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A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN STATES

The Nigerian state is a colonial creation. Its historical background on government and politics involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period. Prior to the time of time of colonialism, Nigeria had quite a number of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. The exact time man settled in Nigeria is unknown but man can be dated back to 500,000-9000 BC in the space now referred to as Nigeria. Studies have also show that the early Nigerians also participated in the stone-age civilization.

The early men who lived in Nigeria had to cope with his environment. He soon created weapons to help them hunt for food and keep them protected. Evidence of technology and other forms of civilization were found. Sculptures too were made and they were found mainly in the village of Nok. Through excavation work Nigeria was seen to have various landmarks around the country, and usually referred to as centers of civilization. Nok culture is believed to be transitional between the stone and iron ages in the Nok civilization areas. Through carbon dating it was shown to exist between 5th and 2nd century BC. For the Benin people their art works were mainly in wood, ivory, bronze and brass. Ife is important because of its bronze and terracotta heads. It is believed that the Ife art originated from Nok art and that the Benin people learnt their art from the Ife people due to their similarities. Some bronze art and ornaments where excavated in Igbo Ukwu in 1939. This led to various other discoveries. The art was dated back to the middle of the 9th century AD.

Nigeria had various political systems for its various ethnic groups in the pre-colonial times, but I will only discuss the three major ethnic groups-Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa.

The Yorubas are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. They believed to be originated from Ile-Ife and their founder to be Oduduwa. There are many versions of the Yoruba history one of them being that they originated from the East which is Mecca. Oduduwa is believed to have led the Yorubas to Ile-Ife and the sent his sons to form the other Yoruba Kingdoms. Another version being that the Yorubas originated from Oke Oramfe in Ile-Ife. That the almighty sent Obatala and sixteen immortals with some materials to form the earth. And how along the line Oduduwa took the symbol of authority from Obatala and led his people to Ile-Ife. The Yoruba people had similar political systems with a ranking system. The overall head was the Oba with supreme authority and paraphernalia of office. His power is restricted with eewo which could lead to his death if violated. The main town was divided into sub-ordinates which were ruled by a lesser rank. The Baales where the third rank and the Oloja’s the fourth rank. The Oyo empire had a typical Yoruba political system. The head of the empire or the King was the Alaafin who resided in the capital. He was considered to have autocratic power Although that wasn’t completely true as there was a council of seven that regulated his activities, and they are known as the Oyomesi. They acted as the prime ministers and as King makers too. They also had the authority to remove the King if he acted out of line. There is also another called the Ogboni cult, who acted as a mediator between the Alaafin and the Oyomesi. They also had power over the Oyomesi. There is also the army headed by Are-Ona Kankanfo who was expected to live outside the capital.

The Igbo people are well known for their segmentary system of ruling. They are grouped into five sub cultures. The best known origination story is that they migrated from Israel because of the similarities. According to the Nri version the ancestors sailed from the heavens and landed in Anambra where they met people and lived with them. The Igbo people practiced direct democracy as there was never an Igbo empire. Although there were institutions for democratic functions. The smallest institutions were the family, who had a head that was referred to as the Ofo. The oldest member with a space on the council of elders was called the Okpara. Age grade was organized for work, war and government. They not only ensured discipline but they also aided morality of the public. Oha-na-eze was a form of general assembly where all the decisions taken where absolute and final. Each age group had their own rights and duties in the society. They also had secret societies that consisted of chief priest, masquerades a d others, who acted as a medium between the humans and the gods. The official religion practiced at the time was traditional religion. They also believed in re-incarnation of the dead.

The Hausa are divided into two distinct groups the Hausa Bakwaii and the Banzai Bakwaii each consisting of seven states. The Hausa’ believed that Bayajidda killed a snake tormenting the land and married the queen who already has seven sons and had another seven with him. It is also believed that they migrated from East Africa. Most typical Hausa states had a Sarkin Kadar who served as a political and spiritual leader with an organized court. Although at the 14th to 15th century political power took another shape with the introduction of Islam. By the 18th century the Jihad had helped the Fulani overthrow the Hausa replacing all the Hausa leaders with Fulani Emir. The Emir has absolute power, although the Sultan appoints Emirs. Emirates are divided into districts that are headed by a Hakimi. The judicial system was based on the Sharia. The Sharia court is headed by a Judge called Alkali. Normal crimes were handled by the village heads but serious crimes are taken to the Sharia court.

The first Europeans to come to Nigeria were the Portuguese around the 15th century. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the channel through which the British had contact with Nigeria. In the early 19th century the Europeans decided to bring slave trade to a stop. And this was the time that they also used as an advantage to gain colonies in Africa. They removed all visible opposition to the colonial rule and British authority over Nigeria.

The first ever amalgamation was in May 1906 of the Lagos colony and the southern protectorate without the approval of the Nigerians. It was fine solely for business purposes. The second amalgamation was that of 1914 of the northern and southern protectorate. It had the same reason as it’s predecessor-purely for business. This was done by Sir Fredrick Lugard. Britain therefore ruled the Nigerian through ’Indirect Rule’.