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GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

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REVIEW OF CHAPTER 2 OF SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIA STATE

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves two periods: the pre-colonial period; the period before the coming of the colonialists and the colonial period; the period that colonial administration was established in Nigeria. The Nigerian state is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of the colonization of Africa. Before colonization, Nigeria was made up of independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. Some of which include the Borno empire, the Hausa states, the Igbo segmentary societies, Benin kingdom, Oyo empire and several others. Nigeria is bordered to the north by Niger, to the east by Cameroon, to the south by the Bights of Benin and Biafra which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean and to the west by Benin. The country covers an area between 3° and 15°E longitude and between 4° and 14°N latitude.

The exact time man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but according to archaeological findings from all over the country, it has been confirmed that man had lived in the region since the paleolithic period 500,000- 9000BC. Archaeological evidences have also pointed to the fact that Nigerian took part in the stone age civilization. The excavation of a stone age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure which was dated some 12,000 years ago suggests that the country has been long inhabited. The early man worked hard to cope with his environment. He hunted animals and gathered fruits for food. He also invented tools using pebbles for chopping and cutting. Archaeologists refer to these tools as Oldowan-type tools. He advanced and began to male tools that were oval and pointed in shape; hand axes. The early man then proceeded to invent another tool that proved to be more efficient in cutting than the other tools. It was called the Sangoan because it was first seen in Sango Bay on the west shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda. The early man was also involved in sculpture making. Many were of human heads and figures and were made of terracotta.

Through the excavation work done, the places where man first settled in, in Nigeria is revealed. Some which include; Nok, Igbo Ukwu Ife and Benin among others. These places are usually referred to as centres of ancient civilization.

Nok civilization; this culture is believed to be a transitional civilization between the Stone age and Iron age in Nigeria because of the presence of a combination of stone and iron objects. Through the use of carbon dating, it was discovered that the Nok culture existed between the 5th and 2nd century BC.

Benin civilization; this culture was well known for its artwork. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. They cast wooden doors and ivory masks one of which was the ivory mask used as the FESTAC symbol in 1977.

Ife civilization; this culture was well known for its terracotta and bronze heads. Art historians believe that Ife art originated from the Nok culture because of the similarities between the two. They also believed that the Benin civilization learned bronze sculpture from the Ife.

Igbo Ukwu civilization; Thurstan Shaw led the excavation in three sites in the area after the accidental discovery of bronze objects and ornaments in 1939 during the digging of a toilet pit. The three sites included a burial chamber, a pit and a compound wall. Many bronze objects were discovered as well as the skeletons of what was said to be the king and the five slaves buried alongside him.

TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Yoruba: they are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa. Ile-Ife is regarded as their ancestral home. There are different versions of the origin of the Yoruba people. There is the story of their migration from the east. Some people believe that the Yorubas migrated from the North-Eastern area of Africa; Mecca, with their leader as Oduduwa. There is also the Oke Oramfe version. According to the legend, the earth was full of water and God, Olodumare sent servants who were given some objects which they used to create the world.

The political structures of the Yoruba Kingdoms were similar. Each consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town has a King, Oba, who lives in the palace, Aafin. The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom. He is the supreme authority. The pattern of administration in this kingdom was hierarchical. At the lowest level there were compound heads known as Baale who administered the compound on behalf of the king. Next was the wards headed by Ijoye who administered his ward on behalf of the king. At the top was a group of civil chiefs (igbimo ilu) which was headed by the king. The government of the Oyo empire is a classical illustration of this. The organs government in this Kingdom include; the Alaafin administration, the Ogboni cult administration and the army.

Igbo: these people are best known for their acephalous way of life. This is because they have no centralized state. The Igbos are grouped into five: The Igbo of the Eastern Nigeria, The Igbo of the South-Eastern Nigeria, The Igbo of the North-Eastern Nigeria, the Western Igbo and the Northern Igbo. They also have different versions of their story of origin. Some people believe that the Igbos migrated from Israel while others are of the view that the ancestor of the Igbos, Eri, descended from the sky, sailed down River Anambra and arrived at Aguleri where he met a group of autochthonous people who had no living memory and settled with them.

The Igbo people practiced a decentralized system of government where there were no traditional rulers in the form of Oba as in the case of the Yoruba. Regardless of the fact that there was no highly centralized government, some socio-political institutions were put in place to perform legislative, executive, administrative, military and judicial functions. Some of which include: the family which was the smallest political unit in Igbo land headed by an Ofo title holder, the age grade which enforced discipline among themselves and guarded public morality, Oha-na-eze which consisted of all the male adult members of the community and the secret societies who served as intermediaries between the living and the dead (ancestors).

Hausa: Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Hausa land, before 1804 was made up of fourteen states, and they were of two distinct groups. The first group consist of seven states called “Hausa Bakwai” states, that is, Hausa legitimate states. The second group consist of the remaining seven states and were known as “Hausa banza” states, that is Hausa illegitimates states. The Hausa “bakwai” states are Daura, Biram, Zaria, Katsina, Kano, Rano, and Gobir while the Hausa “Banza” states are Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi. The origin of the Hausa states can be traced to man named, Bayajida who was an Arab prince. He travelled to the Sahel from Baghdad. He killed a monstrous snake that oppressed the people of Daura, and he married the queen. The queen had six sons already, and she produced another son with Bayajidda, and each of these sons ruled one of the seven Hausa city-states, becoming the first kings. The combined kingdoms of Hausa land were sometimes called the Daura, since Daura is the place where Bayajidda supposedly founded the Hausa people.

Sarkin Kasar which means “ruler of the land,” was the title given to an effective and efficient head of state in Hausa land. The Sarkin Kasar performed both political and spiritual functions. He was the chief executive and judge of the state, but was aided by a council of the state. At the district level, the government was modelled after that at the national level. It is important to note that between 14th and 15th centuries, the socio-political organisation of Hausa States took another shape. For instance, Islam was adopted and this gave birth to many new political institutions such as the offices of the Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Dogari, Yari Sarki and Sarki Yau. This Islamisation also influenced its judicial system as sharia law started taking shape.

Islam was introduced to Hausa land in the fourteenth century, and by the fifteenth century it was accepted as the religion of the ruling class. The Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 further strengthened and consolidated the religion in this area. This led to the establishment of a centralised system of government. There was also the introduction of a new system of selecting and appointing rulers called Emirs to rule the caliphate. Each of the newly appointed Emirs owed allegiance to Dan Fodio. The Emir was an absolute monarch in his caliphate. He was the political, administrative and spiritual leader.

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION AND INDIRECT RULE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

As opposed to popular opinion, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in Nigeria, not the British. They came through the Bini Kingdom and brought with them the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 15th century. It was through this channel that the British came into Nigeria and with them their woes of colonisation. The slave trade was abolished in the early 19th by the British. The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century. Each of the European powers was given the opportunity to establish colonies where it had vested interest. The scramble for Africa, by these European powers led to the partitioning of Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1884–85.

THE BIRTH OF NIGERIA AS A GEO-POLITICAL ENTITY

By 1900, the whole of Nigeria was under the administration of the British colonial government. In the year 1906, the British government amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. However, this was done without the consultation of Nigerians as to whether they wanted the amalgamation or not.

The second amalgamation was that of 1914. In January 1914, the British government amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard is regarded as the father of the January amalgamation. Britain governed Nigeria by indirect rule system which is a system adopted by the British colonial government in ruling her colonies through local traditional rulers. Here, the British government defined the framework of policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local traditional rulers.