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Government and Political Institutions

**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN STATE**

The historical background of the Nigerian government and politics consisted of both the pre-colonial and the colonial period in Nigeria, with the pre-colonial period being the period before the invasion of the colonialists in Nigeria and the colonial period being the period of colonial administration in the country. The Nigeria state emerged as a result of the colonial creation and is a product of historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonisation of Africa. Before the appearance of the Nigerian state, the pre-colonial Nigeria comprised of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires including the Borno empire, Hausa states, Sokoto Caliphate, Igbo segmentary societies, Benin Kingdom and the Oyo empire, also several identities in the Benue Valley. These ethnic groupings significantly differ in their historical, social and cultural make-ups.

**EARLY MAN IN NIGERIA:** The period man started living in Nigeria is an unknown fact however there have been archaeological evidence from different parts of Nigeria which showed that man settled in Nigeria since the palaeolithic period of 500,000-9000 BC. A good proof of this are the artefacts, mostly stone tools found by archaeologists which confirmed that Nigeria existed in the stone-Age civilization which can be divided into the Early stone Age, Middle stone Age and the Late stone Age.

**THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF EARLY MAN:** The man who lived in Nigeria during these early period of years worked hard to cope and survive in his environment. He needed food and began the act of hunting animals and gathering of fruits. He also started inventing tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting of tools which the archaeologists called the **Oldowan-type tools** first identified in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanazia. The Early man later advanced from the Early stone Age and started making axes and the invention of tools, axes and sculpture continued through the stone age period although there was evidence of a more advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria during the bronze and metal age.

**THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY NIGERIAN SOCIETIES**

***Major Landmark in Early Nigerian History***: This was made possible through the excavation of work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the remote past. Some of these places included; Nok, Igbo Ikwu, Ife and Benin among others. They were regarded as the centers of ancient civilization.

**TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA**

Here, the three major ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani in the Nigeria traditional political system of government are discussed.

***Historical Background of Pre-colonial Political System in Yoruba Land.***

The Yorubas are known as one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and one united by Language. Their origin can be traced to **Oduduwa** who was the founder of the Yoruba Kingdom while Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. There are however, different versions of the tradition of the Yoruba Origin. Oduduwa is believed to be the first leader that led the Yorubas to Ile-Ife and afterwards, sent his sons and grandsons to found other Yoruba Kingdoms.

A particular version of the Yoruba Kingdom is the Oke Oramfe’s Version. Oke Oramfe is located in Ile-Ife and is popularly believed to be the center from which the world was created. A clearer /full picture of this version was given by Akinjogbin and Ayandele [1980] in their paperwork **“Yorubaland up to 1800”**.

**Political Structure of the Pre-colonial Yorubaland.**

The political structures of the Yoruba Kingdoms were similar in nature. They consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages, and farmlands. Each of these towns were ruled by kings known as **“Oba”** who resided in the palace **“Aafin”**. The Oba is seen as both spiritual and political head of the kingdom with supreme authority in the kingdom and binding laws on everyone he rules. The oba also enjoyed many privileges but there were certain limitations on his power called **“eewo”** to avoid the despotism and tyranny. The oba however did not rule single-handedly but had rulers of lesser ranks and status –**“Baale and Oloja”** who were the rulers of the villages and farmlands. The town was considered as the basic political unit. The pattern of this administration was hierarchy.

The government of the Oyo empire is a typical example of pre-colonial administration in Yoruba Land. Oyo empire was very unique and exceptional in its system of government. The first system of government was the king known as the **“Alaafin”** of Oyo.

Alaafin Administration: The Alaafin was the head of the empire, and was resident in the capital. He was regarded as the **“Lords of many Lands”** and was assisted by a retinue of priest officials and eunuch. The Alaafin was the fountain of authority and was regarded as the companion of the gods. Sometimes, he had an autocratic tendency but his powers were often limited and regulated by the Oyomesi (Kingmakers) and Bashorun (Prime Minister).

The Ogboni Cult Administration: This cullt had a very vital position in the Yoruba Society. It was a very powerful cult that were composed of free and prominent members of the society. This cult played a mediatory role in any conflict between the Oyomesi and the Alaafin.

The Army: The army was very organized and was headed by Are-Ona-Kakanfo. The army was credited with performing important functions which included stability of the empire, expansion as well as keeping dissident territories in check.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL SYSTEM IN IGBO LAND**

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life because they had no centralized states and they operated a kind of government without kings. The Igbos are grouped into five sub-culture namely;

* The Igbo of the Eastern Nigeria
* The Igbo of the South-Eastern Nigeria
* The Igbo of the North-Eastern Nigeria
* The Western Igbo
* The Northern Igbo

One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of the origin of the Igbos is the one that points to Israel. There are assumptions in the similarities between the Igbos and the Ancient Hebrew. It is very difficult to reconcile these versions because of the very limited professional historians at that period. However, **“Professor M. A Onwuejeogwu”** regarded the “Nri Version” as the only authentic version of the origin of existence in the oral tradition of the Igbo.

**Political structure of the Pre-colonial Igbo Land.**

In the Igbo traditional society, there were no highly centralized authority but instead they had diffusion of authority into different groups. They practiced direct democracy and a decentralized system of government because they had no traditional rulers. Although, there was no highly centralized authority, some socio-political institutions existed in each village to perform Legislative, executive, administrative, military and judicial functions. These institutions included the Family, council of elders, age grades and secret societies.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL SYSTEM IN HAUSA LAND**

Hausa Land is located in Northern Nigeria. Before 1804, the Hausa land was made up of fourteen states and consisted of two distinct groups. The first group had consisted of seven states called **“Hausa Bakwai”** states which are the legitimate states and the second group of states known as **“Hausa Banza”** which were the illegitimate states. The legitimate states are “Daura, Biram, Zaria, Kastina, Kano, Rano, and Gobir” while the illegitimate states include; “Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi, Yoruba”.Islam was not introduced to the region on any discernable scale until the eleventh century.

**Political Structure of the Pre-colonial Hausa Land**

The **“Sarki”** was the head of any typical Hausa states, who worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organized court. Sarkin Kasar (ruler of the Land) , combined both political and religious/spiritual functions . It is note worthy that between 14th and 15th centuries, the socio-political organization of Hausa states took another shape. The Islamisation of the Hausa also influenced the Judicial system as Sharia law started taking shape.

Emirate System of Government: Islam was introduced in Hausa Land in the fourteen century, and was accepted as religion in the 15th century by the ruling class. Because of this, the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 strengthened and consolidated the religion in that area. The Hausa kingdom was divided into two confederation. The Sultan supervised the administration of the emirate system. He acted in advisory capacity and appointed Emirs over the emirates. The Emir was the absolute monarch in his empire. He was the political, administrative, and spiritual leader who administered in accordance with the provisions of Islamic and Sharia law. Important titles held in the Emir’s Cabinet included: “Sarkin Fada, Waziri, Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Sarkin Dan Doka, Sarkin Ruwa, Sarkin Paws, Yari”.

The judicial administration of Hausa-Fulani was based on the Islamic legal system called **“Sharia”.** These Sharia courts were established throughout the Emirates and each were headed by a trained Sharia Court Judge called **“Alkali”.**

**COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION AND INDIRECT RULE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**  The British who have often been credited with the creation of Nigeria were however not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive Nigeria through the Bini Kingdom. The Atlantic Slave Trade became very important in the 15th century during the arrival of the Portuguese. It was the slave trade carried across Atlantic Ocean between the European and Africans. The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century and the scramble for Africa, by these European powers led to the partitioning of Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1884-85.

**THE BIRTH OF NIGERIAN AS A GEO-PPOLITICAL ENTITY**

The May 1906 amalgamation is known as the first amalgamation of the British who amalgamated Lagos colony and the Southern protectorate without the consultation of Nigerians. The reason for this 1906 amalgamation was purely economic. The second amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria occurred in January 1914 for the reason as that of May 1906. The British governed through a system known as the **“Indirect Rule”.**  Indirect Rule is the system of Britain ruling her colonies through local traditional rulers. The British officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or the rulers.