NAME: UKWELA JOANNA IBEOJO

DEPARTMENT: MEDICINE AND SURGERY MBBS

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An Historical Analysis of the Evolution of the Nigeria State (Chapter 2)

In order to fully understand background of Nigerian government and politics, we need to look at the periods involved, they are;“The Pre-colonial period” which is the period before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria and ‘The Colonial period which is the era that colonial administration was established in the country Nigeria, after all Nigeria is a Colonial creation. The pre-colonial period comprises of different independent chiefdo,states,kingdoms and empires which significantly differ in their historical,social and cultural make-up. For example the Borno Empire, the Hausa states, the Benin kingdom etc.

It is still not known the exact time man began to live in Nigeria but due to archeological findings in different parts of the country ,man was in the region since the paleolithic period 500,000- 9000BC. Nigerians also took part in the stone age civilisation, which is divided into, the early stone age 3,000,000 -35,000BC, middle stone age, 35,000- 15,000BC and Late stone age, 15,000-500BC.

The Early man in Nigeria needed food and as a result started inventing cutting and hunting tools which archaeologists called the Oldowan-type tools. Over time man continued to make more tools for various purposes and these tools were refined during the middle and late stone age. Man also made the “Sangoan". One of the most active period of technological efforts in nigeria between 500BC-200AD. This period people made sculptures,some found in the village of NOK.

Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife and Benin are usually referred to as the centres of ancient civilisation for history of early man in Nigeria was gotten from there. The Nok civilisation or culture is said to have existed between the 5th and 2nd century B.C, then there is the Ife civilisation known for its terracotta and bronze heads, the Benin civilisation known for its art-work and the Igbo Ukwu civilisation.

Moving on to the Traditional political institutions in Pre-Colonial Nigeria, we look at the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the yoruba kingdom and Ile-Ife as the ancestral home of the yoruba people. There are other versions of the origin of the Yoruba people one of which is the *Oke Oramfe's version of the yoruba people.* The political structures of the yoruba kingdom’s were very similar,each town had an Oba who resides in the palace “Aafin", he was both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom, but not withstanding he had limitations known as “eewo". The king had other rulers of lesser ranks and status , who ruled subordinate towns rulers like the Baale and the Oloja. The pattern of administration was hierarchical.

The government if the old Oyo empire is a typical example of the pre-colonial administration, it was unique and exceptional in its system of government. The Alaafin was the head of the empire and was resident in the capital, he was regarded as “Lord of many lands", he was assisted in his administration by a retinue of officials, priests and eunuchs. He had a well organized court.⁸ The Oyomesi was a council of seven members , headed by Bashorun who acted as the prime minister, they were the king makers. Apart from the Alaafin cabinet and the Oyomesi cult, there was another arm of government called The Ogboni Cult , who were mediators in any conflict between the Oyomesi and the Alaafin. The Army was also an arm of government in the traditional Yoruba society.

Now unto the Pre-colonial system in Igbo land. The igbo people are best known for their sedimentary or acephalous way of life,due to the fact that they had no centralised states. The igbo are grouped into Five sub-cultures: the Igbo of eastern nigeria, the Igbo of south-eastern nigeria , the Igbo of north-eastern Nigerian, the western Igbo and the Northern Igbo. One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of origin of the igbo people is the one that points to Israel. There are various versions on the origin of the Igbo people ,but Professor M.A Onwurjeogwu (2000) regards the Nri version as the only authentic version of origin in existence in the oral tradition of the Igbo.

The Igbo traditional society, practiced direct democracy and/or a decentralized system of government. They had no highly centralized authority, but they had some socio-political institutions which existed in each village to perform different functions, such were 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 but an “Ofo" title holder. The age grade was organised on a village basis, they were organized among the northern and southern igbo people, communities organised themselves through the age grade for work, war and government. There were also the secret societies and a group called the “Oha-na-eze”.

The historical background of the Pre-colonial political system in hausa land. The hausa land is located in northern Nigeria and before 1804, was made up of 14 states, the “Hausa Bakwai" which is the Seven Hausa legitimate states and the “ Hausa Banza", that is the seven illegitimate hausa states. The most famous version of the hausa history is of the Bayajidda legend, an Arab prince from Baghdad who killed an oppressive snake in Daura, married the queen and founded the hausa people and states.

The “Sarki” was the head of any typical hausa state. The Sarjin Kasar which means ‘ ruler of the land’ was the head of both the political and religious/spiritual functions, was the chief executive and judge of the state and was aided by a council of state. The Emirate system of government among the hausa peopl, included the introduction of a new system of selecting and appointing rulers described as Emirs to rule the caliphate,who owed allegiance to Dan fodio who established the caliphate and the fulani Emirates in northern Nigeria and his two representatives. The whole of the former hausa kingdom was divided into two confederations. The Emir was an absolute monarch in his emirate and was the political, administrative and spiritual leader.

Now that we have seen the historical background of Pre-colonial systems in the hausa, igbo and yoruba lands, we go further in the colonial administration and indirect rule system in Nigeria historical background. The British who have often been credited with the creation of Nigeria were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria, the Portuguese were the first to arrive in Nigeria, through the Bini kingdom. The Atlantic Slave trade came with the Portuguese, and this was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria and the slave trade continued until the 18th century when the British decided to abolish the trans-Atlantic slave trade ,through the British West African Naval Squadron. Later on there was a struggle among the European powers for colonies which led to the partitioning of Africa among them I’m the 19th century, where as each of the European powers was given the opportunity to establish colonies where it had vested interest.

Britain colonised Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia and Sierra Leone in West Africa, as from 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria and a number of measures were to be taken, like the removal of visible opposition to the imposition of colonial rule,expansion and consolidation of British authority over the territory later known as Nigeria. Before the year 1900, all different parts of Nigeria were 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. The first ever amalgamation was in May 1906 but this was done without the consultation of the Nigerians, if they were in support or not. The second was that of 1941. In January 1914, the British amalgamated northern and southern Nigeria. Sir Fredrick Lugard ( later became Lord) is best known as the father of the “ January 1914” amalgamation. Britain therefore governed Nigeria by means of a system popularly referred to as “indirect rule" were the Britain officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or the rulers.