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The Political, Social and Economic Structures in Pre-Colonial Africa

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³ The Political, Social and Economic Structures in Pre-Colonial Africa

The history of Africa and Africans has been linked to the post-colonial era, meaning Africa became known after the colonial period in most African countries. Africa had their indigenous ways of doing things and maintaining order before the influence of the European culture. Some of the African cultures were barbaric in different cultures and communities, while others were simple. Notably, Africa and Africans at large had their political, social, economic, and cultural history before the European contact. Each African country had its own set of rules and ways of doing things from having local chiefs who would set laws that govern its community and participating in barter trade for exchange of goods and services with other communities. Primarily, the sources of African history were the national archives of the African states, where they store different kinds of raw information (Albert & Phillips, 2005). The archives hold official documentation such as census reports, petitions, and parliament papers. The paper will discuss ³ the political, social and economic structures in pre-colonial Africa.

⁹ **Political Structure in Pre-Colonial Africa**

The state of African politics was based off on kinship and lineage. A son was the most valued child, especially in a household that held the leadership mantle since the leadership role was passed down from son to son. In West Africa, the Ashanti kingdom, now known as Ghana, ruled their community through chiefdoms. They had a golden stool, which symbolized national unity and power amidst the local chiefs of the Ashanti kingdom. Their government structure included four sections, namely, state, district, lineage, and village. Interestingly, the lineage category was headed by chiefs and a council of elders who would advise the leaders on matters regarding the growth of the community (McCaskie, 2003). Men in the Ashanti kingdom mostly ruled the government, and women had a small part to play when it came to political matters.

Their political rule was solely based on a centralized monarchy, which was governed by an Asantehene (King). The Asantehene served as the judge of the high court, chief executive of the government and the commander in chief of their military. Besides, the golden stool enthroned to the Asantehene provided a political authority to them. The wife to the Asantehene played a small role when it came to governance. Notably, her part was to nominate individuals for the continuation of the kingship. Once the chiefs approved the selected candidate, then they can be elected by the people. Their decision making power was shared with the national assembly that comprised of two hundred executive chiefs and provincial leaders. In addition, their purpose was to resolve issues and organize the government's business. Their national assembly was known as the Asantemanhyiamu (Eldredge, 2018).

Social Structure in Pre-Colonial Africa

In East Africa, each country had its social Structure. Like in the Buganda kingdom, now known as Uganda, their social Structure was divided into different social classes where the royal family was considered as a high class in the society. The second place in society was for the chiefs who ruled over the peasants in the community (Ramadhan, 2018). They believed in many gods as well, for instance, Katonda was the creator whose place was in heaven and they prayed to Katonda every morning and it was conducted by the head of the homestead. Mukasa was the goddess of fertility. They worshipped her so as she could bless the land with livestock, children and plenty of food. Besides, they believed that ancestral spirits existed, and their primary purpose was to ensure there was discipline among the clansmen, and they were contacted through prophets. Pre-colonial Uganda valued polygamy so much; they believed that a man is blessed if they had many wives and children who will continue their legacy, especially male children (Moscona et al., 2018). When it came to work, they divided labor among men and

women. Women were responsible for farming and taking care of household chores while the men were responsible for building houses, fighting when there was war, and making cloths.

Economic Structure in Pre-Colonial Africa

Before colonization, African countries engaged in farming, mining, trading, hunting, and gathering. These activities were what boosted the economy of most African countries through trading. Communities that could not do farming traded their produce with communities that practiced fishing or mining. These exchanges in local and even distant markets encouraged interrelations and cooperation between different communities. Remarkably, they were able to achieve this by organizing different market days in different villages where the exchanges would take place. In West Africa, gold dominated most of their trades before they became overrun by salt and copper due to demand (Jerven, 2016). They used these products for long-distance trading along the Sahara desert. On the other hand, in East Africa, the case was similar since agriculture was the primary source of income, followed by livestock. One was considered wealthy when they possessed these in large quantities because it meant during trading, the market will be full of goods. They built a center where these exchanges would be taking place, thus improving its infrastructure and developing towns such as Mombasa old town where trade still takes place today.

In summation, having discussed ³ the political, social and economic structures in pre-colonial Africa, it is clear that Africa and Africans had a way of life before colonization. Although Africa was not developed like other European countries, it had its own values, resources, wealth and structures that attracted the colonial masters.

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