

GODFATHERS AND THE 2007 NIGERIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS*

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ABSTRACT

The paper is a critical analysis of the role of the 'godfathers' in the 2007 Nigerian general elections from the perspective of the elitist concept of politics, with emphasis on its manifestation, implications and possible solutions.

The main argument of the paper is that the unprecedented influence of the 'godfathers' on the 2007 elections may not be unconnected with the weak institutionalisation of political parties and related infrastructures of democracy. This enables the monetisation, privatisation and criminalisation of politics, ably assisted by the undemocratic attitudes and behaviour of major political actors at the highest level. The result has been the deinstitutionalisation of core institutions of democracy and people who have been reduced to mere clients/consumers/spectators rather than primary stakeholders in the democratisation process.

The consequences have mostly been bad governance and rising conflict across the country. Unless something fundamental is done to address the situation Nigerian elections, as the 2007 experience suggests, will produce little more than 'choiceless' democracy. The paper concludes with recommendations for the reform of all democratic institutions and the initiation of a sustainable process of political re-engineering and social mobilisation at all levels. These are possible within a reformist developmental state.

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INTRODUCTION

The impact of the godfathers on Nigeria's 2007 general election was unprecedented. 'Godfathers' are those who have the security connections, extended local links, enormous financial weight, and so on, to plot and determine the success or otherwise of a power seeker at any level of a supposedly competitive politics. The complex processes of doing this from 'womb to tomb' is famously known as 'godfatherism'. Although godfatherism has been an institutionalised feature of Nigerian politics over the years (Joseph 1987; Falola & Ihonvbere 1985; Takaya & Tyoden 1987; Nnamani 2003), its contemporary manifestations suggest that it has assumed epidemic proportions, becoming one of the greatest threats to democratic consolidation.

In the main, this paper analyses the dynamic of this political enigma, its manifestations, form and character, implications and possible solutions, with emphasis on the 2007 elections. For in-depth study, however, it selects some case studies at federal and state levels to illustrate its position. The main argument of the paper is that the unprecedented influence of the godfathers on the 2007 elections may not be unconnected with the weak institutionalisation of political parties and related infrastructures of democracy.

The first substantive section places the paper in a theoretical perspective, interrogating the elitist conception of power and politics. The second situates godfatherism in Nigeria within a comparative-historical perspective. The next examines the role of godfathersim in the making of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2007). This is followed by the analytical fulcrum of the paper, which considers selected cases showing the impact of the godfathers on the 2007 elections. The next examines the implication of godfatherism for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. The final section contains some recommendations for taming the monster.

THE ELITIST CONCEPTION OF POWER AND POLITICS

Power is at the heart of politics. It connotes the ability of a person to force a given course of action on others even when those affected would ordinarily have preferred to behave differently. This is why power is a master-resource, the most important of all resources. With it, nothing seems impossible as it offers the surest access to all other resources as a central factor in the allocation of values. This rationalisation captures the Machiavellian concept of politics as an all out struggle for power, where the 'ends justify the means'. Against this background it is therefore important to situate this paper's analysis within the paradigm of the nature, composition and decomposition of power politics. The elitist conception of power politics offers a plausible window through which these can be examined.

The central postulations of the elitist conception of power politics are well known. Basically, the theory focuses on the acquisition, use, misuse, and consolidation of power. Its central assumption is the concentration of political power in the hands of a few, usually referred to as the power elite. The theory, therefore, presupposes that in every society at any point a minority rules over the rest of society (see Mitchell 1968; Mill 1980). The ruling minority, either political class or governing elite, comprises all those who occupy political power or influence governmental businesses and decisions.

This minority also undergoes changes in its membership and composition over time. However, such changes, according to the theorists, affect merely the form, not the structure, of rule, which remains at all times minority dominated. Again, there is an established system of reproduction of elites – what has come to be regarded as the ‘circulation of elites’, explained as ‘a situation whereby one set of elites is replaced by another set of elites possessing similar traits’ (Olaniyi 2001, pp 88-91); or as ‘the number of individuals occupying the post per unit of time’ (Lasswell et al 1963 p 49).

The concept of elitism is not only classificatory in nature, but also descriptive, designating the holder of high positions in a given society in contradistinction with those at the lowest echelon of power. It therefore raises the question of hierarchy and inequality. Hierarchy, according to Albert (2005, p 79), ‘has to do with the vertical ranking of people in the society into two categories, namely, those at the top and those occupying the lowest position’. In this pyramidal typology there are usually more at the bottom, but they are assumed to be less important than those at the top, who wield and exercise political, economic and socio-cultural power. As far as the classical elite theorists such as Pareto, Mosca, Mitchell and Marx are concerned, this is a group of inherently united people driven by a common agenda to dominate society at all times.

The monolithic concept of the elites has, however, not gone unchallenged. In his critique of the ruling elite model Robert Dahl came up with the idea of the multiplicity of elites, arguing that there were as many elites as there were values (Dahl 1958, pp 463-69). Apart from the elite of power (the political elite), ‘there are elites of wealth, respect and knowledge (to mention but a few)’ (Lasswell et al 1963, pp 49-50). Adekanye (2000, pp 164-5) drew largely on this concept to develop a much more comprehensive classification of elites, identifying political, bureaucratic, business, intellectual, aristocratic, religious and labour elites.

While the tendency toward unity of purpose and interdependence seems high among these varieties of elites, they are equally engaged in severe competition, given the divergent interests of each sub-group. For the overall elite to sustain coherence and mutually reinforcing interdependence it must possess sustaining qualities, most notably self-consciousness, coherence and unity (Dahl

1958, pp 463-9). But this is hardly the case because while the power elites actually occupy power and the government is merely in office, the former are often divided along several fault lines, a development that retards their consciousness. As such, the discipline of the power elite (ruling class) becomes poor and the government, which expresses its collective political power, will become weak as well (Ake 1996a, p 31).

The central concern of this paper, the impact of the godfathers on the 2007 elections, is well captured by the above concept of power politics from the elitist perspective. Since the birth of the democratisation process in Nigeria in May 1999 the heavens would appear to have let loose on the political system an unprecedented and suffocating downpour of godfathers. Chimaroke Nnamani, the immediate past governor of Enugu State, portrays the godfather in the Nigerian context thus:

... an impervious guardian figure who provided the lifeline and direction to the godson, perceived to live a life of total submission, subservience and protection of the oracular personality located in the large, material frame of opulence, affluence and decisiveness, that is, if not ruthless ... strictly, the godfather is simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes

Nnamani 2003; also quoted in Albert 2005, p 82

Possibly because of this pivotal location of the godfathers in the democratisation process, which, in some instances, appears unreal or fictitious, the godfathers have been able, effectively, to privatise the game of politics to the extent that only the highest bidders, measured in terms of willingness to swear an oath of eternal gratitude and loyalty to the godfather, as well as the continuous lubrication by the godfather of the political machinery, are accredited for political office.

In the circumstances, only those willing to advance the selfish interests of the existing structures of power gain access to power. This mode of elite reproduction, therefore, relegates collective social mobility and even individual social, political and economic mobility based on merit. The result, as this study will demonstrate, is the criminalisation of politics and the deinstitutionalisation of the people and rule of law in the democratisation process in Nigeria.

THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE IN COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The phenomenon of godfatherism is neither new nor peculiar to Nigeria. Societies have always been stratified into two seemingly opposing groups, the upper and

the lower classes, where the latter largely owe their material existence to the former. If anything, therefore, it has to do with the form and character of its manifestations, whether enabling or disabling to democratic development.

Albert (2005, p 81) documents how godfatherism manifests in the European and American context. According to him, France had what is referred to as 'godfathers of industry', which connotes 'corporate titans, that is businessmen with the most clout, and an interesting class of people who keeps the economy running'. These people manipulate the system either to further their selfish interests or to advance the cause of the poor. This trend also manifests in America through American films, where godfathers, according to Albert (2005, p 81), are associated with mafia gangs and are usually the 'big boss' who surrounds himself with all manner of criminal, often violent, clientele. The godsons take orders from the 'big boss' and defer to his 'good judgement' in virtually all things. This is usually done in exchange for the defence/protection of the godfather whenever the godsons run into problems; either with law enforcement agents or members of other gangs.

This socio-economic issue, according to Albert, gained entry into the politics of developed countries in terms of criminal underworld groups sponsoring politicians during elections in return for the protection of contracts. This, he writes, is euphemistically referred to in the American political science literature as 'party machine' politics. It was this system of political godfatherism that produced one of the best presidents in American history, Harry S Truman (Nwanna 2006, p 3). With the full backing of a godfather, Thomas J. Pendergast, widely known for bossing notorious political machines, Truman not only emerged as vice-president in 1944 against the wishes of President Franklin Roosevelt, but went ahead to become president.

A similar system also reportedly contributed to the emergence of Bill Clinton as governor of Arkansas in 1978, with the Arkansas poultry farmers as his godfathers. A unique factor was that when the alliance between the godfather and the godson collapsed it was handled in such a way that it would not jeopardise governance. As Nwanna (2006, p 3) puts it, 'there was no warfare'. This contrasts sharply with the Nigerian experience.

Godfatherism in Nigeria, particularly in its current form and character, is disturbing. Though it is a longstanding and deeply rooted feature of the cultural values of Nigerian society, where it is purely socio-economic in nature and mutually productive for both parties, its politicisation would appear to have contributed to the criminalisation of politics.

For example, the Hausa have a well-institutionalised system where the godfather is known as 'Maigida' (landlord or head of a household). The godfathers, according to Albert (2005, p 85) provide Hausa traders with various

facilities such as accommodation, storage, and brokerage services in order to facilitate their economic activities in exchange for compensation. Among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria a godfather is variously referred to as '*baba kekere*' (the small father), '*baba isale*' (the father of the underground world), or '*baba nigbejo*' (a great help in times of trouble). Whatever the appellation, it 'depicts community leaders with whom people of less social status identified as a way of providing physical, social, political and economic security for themselves' (Albert 2005, p 86) in return for tributes from the 'godsons'. This system also finds expression among the Igbos of Southwestern Nigeria, most notably in the relationship between '*Nnam-Ukwu*' (my master) and '*Odibo*' (the servant). The master is expected to train the servant in social, economic, and moral adulthood in exchange for the services of the servant, who, in turn, expects to be established by the master in a mutually agreed business at the end of his/her training (Albert 2005).

The above scenarios suggest that the form of godfatherism known in Nigerian cultures is symbiotic, providing mutual positive reinforcement for godfathers and godsons. The founding fathers of modern Nigeria, that is, the legendary nationalists who led the struggle for independence, among them Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikwe, and Obafemi Awolowo, tried, as far as possible, to uphold this tradition. In turn they produced notable godsons such as Lateef Jakande, Bisi Onabanjo, Bola Ige, Jim Nwobodo, Sam Mbakwe, Abubakar Rimi and Balarabe Musa, all of whom were governors during Nigeria's Second Republic (1979-1983).

The roles of the godfathers in this golden era of Nigerian politics could be likened to 'political mentorism' (Ogbuju 2006, p 6), where the godfathers 'supported and nurtured their godsons positively rather than negatively' (Albert 2005, p 88). Then, the emphasis was on issues through which the godfathers motivated their godsons to adopt a higher level of political morality and made it necessary for them to be accountable to those who voted them into office, as much as they provided them with logistic support.

Unfortunately, the godsons, who became the new godfathers, could not sustain the tradition bequeathed to them. While professing the same political ideals and claiming to be the heirs apparent of their godfathers, they displayed contradictory attitudinal and behavioural dispositions. These manifested in the form of what Joseph (1987) referred to as prebendal politics, where clientelism was the order of the day. The failure to check the problem eventually contributed to the collapse of the Second Republic. The second coming of the military, particularly under the Babangida and Abacha regimes, exacerbated the problem and elevated it to the status of national ideology. Ever since, the phenomenon of godfatherism has become a monster which threatens democratic survival in Nigeria.

GODFATHERS IN THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

Prior to the inauguration of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in May 1999, the country had been under the authoritarian grip of the military for about 16 uninterrupted years. During this era, particularly under the Abacha regime, Nigeria demonstrated little or no understanding of the cherished values of democracy and human rights. The country's deepening crisis of democratisation and governance took it almost to the brink of collapse when Abacha died in 1998.

Very few Nigerians had confidence in the transition programme initiated by the Abubakar regime. This is understandable given their frustrating experience under successive military regimes (Ojo 2006). As it turned out, the apparent indifference of a critical mass of the people to the transitional process may have contributed to the hijacking of the process by the godfathers.

The validity of the above can be seen in the way in which Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as the presidential flag bearer of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 1999 and eventually won the election to become president. His emergence, according to informed sources, was the result of a pact between him and some godfathers (Adekanye 2001, p 7). It will be recalled that when Abubakar began his transition to civilian rule it was the powerful northern powerbrokers, led by General Babangida, who negotiated Obasanjo's state pardon and plotted his emergence as president.

The pact theory gained credibility as influential PDP members confessed before the Human Rights Violation and Investigation Committee (HRVIC) to its existence. It came to the fore again during the troubled days of the 13 August 2002 impeachment motion against President Obasanjo in the House of Representatives (Omotola 2003).

The situation was not very different at state level, with the most notable and worst affected states being Kwara, Oyo, Anambra, Bornu and Enugu, where political godfathers played prominent roles in the emergence of governors. In Kwara, for example, Dr Olushola Saraki single handedly ensured the emergence and victory of Muhammad Lawal as state governor (Lawal 2005). In Bornu Senator Alli Modu Sherif bankrolled the political ambitions of Alhaji Mala Kachallah to become governor. In Oyo State Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu calls the shots, with almost all political aspirants in the state deferring to his dictates. Chief Chris Uba remains the undisputed godfather of Anambra politics and possibly the most influential of all the godfathers.

In all these cases the country witnessed the collapse of the pacts between the godfathers and the godsons, leading to serious breakdowns in law and order. The two most notorious instances were those of Anambra and Oyo States. In the

former, the apparatus of governance crumbled to the extent that the sitting governor, Chief Chris Ngige, was removed in a 'civilian coup' executed by the police and the government office was set ablaze (Nna-Emeka 2006; Aremu & Omotola 2007). In Oyo, as in Anambra, the godfather ensured the illegal impeachment of the governor for failing to surrender the state treasury to him. Adedibu told all who cared to listen that he had invested so much in the making of Rasheed Ladoja that he should be getting at least ₦15- million a month from the state security vote (Ogbuju 2006, p 8; Omotola 2006c).

'WE ARE THE STATE' SELECTED CASES OF GODFATHERISM IN THE 2007 NIGERIAN ELECTIONS

Louis XIV (1643-1715) of France was quoted as saying 'I am the state', meaning that 'his opinion and view, no matter how chauvinistic and narrow-minded, remains the opinion of the people he ruled' (Abanobi 2007, p 30). With this mindset Louis VIX ruled France in an authoritarian manner for 62 years. In contemporary Nigerian politics, particularly under the Fourth Republic, many politicians would appear to have approximated the state as their personal estate at different levels. While this attitude had been present since the outset of the democratisation process in 1999 (Gambo 2006) the manifestation of godfatherism in the 2007 Nigerian general elections was unprecedented. This perhaps largely explains why the elections were the most flawed in the annals of the country's electoral history (Adejumobi 2007a; Suberu 2007).

It is apposite to begin with what happened at the federal level, particularly with respect to the presidential election. In doing this, I shall focus specifically on the ruling party, the PDP, which was hell-bent on retaining the presidency at all costs. It was at this level that the deadly impact of godfatherism in the 2007 election began to manifest.

It began with the process of electing the party's presidential candidate. Ideally, this is done by means of party primaries used to assess a candidate's popularity and acceptability to the party and its supporters. This can be ascertained through strict adherence to the rules of the game and by ensuring that the processes are truly open, transparent and competitive. However, this was not the case, essentially because of the vested interests of the godfathers.

Initially Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the then incumbent vice-president, indicated his desire to contest the presidency under the umbrella of the PDP. As his ambition grew, and given his growing profile as a probable successor to President Obasanjo, the godfathers within the PDP moved swiftly against him and his aspirations. The first move was an attempt to discredit him by means of the Economic and

Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), established to combat corruption in the country. He was alleged to have engaged in questionable deals with the Petroleum Technology Development Fund, which had been placed under the direct control of his office.

The response of the presidency was to set up an ad hoc administrative panel to investigate the allegations. The panel completed its work in a few days, found the vice-president guilty of corruption, and recommended that his name be gazetted and that he be disqualified from contesting the election (Adejumobi 2007a; 2007b). The Presidency adopted the report and its recommendation and gazetted it. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), claiming to be acting on the basis of the indictment, subsequently disqualified Atiku from contesting the election.

The disqualification of Atiku, along with other disabling factors, most notably the aborted third-term agenda and the use of the EFCC for political purposes, led to what Adejumobi (2007a, p 13) called 'contrived political tension and confusion' over the politics of succession. What appears to have had a moderating effect on the deeply conflagrational political atmosphere was the opposition's preference for due process and respect for the rule of law. This manifested in several court actions initiated by leading opposition elements, notably Atiku, against INEC and the federal government. For example, Atiku opted to challenge his disqualification in court, arguing, quite correctly, that INEC did not have the power to disqualify any candidate as such powers are the prerogatives of the judiciary. The validity of this interpretation became evident when, on 16 April 2007, a few days before the presidential election, the Supreme Court, in a landmark but unanimous and widely celebrated judgement – a victory for democracy – ruled that INEC did not have the power to disqualify candidates and nullified its action (Soniya & Fabiyi 2007; Okanlawon et al 2007; Mojeed 2007).

Earlier, on 22 December 2006, the ruling PDP had declared the position of the vice-president vacant after Atiku had defected to a leading opposition party, the Action Congress (AC), in an attempt to achieve his presidential ambition, which, based on the exigencies of the time, might have been impossible to pursue in the PDP. The most notable of these exigencies were the reports of the administrative panel of inquiry set up by the Presidency to investigate allegations of corruption against Atiku. The panel found him culpable and recommended that he be banned from contesting the election. As the report was gazetted INEC insisted on stopping him from contesting. At a press conference in Abuja John Odeh, then national publicity secretary of the PDP, noted that at an emergency meeting held on 22 December 2006 the PDP's National Executive Committee had reviewed current political events and had 'after exhaustive deliberations condemned the action of the Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakr in declaring

for the presidency on the platform of another party while still laying claim to the office of the Vice President, a position he assumed on the platform of the PDP' (Gbadamosi 2006 pp 1, 9).

In a landmark judgement the Supreme Court reinstated Atiku as vice-president (Osaghale 2007, p 26). It is widely believed in Nigeria that there was more to the travails of the vice-president in the latter days of Obasanjo's presidency than meets the eye. The dominant view is that Obasanjo wanted to ease the vice-president out of the race in order to pave the way for his anointed candidate. It would appear that the vice-president's main offence was the role he played in opposing Obasanjo's third-term agenda (Omotola 2006b; Ibrahim 2006; Ofeimu 2006). Atiku had led a powerful coalition of opposition elements, civil society, and mass media to frustrate Obasanjo's campaign (Oyebode 2006). It can therefore be argued that the contest for the PDP's presidential ticket offered the most appropriate payback opportunity for President Obasanjo.

As it turned out, all the main contenders for the PDP presidential ticket were eased out of the race to pave the way for Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua, who was eventually elected. President Obasanjo is perceived to have played the godfather role in the election, a perception which appears to be accurate given his practical involvement in the election campaign, acting as Yar'Adua's principal campaign official and participating in the campaign team in almost all of the 36 states of the federation.

During one campaign rally Obasanjo told his audience that the presidential election was a 'do-or-die' affair for him and his PDP. And that was exactly what it became, as the Presidency and the PDP deployed all available state machinery, including the government-owned media, the military and INEC to ensure victory for Yar'Adua (Adejumobi 2007a; EUEOM 2007; Ibrahim 2007). In the aftermath of Yar'Adua's victory it was shocking to see the mothers of Yar'Adua and Jonathan Goodluck, the vice-president, lead a team of selected personalities from their respective states to pay a thank you visit to Obasanjo.

Perhaps somebody had told them about the famous Yoruba adage '*eniti ase lore tiko dupe, odabi olosa koni leri loni* (if one who has been assisted fails to show appreciation it is the equivalent of being robbed of priceless belongings)'. Indeed, the high-powered delegation was showing appreciation for the godfatherly role Obasanjo had played in ensuring the emergence of Yar'Adua and Goodluck and their eventual victory at the poll.

The suffocating influence of the godfathers in the presidential election also manifested in the 2007 gubernatorial and parliamentary elections. The gubernatorial election in Anambra State is an interesting case. Since the return of the country to civil rule in 1999 the state has been engulfed in one form of godfather-godson crisis or another. This peaked with the successful execution of

the first civilian coup in the state on 10 July 2003, referred to by many as the coup of the godfathers. In this civilian coup, Chief Chris Uba, the acclaimed godfather of Anambra politics, succeeded in masterminding the abduction of the state governor, Chief Chris Ngige, for daring to challenge Uba's 'sovereignty' by questioning his 'good judgment'.

Uba had always boasted that he had single-handedly ensured Ngige's emergence and bankrolled his campaign and must therefore dictate the tone of the politics and governance of the state, including the treasury. In the ensuing struggle Ngige was abducted but was later freed and reinstated. However, since Uba reportedly enjoyed the backing of the presidency in the crisis, the state ensured that the PDP lost in the Supreme Court, which ruled that the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) had won the election. This led to the removal of Ngige and the swearing-in of Peter Obi, the APGA candidate (Aremu & Omotola, 2007; Ayoade 2006; Nna-Emeka 2006). Peter Obi had only spent a year in office when gubernatorial elections were conducted in April 2007. Chief Andy Uba, Chris Uba's older brother, who stood for the PDP, was declared the winner and was sworn in as governor on 29 May. His success was attributed to the dogged influence of superior godfathers, particularly President Obasanjo.

The younger Uba, who had aspirations to becoming governor himself, had believed his 'grassroots' credentials would win him the position. 'This fight must continue. I am a grassroots politician on ground in Anambra. I am a political godfather and no one dares me,' he was reported as saying (*Nigerian Tribune* 23 April 2007, p 6). When the tension between the Ubas became fiercer and the PDP felt threatened, the younger Uba was arrested on orders from the presidency and taken to Abuja barely two days before the 14 April gubernatorial election. Moreover, Dr Chris Ngige, the estranged godson of Chris Uba and the gubernatorial candidate for the AC, was unilaterally disqualified by INEC the day before the election.

In an ideal situation the gubernatorial election in Anambra state should not have taken place until 2010, by which time Peter Obi would have concluded his four-year term. Section 180(2) of the 1999 Constitution states that 'the Governor shall vacate his office at the expiration of a period of four years commencing from the date when ... he took the Oath of Allegiance and oath of office' (FRN 1999, p 89). All appeals to INEC, especially from Peter Obi, to respect this constitutional provision fell on deaf ears, which left Obi with no option other than to seek a judicial interpretation. In a unanimous decision on 14 June 2007 the seven justices of the Supreme Court nullified Uba's election and ordered the immediate reinstatement of Obi. This has since happened. It is, however, important to note that Obi's victory was at a very high cost to the state, whose inhabitants endured a long spell of violent conflict and instability during the struggle for supremacy.

The scenario in Oyo State was as devastating as that in Anambra. Shortly after the installation of Senator Rasheed Ladoja as governor under the umbrella of the PDP by Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, the widely celebrated godfather of politics in the state, irreconcilable differences emerged between the two. The differences deepened as Adedibu demanded about ₦15-m of the ₦50-m monthly security vote for the state to oil and service his political machinery, which he deployed to ensure Ladoja's victory. When Ladoja failed to defer to him, Adedibu deployed the same machinery to ensure the impeachment of Ladoja, which was subsequently found by the Supreme Court to be illegal because due process was not followed. The Court declared the impeachment unconstitutional and null and void and reinstated Ladoja after 11 months. Adebayo Alao-Akala, Ladoja's deputy, was immediately sworn in as governor after Ladoja was impeached (Omotola 2006c).

At the same time the PDP in Oyo conducted the gubernatorial primary, which endorsed Alao-Akala as the party's candidate for the April 2007 elections. All attempts by Ladoja after his reinstatement to challenge the election of Alao-Akala proved abortive. As a result, politics in Oyo State has become more deinstitutionalised and privatised than ever before and has reverted to the 'Wild West' quality which characterised politics in the region, especially during the Second Republic.

Adedibu ensured that Alao-Akala won the election at all costs, including electoral manipulation and violence. The result has since been a subject of litigation at the election petition tribunal, where the All Nigerian People's Party's (ANPP) candidate, Senator Ajumobi, is challenging Alao-Akala's victory. It should also be noted that Adedibu's influence extended to other elections as he ensured that he single-handedly nominated the three state senators (one his son and another his son-in-law) under the PDP and ensured their victory. His influence extended to the House of Representatives and State House of Assembly elections as well. In the aftermath of the elections and attendant impasse, the new Olubadan, Oba Samuel Odulana Odugade I, attempted to sanction Adedibu, insisting on a clear line of demarcation between the traditional institution and politics in the state, banning all Ibadan high chiefs, including Adedibu, from participating in politics.

Undaunted, Adedibu proclaimed:

I am the controller of politics in Oyo State. I dominate the political affairs of the state. All the governors that won never did so without my contribution and influence.... If you must win election, you must come here. By the will of God, wherever I am, people must definitely win.

... Even though people have different opinions about me, wherever I stand, God is always there. It is a known fact and it has

always been so before now that *if you pass through me, you would do anything you want in politics*. So if I say I dominate politics, I do [Emphasis mine].

Quoted in Abanobi 2007, p 30

In another forum, Adedibu boasted:

... By the will of God, I remain the controller of politics here in Oyo State. The political power of this state is still in my hands... All the 33 local government chairmen, Speaker and legislators in the state are with me here.

Adeyemo 2007, p 12

Since the inauguration of the Alao-Akala administration on 29 May the centre seems to have been held together tightly between godfather and godson. Thus far there has been no public disagreement between them, suggesting that Alao-Akala has been deferring to the judgement of Adedibu, the 'eternal' godfather of politics in Oyo State. Only time will tell whether they can sustain this stability, which also depends on the outcome of the election petition tribunals.

The Kwara State experience has not been different in any fundamental sense. Over the years Alhaji Abubakar Olusola Saraki has been the only godfather of politics and those who defer to his judgement carry the day. He demonstrated this during the Second Republic when, through his political machines, he ensured the emergence and success of Alhaji Adamu Attah as governor in 1979 under the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as well as his downfall in 1983 when Attah no longer acted as a dependable godson.

Saraki defected to the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and ensured the emergence of Chief Cornelius Adebayo as governor. He repeated this feat in 1999 when he installed Rear Admiral Mohammed Lawal as governor under the ANPP. Before the 2003 elections they had parted ways and the state became a battleground between their supporters. Saraki again defected to the PDP and deployed his political machine to secure the governorship ticket for his son, Abubakar Bukola Saraki, who eventually emerged as winner, proving that Olusola Saraki remains possibly the strongest, if not the only godfather of Kwara Politics (Lawal 2005). The attempt by Muhammed Lawal and other opposition forces to challenge his dominance came to naught, merely heightening political tensions and political violence in the state without making any meaningful impact on Saraki's influence, probably because of the support he enjoyed, given the federal government's intention of capturing more states and consolidating the PDP's national hegemony.

Saraki's political strength became more pronounced as the 2007 elections approached. His son wanted a second term in office. Keen observers of Kwara politics pointed out that a second term was unprecedented in the state, given the ordeals, during the Second and Fourth republics, of Adamu Atta and Muhammed Lawal, each of whom had spent fortunes to gain a second term but had failed, despite their incumbency. It was therefore widely speculated that Bukola would fail. But the Senior Saraki remained resolute in his determination to instal his son for a second term. The process started when he declared that there was no vacancy in government house. All the main contenders for the party ticket, most notably David Bamigboye, who would have slugged it out with governor Saraki, were thus frustrated by being denied application forms. The primary election, intended to elect party candidates, was therefore a key constitutional requirement. In the end, Saraki won the gubernatorial election by a wide margin. Similarly, the senior Saraki also ensured that his daughter, Gbemisola Saraki, who had been a member of the House of Representatives since 1999, stood for the PDP in the Senate election in the Kwara Central Senatorial District, which she won. Reflecting on the unparalleled influence of the senior Saraki on Kwara politics, a commentator avers: 'it has been tested and verified that as long as Kwara remains Kwara and Saraki remains Saraki, nothing can be done without the "pillar" of Kwara State politics' (*Herald* 25 April 2007, p 19).

While the above examples are some of the most prominent, the influence of the godfathers is felt in several other states. In Abia State, for example, ex-Governor Orji Uzor Kalu would appear to have emerged as the most influential godfather. Elected in 1999 on the platform of the PDP, he had had irreconcilable differences with the party's leaders by the time the race for 2007 got under way. He therefore defected to the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) to realise his presidential ambitions. He single-handedly masterminded the emergence of Theodore Orji as the party's candidate in the gubernatorial election and ensured his victory, even though the candidate was in detention during the election, facing allegations of corruption. He also ensured that the PPA won all the seats in the State House of Assembly and National Assembly.

The case of Imo State was much more intriguing. Senator Ifeanyi Araremu had won the PDP's gubernatorial ticket in the primary election. But in a dramatic twist his name was substituted at INEC by that of Charles Ugwuh, the godfathers' favourite. After his unsuccessful attempt to seek local remedies within the party, he contested the decision in court and won in both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. This milestone judgement by the Supreme Court did not go down well with the godfathers, who were hell-bent on frustrating Araremu because of what they claimed was 'anti-party activity', though others believe the hostility stemmed from Araremu's anti-third-term stance.

In an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court's judgement President Obasanjo, along with the PDP National Chairman, Col Amadu Ali (rtd), and other party stalwarts, went to Owerri, the Imo State capital, to announce the expulsion of Ararume from the party, declaring that the party would not put forward a candidate for the election. However, on election day the ballot paper featured Ugwuh as the PDP's candidate. This generated serious tension between INEC and the people. In the end, INEC announced the cancellation of the governorship election but upheld those of the state House of Assembly, conducted on the same day (*Nigerian Tribune* 23 April 2007, p 8). Referring to the godfathers who crafted the Imo scene, an observer wrote:

Even in the face of the unambiguous and people oriented judgment, the tin gods in Owerri could not read between the lines and would not believe that the macabre dance of injustice and cheap imposition of a failed candidate was over.

Uba 2007, p 9

Implications for Sustainable Democracy

The role of the godfathers in the electoral process has serious negative implications for sustainable democracy, which requires that the game be played according to the rules, with people with a democratic mindset calling the shot at all levels of governance. The actions of the godfathers impede the emergence of true democrats in governance. They do this in a number of ways. First, only the highest bidder gets their nod, which, according to Ayoade (2006, p 86), 'forces the cost of elections up'. Second, in their bid to deliver on their promises, which are often out of proportion, they wittingly or unwittingly promote the criminalisation of politics. In most instances, the godfathers rely on political thugs who use force to intimidate political opponents and rig elections. Third, a recent development is that the godfathers compel their would-be godsons to swear an oath of total loyalty, including the submission of the state's treasury to the godfather, when they emerge victorious. They rely for their influence on security connections, both conventional and unconventional, extensive grassroots links and financial muscle.

There are many implications for democratic governance of the excessive use of money in politics and criminalisation of politics. Not only do they ambush and neutralise the rule of law, they also ensure that genuine democrats with sterling credentials never emerge as candidates. The result, as the Nigerian experience has shown, is the recycling of irresponsible and unresponsive leaders who must always obey the godfathers. In such situations, because the governed have made little or no contribution to the emergence of the governors, 'the governed cannot

govern the governors, which is the most important quality of democracy' (Ayoade 2006, p 87). The phenomenon of vote buying predominant in Nigeria, where the electorate and the candidates convert votes into economic / monetary exchanges (Ojo 2006), means the dividends of democracy in the form of respect for the rule of law, improved delivery of social services, provision of infrastructural facilities, mass employment and security of lives and properties, become sacred and hard to come by. One student of Nigerian politics describes the problem thus:

The influence of money on our politics is a constraint on the evolution of credible candidates into public office. One may have the best ideas on governance, impeccable academic credentials, a sustainable history of tendency towards public-spiritedness. But it would amount to nothing in our society if he seeks public office without a corresponding deep pocket.

Kolawole 2007, p 16

If contemporary Nigerian experience is anything to go by, another major implication of godfatherism for sustainable democracy is its propensity to lead to undue violence, usually when there is a breakdown in the understanding between the godfather and the godson.

As we have seen in Nigeria since 1999, especially in Anambra, Borno, Kwara and Oyo states, there is a tendency for the godson to want to challenge his godfather and to establish his own political dynasty (Gambo 2006; Ayoade 2006). The godfather, too, would like to demonstrate that the machinery he used to put the godson into power remains intact and can equally be used to unmake him. The result has usually been violent confrontations between the opposing camps, each of which has armed its supporters, especially political thugs, to the teeth. In the process, lives are lost, properties are destroyed, and economic and commercial activity is disrupted, forcing untold hardship on the people. This was the case in Anambra, Kwara and Oyo states for as long as the godfather-godson conflicts lasted. In the end Nigeria is portrayed as highly susceptible to political instability and violence, scaring away potential investors and denting the country's image.

Another major effect of godfatherism on Nigerian democracy is the de-institutionalisation of democratic institutions. As a result of godfatherism the participation of the people in politics, either as voters or as candidates, is severely restricted. Decisions are never allowed to flow from the grassroots to the top, but do the reverse. Godfathers play the role of 'political gate keepers' who 'dictate' who participates in politics and under what conditions (Albert 2005, p 101). They also hijack political party machinery to ensure that internal party democracy is not well institutionalised and therefore injurious to their interests.

They strive to ensure that the supremacy of the government takes precedence over that of the party and, since their godsons are in government, they are able to have their way in the party. This influence extends to electoral management bodies, in this case INEC, thus compromising their independence, impartiality and efficiency, which are central to the effective performance of their duties.

In the final analysis, the democracy project is the major casualty of the godfather system. When the activities of the godfathers inhibit democracy, which is believed to be the ultimate solution to Nigeria's multifaceted problems, including succession, the legitimacy crisis and the growing inability of government to deliver on its promises, the people lose interest in the project. As Claude Ake (1996b) argues, the only democracy Africans need is one that thoroughly engages their poverty. By the time lack of interest graduates to apathy the democratisation process is threatened by declining levels of participation. If this persists it may set the stage for the military to take over power in Nigeria once more. This is a deadly option and the situation must be arrested before it degenerates to that level.

CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals how godfatherism has continued to cast ominous shadows over the democratisation process in Nigeria, particular under the Fourth Republic. The weak institutionalisation of democratic infrastructures such as the people, political parties, and INEC may be attributed to the godfathers. The result has been a heavy reliance on the use of money and force to influence politics, at the expense of due process. The consequences have manifested in the form of choiceless democracy, where the party and the people have only such influence as the godfathers will permit. This trend poses a serious threat to sustainable democracy.

It is important to conclude with some recommendations about what should be done to contain the monster godfatherism has become in Nigeria. First, the philosophical foundations of Nigerian politics over the years seem to have been predicated on the winner-take-all system. This disposition tends to strengthen the role of godfathers since they know that they will monopolise the dividends of their investment in the election of their godsons. There is a need to rethink this philosophy to ensure that winners no longer take all. If this is properly handled it has the potential to reduce the determination of godfathers to invest their all in a given election, and thereby reduce the costs of elections.

Given the fact that most of the most notable godfathers in Nigeria would appear to be the direct agents of the federal government, considering the high level of patronage and protection they enjoy from the state, a more fundamental approach would be to engage the character of the Nigerian state, especially its

undue proclivity to violence and criminal tendencies, including the promotion of prebendalism and clientelism.

It is also important to undertake a fundamental restructuring of democratic institutions such as political parties to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively and operate within democratic ideals both internally and externally. The issue of party funding is central to actualising this in that it can prevent the rich from hijacking parties because they have the financial strength to do so. There is also a need to reform the electoral system, with an emphasis on enhancing the autonomy, impartiality and efficiency of INEC. This may require reconstituting INEC as an autonomous commission instead of one that is under the direct control of the Presidency. Indeed, it should be answerable only to the people through the National Assembly, judiciary and mass media.

The task will be Herculean, especially since the problems cannot be divorced completely from the problem of the Nigerian state, epitomised by its weak autonomous base, its coercive and alienating nature and by mass poverty. Any strategies aimed at redressing the problems of godfatherism in Nigeria must, therefore, be pursued within the framework of a reformist and developmental state, capable of formulating adequate public policies and ensuring coherence between formulation, execution and evaluation.

Only such a state is capable of exercising power in the overall interests of the people, irrespective of ideological, ethnic, religious, party or gender affiliations. This requires the presence of democrats at all levels of governance – the governors and the governed – and institutions of government. A sustainable regime of social mobilisation and political re-engineering is pivotal to achieving these. In this reformative enterprise civil society and the press have a duty to sensitise, inform, educate and mobilise the people about the actions and inactions of government, including exposing the evil machinations of the godfathers and their godsons.

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