

The Theory of Public Administration and Its Relevance to Nigerian Administrative Ecology

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ABSTRACT We analytically put the concept of public administration into perspective in this paper. In the process, we traced its genealogy and, its theoretical provisions as well as the implications and challenges of these provisions at each stage of its development. We specifically zeroed-in on the practical applications of these provisions in a country like Nigeria. Prominence was given to the features - (political neutrality, anonymity and permanence) - of the Nigerian civil service and their attendant practicability or otherwise within the context of the nation's ecological factors, slippery administrative terrains and cultural pluralism. Within this same context, the issues of representative bureaucracy and its accompanying principles of quota system, federal character, as well as the inherent prevalence of conflict of interest and political patronage engendered in the process. Consequent on these efforts, we conclusively argued that there is need for a re-orientation by the Nigerian citizenry and Public Bureaucrats vis-à-vis the principles of meritocracy and non-partisanship in dealing with socio-economic, cultural and political issues within the nation's administrative landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexities and responsibilities of government within most polities of the world over the years have created, among others, intellectual excitement and attention about the study of governmental processes and structures. Thus, the study of public administration as a field of inquiry has homologically gained increasing attention in order to keep pace with the ever expanding administrative and policy functions of government and their accompanying demands on practical administration and the practitioners. This, in itself, has necessitated the need to understand in both theoretical and practical sense the concept of public administration.

This being the case, this paper examines in a revisitational manner, the nature and scope of public administration and its relevance to the Nigerian political and administrative landscape giving due recognition to ecological factors. In pursuit of its goal, the paper is divided into six

parts. Part one is the introduction. While part two focuses on the concept of public administration, part three synoptically discusses its origin. Parts four and five examine the various implications and challenges which the new thinking in public administration poses to the practical application of the theory of public administration in Nigeria. Part six concludes the paper.

THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Within the disciplinary parameters of social sciences, the concept of public administration like other concepts has not been free from definitional disputations. Infact, the discipline has undergone various metamorphoses in the quest for a definitional unanimity. This has been largely due in part, to the indispensability of the bureaucratic procedures and processes, and the extension of governmental role from its traditional maintenance of law and order to the performance of socio-economic roles through regulatory activities, provision of infrastructure and other services (Agagu, 1997) which brought with it complex asymmetrical goals; aspiration and interest that cannot be ignored by any reasonable definitional elucidation of the concept of public administration.

Not only this, scholars commitment to the development of public administration as a field of inquiry had, over the years been equally encouraged and scholarly fertilized by the availability of virtually unlimited sources of revenue to government particularly from taxation in countries like the United States, Britain and Canada (Agagu, *ibid*), which require administrative competence and bureaucratization. All these among others, have created awareness and concern on the need to focus and develop such a field of inquiry due to its propensity for the development of the required administrative sophistication.

This awareness in addition to other factors had

long created the tempo for the definitional pluralism of the concept of public administration as a field of inquiry. And in the process, Pfiffer and Presthus (1967) described public administration as a field mainly concerned with the means for implementing political values. This probably grew out of Wilson's (1887) classical conceptualization of public administration as the most obvious part of government and, as the government in action. And it probably explained why it has been argued that public administration deals with the study of the institutional framework of government, its socio-economic and political environment and the behavioural inclination of those who man the bureaucratic machine (Presthus, 1975). Corson and Harris (1963) once opined that public administration is the action part of government, the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realized. And in the process Waldo (1980) describes it as the Continuously active business part of government concerned with carrying out the law, as made by legislative bodies or other authoritative agents and interpreted by courts, through the process of organization and management. Harold Stein (1952) had, in the same vein, earlier described the discipline as a field in which every man is his own codifier and categorizer.

Because of the involvement of public administrators and their importance in the process of decision making, the discipline has been viewed as a political process (Lane, 1978). This position probably grew out of that of Waldo and Gaus (1950) who both conceived public administration as the science that deals with Government and how its work is done.

On the same token, Tomori (1985) opined that public administration can be described as the apparatus of government, including personnel, equipment and the administrative processes designed to assist governmental public policy formation and implementation. This could be explained within the parameters of Wilson's (1887) typification of public administration as the detailed and systematic execution of public law. The same thing goes for the position of Bartholomew (1972) who once claimed that:

Public administration, in the political sense, has two distinct meanings. In a broad sense it denotes the work involved in the actual conduct of government affairs, such as the administration of justice or the

administration of the affairs of any office.

In a narrow sense the term denotes the operations of the administrative branch only, that is, the activities of the chief executive and officials called administrators.

In line with this claim, this scholar further stressed that public administration is "essentially the process of carrying out the public will as expressed in law, and that it deals with the coordination of collective efforts to implement public policy". And, in the views of Dimock and Dimock (1969) which are isomorphic to that of Davies (1974), public administration deals with the accomplishment of politically determined objectives.

Given the foregoing, it could be innocuously argued that public administration, whichever way one looks at it, deals with the translation of policy decisions into practical and physical reality through the action efforts of bureaucrats who are expected to be politically neutral.

Having analytically, though in a synoptic fashion, perused what constitutes the subject-matter of public administration, we found it appropriate to examine its origin at this point. This is what constitutes the core of the discussion in the next section of this paper.

Origin of Public Administration

There is no sharp point in history where the story of public administration begins (Stillman, 1980). In the United States, there were two general textbooks on the subject matter of public administration which were regarded as the first attempt at presenting the discipline. These books were written by two scholars, White and Willoughby and published in 1926 and 1927, respectively (Stillman, *Ibid*). Although the publication of these books marked the birth of public administration as a discipline, it should at the same time be noted that there had been several decades of preparation for the birth of the discipline ever before they were published. For example, the works and efforts of some United States political leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton cannot be underestimated in the attention which these leaders gave to the problems of public administration in a futuristic manner.

Despite these efforts and their relevance to the growth and maturation of public administration, one cannot also down-play or ignore a remarkable

essay by Wilson (1887) which serves as the symbolic beginning of the discipline in such a perceptive, persuasive and influential way.

In any political setting, the making of policy decisions compared to its implementation is very easy. This is so because any policy decision made without proper implementation is not worth its creation. This Wilson corroborate in his argument that it is getting to be harder to run a constitution than to frame one (Waldo, 1953).

In the same vein, he noted that the study of Public administration has been characterized by normative approach (political philosophy, lawmaking and constitutional arrangements) up till the 19th century. According to him, as socio-economic life becomes more specialised and complex and, as well as there continues to be an increase in government functions and responsibilities, there is a need for the diversification of efforts towards a more empirical analysis of events. He equally opined that there should be a science of administration which shall seek to straighten the paths of government, to make its business less unbusiness like, to strengthen and purify its organisation, and to crown its duties with dutifulness.

These initial practical and theoretical efforts coupled with that of those who might be called the founding fathers of public administration and, who were initially trained as political scientists, led to the genesis of public administration as a field of inquiry under the umbrella of political science (Stillman op cit). However, the discipline acquired certain distinctive characteristics by the mid-1920s.

The public administration of the 1920s had certain "core-orienting beliefs". Centrally, its leaders thought of their enterprise as an attempt to achieve the republican-democratic ends of freedom and equality by making government simultaneously strong and efficient, responsible and responsive (Stillman, Ibid). Hence, the need at that time for some expertise that can efficiently carry out the functions of administration (Agagu, op cit), without any political coloration or bias. This gave birth to the ideological persuasion called "*the orthodoxy of public administration*", the period of existence of which was characterized by the strands of politics-administration dichotomy. It should be noted however that regard must be given to the work of Goodnow's (1900) politics and administration vis - a - vis the genesis of the politics-administration dichotomy. In this work,

Goodnow emphasized the "will of the state" and, he identified politics with expression and administration with the execution of this will. Goodnow's initial effort was complemented by Leonard, D. White's work; Introduction to the study of Public Administration (1926) and Willoughby's principles of public administration (1927). Although these works differ significantly with regard to the constitutional authority to control public administration. While White regarded the president as the Chief administrator by constitutional right, Willoughby regarded the congress (Stillman op cit). But this notwithstanding, their core belief was that government could be divided into functions or process, decision and execution (Akindele, 1994).

The foregoing discussions point to the fact that the issue of politics-administration dichotomy constitutes one of the developments that could be identified with the growth of the field of public administration since it originated. And, there is no gainsaying the fact that the issue of "*politics-administration dichotomy*" has attracted a lot of attentions over the years as far as the theory and practice of public administration are concerned (Akindele, 1994). Infact, its resultant debate has practically affected and continue to affect the physiology of the administrative machineries in most polities of the world.

The roots of this debate are according to Santos (1969) traceable to the 1887 classical work of Woodrow Wilson earlier cited herein. In this pioneering work, Wilson saw no symmetry between politics and administration (Stillman, 1976: 269). This belief existed at a period when the scholars in public administration took for granted the responsibility of administrative agencies to popular control (Akindele, 1994, op. cit). And, this period, argued Sayre (1966: 1-2) represents the orthodoxy of public administration which reached its zenith in the 1930s before its challenge by the post-world war II dissenting intellectual development tagged heterodoxy of public administration (Akindele, 1994 Ibid.)

This challenge which is later discussed gave birth to the notion of "public administration as politics" (ibid). It rejected "*politics-administration dichotomy*" as a progeny of misleading and meaningless generalisation about politics and administration brought about by the events of the 1930s (e.g. the depression, new deal, the rise of big government and the 1950's new intellectual

development etc). More interestingly, it was argued by Harold Stein (1970) that, factors like the separation of power, and political neutrality of the civil service contributed in no small measure to the fertilization of the dichotomy.

This dichotomy and its notion of political neutrality argued Akindele (1994 op cit) had been embraced wholesale by many developing nations Nigeria inclusive. In most of these nations, the idea of political neutrality of the public bureaucrats has been incorporated as an accompanying conditions of the merit principles, political impartiality in the decision of Civil Servants and a mechanism for avoiding bureaucratic pathologies, conflict of interest and abuse of powers by the public officers. For example in Nigeria, civil servants are prohibited from partisan politics. Apart from the fact that this is constitutionally stipulated, it has become a practice in Nigeria since 1979 Muritala/Obasanjo's transition programme that civil servants and public officers must resign their appointments before going into partisan politics.

The attractiveness of this development notwithstanding, it has, as earlier stated, been fatally challenged by the new thinking which treats public administration as politics. This new thinking argued, Akindele (1994 op cit) places emphases on the political character of public administration thus, propelling through the introduction of new methodological approach, the field of public administration in a new direction of scholarship and intellectual inquiry. The philosophy of public administration as politics which represents a paradigm change in public administration recognises the ubiquity of politics within the physiology of the governmental processes. And it took off as a completely different orientational belief from the pre-world war II basis of public administration.

Various factors have been identified as the precursor of the paradigm change. These include among others, the conceptualised non-separability of politics and administration, impracticability of the conservative undertone of the classical separation of power theory and the rigorousness of the policy process. This new paradigm at inception had a telling effect on the fraternity of public administration scholarship and, it has been so since then, particularly in the areas of research and teachings of public administration. Infact, a great number of scholars in public administration

had since then been influenced by the paradigm change. Some of these scholars as identified by Akindele (1994 ibid) included: Paul Appleby, Harold Stein, Herbert A. Simon, Donald W. Smithburg, Victor A. Thompson, Charles Jacob, Santos, Robert Presthus, John Merriman Gaus, Nicholas Henry, Dwight Waldo, Fred Riggs, Fritz Morstein, Marx and a host of others.

However, apart from the above scholarly identified criticisms on politics-administration dichotomy, various other evidences had shown that the division is just a mere artificial boundary. Not only this, the increasing use of systems theory and functional analysis tends to emphasise the inter connectedness of politics and administration rather than their division. The systems approach emphasizes the interrelatedness of all parts of the political system of which administration cannot be isolated (Agagu, op cit), Akindele (1995), Akindele et al. (2000). Thus, according to Watson and Montjoy (1991) the dichotomy between politics and administration as a strict institutional separation cannot be realistically sustained. And, this is the situation in most of today's political systems.

Implications/Challenges of the New Thinking

As could be inferred from the foregoing sections, the traditionalism of "*politics-administration dichotomy*" has been scholarly and practically challenged. In the process, the scholars concerned have created a new scientific and intellectual community premised on a completely new philosophical direction. Through this, they had jettisoned the hitherto (orthodox) existing belief which failed to properly recognise the moral values of the public bureaucrats and which instead treated and continue to treat them as mechanical Robots.

This new thinking has a lot of implications which on their own pose some challenges to the practice of public administration. This is particularly evident in the continuous recognition given to the notion of political neutrality in today's administrative processes in the affairs of the state despite its obvious negation by the impracticability of value - free interpretation and execution of governmental policy decisions by the public service bureaucrats.

These challenges which, argued Akindele (op cit), call for consensus on the paradigm of public

administration as politics, are mostly identifiable in the area of practical application of the theoretical constructs on public administration. These challenges are practically obvious in the areas of the concepts of bureaucracy, representative bureaucracy, (quota system and federal character), political patronage and conflict of interest all of which demand impartiality on the part of the public bureaucrats. How the Bureaucrats in a country like Nigeria could practically demonstrate or be expected to do so given her slippery administrative landscape and multi-ethnic ecological factors would form part of the discussion to which we now turn.

Practical Application of the Theoretical Constructs on Public Administration in Nigeria

Nigeria is a mosaic of different ethnic groups due to the multiplicity of linguistic groupings. There are three major ethnic groups, the Yoruba inhabiting the south-West, the Ibos, inhabiting the South-Eastern, and the Hausas, inhabiting the Northern part of the country all of which are extremely culturally different from one another. Within these groups are other linguistic groupings. Infact, the existence of these culturally different groups in addition to the problems posed by administration played a dominant role in the way socio-economic and political resources are distributed and, in the citizens perception of Bureaucracy in the public service and their expectation from same.

The Concept of Bureaucracy

The concept of bureaucracy has been subjected to repeated criticisms among scholars and ordinary citizens alike. The concept has been used as a synonym for inefficiency, red tape, stupidity, secrecy, smugness, aggressiveness and self-interest (Stillman, op cit). This castigation notwithstanding, the concept is an ambiguous term which can be taken to mean different things. For instance, it might be taken to mean the type of organization used by modern government for the conduct of its various specialised functions, embodied in the administrative system and personified more specifically by the civil service, it might also mean a mechanistic and formal approach in carrying out such functions, to the point of indifference toward the effects achieved.

The foregoing could be cited as forming part of the basis of Gerth's and Wright Mills (1979: 196)

conceptualisation of bureaucracy as:

a hierarchical arrangement within an organisation based upon a line of authority and a division of work predicated upon this arrangement.

The concept can also mean the kind of government that shoulders a large burden of responsibilities in support of the economic and social order and so on (Marx 1960). However, the concept was elaborately formulated by the German social scientist, Max Weber (1864-1920) who as one of the foremost exponents of bureaucracy, explicitly defined the concept as the general formal structural elements of a type of human organisation, particularly the collective personnel and structures of a governmental organisation (Stillman, op cit). Eventhough, as (Akindele, 1987: 38) once opined, Weber, in his outline of bureaucracy as the "ideal type" by which he neither meant "perfect nor good", did not explicitly define bureaucracy, he gave some of its characteristics with a definitive degree of specificity.

Characteristics of Bureaucracy

According to max weber (Stillman, Ibid), the characteristics of bureaucracy are explainable as follows:

- There is the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is, by laws of administrative regulations.
- The principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones.
- The management of the modern office is based upon written documents (? the files?), which are preserved in their original or draught form.
- Office management, at least all specialised office management and such management is distinctly modern- usually presupposes thorough and expert training.
- When the office is fully developed, official activity demands the full working capacity of the official, irrespective of the fact that his obligatory time in the bureau may be firmly delimited.
- The management of the office follows general rules, which are more or less stable, more or less exhaustive, and which can be learned

(Stillman, Ibid).

The central characteristics of bureaucracy as outlined above had long been idealized by Max Weber. The core components of these characteristics as could be clearly deciphered here are: hierarchy of authority, officialdom, division of labour, impersonality, rules, technical expertise and procedures (Akindele, 1987, op cit, 39). And, it could be reasonably argued that all of these characteristics were and have since been assumed to be indispensable to the efficiency, effectiveness, impersonality and responsiveness of any organisation - (either in the private of public sector of the (political) economy) - in the pursuit of its goals. This explains why these characteristics had long formed and continue to form the building-block of organisations in our society. This according to Akindele (1987 *ibid*) explains why Weber contended that "bureaucracy is inevitable if efficiency and effectiveness of organisations are to be realized.

Consequent on the foregoing, Sayre (1979: 31) once argued that, for any civil service to be worth its name in terms of bureaucratization and, particularly since the age of reform, it has to:

- Eliminate patronage from its management of civil service matters.
- Guarantee equal treatment to all applicants for public employment and among all public employees.
- Adopt the logic of scientific-management in the performance of its duties.
- Foster the attainment of merit, efficiency, morality, impersonality, politics-administration dichotomy, protection of the employees from politically motivated retributions.

The foregoing put together, has, in the view of Sayre (*ibid*, 33) in most polities - (Nigeria inclusive) - within the global political community led to the importation of "ideal" bureaucratic procedures and rules into the realm of civil service administration. This, in itself, has transformed the latter into the cold objective atmosphere of tests, scores, (credentialism), rigidity, logic of efficiency, subordination of individuals to technical requirement so that technical trappings have now completely become the symbol of merit. It has equally led to series of structural transformation designed to induce impersonal and rational orientation conducive to efficient administration (in the public service) of most polities of the world.

Specifically, given the above enumerated

characteristics of bureaucracy, in practices the bureaucrats/civil servants are expected to possess some features in order to be able to discharge their duties accordingly in most politics of today Nigeria inclusive. These characteristics are briefly explained below.

Permanence in Office

The civil service is a permanent institution that is saddled with the responsibilities and functions of implementing the policies and programmes of government. It is equally expected to ensure the continuity of the government and its services to the people. Regardless of changes in information and composition of the government, the public/civil servants are expected to remain in office without any fear of being sacked or fired unless found guilty of any offence contrary to the ethic of the office. The essence of this feature is that it promotes the societal welfare and stability and more importantly, it provides the government with officers with adequate experiences and administrative sophistication.

Political Neutrality

Another feature of the civil service is that its officials are expected to be politically neutral. They should remain neutral, loyal and dedicated to any government in power. In the discharge of their normal duties, they should not be partisan. They must act without fear or favour of any particular individual or group of individuals. This feature is important in that it guarantees public confidence in governmental administration.

Moreover, civil servants are expected to be anonymous. Anonymity in the sense that they are not held responsible on matters affecting the ministry in relation to the performance of their functions. This is so in that the civil servants acts on directives inspite of the fact that policies may be formulated by them. Infact, any commendation or condemnation for any policy is directed to the minister or commissioner on behalf of whom they acted.

A lot of challenges have been posed as to whether the features of bureaucracy and civil service can be universally applicable or put differently, whether the bureaucrats and civil servants have lived up to their features in terms of their practical performance or operation in Nigeria.

For instance, can we talk of the political neutrality and anonymity of the Civil Servants when it comes to taking decision that affect them, their relations, ethnic groups or political loyalists? How do we explain a situation where a civil servant was sacked without notice? In this situation, can we talk about the principle of permanence? What will be the quality of the administration whose composition is based on representative bureaucracy (quota system and federal character) as an important factor for recruitment? How can the civil service/bureaucracy be organised to function freely when there is a conflict of interest on any decision that is needed to be taken? How do we have a corruption-free bureaucracy when there is need for the african or Nigerian bureaucrat to honour his cultural and group values? That is, how can he fulfil the demands of marginality throttled on him by the inevitability of bureaucratization and its clash with the normal nepotistic undertones of his culture in most cases?

The need to take into consideration the mosaic of groups in Nigeria earlier (referred to in this paper without bureaucratic discrimination in some unavoidable circumstances, inspite of obvious prohibition of same by the rationality of ideal bureaucracy), informed the use of quota system and the principle of federal character in the process of recruitment as a way of making the bureaucracy representative.

Federal character as a doctrine of the 1979 constitution sought to give a semblance of order to the distribution of privileges and benefits among the primordial components of any state organisation in such a way that no group has predominant and exclusive access to these opportunities and benefits inherent in the exercise of state powers (Ekeh, 1989). A lot of reasons have been adduced for the implementation and acceptance of this principle. These reasons were put into various imperatives by Ekeh (Ibid) as historical imperatives where he explicitly discussed the North-South problem; political imperatives under which he identified the forms of Nigerian federalism and its consequences as the reason for establishing the principle and the sociological imperatives which involve the ethnic diversities of the country.

The principle has attracted the butt of critics on several grounds some of which are discussed below.

Since the intention of those that formulated the

principle in the 1979 constitution was to promote national loyalty and reduce ethnic attachment through the application of the principle to inter-ethnic groups conflicts, the principle was otherwise applied. When applied the principle was generalized to areas where this problem did not exist, within the same ethnic groups" (Ekeh, Ibid). In other words, the federal character solution was applied to intra-ethnic groups rather than inter-ethnic groups which it was meant for, thereby resulting in overgeneralization in the formulation of the principle.

Another pitfall of the federal character principle is that, it quite unnecessarily seeks a permanent solution to what ought to be, and may well turn out to be, a temporary problem of ethnicity (Ekechi, Ibid). The doctrine has taken the problem of ethnicity too big than necessary. Much importance has been attached to the problem than it should be without recognising the fact that the problem may ease up in the course of history. Thus, according to Bala Usman (1977), federal character has deepened the reach of ethnicity and, extended its ravages. In effect, federal character is the solution that has deepened the problem it was devised to tackle.

In addition, the principle has been overloaded with a lot of responsibilities. It takes a greater concern on the need to satisfy the ethnic groups and sub-divisions of ethnic groups in terms of appointments. The principle overburden the political system too much to the extent that administration may find it difficult to fulfil the requirements inherent in the principle. Lastly, and more importantly, the formulation of the principle of federal character potentially invaded the integrity and standard of public bureaucracy and such other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of politics (Ekeh, op cit).

Given the aforementioned pitfalls, the operation of the principle has had a lot of consequences for the Nigerian political system especially the civil service and other public services. The increased consideration and application of the principle, without regard for merit and minimum standards, has greatly affected the quality of Nigerian political system in terms of professionalism. Career officers are withdrawn and removed from service because of this principle thereby weakening bureaucracy.

In addition, people from disadvantaged areas are better opportuned to exploit others and even

the political system without a corresponding contribution to the system by the others. The principle promotes elitism rather than ascription. This is because, regardless of qualification, experience and merit, one is sure that to enhance representativeness one will surely be employed or given a chance.

More over, the principle has killed national loyalty and consciousness. It has discouraged the emergence of national elites which goes to reduce loyalty and commitment to the Nigerian nationhood. The spirit of unity and one Nigerian which people like Obafemi Awolowo, Aminu Kano, Joseph Tarka, Okoi Arikpo, Anthony Enahoro, etc. had, had seriously diminished. Thus, it has led to the fragmentation of loyalties, elitism and regional allegiance.

Consequent on the above, the principle of federal character in our own view, apart from the representativeness which it brought has done more harm than good especially when the system is quality conscious with respect to the output of her administration.

The foregoing arguments notwithstanding, the point need to be made that the rationale behind federal character principle is not entirely defective, irrelevant or inimical to the stable systemic existence of Nigeria and Nigerians. It is not impossible to operate the principle without reasonably undermining meritocracy in the civil service. Federal civil service, for example, being a national institution ought to be composed of people in such a way as to give it a national spread. The reality of Nigeria situation is such that a section of the country cannot be completely excluded from the service, using whatever criteria, without threatening the peace and stability of the country.

This is not to say, however, that equal number of people from defined geo-political zones should be necessarily recruited into the civil service. Emphasis on such equalization is bound to, not only conflict with but also, seriously hamper the application of meritocracy. As an equitable mechanism, the principle ought to be applied in such a manner that groups who would have otherwise been unrepresented are given some degree of involvement.

As empirical studies have shown (Obiyan, 1998), one of the problems that has afflicted the application of the principle in Nigeria has been the attempt to make it an equalization mechanism. Even then, it has not been seen to be fairly

implemented.

Apart from the principle of federal character, the issue of the political neutrality of the civil servants or bureaucrats is another factor that is needed to be given consideration.

As earlier noted, civil servants are expected to be neutral, loyal and dedicated to any government. This issue of political neutrality preclude that in a matter of decision making, the civil servants should not be subjective or allow his decision to be influenced or affected either by his party affiliation or political interest. For instance, a federal minister for education who also owns a private educational institution or schools is expected not to be influenced, when it comes to decision making or execution, by his private interest (owned private educational institutional) in order to avoid the dangers of conflict of interest and abuse of power by such public officers or civil servants.

In an attempt to ensure objectivity in the performance of public officers' or civil servants' operation, the issue of political neutrality of civil servants have been embraced by many developing nations, including Nigeria as an accompanying condition for the institutionalisation of the merit system. Civil servants both in the federal and state levels in Nigeria are prohibited from partisan politics (Akindele, op cit). For instance, the fifth Schedule particularly sub-sections 1 and 9 of the 1979 Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution and certain portions of the 1989 and 1999 constitutions specifically stated this in addition to other codes of ethics or conduct (for public officers) (Akindele, Ibid). For instance, the Obasanjo regime's stipulations prior to the 1979 military disengagement from politics, that civil servants and public officers like university Dons must resign their appointments before going into active politics in the second Republic and its reincarnation by Babangida's maradonic transition philosophy of gradual disengagement and mechanistic experimentation in human engineering; the Abacha's aborted transition programme and, that of Abubakar which produced the fourth Republic in Nigeria go a long way to put into perspective the relevance given to the notion of political neutrality vis-a-vis the political activities of civil servants in most developing polities and particularly in Africa, (Akindele, Ibid).

Despite the above, the prohibition of public officers from partisan politics in Nigeria is just a mere expression on paper. Indeed, the question

need to be asked as to the extent to which civil servants in Nigeria have been neutral, are neutral or expected to be politically neutral.

Man, it has been said, is a political animal. Civil servants are among the well informed groups in the society. Individually, they have their own prejudices and political preferences. These prejudices and political preferences have partly served as influence on the input of civil servants into policy formulation and, of course, implementation in Nigeria.

A pragmatic perception of political neutrality seems more appropriate. From this perspective, it does not denote the outright pulverization of political preferences. Rather, civil servants are expected to play down their political preferences in the performance of their jobs such that those personal political preferences do not impair the achievement of the policies of any political party in power regardless of whether such policies are in consonance with those personal political preferences.

In Nigeria, however, it appears that the attainment of this pragmatic conception of political neutrality by civil servants is far fetched. Some civil servants are in the habit of attempting to derail policies of political parties which do not enjoy their sympathy. We hope that this attitude will not subsist in the fourth republic. In most cases when it comes to decision making and, or its execution in Nigeria, there is a conflict of interest and abuse of power by public officers. This has adversely affected the performance of her public officials and civil servants. And, according to Manning (1969) it exists when a government employee's public responsibility clashes, or appears to clash, with his private economic affairs and there is nothing to suggest that the clash has been resolved to the disadvantage of the private rather than the governmental interest.

The foregoing, summed together, shows that bureaucracy, its performance and operations in the Nigerian public sector have been influenced by the principles of representativeness (federal character and quota system), issue of the political neutrality of the civil service, and corruption with respect to political patronage and conflict of interest.

CONCLUSION

The analysis and review in this paper up to this

point have attempted to put into perspective the concept of public administration, its origin and the various challenges posed by its theoretical provisions to practical application in a country like Nigeria. In the process, we have equally argued that the features of the civil service (political neutrality, anonymity and permanence) have been difficult if not impossible to practically attained in Nigeria. This has been largely due to various ecological factors occasioned in part by the country's slippery administrative terrains and cultural pluralism, which have militated against the spirit of National Loyalty in most cases.

Moreover, it was argued that the choice of representative bureaucracy through quota system and the principle of federal character, and the prevalence of conflict of interest and political patronage in most cases, have adversely reduced the quality of Nigerian public administration. Thus, in our opinion, there is a need to re-orientate the entire citizenry and the public bureaucrats in particular to change and imbibe the principle of merit and non-partisanship when it comes to addressing the issues of socio-economic and political benefits in Nigeria to Nigerians and other Residents.

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