**ABIMBOLA SOFIYYAH OMOBOLANLE**

**19/LAW01/004**

**200L, LAW**

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

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period. The Nigerian state is a colonial creation. It is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonization of Africa. Prior to the emergence of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria comprises of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. The country is bordered by the Bights of Benin and Biafra to the south, by Benin on the west, by Niger on the north and by Cameroon on the east.

**Early Man in Nigeria**

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Palaeolithic period 500000-9000 BC. The man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment. First, he needed food. For this purpose, he began to hunt the animals and to gather fruits. But he soon began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools which archaeologists called the Oldowan-type tools. He then proceeded to invent another type of tool which is a heavy chopper. It was more efficient in cutting than existing tools.

**The Scientific and Technological Development of Early Nigerian Societies**

***Major Landmark in Early Nigerian History***

Some of the places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past included; Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife, Benin among others. They are usually referred to as centres of ancient civilization.

**Nok Culture**: the discovery of terracotta head of a monkey by tin miners in Nok in 1936 prompted more discoveries in other places. It is believed to be a transitional civilization between the Stone Age and Iron Age in Nigeria.

**Benin Civilization**: Benin was important for its artwork. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. Art historians claim that bronze casting was introduced into Benin by an Ife artist.

**Ife Civilization**: Ife is important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Most of the bronze and terracotta heads were said to be life-size decorated with facial marks and natural hair. Art historians believed that Ife art originated from Nok culture because of their similarities.

**Igbo Ukwu Civilization**: Some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939. This eventually led to the excavation of three sites in the area by an archaeologist called Thurstan Shaw.

**Traditional Political Institutions in Pre-Colonial Nigeria**

***Historical Background of Pre-Colonial Political System in Yoruba Land :*** The Yorubas are one the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are united by language. They trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom and Ile-Ife is their ancestral home. There are different versions of the traditions of origin. There is the Oke Oramfe version, Oke Oramfe is located in Ile Ife and it is believed to be the centre from which the world was created.

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

The political structures of the Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature. Each consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town has a king residing in the palace. Oba was the spiritual and political head of the kingdom and he had privileges and limitations placed on his powers. The king also had other rulers of lesser rank. The pattern of administration was hierarchical.

**The Oyo Empire**

The first organ of government in Oyo empire was the king known as Alaafin of Oyo.

***The Alaafin Administration:*** Oyo empire was very unique and exceptional in its system of government. Alaafin was the head of the empire and resident in the capital and he was assisted by a retinue of officials. Sometimes he had autocratic tendency but his powers were often limited and regulated by the Oyomesi (also kingmakers).

***The Ogboni Cult’s Administration:*** It was a very powerful cult that comprised free and prominent members of the society. It also mediated conflicts between Oyomesi and Alaafin.

***The Army***: headed by Aare Ona Kakanfo, it was made up of infantry and cavalry. They were responsible of stability of empire and expansion. Alaafin had personal agents all over the provinces.

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

The Igbo people are known for their acephalous way of life. They had no centralized states and operated without kings. They are grouped into five sub-cultures. One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of origin of the Igbo people is the one that points to Israel because of the so-called similarities between the Igbo culture and ancient Hebrew. Nri version is regarded as the only authentic version of origin in existence in the oral tradition of the Igbo.

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

In the Igbo traditional society, there was no highly centralized authority but instead they had a diffusion of authority into different groups. There were some socio-political institutions in each village that performed certain functions. The family was the smallest political unit and each family was headed by an Ofo title holder. Among these title holders, the most senior was known as Okpara who held the Ozo title and presided over the council of elders meeting. Age grade was organized on a village basis. The communities organized themselves through the age grade for work, war and government. Oha-na-eze was a form of a general assembly where all the male adult members usually met to perform legislative functions. The secret societies consisted of the diviners’ masquerade which played significant roles in the Igbo traditional society. The official religion during this time was traditional religion.

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

Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Before 1804, it was made up of 14 states divided into two distinct groups namely Hausa Bakwai (legitimate) states and Hausa Banza (illegitimate) states. Oral tradition attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man named Bayajidda, an Arab prince who travelled to the Sahel from Baghdad.

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

The Sarki was known as the head of any typical Hausa state. He worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organized court. Sarkin Kasar was the full title given. He combined both political and religious functions. He was also the chief executive and judge of the state but he was aided by a council of state.

**Emirate System of Government** **among the Hausa People**

Islam was introduced to Hausa land and in 15th century accepted as religion of ruling class. There was the introduction of a new system of selecting and appointing rulers described as emirs to rule the caliphate. The whole of the former Hausa kingdom was divided into two confederations. The Emir was an absolute monarch that ruled in accordance to Islamic law and he was assisted by some councils with titles specifying their functions. The judicial administration was based on the Islamic legal system called Sharia.

***COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION AND INDIRECT RULE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA***

The British who have often being credited with the creation of Nigeria were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria, the Portuguese were. The Atlantic Slave Trade was the trade carried on across the Atlantic Ocean between Europeans and Africans. This slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. After three centuries came the period of ‘legitimate commerce’. The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century. To achieve the establishment and maintenance of a colonial state, a number of measures needed to be taken.

**The Birth of Nigeria as a Geo-Political Entity**

Before 1900, all parts of Nigeria conquered by British was still under their original administration. By 1900, the whole Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British Colonial Office. The first amalgamation was in May 1906 when Lagos was merged with the Southern protectorate. The second amalgamation was in January 1914, the Southern and Northern protectorate were merged. The reason was to aid economical buoyancy. Britain governed Nigeria through Indirect Rule System. This is a system where Britain ruled her colonies through local traditional rulers.