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The oneness of Nigeria, a diverse nation comprising over 250 ethnic groups, has been a topic of significant debate and introspection. This paper explores the various dimensions through which the concept of Nigerian unity has been interrogated. It critically examines the historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic factors that have both bolstered and challenged the idea of a singular Nigerian identity. Firstly, the historical perspective delves into the amalgamation of Nigeria by the British colonial authorities in 1914, which brought together different ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultural practices, and religious beliefs. The legacy of this forced union and subsequent struggles for independence has influenced Nigeria's national cohesion to date. Through a comprehensive analysis of these multidimensional aspects, this paper underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the challenges to Nigerian unity. It highlights the need for meaningful dialogue, inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and the promotion of shared national values as vital ingredients for sustaining a unified Nigeria. To conclude, the interrogation of the oneness of Nigeria requires a holistic understanding of its historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic complexities. By acknowledging and navigating these challenges, Nigeria can strive towards strengthening its national unity, ensuring a promising future for all its diverse citizens.*



**Key words:** Nigeria, Unity, Diversity, Identity and Cohesion.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria bordered to the south by the Bights of Benin and Biafra, which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. On the west Nigeria is bordered by Benin, on the north by Niger, and on the east by Cameroon. In its extreme north-eastern corner, Lake Chad separates Nigeria from the country of Chad. Nigeria stretches roughly 700 miles from west to east and 650 miles from south to north, covering an area between 3° and 15°E longitude and between 4° and 14°N latitude.<sup>1</sup> It is a country with multi-ethnic groups who are distinguishable on the lines of language, customs and religious inclinations.<sup>2</sup> The concept of the oneness of Nigeria is a complex and highly debated issue that requires thorough examination and interrogation. This paper aims to critically analyze the factors that contribute to the oneness or division of Nigeria, taking into account historical, political, cultural, and socio-economic perspectives.

The history of the country (Nigeria) has featured many waves of human travels from across the Sahara, which has never been a complete hurdle between the lands to the north and south of the desert. Archaeological evidences from various parts of Nigeria suggest that parts of the country have been settled by man since the Palaeolithic or Stone Age period. Though Erim seems to suggest that Nigeria and by extension Nigerians had existed before the imposition of British Colonial rule because the peoples of modern Nigeria had already established various forms of trade, political, social and religious communication before European presence,<sup>3</sup> yet there is the tendency to rather agree with Niven that the concept of a Nigerian identity originates from British Colonial presence in this part of West Africa. According to Niven:

*We must not forget that the word Nigeria is a very modern word, before that there was no general name for this area. Some of it was called by the Europeans Negroland or the Western Sudan, at one time it was almost officially called Nigritia.*<sup>4</sup>

Consistent with the foregoing, it has been submitted elsewhere and the researcher hereby agrees with the submission that technically speaking, Nigeria never existed until the official proclamation of colonial imposition in the region carved out as Nigeria on January 1, 1900, and the subsequent amalgamation of the northern and southern parts in 1914 to form a single country.<sup>5</sup> Hence, this chapter has devoted moderate space to do a historical interrogation of the oneness of Nigeria.

### **Meaning and Major Manifestations of Colonialism**

The practice of colonialism/colonization dates to around 1550 BCE when Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt, and Phoenicia began extending their control into adjacent and non-contiguous territories. Using their superior military power, these ancient civilizations established colonies that made use of the skills and resources of the people they conquered to further expand their empires.<sup>6</sup> Going forward on the historical lane, it has been noted that many African societies experienced an intensification of European territorial domination and exploitation following the European “Scramble for Africa” and the Berlin Conference in 1884, in which Western European powers met to arrange the territorial domination of the African continent in a manner cordial for Europeans.<sup>7</sup> Let us now press on to inquire what colonialism or colonization actually is.

Colonialism or colonization refers to the combination of territorial, juridical, cultural, linguistic, political, mental/epistemic, and/or economic domination of one group of people or groups of people by another (external) group of people.<sup>8</sup> Colonialism is the policy and practice of a strong power extending its control territorially over a weaker nation or people.<sup>9</sup> According to Ocheni and Nwankwo, colonialism is the direct and overall domination of one territory by another on the basis of state power being in the hands of a foreign power – an example is the direct and overall domination of Nigeria by Britain between 1900 and 1960.<sup>10</sup>



In essence, colonialism is an act of political and economic domination involving the control of a territory or geographical area and its people[s] by settlers from a foreign power. In most cases, the goal of the colonizing countries is to profit by exploiting the human and economic resources of the countries they colonized. In the process, the colonizers – sometimes forcibly – attempt to impose their religion, language, cultural, and political practices on the indigenous population.<sup>11</sup> To Ocheni and Nwankwo, the first objective of colonialism is political domination while its second objective is to make possible the exploitation of the colonized people and the colony.<sup>12</sup>

Colonialism is generally classified by one of four overlapping types according to the practice's particular goals and consequences on the subjugated territory and its indigenous peoples. These are settler colonialism; exploitation colonialism; surrogate colonialism; and internal colonialism.<sup>13</sup>

**Settler Colonialism:** This is the most common form of colonial conquest, and it describes the migration of large groups of people from one country to another country to build permanent, self-supporting settlements. Remaining legal subjects of their native country, the colonists harvested natural resources and attempted to either drive the indigenous peoples away or force them to assimilate peacefully into colonial life.<sup>14</sup> In settler colonialism, the colonizers appropriate land for the purposes of occupation as well as for the purposes of capital accumulation. Colonial settlements are imposed through *racialized* rhetoric of permanence that demand large-scale displacements and resettlements of Indigenous people[s].<sup>15</sup>

**Exploitation Colonialism:** This describes the employment and/or deployment of force to control another territory for purposes of exploiting its population as labor and its natural resources as raw material. In undertaking exploitation colonialism, the colonial power

sought only to increase its wealth by using the indigenous people as low-cost labor. In contrast to settler colonialism, exploitation colonialism required fewer colonists to emigrate, since the indigenous people could be allowed to remain in place – especially if they were to be enslaved as laborers in service to the motherland.<sup>16</sup>

**Surrogate Colonialism:** In surrogate colonialism, a foreign power encourages and supports, either openly or covertly, the settlement of a non-native group on territory occupied by an indigenous population. Support for surrogate colonialism projects might come in the form of any combination of diplomacy, financial aid, humanitarian materials, or arms. Many anthropologists consider the Zionist Jewish settlement inside the Islamic Middle Eastern state of Palestine to be an example of surrogate colonialism because it was established with the urging and assistance of the ruling British Empire. The colonization was a key factor in negotiations that resulted in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which facilitated and legitimized the still-controversial Zionist settlement in Palestine.<sup>17</sup>

**Internal Colonialism:** Internal colonialism describes the oppression or exploitation of one racial or ethnic group by another within the same country. In contrast to traditional types of colonialism, the source of the exploitation in internal colonialism comes from within the county rather than from a foreign power.<sup>18</sup> Internal colonialism can be said to be a manifestation of the traditional types of colonialism in view of Mukaria's<sup>19</sup> submission that:

*...after the colonizers had seized vast indigenous lands, they exploited them to their advantage...As a result, the indigenous people become dependent on the colonizers. After independence, the indigenous people who took over power had learned the art of exploitation...They further expanded and continued with the exploitation...<sup>20</sup>*

The typical manifestations of colonialism range from racial and cultural inequality between the colonizer and the colonized, political and legal intimidation and/or domination by the colonial power, to exploitation of the indigenous people[s].<sup>21</sup> Colonialism being the maintenance of political, social, economic, and cultural domination over people by a foreign power for an extended period,<sup>22</sup> affected indigenous peoples in several ways such as bringing about the involuntary (forced and arbitrary) union or amalgamation or fusion of different indigenous peoples who existed independently prior to the colonization/colonialism and sometimes it has often made indigenous people[s], such as tribal/ethnic groups, to become [a] minority in an area they once were the majority (dominant) group.<sup>23</sup> According to Hart, colonialism has greatly impacted upon indigenous peoples as indigenous peoples are oppressed and the said oppression varies throughout the world, ranging from forms and/or political structures that marginalize indigenous voices and practices to outright violent persecution or oppression of indigenous peoples.<sup>24</sup> Zimmerer<sup>25</sup> was reported to have submitted that:

*The problem is that when European powers partitioned Africa, they split up families, relatives and communities that got along very well, whereas in some cases, communities that were enemies or competed against each other were bundled together into one territory.*<sup>26</sup>

Murrey<sup>27</sup> captured one of the critical manifestations of colonialism/colonization when he submitted *inter alia* that colonialism/colonization brought about “the forced and arbitrary amalgamation of previously distinct boundaries of African regions”<sup>28</sup>. In this regard, he (Murrey) pointed out that “the boundaries drawn by colonial authorities were indiscriminate and brought together diverse societies within the authority of a united colonial nation-state”<sup>29</sup>. Murrey’s submission is corroborated by the historical fact that prior to the European occupation, balkanization, and colonization of Africa, the

different African tribes and the indigenous peoples therein had, and lived in, well-organized [political] empires.<sup>30</sup>

It is noteworthy that there is substantial consensus in the critical humanities and social sciences that colonialism, in some form(s) and manifestation(s), endures and that the traces and/or influences of colonialism/colonization continue to structure and inform culture, relations, territoriality, geography, politics, and economics.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in a modern sense, colonialism may also refer to those less immediately visible residues, practices, logics, and arrangements of colonialism.<sup>32</sup>

To the foregoing ends, colonialism may not rightly be discussed and/or dismissed as a mere historical artefact since it is still a persistent force, cause or course behind several conditions, crises and clamours involving and/or affecting various indigenous peoples in the contemporary world and it remains a relevant term for any meaningful voyage of academic enquiry into the contours of true decolonization in relation to the right to self-determination.

### **The Pre-Colonial History of Nigeria**

Prior to the European occupation, balkanization, and colonization of Africa, the different African tribes and the indigenous peoples therein had, and lived in, well-organized [political] empires.<sup>33</sup> Particularly noted for their ability to organize themselves into orderly social, culture and political grouping are the *Yorubas*, *Igbos* and *Hausa-Fulani* Indigenous peoples of Nigeria.<sup>34</sup>

According to Atanda,<sup>35</sup> no one can say exactly how and when socio-political organizations began in Nigeria. According to him the family was the primary unit of socio-political organization. He traced the genesis of political systems in Nigeria from the emergence of the nuclear family as the primary socio-political unit with members bound together by strong kinship tie, to the extension and aggregation of family units into lineages, to the extension of lineages into clans and the aggregation of lineages into villages while villages expand into an

overall authority of a state. He went on to divide the concept of ruler ship into two: centralized and non-centralized. He augured that the different states and kingdoms in Nigeria operated at one time or the other either of the two concepts of ruler ship. Non-centralized states existed virtually in most parts of the Nigerian region from early times, but many of these transformed to centralized states before 1900. A basic feature of the political system of the non-centralized state was that authority was dispersed, no single individual served as the symbol or personification of authority. Emphasis was placed more on collective leadership. The areas where non-centralized states most endured were central Igbo, the Tiv, the Idoma and many people's inhabiting the plateau region in the central part of Nigeria and the western and eastern Niger Delta as well. Centralized states existed in many parts of Nigeria up to 1900; typical examples were in Kanem-Bornu, Hausa land, *Jukun* land, *Nupe* land, Yoruba land and Edo land. A basic feature was that authority was centralized, unlike in the non-centralized states, each centralized state had an individual who was the symbol of authority. Indeed he was the personification of the state. As Atanda puts it, though these kingdoms were centralized, the people however prevented tyranny, through the use of an advisory council and the use of taboos (Atanda, 2006). The paper will illustrate the nature of power structure in Nigeria using examples of kingdoms in the north of Nigeria as well as in the south of Nigeria.<sup>36</sup>

It is thus significant to observe that the geographical area now merged and known as Nigeria is, and had always been, made up of a heterogeneous population – it consisted, and still consists, of various indigenous peoples [of different ethnicity/tribes, different tongues/languages, different aspirations, different cultures, and different religions] who, before colonization, existed and operated independent of each other. *Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo*, are the three major tribes in Nigeria. The South-western region of what is the modern-day Nigeria has always been dominated by the indigenous peoples of the *Yoruba* tribe/nation – descendants of the *Oyo* Empire, while the South-



eastern region has always been dominated by the indigenous peoples of *Igbo* tribe/nation from the *Nri* Kingdom. Most of the Northern part/region has been inhabited by the Indigenous peoples of both *Hausa* and *Fulani* who are descendants of the *Hausa* Kingdom, *Fulani* Empire and *Songhai* Empire.<sup>37</sup>

The pre-colonial [indigenous] peoples in Nigeria had a well-organized system of administration where law and social order were provided and maintained respectively.<sup>38</sup> Though, there are other ethnic minorities in the pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, the pre-colonial political structure and/or kingdom of each of the three ethnic groups (tribes) identified above as the major ethnic groups (tribes) is hereunder highlighted.

### **The Yoruba Political Kingdom**

Of great significance on the West coast Africa is the Yoruba political system.<sup>39</sup> Yoruba political kingdom was one of the well-organized kingdom prior the advent of the colonial masters. There was monarchy operating in the Yoruba kingdom; the monarchical system was fundamentally a system in which the society was governed by or in the name of one person chosen from one family.<sup>40</sup>

There are various beliefs as to the origin of the Yoruba kingdom. Some hold the view that *Oduduwa* the father of the Yoruba came from the East and after which he conquered many land, he finally settled at Ile – Ife. Others believe that while the earth was still covered by water, *Olorun* (the supreme god) let a chain from the heaven. It was believed that *Oduduwa* climbed down it and made an island of earth; some having compared the Yoruba and Egyptians arts and cultures asserted that both have common origins and as such the former descended from the later. However our interest is rather to examine the political, social and economic setting of the kingdom and not to bore us in the historical details of the origin of the *Yorubas*.

Apart from the authentic claim for common descent from *Oduduwa* and dispersion from Ile-Ife, it is evident that the *Alafin* of *Oyo* at one time

wielded political as well as military leadership of the Yorubas. Ooni of Ife was and is accepted as the spiritual head of the Yoruba race. Relevant also was the fact that when Oduduwa died, (his eldest son, Akin, having died too) five Oduduwa renowned princes and two princess succeeded him. The eldest of them all, a princess married Oduduwa's chief priest who eventually gave birth to Olowu, later known as the Olowu of Owu. The second, who was a princess, was the mother of Alaketu of Ketu. The Overami of Benin, a renowned prince is the third in the line. The fourth, also a prince become the Oregun of Ila while Onisabe was fifth in the line. The sixth – Onipopo of popo was followed by Oranmiyan, Seventh and the last born, Oranmiyan, who succeeded their father, his highness Oduduwa was the most famous of the princes. He was progenitor of the Yorubas. What is particularly very interesting here is the real and the true crown Obas that is. Obas wearing crowns in Yoruba land. In that way, they were direct children who contrast to the vassal and lesser Obas now accepted as crown Obas. What is interesting about the vassal is that they are only qualified to wear coronets. It is thus evidence that from the first batch of Oduduwa princes and princess have emerged the various tribes making up the Yoruba nation today.<sup>41</sup>

In terms of political administration, the Yoruba kingdom consisted of the Headquarter and number of towns and villages. The Oba and his senior Chief ruled from the headquarters. Every day, the chiefs met at the Oba's palace to discuss the affairs of the kingdom. They discussed the conduct of wars; the kingdom's relationship with the others took decisions and communicated these to the Oba who would issue any necessary directive in his name. In those days, it was not customary for the chiefs to sit together with the Oba because of his sacredness. Thus any decision taken would normally be communicated to him through a messenger.

The autocratic tendencies of the Oba were widely curtailed, if there was a proclivity towards this by an Oba, the line of communicating the Oba's wishes and orders to his people or subjects would paralyzed. In

addition to this, any Oba who wanted to rule autocratically would be forced to commit suicide. Other devices to checkmate the autocratic ruling of an Oba if there was a disagreement between him and the chiefs was neglect of religious ceremonies and other rituals.<sup>42</sup>

In the aspect of executive function, the Oba depended on his chiefs, slaves, wives and servants as means of effective communication between him and his subjects. He had no monopoly of either secular or spiritual authority. Throughout Yoruba land, the authority of the Oba is derived from his subject. The Oba was mere figure-head and symbol of authority. He saw nothing and he did nothing by himself, which is the tradition of the people. The fringes around the edge of the crown which veiled the face of the Oba in Yorubaland were not without meaning. They were symbolic of his position and contract with the public. The Oba remaining under the control of his traditional adviser, his chiefs and representative of the people.<sup>43</sup>

To employ the proper language, the Oba, heard and spoke through the eyes, ears and mouth of his chiefs or traditional advisers. He appeared in public, but his face was not seen and his voice was not heard. Therefore, from the foregoing, it is evident that the Oba enjoyed no monopoly of both secular and spiritual authority in *Yorubaland*. Nevertheless his personality his social, political and cultural positions were highly respected. As there was no written constitution. Customs, conventions and precedents were largely relied upon in decision making. In the regulation of trade, commerce, public works and the maintenance of law and order, the Oba in Council (the Oba, his chiefs and council of elders) are in regular contact with the subjects, initiated and ratified legislation.

The *Oba* was not only highly respected; a great deal of wealth was attached to the throne. The *Oba* inherited all that officially belonged to his predecessors. Such might include the late *Oba's* wives, besides a war spoils usually accrued to the *Oba* and his chiefs and it was not unusual for the *Oba* to receive homage like yams, cattle, wine, kola, and

other things from his subjects. With regards to legislative power, law making was the responsibility of the *Obas* and his senior chiefs. Thus the enactment of new laws, imposition of taxes and decision to wage wars were carried out jointly by the *Oba* and his senior chiefs. Allocation of vacant lands was also done in the same way. Sometimes if the senior chiefs took an initiative or a particular legislation, which the *Oba* had accepted such a new law would be announced by the town carriers.

In terms of judicial structure, whenever there were conflicts, lineage, compound heads and elders came together to settle them the guilty party had to seek forgiveness which was granted if the offence was mild. But if the offence was serious and guilty party did not seek forgiveness, he might be ostracized. Difficult decisions were often made in the private sittings of lineage and compound heads who were often made in the private sitting of lineage and compound heads who were loyally and collectively bound not divulge to the public, such decision which they might have arrived at, especially if such cases required clandestine treatment. When a case had been settled, particularly a civil and not too serious one, kola, alligator pepper and palm wine are shared – an indication that the decision of the elders are accepted to all. Serious cases, which could not be settling, were generally transferred to the *Oba* who, with his high chief and elders, effected settlement in their capacity as the highest court of the land. The verdicts of this court were not generally challenged, especially when they were reached by the majority decision. The court levied fines on and imprisoned offenders for minor offences. Very serious criminal offences earned death or banishment.

### **The Hausa/Fulani Political Administration**

From historical background, the present Sokoto caliphate and the northern Emirate of Nigeria owe their origin to the holy war which was started by Shehu Othman Dan Fodio in 1804. Before the period of crisis the Fulani had been under the Hausa Kingdom. The holy war however

broke out because the Hausa kingdom which used to be Moslems had fallen into semi paganism. Usman Dan Fodio ensured that he installed his flag bearers as Emir of the cities that fall to his armies. The result was that after the war, the Fulani become masters, and this led to the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate, in the present northern Nigeria for proper and easy administration of the entire empire. Usman Dan Fodio divided it into two, between himself and his brother (Abdullahi), and then established the capital of his caliphate at Sokoto. He took possession of the Eastern part of the caliphate comprising of Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Bauchi, Gombe and Yola.<sup>44</sup>

While the eastern part of the empires was given to his brother (Abdullahi) and this also consisted of Ilorin, Kontagora, and Arungun. Dan Fodio however established his brother as the Emir of Gwandu. On the whole all the Emirs installed by him and their successor acknowledged the over lordship of Sokoto and Gwandu and thus sent tribute to them as was the case in Yoruba kingdom.

Administratively, each of these emirates consisted of large number of officers of state. These officers were assigned with specific portfolio ranging from administrative to military in active. The emir of each emirate had the sole responsibility to appoint the officers. Numerous office holders were found within each emirate, significant among them were:<sup>45</sup>

- *Madawaki* – The commander of Calvary Galadima – He performed various duties such as sending him errands by the Emirs sometimes he awarded punishment to the offenders.
- *Waziri* – He was the Emir’s administrative adviser
- *Sarkin Fada* - He was the head of the palace officials
- *Sarkin Ruwa* – He was in charge of the rivers / waters
- *Sarkin Pawa* – He was in charge of butchers
- There are also the *Hakimis, Dogari, etc* Hakimi settles disputes, *Dogaris* usually sent to call/summon defendants and run other errands.



- *Sarkin Fada* – The spokesman of the Emir and organizer of palace workers.
- *Magaji* – Officer-in-charge of the treasury.

It was significant to note here that the consultation of Emirs and senior title holders was necessary in conducting the affairs of the state for the purpose of effective governance.<sup>46</sup> The emirate was divided into number of districts headed by a ruler called Hakimi. The Hakimi lived in the emirate's headquarters. He was saddled with the responsibility of tax collection from the people of his district. He maintained laws and orders performed with the help of a small army under a junior title holder. Each district was made up of village head performed the function similar to those performed by the Hakimi.<sup>47</sup>

The Emir was the executive head of the administration. In executing the functions, the Emir was assisted by his senior officers. As a result of his religious position, the Emir enjoyed great power. Thus it was obligatory for all the subjects to obey him.

The Emir was made laws concerning the maintenance of law and order over his subjects in Emirate. He also levied taxes. But in performing these functions, he made such he did not contravene the Islamic laws. The *Hakimi* and the village head performed similar functions in their different constituencies.

Islamic laws applied throughout the length and breadth of the Emirates. These laws are derived from the Sharia. Sharia laws were based on the teaching of Mohammed. Such laws dealt with debt, property ownership, marriage, divorce, slander, inheritances etc. the *Alkalis* (Judges) administered such laws. The *Alkalis* are trained and versed in the basic principles of Islam. There are a number of *Alkalis* courts in the Emirates which of course varied from one Emirate to the other.<sup>48</sup> The *Alkalis* interpreted all the Moslem laws and punished offenders. Dealing with serious offences rested with the Emir as well as settling of all religious disputes, while minor dispute were settled by the village heads.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Igbo Political /Traditional System**

The *Ibos* occupy south-eastern part of Nigeria with a population of over forty million people today.<sup>50</sup> At the time of their contact with Europeans around 1830s, they had an estimated population of five million people. They lived in villages and some large towns, but they were totally a *gemeinschaft*<sup>51</sup> structure and a stateless patriarchal society in modern sense of the word.<sup>52</sup> Pre-colonial Igbo lived in autonomous communities.<sup>53</sup> The Igbo have been described as “The King in Every Man”<sup>54</sup>. This means the Igbo have no kingship system. They do not believe in owing allegiance to any single authority.<sup>55</sup> The Igbo communities which had kings for example: Onitsha and Oguta,<sup>56</sup> were actually groups who are believed to have migrated from other places and settled among the Igbo. The Onitsha Igbo for example still trace their origin from the ancient kingdom of Benin. These resettled Igbo had their cultures which in no way serve as a source for tracing Igbo history.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike the *Yoruba* kingdom and *Hausa/Fulani* Emirates, the *Ibos* had no centralized political authority. Often than not, the *Ibo* political organization has been described as being decentralized. And its government referred to as ‘Republican’.<sup>58</sup> Decentralized is used to describe the political organ of societies without central government which in pre-colonial Africa was usually headed by a single person (King, emperor) etc. Decentralized society is distinguished from stratified, which usually have royal noble families who pass high political office from generation to generation. In decentralize societies, stable government is achieved by balancing small, equal groups against each other and by the ties of clanship, marriage and religious association. Therefore their system was based upon the family group. Each family was expected to choose its head in each of their villages. There were families and a number of these formed kindred. There could be many of such kindred in villages.<sup>59</sup> For the purpose of administration all the elders from the families formed the council of elders who was called *Okpara* would be made the chairman of the council. The *Okpara*

wielded much influence. It should be noted that as a check on him, he had no influence outside his village. His influence was restricted to his family and his village.<sup>60</sup>

The executive functions were performed by the council of elders, the age- grades and some other title holders whereas in terms of legislative powers, there was no clear line of authority in the government authorities among the Ibo and as a result of this, there was no specialized institution for enacting laws. As earlier stated there was council of Elders, the council made laws for the village. Law could again be made by the age- grades which were often acceptable to the elders. Sometimes laws were enacted at the shrine of *Ala* - the earth goddess.<sup>61</sup>

Elders were responsible for settling of dispute within the family group, if such involved members of different groups, the groups would reach a compromise. However, if such dispute could not settled, it is taken to the elders of the village.<sup>62</sup>

The foregoing pre-colonial historical background of the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria was to refute the claims of some writers or authors from Europe that Africa has no system of government or whatever prior to their coming. This was why a detailed history and analysis of how the indigenous peoples/groups besides the unmentioned ethnic groups were able to organize and rule themselves. In the northern and south –west of the country, it could be seen that in spite of the inter –tribal wars and conflicts among the people, the centralized but monarchical kingdom of Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani kingdom of autocratic system and that of Republican in the Eastern part were orderly. Hence, the use of indirect rules system of government in the North and West by the British colony.<sup>63</sup>



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the oneness of Nigeria cannot be definitively defined or simplified into a single narrative. While historical factors such as colonization and the amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups have played a significant role in shaping the nation's unity, various challenges including political instability, ethnic tensions, religious differences, economic disparities, and regional marginalization continue to undermine this unity. To sustain a truly united Nigeria, it is imperative to address these underlying issues by promoting inclusivity, equitable distribution of resources, fostering inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, and strengthening democratic institutions. Only through comprehensive interrogations, critical analysis, and proactive measures can Nigeria achieve and preserve its oneness in the face of its diverse and complex realities.

## End Notes

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