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Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria

Abdul Raufu Mustapha

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Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE)
Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 21 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LA, UK
Tel: +44 1865 283078 · Fax: +44 1865 273607 · www.crise.ox.ac.uk

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Acronyms and Foreign Language Terms

AG	Yoruba dominated Action Group
COREN	Council of Registered Engineers
Edo	An ethnic minority group
FCS	Federal Civil Service
Hausa-Fulani	An ethnic group predominantly situated in the North
Ibibio	An ethnic minority group
Igbo	An ethnic group predominantly situated in the Southeast
Ijaw	An ethnic minority group
Kanuri	An ethnic minority group
NCNC	Igbo dominated National Council of Nigerian Citizens
NPC	Northern Peoples' Congress
Nupe	An ethnic minority group
Tiv	An ethnic minority group
wazobia	Generic term for the three 'hegemonic' ethnic groups in Nigeria: Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast.
Yoruba	An ethnic group predominantly situated in the Southwest

Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria

By Abdul Raufu Mustapha[1]

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a country characterized by intense ethnic polarization and conflict. It has been argued that 'inter-ethnic rivalry for domination' is a 'fatal affliction' of the Nigerian political process [Afigbo, 1989, 4]. But how has ethnic mobilization and confrontation manifested itself in the multi ethnic setting of Nigeria? The estimated population of Nigeria in 2001 is 116.6 million [FRN, 2001, 123], making the country the most populous in Africa. The common myth is that Nigeria has 250 ethnic groups. Some estimates put the number at over 400 [cf. Bangura, nd]. The sociologist, Onigu Otite, has provided a list of 374 ethnic groups [Otite, 1990]. There is common agreement, however, that these ethnic groups are broadly divided into ethnic 'majorities' and ethnic 'minorities'. The numerically – and politically - major ethnic groups are the composite Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast. These three 'hegemonic' ethnic groups are popularly referred to by the generic term '*wazobia*'. Centres of large population concentrations coincide with the homelands of these three majority ethnic groups who constituted 57.8% of the national population in the 1963 census [Afolayan, 1978; 147 & 155]. That census has the Hausa at 11,653,000 (20.9%), the Yoruba at 11,321,000 (20.3%), and the Igbo at 9,246,000 (16.6%) [Jibril, 1991, 111]. All the other ethnicities constitute different degrees of 'minority' status. There are 'large minorities' like the Ijaw, Kanuri, Edo, Ibibio, Nupe, and the Tiv. Eleven of such large minorities constituted 27.9% of the population in the 1963 census [Afolayan, 1978; 155].

Table 1: Ethnic & Regional Composition of Nigerian Population: 1952/3.

Ethnic Group	Population	Percentage
Edo	468,501	1.5
Fulani	3,040,736	9.76
Hausa	5,548,542	17.81
Ibibio	766,764	0.25
Igbo	5,483,660	17.60
Kanuri	1,301,924	4.18
Nupe	359,260	1.15
Tiv	790,450	2.54
Yoruba	5,046,799	16.2
All Nigeria	*31,156,027*	*100*
North	16,835,582	54
East	7,967,973	25.6
West	6,352,472	20.4

Sources: compiled from GoN, 1952a, *Population Census of Northern Region of Nigeria 1952*; GoN, 1952b, *Population Census of Western Region of Nigeria 1952*; & GoN, 1953, *Population Census of The Eastern Region of Nigeria 1953*.

[1] This paper was originally written for UNRISD, Geneva.

The percentage of each ethnic group in the national population is the subject of intense political contestation, particularly amongst the majority groups and some of the large minorities. More recent censuses are particularly disputed. However, the last colonial census in 1952/3 gives an indication of the size of 9 ethnic groups in the population, as shown in Table 1.

The figures suggest that the three majority groups constituted about 51.61 percent of the national population in 1952/3. This dominance is accentuated by the tripodal regional administrative set-up of that period. In the Northern Region, the Hausa constituted 32.6 percent of the population. When the allied Fulani is included, the figure rises to 50.6 percent. In the Western Region, the Yoruba constituted 70.8 percent of the population, while in the Eastern Region, the Igbo constituted 61 percent of the population [GoN, 1952a, 26; GoN, 1952b, 18; GoN, 1953, 36]. Buttressing this demographic distribution were colonial perceptions that 'Nigeria falls naturally into three regions, the North, the West and the East' [Governor Arthur Richards, cited in Oyovbaire, 1983, 8]. There is therefore the numerical and political preponderance of the three majority ethnic groups, in their respective regions, and in the nation as a whole. The tendency of many minority groups to cluster – politically, linguistically and culturally - round the big three, has given Nigeria a tripolar ethnic structure which forms the main context for ethnic mobilization and contestation. But Nigeria is also a country that has creatively, if not always successfully, sought to grapple with its heritage of ethnic diversity and conflict [Mustapha, 2002]. However, a paradox of modern Nigerian politics is the resilience of tripolar ethnic mobilization in the face of repeated efforts at political engineering and nation-building.

This paper investigates this contradictory process of ethno-regional fragmentation side-by-side with a centralizing nation-building agenda. It explores the ethno-regional inequalities in Nigeria, particularly in the political, bureaucratic, and educational apparatuses of the state. Finally, it looks at various efforts aimed at reforming the lopsided nature of the Nigerian federation, and examines why they have not yielded the desired results.

2. Contemporary Educational and Economic Inequalities

Persisting educational and economic inequalities between different regions and ethnicities form the context for the observable inequalities in the staffing of governmental institutions in Nigeria. Inequalities exist between the north and the south halves of the country, and between the various ethnic groups. Inequalities are also observable between administrative units such as the four regions that made up the Nigerian federation up to 1966. The Nigerian federation is currently made up of 36 states, which are then grouped informally into 6 zones. Table 2 shows the zones and states, and the distribution of ethnic groups within them. Broadly speaking, each zone can be given an ethnic identification, based on the majority of the population in that zone. In this regard, the northwest zone is the core Hausa-Fulani area, while the northeast zone contains a mixture of Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri and many ethnic minorities. Both zones are regarded as the 'far north', with overlapping cultural and Islamic attributes. However, Kanuri ethno-nationalism is an important factor in the northeast. The northcentral is traditionally regarded as the zone of the non-Islamic northern ethnic minorities, many of whom are Christian. Though this zone was equally involved in the political construction of a monolithic Northern regional identity against the South in the 1950s, it is also a zone of resistance against alleged Hausa-Fulani 'domination' and cultural oppression. The southwest

zone is made up of the old Western region, the heartland of the Yoruba, while the southeast is made up of the Igbo heartlands of the old Eastern region. The last zone, the southsouth, is the zone of southern ethnic minorities, from the peripheries of the old Eastern region, and the whole of the old Mid-West region.

Table 2: Nigeria: Location of Ethnic Groups

States by zones	**Dominant Ethnic Groups**	**No. of Minority Ethnic Groups**
North West		*54*
Sokoto, Kebbi + Zamfara	Hausa	12
Katsina	Hausa	1
Kano + Jigawa	Hausa	9
Kaduna	Hausa	32
North East		*205*
Borno + Yobe	Kanuri	29
Adamawa + Taraba	Fulani, Hausa	112
Bauchi + Gombe	Hausa	64
North Central		*123*
Old Kwara (+ some parts of Kogi)	Yoruba, Ebira, Igala	20
Old Niger	Hausa, Gwari	19
Old Benue (+ some parts of Kogi)	Tiv, Idoma, Igala	12
Plateau + Nassarawa	Birom, Angas, Yergam, Hausa	72
South West		*4*
Oyo + Osun	Yoruba	-
Ekiti + Ondo	Yoruba	2
Ogun	Yoruba	-
Lagos	Yoruba	2
South East		*1*
Anambra, Enugu + Ebonyi,	Igbo	1
Imo + Abia	Igbo	-
South South		*59*
Edo + Delta	Bini, Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Igbo	13
Rivers + Bayelsa	Ijaw, Ogoni, Andoni, Igbo	10
Akwa Ibom	Ibibio	7
Cross River	Efik	29

Source: adapted from Otite, 1990, 44-57.

Due to historical factors such as the misguided colonial educational policy in Northern Nigeria [Barnes, 1997], and different levels of ethnic receptivity to western education, a huge gap developed between Northern and southern regions of Nigeria from the early 1900s. The persisting educational inequality between the various zones is shown in Table 3. Relative to their shares of the national population, the northern zones and states have fewer institutions and students than the southern zones and states. These differences are then reflected in the capacity of each zone and state to put forward candidates for bureaucratic recruitment. Though the south has about 47 percent of the population, it contributed 80 percent of young people going into the universities in 2000.

Table 3: Admissions to Nigerian Universities by zone of origin, 2000/2001

Zone,	Population in millions & (%) in National Population.	Number of all post-primary institutions in 1989 & (%) of total.	Number of admitted candidates to universities.	Percentage of total university admissions
Northwest,	22.9 (25.8)	567 *(9.7%)*	2341	4.7
Northeast	11.9 (13.4)	343 *(5.9%)*	1979	3.9
Northcentral	12.1 (13.6)	1022 *(17.5%)*	5597	11.1
Southwest	17.4 (19.6)	1575 *(27.0%)*	8763	17.4
Southeast	10.8 (12.1)	1208 *(20.7%)*	19820	39.4
Southsouth	13.3 (15.1)	1114 *(19.1%)*	11734	23.3

Source: adapted from www.jambng.com,; Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2001; *Tell*, November 14th 1994, p. 15.

This pattern of elite formation has obvious implications for inter-ethnic relations. According to a leading northern educationist, Professor Jubril Aminu:

Certain sections of this country will be highly disturbed about their future in a united Nigeria if they study the pattern of higher educational opportunities in the country. It is this kind of disturbance which promotes among the people some actions and counteractions, mutual suspicion, nepotism and loss of confidence in the concept of fair play [cited in *Tell*, 14/11/94, p. 15].

The discrepancies in the levels of educational attainment are further reflected in the level of professional and manpower development in different parts of the country. By the 1990s, despite many efforts at 'bridging' the educational gap between the north and south, the southern parts of the country continued to produce more professionally trained people. Of the 6,407 engineers registered with the Council of Registered Engineers (COREN) in 1990, only 129 or 2.0 percent are from the northern states. Similarly, of the 1,344 lawyers called to the Nigerian bar in that year, only 196 or 14.6 percent are from the northern states. Of the 669 registered estate surveyors, only five or 0.7 percent are from the northern states. Only 160 of the 1,125 (14.2 percent) of the registered architects are from the northern states. And out of the 522 registered firms of accountants, only 14 firms or 2.7 percent are thought to be established by people of northern origins [*Tell*, 14/11/94, pp. 16-20].

The educational and professional inequalities also coincide with similar economic and social inequalities. Of the total number of registered businesses between 1986 and 1990, 57 percent are in Lagos, located in the southwest, 16 percent in the north, 14 percent in the east and 13 percent in the core west [Hamalai, 1994]. By 1997, things had improved slightly, with the northern states now responsible for 34 percent of all registered establishment; but this is still well short of the 64 percent share of the southern states [FOS, 1997, p.188]. Inequalities in the social sector also mirror the inequalities in the educational and economic spheres. As Table 4 illustrates, the northern states are behind the southern states in most indicators of social well-being. The northern states have more households without electricity, a lower proportion of their children in schools, a higher percentage of illiterate adults, a lower proportion of their women and children with access to healthcare.

Table 4: Social Indicators, Zonal Percentages. 1995/6

Zone	% of Household using stream or pond for water	% of HHold without electricity	% of children 6-11 yrs in school	% of children 12 + in school	% of Literate adults, 15+	% of women using family planning	% of pregnant women using clinics	% of new born children NOT immune-ized
N/west	13.6	79.8	34.2	35.2	20.7	2.6	25.3	65.9
N/east	26.4	78.3	42.3	47.6	25	1.4	39.4	60.7
N/cent.	44.4	61.2	69.8	73.7	44.7	4.5	66.8	54
S/west	22.6	30.4	94.6	88.9	68.9	12.1	74.7	29.1
S/east	61.4	47.7	88.3	89.6	75.8	14.9	84.8	29
S/south	50.4	55.7	90.9	87.6	77.2	9.1	60.7	56.9

Source: adapted from FOS, 1995/6.

A final index of the inequalities between different states and zones of Nigeria is the level of poverty in each zone. Amidst generally high levels of poverty, there seems to be a higher concentration of the poor in the northern states; 77 percent of the people in the northwest are poor, compared to 53 percent in the southeast [FOS, 1999, p. 29].

3. Electoral Politics and Government Composition

As can be expected, the long-run patterns of overlapping inequalities have come to shape peoples' life-chances and their political perceptions. They have also had a tremendous impact on the electoral politics of the country and the composition of different governments. Under conditions of scarcity, inequalities and uneven access to economic and political resources, ethnicity has provided a convenient platform for political mobilization [Melson & Wolpe, 1971]. However, my analysis here is limited to an examination of political tendencies at the federal level, because of the enormous complexity of examining the multifarious tendencies at the state and local government levels. The first issue to note at the federal level is a correlation between ethnicity and the pattern of party formation. From about 1951, regionalism gave rise to parties strongly associated with each of the major ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani dominated Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) in the North; the Igbo dominated National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in the East and the Yoruba dominated Action Group (AG) in the West. Until the 1990s, this remained the basic template of party formation in Nigeria, despite repeated efforts by military regimes to 'nationalize' the party process. This resilience notwithstanding, it must be said that the repeated efforts at reform have had a salutary impact. Secondly, there is a correlation between ethnicity and the voting behaviour of large sections of the electorate.

Each of the major ethno-regional parties was dominant in its region. Furthermore, the adoption of the principle of regional per capita representation in parliament in 1958 meant that between 1959 and 1966, parliamentary seats were decided, not necessarily by the total numbers of the actual votes cast, but by an initial allocation of seats on a regional basis. This ensured that all governments up to 1966 had a built-in Northern majority. A political-cum-electoral inequality therefore manifested itself as the reverse of the other indices of inequality already discussed. Based on this system of northern political dominance since 1959, a broad pattern of governmental composition has emerged in which civilian governments are often

composed of northern Hausa-Fulani interests as senior partners with eastern Igbo interests as junior partners, while military regimes are, more often than not, an alliance of northern, often Hausa-Fulani, officers as senior partners with Yoruba western officers as junior partners. This, however, did not mean that other ethnic groups were excluded from such governments, only that they played an essentially supportive role to the main players. Parties or candidates that are purported to 'represent' particular ethnic interests and constellations have continued to get a huge slice of the votes from such constituencies. However, I cannot emphasise enough the fact that Nigerian electoral politics is not therefore reducible to an ethnic census. Many other factors, particularly class, historical consciousness, political clientage and calculations of personal advantage have been just as important in many constituencies. There is also the increasing salience of religious mobilization, and the operations of political machines built around notable individuals.

Between 1951 and 1957, the over-riding principle in the composition of Nigerian cabinets was the equality of regions, each of which contributed three ministers each [Osaghae, 1989, 138]. From Independence in 1960 till 1966, the North began to have a majority in the cabinet. Based on the per capita representation in parliament which gave the North half of the seats, half of the cabinet now came from the North. Apart from Hausa-Fulani predominance, there were also a large percentage of Yoruba ministers in this period, despite the fact that the Western Regional party, the AG, was in opposition to the ruling alliance of the NPC and NCNC at the centre. The instability of civilian rule led to a military coup by largely Igbo officers in January 1966. In July 1966, General Yakubu Gowon, a northern minority Christian, assumed power. As crisis mounted in 1967, the first attempt was made to break the regional mould of Nigeria politics; the erstwhile 4 regions were split into 12 states, with many minority groups now having a state of their own. In the period 1967 to 1979, the composition of the cabinets changed dramatically, largely because of the creation of states and the tendency to promote the equality of states in the composition of the cabinet. Ethnic minority representation increased. Nevertheless, the 1979 to 1983 period witnessed the reassertion of a northern majority in the cabinet. Northern minorities continued to have significant representation, while the constitutional provision for a representative cabinet meant that each state was represented. The Shagari government was overthrown in December 1983 by a group of northern military officers, led by General Buhari, who was subsequently overthrown in a palace coup in August 1985 by General Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida was himself forced out of office in August 1993 by popular protests against his cancellation of the June 12th 1993 Presidential elections. General Sani Abacha assumed office as Head of State in November 1993 and died in 1998. The current democratic experiment took off in May 1999. Increasingly, under the northern-led military regimes, collective institutional rule was gradually supplanted by personal rule. Military dictatorship, arbitrariness, personal ambition, corruption and the use of divide and rule tactics all contributed to swelling the ranks of the disaffected.

The combined Hausa and Fulani ethnicities in the 1963 census made up 29.5 percent of the Nigerian population; the Yoruba, 20.3 percent; and the Igbo, 16.6 percent [Jibril, 1991, 111]. From Table 5, we can therefore see that in *quantitative* terms, the high periods of Hausa-Fulani domination of the cabinet have been the Balewa years of the early 1960s and the Shagari years of the early 1980s. The northern minorities, on the other hand, have done quite well after 1967. Except for the Murtala regime in 1975, the southern minorities have also done well since 1967. With the exception of the Shagari years, the Yoruba have also had a fairly proportionate representation in the cabinets, despite their opposition to the government at the centre. The one group that has not done well are the Igbo. In summary therefore, while there have been periods of Hausa-Fulani domination of

the cabinet, the Igbo have been, by and large, underrepresented. The minorities, who were discriminated against in the 1950s and early 1960s have since found adequate representation since 1967. The Yoruba, on the other hand, have been adequately represented for most of the period under study.

Table 5: Ethnic composition of various Nigerian cabinets, 1960-2004, in percentages

Regime	Hausa-Fulani	Igbo	Northern Minorities	Yoruba	Southern Minorities
Balewa 1960	60	13	0	20	6.7
Gowon 1967	21	0	21	36	21
Murtala 1975	25	0	35	35	5
Shagari 1983	38	8.8	20.5	14.7	17.6
Buhari 1984	35	10	25	20	10
Obasanjo 2004	30	15	18	18	18

Sources: Osaghae, 1989, 158; Nigerian Army Education Corp & School, 1994, 330-349; list of Obasanjo's ministers in 2004

'Qualitatively', however, the distribution of actual governmental powers might be different from the quantitative distribution of cabinet portfolios. Taking into account, the power of patronage and the political sensitivity attached to different cabinet portfolios, it was possible see if there was an ethnic domination of particular cabinet positions. Based on these two criteria, we can identify three sets of portfolios, the very important, the in-between, and the less important. I am particularly interested in looking at the ethnic distribution of the twelve very important and six less important portfolios as shown in Table 6 which suggests that there is an over-representation of northern ethnic groups in general, and the Hausa-Fulani in particular, in the very important portfolios, and conversely, their under-representation in the less important portfolios. On the other hand, the southern ethnic groups, but particularly the Igbo, and to a lesser extent, the Yoruba, seem to be under-represented in the very important portfolios and over-represented in the less important portfolios.

Table 6: Ethnic Distribution of very important & less important portfolios, 1960 – 2004

	Hausa-Fulani	Northern Minorities	Igbo	Yoruba	Southern Minorities	*Total Numbers*
Very Important Portfolio	49 (33%)	37 (25%)	17 (11.6%)	24 (16%)	20 (13.6%)	147
Less Important Portfolios	6 (13%)	5 (11%)	10 (22%)	13 (28.9%)	11 (24%)	45

* Very Important Portfolio are: Finance, Agric, Internal Affairs, External Affairs, Educ, Fed Capital Territory, Defence, Works, Transport, Communications, Petroleum, & Mines and Power. Less Important Portfolios are Labour & Productivity, Information, Science & Tech, Sports & Social Development, Womens' Affairs, and Culture & Tourism. Due to incomplete data, the second Abacha cabinet, the Abdusalami cabinet and the first (1999) Obasanjo cabinet have not been included. Their inclusion is unlikely to change the picture fundamentally.

4. Composition of Parliament

In colonial Nigeria, the principle of elective representation started in 1922 with the direct election of four members to represent three constituencies in Lagos and one in Calabar on the Legislative Council. By 1963, Nigeria had a bi-cameral parliament with a Senate and a House of Representatives. There was no parliamentary

representation during military regimes. By the time the military handover power to civilians in 1979, two fundamental changes had taken place. Firstly, the four regions had been broken into smaller states; 19 in number in 1979. Secondly, the new constitution was based on a presidential model, closer to American presidentialism. As a result, the Senates after 1979 had more powers than the previous Senates. The principle of equality of regions in the Senate was maintained. In the House of Representatives, the population of each state determined the number of its representatives. There was another military take-over of power in 1983. When the military eventually handed over power in 1999, the ethnic composition of the Senate and House of Representatives from 1999 to 2003 is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Ethnic Composition of National Assembly, 1999 to 2003

Ethnic Group	% in Population (1963 Census)	% in Senate	% in House of Representatives.
Hausa/Fulani	29.5	28.4	30.3
Igbo	16.6	14.7	13.8
Yoruba	20.3	20.1	21.3
Southern Minorities	15.1	15.6	13.8
Northern Minorities	18.5	21.2	20.8

Source: Information on National Assembly members computed from data on 109 Senators and 356 Members of the House of Representatives, in Chris Anyanwu, The Law Makers, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999-2003, Startcraft International, 1999.

Using the 1963 census figures as our guide, it would seem that the combined Hausa/Fulani were slightly under-represented in the Senate, but not in the House of Representatives. Northern minorities were over-represented in both Houses of the National Assembly, while the Yoruba are fairly represented in the Senate but slightly over-represented in the House of Assembly. The southern minorities were adequately represented in the Senate but under-represented in the House of Representatives. The Igbos were under- represented in both Houses.

5. Composition of the Federal Public Sector

The rising tide of nationalism in the 1940s confronted the colonial administration with two demands: the right to political participation and access to senior public service positions [Gboyega, 1989, 165]. The demand for access was met through the policy of the 'Nigerianization'. But in the context regional educational and professional disparities, this policy was converted 'from a moderately straight-forward organizational problem into a complex political issue' [Nicolson, 1966, 169]. In 1948, though a special effort was to be made to encourage northern participation, the underlying logic of policy was that of impartiality, protection of the disadvantaged, and equality of opportunity. The bureaucracy was seen as a meritocracy. Between 1948 and 1952, the number of Nigerians in the senior civil service rose from 245 to 685, but this was still only 19 percent of the senior posts [Gboyega, 1989, 167].

The educational and professional imbalance between the northern and southern states of Nigeria was bound to have an effect on the composition of the various bureaucracies in the country. The Northern Region, fearing a southern take-over of both the Northern and Federal services, opposed the policy of 'Nigerianization', preferring to recruit foreigners. By 1954, rapid progress towards federalism necessitated the re-evaluation of the public service. The Gorsuch Commission advanced the notion of 'a healthy regional quota' as a desirable objective for the

Federal Civil Service (FCS). It stated very clearly that 'the service should be representative of the whole of Nigeria' [Gboyega, 1989, 170]. However, in 1957 only 1 percent of the staff of the FCS was of northern origin, and the proportion of northerners in the Senior Service was even less [Osaghae, 1988, 25]. Between 1960 and 1965, more northern officers transferred to the FCS, compared to officers from the East and West [Shehu Shagari, cited in Gboyega, 1989, 173]. By 1961, of the 1203 Nigerian officers in the elite Administrative and Professional cadre, only 34 (2.8%) were from the North. Of the 1150 Nigerians in the Executive cadre, only 30 (2.6%) were from the North [Osaghae, 1988, 25]. Merit continued to be the yardstick for recruitment, but northern officers were given special privileges, such as priority in the allocation of official accommodation. By 1967, 14 (37.8%) of the 37 Nigerian diplomats abroad were northern, along with 3 out of 8 members of the board of the Nigerian Coal Corporation, 4 out of 11 members of the board of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, and significantly, 6 (37.5%) of the 16 Federal Permanent Secretaries [Osaghae, 1988, 26]. As the 1960s progressed, ethno-regional conflict over the staffing of the federal bureaucracies intensified.

The current composition of the FCS shows that the FCS continues to be dominated by southerners, particularly Yoruba and Igbo. All the southern zones, and the northcentral zone, are over-represented in the FCS, while the northwest and northeast zones continue to be underrepresented. However, unlike the situation in Zambia where certain ethnic groups are reported to have dominated certain ministries [Dresang, 1974, 1611], no single ethnic group in Nigeria could be said to dominate a particular Ministry. The ethno-regional segmentation of the Nigerian public sector is shown in Table 8. The discrepancy between population size and bureaucratic and technocratic representation is consistent, particularly in the high-skill areas of the directorate and the technocracy.

Table 8: Ethno-regional Tendencies in the staffing of Federal Bureaucracies

Zone	*Percentage in the Bureaucracy*	Zone	*Percentage in the Bureaucracy*
NW(25.8% of pop)	10.4	SW(19.6%)	24.9
NE(13.4%)	8.6	SE(12.1%)	16
NC(13.6%	18.4	SS(15.1%)	20.7
	Percentage in the Directorate		*Percentage in the Directorate*
NW	16.8	SW	24.4
NE	12.7	SE	13.4
NC	16.4	SS	15.8
	Percentage in the Technocracy		*Percentage in the Technocracy*
NW	7.9	SW	30.5
NE	5.3	SE	21.5
NC	12.8	SS	21.6
	Percentage in the Police		*Percentage in the Police*
NW	12	SW	14
NE	12.7	SE	12.4
NC	22	SS	26.1

Sources: adapted from Federal Character Commission, 2000, p.2; Official list of all Directors in the Federal Civil Service as of 1998; Federal Character Commission advertorial in *Weekly Trust*, 1-7 October 1999, p.23; Federal Character Commission, 1999, p.25.

6. Reform Agendas & Policy Instruments

After Independence in 1960, the composition of the public sector became a major aspect of the war of attrition between the competing regional political forces. For example, the Yoruba controlled Western Regional government alleged that under 'the pretext of pursuing the bogus theory of tribal balancing' (the Yoruba had a historic head-start), the Igbo were constituting themselves into the 'sole shareholders' of many statutory corporations [cited in Osaghae, 1988, 26]. For example, there were allegations of nepotism and 'tribalism' in the Nigerian Railway Corporation under an Igbo chairman. It was suggested that 'out of a grand total of 431 names on the current staff list of our Railway Corporation, 270 are Ibos and 161 belong to other tribes'. [cited in Agbaje, 1989, 111-2] At the Nigerian Ports Authority under an Igbo Transport Minister, Mr Raymond Njoku, it was alleged that 21 of the top positions were Igbo, and that of the top 104 positions in the Authority, 73 were Igbo, 23 Yoruba, and all the other ethnicities had a paltry representation of eight [Osaghae, 1988, 26]. The press was soon inundated with statistical claims and counter-claims, as champions of Igbo and Yoruba chauvinisms sought to show which ethnic group was cornering which federal establishment. On its part, the northern elite's position was expressed by Dr Iya Abubakar, who called for a probe of the federal statutory corporations in the hope that northerners will get 'their fair share of office in the federation' [cited in Agbaje, 1989, 113]. The northern regional mouthpiece, the *Nigerian Citizen*, referred to the corporations as rotten, scandalous and treacherous [Agbaje, 1989, 113].

The conflict-ridden civilian regime was overthrown in a military coup in January 1966. The military regime of General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo who was hitherto head of the army, identified ethno-regional conflict as the major obstacle before the Nigerian state. He decided on a reform agenda whose object was to abolish the regions, seen as the institutional backbone of the contending ethno-regional forces. In the Unification Decree 34 of 1966, the federation was abolished, to be replaced by a unitary system. The regional civil services were to be unified to become a single national service. These plans raised immediate apprehension on the part of northern leaders, who felt that a unitary system would open the possibility of a southern dominated public service, not just at the centre, but also in the north. [Appendix 4, Arewa, 2001]. In the Yoruba west, there was little support for the policy. When Ironsi was subsequently overthrown and killed in July 1966 in an uprising of northern army officers, his attempt at introducing unitarism and civil service unification was presented as a thinly disguised attempt by the Igbo to seize control of the country [Arewa, 2001].

With the regime of General Yakubu Gowon, a northern minority Christian, we begin to see the elaboration of a different reform agenda. The Nigerian commitment to federalism was reaffirmed, but the nature of this federalism and the constitution of its public sector were about to undergo a radical change. Under this regime, three important policies were developed: (1) the dismantling of the old regions and their replacement with 12 new states in 1967; (2) the nationalization of the political space by the dismantling of the relics of feudal power in the north, and the defeat of the Igbo-led Biafran secession; and (3) the informal introduction of state, but not ethnic, quotas, as a basis for representation in the cabinet and some other government institutions.

After Gowon's removal in a palace coup in 1975, the nationalization of the political space gained added momentum. This was fuelled by rising receipts from crude oil sales. This period saw the nationalization of erstwhile regional universities and

television stations, and an elaborate programme of building national infrastructure like roads, dams, and the institution of subsidies aimed at creating a uniform market regime across the country. The increase in governmental powers after 1975 was matched by a higher profile for bureaucrats who had a role in the allocation of resources. The decade between 1966 and 1976 has rightly been described as the 'decade of ascendancy' of the FCS. State governments began to agitate for representation in the directorate cadre of the FCS in the hope of getting their concerns onto the federal agenda. This concern for representation at the very top was soon extended to the rest of the service [Adamolekun *et al*, 1991, 78-9]. The agitation by states for representation in federal institutions soon resulted in the attempt at re-engineering the elite formation process through the introduction of state quotas in the educational system. The quota system in the educational system aimed specifically to change the structure of elite recruitment [Oyovbaire, 1983, 24], by changing the composition of the input into the educational system.

The centralizing, nation-building drive which started in 1966 and accelerated in 1975 found its apogee in the 1979 Constitution which formed the framework for the return to civil democratic politics between 1979 and 1983. The Constitution is important for the number of innovations it sought to introduce into the management of inter-ethnic relations within the Nigerian state. Principal among these were: (1) the introduction of a majoritarian executive presidency with a nation-wide constituency as an antidote to regional and local sectarianism; (2) the setting of new power-sharing rules for the appointment of public officers, dealing specifically with the ethnic composition of public bodies; (3) and the establishment of new pan-ethnic majoritarian rules to govern the formation and conduct of political parties, and the electoral process in general. Furthermore, to be elected President, a candidate must: (1) get a majority of the votes cast at the election; (2) and meet a threshold of not less than 25 percent of the votes cast in at least two-thirds of the all the states of the federation [Sections 125 & 126 of 1979 Constitution]. The Constitution also sought to break the connection between ethnicity and party formation by bringing the formation of parties under federal control, and stipulating the conditions aspirant parties were to meet before they could be registered. The thrust was to force erstwhile regional political forces into building wider national majoritarian alliances. The Federal Electoral Commission also insisted that each party must have functioning offices in at least two-thirds of the states. However, despite these stringent rules, the old ethno-regional parties reincarnated themselves in 1979, taking due care not to openly transgress the new rules. Though sectionalism and ethno-regional mobilization had not changed, important changes had nevertheless been forced on the parties by the new rules. All eschewed open appeals to sectarianism. A political party even went furthest by dividing the country into four zones and delineating a clutch of state and party offices to be shared out to these zones. These changes tended to moderate, but did not obviate, the ethno-regional voting pattern in the country [Okpu, 1989, 360].

Another policy instrument for achieving ethno-regional balance is the Federal Character principle. The emphasis on representation and power sharing was given constitutional backing in 1979 under the Federal Character Principle. The drafters of the constitution were of the opinion that the fear of domination or exclusion were salient aspects of Nigerian politics, and that it was essential to have specific provisions to ensure that the predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups is avoided in the composition of the government and its agencies [Report of the CDC Vol. I, 1977, p. ix]. Accordingly, Section 14, sub-section 3 of the 1979 Constitution stated:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies [Section 14 (3), 1979 Constitution].

Other sections which reiterated the Federal Character Principles were Section 135, which stipulated that the president must appoint at least one minister from among the indigenes of each state, and section 157, which compelled the president to take due regard of the federal character of Nigeria in appointing persons to such offices as the secretary to the federal government, ambassadors, permanent secretaries of federal ministries, and the personal staff of the president. Similarly, sections 197 (2) stipulated that the officer corps and the other ranks of the armed forces must reflect the federal character of Nigeria, while section 199 called for the establishment of a body to ensure that the composition of the armed forces does comply with the federal character principle.

It has been suggested that the actual implementation of the federal character principle was marked by arbitrary appointments and removals [Gboyega, 1989, 178-9]. Many southern civil servants came to see the policy as a tool for depriving them of their jobs. Frustrated career expectations were also blamed on the policy, and southern applicants saw it as a discriminatory barrier. Serious damage was thereby done to the *espirit de corps* of the civil service [Gboyega, 1989, 183; Suberu, 2001, 123]. While some praised the policy as the ‘cornerstone of ethnic justice and fair government’, others condemned it as ‘geographical apartheid’ [Suberu, 2001, 111]. Another problem with the application of federal character is that it is based on the principle of the equality of states, when that is only one cleavage in the Nigerian system. Important cleavages ignored include persisting ethnic, religious, regional and local differences. Indeed, the minority rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, called for a federal character based on the ethnic group as the only criteria that will serve the needs of minority groups [Gboyega, 1989, 182].

The implementation of federal character can be criticised on four fundamental grounds. Firstly, it is all about sharing existing educational and bureaucratic facilities. This is a limited state-centred approach to the inequalities in the Nigerian system which runs counter to Nigeria’s own immediate social history. When a similar gap as that between the north and south existed between the west and the east in the 1930s, every town association or improvement union, and every local community in the east was involved in raising funds to build community schools and offer scholarships to their indigenes. This massive communal effort, along with the effort of missionaries proved effective in eliminating the gap between the east and west by the 1950s. In a similar fashion, when northern leaders under the regional premier, Sardauna, came to a full realization of the extent of the gap between the north and south in the 1950s, they embarked on a two-pronged policy of building local facilities on the one hand, and using political power to protect northern interests at the centre on the other. Funds were solicited from private individuals in the north to send northern youth to England on scholarship, and considerable public funds were devoted to building educational institutions in the north itself. Under the current climate of federal character, many northern state governments and communities are content to get their ‘share’ under the federal character principle, and have yet to accept a responsibility to contribute their part in bridging the educational gap which led to the adoption of the policy in the first place.

Secondly, federal character has been accused of encouraging 'mediocrity in positions of power' [Oyovbaire, 1983, 19]. Thirdly, since the 1980s, the application of federal character has itself become a contentious aspect of inter-ethnic relations, as those disadvantaged by it are wont to assert that 'federal character is tribal character' [Oyovbaire, 1983, 19]. In this regard, federal character helps to solve one problem – that of a heavily lop-sided bureaucracy -, but then creates another – inter-ethnic discord and acrimony -, particularly within the bureaucracy itself. This problem will persist until a way is found to practice federal character while simultaneously protecting technocratic principles of merit and due process, and giving due respect to the rights of all workers. Finally, as Adamolekun and Kincaid have rightly argued, federal character legitimates group prerogatives throughout society and encourages group cohesion and elite manipulation [Adamolekun & Kincaid, 1991, 178]. In a similar vein, Brass rejects the consociational model because it violates the rights of individuals [Brass, 1991, 334], and undermines incentives for individual achievement.

7. Conclusion: Nation-building as work-in-progress

Since 1966, the efforts at reforming inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria have had only a limited success. Firstly, ensuring ethnic representation within the bureaucracy has not meant that the individual bureaucrat would be guided by ethnic or national considerations in the discharge of his or her duties. Bureaucratic and political power are frequently used for personal, and not collective, advancement. While the reforms have fundamentally transformed the Nigerian state, they have yet to solve the problem of ethnic mobilization and conflict. As a consequence, there is still a plethora of grievances from the various ethnic groups. Much of the violent politics of Nigeria after 1999 is informed by these inflamed passions [cf Mustapha, 2004]. However, it might be argued that the real problem lies not in the marginalization of this or that group per se, but in the inadequate formulation and/or implementation of previous reforms, their politicization, and the rising pressures of poverty.

To sum up Nigeria's experience in these various reforms, it would have to be said that attempts at creating inclusive institutions have had limited success. It has been relatively easier to broaden ethnic representation in the executives and legislatures than to create genuine structures of social inclusion. Even in the context of increased ethnic representativeness, hegemonic impulses of particular ethnic groups are not totally suppressed. This problem is even more obvious in the organization of political parties, where efforts at wider representation remain subject to manipulation by the more powerful ethnic groups, involving such tactics as the recruitment of lightweight politicians from particular areas to meet federal character injunctions. Despite the federal character reforms, the parties retained their ethnic colouration until the manipulative dictatorship of Babangida (1985-1993), and the tyrannical rule of Abacha (1993-1998) combined to destroy much of the old regional political networks. However, instead of becoming more representative, political parties are now increasingly replacing ethnic forms of organization with personal networks of wealthy and powerful individuals. The old regional ethos supporting party formation has been largely replaced by an ethic of personal ambition. The increasing personalization of power under the military since 1985 has been matched by the increasing personalization of the political party system, using ethnicity as an instrument, rather than a basis, of party political mobilization

The reforms of other institutions of the Nigerian state have been even less successful, particularly in those institutions that privilege expertise as much as

representativeness. The judiciary and the civil service fall into this later category and here, many tensions are discernible. Professionalism has frequently been threatened by political interference, ethnic gate-keeping and internal factionalization. And the private sector bureaucracies in the media, banks, the formal sector economy, and even civil society, continue to manifest considerable ethnic bias with minimum effort at correcting the imbalances. These limitations notwithstanding, we should be mindful of the fact that Nigeria is now a more integrated country than it was in the 1960s.

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