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COURSE: GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTION

QUESTION: IN ABOUT 3 PAGES, REVIEW CHAPTER TWO, ‘AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN STATE’, IN SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS, PAGES 15-32.

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial period is the period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial 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. Prior to the emergence of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria comprises of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. These, among others include the Borno Empire, the Hausa states, and the Sokoto Caliphate in the North; the Oyo Empire in the West and several ethnic identities in the Benue Valley.

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archaeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Palaeolithic period 500,000-9000BC, the Stone Age 3,000,000-500BC. The man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment. First, he needed food. For this purpose he began to hunt the animals and to gather fruits. But he soon began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools called the Oldowan-type tools by Archaeologists.

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 include: 1. Nok, in the nok civilisation, there was the discovery of a terracotta (burnt clay) head of a monkey by tin miners in Nok in 1936. The Nok culture is believed to be a transitional civilisation between the Stone Age and the Iron Age in Nigeria because of the presence of a combination of stone and iron objects. 2. There was the Benin civilisation which was important for its art work. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. The rest include Ife civilisation which was important because of its terracotta and bronze heads, Igbo-Ukwu civilisation, where some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo-Ukwu in 1939.

Moving to the Traditional Political institutions in Pre-colonial Nigeria and starting from the Yoruba pre-colonial political system. The yorubas are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are united by language. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people and there have been different versions of the traditions of origin like The History of the Yoruba (1950) by Johnson and The Oke Oramfe Version.

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 the Oba who resided in the palace called Aafin. The king also had other rulers of lesser rank and status. The lesser rulers were in charge of the subordinate towns. There was also the Baale in the third rank and the Oloja in the fourth rank respectively. The 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; the alaafin was the head of the empire and was resident in the capital. The Alaafin was assisted in his administration by a retinue of officials made up of priests, officials and eunuchs. The Alaafin’s power was limited and resulted by the Oyomesi, a council of seven members headed by the Bashorun who acted as the prime minister and the members were also king makers. There was also the Ogboni Cult, this was a very powerful cult and it played a mediatory role in any conflict between the Oyomesi and the Alaafin. It was also a kind of counter power to the Oyomesi as well. There was another arm which was the army that was headed by the Aare Ona Kakanfo, the army was very well organised. 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 pre-colonial political system was very different from the Yoruba system as the system was segmentary and acephalous. The Igbo is grouped into five sub-cultures and they include: The Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, South-Eastern Nigeria, North- Eastern Nigeria, The western Igbo and the Northern Igbo. In the Igbo traditional society, there was no highly centralised authority but instead they had what could be called a diffusion of authority into different groups. The family was the smallest political unit in Igbo traditional society. Each family was headed by an Ofo title holder. Among the Ofo title holders, one of them was recognised as the most senior to the others. He was known as the Okpara who 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 organised on a village basis. The association or age grade grew from childhood and took a common name to commemorate an event associated with the time of their birth. Those who were still youths cleared path and public places and also as police. The elders enforced the elders’ decisions and in war, guarded the settlements and fought on the battlefield. Oha-na-eze was a form of general assembly in the traditional Igbo society. All the male adult members usually met in this assembly to perform legislative functions. The secret societies consisted of the diviners’ masquerades, Ubinuknabi at Arochukwu, the Amadisha of Ozuzzu and they acted as intermediary between the living and ancestors.

The Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Hausa land, before 1804 was made up of fourteen states, and they were of two distinct groups. The first group consist of seven states called “Hausa Bakwai” (legitimate) states and they include Daura, Biram, Zaria, Katsina, Kano, Rano and Gobir. The second group consists of the remaining seven states and were known as “Hausa Banza” (illegitimate) states and they include Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi and Yoruba. In the political structure, the sarki was known as the head of any typical Hausa state. He worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organised court and he combined both political and religious and spiritual functions. Islam was introduced to Hausa land in the fourteenth century, and by the fifteenth century it was accepted as the religion of the ruling class and it gave birth to many new political institutions such as the offices of the Galadima, Madawaki, , Magaji, Dogari, Yari Sarki and Sarki Yau. The Emir was an absolute monarch in his emirate, he was the political, administrtative and spiritual help and he had help ruling the emirate from the members of his council and the council included: The Sarkin Fada( spokesman of the Emir), The Waziri(the Prime minister), Galadima( The administrator), Madawaki( The head of the Emirate Army),Magaji( Government Treasurer), Sarkin Dan Doka( Inspector General of Police Force), Sarkin Ruwa( Minister in charge of water resources), Sarkin Pawa( Head of Chairman of Butchers), Yari( Chief Superintendent of Prisons). The judicial administration of Hausa- Fulani was based on the Islamic legal system called Sharia and it was headed by a judge called Alkali.

Sir Frederick Lugard (later became Lord) is best known as the father of the 1914 amalgamation. Britain, therefore, governed Nigeria by means of a system popularly referred to as “Indirect Rule”. Indirect rule is a system of Britain ruling her colonies through local traditional rulers. The British officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or the rulers.