



REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY IN NIGERIA; FROM FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE TO POLITICAL CLIENTELISM

YAGBOYAJU, D A.

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN.

and

OYEWO, Oyekunle OLUSEYE,

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION,
THE POLYTECHNIC IBADAN

TEL: +234 806 484 9096

E.MAIL: oyeoluseye@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study examined public bureaucracy in a polyglot Nigeria with the view to appraising the efficacy of the Federal Character Principle through a descriptive but analytical approach. It noted that the infusion of ethnic sentiment into the nation's public service does not support its expected roles as agent of socio-economic development in the country and that the federal character principle does not, in practice, address the challenges of representation in the country. Rather, it supports a clientele arrangement in which a patron sponsors individuals into public offices in attempt to preserve and perpetuate his political relevance. The study recommends a reform of federal character principle to enthrone a regime of merit and equity in the nation's public service.

Keywords: *Bureaucracy, Representative Bureaucracy, Clientelism.*

INTRODUCTION

The importance of a highly efficient bureaucracy in any civilization cannot be overemphasized. As a colonial legacy, public bureaucracy in Nigeria emanated from the western idea of complex bureaucratic organization like other former British colonies such as India, Pakistan, and Malaysia among others. Public bureaucracy was established in Nigeria to assist the political heads (colonial masters) in the determination and implementation of the will of the new state. In this regard, the Nigerian civil service had the primary objective of assisting in exploitation of the local resources and other commercial necessities. According to Yagboyaju (2010), the efficiency of bureaucracy and the entire public service is a major determinant of economic progress and security of any nation. It was perhaps for this reason that the effort to position public bureaucracy in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era. To this extent, a number of commissions such as Harragin Commission (1946), Foot Commission (1948), Gorsuch Commission (1954), Tudor Commission (1959) were set up to look into a number of issues, including remuneration, organization, recruitment, orientation e.t.c. for the purpose of higher efficiency (Maduabum, 2008).

The need to rejig public bureaucracy in post-colonial Nigeria through several reform effort was not only to follow colonial tradition but also to cope with the daunting responsibility of catching up with the advanced countries and improve socio-economic development in the country. As observed by Palmer (1989:19), the responsibility of the bureaucrats in the developing world is enormous and perhaps more demanding than



that of their counterparts in the developing world. The bureaucracies of the first world maintain, regulate and extend economic and social infrastructure that are well established. Things are in place and the role of first world bureaucracies is to keep it that way. The bureaucracies of the third world, by contrast must build the economic and social infrastructure of their respect societies from the scratch, very little is in place.

Meanwhile, the capacity of the public service in Nigeria, in spite of several reform efforts to perform these all-important functions has been stunted by a number of factors among which the challenges associated the country's unique cultural diversity is fundamental. Otite (1990) for example, identified a total of 347 ethnic groups in the country. This, according to Onwuejeogwu (1987) constitutes a unique problem for the country. In his words, Russia has about 27 ethnic groups; China and India have more than 40; France about 8; and Germany about 15; the only place in the world that has over 300 ethnic groups is Nigeria. He went further to state that no western or eastern civilization has ever evolved a political system that can cope with this gigantic of problem of hyper-ethnic instability syndrome. Nigeria's attempt to manage this challenge necessitates the adoption of representative bureaucracy; so that no section(s) of the country dominate(s) the national public service at the expense of others; hence the adoption of federal character principle in the recruitment of personnel into the nation's public service.

However, the operation of federal character principle leaves much to be desired in Nigeria. Aside from undermining a system of merit in recruitment process, it established political considerations as the paramount purpose for the formation and operation of public service in the country. The unification and balancing role of the principle notwithstanding, it has over the years, become a subject of manipulation by the political class to support clientele arrangement, being a major tool for preservation and perpetuation of power in developing countries, particularly Nigeria (Medard, 1992). Public bureaucracy in Nigeria therefore, remains formal in outlook but informal in operation which according to Riggs (1964) is one of the characteristic of transitional societies and perhaps, among the reasons for their underdevelopment. It is against this background that the paper discusses the influence of representative bureaucracy on public bureaucracy in Nigeria.

Definitional and Conceptual Issues

The need for conceptual clarification in this study is not an attempt to construct any universally acceptable definition but to situate our understanding within the context which the paper's key terms-public bureaucracy, clientelism and representative bureaucracy are used.

Public Bureaucracy

The term Bureaucracy has attracted a lot of opprobrious remarks and it is often used in a pejorative sense. Over the years, the concept has been used to describe and qualify all sorts of administrative problems. It has become a norm to see people relating



anything that have to do with bureaucracy as wicked, sluggish and frustrating. The concept can however, be traced to the eighteenth century French writer Vincent de Guorney (cited in Riggs 1964) who used the term to distinguish a new polity according to its ruling element- that is rule by public official. It is in contrast to other forms of government such as aristocracy, democracy e.t.c. However, the analysis of the concept of bureaucracy began with the work of Weber (1946) in his analysis of the concept of domination and authority. He observed the importance of bureaucratic administration in supporting legal authority. According to him, bureaucracy contains several elements which include: impersonality, hierarchy, sphere of competence, division of work and a systematic discipline and control. For Weber, bureaucratic organization should put in place a structure that will make the outcome of organizations predictable just like in the case of a machine. He maintained that bureaucracy is the most rational type of organization. Blau and Mayer (1987) see the concept as organization that maximizes efficiency in administration.

The concept of bureaucracy has been attacked on many grounds by a number of writers. The criticism of concept bureaucracy, include that it is rather too mechanistic, not attentive to human character, rigid, self-seeking, produces inertia, red tape, mediocrity and inefficiency. Consequently, intellectual modifications have being sought to the theory of bureaucracy. Riggs (1964) for example, argued that bureaucracy as espoused by Weber is dysfunctional and does not have global applicability. He maintained that there is fundamental difference in the ecology of administration in the transitional and developed societies. He maintained that bureaucracy in developing societies (transitional societies) is formal on the surface but very traditional in practice and as such could not be a catalyst for development as expected.

Public bureaucracy in the context of this paper represents the state or governmental machinery charged with the responsibilities of formulation and execution of policies and programmes in government establishments. The concept encompasses employees in both civil and public services of the country. This clarification becomes necessary in the view of the fact that public and civil service stand for different things in the Nigerian public space. For instance, Section 169 of the 1999 constitution defines the civil service as the service of the federation (state) in a civil capacity. Staff of the office of the president, the vice president, a ministry or department of the federation (state) assigned with the responsibility of any business of the government of the federation constitute the country's civil service. This contextualization makes the concept (civil service) narrower than the public service because of excluded judicial officers, board and officers of the statutory corporation or companies in which the government has and interest however large as well as the members of the armed forces and police.

The civil service, in this regards is considered as part of the executive arm of government. However, the boundary between the two concepts is blurred, the term public service is more encompassing when compared with civil service; every civil servant is a public servant but not every public servant is a civil servant. However both are considered as instrument of development because they are both central to the



efforts towards achieving the goals of every given state and it is for this reason that the two concepts are sometimes used interchangeably or generally regarded as a government bureaucracy. Ayeni (2007) sees the civil service as a body of permanent officials appointed to the political executive in formulating and implementing governmental policies and programmes. The civil service is an important instrument for the attainment of national development because it makes the government function effectively. Adebo (1979), highlighted the relevance of the public bureaucracy to the functioning of any government by describing it as the principal machinery for the achievement of the nation's political and economic goals. Its efficient and effective performance determines the health and stability of the system as well as the direction of the development programmes. The tasks assigned to them are of course governed by the nature and magnitude of the functions and responsibilities of the overall management of the society which government has taken upon itself. In the Nigerian context, the socio-economic, cultural, commercial and political as well as the regulatory functions of government has been on increase both in scope and cost. The increasing role assumed by the government in all aspect of our social life has meant the widening of the areas of responsibilities which rest on its principal executive organ.

The public bureaucracy, all over the world is expected to shoulder the task of social and economic development under the watch and leadership of political executives. According to Abubakar (1992), public bureaucracy in the performance of its day-to-day activities act as a control tower for the flow of information; (b) a prime source of proposal on a variety of issues moving up to the point of political determination; (c) overseer of the mobilization of resource and deployment of competence in the executive of public policy.

Representative Bureaucracy

According to Kristlov (1974), representative bureaucracy is a notion that broad social groups should have spokesman and officeholders in administrative as well as political positions. The idea of representation has been part of political discourse since the early period of democracy in the city states of Athens. However, the issue of representation in the public bureaucracy does not enjoy either the popularity or age of its use in democratic practices. As articulated by Kingsley in (1944), the theory of representative bureaucracy proposes that a demographically diverse public sector workforce will lead to a policy outcome that reflects the interest of all groups represented, including historically disadvantaged communities.

The concept is concerned with the demographic composition of public organizations in relation to a political state. Representative bureaucracy holds that the social composition of public organization is relevant to their performance and acceptability in the 'eye of the public'. It is in this light that Krislov (1974), wondered whether any bureaucracy can have legitimacy if it fails to represent all sectors of a society. Similarly, Van Riper (1958:552), defines representative bureaucracy as one in which there is minimal distinction between the bureaucrats as a group... and the community... To be representative, a bureaucracy must (i) consist of a reasonable cross-section of the body politic in terms of occupation, class, geography, and the like;



and (ii) must be in general tune with the ethos and attitudes of the society of which it is part. He also asserted that representative bureaucracy promotes upward mobility on the part of the minorities and symbolizes the open competition of democracy.

A major criticism of representative bureaucracy is that it does not align with Weberian idea of bureaucracy in which merit and competent examination are the basis of recruitment and promotion. Similarly, the idea of making public bureaucracy representative of the population also indicate that political considerations are paramount in the establishment of the public service than the social and economic development of a polity.

The idea has however become acceptable public policy in the area of recruitment and promotion in public offices in many polyglot states. For example, in Canada it is known as employment equity, reservation in India and Nepal and positive discrimination in the United Kingdom (UK). The introduction and adoption of the principle of representation in public institutions is often discussed under the umbrella of the term affirmative action in the United States. Its main objectives are to bridge inequality in employment, equitable access to education, foster national integration and ultimately, to see that public institutions are representative of the population they serve. Support for representative democracy is also discernible from another angle. For example, it is assumed that the composition of bureaucracy is in itself, capable of serving as a check on a malevolent bureaucracy especially when the traditional controls of administrative actions such as budgeting, oversight law, etc become insufficient.

Clientelism

This represents an asymmetrical relationship between two individuals- patron and client in which case, the patron, individual with access, rely on the subordination and dependence of the client who in return for receiving some benefits provide political support. Political clientelism is the exchange of goods and services for political support. According to Graham (1997), clientelism is a set of actions based on the principle take there, give here, with the practice allowing both clients and patrons to gain advantage from the other's support. It therefore represents exchange systems where voters trade political support for various outputs of the public decision-making process.

The origin of clientelism, according to Wikipedia (2017), can be traced to ancient Rome when relationships between the patron (patronus) and clients (cliens) were seen as crucial to understanding the political process. However, the concept has grown both in scope and popularity beyond the Roman example. For instance, patronage and vote buying are now being used and discussed as its subcategory and it has come to represent one of the useful tools for explaining political behaviour, especially in the developing countries. "Clientelism assist to understand the Mechanism of (how) class control legitimizes the lopsided distribution of resources among social groups and enhances the status of the political elite" (Seteolu 2005:36). Clientelism, for the purpose of this paper is therefore seen as the distribution of benefits by political actors to individuals or groups in exchange for electoral support in which the former seeks to acquire or perpetuate his political relevance in pursuit of personal gains. It is



perhaps on this basis that Luis (2004), sees it as a vestige of political underdevelopment and one of the manifestations of corruption that may be put to check by political modernization.

Public Service and Representative Bureaucracy in Nigeria

The Nigerian public service, is no doubt a colonial heritage and was therefore patterned after the British model. The service was designed by the British to enforce law and order to secure colonial interest at all costs in the country (Offiong, 1995). The earliest stage of modern Nigerian civil service could be traced to 1849 when the British sought to sanitize the Bights of Benin and Biafra which were notorious ports for slave trade (Afigbo and Uya, 2000). It was on the basis of this that J. Beecroft was appointed the consul for Bright of Benin and Biafra with headquarter in Fernando Po. Although the responsibilities of the consul during the time was basically commercial oriented, his era represents the cradle of bureaucracy in Nigeria. Other highlights of evolution of Nigerian public service as detailed by Maduabum (2008) include;

1. From 1866 – 1874, the central administration for Lagos, Gold Coast the Gambia and Sierra Leone was transferred to Free Town, Sierra Leone
2. From 1874 – 1886, Lagos colony was administered from Gold Coast
3. In 1886, Molony was appointed governor of Lagos
4. In 1889, the Nigerian coast protectorate was merged with the territories of the Royal Niger companies
5. On January 1, 1900, the protectorates of southern Nigeria were created
6. In 1906, Lagos colony was merged with southern Nigerian
7. In 1914, Lagos colony and the southern protectorate were merged with northern protectorate to form an amalgamated territory called 'Nigeria'. Efforts to establish modern civil service continued as different government introduced measures to improve on bureaucratic capacity of the new state.

Meanwhile, the administrative decentralization which started under the leadership of Bernard Bourdillion in 1939 saw the regional governments developing their public bureaucracies along regional lines. However, bureaucracies at the regional level in the country at this stage were only regional in structure but not in terms of the personnel mainly because the interest was in the quality and efficiency of the workforce. For example, the northern region had a good number of expatriates and bureaucrats of southern extraction. This was apparently due to the relative literacy level in the region at that point in time.

However, the first servo to make public bureaucracy in have regional and ethnic identity was fired by the Northern Region in 1952 when it communicated to the central Government a conclusion of its Executive Council in regard to the policy of Nigerianisation of Senior Service posts in regionalized Departments. It recommended to the Nigerian Government that, pending the report of the investigation then proposed into



the progress of Nigerianisation, (a) no appointments of non-expatriates officers other than of northern origin, should be made without prior consultation with the Lieutenant-Governor and (b) if there is a suitable Northerner with the necessary qualifications available, he should be appointed to a post in preference to other claimants.

Challenges of equitable representation which is one of the most confounding problems of the polyglot states, including Nigeria, started to gain momentum immediately after independence. Although, the adoption of quota system which was a forerunner to federal character principle in Nigeria was used in many areas of the nation's life including admission into institutions of learning. However, the real attempt to make Nigerian public service have a representative outlook and correct the obvious imbalance of representation between the north and south came through the federal character principle in under the 1979 constitution. It is equally important to note that issue of representation in public offices does not end at the federal level in Nigeria. State governments in Nigeria also discriminate in matters of recruitment. For example, Oyo State Government, according to the white paper on report of visitation panel of the polytechnic Ibadan in 1999, accepted the proposal that the numerical strength of non-indigenes at The Polytechnic should be reduced through a deliberate and gradual process of recruitment of indigenes.

The morbid fear of domination among the ethnic groups, particularly, regarding representation public service gained policy attention in 1979. The 1979 constitution provides for the establishment of Federal Character Commission and since then, it has survived every other constitutional frameworks for example, 1989 and 1997 constitutions. According to Ojo (2009), Federal character principle is an integrative mechanism which aims at ensuring fair and effective representation of the various component of the Federation in the country's positions, power, status and influence. Specifically, the objective of the Federal character principle according to section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution as amended is that:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty. Thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the government or any of its agencies.

Operation of the federal character principle leaves much to be desired. In the words of Abati (2016), there has been so much concern about how the federal character principle has since its introduction in 1979, promoted mediocrity within the public service, and retarded national growth and progress. Similarly, Ekeh (1989:34), contends that the "principle's most radical and damaging application has been in the bureaucracies and public service of the federation... permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed". He further argued that the application of the federal



character principle “has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of politics”. In short, Ekeh (ibid.) describes it as the solution that has deepened problem it was devised to tackle. Arguing along the same line, Forrest (1993:76), opines that the implementation of the principle of federal character in public office has “not only led to poor appointments but also enhance mediocrity rather than merit”.

Meanwhile, the arguments in support of representation in bureaucratic organizations centre on the fact that Nigeria cannot be run as a clan even on the basis of merit. According to Olaopa (2012:5), the federal character principle remains one of the “effective nation-building strategies invented for managing the combustive diversity in Nigeria”. Similarly, Ojo (2009), sees it as one of the instruments for managing Nigeria’s federal system. Arguing along the same line Gberevbie (2012), argued that the fact that someone is recruited into the service of the federation does not necessarily mean that such a person cannot contribute to the development of such nation.

Federal Character Principle and Political Clientelism in Nigeria

Thinkers such as Machiavelli, Pareto, Michels, and Marx etc. have devoted their political analysis to how power is acquired, used, misused and maintained by various types of elites. In the context of this paper however, the perversion of the spirit and principle of federal character in recruitment into public service through the establishment and maintenance of patron-client exchange pattern between elites of various shades and the teeming unemployed Nigerian graduates is viewed as a clientele arrangement.

The phenomenal growth of public bureaucracy in Nigeria over the years, has endeared it to a lot of interests, for example, religious, ethnic, social, political and so on. For instance, the Orosanye led Presidential Committee on Rationalization and Restructuring of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies in 2012, put the total number of government agencies and departments at 541. This figure exclude the ministries, National Assembly Staff, judicial workers etc. In the words of Abubakar (1998) through the control of state power at the centre, the ruling class has not only enhanced their leverage through patron-client alliances that cut across ethnic and regional and religious cleavages, but also appropriated federal character principle to ensure its hegemony at all levels. However, two major factors can be attributed to the reason why recruitment into public offices has become object of transaction in the country’s political landscape. The first, is the belief that public offices are important avenues to seek a fair share of national cake; more so, when such cake is only to be shared and never baked (Ogundiya, 2009). The second reason is the sudden rise in the population of graduates in the country without corresponding job opportunities due to low absorptive capacity of the economy, particularly due to a very low level of private investment (Ajayi and Adeniji, 2009).

The pattern of patron-client exchange system between political elites and job seekers is such that latter express political support through voting and sometimes functioning as party militia and private guards during and after elections in return for employment in public service. Political elites, who according to Ayoade (2010), sometimes appear more powerful than the state, through the control of state power and



information in Nigeria have proven to be viable source of employment than competitive examination. Rather than recruiting from various segments of the country in line with public service rules and regulations, employment slots are distributed using federal character principle among the political elites who in turn reward the 'loyal' followers with the same. Competition for jobs in public service has therefore been reduced to political competition at the expense of a system of merit.

Concluding Remarks

Challenges of equitable representation remains one of the most confounding problems of the polyglot states across the world. Equitable and fair representation in public offices, both elected and otherwise is therefore, a natural demand on multi-ethnic states, including Nigeria. This becomes more important, considering the fact that bureaucratic domination is capable of reinforcing hegemonistic influence of one group over the other. More so, as observed by Yagboyaju (2014), manipulation and politicization of ethnicity by many of the prominent political and bureaucratic elites has become a dominant feature of public bureaucracy in Nigeria. It is on the basis of these that supports for all forms of affirmative actions have become local and international affair. For example, in 1989, the international convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial discrimination stipulated (in Article 2.2) that affirmative action programs, may be required of countries that ratified the convention, in order to rectify systematic discrimination, which for example was the case between the north and south in terms of their representation in Nigerian public service from the colonial past.

The Federal Character Commission by virtue of its statutory responsibility strives to maintain equitable distribution of human resources in government establishments in Nigeria. However, the principle has been used to relegate the system of merit which is generally accepted as the important foundation of every public service. In the words of Thomas Taylor Meadow for example, the long duration of the Chinese empire is solely and altogether owing to the good government which consists in the advancement of men of talent and merit in the public service system. Regrettably, the political class and senior bureaucrats in Nigeria see the 'ethnic balancing arrangement' as a method of sharing employment opportunities in the country's public service rather a basis for the recruitment of competent hands into the public service.

Therefore, it is evident that Nigeria started her journey into nationhood and socio-economic development with a multiple 'flat tyres' resulting from the unhealthy competition among the various ethnic and linguistic groups in the country and the consequent perversion of the principle of federal character which was designed to mitigate ethnic tension in the country. Consequently, in view of the travesties that have graced the application of the federal character principle, the paper calls for a total reform of the Federal Character Commission. Specifically, the Commission should be turned into a national job centre which can generate a pool of competent and qualified job seekers on quota basis through competent examination from every part of the country. This will enable the nation to recruit the best brains from every part of the federation without necessarily compromising merit.

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