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An Historical Analysis of the Evolution of the Nigeria State

Nigerian government and political historical background involves both the pre-colonial period and colonial period. The pre-colonial period being the time before the arrival of the colonialists and the colonial period being the era of the colonialist administration in Nigeria. The Nigerian state itself is a colonial creation as it is a product of an agreement that arose out of European adventures and trade activities. Before the arrival of the European powers, the pre-colonial region now collectively known as Nigeria was made up of various, very diverse ethnic groups such as the Benin Kingdom, Oyo Empire, the Borno Empire and the segmentary Igbo societies. Nigeria as we know it is located between 3° and 15° E longitude and between 4° and 14° N latitude.

Archaeological evidence from all over the Nigerian state proves that early man had settled in the region as far back as the Palaeolithic period (500,000 – 9,000 BC). The artefacts and skeletons found proved that early inhabitants took part in the Stone Age civilization. Some of the scientific and technological developments of the early Nigerian societies include; major landmarks in early Nigerian history with evidence of human occupation in the very distant past; the Nok culture discovered in 1936 and dated as far back as 5th and 2nd B.C; the Benin civilization with its beautiful wood, ivory, brass and bronze artworks; the Ife civilization with its terracotta and bronze heads; Igbo Ukwu civilization discovered during a toilet project in 1939 and dated back to the 9th century.

Traditional Political Institutions in Pre-Colonial Nigeria

Here the traditional political institutions of the Nigerian major ethnic groups were discussed, the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani group.

- Historical Background of Pre-colonial Political Systems in Yoruba Land

The Yorubas are undoubtedly one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, united by language. They trace their origin to Oduduwa and Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. The varieties to the versions of their origin are plenty but one that stands out is their migration from the North-Eastern part of Africa. Another version of the origin story is the Oke-Oramfe version that claims that Oke-Oramfe which is located in Ile-Ife is the centre of creation and God sent messengers, Oduduwa among them to a water filled earth and they used the materials given to them to make land and so the world was formed and Oduduwa became the ruler and from there he extended his authority.

The political structures of the various Yoruba kingdoms were similar in structure with a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands each. The towns had an Oba who served as both the political and spiritual head of state, resided in a palace called Aafin. The Oba also had other rulers alongside of lesser rank and status. There were also the Baales who were in charge of villages and the Oloja who

were in charge of the farmlands. Each town was divided into subunits for smooth administration and the pattern of administration was hierarchical and the apex of administration is the civil chiefs (Igbimo Ilu) headed by the king. The Oyo empire administration was a prime example of a Yoruba administration with the Alaafin administration which was limited and regulated by the Oyomesi, the Ogboni cult administration which consisted of prominent members of the society as well as the Oyomesi and served as an arm of the government, the last arm was the army which was an organized structure headed by the Are-Ona-Kankanfo and functioned to provide stability, expansion and keeping territories in check.

- Historical Background and Pre-Colonial System in Igbo land.

From ancient times the Igbos have been known for their lack of centralized states and lived segmentary lifestyles and ruled without kings. They are grouped into five subcultures namely the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of North-Eastern Nigeria, the Western Igbo and the Northern Igbo. The most common migratory story of the Igbos point to Israel as a result of the similarities between the ancient Hebrew and the Igbo culture. Some others believe that the Igbo people never migrated but have been at their current location from the beginning. The Nri version of their origin story states that the original ancestor Eri descended from the sky sailed down river Anambra and met some people with no memory and settled with them and as they grew in numbers some groups migrated and established other settlements.

The political structure of the traditional Igbo society lacked a central authority and so powers were diffused and they practiced a direct democracy, though they lacked a central political authority they possessed certain socio-political institutions that performed legislative, executive, administrative, judicial and military functions, such institutions included the family, council of elders, age grade and secret societies. The family was the smallest political unit and it was headed by the “Ofo” title holder. The members had a common ancestor and inhabitants of the village take decisions by these Ofo holders coming together and making a decision for everyone. The head of this council of Ofo title holders was the Okpara who held the Ozo title. The age grade group was organised based on the village and as they are composed of people born around the same period. They took a common name usually from an event close to their birth. The age group was a society of companionship and protection, carrying out tasks like clearing paths and acting as police. The Oha-na-axe was a form of general assembly in the Igbo society and it was made up of all the adult male members of the community who came together to perform legislative function. They usually met in the village square and made decisions that were final. The secret society was another institution present in the ancient Igbo society and they consisted of the diviner’s masquerades, “ubinuknabi” at Arochukwu, the “Amadisha” of Ozuzzu and so on. They played important roles such as acting as intermediary between the living and the ancestors as well as offering sacrifices to appease god’s and ward off evil spirits

- Historical Background of Pre-colonial System in Hausa Land

Northern Nigeria is the location of the Hausa land. Before 1804, Hausa land was made up of fourteen states which were divided into distinct groups of seven each. The first group were the “Hausa Bakwai” states, that is the legitimate seven were: Daura, Buran, Zaria, Kastina, Kano and Rano. The second group known as the “Hausa Banza” states, that is the illegitimate seven were: Nupe, Gwari, Yauri,

Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi and Kwara. The oral tradition points their origin to a man named Bayajidda, a prince who saved the people of Daura by killing a monstrous snake and then marrying the Queen. The Queen's six sons prior to her marriage to Bayajidda and her one son with him founded the Hausa Bakwai states and his other illegitimate sons founded the Hausa banza. The combined kingdoms of the Hausa land were sometimes called the Daura. Other sources point to the Hausa land being founded by Berber immigrants from the North of the Sahara. For most of the history of early Hausa they were polytheists before Islam was introduced properly in the eleventh century and maybe the Bayajidda legend was simply an allegory of their change in religion.

The political structure of the precolonial Hausa land was thus. The "sarki" was the typical head of every Hausa state and he worked with other officials in a well organized court. The district level of government was shaped after the national level. Between the 14th and 15th century Islam was adopted and reshaped the socio-political aspect of the Hausa land, birthing new political offices and the Sharia law began taking shape. By the 15th century Islam was accepted as the religion of the ruling class in Hausa land. The jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio in 1804 completely rearranged the political system of the Hausa society and replaced former Hausa rulers with Fulani Emirs and a centralised system of government introduced with the Sultan at the very top and the appointed Emirs being absolute monarchs in their Emirates. Various new positions were created in the council with titles corresponding to their functions.

- **Colonial Administration and Indirect Rule System in Nigeria.**

The British although credited with the creation of the Nigerian state were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria. The Portuguese were in 1472 and 1484 during the reign of Oba Ewuare and then Oba Ozoluwa's reign respectively. The transatlantic slave trade was the economical transaction carried on between the Europeans and Africans with about 700 to 800 slaves exported annually to Portugal by the 1460s. The trade was the first link between the Europeans and Nigeria for several years and lasted for over three centuries and when it was finally abolished in the early 19th century the Europeans became involved in what they termed "legitimate commerce" and they introduced "gun-boat" politics and got even more involved in the affairs of the African states. Due to the struggle for African colonies each of the European powers were given the opportunity to establish colonies where they showed interest. The British colonised Nigeria as well as Ghana, the Gambia and Sierra Leone in West Africa. Nigeria as we know it today was still governed by the original administration before the year 1900 and in May 1906 the first ever amalgamation of the Nigerian state came about although it is noted for economic reasons. The British government amalgamated the Lagos Colony and the Protectorate of southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria, this was done without consulting Nigerians. The second amalgamation spearheaded by Sir Frederick Lugard took place in January 1914 and for economic reasons as well, amalgamated the northern protectorate and the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria to make the current state of Nigeria. Britain governed Nigeria by indirect rule and their practices then laid the framework, which is still followed today, of politics and government in Nigeria.