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200 LEVEL

ASSIGNMENT

Summarize Chapter 2 of the textbook “SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS”

ANSWER

CHAPTER 2

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period is the period before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era the era that colonial administration was established in the country Nigeria.

The Nigerian state is a colonial creation. It is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure. Prior to the emergence of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria comprises of the different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires.

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. The artefacts found by archeologists further confirmed that Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilization. The excavation of a Stone Age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure on Ondo state has thrown more light on the earliest occupation of Nigeria. The man who lived in Nigeria during these years worked hard to cope with the environment. First he needed food. Then he began to invent tools for cutting and chopping. Then, the early man advanced from the Early Stone Age. He made hand axes. The tool was used for many purposes. Then, the early man proceeded to invent another type of tool,

which is a heavy chopper. This was found in Sokoto state. There is evidence of more advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria during the bronze and metal age.

The discovery of Nok of terracotta head of a monkey by tin miners in Nok in 1936 prompted more discoveries in other places such as Wamba, Jema, etc. Benin was important for its artwork. They cast wooden doors and ivory masks (used in FESTAC). Ife was important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939. This led to the excavation of three sites by the archeologist, Thurstan Shaw.

Historical background of pre-colonial political system in Yoruba land

The Yoruba people traced their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Ile Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. There are different versions to the traditions of origin. In the Oke Oramfe version, there was a period when the world was covered by water. Then the Almighty God sent his messengers to the world. Oduduwa later became the ruler.

The political structures of the Yoruba kingdom were similar in nature. Each consisted of a capita town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town had a king named Oba. The king had other rulers of lesser ranks. The pattern of administration was hierarchical. At the lowest level were the compound heads. Next was the ward head and at the apex was a group of civil chiefs headed by the king.

Oyo Empire was very unique and exceptional in its system of government. The Alaafin was the head of the empire. He was assisted in his administration by a retinue of officials. He was the fountain of authority. His powers were often limited by the Oyomesi, who was headed by the Bashorun. The Oyomesi had the power to remove any Alaafin when he transgressed the laws. Then, there was also the Ogboni Cults administration and the army (headed by Are-Ona-Kankafo).

Historical background of pre-colonial political system in Igbo land

The Igbo people are best known for their acephalous and segmentary way of life because from the ancient times they had no centralized status. They had no king. They are grouped into 5 sub-

cultures. One of the most popular version of the migratory stories of origin points to Israel because of the similarities between the cultures of Igbo and the ancient Hebrews. Professor M.A. Onwuejeogwu regards the Nri version as the only authentic version of origin in existence in the oral tradition of Igbo. The family was the smallest political unit in Igbo traditional society. Each family was headed by an 'Ofo' title holder and among them was the most senior who was regarded as 'Okpara'. Age grade was organized on village basis. The communities organized themselves through the age grade for work, war and government. Oha-na-eze was a form of general assembly in traditional Igbo society. Legislative functions were performed in this assembly by adult male members. Then there were secret societies that acted as the intermediary between the living and the ancestors. They performed rituals and offered sacrifices at different shrines to ward off evil or appease the gods or goddesses. The Igbo believed in re-incarnation and were surrounded by mysticisms and superstitions.

Historical background of pre-colonial political system in Hausa land

Oral tradition attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man named Bayajidda, an Arab prince. He married the queen after killing a monstrous snake that oppressed the people of Daura. The queen's children became kings and ruled the seven Hausa city-states. The Hausa states may have been founded by Berber immigrants from the north of Sahara. Islam was not introduced to the region until the eleventh century.

The 'Sarki' was known as the head of any typical Hausa state. Sarkin Kasar which means "ruler of the land" was the full title given to any effective and efficient head of Hausa state. The Sarkin Kasar combined both political and religious/spiritual function. He was also the chief executive and judge of the state. Then, the Islamisation of Hausa land also influenced its judicial system. The Sharia law started taking shape.

Colonial Administration and Indirect Rule System in Nigeria Historical Background

The British were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in Nigeria through Bini Kingdom. The Trans-Atlantic trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. After three centuries of shameful slave trade came the so-called period of legitimate commerce. The struggle among the European power for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century

after the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. Each of the European powers was given the opportunity to establish colonies when it had vested interest. Britain colonized Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Sierra Leone.

The Birth of Nigeria as a Geopolitical Entity

Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under their original administration. But by 1900, the whole Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British Colonial Office. British government amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria in May 1906 to form a new colony. The second amalgamation was in 1914. In January 1914, the British government amalgamated the Northern and Southern Nigeria. They were amalgamated for economic reasons. Sir Frederick Lugard is best known as the father of the January 1914 amalgamation. Britain governed Nigeria by means of 'indirect rule'. Indirect rule is a system of Britain ruling her colonies through local traditional rulers.