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GST 203 SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIA STATE

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period is the period before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era that colonial administration was established in the country Nigeria.

The Nigerian state is a colonial creation. It is a product of historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonization of Africa. Pre-colonial Nigeria comprises of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms, and empires e.g. Borno Empire, the Hausa states and the Sokoto Caliphate in the north, etc.

Nigeria is bordered to the south by the Bights of Benin and Biafra, which are on the east, by Cameron. In its extreme north-eastern corner, Lake Chad separates Nigeria from the country of Chad. Nigeria stretches roughly 700 miles from west to east and 650 miles from south to north, covering an area between 3° and 15°E longitude and between 4° and 14°N latitude.

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 5,000,000 – 9,000 BC. Archeologists confirmed that Nigeria took part in the stone-age civilization because artifacts mostly stone tools were found. The Stone Age can be divided into several periods, these are: early Stone Age, 3,000,000-35,000 BC; middle Stone Age, 35,000-15,000 BC and late Stone Age, 15,000-500 BC.

The man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment. In order to cope with his environment, he needed food, therefore he began to hunt the animals and gather fruits. He then began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools. Early man in Nigeria advanced from the early Stone Age to make hand axes to invent another type of tool called heavy chopper and so on.

Information on the major land marks in early Nigerian history was made possible through the excavation work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past. Some of the places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past includes: Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife, Benin, etc. These places are usually referred to as centers of ancient civilization.

The major ethnic groups in Nigeria are: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani.

The Yoruba’s are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and are united by language. There are different versions of their origin but the most popular version is that Oduduwa was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom and that Ile-Ife is the ancestral home of the Yoruba people.

The political structures of the Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature. Each consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town had a king known as Oba who resides in the palace called Aafin. His paraphernalia of office included a beaded crown (Ade), a slipper (bata), horse tail (irukere) and scepter (Ase). The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom. There were lesser ranks and status after the Oba such as the Baales and Oloja. The Baales were the third rank of leaders and the Oloja were the fourth rank of leaders. The pattern of administration was hierarchical. At the lowest level were the compound heads.

The government of the old Oyo Empire is a typical example of the pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land. The first organ of government in Oyo Empire was the king known as Alaafin of Oyo. Other arms of government includes: the Ogbonin cult’s administration and the army.

The Igbo people are best known for their sedimentary way of life because from the ancient times, they had no centralized states. They operated a kind of government without kings. The Igbos are grouped into five sub-cultures namely: the Igbo of the eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of north-eastern Nigeria, 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. This assumption is based on the so-called similarities between cultures of the Igbo and the ancient Hebrew. Some Igbo scholars consider themselves as off-shoots of the lost tribes of the Hebrews who migrated southward.

In the Igbo traditional society, there was no highly centralized authority but instead they had what could be called a diffusion of authority into different groups, that is, they practiced democracy and/or a decentralized system of government.

Hausa land is located in northern Nigeria. Before 1804, Hausa land was made up of 14 states, and they were two distinct groups. He first group consist of 7 states called Hausa Bakwai sates , that is, Hausa legitimate states and the second group consist of the remaining 7 states and were known as Hausa Banza states, that is, Hausa illegitimates states. Oral tradition attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man named Bayajidda, an Arab prince who travelled to Sahel from Baghdad.

The Sarki was known as the head of any typical Hausa states. He worked with retinue of officials in a well-organized court. Sarkin Kasar, which means ruler of the land, was the full title given to any effective and efficient head of Hausa states. The Sarkin Kasar combined both political and religious/spiritual functions.

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 Europeans to arrive in Nigeria through the Bini Kingdom. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria.

Britain, therefore, governed Nigeria by means of a system popularly referred to as Indirect Rule. The British officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or the rulers.