

## REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY AND THE BURDEN OF EFFICIENCY IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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### ABSTRACT

Efficiency as a product of optimum engagement and productivity that strings from a balance representation especially in developing federal states with diverse population has been an issue of debate in developing bureaucracies globally. The bureaucracy whether in developed or developing countries is viewed as the mechanism of actualizing public goals, programmes and objectives and as such cannot be under estimated. The peculiarity of the Nigerian state and its bureaucracy in terms of representation of all segments of the union, with a focus through the eyes of the instrumentation of the “value added” narrative is viewed as the main point of this paper. The paper utilizes secondary data and a comprehensive desk analysis was carried out. It was discovered amongst others that, the Nigerian bureaucracy lacks effective representation and that, human resource procurement process has been hijacked by corrupt politicians. As a way of policy recommendation, the paper opines amongst others that, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) be overhauled in terms of reforms in order to place it in a proper framework to effectively carry out its duty without fear of interference.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The bureaucracy is not a creation of modern times. It dates back to the ancient civilizations of Greece, the Chinese empire (462 BC) and the Han dynasty (202 BC), as well as to philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes (Omoleke, 2013). The role of the public bureaucracy in fostering a perfect and efficient administrative system in a country cannot be under estimated. This can be seen from the vital role it plays in the formulation and implementation of policies designed for the development of such country (Nwankwo et al, 2015). In a country like Nigeria which practices a federal system of government with its extreme complex structure to govern – something much of the world may not realize (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018), the concept of representative bureaucracy is viewed as paramount. Thus, Okpe (2002) opined that, it is also fundamental that bureaucracy operates in the midst of other institutions and social structures of the society that has some diversity. Therefore, to actualise the goals of a highly diverse people in the case of the Nigerian state, bureaucracies were set up to provide essential services to residents which individual or few/groups cannot afford. It is also responsible in the co-ordinations of efforts of individuals and communities to secure survival through provision of food, clothing and shelter to people within a hostile environment. While a number of scholars continue to argue for such representation according to Karikari and Ohemeng (2012), others are of the view that the bureaucracy cannot, and should not be, a representative institution. Such representation, its supporters say, is not only appropriate in modern diverse societies; it may help resolve conflicts that have gripped such societies through a sense of belongingness (Meier and Hawes, 2009). There is, moreover, “widespread acceptance of the notions that in a democracy, public bureaucracies ought to be representative in meaningful ways of the citizen-clients they serve, and that representation based on demographic characteristics can lead to meaningful representation” (Halle and Kelly, 1989:9 in Karikari and Ohemeng, 2012). The degree of representativeness of a public bureaucracy can significantly affect how public servants carry out their functions, and how effective they are in the delivery of goods and services to various clients in the society (Karikari and Ohemeng, 2012).

In the heat of this debate, many democratic governments including that of Nigeria continue to develop and implement policies to enhance the involvement of minorities in their public services. This eventually led to the establishment of the Federal Character Commission which is statutorily mandated to enforce the Federal character principle as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. Despite the aforementioned *de jure* effort by the state, a lot of foul cries are still heard among the federating units of the amoral situation of the bureaucratic structure in Nigeria. Not only does this reality undermine the equitable representation of the minorities in society; it also undermined the principle of federal character. According to Okpe (2002) and Rice, (2001), ensuring fair and active representation is not only morally right; it is a *sine qua non* for modern development, because it is the professional public servant who determines the standards and regulations of public law, as well as making interpretive decisions in myriad public policy areas. Kaufman (2001) also opined that “not only do public employees shape policy directly by the way they do their jobs; they also influence policymakers who give them their powers and tell them what to do”. That is, they play a prominent part in formulating the directives they receive. Representative bureaucracy is thus critical in the civil service to ensure equal access and opportunity, and the inclusion of group interests in administrative decisions (Okpe, 2002). The present effort therefore is geared towards determining the efficiency burden of the Nigerian civil service against the backdrop of representativeness in the public bureaucracy.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Fundamentally, a fully developed bureaucracy has the advantage of bringing speed, precision, unambiguity, continuity, strict subordination and reduction of friction and cost into an administrative process. Therefore, Peter Blau in Onah (2001) sees bureaucracy as an organisation that maximizes efficiency in administration or an institutionalised method of organised social conduct in the interest of administrative efficiency. There is thus a conflict at the point of applying the bureaucratic principles of impersonal and Universal rule in a predominantly pre-industrial society with a set of traditional values of kinship and reciprocity (Etnezie 1998). The mixture of this case is everywhere present which produced a new form of characteristics of neither the western nor traditional institutions (Okpe, 2002). The fusing of bureaucratic imperatives of impersonality, rigidity and universality of norms with traditional values of kinship, where primordial attachment to social groups are eminent and reciprocal, the end results are inefficiency, embezzlement, favoritism, graft, misuse of official property, poverty, declining standard of living, nepotism, non-accountability etc in the system. Again, the inefficiency of the Nigerian bureaucracy can also be captured in the reform process by El-Rufai and his team. He opined that, they faced the daunting challenge of reforming a federal public service whose central management organ – the civil service commission and the office of the head of the civil service, had become corrupt, inept and ineffective. They claimed that appointments, promotions, postings and discipline were bought and sold by civil servants almost the same way shares are traded on the stock market El-Rufai (2013).

Thus, with the aforementioned problematic, this paper tends to proffer answers to the following questions;

1. How has the federal character principle reflected in the recruitment and selection of workers in the Nigerian public service?
2. To what extent is neo-patrimonial representation a burden to the efficiency of the Nigerian public service.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 The Neopatrimonial Approach**

The neopatrimonial approach is used as a theoretical base in this study. Neopatrimonialism is the vertical distribution of resources that gave rise to patron-client networks based around a powerful individual or party (Francisco, 2010). According to Egemonye (2013), Neopatrimonialism is a system of governance where the formal rational-legal state apparatus co-exists and is supplanted by an informal political system of governance. It is a social order where patrons “big men” secure loyalty and support of clients by giving them benefits from state resources. In this instance, an office of power is used for personal gains. Neopatrimonial politics have developed the capacity of being able to divert public resources for private lucrative gains, undermining development possibilities already restricted by social and economic constraints (Cromwell & Chintedza, 2005 cited in Francisco, 2010). The Neopatrimonial nature of any political system weakens bureaucratic institutions, hinders good governance and prevents development from taking place. This is particularly seen in the area of recruitment and selection of individuals into vacant public positions where the “patron” with his or her political power monopolizes such positions for the benefits of his “clients” which most of the times don’t have the capacity to operate in such office, thereby leading to inefficiency and lack of development and progress in such office. Furthermore, in a neopatrimonial state, decisions are taken not on the basis of institutionalized rules but in favour of personal relationships and to personal advantage (Okafor et al., 2012). This practice has given rise to corruption, clientelism and nepotism, and these are some factors that militate against the attainment of efficiency and good governance in any given system. Neopatrimonialism makes good governance elusive in any political system. This is because the system has led to great inequalities in the distribution of wealth and has condemned a lot of citizens to live in poverty. For example, 80% of Nigeria’s oil revenue is stolen by 1% of Nigerians (Egemonye, 2013). Neopatrimonialism in Nigeria is seen as one of the obstacles to representative bureaucracy in the public sector. Thus, its outcome has been bad administration and governance which is manifested in corruption and inefficiency, high level of inequality, a distorted public sector bereft of ideals, and slow growth (Okafor et al., 2012).

## **2.2 Representative Bureaucracy and Public Service in Nigeria: A Historical Antecedent**

The Nigerian public service, is no doubt a colonial heritage and was therefore patterned after the British model. The service was designed by the British to enforce law and order to secure colonial interest at all costs in the country (Offiong, 1995). The earliest stage of modern Nigerian civil service could be traced to 1849 when the British sought to sanitize the Bights of Benin and Biafra which were notorious ports for slave trade (Afigbo and Uya, 2000). Other highlights of evolution of Nigerian public service as detailed by Maduabum (2008) include; the central administration for Lagos, Gold Coast the Gambia and Sierra Leone was transferred to Free Town, Sierra Leone (from 1866 – 1874), Lagos colony was administered from Gold Coast (1874 – 1886), in 1886, Molony was appointed governor of Lagos, in 1889, the Nigerian coast protectorate was merged with the territories of the Royal Niger companies, on January 1, 1900, the protectorates of southern Nigeria were created, in 1906, Lagos colony was merged with southern Nigerian, in 1914, Lagos colony and the southern protectorate were merged with northern protectorate to form an amalgamated territory called “Nigeria”. Efforts to establish modern civil service continued as different government introduced measures to improve on bureaucratic capacity of the new state.

However, the administrative decentralization which started under the leadership of Bernard Bourdillion in 1939 saw the regional governments developing their public bureaucracies along regional lines (Yagboyaju and Oyewo, 2017). However, bureaucracies at the regional level in the country at this stage were only regional in structure but not in terms of the personnel mainly because the interest was in the quality and efficiency of the workforce. For example, according to Yagboyayu and Oyewo (2017), the northern region had a good number of expatriates and bureaucrats of southern extraction. This was apparently due to the relative literacy level in the region at that point in time. However, the first attempt to make public bureaucracy to have regional and ethnic identity was fired by the Northern Region in 1952 when it communicated to the central Government a conclusion of its Executive Council in regard to the policy of Nigerianisation of Senior Service posts in regionalized Departments (Yagboyayu and Oyewo, 2017). It recommended to the Nigerian Government that, pending the report of the investigation then proposed into the progress of Nigerianisation, (a) no appointments of non-expatriates officers other than of northern origin, should be made without prior consultation with the Lieutenant Governor and (b) if there is a suitable Northerner with the necessary qualifications available, he should be appointed to a post in preference to other claimants.

Challenges of equitable representation which is one of the most confounding problems of the multi-lingual states, including Nigeria, started to gain momentum immediately after independence. Although, the adoption of quota system which was a forerunner to federal character principle in Nigeria was used in many areas of the nation’s life including admission into institutions of learning. However, the real attempt to make Nigerian public service have a representative outlook and correct the obvious imbalance of representation between the north and south came through the federal character principle under the 1979 constitution (Yagboyayu and Oyewo, 2017). It is equally important to note that the issue of representation in public offices does not end at the federal level in Nigeria. State governments in Nigeria also discriminate in matters of recruitment. For example, Oyo State Government, according to the white paper on report of visitation panel of the polytechnic Ibadan in 1999, accepted the proposal that the numerical strength of non-indigenes at the Polytechnic should be reduced through a deliberate and gradual process of recruitment of indigenes (Yagboyayu and Oyewo, 2017). The gloomy fear of domination among the ethnic groups, particularly, regarding representation public service gained policy attention in 1979. The 1979 constitution provides for the establishment of Federal Character Commission and since then, it has survived every other constitutional frameworks for example, 1989 and 1997 constitutions. According to Ojo (2009), Federal character principle is an integrative mechanism which aims at ensuring fair and effective representation of the various component of the Federation in the country’s positions, power, status and influence. Specifically, the objective of the Federal character principle according to section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution as amended is that: The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the government or any of its agencies.

Operation of the federal character principle leaves much to be desired. In the words of Abati (2016), there has been so much concern about how the federal character principle has since its introduction in 1979, which according to him has promoted mediocrity within the public service, and retarded national growth and progress. Similarly, Ekeh (1989:34), contends that the “principle’s most radical and damaging application has been in the bureaucracies and public service of the federation... permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed”. He further argued that the application of the federal character principle “has eroded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of politics”. In short, Ekeh (1989) describes it as the solution that has deepened the problem it was devised to tackle. Arguing along the same line, Forrest (1993:76), opines that the implementation of the principle of federal character in public office has “not only led to poor appointments but also enhance mediocrity rather than merit”. Meanwhile, the arguments in support of representation in bureaucratic organizations centre on the fact that Nigeria cannot be run as a clan even on the basis of merit. According to Olaopa (2012:5), the federal character principle remains one of the “effective nation-building strategies invented for managing the combustive diversity in

Nigeria". Similarly, Ojo (2009), sees it as one of the instruments for managing Nigeria's federal system. Arguing along the same line Gberevbie (2012), argued that the fact that someone is recruited into the service of the federation does not necessarily mean that such a person cannot contribute to the development of such nation.

### **2.3 The Nigerian Public Service and the Burden of Efficiency: Interrogating the Politics of Neo-Patrimonial Representation**

Before interrogating the politics of neo-patrimonial representation in the public sector especially in developing countries, the issue of productivity and efficiency is pertinent in ushering the subject matter. According to Mustapha and Omoredede (2017), productivity viewed from the lens of the economist has to do with an efficiency which has as its essential calculus in the ratio of input and output. Productivity determined by efficiency model of the economist is the ability of the organisation concerned, whether private or public, to generate profit in excess of its overall expenditure. Also, in the view of Ikeanyibe (2009) cited in Mustapha and Edegware, (2018), productivity is a measurement or calculation of input and output ratio. Inputs are the amount of resources such as human resources, money, time, physical, technology and effort spent working in the organization, while output are the result. If the inputs are equivalent to the outputs, the worker is considered productive. Furthermore, according to Onah (2010:172) cited in Mustapha and Edegware (2018), productivity is the relationship between output of goods and services and input of resources, and human, used in the production process. In other words, productivity is the ratio of output to input. The higher the numerical value of this ratio, the greater the productivity. Accordingly, the multi-faceted nature of the public sector also constitutes a serious hindrance to developing holistic productivity strategies and efficiency and consequently, a single definition of public sector productivity is a near impossibility (Mustapha and Omoredede, 2017). These constraints to determining productivity in the public sector have been a serious concern to scholars of public administration and public sector governance (Mustapha and Omoredede, 2017). Similarly, from the angle of input, productivity can increase due to improvement and quality of various components such as manpower (which can be achieved from a merit based recruitment and selection process), machineries amongst others which leads to an increase in output in terms of products and quality. Looking at recruitment and selection process in Nigeria's public sector, various actors and contenders (political, social and economic elites) struggle for recruitment slots in order to satisfy their immediate cronies and political clients thereby undermining the concept of quality in manpower (which flows from merit), and increasing elites political and economic power on the timid unemployed populace and society at large. Thus, with the patron client posture in the public sector, low productivity becomes inevitable. From the foregoing, the influence of the political gladiators in the recruitment process can be interpreted or discussed within the rubrics of power dynamics and calculus.

Hence, thinkers such as Machiavelli, Pareto, Michels, and Marx etc. have devoted their political analysis to how power is acquired, used, misused and maintained by various types of elites in public sector governance (Yagboyaju and Oyewo, 2017). In the context of this paper however, the perversion of the spirit and principle of federal character in recruitment into public service through the establishment and maintenance of patron-client exchange pattern between elites of various shades and the teeming unemployed Nigerian graduates is viewed as a clientele arrangement as enunciated in the theoretical frame of the paper. Thus, the next section of the paper shall analyse the recruitment and promotional dimensions as they relate to politics of representation in the Nigerian public sector.

### **2.4 The Recruitment Dimension**

The human resource is considered as the most important and most valuable in any organisation. It is this resource that processes other resources for better results and the achievement of organisational goals and objectives (Mukoro, 2015). The availability of a competent and effective labour force does not just happen by chance but through an articulated job analysis and recruitment. According to Ilepe (2017), recruitment for any organization is very important right through the entire lifespan of that organization. It constitutes the process of soliciting, contacting and interpreting potential employees and then establishing whether it will be appropriate or suitable to appoint them. Recruitment is a set of activities used to obtain a sufficient number of the right people at the right time from the right places, and its purpose is to select those who best meet the needs of the work place, and to develop and maintain a qualified and adequate workforce through which an organization can fulfill its human resources plan (Ilepe, 2017). In spite of the foregoing it is no longer in dispute that the Nigerian public sector recruitment and selection exercise has been politicized with consequential and dysfunctional effects on the institutional and employee enhanced productivity, quality decisions, programme exercise and quality public service delivery (Ejumudo, 2011). Politics of recruitment can be described as the recruitment and selection that are based on political patronage or determined by the political class. According to Yagboyaju and Oyewo (2017), the phenomenal growth of public bureaucracy in Nigeria over the years, has endeared it to a lot of interests, for example, religious, ethnic, social, political and so on. For instance, the Orosanye led Presidential Committee on Rationalization and Restructuring of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies in 2012, put the total number of government agencies and departments at 541. This figure excludes the ministries, National Assembly Staff, judicial workers etc. In the words of Abubakar (1998) through the control of state power at the centre, the ruling class has not only enhanced their leverage through patron-client alliances that cut across ethnic and regional and religious cleavages, but also appropriated federal character principle to ensure its hegemony at all levels. A vivid example can be drawn from the employment exercise at the Federal Civil Service with officers posted to



Federal Government Girls' College, Benin City (FGGC), Edo State, between the year 2008 to 2014 where more than the average number of the workers employed were from a particular section of Edo State due to the influence of a particular political "godfather and patron". The table below further buttresses the aforementioned assertion.

**Table 1**

Employment Local Spread in FGGC Edo State between the year 2008 to 2014

Employment Local Spread in FGCC Edo State between the year 2008 to 2014						
Institution	Overall Staff Strength (Academic)	Focus State	Senatorial District	Local Government Area of Origin	No. of Staff Appointment	Total No. of Staff Appointment
Federal Government Girls' College (FGGC), Benin City, Edo State	195	Edo State	Edo Central	Esan Central	3	10
				Esan North East	5	
				Esan South East	1	
				Esan West	Nil	
				Igueben	1	
			Edo North	Akoko Edo	1	5
				Etsako East	1	
				Etsako Central	Nil	
				Etsako West	2	
				Owan East	1	
			Edo South	Owan West	Nil	7
				Oredo	1	
				Orhionmwon	4	
				Ovia North East	Nil	
				Ovia South West	Nil	
				Egor	2	
				Uhunmwode	Nil	
				Ikpoba Okha	Nil	
	3	18	22			

Source: FGGC Registry (2019)

As observed in table 1, the indigenous spread of employment into FGC, Benin City, from year 2008 to 2014 has its concentration and flow to a particular direction of the state which is locally known as the "Esan land" (Edo Central Senatorial District) which has a major patron and an elder state man and one of the former leaders of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). It was discovered by this study that, out of the 22 staff employed from Edo state within the study concerned time frame (that is, 2008 – 2014), ten (10) of the total staff number employed were from Esan land (Edo Central Senatorial District), which goes to show statistically, a more than average number of the entire local government area of the state put together. Also, to establish the unevenness in the employment spread, 5 employees (academic staff) were from Edo North, while 7 employees were from Edo South Senatorial District which boasts of the highest number of population in the state. In other words, from the data in table 1, there exists an uneven representation within the state, which is theoretically due to "neo-patrimonialism" which has its operations in patron – client relations thus, making employment opportunity an issue of "buying and selling". Hence, supporting the statement of El-Rufai (2013) "...appointments, promotions, postings and discipline were bought and sold by civil servants almost the same way shares are traded on the stock market"

However, as argued by Yagboyaju and Oyewo (2017), two major factors can be attributed to the reason why recruitment into public offices has become object of transaction in the country's political landscape, which according to Okonjo-Iweala (2018), are constantly manipulated by politicians for their own ends and benefits. The first, is the belief that public offices are important avenues to seek a fair share of national cake; more so, when such cake is only to be shared and never baked (Ogundiya, 2009 in Yagboyaju and Oyewo, 2017). The second reason is the sudden rise in the population of graduates in the country without corresponding job opportunities due to low absorptive capacity of the economy, particularly due to a very low level of private investment (Ajayi and Adeniji, 2009).

The pattern of patron-client exchange system between political elites and job seekers is such that latter express political support through voting and sometimes functioning as party militia and private guards during and after elections in return for employment in public service. Political elites, who according to Ayoade (2010), sometimes appear more powerful than the state, through the control of state power and information in Nigeria have proven to be viable source of employment than competitive examination. Rather than recruiting from various segments of the country in line with public service rules and regulations, employment slots are distributed using federal character principle among the political elites who in turn reward their "loyal" followers with same. Competition for jobs in public service has therefore been reduced to political competition at the expense of a system of merit. The case of 2014 National Immigration Service – NIS recruitment is a vivid example, where each applicant was made to pay the sum of 1000naira, which NIS allegedly raked 6billion naira from the applicants as processing fee for just 4,500 vacancies. The analysis according to Ojeme (2014) stated that, about 16 persons lost their lives due to stampede at the Abuja National stadium and at the end, the political class, elites and political patrons hijacked, allotted

and rewarded these positions to their clients which most of the times are misfit. Thus, with the increase and promotion of inefficiency and unproductiveness in the public sector which are being facilitated by entrants through political god-fathers and are most times termed “untouchable” when it comes to discipline as a result of inefficiency and other misdemeanors in the public service, productivity and efficient service delivery will continue to deteriorate if the patron-client menace is not checked by all stakeholders in the public sector.

## 2.5 Promotion Dimension

Promotion is simply defined as an act of placing a worker or moving him to a more important job or rank in an organization. Also, according to Heathfield (2011), the advancement of an employee from one job position to another that has a higher salary range, a higher job title and often more and higher-level job responsibilities is called promotion. Individual contributors must be eligible for promotion. In the public sector, there are four main characteristics of workers to be promoted:

1. Right qualification.
2. The length of service required to obtain a higher post.
3. Satisfactory discharge of duties.
4. Decent behavior, successful passing of the regular interviews and examinations.

But with the fulfilment of the aforementioned criteria, there are still dramas and questions unfolded around the issue of promotion in the Nigerian public sector. And this if traced diligently to its core will be coiled with the strings of neopatrimonialism. According to Tinibu (2017), lots of Nigerian newspapers are full of stories of deprived public workers who passed all the needed procedures in the reporting year but was left outboard due lack of powerful patrons and recommendations from the top. This lack of career movement and undue favouritism in all its amoral form in the public sector has tend to dampen workers productivity which has led to an ineffective and inefficient public sector. With an interview section conducted on this matter, a former staff member of the FGC, Benin City was of the view that; “...most times appointments are gotten from Abuja were a fresh graduate is given grade level ten (10) were he/she is supposed to start with grade level eight (8)...hence, this undue promotion most of the times lead to dissatisfaction and low performance of staff members of the institution...”

Tinibu (2017) in his argument opined that, in some cases civil servants are blocked from their promotions not for objective reasons, but for their political attitudes and not fraternizing with the powers that be. Summing up the line, the paper argued that, the right regulation of public workers promotion is an obligatory component of civilized society. Thus, the objective still remains; how to promote worthy candidates and weed out the unworthy without the influence of political patrons in a representative bureaucratic structure and framework.

## 3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In an ethnic and religious diverse union like Nigeria, the challenges of equitable representation remain one of the most bewildering problems facing it. With the demand of equity and representation in public office, both elected and appointed, which is a natural mandate on multi-ethnic states. Thus, with this notion as noticed by Yagboyaju (2014), manipulation and politicization of ethnicity by many of the prominent political and bureaucratic elites has become a dominant feature of public bureaucracy in Nigeria. It is on the basis of these that supports for all forms of affirmative actions have become local and international affair. As a way of policy recommendation, the paper opines that, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) be overhaul in terms of reform in order to place it in a proper framework to effectively carry out its duty without fear of interference. This can be done in the form of the FCC ensuring a equitable spread and scrutinization of potential employees without compromising merit which is a major tool in bureaucratic performance and efficiency. The paper also recommends a monitoring and supervisory team, to effectively assess the promotional activities of public servants without fear and prejudice. Also, appointees into any state institution should be made to follow the due process of promotion done without favouritism and prejudice. Lastly, the paper call for a strong and vibrant union which will be able to chest and shoulder workers challenges such as promotion related.

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