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AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIA STATE

The historical background of Nigeria government and politics involves the pre-colonial and colonial period in Nigeria; the pre-colonial period involves the period before the coming of colonialist to Nigeria while the colonial period involves the era that colonial administration was established in Nigeria. We will be reviewing the Pre-colonial era of Nigeria.

Pre-colonial Nigeria is bordered to the south by the Brights of Benin and Biafra, which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean; on the west, Nigeria is bordered by Benin, on the north, by Niger and on the East by Cameroon. Nigeria stretches 700 miles from west to east and 650 miles from south to north. Pre-colonial Nigeria comprises of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires; this includes: Borno Empire, the Hausa States and the Sokoto Caliphate in the North; the Igbo segmentary societies in the East; Benin Kingdom and the Oyo Empire in the West and several ethnic identities in the Benue Valley.

EARLY MEN IN NIGERIA AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENT

There are archaeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000 – 9000BC. The excavation of Stone age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure in Ondo state has thrown more light on the earliest occupation of Nigeria, the skeleton was dated 12,000 years ago and this suggest that the country has been long inhabited. The men who lived in Nigeria in those years worked very hard to cope with his environment; he needed food and in order to hunt animals and gather fruits, he began to invent tools consisting of pebbles to make chopping and cutting tools. Archeologists called the tools the OLDOWAN-TYPE TOOLS; early man in Nigeria advanced from early Stone Age and began to make hand axes, these tools were oval and pointed in shape. Small stone tools have been located in Jos, Plateau States and in Iwo Eleru in Ondo state. Early Man proceeded and invented another type of tool which is a heavy chopper

which was more efficient in cutting than existing tools; one was found in the Upper Sokoto River in Sokoto state. One of the most active periods of the technological efforts in Nigeria was during this period around 500BC to 200AD; during this period there were people who live in Nigeria who made sculptures, some were human heads and figures, the figures were found in a village of Nok, these figures were made of terracotta and they possessed a distinctive artistic style. Similar findings have been made in parts of Ile-Ife, Esie, Jebba, Igbo-Ukwu and Benin.

MAJOR LANDMARK IN EARLY NIGERIAN HISTORY

NOK CIVILLISATION: A terracotta head of a monkey was discovered by miners in Nok in 1936, the area where these terracotta were found is called the Nok culture or civilization area. The Nok culture is believed to be a transitional civilization between the stone and iron age in Nigeria because of the combination of stone and iron objects. Nok culture existed between the 5th and 2nd century BC.

BENIN CIVILISATION: The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and Ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. They cast wooden doors and ivory masks, one of which was the ivory mask used as FESTAC symbol in 1977.

IFE CIVILIZATION: Art historians believe that Ife art was originated from the Nok culture because of the similarities in the two especially beaded neck, wrist and ankles. They believed that the Benin learnt bronze sculpture from Ife.

IGBO UKWU CIVILISATION: Bronze objects and ornaments were found accidentally while digging a toilet pit in 1939; this led to the excavation of three sites which they discovered many objects made of bronze including remains of a decayed king and five slaves buried with him. The excavation at Igbo Ukwu has been dated to the middle age the 9th century A.D.

TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Nigeria is a very diverse country which divided into three major ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani, in this section, the Nigeria traditional Political system of Government shall be examined.

The YORUBAS are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria united by language. The Yoruba people believe that Oduduwa is the founder of the Yoruba Kingdom; Ile-ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people from which Oduduwa extended

his authority to other Yoruba towns and villages. According to the Oke Oramfe's version of the Yoruba, Obatala was the messenger God sent to the world, he immediately fell asleep in the course of his study and Oduduwa took over his responsibilities. Most Yoruba kingdom has similar political structures consisting of capital subordinate town's villages and farmlands. Each town has a king 'OBA' who resides in a palace called 'ALAFIN'; 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' which are placed on his powers. The purpose of these limitations is to stop tyranny and despotism. The Oyo Empire is a good example of the pre-colonial Yoruba Kingdoms. The first organ of Government was the King known as 'Alafin 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 alafin when he appeared dictatorial or transgressed by law; they also had the power to choose the successor. The members of the Oyomesi also constituted members of the Ogboni cult which played a mediatory role between the Oyomosi and the alafin. The army was another well-organized arm of the 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 a cephalous [to have no head] way of life. One of the most popular versions of the migrations stories believe the Igbo people migrated Israel while another believe the Igbo have been in their present abode from the beginning. In the Igbo society, authority was diffused into different groups, there was therefore a decentralized system of Government. Each family in the Igbo society; which is the smallest unit of the society, was headed by an 'OFO' title holder. 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 two which are Hausa Bakwai 'Legitimate States' and Hausa Banza '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 however the Political organizations 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 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 with 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 conferences 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 of Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria in 1914, the northern and southern Nigeria were amalgamated, Sir Frederick Lugard 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 shows how her political systems have changed over the years. This chapter has helped to inform the ignorance the country 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.

