

## THE COLLAPSE OF PROBITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE BUREAUCRACY DISCHARGED BUT NOT ACQUITTED

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**ABSTRACT:** *It is fifty-four years since the British colonial overlords departed Nigerian geo-political space living the stage for indigenous rulers. Fifty four years of independence provides opportunity for discourse, on good governance as Nigeria features prominently in the crises in Africa. Literature is awash with prognoses on the probable causes of this parlous state. There is a growing consensus that lack of probity and accountability are responsible for the appalling governance situation in Africa. Scholars in Nigeria taking a cue from polemics on politics and administration dichotomy and its dialectics in the western hemisphere have been arguing about the helplessness of public administration in Nigeria's crisis of governance. Tracing the history of Nigeria's political leadership and its bureaucracy, the paper provides a descriptive analysis of the crisis in Nigeria within the context of the nature of political leadership (colonial, post-colonial, military and civilian) and argues that neither Nigerian political leadership nor the bureaucracy are blameless using the theoretical stand-points of structural/functionalism and elitism especially in view of the influential role the bureaucracy had opportunity to play during the inexperienced three decades of military rule out of Nigeria's five decades of independence. Recommendations include: a coherent and comprehensive bureaucratic reform that will wean the Nigerian public service from western-inspired top-down development paradigm to bottom-up approach; that there should be social re-orientation designed to eschew primordial values that promote nepotism and mediocrity; that merit should not be sacrificed on the altar of "sense of self-belonging" in Nigerian federation; and that Max Weber bureaucratic model should be adapted to grass-roots participatory governance.*

**KEYWORDS:** Governance, Probity, Political Leadership, Bureaucracy.

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### INTRODUCTION

The African post-colonial predicament has generated so many epithets that describe the continent. Apart from the notorious "Dark Continent" prevalent in the colonial discourse on Africa, a most recent one in journalistic assessment abridged the African continent into an "Island of Want"... The failure of the African governments and of the post-colonial states in Africa is starkly manifested in the decline and decay of bureaucracy, which represents the existential institutional interstice between the government and the citizens (Utomi; cited in Olaopa 2010).

Nigeria is already fifty-one years old. When the bugle of independence sounded in 1960, the burst of speed it took in league with its contemporaries like Malaysia and Indonesia gave high hope of breasting the tape of developed nations at least in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it is sad today that when the crisis of governance in sub-Saharan African (SSA) is being discussed,

Nigeria features prominently. Literature abounds ranging from prognoses to recommendations with scholars taking their points of departure from sub-themes of this crisis of governance. A scholar in his attempt to “wash off the hands” of the bureaucracy like *Pontius Pilate* from the crisis of governance that has bedeviled Nigeria since independence, chose to pass the buck to the political superstructure.

This was done in a well written review of Nigeria’s political development where leadership failure was analysed, first in historical context and then zeroing down to contemporary challenges. However, apart from incidental and marginal reference to the history of Nigeria’s bureaucracy that he has so whimsically “discharged from the dock”, no major attempt was made to “diagnose” Nigeria’s political leadership in league with the Bureaucracy. To quote him *abinitio*:

Nigeria’s history has been marked by a crisis of governance. The consensus arising out of the general debates on good governance and its requirements have severely scored the bureaucracy for its failure to provide the much needed institutional support for good governance. It is the abiding concern of this paper to discharge the bureaucracy from the “dock” where it sadly stands, to establish that the political superstructure is largely to blame for the leadership failure, and to argue that due to obvious constraints, the public service failed to optimize its statutory role of translating the will of the state into concrete and desirable terms (Ozohu-Suleiman; 2010).

The posers to this opinion are these; was Nigeria bureaucracy clean like whistle from colonial time until it was defiled by the political leadership of post-colonial era?, and how relevant, purposeful, dynamic and pro-active was the bureaucracy to the socio-economic milieu of Nigeria from colonial time until it met its waterloo in the hands of indigenous rulers? It is these obvious gaps this paper intends to fill.

### **Statement of the Problem**

When a French philosopher; Baron Montesquieu in his book, *The Spirit of Law* (1949) espoused the principle of separation of powers in government to attain the ultimate purpose of governance, he never envisaged the kind of polemics that now characterize the intellectual boundaries in the executive arm of government – that is, politics and administrations. The first shot was fired by Wilson (1887), ably supported by Goodnow (1900) who said:

There are then, in all government systems, two primary or ultimate functions of government, viz the expression of the will of state and the execution of that will. There are also in all state separate organs each of which is mainly busied with the discharge of one of these functions. These functions are respectively politics and administration (cited in Ademolekun, 1998: 13-14).

On the other side of the intellectual divide is Appleby (1949) who charged that:

Public administration is policy making-public administration is one of a number of basic political processes by which people achieve and control governance (cited in Ademolekun, 1998: 14).

If these two opposing scholarly opinions are meant to enrich the disciplines of politics and administration respectively via this academic exercise in the developed world, not so in the

third world where prognoses on the crises of governance have assumed the dimension of buck-passing. As if a sheriff at a crime scene asked this question; “who did it?” scholars in the two disciplines of politics and administration are at pain to exonerate their own disciplines from the ills of mis-governance. In the words of Lynn and Wildavsky (1992:5):

If public administration could hop on the bandwagon of democracy with enthusiasm, there was less gusto in their ranks about boarding the battered bus of public policy.

Can the bureaucracy deny its fraternity with the political class in the failed governance project of Nigeria?, to what extent does available historical facts help to apportion blame between the two institutional structures of governance?, can a critical aspect of leadership elite group like the bureaucracy be discharged and acquitted for the crime of leadership failure in Nigeria? This paper seeks therefore, to examine how the nature of political and bureaucratic leadership that characterized the colonial and post-colonial periods of Nigeria has wittingly and unwittingly contributed to the crisis of governance in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the discourse about the political superstructure and the bureaucracy in governance, Gabriel Almond’s structural/functional theory in political system and the elite theory by Pareto, Mosca (1939), Michels (1969), Mills (1959) and Laswell (1950) combined to provide an irresistible framework of analysis. A system according to Almond is characterized by; Comprehensiveness, Interdependence and Existence of boundaries.

A system is *comprehensive* in the sense that it includes all the interaction, input as well as outputs which affect all the structures. *Interdependence* means that the various subsets of the system are so closely connected with each other that a change in one sub-set produces a change in other sub-sets. Almond defines *boundary* as “points where other systems end and the political system begins (Varma, 2006: 212).

The input functions are performed by non-governmental sub-systems, the society and the general environment, while the output functions are governmental functions. Almond has used a “*seven variable*” list of functional categories. Four of these are input functions; Political socialization and recruitment, Interest-articulation, Interest aggregation and Political communication and the remaining three; Rule-making, Rule application and Rule-adjudication are output functions.

The input functions are performed by non-government sub-system while the output functions are governmental functions (Varma, 2006: 213).

To Almond, all the sub-systems in input and output loop must function in harmony to ensure political stability (equilibrium). If there is any problem, effort should be made to trace which of the sub-systems is performing dysfunctional instead of functional role in the political system. Elite theory is a reinterpretation of the liberal theory of democracy in a strictly empirical direction. The elite theorists like Pareto, Mosca, Michels, Mills and Laswell lay stress on the point that, what is known as the rule of people, in a practical sense, is the rule of elites. It follows that classical affirmations highlighting fact of “power with the people” have a normative and/or idealistic connotation. In terms of practice, it is the body of the very few that takes all important decisions and plays its part in the political process of the country. The people may think that they may participate in the political process, but in reality, so the

argument runs, their influence is largely confined to election. At the centre of power, there is social elite which wields considerable influence (Johari, 2007: 511).

Against the backdrop of the foregoing theoretical premises, the crisis of governance in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular can be traced to the dysfunctional roles of the ruling elites represented by the executive arm of the government. In view of Nigeria's political history, there is no way we can absolve the bureaucracy from leadership failure given the fact that in three out of five decades of Nigeria's independence, military governments entrusted the bureaucracy with the technical role of governance. However, it failed to bring the required change. It follows that the disequilibrium (political instability and policy inconsistency) can be attributed to the dysfunctional role of the executive arm of government as represented by the political and bureaucratic leadership that constitutes the ruling elites in Nigerian political system.

### **Political Administration of Nigeria: An Overview**

To fully comprehend the history of Nigeria's administration at the national and grass root levels as well as the political leadership, from the colonial time to the present, it is helpful to review the enormous and diverse literature generated by scholars and statesmen who have put their thoughts on paper on this complex subject (Sani, 2003; Falola, Mahdi, Womoibhi, Anyanwu, 1989).

The Nigerian civil service evolved from the colonial service, established by the British authorities as the administrative arm of government in Nigeria. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard led to the establishment of what seemed a unified civil service for the first time (BPSR, 2007: 37). In the North, the system of Indirect Rule was operated par excellence in sharp contrast to what obtained in the Southern part of the country in view of the various constraints like vastness of the North, underdeveloped and limited communication network, limited manpower and financial resources and the existence of traditional political system (Sani, 2003: 29) while in the South, direct administration was practiced because of difference in size, scattered population, good road networks and the activities of the missionaries (Sani, 2003: 32). Lord Lugard in stating the purpose and style of his administration in Nigeria minced no word in stating as follows:

Let it be admitted at the outset that European brains, capital and energy have not been... expended in developing the resources of Africa from motive of pure philanthropy, that Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her own industrial classes and of the native races in their progress to a higher plane, that the benefit can be made reciprocal and that it is the aim and desire of civil administration to fulfill this dual mandate (Lugard cited in Ademolekun, 1998: 33).

Three regional civil services evolved in 1954 with the creation of three regions – North, East and West. A public service commission was also established at the centre and in each of three regions within the same period. The federal and regional services thereafter nurtured a career civil service within their respective domains. At independence in 1960, the role of civil service shifted from the colonial mould of maintaining law and order to that of facilitating the realization of the nation's development aspirations (BPSR, 2007: 37).

Shortly after the coup d'état that overthrew the civilian government in January 1966, executive and legislative powers were vested in military leaders. They were assisted in their duties by higher civil servants who served as members of the politico-military executives of the federal regional governments. In these circumstances, the directorates associated with western democracies according to which elected temporal political leaders exercise executive and legislative powers with career officials associated with the executive in varying degrees of subordination are most certainly inapplicable. The duration of the power derived from the barrel of the gun was indeterminate and lacking experience in civil governance. Thus, the military leaders invited the leaders of the career civil service to join them in running the government (Ademolekun, 1998: 100).

When the magazine "Nigerian Opinion" asserted in 1972 that Nigeria was being governed by a military-bureaucratic complex, it was referring to the leadership structure at the federal level which resembled more of the diarchy of January 1966 to May 1967 than the national emergency government of June 1967 to 1970. This means that, but for the special circumstances of the civil war, the system of governance in Nigeria would have maintained a consistent character between 1966 and 1973. However, the return to the pre-June 1967 arrangement was not total. The most significant difference between the two periods was the fact that civilian politicians remained in the federal executive council as commissioners (Ademolekun, 1998: 109-110). Without gainsaying the fact, the bureaucracy of the military government from 1975 to 1979 maintained the same character of military-bureaucratic complex. The civilian government of 1979 to 1982 assumed a holistic character of democratic bureaucracy until the succession of military rules that finally terminated with the transition to civilian government of 29 May, 1999 till date.

### **Good Governance: Between Political Superstructure and Bureaucracy in Nigeria**

From the liberal paradigm, the concept of good governance is believed to be encompassing of and organically interlinked with the object of liberal democracy. They are seen as mutually reinforcing elements in which the latter is a precondition for the realization of the former. And in which, the former cannot be adequate or realizable without the latter. Both share core features and values, political representativeness, entronement of civil and political rights, public accountability, and rule of law and the notion of formal equality. Indeed, the key properties of the governance realm are believed to emphasize and reinforce the same norms and practices. These are authority, reciprocity, exchange, trust and accountability (Hyden, cited in Odion-Akhaine, 2004: 15). These ingredients are the pre-conditions for the entronement of good governance in any polity. Without these, the indicators for human development will be abysmally low. It is against this background that:

The governance context of public administration in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has attracted considerable attention since the late 1960s. According to many observers, the problem of persistent underdevelopment in SSA is due in large to the poor governance environment. A 1989 World Bank study of SSA stated; "Underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance" (Ademolekun, 2002: 3).

The bureaucratic elite are not an exception to this orientation. Thus, the Weberian bureaucratic mission and goal of serving as a rational mechanism for the efficient execution of developmental policies are distorted, displaced and subverted by elitism, the advancement

of the bureaucratic class interest who preserved themselves as a special privileged group (Olaopa, 2010: 73).

Nicholson, 1966 (cited in Duru, Ikejiani-Clark and Mbot, 2001: 13) observed that, the earliest period of colonial rule in Nigeria was one of “minimum government”. Even if the colonial authorities had wished to embark on developmental activities; the meager financial resources would have depressed their ambition. According to him, the earliest colonial administration in Nigeria was an administration on a “shoe string”. The colonialists on living Nigerian political environment left neo-colonial bureaucratic structures, and instead of total overhaul and value re-orientation, the indigenous elites entrenched the structures further. Hence, steeped in western values, orientation and lifestyle as the bureaucratic elite are, there has developed a value gap between them and the poor masses that are mostly uneducated and schooled in traditional values and norms (Olaopa, 2010: 81).

Out of five decades of Nigeria’s independence, the military governments in Nigeria chalked-up three living the remaining two to civilian rule. Since the military is not equipped within the art of policy making, especially for the purposes of economic and political development, it is forced to rely more on the bureaucratic top echelon, thereby accentuating the military leadership’s dependence on an unelected and unaccountable bureaucracy which further enhances the latter’s power. Such unfettered power renders the bureaucracy prone to the abuse of power (Olaopa, 2010: 75).

Over the last 60 years, administrative reforms have been carried out by successive governments to transform the public service into an instrument of modernization. From 1945 to date, there have been 12 of such reviews, with varying focuses and complexities of coverage in terms of their attempts at installing more appropriate structures and condition of service and the need to improve the efficiency of service delivery (BPSR, 2007: 38).

Various attempts on the part of Nigeria’s government to bring development to the grass-roots were meant to achieve different objectives. Local government reform was the idea of the British colonial masters in Nigeria who used it as a veritable instrument of stronghold on the activities of the citizenry particularly those at the periphery of the society (Duru, Ikejiani-Clark and Mbot, 2001: 98). However, in 1976, the Federal Military Government in order to strengthen local government as agents of grass-root development established the Dasuki panel to look into possible reform of the system. Ten years later in 1986, the Federal Military Government appointed yet another Committee on local governments. This time, the scope of its mandate was limited to the application of civil service reforms in the local governments. Broadly stated, the Federal Military Government noted the committee’s observation, then, it issued the 1988 implementation guideline on the application of civil service reforms in the local government. Based on the 1988 reform, the chairman of the local government was now given the position of chief executive and accounting officer just like his counterparts in the state and federal level (Duru, Ikejiani-Clark and Mbot, 2001: 98-99). What this means is that, presidential system of government with clear-cut separation of powers has been brought to the grassroots for effective service delivery and good governance.

### **The Bureaucracy: How Far and How Fair In Good Governance?**

Apart from the ills of bureaucratic elite in Nigeria already highlighted, civil service reforms in terms of service delivery have not been successful because the bureaucracy in Nigeria failed to achieve intellectual jail-break from the lethargy of Weberian model which is

symptomatic of failed top-down development paradigm which has generally refused to work in the African continent. Development efforts are only geared towards urban areas and allowed to trickle-down to the preponderance population of rural dwellers. The rigid Weberian bureaucratic model used by the imperialists to create social infrastructures like railways, seaports, harbours, airports, road and communication networks to aid onward transfer of cash-crops to overseas are still being perpetuated by the indigenous rulers for self-aggrandizement. Thus, accounting for the failure of Nigerian political leadership and the bureaucracy to give the required good governance to the citizenry, Olowu, Otobo and Okotmi (1997: 7) quoted in Ozohu-Suleiman (2010) argues that:

The restiveness of the military in constantly taking power from fumbling politicians and then renege in their promise to relinquish power and the subsequent politicization and corruption of the military elites, a public service that has overtime lost its inherited commitment to political neutrality, professionalism and developmental ethos are the major factors responsible for leadership failure in Nigeria.

Coming to the issues of political neutrality and professionalism observed by the scholar, the nature of pre-colonial bureaucracy created for the convenience of the imperialists and the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria make these two cardinal objectives difficult to realize in post-colonial bureaucracy. As rightly observed by Olaopa (2010):

The orientation of Africa's independence leadership was shaped by a combination of indigenous and colonial cultures with the latter exerting a particularly powerful influence on its psyche. Thus, the emergent governing formula typically blended traditional modes of authority and institutional forms inherited from the colonial regime (Olaopa, 2010: 72).

Corroborating the foregoing views is another prognosis by a scholar which gives insight to the negative impact of federalism on Nigerian bureaucracy. He noted thus:

Public bureaucracy in Nigeria has been democratized through the principle of representation as contained in Chapter II, Section 14, Subsection 3 and 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979. This democratization which involves the subordination of the concept of representation (politics) violates the Weberian ideal type in all its essentials and thus, throws public bureaucracy in Nigeria into crisis of legitimacy (Landau, 1973 cited in Chukwu, 1990: 1).

Equally tempting to ask is the question of ideology in bureaucracy. On which ideological score board do we place Nigerian bureaucracy? Is it socialism, capitalism or mixed-bag of borrowed models from other climes? It is this lack of ideological focus that has placed serious limitation on the coherence of policy measures and implementation by the successive governments in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

The history of Nigeria's political and the bureaucratic leadership is chequered but the problem can be contextualized within the inherited colonial structures of Public Administration where Max Weber's principles of bureaucracy for service delivery were distorted by the colonial overlords to serve their imperial interest.

The Neo-colonial inherited structures of Public Administration were turned by the comprador elites as instrument of rent-seeking, clientelism, nepotism and corruption. These iniquities transcend the nature of leadership whether colonial, post-colonial, military or civilian. For example, military regimes are usurpers of power who normally leave the technical aspects of Public Administration to the bureaucrats. The abuse of this privilege especially during the period of military governments by bureaucratic elites contributed to the leadership failure of these administrations.

In view of this symbiotic relationship and the unholy alliance between military and civilian class, political leadership and the bureaucrats, it will be wrong to place the bulk of leadership failure at the door-step of the political superstructure. Moreover, power is so diffused in democratic leadership that the executive arm of government is just an arrow-head in the twin combination of law making and implementation through the bureaucratic arm of the executive.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Agreed that many reforms have been carried out by successive Nigerian governments right from independence to bring development closer to the people, but they lack the required coherence and comprehensiveness. The western-inspired top-down development strategy still subsists in the reforms. Therefore, a bottom-up approach/strategy is recommended.
2. The traditional norms and values still subsist in every facets of Nigerian life thereby promoting nepotism, mediocrity in the executive arm of the government. There should be social reorientation on the part of the ruler and the ruled to de-emphasize sub-national sentiments in our national life.
3. Nigeria is a federation and therefore, merit should not be sacrificed on the altar of "self-belonging". Because if people without qualifications are entrusted with responsibilities that borders on human welfare, it can be counter-productive. Areas of strength in professional skills in the constituent units of the federation should be used for serious appointment instead of the prevalent federal character formula in Nigerian federation.
4. Max Weber's bureaucratic models may work perfectly in the Northern hemisphere than the South. Therefore, it should be made flexible enough to take care of our peculiar idiosyncrasies as a third world nations where traditional values still predominate. In other words, participatory governance from the grass-roots should be promoted.
5. Corruption is another endemic cancer in our national life. Appointment should not be seen as opportunity to access wealth, rather it should be seen as public trust and a call to service of our father land.

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