

TOPICAL ISSUES IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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S. 'Banji Fajonyomi (Ph.D)**

CHAPTER I

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUREAUCRACY IN NIGERIA.

DR. S. BANJI FAJONYOMI

*Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos.
He is the Co-ordinator of the Master in Public Administration (MPA) Programme.*

African administrative system is continually studied in comparison to the Weberian universal bureaucratic model forced on these countries at independence. The assumption then was that bureaucracy is closely linked to modernisation and that if the newly independent states were to attain the same level of development as their colonial masters, they had no option than to imbibe the Western bureaucratic culture. This was done without taking into consideration the social, economic and political environment of these countries. It was then believed that administration was a universal concept that was above any geographical delimitation. This has been proved wrong with the various shortcomings in the administrative machinery of African states. It is this that lends credence to new approaches to understanding African bureaucracies.

This chapter attempts to explain the impact of the cultural and political environments on the evolution of bureaucracy in Nigeria. This will be done, firstly, by looking into the role of the environment on administration in general; secondly, by enumerating the principles of the ideal bureaucratic model; thirdly, by looking at some features of the cultural and political environment; and lastly, by finding out the influence of these aspects on Nigerian bureaucracy.

1. ON ADMINISTRATION AND ENVIRONMENT

An administrative system can not be separated from its environment - social, cultural and political. This has been the contention of many analysts of administration in developing countries. Riggs¹ has shown in his *Ecology of Public Administration* that administrative system can only be identified in its relation with its environment. This is also the view of La Palombara². Though these authors emphasized that bureaucratic organisation is necessarily a reflection of the larger society, they have been criticized for underestimating the impact of the civil society because, according to Darbon³, the western administrative model is perceived as an end in itself. Subsequent studies have come to recognize the role of societies in transforming administrative systems, thereby acknowledging the

importance of the environment. In one of such studies, Crozier⁴ argues that environment, especially culture, strongly influences the nature of human relationships within organizations, whether between individuals, between a supervisor and a subordinate, or among groups. In the same vein, Lockett⁵ analyzed how culture has contributed to the problems of Chinese management. According to him, "national and organizational cultures are often seen as important factors in determining the shape of organizations as well as their performance and problems". Berger in another study observed that officials in the Near East are not accustomed to dealing with other individuals in an impersonal manner since prevailing cultural norms stress the primacy of particularistic relationships⁶. This attitude is apparently against the bureaucratic norm. For Bugnicourt⁷, African bureaucracy is nothing other than an imitation, what he termed '*mimetisme administratif*'. This is because the same administrative machine that was invented for the governance of advanced countries are introduced and used in a society and in an economy whose development is different from that of the country where this model, which has no relation with the history, sociology, habits and aspirations of the African countries concerned, originated from. As such, an administration conceived for the management of an industrialised economy should not be expected to work in the development of large underdeveloped zones. The neglect of environmental factors during the decolonisation years led to what Okoli⁸ called 'premature bureaucratization.' According to him, the process of bureaucratization in the then new states of Africa was done 'by not paying heed to the socio-cultural, politico-economic conditions, and the time constraints of colonial societies.'

This has made Ould Dadda⁹ to attribute administrative problems in Africa to colonisation. According to her, colonisation 'has caused the state of confusion which characterizes administrative system and things could only be put back in order if the socio-cultural values of these countries are taking into consideration.'

Since it has been established that African countries do not have the requirements that necessitate the introduction of the bureaucratic model, what has been the impact of the introduction not only on the administrators, but also on the governed? Darbon¹⁰ believes that when administration comes in contact with the societies it governs, it adjusts itself after several attacks from these societies.

This makes it more social and progressive. In a nutshell, administration will no longer produce the same effect like when in its original model. It would have undergone various transformations both from within and from outside. Instead of following strictly the

laid down administrative norms, new ideas like compromise, negotiation and settlement are integrated into the system to suit local purposes. Several studies have shown how different societies respond to innovation. This response depends on a number of factors like the actual political system the country operates, the traditional system of government before colonisation, their style of living and the perceptions of the individual based on his personal resources.

II. Max Weber's Bureaucratic Model

The basic elements of Weber's model include the following:

1. Division of labour and functional specialization-the work divided according to type and purpose, with clear areas of jurisdiction marked out for each working unit and an emphasis on eliminating overlapping and duplication of functions;
2. Hierarchy-a clear vertical 'chain of command' in which each unit is subordinate to the one above it and superior to the one below it;
3. Formal framework of rules and procedures- designed to ensure stability, predictability, and impersonality in bureaucratic operations, and thus equal treatment for all who deal with the organization, as well as reliability of performance;
4. Maintenance of files and other records-to ensure that actions taken are both appropriate to the situation and consistent with past actions in similar circumstances;
5. Professionalization-employees who are (a) appointment (not elected) on the basis of their job-related skills, (b) full-time and career oriented, and (c) paid a regular salary and provided with a retirement pension.¹¹

III. FEATURES OF CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

A contrast of this model to what operates in Nigeria illuminates how far there has been, to borrow Darbon's term, 'cannibalsation' of the model. We are not saying that other bureaucracies of the world perform exactly like the original model. What we are trying to point out is how wide the discrepancy between the model and what operates in Nigeria is. Though this bureaucracy in name and structure resembles the model, a number of differences appear in its operation. These differences are as result of certain characteristics inherent in the Nigerian society which influence bureaucratic performance. Some of these are, interpersonal relationship or group orientation, respect for age, personalisation of power and a big confusion between what is private and what is public. These differences are further compounded by the nature of the political

environment within which the bureaucracy functions. Let's take a look at these features one after the other.

Interpersonal relationship or group orientation

The Nigerian society could be classed among those that Hofstede referred to as "collectivist societies" as against "individualist societies"¹². While the latter exhibit a loosely knit social framework in which individual freedom is greatly valued and social behaviour is primarily motivated by self-interest, the former depict people who are closely tied with an in-group - such as relatives, tribe, or organizations - and expect the group to look after them in exchange for absolute loyalty to it. A major feature of the Nigerian society is the relative importance of group as opposed to individual orientations. The first attachment the individual has is towards his immediate family. Reference to the individual is as such on that basis. In a typical Nigerian family, the achievement of one is considered as that of everybody and whatever any member has is considered to belong to others too. The phenomenon of family solidarity, without doubt, restrains the modernisation of the country's bureaucracy. Agedah affirms that:

"In Nigeria, as in other African societies, there is great allegiance to the primordial extended family system. In spite of the tremendous influence of Western culture, life is still essentially based on communal commitment to one's home, village or hamlet, which demands from 'all sons and daughters' certain contributions by way of economic, social or political input"¹³.

What Woods refers to as "economy of affection" continues

"to influence the manner in which organizations function and relationships are constituted by fostering dualities in Africa in which universal norms are in constant conflict with the particularistic behaviour of certain groups."¹⁴

Kirk-Greene also saw a kind of contradiction in the extended family system and the civil service code of behaviour when he said he:

"is inclined to doubt whether it is possible absolutely to reconcile the accepted civil service code of behaviour with the traditional African way of life. Aside from any question of criteria or attitudes, one other reason will suffice; family obligations"¹⁵

These obligations according to Medard pass before any other obligation, even that to the state¹⁶. This has culminated into generalized nepotism which perturbs the functioning of the

administration and always put both politicians and higher civil servants in difficult situations. Their first duty is towards their family. This is an obligation from which they can not and/or they don't want to escape. This evidently creates a situation of double loyalty: one to the family, the other to the employer. In most of these cases, the one to the family is stronger and civil servants at times do things in favour of their family even at the risk of losing their jobs. Though Okoli believed that the extended family phenomenon could have been used by the colonial administration to the progress of administration in Africa if they had done proper exploration to seek out the adaptable elements of the traditional ethics. But because such exploration never took place, "the problems of the extended family system became unmanageable and dysfunctional... bureaucratic officials became faithful representatives of their corporate groups in the council of spoils... They were accordingly expected to use their positions in the white man's alien institutions to advance and protect the interests of their corporate groups"¹⁷.

Apart from the family, other types of group identification include one's clan, tribe and ethnic group. Harris states that,

"Tribal loyalties, much like extended family ties, do not appear to have weakened in proportion to the acceptance of new norms ... The uniqueness of one's tribal group is instilled in most Nigerians at an early age, and later reinforced by the individual's own perception of the immediately obvious differences of language, religion, and custom which differentiate the various ethnic communities"¹⁸.

Though attempts have been made to mask this fact, it always re-occurs when citizens look for jobs. It is difficult to refer to Nigerians without making mention of the Yorubas, the Hausas or the Ibos. The Nigerian 1979 and 1989 constitutions have even institutionalized ethnicity by the inclusion of the principle of federal character¹⁹.

Respect for age

A second major feature of the Nigerian society is the respect given to age. Elders are always respected in their given societies. Certain social roles are occupied simply based on the criterion of age. Age actually helped in the organisation of traditional societies. Ould Dadda remarked that the highly democratic political organisation found by the colonisers on their arrival recognised the heads of families as equal in village administration and that if there were special considerations granted to some, it was based on age or merit²⁰. Among the Ibos of Nigeria, age was also used in the village

administration set-up. Okoli stated how all adult males took part in deliberations and how, for the purpose of orderliness, the most senior elder acted as the *primus inter pares* in the council of elders²¹. When a group of children are sent somewhere by an elder, an effort is made to find out the eldest among them. It is he who will carry the responsibility for the whole group. This attitude grows with the child who when he becomes an adult will always want to claim that right anytime he finds himself among younger persons even when he is less privileged financially, economically or educationally. Though there is no systematic research on the effect of this phenomenon, Asiodu remarked on how age has been one of the reasons causing bitterness among Nigerian higher civil servants, especially between administrative and professional officers²². The rapid withdrawal of expatriate political/administrative officers after independence and their replacement by Nigerian administrative officers, who were often younger, did not go well with their professional colleagues whose work they had to co-ordinate in the ministry. It was difficult for them to accept the fact that their work would be supervised by younger officers. Thus, it is obvious that respect for age is an important aspect of the Nigerian society.

Personalisation of Power

One other trait of the Nigerian society that is worth mentioning is the fact that power is highly personalized. Ekeh points out that this is, in part, "a reflection of the difference between African traditional cultures in which personalized relationships predominate over abstract, impersonalized one"²³. This situation corresponds to the patrimonial system of Weber, where

"the object of obedience is the personal authority of the individual which he enjoys by virtue of his traditional status. The organized group exercising authority is, in the simplest case, primarily based on relations of personal loyalty, cultivated through a common process of education. The person exercising authority is not a superior but a personal chief. His administrative staff does not consist primarily of officials but of personal retainers. Those subject to authority are not members of any association, but are either his traditional comrades or his subjects. What determines the relations of the administrative staff to the chief is not the impersonal obligations of office, but personal loyalty to the chief"²⁴.

This automatically leads to a situation whereby "all governmental authority and the correspondingly economic rights tend to be treated as privately appropriated economic advantages"²⁵ or even

whereby "governmental powers and the associate advantages are treated as private rights"²⁶. Power in Nigeria, according to Dudley, "is not a relation, as it would generally be construed to be, but a 'property', (or put differently, a predicate), and as such something to be valued not only for its own sake, but because its possession is what makes everything else possible."²⁷ In this type of situation, the official can not be separated from the office which he occupies and thus bureaucratic operations are personalized as against impersonality recommended by the classical model.

THE NATURE OF THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Though the features of the political environment are numerous, for the purpose of this paper, we shall discuss the three which we consider to have had one effect or the other on the administrative setting. These are, the softness of the Nigerian state, the problem of national integration, and the pervasive problem of corruption.

1. Softness of the Nigerian State.

African states, in general, are soft and weak²⁸. The concept of soft state was first suggested by Gunnar Myrdal to describe the softness of states in Asia²⁹. It refers to absence of social discipline, which manifests itself in the non implementation of decisions and non respect for laws; rules and directives made by the authority not being obeyed and the tendency by every group in the population to resist control by the public authority³⁰. It also refers to the informal but crucial linkage between government functionaries and powerful individuals in the society³¹. This phenomenon is not peculiar to a specific regime. It manifests itself irrespective of the type of regime: one-party or multiparty, civilian or military, capitalist or socialist³². This softness has been a bane in the development of the country's bureaucracy. Apart from the fact that government policies and reforms are diverted from their original objectives they are frequently deflected to suit private interests³³. This only makes the state to be powerless and useless. No matter the level of human and economic resources at its control, it cannot function both effectively and efficiently.

This softness is also evidenced in the attitudes of government towards implementation of reforms, be it political or administrative. Administrative reforms should involve deliberateness, planned, directed and monitored change process. This is not the case in Nigeria where many of the reforms were neither planned nor directed for long-term change. Even the widely acclaimed Udoji exercise was not 'programmed effectively for implementation'³⁴. This has been responsible for the relatively high number of reforms in the country.

While old reforms are left unimplemented, new ones are initiated. Philip Mawhood grasps the situation when he writes that:

"What seems to happen in district and regional administration is that a government tries out one structure... and is dissatisfied with the results. The conclusion is drawn that it is the structure itself which is at fault, and new laws are brought in to set up one of the other types. This in turn fails to give satisfaction, and the process begins again. It is easier to change structure than to deal with the underlying weaknesses of government, still less with the intractability of a peasant society..."³⁵

This softness has also been responsible for the failure of the state in tackling the problem of corruption. Most of the measures taken to curb this plague were either half implemented or not implemented at all³⁶. This is even heightened in the governments' non commitment to implementing budgetary proposals. The 1990 budget is a typical case in point. In the words of an observer, the federal government

"suddenly changed from deregulation to regulation at a time when the progressive world is embracing the operation of market forces as the most effective and pragmatic economic strategy... Neither the fixed foreign exchange rate nor the imposed interest rate is being observed. Even the federal government itself has not attempted to enforce them by any coercive legislative measures or executive penalties"³⁷.

b. Lack of National Integration

Nigeria still battles with the problem of national integration. National integration, according to John Paden and Edward Soberg Shue, refers to the aggregate of erstwhile autonomous, independent and primordial groups into larger, more diffuse units whose implicit frame of reference is not the parochial ethnic scene but the national state³⁸. If applied to the political process of a plural society, national integration would mean the process through which the component units transfer their loyalty. It should, however, be noted that in practical terms, the reservation of some degree of loyalty to one ethnic group is not necessarily at variance to national integration. Ethnic loyalty and integration do not represent two parallel lines. In fact, the historical experiences of such nations as the United States of America, Switzerland and Belgium demonstrate that the maintenance and retention of limited or residual cultural values and identities do not preclude the emergence of a strongly held national identity. Unity in this perspective and context only requires that identification

with the nation should in certain situations, supersede limited or sub-group loyalties³⁹.

Certain problems of national unity have been identified in a plural post colonial state. Firstly is inter-ethnic conflict that develops as a result of struggle between competing ethnic groups for leadership in the political system⁴⁰. This conflict could also be due to inter-personal competition for opportunities to control national politics and economy. This problem is most evident in countries where there are fears of domination of other ethnic groups by a particular group even though a reasonable degree of peace and mutual coexistence had been maintained under colonial rule. Events in Nigeria have shown that group loyalties prevail over those of the state. There is the

"absence of any strong feelings of national consciousness on the part of public, their political representatives or public officials. All of these are more committed to lobby the political executives to ensure that their 'sons' and 'daughters' in the public service get promoted! More common is the general tendency for public officials to concentrate government investment to choice areas - their own villages or those of their bosses"⁴¹.

These inter-ethnic and inter-personal competitions for political and public service positions have resulted in the introduction of an ethnic balancing measure like 'federal character'. Osaghe sees federal character as both a concept and a principle. As a concept, it refers to the federal nature of the Nigeria polity, that is, to the complex of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, geographical, regional, and historical diversities and cleavages which make up the Nigerian polity. As a principle, it "seeks to relate the structural integration of the federation to the forces of national loyalty by balancing statist and non-statist units in the composition of government and its agencies."⁴² Section 14 of the 1979 Constitution states that,

"The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies and the 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 that government or any of its agencies."

Despite the good intention of the principle, it has been bastardized by its operators at the detriment of merit and competence. We shall come back to this in the last part of this article.

c. *Pervasive Problem of Corruption*

Political and administrative corruption constitute one of the basic characteristic of the neo-patrimonial African State. What has been described as 'systemic corruption'⁴³ pervades almost all African states though in varying degrees. This has been the situation even before independence. Diamond, speaking on the Nigerian situation remarked that

'During the last decade of colonial rule, as the scope of the state expanded and the indigenous political elite achieved power, bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, and extortion became rampant. In these final preindependence years, and under the First Republic (1960-66), state contracts and loan programs were systemically milked to enrich elected officials and their cronies at both the regional and federal levels'⁴⁴.

Corruption is also the root of political instability in Nigeria. is the major reproach that military juntas make to overthrow democratic governments in the country, even though they themselves, after a period of time, end up in the same spiral of corruption⁴⁵. Corruption is also one of the consequences of personalized rulership. There is an increasing privatisation of public resources because of expropriation of government by government functionaries. The end result is a situation of corruption, self enrichment, embezzlement and aggrandizement in which public resources meant for the production and delivery of public social welfare are transformed into individualised private assets⁴⁶. Ageda has used the 'trickle down' theory to explain the phenomenon in Nigeria. According to him, 'a good number of Nigerians from top to bottom have come to see corruption as a means of circulating resources and paying for social services in the absence of government resources and paying welfare system'⁴⁷. The effect of corruption on the state is noticeable on two major fronts. Firstly, 'the administration, public services and parastatals become inefficient sometimes to the point of paralysis... They no longer fulfil the goal for which they have been set up'⁴⁸. Though this displacement of goal exists in all bureaucracies, the Nigerian situation is more or less the extreme. This extremity is noticed in the fact that public institutions no longer serve the purpose for which they are created. Hospitals have been turned to mere consulting centres because drugs are no longer available, the police force, instead of preventing crimes, has very deep hands in them, civil servants in the various ministries engage in petty trading to make ends meet etc. Secondly, 'the decisions of governments are no longer implemented and the

laws are not applied'... at best, the implementation of decisions and application of the law are carried out in an uncertain and totally unpredictable manner⁴⁹. Nigerians have learnt how to 'settle'⁵⁰ themselves out of certain government regulations that do not favour them. This has contributed in a way to the bankruptcy of the Nigerian state. Taxes are not paid. And when people decide to pay, they only pay a part of it and the other part shared between the government officer and the payer. Regulations are not strictly followed because the same measure is not applicable to everybody.

V. CERTAIN DYSFUNCTIONS IN THE BUREAUCRATIC SET-UP

Imported into the above environment, bureaucracy cannot but function in a conflicting manner to what obtains in developed countries. Bureaucrats combine traditional practices with administrative conduct. This not only makes a mockery of the bureaucracy that was initially conceived for development purposes. There is consequently a contradiction between the search for political alliance and the promotion of efficiency within the administration since formal rules are bypassed for personal reasons. Most of the elements that constitute the ideal-type bureaucratic model are brushed aside due to pressure from the socio-political environment. As such one ends up recording significant differences from Weber's model.

First, while it is true that there exists a vertical hierarchy of authority, it is also true that bureaucrats in Nigeria respond to other forms of authority emanating from their environment. The most common of this is personal relationship. Normal chain of command are bypassed in the name of family obligations, friendship and patronage. Once this chain is disturbed, the basis of the bureaucratic model is upset. This, effectively affects other aspects of the bureaucratic model like official secrets and application of regulations which in turn leads to lapsed discipline.

Second, Weber's functional specialization and division of labour, designed to promote efficiency are not followed. The degree of variation differs from the period immediately after independence to now. The fact that the country, like most post independent African states, was faced with the problem of social and economic development (health, education, housing, employment etc) made her to assume a redistributive role of trying to do everything for the citizens. In this type of situation, it was difficult, as a result of the problem of manpower, to blame her for overlapping functions of the different units. This does not explain the fact that several years after independence, the situation still remains the same. Many senior civil servants were known to be chairmen of three to five boards and

members of several others in addition to their normal jobs. Mr. Allison Ayida, a former permanent secretary of the federal Ministry of Finance was said to be a member of over fifty boards⁵¹. This not only encourages duplication of function, it leads to a decline in efficiency as officers no longer have enough time for all the jobs at the same time thereby hampering competence and efficient performance.

One other area where conflict exists is in the recruitment of officers. The kind of professionalization anticipated by Weber is one in which employees are appointed on the basis of their job-related skills. This is far from being the case in Nigeria. Recruitment is highly influenced despite the laid down regulations. The quality of the candidate is not necessarily taken into consideration. Group affiliation, especially ethnicity, or other forms of consideration take precedence over merit in appointment or selection for offices or positions. Nothing undermines meritocracy like the principle of federal character which operates in the country. Even though at the beginning, as we have mentioned earlier on, it was an ethnic balancing measure, on the long run it has frustrated professionalisation and competence as regards its introduction to the public service. It has made it impossible to maintain uniform standards for everyone as regards recruitment, the measurement of performance and advancement within the civil service⁵². Since access to employment is not open to everybody, the 'lucky', 'anointed' few (those who Alhaji 'Saleh, the Secretary to the Nigerian federal government called the sacred cows), who in most cases, don't have the required skills to perform responsibilities that are meant for professionals. The 'protection' they enjoy from their mentors keep them in the service for as long as they want, and make them to be outside any hierarchical chain of command and above any disciplinary action on the conduct of their duties. This situation coupled with others, has been responsible for frustration among some public servants and has done serious damage to the *esprit de corps* of the service⁵³. It has also served to obstruct the development of a genuine national outlook and sense of unity among both the bureaucrats and the public at large⁵⁴.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that administration cannot but respond to the socio-political environment. Administration in Nigeria has not produced the same impact as in the Western bureaucracies as a result of certain features emanating from its environment. Even though most public servants have gone through western education before taking up their various posts, the traditional milieu from which the

come affect administration not only in its operation but also in its performance. This has been shown by analyzing the impact of certain traditional practices like group orientation, respect for age and personalization of power on administrative behaviour of public servants. These are not the only inputs from the environment that affect administration. Other inputs come from the political environment. Our contention here is that even if the impact of the traditional environment can be minimized, there is the political environment to contend with.

In this regard, we identified certain inputs from the political environment like the softness of the Nigerian state, the problem of national integration and the endemic problem of corruption, which affect the performance of its bureaucracy. With administration operating in what can be described as a hostile environment, it is automatic that dysfunctions exist. The point we have tried to raise in this chapter is that no matter the level of governmental panels set up to review administrative inefficiencies in the country, (and very often the recommendations of such panels are based on foreign experiences), until the cultural and political environment of the country are given high considerations, such imitation is bound to fail.

NOTES

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47. AGEDAH, op. cit. p. 61
48. MEDARD, 1986; op. cit. p. 127
49. Ibid.
50. "Settlement", "to settle someone" are both terms that came into the Nigerian day-to-day administrative language under the regime of General Babangida. He was said to have developed the habit of settling those who were likely to oppose his government to make them have a change of mind. It is now a way of saying "give me my share of the deal"
51. OLUGBEMI O. Stephen, "The civil service: an outsider's view" Oyediran Oyeleye (ed), Nigerian Government and Politics Under Military Rule, 1966 - 1979, The Macmillan Press Ltd 1979, p. 105
52. ASIODU, op. cit. p. 92
53. QBOYEGA A., "The Public Service and Federal Character", Ekeh P.P. and Osaghae (eds.), Federal Character and Nigerian Federalism. Ibadan, 1988.
54. HARRIS, op. cit. p. 307.