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## **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN A POST-OIL NIGERIAN STATE: SOME PROGNOSSES**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of public administration in a post-oil Nigerian state. It is built fundamentally around the premises that in the oil-dependent era in this country, public administration was ineffective in the translation of governmental intentions (whatever that were the intentions) into societal benefits. It is argued accordingly in the paper that public administration was a culpable party in the economic and political foibles of the oil-dependent Nigerian state. It is posited in the paper that the hub of public administration in the post-oil period should be the genre of financial administration. The study is significant in its refusal to acquiesce to the notion of the demise of dependency theory. It accordingly adopted this theory as its framework of analysis. The paper also possesses and interdisciplinary undertone that adds to its significance, as it discusses oil-related issues. Among the study's most critical conclusions is that in the post-oil Nigerian state, public administration must be immune to all togas of foreign dependency and it must above all detest and reject systemic corruption.

### **Introduction**

Progressive societies are not built on quixotic institutions. And public administration is one of such segments of societal institutions that their contributions are not only critical to the progress of a given society but must be seen to be undeniably so. The role of public administration in support of governance institutions is therefore essential to steer society on its chosen development path (Puppim de Oliveira, Jing & Collins, 2015). Public administration is furthermore, one of the main organizational pillars for delivering an ever-widening range of public services and goods to an ever multiplying and diverse citizenry in a changing, complex environment with new challenges ahead (Puppim de Oliveira, Jing & Collins, 2015). A post-oil Nigerian state reflects such a changing, complex environment with new challenges. It signifies a complex change from an oil-dependent character to a post-oil condition. In the oil-dependent Nigerian state, the complexity of society was only limited to the politics of "share the money". It never extended to the challenges of how to make the lucre available. The money was always there. A post-oil Nigerian state will not reflect such providential benevolence.

The general objective of this study therefore is to examine the role expected of public administration in the building of a post-oil Nigerian state. The study's research questions are accordingly as follows: (i) what is public administration (ii) how did public administration

contribute to the character of the oil-dependent Nigerian state (iii) how would public administration become effective, in the building of a post-oil Nigeria. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study are to (i) examine the meaning of public administration (ii) verify how public administration contributed to the character of the oil dependent Nigerian state and (iii) determine how public administration would be considered effective in the building of a post-oil Nigeria. The methodology of the paper is logical argumentation. The theoretical framework is the dependency theory.

### **Conceptual Issues**

#### **What is Public Administration?**

Public administration must rank among the most difficult issues to conceptualize in the social sciences. Rutgers (2010) has however provided a taxonomy of some classic definitions of public administration as follows:

- Public administration is the detailed and systematic execution of public law (Wilson 1887).
- Public administration is the management of men and materials in the accomplishment of the purpose of the state (White, 1926).
- Administration is both social engineering and applied psychology (Dimock, 1937).
- Public administration is the organization and management of men and materials to achieve the purpose of government (Waldo, 1955).
- When a government is organized, for the effectuation of community business, we have what has come to be called public administration (Dimock, 1967).
- That part of the public domain concerned with the administrative aspects of the resolution of public issues (Caiden, 1971).
- (1) The executive branch of government (yet it is related in important ways to the legislative and judicial branches); (2) The formulation and implementation of public policies; (3) The involvement in a considerable range of problems concerning human behavior and cooperative human effort; (4) A field that can be differentiated in several ways from private administration; and (5) The production of public goods and services (Stillman, 1982).
- Generally speaking, public administration is concerned with managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values (Denhardt, 1981).

It is indeed, the organizational means of translating government's intentions into actions, for the benefit of society. Hence, where these intentions are dependent on the whims and theories of other societies, what public administration translates, become moribund at birth. The locally dependable public administration is in this case, imbued with the capacities for the negation of such stillbirths and external depend-abilities. In Rodman (1968), the import of public administration is further depicted in the following words:

Public administration is a strategic factor in economic and social development. It influences and determines the success of any development plan, and is at the same time susceptible to deliberate social control and change. The inadequacy of

administration in many developing countries is now recognized as a major obstacle to development, perhaps more serious an obstacle than the lack of capital or foreign aid

Public administration is accordingly at the center of the translation of the economic and social dreams of the state into realities. It critically influences development plans. It generates the fundamental statistics of purposeful planning. In its ideal form it hedges itself against social manipulations and negative change. Thus, from the foregoing, it becomes obvious that public administration was a culpable party in the economic and political foibles of the oil-dependent Nigerian state.

### **The Concept of a Post-Oil Nigerian State**

The post-oil era may be a terminology of universal import. It signifies an emerging historical period in which the natural oil resource would cease to be a dominant source of energy. The income sources of the oil-dependent states would consequently become impaired. And in the Nigerian context of scholarly discourses, the origin of the concept of post-oil Nigeria is attributable to Soludo (2015) who made reference to a post-oil Nigerian economy. The concept of a post-oil Nigerian state in this study is an adaptation and / or elongation of the post-oil Nigerian economy position of Soludo (2015). It is thus, built on an assumption that the oil boom in the country and the attendant petro-dollar surpluses are over. It also fully recognizes the fact that the price of oil may rise from its current \$45.00 per barrel (in April 2016). However, the concept is weaved around a strong notion that the possibility of crude oil reaching \$145.31 per barrel, the all time high it reached in July of 2008 (Tradingeconomics.com, 2016) is remote. In the post-oil state, therefore, it would not be business as usual in the management of state affairs in Nigeria, principally because of dwindled financial resources and non-existent financial surpluses.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study: Dependency Theory**

According to Mbah (2014), the development of dependency theory was influenced by the Marxian theory of imperialism in the 1950's and 1960's. Hence, dependency theory largely originated from the Latin-American countries. The initial formulation came from people who worked with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America who sought a middle way between socialism and semi-colonial status for the region. The leading articulators of the (Marxian) dependency theory thus, include Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Harry Magdoff, Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin (Mbah, 2014). According to James (1997), Theotonio Dos Santos gave the classic definition of dependency as follows:

By dependency we mean the situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies and between these and world trade assumes some form of dependence, when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and be self-sustaining while other countries (the dependent ones), can do this, only as a reflection of that expansion which can have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate environment.

Nevertheless, dependency theory is clearly eclectic in nature ((Chilcote, 1974). Its import is therefore not limited to its Marxist and core radical trajectories. In addition, the incidence of domestic capitalism does not vitiate the fact of an external angle to the issues that have led to the inefficiencies of public officials in the dependent countries. Hence, nobody can deny that dependency theory opened up a new perspective on the realities of international political economy (Namkoong, 1999). It was therefore, once thought that the strength of dependency theory laid in the fact that it challenged prevailing mainstream assumptions about development, in particular, the neoclassical liberal view that capitalism and economic growth were inextricably linked (James, 1997). It is however held in this study that the strength of dependency theory is rather hinged on the fact that it exposed the disarticulations that were inherent in an unjust societal order. This is because, it is not yet certain that the capitalist tendencies and economic growth are not profoundly related. The critical question truly borders on the shape and physiognomy of the capitalist tendencies.

Consequently, dependency theory is in this study reflective of a scenario whereby a satellite country depends on some metropolitan states for developmental bearing in its public administration. In applying dependency theory to this study, it is held that in both theoretical and empirical terms, public administration in the Nigerian state during the oil-dependent era also, relied on the metropolitan locations for guidance and relevance.

### **The Character of the Oil-Dependent Nigerian State**

A central feature of the oil-dependent Nigerian state was profligacy. It was a period in which many Nigerians continued to swear by the gospel, preached in the 1970s by the then Military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, that Nigeria's problem was not money but how to spend it (Odunfa, 2010). Several generations of Nigerians and indeed different regimes in the country, continued to believe that there was an endless flow of spendable cash in the country. Among many of the citizens, the refrain remained: there is money in this country.

In the era of oil-dependence, Nigeria was an immensely corrupt country. The Royal Dutch Shell Company discovered oil in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria in 1956 (precisely in Oloibiri, in the present Bayelsa State of the country). Since then the oil industry has been characterized by political and economic strife, largely due to a long history of corruption by military regimes, inept civil rule and complicity of multinational corporations in the national dubious oil deals (Baghebo & Atima, 2013; Donwa, Mgbame, & Julius, 2015). Odunfa (2010) turns his attention to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which manages the country's 2m barrels a day crude oil production and highlights that even at a depressed \$50 a barrel in very bad times, the corporation would net a handsome \$50m (about £31.7m) every day of the year. Then suddenly, a junior minister says that the corporation was flat broke. And within hours of his comments, Nigerians were asking, where has all the money gone?

According to Odunfa, its detractors may rank the nation among the most corrupt but siphoning all that money would be beyond even Satan. Nevertheless, that was precisely what happened. All the money was gone. According to Obioma (2012), corruption in the petroleum sector in Nigeria could be characterized in four ways, thus:

- Policy Corruption, which involves corrupt influences on the design of sector policies as well as the enactment of sector laws and the extraction of taxes in a manner, intended to provide political or personal gains at the public expense.
- Administrative Corruption, involving the abuse of administrative office, to extract illegal benefits in exchange for political approval, covering a wide range of commercial and operational activities, “looking the other way” in the face of corrupt behavior, or for a favourable interpretation of fiscal regulations. It may also involve direct action by administrative agencies in their own selfish interest, when, for example, such agencies become illegally involved in trading on government oil or in regulating access to oil-delivery infrastructure. Thus, the more heavily regulated the system, the higher the degree of government control, and the greater the scope of administrative corruption.
- Commercial Corruption, in the broad areas of procurement abuse, including tender rigging, kickbacks and cost inflation.
- Grand Corruption, occasioning direct theft of massive amounts of money, through the disruption of production (to precipitate dubious importation of petroleum products), diversion of imported or locally produced oil and / or diversion of oil revenues.

In the oil dependent era also, strongmen were principally in-charge in Nigeria. In the games played by the strongmen, the diadem was the petro-dollar. In all their battles also, the war booty was money. A civil war was even fought to keep the country as one, so that no one section of the country could control the oil endowments in the aboriginal national contraption. According to Cebiloan (2008), oil was a major issue in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. He opines that Biafra was not a semi-desert enclave; that beneath it lays ocean oil. Approximately one tenth of this field he says lays in neighbouring Cameroon, three tenths in Nigeria. The remaining six tenths lies under Biafra. And at the end of the civil war, the strong men in military fatigues remained in power, to be in-charge of the subsequent oil windfall. No wonder Panter-Brick (1978) attributed whatever that might have been termed political transformation in the country at the time to soldiers and oil.

There was also the incidence of a pervasive belief in the picture of a national cake to which all citizens may freely and glibly partake in its consumption. Nobody bordered about how different brands of this cake could be rolled out from the supernatural national bakery. The magical bakery always had the cake ready for dismemberment by the greedy citizens. Nigerian legislators became the highest group of lawmakers on the planet. Civil servants were employed for the sake of their being employed, not because there was work for such employees to do in their places of dubious employment. There were frequent strike actions by such fictitious workers who continuously agitated for salary increases for doing no work.

Finally, governments and citizens alike profoundly believed that things just happened, without exertion or sacrificial planning on the part of anybody. National budgets and the estimates of the various state governments indeed became mere formalities and ordinary annual governance rituals couched in technical and foreign terms. There were the so-called development plans that only led to some unspecific destinations. Everybody knew that there were legions of other mineral deposits in the country but nobody was determined to explore and exploit them. Public administration for instance had to rely on GDP sloganeering as a

measure of its own effectiveness. And this was highly indicative of a dependency syndrome, being that while the metropolitan audience appreciated the results of the GDP measurements, the citizens of the dependent country considered such statistics as mere highfalutin governmentese.

When our public administration assemblage in the oil-dependent era was not focused on the attendance of international meetings abroad, it was directed at the hosting of such conferences at home. In the process, we were expending our petro-naira on international gatherings, as we left undone some critical matters that were required for the building of a sustainable society. For instance, our roads remained in a perpetual state of disrepair while we depended on international consultants and pseudo-technical advisers who were remunerated in dollars, to organize workshops for us on good governance and accountable representation. Our dependence on them continued to deepen.

### **Public Administration in the Post-Oil Nigerian State**

A profoundly distinguishing feature of public administration is locatable in its inherent expertise. Devoid of this quality, public administration would begin to possess immense similarities with private administration, trade unions and market associations. In the oil-dependent period, a dependency syndrome unnecessarily tainted the expertise of the Nigerian public administration. In the post-oil period, this expertise must not only be agreed to be present, it must also be seen to be effective in its indigeneity. We will not need experts from foreign countries to teach us how to get rid of mosquitoes from our environment.

Indeed, when we restore the position of expertise in the socio-political and economic systems of the country, strongmen will find it difficult to dismember our common national patrimony. Baboon will not be working and the monkey will only be eating. What happened in the past was that the expertise of public administration was lost in the euphoria of the oil-boom. Baboon was not even working. Strongmen capitalized on this lacuna and invaded the entire socio-political and economic space. To illustrate this, if the expertise of public administration is deployed manifestly in the raising of the tax revenue base of the national financial architecture, would strongmen easily capture the same finances, while society sheers them on?

Invariably, the hub of public administration in the post-oil period should be financial administration. This post-oil period is incidentally the period of unprecedented advances in information and communications technology (ICT). It is therefore a period, in which a national bureaucracy, in an age of emergency would critically agree on its priorities. The Nigerian priority at the time would be to massively improve on its revenue base and its revenue potentials. What will drive these efforts will principally be financial administration.

In the post-oil period, public administration must (decisively) reject corruption – the misuse of public power for private gains (World Bank, 1997). It must detest and reject the dubious systemic measures that make it seamless to siphon Nigeria's resources away to distant lands where such proceeds of corruption are utilized in the further development of such locations. Then we dependently return to such sites for consultancy services on how to run our own state. Invariably, our resources continue to flow in a cycle of perpetuity to such places while they render pseudo-professional services to us for our unsustainable development.

In the post-oil times, public administration must take the leading professional position in obstructing such nationally anemic practices. The public power that is invested in the institution of public administration must no longer in the post-oil dispensation be utilized for private gains. Therefore, although corruption has been depicted as an ancient practice, traceable back to pre-biblical times and known in the ancient civilizations of developed and developing countries (Nwankwo, 2014), we do not want it any longer in the post-oil Nigerian state.

In the post-oil Nigerian state, public administration must of necessity transform into what Rodman (1968) depicts as indigenous administration as he argues that the indigenous administration, whatever its failings, is the instrument that must execute governmental plans. It is not only a patient to be cured; it is also the only doctor in town. Technical assistance can indeed, only assist. In the post-oil Nigerian state, therefore, public administration would not need to rely on foreign technical assistance. It must see its role as that of the only doctor in town. It must be fully ready to execute the plans of government, with efficiency and effectiveness.

### Conclusion

It is concluded in this study that public administration is the organizational means of translating government's intentions into actions, for the benefit of society. It is accordingly anathema for this administrative vehicle to be deployed for private gains and corruption. The study indeed found that contrary to the orthodox notions, public administration was culpably passive in the economic and political foibles of the oil-dependent Nigerian state. James (1997) had aptly argued that dependency is a process of subjection, but that does not mean that it is a passive process. Hence, one of the most tragic of passive inclinations in a dependent nation-state must be the passiveness of its public administration. This situation even becomes more objectionable when the occasioning indifferences and apathies are in contrariness generally concluded to be activeness. In the post-oil Nigerian state, public administration must have its activeness, unquestionably restored and must be seen to be immune to all togas of foreign dependency. Above all, it must detest and reject systemic corruption.

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