CHAPTER TWO

Nigeria has evolved severally and severely over the years. A historical outlook of the evolution of Nigeria can be coined from the pre-colonial and colonial periods in Nigeria. Before the arrival of colonial masters in Nigeria, it is not confirmed the exact time man began to live in Nigeria. However, archaeological evidences show that man had settled in Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000 to 9000BC. The Nigerian men of the pre-colonial time had to adapt to their environment based on their needs. Due to the need to feed they learnt how to hunt. They also made hunting tools (Oldowan-type tools) that facilitated this process. The axe was first made to make the chopping of animals easier, then heavy chopper was also made and subsequently other tools. The more tools were made the better they were, man therefore learnt how to outdo themselves by coming up with different hunting techniques and tools, each better than the last.

The bronze and metal age have shown evidence of more advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria especially between 500BC and 200AD which is known as one of the most active periods of technological efforts in Nigeria. It was during this period that sculptures, human heads and figures were made. Some scientific and technological developments also took place in the centers of civilization of Nigeria which are Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife and Benin among others. Some of these developments include: the discovery of terracotta heads, quartz – on which stools and figures were carved, and also ornaments and bronze objects.

The pre-colonial period have shown Nigeria to be a very diverse country, divided into three major ethnic groups namely: Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. The Yorubas are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria united by language. It is believed that Oduduwa is the founder of the Yoruba kingdom and their first leader. It is also commonly know that Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people from which Oduduwa extended his authority to other Yoruba towns and villages. However, according to the Oke Oramfe’s version of the origin of the Yoruba, Obatala was the messenger God sent to the world. He unfortunately fell asleep in the course of his duty and Oduduwa took over his responsibilities.

Most Yoruba kingdoms have similar political structures consisting of a capital town, subordinate town’s villages and farmlands. Each town has a king known as “Oba” who resides in the palace called “Aafin”. The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom. He has supreme authority and has certain privileges but certain limitations, known as **‘eewo’**, are placed on his powers. The purpose of these limitations is to stop tyranny and despotism. The Oyo Empire is a good example of pre-colonial Yoruba kingdoms. Then, the first organ of government was the King known as **‘Alaafin of Oyo’** who was the head of the empire and was also regarded as the **Lord of Many Lands**. He was assisted by priests, officials and eunuchs and but may have autocratic tendencies. His powers were, as a result, often limited and regulated by the Oyomesi -a council of seven members headed by Bashorun who acted as the Prime Minister. The Oyomesi had the powers to remove the alaafin when he appeared dictatorial or transgressed the law; they also had the power to choose his successor.

The members of the oyomesi also constituted members of the ogboni cult which played a mediatory role between the oyomesi and the alaafin. The army was another well-organized arm of government in the traditional Yoruba society. It was headed by the Are-Ona-Kankanfo who was expected to live outside the capital. The army was credited with performing important functions which included stability of the empire, expansion as well as keeping dissident territories in check.

The Igbo people, on the other hand, had no centralized government. Right from ancient times they operated a government without kings and are best known for their segmentary and acephalous (to have no head) way of life. One of the most popular versions of the migration stories believe the Igbo people migrated from Israel while another believes the Igbo have been in their present abode from the beginning. Authority was diffused into different groups, there was therefore a decentralized system of government.

In each family -which is the smallest unit of the society- an “Ofo” title holder was the head. The most senior amongst the Ofo title holders is known as the “Okpara” who also held the “Ozo title and presided over the council of elders meeting where issues affecting the lives of the people were discussed. Age grade was also a very body of government among the traditional Igbo people and even till date. They had the responsibility of guarding settlements, fighting battlefields and even collecting fines from offenders of the law. They were therefore a society of championship and protection.

The Hausa people of Nigeria are mostly located in the Northern part of Nigeria. The people are divided into **“Hausa Bakwai”** which are the legitimate states and **“Hausa banza”** known as the illegitimate states. It was between the 14th and 15th centuries that the socio-political organization of Hausa states took another shape; it was even during this period that Islam was adopted as main religion of the Hausa people which in turn introduced judicial system and the sharia law commenced.

After the acceptance of Islam by the Hausa states old rulers were replaced by Fulani Emirs. The political organization, however, was not destroyed but improved upon. The emir was an absolute monarch and owed allegiance only to Uthman Dan Fodio and his two representatives at Sokoto at Gwandu. In performing functions, the emir was assisted by a group of district/village heads, a body of councilors and advisers with which consultation is made regarding matters affecting the emirate.

Furthermore, even though a lot of tradition existed before the arrival of the British in Nigeria, they have been credited with the creation of Nigeria. They were however not the first set of Europeans to arrive at Nigeria. According to **Hodgkin,** “the second half of the 15th century saw the arrival of the first Europeans in Benin, the Portuguese *Ruy de sequeira* in 1472. Moreover the search for slaves is what brought the Europeans to Africa in the first place. They traded such glib items with Africans in exchange for condemned criminals, political prisoners or victims of kidnapping.

The scramble for Africa led to its partition after the berlin conference of 1884-1885. By 1900 the whole of Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British council office. Nigeria was in turn parted and merged together like a piece of clothing. During the 1906 amalgamation, the British government amalgamated the Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria. In 1914, the northern and southern Nigeria were amalgamated; Sir Frederick Lugard (later became Lord) is best known as the father of this amalgamation, the British therefore governed Nigeria though an “indirect rule” system.

Knowledge of the history of Nigeria show how her political systems have changed over the years. This chapter has helped inform our ignorance of all the county has been through and how she has changed as a result of these events. If not for the elaborate history given in this chapter one would be oblivious to the history of the major ethnic groups of the country, their culture and tradition and the history of their political systems, I therefore enjoin people to search up the history of their country.