

God-fatherism in the Politics of Nigeria:

Continuity and Change

GOD-FATHERISM DANS LA POLITIQUE DU NIGÉRIA :

CONTINUITÉ ET CHANGEMENT

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Abstract: The concept of god-fatherism in other words clientelism; patron-client relationship in Nigerian politics is not a new phenomenon. It has been in existence right from the inception of party politics in the country. Thus, it is a phenomenon in continuity but with changes. This concept – god-fatherism in politics implies a dominant individual in the politics of an area or geo-political zone who is capable either by her/his influence/past record or current political power of determining who win elections in that area or zone. What is new or change however in theory and practice of god-fatherism in Nigerian politics is that, it has taken a different posture from the earlier posture which was based on ideology, charisma, contribution and achievement of the individual god-father to the current posture based on thuggery, money and coercion among others. This paper therefore tries to unravel the previous and current postures of god-fatherism in Nigerian politics and proffers suggestions for improvement.

Key words: God-fatherism; Politics; Change; Nigeria

Résumé: Le concept du clientélisme d'un god-fatherism en d'autres termes ; les relations de patron-client dans la politique nigérienne ne sont pas un nouveau phénomène. Elles ont été dans le juste d'existence du commencement de la politique de partis dans le pays. Ainsi, c'est un phénomène dans la continuité mais avec des changements. Ce concept , un God-fatherism dans la politique implique une personne dominante dans la politique d'un secteur ou d'une zone géopolitique qui est capable par son pouvoir politique record ou actuel d'influence/passé de déterminer qui des élections de victoire dans ce secteur ou zone.Ce qu'il y a de neuf ou le changement cependant de la théorie et de la pratique d'un god-fatherism dans la politique nigérienne est ce, il a pris une posture différente de la posture plus tôt qui a été basée sur l'idéologie, le charisme, la contribution et l'accomplissement du parrain individuel à la posture actuelle basée sur le vol à main armée,l'argent et la coercition notamment. Ce document essaie donc de se démêler les postures précédentes et actuelles d'un god-fatherism dans la politique nigérienne et offre des suggestions pour l'amélioration.

Mots clés: Un Dieu-fatherism; La politique; Changement; Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

With the kidnap and the re-kidnap of Governor Chris Ngige of Anambra State in July 2003, barely two months after he was sworn in, in May 2003, discussion on god-fatherism in Nigerian politics was ignited. This development was based on the allegation that the kidnap resulted from the misunderstanding between the god-father; Chris Uba (young, rich and well-connected to the power that be) and the god-son; Chris Ngige (the then Governor of Anambra State). That, the god-son could not or refused to honour the agreement with the god-father when he was to be made the Governor of Anambra State, therefore, the god-father resorted to kidnapping the god-son not by thugs but by a detachment of the Nigeria Police Force led by the then Assistant Inspector of Police; Raphael Ige.

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*Received 19 February 2011; accepted 10 April 2011

With this background, this paper tries to position the issue of god-fatherism in Nigerian politics by discussing its earlier and present characteristics. In doing this, the paper is divided into sections; conceptual and theoretical frame-work, god-fatherism in the earlier Nigerian republics; first and second republics, god-fatherism in the later republics; third and fourth republics, causes of changes in the characteristics of god-fatherism from its posture in the earlier to later republics with conclusion and suggestions.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

God-fatherism, clientelism, patronage system, patron-client clusters are terms that are used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon.

The patron-client (god-father – god-son) relationship – an exchange relationship between roles – may be defined as a special case of dyadic (two persons) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron or god-father) uses his/her own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits or both for a person of lower status (client or god-son) who for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron (Scott, 1972:92).

The study of clientelism as a crucial mechanism of power in developing countries was proliferated in the 1970s. In those studies, differences could be seen in the use of the concept; patronage among the anthropologists and political scientists. To the former, it is a type of social relationship while the latter sees it as a feature of government (Weingrod, 1978). But in Nigeria, that distinction is not distinct because the patron-client ties though reflect a social relationship but also was a crucial element of government.

In essence, the Nigeria socio-political system which often determines the allocation for public offices is the phenomenon of god-fatherism. This phenomenon is the underlying factor in ethnicity, regionalism and religious identities in the country. In the spirit of god-fatherism, an individual seeks the position of patron or god-father as he or she moves upward socially and materially and accepts the ties of solidarity from his/her god-sons/daughters which they see as fundamental to the latter's security and continued advancement as well as of their own. Thus, god-fatherism is the channel through which one joins the dominant class and a practice which is often seen as fundamental to the continued enjoyment of the perquisites of that class.

This phenomenon; god-fatherism, flourishes in Nigeria like any other developing country because countries are minimally industrialized and majority of the population is tied to agrarian pursuits often of marginal or precarious profitability. Therefore, government enjoys a pre-eminent position due to the economic power it possesses and thus defined the essential elements of the future of the subjugated people who are in majority. In addition, foreign domination of the economy as well as the constraints of peripheral capitalist industrialization which Nigeria assumes as a post-colonial country, made access to government remain the main if not the only assured means in the struggle for resources and upward mobility.

Moreover, the peculiar and economic conditions of the post-colonial Nigeria also contributed to the entrenchment of a form of state organization and of attitudes regarding the use of state offices which are pre-modern whereby constitutional and legal systems do not determine state affairs but personal norms. Thus, clientelism is the fundamental principle of political organization and behaviour in Nigeria. This is a situation whereby an individual seeks the support and protection of a god-father while trying to acquire the basic social and material goods such as loans, scholarships, licenses, plots of urban land, employment and promotion. And the main resources of the patron in meeting these requests is from access to state power such as ministerial appointments or positions on government boards apart from other elective positions.

Such opportunity also covers individuals in the private sector because business is determined by bureaucratic regulations. That is, to do business in Nigeria, one has to procure import and export licenses, building and other permits and there are also soft developmental grants and loans that can reduce the burden of initial capital investment. In addition are the phenomena of marketing boards or agricultural agencies with deposit of large sums taxes from peasant agricultural production and later petroleum products. Therefore, accesses to the use of such funds could be secured through the capture of government at any level, but more importantly at the federal level where over 50% of the resources is retained (Schatz, 1977).

In essence, to keep the client as a patron or keep a god-son as a god-father, one must gain a political office and to be sure that in the distribution of the offices, an individual god-father or patron has a reasonable chance of getting one, clients or god-sons must be gathered together to make their collective claims as well as to prove that the god-father is a person of consequences whose co-optation would be rewarding to the political entrepreneurs. Under the civilian government, with its vast array of ministerial and sub-ministerial appointments, with legislative offices and their private staff positions to be filled, there is a veritable boom to god-fatherism. This is because such opportunities are many as political parties compete for votes and minor god-fathers emerge with the enjoyment of new leverage procure preferential treatment, since it is the

aggregating of votes which determines success, and the only route to such vote is via the recruitment of presumed influential god-fathers.

3. GOD-FATHERISM IN THE EARLIER REPUBLICS

The earlier Nigerian republics in this section refer to the first (1960-1966) and second (1979-1983) republics. The two republics are brought together under this discussion because they look alike in many circumstances particularly in terms of their actors and in relation to the phenomenon of god-fatherism.

In the first republic, the issue of god-fatherism was based on achievement, ideology, background and sometimes on sectional or ethnic consideration. At that time, there were three regions; East, North and West though in 1963, a fourth was carved out from the Western region; the Mid-Western region. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) which later became the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) after the 1963 plebiscite was dominant in the Eastern region, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) dominated the Northern region while Action Group (AG) was dominant in the Western region (Kirk Greene and Rimmer, 1981).

During that time, the leader of the parties; NCNC, NPC and AG were Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Obafemi Awolowo respectively. Unequivocally, each of them was a dominant god-father in his region whereby an invocation of his name alone is an automatic election ticket in the concerned enclave. In addition, during the same first republic were other smaller political parties that were capable of winning election or mobilizing people easily in their area of control. They include; Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) led by Mallam Aminu Kano with the Takalawa (poor masses) of Kano and environs as members, United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Joseph Tarka which had the Tiv of Benue and environs as members, the Borno Youth Movement (BYM) led by Kashim Imam with the Kanuri and its allied in the then Borno province as members while the Ilorin Talaka Parapo was led by Joseph Olawoyin with the support of the Yoruba-speaking people of the then Ilorin/Kabba provinces as members (Oyediran, 1979). Each of those individuals was a god-father in his area of control and could win election in that area at any time come rain come sunshine, while various god-sons do rally round them in order for them to be anointed for any elective or appointive position.

In the second republic (1979-1983), the parties that operated then were based on god-father syndrome as they were reincarnations of the parties in the country's first republic. For instance, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) which was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo was seen as an off-shot of Action Group of the first republic whereby with Awolowo's name, one is sure of winning election in the South-West and truly to that, the UPN cleared all the elections in the states that composed the old Western region.

Furthermore, the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) led by Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe who led the NCNC of the first republic maintained his god-father position and won the elections in the states in the South-Eastern zone. Also, Mallam Aminu Kano of NEPU of the first republic led the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) in the second republic which won the gubernatorial elections in the then Kano and Kaduna states. Moreover, the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim could be said to be an offspring of the Borno Youth Movement of the first republic won the gubernatorial elections in the then Borno and Gongola states.

The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which could be said to be an offspring of NPC of the first republic won the presidential elections in addition to some states in the North-West, North-East, North-Central and South-South zones. The approach of the NPN in the campaign and elections of the second republic could be said to be based on the use of god-fatherism strategy as well whereby different ethnic groups in the country were incorporated into one party through the affiliation of individuals acknowledged to be god-fathers of their particular communities. In a nutshell, mass god-sonism with large blocs of population linked to the godfather (Joseph, 1987).

4. GOD-FATHERISM IN THE LATER REPUBLICS

The later republics here refer to the third and fourth republics (1991-1992) and (1999 to date) respectively. During the third republic, about thirty political parties that applied for registration were not registered by the military regime then, instead, two government founded and funded political parties were imposed; National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). Towards that stage, there were a number of retired soldiers and civil-servants who had acquired a lot of wealth and influence and thus changed the god-fatherism posture of the previous republics based on the achievement and sectional attachment to money and imposition.

In this direction, none of the political parties that applied for registration could be registered by the military government. Unfortunately, when the NRC and the SDP were imposed, the same people whose parties were denied registration or even banned from political contest were able to influence with especially wealth, the electorate in the direction they were to vote. That period marked the end of god-fatherism based on personal achievement to that of monetization and thuggery or imposition. This was because at that time, candidates contesting elections were banned at

will while those who were anointed by the military leader were imposed as winners when wealth could not be used to influence the electorate.

In the fourth republic (1999 to date), worst is even happening with political thuggery, money, government patronage as basis of god-fatherism in the country's political practice; the case of Anambra State is most spectacular, although there are smaller ones such as Kwara State between Dr. Olusola Saraki and Governor Mohammed Lawal both of All People's Party (APP) in 1999. The former a god-father while the latter, a god-son could not meet their terms of agreement and later went apart. Another is the late Chief Lamidi Adedibu; a god-father and Governor Rasheed Adedjoja of Oyo State; a god-son of People's Democratic Party (PDP) who could not meet their terms of agreement and were involved in a serious war of words and thuggery.

Unequivocally, the worst case as noted earlier is that of Anambra State where the god-son – Governor Chris Ngige could not meet the terms of agreement with the god-father; Chief Chris Uba. But instead of limiting their misunderstanding to war of words and thuggery, the god-father resorted to the use of a detachment of the Nigeria Police Force led by an Assistant Inspector General of Police; Raphael Ige to kidnap the Governor but was later released. Unfortunately, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which the two of them belong to also control the government at federal level could not do anything concrete rather saw the embarrassment as a family affair while the President himself sees the god-father as a good party member. This shows that the god-father; Chris Uba though not on achievement but on money and well-connected support is influential and moves about with police escorts that was even more powerful than that of the Governor of the state. And even with a doubtful court injunction, the police escort of the governor was at a time withdrawn (Daily Trust, 2004:1). With this background, what are the causes of the changes in the characteristics of god-fatherism from the earlier to that of later republics? This question shall be answered in the subsequent section.

5. CAUSES OF THE CHANGES

There could be as many factors used in explaining the changes in the characteristics of god-fatherism from the earlier to later republics but for the purpose of this paper, two of them shall be examined; imposition of two political parties in the third republic and poverty/greed. With the imposition of NRC and SDP in the third republic after the cancellation of over thirty political parties that sought for registration during the period and the ban placed on certain categories of politicians as well as the cancellation of the primaries and even main elections during the period polluted the political system in Nigeria to a very high degree. This pollution was so much that those with achievements were brushed aside and given no recognition in the face of the influence of money and state power. Thus, the concept of god-fatherism in the politics of the country was based essentially on money and the connection one has with the government of the day rather than on achievement.

This type of situation extended to the fourth republic whereby money and imposition through declaration by INEC or influence of the police and thuggery could make one to win election instead of the previous use of names of individuals that have had good track records; related to this is poverty/greed. The terms poverty/greed are deliberately used jointly here because most Nigerian electorates hide under the cover of poverty to commit political crime of exchanging money for vote with the politicians. But it has been observed as well that there is element of greed in such action because there is always no limit or end to such deal. In addition, such action is so endemic that no matter what your achievement is, without money to share among people no matter how small, you may not win an election how much more being a god-father. For instance, at the socio-economic level, the picture shows a depressing lack of substantial progress in nation-building and the provision of social infrastructure. Nigeria which is the most populous country in Africa has 40-50 percent unemployment rate with the World Economic Forum (WEF) slammed her over alleged poor governance and inadequate infrastructure financing and downgraded her to 127 out of 139 countries. In the UNDP's Human Development Index ranking in 2010 Nigeria was grouped among 41 countries to have the "least human development". The country's GDP was given as mere 1,2224 dollars compared to 9,812 dollars in Kenya and 2,197 dollars in Cameroon. On life expectancy, the report said that in 2010 Nigeria's life expectancy was 48.4 years on the average below that of Ghana 57.1, Cameroon 51.7, Benin Republic 62.3 and Uganda 54.1. Also in the list released by Transparent International (IT) on October 26, 2010 showed that Nigeria has fallen steps from the 121st position in 2008 to 130th in 2009 and 134th in 2010. Again in October, 2010 it was reported that Nigeria slipped from 35th to 40th position in the Mo Ibrahim good governance ranking of 53 countries in Africa. Similarly, a survey conducted as part of its membership operational audit in January 2010 by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria showed that 839 manufacturing companies closed shop in 2009 as a result of harsh operating environment (Adibe, 2011:64). Daily newspaper circulation is only about 16 percent per a thousand people. There are only three telephone sets and four passenger cars per 1000 people, while only 172 citizens in every 1000 own radio sets. There are only 0.9 scientists and technicians per 1000 people with only 0.3 percent of the appropriate age-group being tertiary graduates. On the average, a single post office provides postal services for as many as 28,400 people.

In this type of situation, god-fatherism based on money-sharing to poverty-stricken population seems to be more effective than any previous achievements. Coupled with this is greed of individual Nigerians who are not satisfied materially no matter their financial status. And where that is not possible, coercion even through the use of the instrument of coercion of the state could make one to be a god-father. And that was exactly the situation that contemporary Nigeria finds itself.

6. SUMMARY

This paper surveys the characteristics of god-fatherism as a phenomenon in the political practice of Nigeria. In doing this, the paper classified the experience into two periods; earlier period (first and second republics) and later period (third and fourth republics). In doing this, the paper discovers seemingly differences in the characteristics of god-fatherism between the earlier and later periods. For instance, in the earlier period, the phenomenon was based on achievement, records, potentials of the individual god-father but in the later period, it was monetized coupled with the use of thugs or even state's instrument of coercion. The paper also adopts two factors in explaining the changes in the character of god-fatherism between the earlier and the later republics, namely; imposition of political parties; NRC and SDP by government in the third republic and the stinking level of poverty/greed. The paper also discovers that god-fatherism is an important and effective phenomenon in the politics of Nigeria like any other developing country.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above expositions, the paper intends to recommend as follows:

- (1) Elective and appointive offices should be seen as services to the society and not as a means of acquiring illegal wealth.
- (2) Means of alleviating if not eradicating poverty should be devised so that the populace could be empowered in order to take decisions without subjecting their freedom to any god-father.
- (3) The economic power of the country needs to be decentralized and not concentrated as it is today so that the issue of god-fatherism could be based on achievement and not on wealth, and
- (4) Leaders should not use their legal power of coercion for personal aggrandizement.
- (5) Citizens should be enlightened on the evil of insatiable quest for wealth. A wealth individual is one that can control her/his urge.

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