

# AN APPRAISAL OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA AND TRANS-NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

*Ajagun, Samuel Olushola and Alimi M.K.O.*

## Abstract

The study examined the prismatic nature of Nigeria society and how public administrative system blended with the more civilised and developed trans-cultural administration to enhance socio-economic development and stability in the polity. It also identified the problems of political system that influenced the administrative system such as corruption, poverty, instability, discontinuity, traditional approach, bad leadership and heterogeneity and proffered solutions towards making it scientific. Survey method was employed, primary data were collected through questionnaires and interview. Random sampling technique was adopted. Secondary data were sourced from relevant books and journals, proceedings of conferences, newspapers and official publications. Data gathered were analysed using parametric and non parametric statistics. The paper found out that Nigeria has not attained modern status scientifically because of the parochial and rigid traditional approaches. It showed that organisation is a close system separated from the various complex influences of its environment as opposed to the modern thinking that there were permeable boundaries which allow interactions. The paper concluded that blending public administration in Nigeria with that of G8 will make it scientific and hence, potent enough to deal adequately with new administrative realities of post world war period as obtained in U.S.A and other western world.

## Introduction

Nigeria is one of the prismatic societies in Africa striving to attain modern status scientifically. Proper tools have not been employed in comprehending comparative politics despite the exposure to the western world over forty years ago. The traditional approaches being have been found to be inadequate in dealing with the new administrative realities of post World War period both in the U.S.A and other western world. With the realisation that the traditional approaches are too rigid, narrow and too parochial based mainly on American experiences and hence, could not be relied upon in cross-cultural situations. Traditional administrative thinking further suffered from the false assumption which led to view organisation as a closed system separated from the various complex influences of its environment. Conversely, the modern thinking is that there are permeable boundaries which allow interactions.

Stemming from the foregoing problematic of the subject, the paper seeks to make public administration scientific by making it comparative with that of the developed democracies of the G8.

### Conceptual Clarifications

## Public Administration (PA)

Nigro and Nigro (1984: 1-10) summarised the definition thus: “ Public Administration

- i. Is a co-operative group **effort in a public setting**
- ii. Covers all the three (3) branches - Executive, legislative and Judiciary as well as their interrelationships.
- iii. Has an important role in the formulation of public policy and is thus a part of the political process.
- iv. Is different in significant ways from private administration, and
- v. Is closely associated with numerous private groups and individuals in providing services to the community

## Trans-national

In this paper, trans national or cross cultural will refer to public administration across nations and cultures the world over especially the G8

## Appraisal of the Current Administration System

### Political Culture/Climate

The basic peculiarity of the Nigerian situation which must be noted is that, unlike some of the other Federal states like the United States, Canada and Australia, Nigeria started under what was more or less a central and single administration which is due, course shredded some of its powers by way of devolution on small units created from the existing big unit. It is most vital always to remember this, since it was an unusual arrangement, which sowed the germ of political and legal problems. As a result of this historical background, the 36 states making up the federation of Nigeria have only such powers are given to them

whilst the Federal Government retains to itself much power, if we take example the United States of America, when the Representatives of the thirteen original states (now 50) met in Philadelphia, they were doing so as independent states, and they were concerned with forging a union not necessarily unity (aggregation). Similarly, the states which make up the Federal Republic of Germany enjoy considerable political autonomy within the federal structure, and have strong voices in upper levels of the Federal Government which is quite unique among western Republic (Wheara 1963: 10), Nigeria has never seen anything of that type

Essentially, from the colonial era up to this stage, it can be said that administrative process may be traced in an unbroken line following the British pattern from 1851 - 1965. From 1966 to 1979, it was a sad story of military Junta.

The trend continued immediately after the four (4) years civilian interregnum of (1979 - 1984) climaxed in totalitarian and draconian military leadership of Late Gen. Sani Abacha (1993 - 1998). Until Gen. Abdusalam Abubakar handed over to the civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, then Olusegun Obasanjo to Umar Musa Yar' Adua, which was recorded in history as the first civilian to civilian transition. The concomitant effects of the military incursion into the body politics of Nigeria are instability in the polity, corruption at every level and lack of responsiveness and accountability of the political system. Thank goodness, some anti-graft institutions were promulgated to curb the official recklessness — EFCC, ICPC and due process between 2000 - 2004.

### **Accountability and Responsiveness**

Nigerian public Administration, unlike what obtains in U.S.A Britain, Canada, Germany, Russian, Italy and France suffer from the problems of accountability and control measures.

As far as Nigeria is concerned, the general assessment of the institutional arrangement established to ensure public accountability - electoral process, law of recall, impeachment, legislative, executive, judicial control, control by ombudsman like constitutions, the mass media and public opinion, as well as general service rules/regulations or civil service rules, financial memoranda - is that they are weak and ineffective. The problem of accountability confronting the Nigerian public service and the civil service in particular remains as it used to be. Sadly enough, political/military leaders have often colluded with permanent officials and business moguls to cart away government money through over inflation of contracts, diversion of funds to satisfy personal interest. The measures put in place broke down because of political instability, the impact of the military rule, low of political and civic awareness amongst Nigerians, a corrupt political class, and the absence of a clear conception of public service and ethical standards in Nigeria ( Erero, 1997: 202 - 213)

The need to ensure accountability among appointed officials arose mainly from the rapid expansion of state bureaucracies which resulted to the increase in the scope and volume of the activities for which modern states are responsible. Technological advancement has also led to government work becoming more complex but easier to accomplish than it used to be. Bureaucrats enjoy permanency of tenure and they develop expertise necessary for them to cope with the complex tasks previously articulated. It is therefore a difficult task to ensure their responsiveness. These bureaucrats are capable of abusing their office for selfish ends and conflicts could arise in their interactions with citizens. The citizens are assumed to be weak vis-a-vis the powerful state bureaucracy. The activities of the latter cover a very wide aspect of the citizen's life. This again renders it the more imperative to check bureaucratic power and the excesses of bureaucrats.

In Britain, for example, the doctrine of collective responsibility and anonymity constitute the essential theory of accountability. In practice, civil servants are supposed to be seen but not heard and a minister takes responsibilities for all the actions of his ministry. He takes all the credits and he accepts all the blames resulting from the actions taken by his ministry. Within this theoretical framework, it is possible for the parliament to pass a vote of no confidence on the executive. The latter resigns collectively following this action. Parliamentary debates, letters to ministers, parliamentary commissioners, parliamentary committees' question time, are some of the other devices used in ensuring individual and collective accountability.

The American experience differs from that of the British. In the former, the President is more or less accountable to the public because of the role that the popular vote plays in election. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of similarity in the ways permanent officials are held accountable. In the U.S.A permanent bureaucracy obeys the rule of anonymity and impartiality. But unlike the British style, the American judiciary plays a significant role in public accountability.

### **The Efficacy of Nigerian Ombudsman-Like Institutions vis-a-vis the Trans- Cultural**

It is common knowledge that the measure has not led to effective public accountability and responsiveness. It is not that the measure is defective in itself, but has been ineffectively and inappropriately tropicalised as far as the Nigerian case is concerned. For example, the ombudsman - like institutions (an imitation from the Scandinavian model) has collapsed, to a certain degree at the level of application, due to the very uncooperative attitude of public servants, coupled with very weak enthusiasm of very many public

complaint commissioners.

The body which is known as the public complaints commission in Nigeria is known by other names in different parts of the world as could be seen in the previous paragraph, for instance, as the permanent commission of inquiry in Tanzania, the Parliamentary Commissioner for administration in Britain and the Procurator General in Soviet Union.

In Nigeria, the call for an ombudsman came first from Justice Ayoola in his "Report on Civil Disturbances" in the Public Service Review:

"Government should consider the possibility of appointing a Public Complaints Commissioner on the same basis as the Parliamentary Commissioner in Britain, whose duties would include the spotlighting of public grievances, receipt of complaints of a public nature, the investigation of such complaints and the is recommendation of quick remedies of government (Ayoola, 1975: 181 - 187).

The western government on the grounds of cost and duplication of effort did not heed to call. However, the report of the Public Service Review Panel, (otherwise known as the Edgy Report) set up by the Federal Government in 1972 to look into the conditions of service of all public workers in the federation recommended among others, the setting up of the institution of an ombudsman for better administration. In July 1975, a team started work on the role and activities of ombudsman in Africa and elsewhere. Upon submission of their report, the Federal Government promulgated on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1975, the public complaints commission Decree no 31 of 1975 ( now the Public Complaints Commission Act. 1975) for the establishment of a commission to be known as the "Public Complaints Commission" vested with power to investigation mal-administration in the public sector.

This is re-emphasised by section 274 sub-sections 5 (b) of the 1979 Constitution and still upheld in the 1999 Constitution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979). It is worthy of note that before this time the governments of North-Central State (now Kaduna) and Kwara State had by decree, established the Public Complaints Commission called ombudsman (North Central State Government, 1974:3).

At this juncture, it is germane to assess how effective or efficient is the public complaints commission. It is noteworthy that the commission has come a long way in the exercise of its powers. Going through the various annual reports, the commission has dealt with matters ranging from nonpayment of compensation to landlords by government parastatals, non-payment of outstanding salary arrears, wrongful dismissal from service, delay in payment of N.P.F, irregularities in promotion, victimisation and failure to pay fringe benefits to even personal matters. Some of the gains of the commission is that it brings the grievances machinery within the reach of the citizenry. As no expenses are incurred, while it breaks officialdom by affording subordinate officials a forum in which they can bring grievances against their superiors, it also improves public administration by calling higher officials' attention of the inept performance of a subordinate conduct that he would otherwise never have known. Above all, it gives the citizens confidence in the civil service and makes them a part of government.

Despite the gains of the commission, there exist some flaws in it which include: the decisions of the commission usually do not have binding force on the parties so that the effectiveness of the decisions depends on the personality and integrity of the commissioner.

Though, a step towards bringing justice against mal-administration on the citizen, it has not fully achieved this considering the fact that most of these commissions are cited in the state capitals and quite a number of people are still ignorant of its existence.

Worse still, there exist little or no remedies for identified parties. There should be some kind of body to which these administrative appeals should lie because most times they do not only investigate but also adjudicate.

## **Personnel Management Recruitment**

Just like what operates in Great Britain, recruitment into the public service in Nigeria is through competition but, the degree of transparency in the selection leaves much to be desire. Factors such as tribal jingoism, ethnic chauvinism, corruption and political patronage or opportunism have always militated against result-oriented recruitment exercise opportunities for promotion, job security while disciplinary procedures suffer under these unethical behaviour. Little wonder why there is generally low productivity, brain-drain, labour turnover in the face of attractive conditions of service in the private sectors in Nigeria and abroad.

Comparatively, recommitment into public service in the western record is based on merit and experience unlike in Nigeria where nepotism and whom you know play dominant role.

### **Promotion Exercise**

Promotion is carried out by the treasury upon the completion of relevant training at the civil service

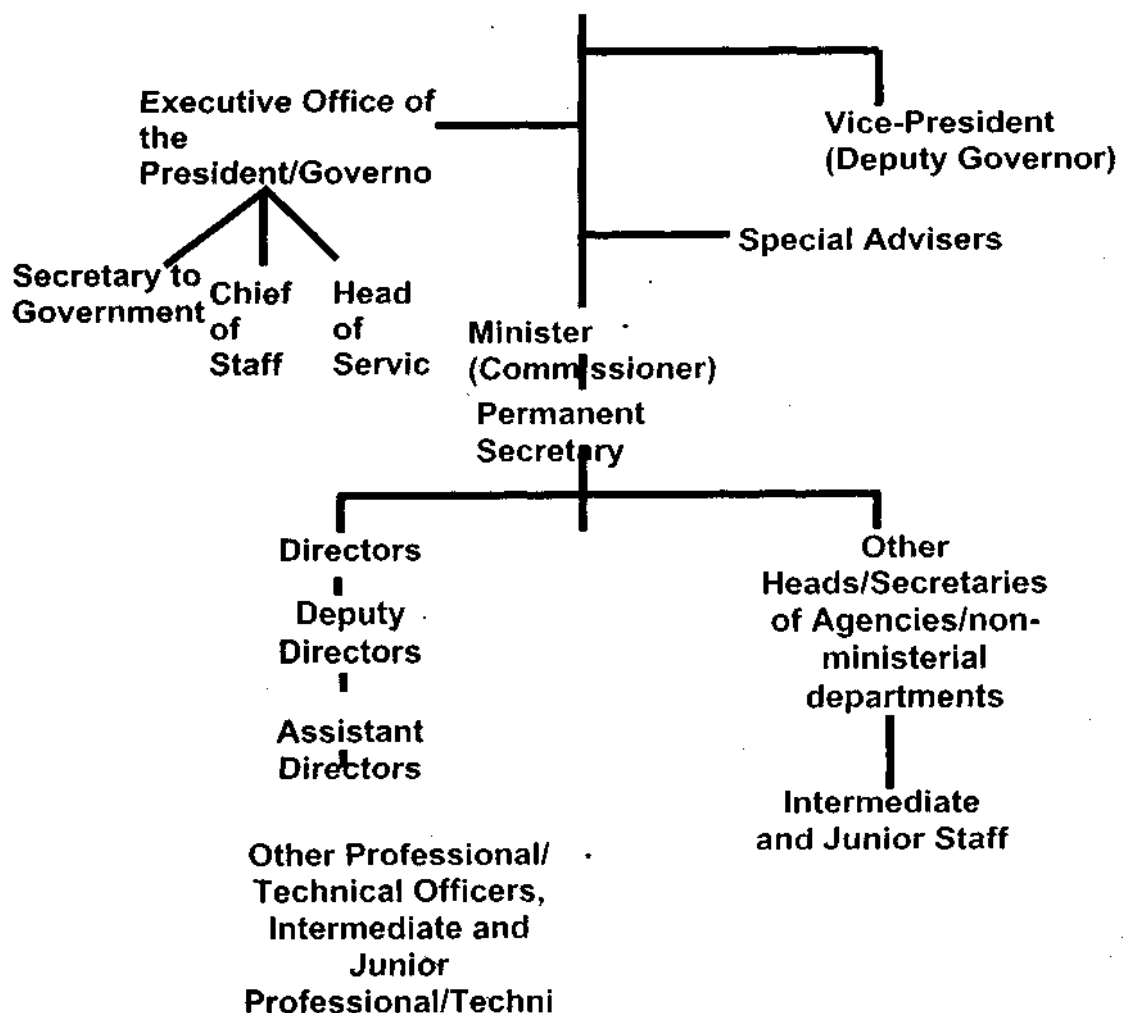
college in the British Public Service while in Nigeria, promotion of officers on GL 01-06 is carried out by the ministry/extra ministerial departments, officers on GL 07-17 are to be promoted by the Civil Service Commission of the Federation and respective States, and Local Government Service Commission in the case of local government staff. In the other member countries of G8, promotion exercise is transparent and patriotic unlike in Nigeria where favoritism, corruption and unethical behaviour more often than not, influence promotion exercise in the public service. Cases of promotion or supercession of senior officers by junior staff abound all over Nigerian civil service with the consequent petitions and counter-petitions.

The Administrative Staff College Of Nigeria (ASCON) conducts National Examination once a year for all categories of staff in the public service of the three tiers of government who wish to be officers in the service. Unlike in Great Britain and other civil and classic administration, higher civil service positions are not reserved, candidates have opportunities to undergo series of sub-degree training programmes that may qualify them to reach the peak of Permanent Secretaries of Heads of Service of the State or Federal civil service. The Federal Civil Service and State Civil Service Commissions in Nigeria handle recruitment, promotion, transfer and discipline, through the process is often politicized while the Local Government service commission is responsible for the recruitment, promotion, discipline of Local Government Staff (Ayida 1997; Philips 1988 FGN 1976). However, provision is yet to be made for the Local Government service commission in the 1999 constitution.

### Structure of Nigerian Central Governmental Administration

For the ministries/ departments as well as political leadership as provided for in the 1979 constitution happen to be the same arrangement in the 1999 constitution as could be seen in the following diagrams.

#### Structure of Nigerian Central Governmental Administration under the Presidential System President (Governor)



Source: Adapted from Organogram Federal/State Ministry

One particular and interesting feature of Nigerian Public administration and that of France is over centralization. Out of 47 years of Nigerian independence, civilian administration only endured for 18 years (1960- 1966) and (1979-1984) and (1999-2004) while we cannot be too hasty to predict the future of the Nigeria nascent democracy. Another area of parallelism is that ministers head ministries at the federal and commissioners at state levels. Essentially, Nigerian public administration needs to be more transparent,

responsive, accountable and effective, an arrangement akin to what obtains in developed countries of the world.

### **Assessment of the Nature of the Nigerian Political Economy as It affects Current Administration System**

Many people believe that given Nigerian factors, nothing works. Little wonder why scholars conclude that the Nigerian political economy is under-developed. The polity is being threatened by high mortality, crime, unemployment and poverty rates exacerbated in the Nigerian situation by large scale corruption, observers have watched with keen interest whether or not the anti-corruption bills passed into law will arrest the ugly situation. Interestingly, the acts have reduced to the barest minimum corruption at all levels of government except for selective judgment observed in the operations of EFCC.

Worse still, the Nigerian public administration is not functionally effective (Okunade 1993:15-16) and efficient unlike what obtains in Britain, America, Germany, Italy and France to mention just a few. Factors such as political immaturity as well as under-developed civil culture and cake-sharing syndrome have made the matter worse. In the developed countries, public administration is more responsive, effective, efficient and accountable because of low level of corruption, instability, electoral flaws in the democratic process of the polity, high degree of true federalism, good leadership, as well as stable constitution e.g. U.S.A that has been using the same constitution for over 200 years.

### **Evaluative Studies of Civil Service Reforms**

The civil service reform has always been a part and continued exercise of Nigerian government right from the colonial era's GORSUCH commission (1954- 1955) and up to the present day's time Allison Ayida (1997) ( Ige, 1995: 3)

Notwithstanding, a critical examination of the set of reforms would reveal that the result of the implementation efforts run in antithetical direction to the promulgated objective:

- (i) Why has government continued in reforming the civil service ?
- (ii) How far have these reforms revamped the civil service?

Over the years, it has been a calculated attempt of each of the various governments to reform the civil service in terms of its structure, function and control so as to increase or maintain the expected level of efficiency and effectiveness, which they though, would suit the purpose of their time.

However, in the pre-colonial period, administration was quite simple both politics and administration were fused together; Kings/Emirs/Chiefs were usually at the peak of authority controlling their villages or town and usually assisted by their subordinates. During this period, their major task was to maintain peace and order as well as to collect taxes through enforcement groups, (king, 1988:18-32).

With the advent of the colonial imperialists, modern system of administration started to emerge. With the amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates to form a whole Nigerian in 1914 (by means of desegregation), the concepts of reform started to take effect. Government agencies were identified and assigned functions and along side, training was designed for those that would be employed to man these agencies. These agencies include the state owned corporations, judiciary, military forces etc.

Comparatively speaking, the reforms in developed countries have always been noted for bringing about high degree of effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, responsiveness and development of the polity. Financial accountability is enshrined in all facets of human life e.g 1982 French Decentralization Reform Agenda.

In England, for example, the desire to control the monarch's finances had been a major subject of concern before a parliamentary system of government emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Significantly, one of the earliest committees of the British Parliament was the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), first established in 1882. In America, the desire to enforce financial accountability (no taxation without representation) was one of the major reasons while the United State successfully rebelled against Britain, her erstwhile colonial master. Presently, financial accountability is ensured through several ways including the general Accounting Office (G.A.O), the congressional budget office and legislative oversight over executive departments and bureaus with regards to programme implementation (king 1988: 30-32).

In France, the prestigious court of Accounts was created under King Louis XIV as means of controlling the finances of the monarch. This court has survived successive regime changes and still exists as a major tool of ensuring financial probity.

Nigerian, like most new states of the post-second world war period, has also followed this tradition. Thus, when in 1951, Nigeria adopted a quasi-parliamentary system of government; one of the first committees established was a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and which still subsists till today.

Brooding upon the 1988 civil service reform, the issue of professionalism collapsed, because, from practical experience, the public service has witnessed cases of officers engaged in cases of intra and inter-departmental or ministry transfer, hence, an officer who chooses a discipline in a ministry and he is supposed to remain in that section until he retires, does no longer hold. Thus the objective professionalism in the service is defeated.

Moreover, the politicisation of offices e.g. Permanent Secretary (PS) that was by promotion and tenure of the officer was permanent was replaced by the appointment of Director General (DG) which became a political office and the tenure terminates with the government that appointed him.

Merit was thrown overboard in such appointment the appointees apply sentiments and feel obliged to favour the government that appoints him in matters of National interest. Worse still, officers were discouraged in putting in their best because that ultimate post was no longer meant for ambition. There is tendency for instability and discontinuity in the ministry since, such appointment is tied with any incumbent government. Consequently, inefficiency and deficiency become the order of the day. Thank goodness that the Allison Ayida report has reversed the vicious circle.

Furthermore, making the ministers and commissioners as accounting officers of their various ministries is not appropriate because, having realised that their tenure will expire with the government that appoints them, portends that they would strive to cart away public funds to satisfy their wants within shortest possible time. This has been reported to be veritable avenue of corruption and nepotism.

On privatisation and commercialisation, the 1988 reform has not been able to stimulate efficiency and effectiveness of most government companies and corporations. Besides, these companies and corporations are no longer operating in favour of the masses, which was the original objective of making them the public liabilities. Many a times, the gap between the rich and the poor is widened with the clique of bourgeoisies buying all the shares to become shareholders in these parastatals who, more often than not constitute the boards, thereby dictating and influencing the running of these companies and corporations in favour of their selfish interest. For examples NIPOST increased the cost of postage stamps as well as their services to about 300%. What of Nigerian Aviation Authority that raised flights to 800% so also is NITEL that jerked up their services to 750% now reduced by new democratic government in the country to 4000%. Better day is here with the GSM operating throughout the country since you pay as you go.

As if this is not enough, loss of packages are rife with NIPOST, while sluggish delivery of parcels is the order of the day. Worse still, NAA is always with problems of aircraft refurbishing and infiltration of touts at tarmac with the concomitant effects of plane crashes: Lisa Village, Ejigbo, village, Ejigbo, village near Abuja to mention a few, NEPA now PHCN and its power failure is an issue to be conjectured, through the Obasanjo (1999 - 2007) led administration has improved in this direction to rid common man of living a 'scavenger of life' through its privatisation. The new nomenclature PHCN does not make the organisation more effective, it is only swift in bill delivery but poor in electricity supply. On the issue of local government autonomy, there is a paradox of being near and far. Near in physical existence but far in service delivery. Embezzlement, corruption and misadministration were reported in most Local Governments throughout the federation. At present, the local government are being supervised by their respective state governments, (Section 7 of 1999 Constitution) hence they are no longer autonomous (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999) as it course was hitherto being the case with the Allison Ayida Report of 1997.

### **The *Future* of Nigerian Public Administration**

At present, there is a dim of hope but with the complete re - orientation from unethical behaviour such as dishonesty, corruption, tribal jingoism, ethnicity and lack of discipline and patriotism, among Nigerians, the public administration in our country (Nigeria) will have a tradition of its own, making the carrier administrator the master of policy and his minister/ commissioner its purveyor.

### **Recommendation and Conclusion**

In this paper so far, we have been able to bring into clear focus the distinctive characteristics of Nigeria and trans - national public administration systems, while the strengths and weaknesses of each have been identified with a view to blending the suitable features with the Nigerian system 'mutantis mutandis'. Similarly, the social, cultural and political problems that contributed to the success or failure of our system have been identified, so also, the behaviour of the bureaucrats in the civil service in the state of France and the federal states of America and Nigeria as well as that of parliamentary states Britain and Russia were also articulated for the purpose of improvement on our own political and administrative cultures.

As we are now in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic, this paper has outlined the basic problems (in comparative perspectives) that have to be tackled before the administration system (career and political) could succeed. These problems, of course, are a carry - over from past regime types. The problems of revenue allocation, which in itself is the backbone of intergovernmental relations, the controversy surrounding the federal character principle, the call for sovereign National Conference, the issue of poverty alleviation, property rights, political instability, bad orientation, unethical behaviour and of course the endemic problem of corruption are critical. These are not all the problems. From our comparative analysis of cross - cultural

public administration systems, it could be inferred that bad management resulting partly from poor political leadership has led to the collapse of not only the regimes but also the national economy as well over the years.

On external control, while other countries America, Britain, Germany, Russia, Italy and France to mention just a few, enjoy autonomy among committee of nations, Nigeria is experiencing deep economic crises which have been compounded by economic imperialism masterminded by multinational institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Economic Community (EEC) to mention just a few.

Finally, good leadership, prudent management of resources, patriotism and self-purgation self-discipline and jettisoning of unethical behaviours and corruption at all levels could make the Nigeria Public Administration, more effective, efficient, responsive and accountable as obtained in the trans-cultural administrative set-up.

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