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OVERVIEW ON AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIA STATE.

The Nigerian state is a colonial creation which is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure. The historical background of the Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial and colonial period in Nigeria. Prior to the emergence of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria comprised of different kingdoms, empires and states. On the West, Nigeria is bordered by Benin, on the North, by Niger and on the East, by Cameroon and in the extreme northeastern by Lake Chad.

The exact time man began to live in Nigeria is unknown although archaeological evidences have proven that man took part in the stone age era and had inhabited that space far back as 500,000BC-900,000BC. The early man worked hard in order to cope with his environment and so he began to hunt and invent various tools. In Nigeria, one of the most active periods of technological efforts where man made sculptures and major achievements was between 500BC to 200AD.

There were some major landmarks in the early Nigeria. One of these landmarks is the Nok Culture/Civilisation; through the use of carbon dating it was discovered that the Nok Culture existed between the 2nd and 5th century B.C. It is believed to be the transitional civilization age between the stone age and iron age because of the presence of a combination of stone and iron objects. Another landmark is the Benin Civilization. The Benin was noted for their art work in wood and ivory cast objects which was eventually used as FESTAC symbol in 1977. Ife Civilization is also another important landmark noted for its terracotta and bronze heads which was also used to make Opa Oranmiyan. It was believed that the Ife art originated from Nok art and the Benin people learnt their art from the Ife people because of the similarities. Igbo Ukwu Civilization was known for some bronze objects and ornaments which were found while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939. This discovery has been dated to the middle of the 9th century AD.

The traditional political systems of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani; will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The Yorubas are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The ancestral home of the Yoruba is regarded as Ile-Ife and they believe that their founder is traced to Oduduwa. There are different versions of the Yoruba history, one of which is they came from East which is Mecca and they were led by Oduduwa who finally made them settle in Ile-Ife and sent his sons to found other Yoruba kingdoms. Another version of the Yoruba history is that that the Yorubas originated from Oke-Oramfe in Ile-Ife. In this version, it was said that the Almighty God sent Obatala and sixteen immortals to earth. They were given some materials but along the way, Obatala got drunk and so Oduduwa stole the symbol of authority from him and led the people to Oke-Oramfe in Ile-Ife. The Yoruba people had similar political structure and ranking system. The overall head was the Oba with supreme authority and paraphernalia of office. His powers were restricted by 'eewo' which could lead to his death if he violated it. There were other ranks such as the Baales being the third rank and the Oloja being the fourth rank. A typical example of the administration in the Yorubaland is the Oyo Empire. The head of the empire was the Alaafin. He had an autocratic tendency although his powers were regulated a council of seven members known as Oyomesi headed by Bashorun. The members of the Oyomesi had the power to put in kings and remove them. Another organ of the administration was the Ogboni Cult. It was a very powerful cult that played a mediatory role in any conflict between the Oyomesi and Alaafin and also had power of the Oyomesi. The last organ was the army. It was headed by Are-Ona-Kankanfo and was expected to live outside the capital. It had a duty of stabilizing the empire.

The Igbo people are known for their acephalous way of life because in the ancient times they operated a government without kings. The Igbo are grouped into five sub-cultures and they have a similar origination story because they migrated from Israel. According to Nri version, the ancestor of the Igbo, Eri descended from the sky and sailed to River Anambra where they met people and lived with them. The Igbo practiced direct democracy. The family was the smallest political unit which was headed by an 'Ofo'. The oldest member of this council was known as 'Okpara' who held the 'Ozo'. Age grade was organized on village basis and were mainly for work, war and government. They enforced discipline amongst themselves and guarded public morality. Oha-na-eze was a form of general assembly where all the decisions taken were final. They were highly respected and each age-set had its own special rights and obligations. The Igbos also had secret societies which acted as intermediary between the living and ancestors. The secret societies had a chief priest who acted as the intermediary between the people and the deities and also offered sacrifices to ward off evil or appease the gods. The Igbos believed in re-incarnations and their religious lives were surrounded by mysticisms and superstitions.

The Hausa before 1804 was divided into two distinct groups each consisting of seven states each. The first group is the Hausa Bakwaili, the Hausa legitimate states and the second group Hausa Banza, the Hausa illegitimate states. The origination story of the Hausa is that a man Bayajidda killed a snake that oppressed the people of Daura and then he married the queen. The 'Sarki' was the head of any typical Hausa state. He combined both political and religious functions. Between the 14th and 15th centuries, the socio-political organization of Hausa states took another shape

such as the adoption of Islam which gave birth to new political institutions. The Emir was an absolute monarch although he was appointed by the Sultan. The Emir was the political, administrative and spiritual leader. He maintained law and order in his domain. Emirates were divided into further districts headed by 'Hakimi' who appoints village heads to help him collect taxes for the emirates. The judicial administration of Hausa-Fulani was based on the Islamic system known as the Sharia which was headed by a judge called 'Alkali'. The chief justice of the Sharia court was called Grand Khadi. Village heads settled minor disputes but serious crimes were taken to the Sharia.

The first Europeans to arrive Nigerian were the Portuguese through the Bini Kingdom. In the 15th century, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the channel that brought the British in contact with Nigeria. But in the 19th century, the British decided to abolish the trade through the operations of the British West African Naval Squadron. In 1861, the Europeans took Lagos as a colony. The partitioning of Africa among the Europeans happened after the Berlin conference of 1884-85. The British government decided to maintain a colonial state in Nigeria by removing all visible opposition to the imposition of colonial rule and consolidation of the British authority over the Nigerian territory.

By 1990, the whole of Nigeria was under the British Colonial Office. The first amalgamation was in May 1906. The British amalgamated the Lagos colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria without the consent of Nigerians. This amalgamation was solely for the purpose of business. The second amalgamation was in January 1914 where the Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated. It was also for the same business making purpose. This was done by Sir Frederick Lugard. Therefore, Britain governed Nigeria by a system known as 'Indirect Rule'.