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MATRIC NO: 19/SMS01/019

COURSE: GST 203

DEPARTMENT: ECONOMICS

Chapter 2

Nigeria’s history background constitutes the pre-colonial period and colonial period, the pre-colonial being before the advent of colonialists and colonial being the administration of colonial rule. Nigeria is a colonial creation arising as a result of the colonization of Africa by the Europeans, which prior to this was made up of the Borno Empire, the Hausa States, and the Sokoto Caliphate in the north, the Igbo segments in the east; the Benin kingdom and Oyo Empire in the west and several other entities in the Benue valley. These ethnic grouping are different in history, social and cultural make-ups. Archeological evidences from different parts of the country suggests that Nigeria has been inhabited since the Paleolithic period 500000-9000BC, even in the Stone Age. During that period, man were mostly hunters and gatherers. He soon began to invent various cutting tools as he evolved. Technology became more advanced in the Bronze Age, sculpting came into existence and with time became profound, discovered in sites at Ile-Ife, Igbo-Ukwu, Jebba, Benin and others.

These sites in turn became landmarks of ancient civilization through excavation. Nok terracotta was discovered in 1919 in Wamba, Katsina-Ala and Jema, are said to have existed between 5th and 2nd century BC through carbon dating. The Benin are known for their bronze art, one of which is the ivory mask of FESTAC ’77. The Ife boasted bronze and terracotta works, such as the Opa Oranmiyan; historians believe they learnt terracotta from the Nok and bronze from the Benin. Igbo-ukwu arificts were discovered in 1939 by Thurstan Shaw and are dated back to 9th century AD.

In the political sphere, the Oyo Empire of the Yoruba was led by the Alaafin. The empire had built-in checks and balances, so that the ruler’s powers were regulated and limited by The Oyomesi kingmakers; the Bashorun acting as prime minister. They had the power to install and remove any Alaafin if found using power arbitrarily. The Ogboni cult served as the judicial arm, mediating any conflict between the Oyomesi and the Alaafin. The imperial army was led by the Are Ona Kakanfo and charged with protecting the territorial integrity. The empire also had provincial governments led by the Baale or Ilari. Bere festival was held annually to renew fealty to the Alaafin. The Igbos had a segmented or acephalous culture due to their lack of kings. They are sub-divided into northern, western, southeastern, northeastern and eastern Igbos. Some igbos believe they migrated from Israel, based on cultural similarities. Prof. Onwuejeogwu believed the Nri version of Igbo origin to be authentic, with Eri descending from the sky, sailing down to Aguleri and settling with natives which migrated to different parts as population increased.

The Igbos practiced direct democracy and was administered through institutions like family, council of elders, age grades and secret societies. Family was the smallest political unit led by Ofo title holder. Amongst them, the senior, Okpara, held the Ozo title and led the council of elders. The age grades were organized on a village basis, for work, war or government, clearing paths and serve as police. The elders enforced decisions and punished offenders. Seniority was of great importance. The Oha na eze was a village assembly were decisions were made. The secret societies were made up of diviners and various oracles, acting as liaison between the living and the ancestors, performing rituals or sacrifices to honor them or ward of evils. The Igbos believe in reincarnation and abhorred profaning deities. Their lives were surrounded by mysticisms and superstitions.

The Hausas were made up of 14 states before the jihad of 1804, the first 7 called Hausa Bakwai and the other 7 called Hausa Banza. Oral tradition believes that Hausa originated from Bayajidda, an Arab prince who migrated to Daura, killed a monstrous snake oppressing the natives and married the queen. The seven sons raised by them became the first kings and kingdoms. Some believe Hausa originated from the Berber of Sahara or from East Africa. The Hausas were polytheists until Islam was introduced in the 11th century. Politically, the Sarki was the head of state. Sarkin Kasar was ruler of the land and chief judge of the state, aided by a council. After Islam was adopted, more offices like Sarkin Yau, Yari Sarki, Madawaki, Magaji and Dogari were created. The Alkali and Qadi were judicial posts. Islam was introduced to Hausaland in 14th century. The Uthman Dan Fodio jihad led to the conquest of Hausa kingdom and was replaced with centralized emirate government led by Emir, with their headquarters and Sokoto and Gwandu, owing fealty to Dan Fodio. The emirates where divided; the Sultan appointing emirs over the emirates, who were political, administrative and spiritual leaders. They administered according to the doctrines of Islam and Sharia. They were assisted by a council appointed by Uthman Dan Fodio, which included Sarkin fada, head of palace workers; Waziri, prime minister; Galadima; city administrator; Madawaki, head of army; Magaji, treasurer; Sarkin Dan Doka, inspector general; Sarkin Ruwa, master of water resources; Sarkin Pawa, head of butchers and Yari, chief prison superintendent. Hakimi were appointed to make local government efficient, who then appointed village heads to assist them in administration. The judicial administration of Hausa-Fulani was based on the Sharia Islamic legal system was headed by Alkali, the sharia court judge and the Grand Khadi, the chief justice of the sharia courts. They settle disputes in their jurisdictions. The most serious cases were taken to the Emir for judgement.

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 land in Nigeria through Bini kingdom. The Atlantic slave trade was the trade carried on across the Atlantic Ocean between the Europeans and Africans. It became more important in the 15th century with the arrival of the Portuguese. Demand for slaves could be traced to the introduction of plantation system of agriculture in places like Brazil, Jamaica and Haiti among others. The Trans-Atlntic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. The trade got to maturity in the 16th centuries. For almost 300 years, Nigeria’s relations with British were dominated by Trans-Atlantic slave trade, but was abolished by the British in 19th century, through the West African Naval Squadron.

After 300 years of shameful slave trade, came the so-called legitimate commerce. This was another golden opportunity for the Europeans to get more directly involved in the affairs of the African states. Europeans first introduced ‘gun-boat’ politics, which they used to formally annex Lagos in in 1861; the bulk of Nigeria getting fully occupied in the 19th century. This happened through treaties that were signed with some Nigerian community leaders, and through military conquest of states and deportation of rulers.

The struggle for power among the Europeans led to partitioning of Africa in the 19th century during the 1884-85 Berlin Conference. Before the year 1900, Nigeria was still under British administration. In 1906 the southern protectorate was merged with the Lagos colony, on a purely economic basis. The 2nd amalgamation took place in 1914, where the government amalgamated northern and southern Nigeria. Sir Fredrick Lugard (later Lord) became the Governor-General of Nigeria and governed through the indirect rule system, which is delegating governmental powers to the native authorities or local rulers.