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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 in Nigeria. 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 colonisation of Africa.

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archaeological 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 500,000- 9000BC. The artefacts mostly stone tools found by archaeologists further confirmed that Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilisation. The man who lived in Nigeria 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. There is evidence of more advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria during the bronze and metal age. During this period there were people who lived in Nigeria who made sculptures.

Information on the major land marks in early Nigerian history was made possible through the excavation work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past. They are usually referred to as centres of ancient civilization. The history of these centres of ancient civilization presents us with the scientific and technological developments of early Nigerian societies.

**Nok culture:** The area where terracotta figurines were found is called the Nok culture or civilization area. The Nok culture is believed to be a transitional civilization between the Stone Age and Iron Age in Nigeria.

**Benin civilisation:** Benin was important for its art-work. The craftsman of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze or brass. Art historians claim that bronze casting was introduced into Benin by an Ife artist.

**Ife civilisation:** Ife is important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Objects such as stools and figures were carved on hard stone called quartz while animal and human figures were carved from granite and decorated with iron nails.

**Igbo Ukwu Civilisation:** 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 Thurston Shaw. Many objects made of bronze were discovered in the various sites.

The three major ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria traditional political system of government shall be examined.

**THE YORUBA**

The Yoruba’s are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are united by language. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. Oke Oramfe is believed to be the centre from which the world was created. The political structure of the Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature. Each consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town has a king known as “Oba” who resides in the palace called “Aafin”. His paraphernalia of office included a beaded crown (Ade), a slippers (bata), horse tail (irukere) and sceptre (Ase). The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom. He is the supreme authority in the kingdom and his words are laws and biding on everybody. The Oba enjoyed many privileges but certain limitations were placed on his powers.

The government of the old Oyo Empire is a typical example of the pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land. It consisted of the Alaafin Administration, Ogboni Cult’s Administration and the Army.

**THE IGBO**

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. This is because from the ancient times, they had no centralised states. They operated a kind of government without kings. The Igbo are grouped into five sub-cultures: Igbo of eastern Nigeria, Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, Igbo of north-eastern Nigeria, the western Igbo and the northern Igbo. The Nri version is regarded as the only authentic version of origin in existence in the oral tradition of the Igbo. In the Igbo traditional society, there was no highly centralised authority but instead they had what could be called diffusion of authority into different groups.

Although there was no highly centralised authority, some socio-political institutions existed in each village to perform legislative, executive, administrative, military and judicial functions, such institutions included the family, council of elders, age grades and secret societies. The family was the smallest political unit in Igbo traditional society. Each family was headed by an “Ofo” title holder. Age grade was organised on a village basis. The association or age grade grew from childhood and took a common name to commemorate an event associated with time of their birth. The secret societies consisted of the diviners’ masquerades. They act as intermediary between the living and the ancestors.

**THE HAUSA**

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 illegitimate states.

Oral tradition attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man named Bayajidda. He killed a monstrous snake and married the queen of Daura. 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 “Sarki” was known as the head of any typical Hausa state. He worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organised court. The Sarkin Kasar combined both political and religious/spiritual functions. He was also the executive and judge of the State, but he was aided by a council of state. 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. In every state, the Hausa ruler was replaced by a Fulani Emir. The Emir was an absolute monarch in his emirate, he was the political, administrative and spiritual leader. The judicial administration of Hausa-Fulani was based on the Islamic legal system called Sharia. The sharia court was headed by a sharia court judge called Alkali.

The British who have been credited with the creation of Nigeria were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive Nigeria through Bini kingdom. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. The trade got to maturity in the 16th century. The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century. As from 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria.

Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under their original administration. The May 1960 amalgamation is known as the first ever amalgamation of the British in Nigeria. British government amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria. The second amalgamation was that of 1914. In January 1914, the British government amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria. The principal reason for this is the same as that of May 1906. The Northern protectorate was not as economically buoyant as the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Britain therefore governed Nigeria by means of a system popularly referred to as “Indirect Rule”. Indirect rule is a system of Britain ruling her colonies through local tradition rulers. The British officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or the rulers.