

Examining the Interface between Bureaucratic Leadership and Nation-building in Africa

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Abstract

Background: Most countries in Africa are heterogeneous in nature, as reflected in their ethno-religious, linguistic and cultural diversities. Very few countries in the continent of Africa enjoy homogeneity in terms of customs, religion, and ethnic groups, among others. Unlike some countries in Europe that share many things in common and have been able to enjoy relative peace and development over time, Africa has been a hotbed of crises and conflicts.

Aim: Within the framework of the Theory of Integration, this article examines the interface between bureaucratic leadership and nation-building in Africa, with reference to Nigeria. The aim is to identify the challenges facing this country in its efforts at nation-building.

Method: The article adopts a qualitative approach and is descriptive in nature, with the researcher setting out to illustrate the association that exists between dependent and independent variables. Authoritative scholarly sources were reviewed during a desktop study. The purpose was to identify the relevant publications and apply them in the research.

Results: This article argues that Nigerians, in particular, and Africans, in general, do not seem to really desire a change of leadership that could enhance nation-building. If its leaders are bad, it is because they (the electorate) support them.

Conclusion: Building administrative capacities is key to resolving the myriad of challenges facing bureaucratic leadership in nation-building in Nigeria. The activities of government are increasing by the day and are getting more complex, but the available skilled and experienced administrators are far behind what is required at any given point in time.

Keywords: Africa; development; nationalism; Nigeria; service delivery; unity



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Introduction

Most countries in Africa are heterogeneous in nature, as reflected in their ethno-religious, linguistic and cultural diversities. For many of these countries, their present composition was not their own making. They are best described as accidents of history in the course of which they were forced together by empirical powers, with little or no input from nationalists in those areas. Very few countries (Burundi and Rwanda) on the continent of Africa enjoy homogeneity in terms of similarity of languages, customs, religion, and ethnic groups, among others. Unlike some countries in Europe that share many things in common and have been able to enjoy relative peace and development over time, Africa has been a hotbed of ethno-religious crises and conflicts.

In most plural societies, therefore, the arduous task remains how to bring together the various ethno-religious and sectional groups in such a way and manner that they begin to see themselves as having something in common, emphasising those things that unite them and de-emphasising those elements that accentuate their differences. There are strong points or features in every nationality that can be identified and brought together with those of other nationalities to forge a strong, united and virile nation-state.

Nigeria, like other countries with similar traits, has been working in this direction since its independence in 1960. The bureaucracies in the colonial ex-dependencies are expected to help accelerate this process by assisting the state and its respective governments with useful advice and the faithful implementation of policies and programmes that help unite various peoples in the nation-states. This is possible to achieve because the formal bureaucracy or civil service is made up of representatives of different nationalities and interest groups within the state (Ademolekun 2015). Also, its interest is to pursue a national agenda as represented in the principles of the state. Therefore, irrespective of the nature of the composition of the modern state, the civil service is expected to promote, through its creative talents and nationalistic ideology, the values of nation-building until what divides the people becomes inconsequential in the bigger scheme of things in such a country. Therefore, this article seeks to examine the nexus between bureaucracy and nation-building in Africa, with specific reference to Nigeria, and the aim of identifying the normative and empirical obstacles facing it on the way forward.

This article first presents an introduction to the methodology, followed by conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. The article examines the interface between bureaucratic leadership and nation-building, and assesses the role of bureaucratic leadership in nation-building. The focus then shifts to colonial interregnum and nation-building: the state-citizen nexus, as well as challenges confronting bureaucratic leadership in its efforts at nation-building. Before concluding, the article proffers a road map for the way forward through which nation-building can be achieved.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative approach and is descriptive in nature, with the researcher setting out to illustrate the association that exists between dependent (bureaucratic leadership) and independent (nation-building) variables. Authoritative scholarly sources were reviewed during a desktop study. The purpose was to identify the relevant publications and apply them to the research.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

Concepts in the social and management sciences do not easily lend themselves to universally agreed definitions. This makes every definition perhaps only relevant within the parameters set for a given investigation (Igbokwe-Ibeto 2020). The concept of “bureaucracy” is a specific form of organisation defined by complexity, division of labour, permanence, professional management, hierarchical coordination and control, a strict chain of command, and legal authority (Ademolekun 2015). It is distinguished from informal and collegial organisations. On the other hand, bureaucratic leadership is a management style that follows hierarchical structures. Decision-making follows a clear chain of command based on established rules and regulations. Bureaucratic management promotes efficient systems due to clearly spelt out expectations, roles and responsibilities.

The term “nation” is problematic to define in actual terms. While in theory, one can easily talk of nations in reality, it is not the case in defining a nation. According to Mclean and McMillan (2013), a nation refers to the population within a territory sharing a common culture, language and ethnicity, with a strong historical continuity. These virtues often manifest themselves in a collective communal identity (Akhakpe 2019). Following this view of a nation, one can argue that prior to colonialism, the various social groups that form the Nigerian state (such as the Hausa/Fulani, Benin Kingdom, Igbo clan system, and Yoruba Kingdom, among many others) were not nations because of their diversities in culture and languages, nor could the process of amalgamation through colonial fiat have produced a nation out of them (Nnoli 2018). The situation would have been different if these social groups had evolved on their own “through the pursuit of a common objective or aspiration” (Nnoli 2018).

There have been robust debates in the literature on what the term “nation” means in the context of the Third World environment and that of Europe. Scholars from these different areas have their views of what a nation is. Western scholars emphasise primordial sentiments as crucial variables in the emergence and development of African states (Mclean and McMillan 2013). Even Hyden (in Nzongola-Ntalaja 1993) equates this to the economy of affection, “a type of peasant economy comprising a network of support, communication and interactions among a structurally defined group connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities, for example, religion.” While this may be the case, it nonetheless obscures the interplay of class and economic and geopolitical

actors, which weighs heavily on contemporary African politics (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1993). The concept of nation conjures in one's mind the existence of a political unit of commonality in psychological perceptions, and an actual integrative infrastructure in languages, customs, culture, as well as other elements of national identities and consciousness.

For Nnoli (2018), a nation-state presupposes the prominence of social coherence and nationalism in the state, which makes it a nation-state. He submits that without social coherence and nationalism, a state may never become a nation-state (Nnoli 2018). The concept of a nation-state has embedded within it the issue of legitimacy and efficiency, both of which give the state bragging rights over the question of nation-building. Since independence in 1960, the Nigerian state has been striving hard to wield its diversities into a unified and integrative whole, with an enormous dose of national consciousness and nationalism.

There are several theoretical windows through which the issue of bureaucratic leadership and nation-building can be analysed. However, this article is anchored in the Theory of Integration, propounded by Weimar (1971). According to Weimar (in Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede, and Uli-Emina 2020), the Theory of Integration enhances the understanding of how unity is created from formerly detached groups by promoting what is common and communally advantageous to them, while de-emphasising their areas of differences. He identifies several dimensions of integration, among which are behavioural integration and elite-mass integration. There is no doubt that the power elite and the people need some form of attitudinal integration or change to organise for a common purpose, which could lead to a political culture in which both the rulers and the ruled accept one another, irrespective of their ethno-religious and other sectional differences (Ibodje and Bode 2017). Perhaps it may be difficult for a people to completely put aside their differences when dealing with one another. However, there is an imperative need for these differences to be subordinated to a higher authority that enjoys ultimate legitimacy over the political society. It is this authority that is still lacking in most African states, unlike the United States and other ethnically and religiously divided countries.

Interface between Bureaucratic Leadership and Nation-building

The burden of nation-building falls almost squarely on the civil service or bureaucracy. Roles involved, according to Igbokwe-Ibeto and Osakede (2022), can be identified as:

- a) Interpretation of the broader implication of policies.
- b) Translation of policies into programmes and their actual accomplishment.
- c) Serving as an instrument of social change and political socialisation.
- d) Regulating the political struggle among social groups.
- e) Accommodating various ethnic groups in the various national political institutions and values of the country.

- f) Building of political institutions and politics through experience in development administration.

These identified roles of bureaucratic leadership in nation-building are explained briefly below.

Public policies could be formulated in a skeletal format. It is the duty of bureaucrats to flesh them out into programmes for efficient and effective implementation. In the process of doing this, they exert enormous influence on the implementation processes. Bureaucrats are, therefore, in a prime position to influence not only policymakers, but the policies themselves (Amaechi 2021). These activities have a direct impact on the nation-building project.

Bureaucrats translate policies into programmes meant to wield the various identities and social groups into some form of united front for the purpose of development. Without bureaucracy, it may be difficult to form (at any given point in time) platforms for actualising and accomplishing programmes of development and nation-building (Igbokwe-Ibeto 2020; Kuna 2019).

In new states of Africa, Asia and Latin America, civil bureaucracy serves as a major instrument of social change and political socialisation. The transformation of traditional societies into modern ones was one of the major functions of civil bureaucracies, especially in new states and developing countries that were at that time opening up to the influx of ideas and transformation (Iweriebor 2016). Failure to adapt these processes to the African political economy has been a major undoing of African development.

Bureaucracy in developing countries had a head-start in administration vis-à-vis its political counterparts. Therefore, it was expected that they would use their experiences and skills to regulate political struggles and demands from social groups in these countries. This is more acute in societies that are deeply divided, where all groups compete with one another for scarce political goods. To avoid conflict getting out of proportion, bureaucratic leadership should ensure that the interrelationships are cordial, and should assure citizens of the fair distribution of resources of the state.

Furthermore, in plural societies, issues of fair representation of ethnic nationalities are always important and are crucial for nation-building. Unless the various ethnic groups have a feeling of belongingness in the state and the running of its affairs, they may feel alienated and marginalised, thereby creating separatist ideas within their ranks. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitators in South-East Nigeria and the Niger Delta militants are typical examples. Over time, the bureaucratic leadership has attempted to act as a balancing force by accommodating different ethnic groups into the framework of national polity, political institutions and norms of the country (Katako 2017).

Nation-building is the process of creating infrastructures and structures of integration, unity and coherence necessary for development and stability in the polity. In the context of Africa, where there are wide diversities in virtually all areas of human life, nation-building, for Iweriebor (2016), is the process by which the post-colonial states and the governing regimes attempt to create integrative, political, social, economic, cultural, psychological, emotionally affective and symbolic infrastructures and structures in their countries. These processes are aimed at getting the people to leave behind their affective and symbolic sentiments for a more nationalistic outlook. The putative nation-state should, therefore, be seen as the primary unit of attention to all as they deploy all their emotional and psychological feelings and sentiments for the good of the nation-state.

However, Nnoli (2018) argues that it is not enough to mouth these sentiments, and that nation-building should not be mistaken for representation-building. He sees them as mere statements of intention and long-term aspirations of today's Nigerians. To Gambari (2018), nation-building is never a finished business; it is instead a means to an end. The world seems to be moving away from single-level sovereignty to multi-level ones, as exemplified by the European Union and multi-national corporations. He then sees nation-building as "the product of conscious statecraft. Nation-building is always a work-in-progress, a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-creation" (Gambari 2018, 65). He further notes that nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, and a collective imagination of belonging. These are tangible and intangible threads that bind or hold the people together. It also involves building institutions and values that sustain the collective community.

Bureaucratic leaderships are expected to help realise these lofty goals of nation-building. An aspect of Weber's typification of a bureaucratic set-up is the rational behavioural aspect of administration. As he put it, the specific nature of the bureaucratic organisation (Weber in Akhakpe 2019) develops the more perfect; the more the bureaucracy is "dehumanised" the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from officials business aspects such as love, hatred, and all purely irrational and emotional elements that escape calculation. While these requirements are utopian in the sense that in real-world situations they may not be effectively put into practice, they provide us with a template or an inkling of what a bureaucracy (interested in nation-building roles) should aim at doing. In several respects, the Nigerian variant of civil bureaucracy has diluted some of these requirements for efficient and effective administration. The national civil bureaucracy subscribes to the idea of a representative bureaucracy by ensuring that every major ethnic nationality is represented in the Federal Civil Service (Hague 1985).

Yet, bureaucratic leadership in the context of Nigeria is expected to use its creative talents and abilities to create the context and virtues of symbolic identity and national consciousness amongst the Nigerian people. In this regard, the corporate interests of bureaucratic leadership are expected to coincide with those of Nigerians. In pursuing

the socioeconomic and political ideology of the state, they should elevate the national interest over and above their personal interests.

Assessment of Bureaucratic Leadership's Role in Nation-building

There is intense debate in the literature on the role of civil bureaucracy in a nation-building project. One of the challenges it has had to contend with is forging national unity in the context of diversities. A one-time colonial Governor General in Nigeria, Hugh Clifford, had wondered how a country ethnically, linguistically and religiously divided could forge a united country. In his words (in Saro-Wiwa 1997), a mere collection of self-contained and mutually independent native states, separated from one another by great distance, by differences of history and tradition, and by ethnological, racial, political, social, and religious barriers, cannot co-exist in a united country. While on a *prima facie* basis, this may be true, a more insidious analysis will reveal that this is the story of most countries in the world today. The most powerful country in the world, the United States of America (USA), is an amalgam of several ethno-religious groups; yet, it has managed through several constitutional arrangements to forge a workable federation among its multi-national groups and peoples that make up the country. Therefore, diversity is not the issue, but management is.

These complexities notwithstanding, the country (Nigeria), since independence, has made remarkable efforts towards bringing nationalities together to form a nation-state. Some of these include a multi-tier Federal state, the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, and the Federal Character Principle enshrined in the Constitution and quota system, all aimed at fairness and equality in the distribution of resources and power of the state. There are, among others, various forms of political accommodation and power-sharing arrangements, albeit without constitutional backing, such as the Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue; the National Boundary Commission; the National Sports Festival; and the National Festival of Art and Culture. These are all directed towards forging national consciousness, patriotism and nationalism.

The efficacy of these institutions, structures and measures has always depended on the human factor, particularly attitude and behaviour towards these symbols, expressions of national unity, cohesion and integration. In recent times, the high levels of ethno-religious and sectional crises and conflicts that have engulfed the polity would suggest to all that the country is still very far from being a nation-state (Kuna 2019). While one would want to agree that the nation-building process is a tortuous and complex journey that requires perseverance and painstaking actions and activities, the lack of consensus on the social contract on which the Nigerian state should operate, remains a major containing factor. There is still a lack of a common sense of purpose among the people, as well as a lack of a sense of common destiny and a collective sense of belonging to one country. It is easier for Nigerians to talk of their ethnic origin that they have affection for and a sense of belonging to, rather than the Nigerian state.

How did the country get where it is today? An understanding of the country's history will illuminate the nature of the challenges facing its nation-building enterprise. What is today known as Nigeria was made up of social formations and groups, autonomous, semi-autonomous communities and other clans. What began as economic interests of European traders in the coastal areas gradually penetrated into the hinterlands, and through gun-boat diplomacy, some of these empires and kingdoms ceded their authorities to European powers under the guise of Her Majesty's protection. Pockets of resistance that arose were suppressed by Europeans' superior military might. By 1884, the European powers decided on a peaceful partition of Africa into different European powers' spheres of influence and authority. Expectedly, territories in today's Nigeria were brought under British colonial administration—through the now (in)famous 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates of Nigeria—into one single administrative system.

The point that must be noted here is that these events were foisted on Nigerians either through brutal force or cajolery. The fact remains that the colonial administrators did not allow the people to wilfully decide how they wanted to live with each other. Thus, the Nigerian state was a product of duress, and it has not had the opportunity to redress these anomalies to date. Nigeria was, therefore, cast and weaned by force. As the temple of nationalism and decolonisation increased, the emergent economic and political elites did not have enough time to learn the socioeconomic and political systems that the British colonialists were to bequeath to them.

Two of the institutions they left behind, namely the civil bureaucracy and the military, continue to pose serious challenges to nation-building. Substantially, these institutions have not metamorphosed into indigenous institutions for nation-building. The military prides itself on being a Pan-Nigerian organisation that has advertently or inadvertently failed to be a symbol of unity in the country. All their actions have tended towards the centralisation of power and resources in a country where there is a deep current of sectionalism and communalism. Also, the authoritarian approach and posture of the military have alienated many social groups and forces that enjoyed liberty and freedom as organising principles of social relations prior to military intervention in the politics of most African states.

It is not surprising that for more than three decades, the military was in political power in Nigeria, but did not achieve much in the area of nation-building. It fought a civil war to keep the country united and struggled to put in place some developmental programmes and projects (such as the National Youth Service Corp Scheme), the creation of states and local governments, and yearly national sports festivals, among other activities and programmes. Yet, its stay in power drew the hand of the clock of nation-building many years behind. It surreptitiously took the country into the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), and it failed to harness the huge resources of the country to promote nation-building and national development. This manifested in the decay of social infrastructures, economic underdevelopment, insecurity,

unemployment and ravaging poverty, among several maladies. These issues, if they had been properly addressed, would have been launched into the context of sustainable growth and development.

The most debilitating of Nigeria's military rule was its infraction into the realm of civilian politics and the manner it managed the national wealth. At every point it intervened in politics, it pronounced itself a corrective regime. It accused civilian politicians of waste, mismanagement and corruption. But no sooner had it settled down in power than it became caught in the same web of corruption it wanted to correct. Indeed, several military regimes that took the mantle of leadership (either through bloody or bloodless coups) became the worst advertisers of the product they wanted to sell. At a time under the military, Nigeria became a pariah state that was alienated from the civilised nations of the world. It succeeded in elevating corruption to a new height never before known in the country, in addition to militarising civil society (Akhakpe 2019).

The military in government had the opportunity to deal decisively with corruption at administrative and political levels, but failed to do this; instead it became enmeshed in the very art. The same charge of corruption that led to the first military coup in 1966, led to the overthrow of General Gowon's administration by General Muritala Mohammed in 1976. A similar rendition of corruption was experienced under General Ibrahim Babangida, General Sani Abacha, and General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

The Colonial Interregnum and Nation-building: The State-citizen Nexus

The feeling of oneness among groups of people goes a long way in forging the bond of unity among them. This, in turn, gives rise to the feeling of nationalism, patriotism and integration. Prior to the colonial era, this sense of oneness was already moving towards a nation-state. All these were disrupted by the incursion of British administrators, first to the coastal areas and subsequently to the hinterlands. Their overriding interest was to make a profit, and with this came the subsidiary factors of military might and humanitarian services.

To achieve their selfish interest, they created economic enclaves, protected areas, citizens and subjects among people who had lived together for many years. For example, Smuts (in Mandani 2012) argues that the more the (colonial) economy developed, the more it came to depend on the urbanised or detribalised natives. As this happened, the beneficiaries of colonial rule appeared as an alien minority, and its victims were evidently an indigenous majority (Akhakpe 2019). The institutional legacies of colonialism were to drive a wedge between brothers and sisters who had lived together as one for centuries, now becoming enemies (Akhakpe 2019). This found resonance in the present statist approach to governance where people living together in the same state for years are classified as indigenes and non-indigenes. This segregation policy is

reflected in the distribution of state resources, positions, and goods (Igbokwe-Ibeto and Aremo 2018).

Osaghae (2012) traces the policy of segregation to the colonial epoch that allowed differentials in development to emerge between the North and South of the country. While British officials allowed free penetration of Western education in the South through missionary activities, they blocked same in the North to protect, as it were, the Islamic North from the adulteration of missionaries and Western education (Osaghae 2012). With the so-called modernity in the South came, as Osaghae (2012) argues, an indigeneity complex involving “the son of the soil” syndrome. The major aim was to protect the interest and claims of indigenes to their homelands against all “foreigners” who were denied basic rights; especially rights to land, notwithstanding that they contributed as much as the indigenes did in terms of their duties to the communities. This indigeneity complex robbed and continues to rob the people of the benefits of nationhood that were well on the way to fruition before the colonial interregnum.

Role of External Actors in Perpetuating Dependency and Complexities of Leadership Accountability in Africa

The assumption of the Dependency Theory is that decolonisation was false; thus, the issue of “after colonialism came neo-colonialism.” In all ramifications, neocolonialism fetched Africa and the entire Third World a clientele sovereignty and fake independence (Enuka 2022). Neocolonialism refers to the situation in which a country is independent in theory with all the regalia of national sovereignty, but in reality, its economic system and political policies are directed from outside (Nkrumah 1995). Indeed, it can be conceived as the practice of granting independence by the metropolitan power, with the concealed intention of making the liberated country a client state and controlling it effectively by means other than political ones. These forces, in collaboration with the indigenous elites, have perpetuated dependency as well as arrested leadership accountability in Africa.

In fact, neocolonialism has been argued to be more dangerous than former colonialism (Enuka 2022). In spite of political independence in Africa, the pattern instituted by colonialism survived and remained unchanged. The influences and roles of multinational corporations are conspicuous. It is along this line of thought that Gambo (in Enuka 2022) argues that political independence in Africa does not guarantee true independence in the real sense, but rather a wisely crafted form of control and dominance. This arrangement not only prevents Africa from developing its latent economic potential for its use, but also controls the political life of Africans in collaboration with the indigenous bourgeoisie.

Challenges Confronting Bureaucratic Leadership in Nation-building

Several challenges confront bureaucratic leadership in its efforts to promote nation-building in the country. The civil bureaucracy bequeathed to Nigeria at independence was a product of a Western cultural system, and its goals were meant to serve the system at the level of socioeconomic and political development. Transporting this same administrative mechanism to African ecology was a misnomer. Amuwo (2020) observes since there was neither an adequate attempt to re-evaluate the administrative system bequeathed by the colonial masters in the light of African sociocultural realities, nor to reinterpret it from an African perspective, it is little wonder that the African administrative apparatus has remained largely ineffective.

Most African countries have bought into the idea that to develop, they must copy the precepts, policies and values of Western countries. This leads to the phenomena of micro-macro-mimicry of socioeconomic and political practices from outside the shores of Africa (Amuwo 2020). Lussel (in Amuwo 2020) concludes that this difference is one of the reasons why transplanted ideas are seldom as successful as they were on their native soil. In a globalised world dominated by ideas, Africa, with its own array of distinguished scholars, unfortunately continues to prefer ideas from outside to its homegrown ones, to its own detriment. Looking inward for solutions to indigenous problems holds the key to effective management techniques. This becomes necessary because, according to Balogun (in Akhakpe 2019), all externally developed sciences of societies are expressions of particular sociopolitical and economic values and, to that extent, are potential agents of intellectual imperialism.

Flowing from the above, it is clear that Africa's development strategies have been patterned alongside those of the West. Hardly have countries in Africa consistently pursued development strategies that are indigenous to Africa or homegrown. Ever too often, African elites are inclined to believe that the Western world has all the answers to challenges facing African societies, and unless strategies to solve them come from the Western capitalist countries, they might not succeed. The years of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism under the guise of modernisation and, in contemporary times, globalisation have perpetuated a dependency mentality on Africans and appear to have dashed any hope of socioeconomic and political regeneration in the continent.

Africans cannot solve their developmental challenges through the mirror provided by the West. No wonder the socioeconomic and political performances of successive governments in Africa, have been abysmal. Different solutions from the West, thrown at challenges facing nation-building in Africa, have not proven fruitful and several led to legitimacy crises in the continent. In countries where governments fail to meet the expectations of the people for basic social services and employment opportunities, social disorder and political upheavals are some of the consequences (Akhakpe 2019). In these circumstances, the people are drawn apart instead of being united.

Also, deeper currents of identity crisis and multi-culturalism have “thrown a spanner into the wheel” of nation-building in Africa. Much has been written on the multi-ethnic and religious nature of most African countries (Adedeji 2014; Otite 2017). They have hindered administrative modernisation. The elites, looking at issues from different perspectives, prevented consensus views on the pathway to nation-building among administrative and political elites. It would appear that many of these challenges have taken place because of the failure of the ruling elites to let social groups come up with ideas and models based on their own initiatives rather than those nebulous ones from outside.

Not a few observers of the unfolding events in the continent would doubt the role authoritarian rule played in creating the over-centralisation of resources and power in the hands of some “dishonourable” men and women, who, by some twist of faith or manipulation, got themselves in the precinct and corridors of power. In order for this group of men to remain in power or relevant in the existing order of things, they manipulate ethnicity, religion and other sectional sentiments to frustrate any form of cohesion or unity among the people and nation-building because it pays them for the status quo to be maintained. How else can one explain a situation, as former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan told a bewildered nation, that the dreaded Boko Haram terrorists have infiltrated different organisations in government? This situation resonates in Somalia, Kenya, Mali, and Niger, among others.

The Westminster administrative culture appears not to be working in the African environment. Whereas administrators or bureaucrats are expected to be politically neutral or, at best, a-political and impersonal in the discharge of their responsibilities, the dominant pattern of relationship in Africa remains that of vigorous, personal, face-to-face, informal relations, where communities and individuals come to identify with the *occupants* of public offices and not with the office occupied (Amuwo 2020). This is what Hyden (in Amuwo 2020) calls the economy of affection that drives or organises the relations between individuals and groups in societies with holders of public positions or offices. This going side-by-side with Weberian legal-rational and impersonal behaviour may have rendered public sector organisations, in particular, and nation-building projects in general, dysfunctional.

Here arises the question of leadership. In Africa today, it is customary to say the challenge facing nation-building and other major national projects can be laid on the doorstep of bureaucratic leadership. Bureaucratic leadership is, therefore, seen as the cause and effect of the continent’s predicaments. It would appear that once public offices are personalised, leaderships tend to distance themselves from the people they ought to serve. Such development makes bureaucratic leadership unresponsive to the yearnings and expectations of those they serve. In this context, the essence of governance is ignored, as service and accountability take the back burner. Leadership, therefore, has become the “weeping boy” of the African system.

Bureaucratic Leadership and Nation-building in Africa: The Way Forward

It is pertinent to state that no single recipe can ameliorate or obliterate the enormous challenges facing bureaucratic leadership in Africa regarding its role in nation-building. Rather than seek a unilinear approach to resolving these challenges (as some would want to advocate) or a total revolution or nihilistic model, this article instead subscribes to a multi-dimensional perspective to resolving these issues, bearing in mind that the challenges cannot be traced to a single variable, for example, leadership or its like. It is the latter approach this article shall adopt here.

Indeed, the socioeconomic conditions of the people have to improve tremendously to give them hope for the future of African states. Persistent economic crises, ravaging unemployment and poverty have dashed the hopes of young Africans in the corporate existence of their country. The citizens of the country need to be reassured of their prospects in the country. The continued exit of Africans to Europe, the United States of America (USA), Canada, and even lesser economically endowed countries show the desperation of the people to make something out of their lives; something that their country cannot presently offer. A state that is hijacked by a few privileged people, to the detriment of the majority, cannot aspire to be a nation-state.

There is something definitely wrong with a country that looks outside for virtually everything it wants to grow and develop. Administrative and management techniques are culture-bound and are not transferable in their original form. While no country is an island unto itself, no two countries are exactly the same. Therefore, every country should evolve its own method, model, approach and strategy for development by mobilising its unique cultural values to bring about this change. Africa should look inward and, through the strategy of self-reliance, carve a niche for itself in the comity of nations.

Also, there is a need to bridge the social distance between the citizenry and bureaucrats. The spirit of nationalism should ordinarily wield everyone in the country together in pursuit of the goal of a nation-state, irrespective of their sex, social status or creed. For example, the American President is held accountable for the well-being of every American anywhere on the surface of the earth. Their welfare and well-being are the reasons why he/she is in office. The same philosophy governs public service. However, in Africa, bureaucrats appear to operate an “alternative government.” They tend to be a class in themselves.

One would expect the civil bureaucracy to use its special capacity, at least relative to other groups in society, to engineer and manage growth and development in the country. This must be done in line with the aspirations of the people for a better standard of living based on equity and justice for all. These goals are not far-fetched possibilities, given the enormous resources both men and God have bestowed on the country.

The present political and socioeconomic architectures in the country of Nigeria have been living on borrowed time. The people have made it clear that they need a re-negotiation of the basis of the country's existence as a state. Luckily, the federal government seemed to have heeded this clarion call when it put in motion machinery for the 2014 national conference under former President Jonathan. Regrettably, President Buhari's administration did not implement its recommendations. How much President Tinubu can harvest from that confab report will depend on how his administration can make use of it to re-map Nigeria towards a nation-state. It is a nation-building opportunity that should be used to maximum effect.

The attitude of Nigerians towards the state is dysfunctional in nation-building. The majority of Nigerians do not believe in the country. They still see it as a mere geographical expression where everyone seeks his/her own interests. For example, the moral and ideological commitment of bureaucratic leadership to the state is questionable. Personal interests tend to override those of the state. Expectedly, this attitude has permeated the whole of society to the extent that the ordinary Nigerian has little faith in the country.

Institutional remodelling, re-branding and restructuring may not yield substantial results if they are not matched by distributive justice, efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery to the people. This will give the people a sense of belonging and the impression that they are valued and wanted in the pursuit of nationhood. After close to a century of corporate co-existence, many Nigerians still feel that they are alien in a country that is supposed to be theirs. Non-indigenes of a state or local communities are discriminated against and prevented from enjoying certain rights—even if they are found to have performed a major role in nation-building in Africa.

Conclusion

It is important to aver that every nation or human collectivity deserves the kind of leaders it has. Man is egoistic and self-interested; he revolts against what he does not like and brings about its change. Nigerians, in particular, and Africans, in general, do not seem to really desire a change of leadership at this point in their history. If its leaders are bad, it is because they support them. A number of bureaucratic leaders who stole billions of their country's commonwealth returned to the warm embrace of their society with a tremendous welcome and reception.

Following from the above analysis, it is clear that nation-building is not a unilinear process; it is a multi-faceted one. Also, nation-building is never a finished business; therefore, it is always a work-in-progress. Bureaucratic leadership should man up and take the "bull by the horns" to see if it will have a positive impact on the nation-building project. Beyond this, other variables must come into play for the realisation of this goal. However, the spirit of nationalism must be present at all times to keep both leaders and followers focused on this goal.

Building administrative capacities is key to resolving the myriad of challenges facing bureaucracy in nation-building leadership in Africa. The activities of government are increasing by the day and are getting more complex, but the available skilled and experienced administrators are far behind what is required. While the country has experienced a deluge of universities and public service training institutions, their output in terms of the quality of their graduates is questionable; no thanks to the poor funding of education, economic depression leading to brain drain, a decline in moral values, and the inclination towards materialism in society. To serve as an agent of nation-building, the quality and quantity of bureaucrats have to be exemplary.

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