

1.**SOCIO-POLITICAL RELEVANCE OF PATRON-CLIENT
RELATIONSHIP IN ANCIENT ROMAN AND NIGERIAN CULTURES****Blavo, Etsri Babatunde PhD**Department of Classics, Faculty of Arts,
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blavobabatund@gmail.com, tundeblavo@yahoo.com**Abstract**

One major issue that has generated controversy in Nigerian political scene is patron-client relationship known in Nigerian parlance as 'godfatherism'. At the inception of Nigerian nascent democracy in 1999, the concept of patronage or godfatherism has been in the front burner of political discourse. Scholars have written extensively on the effect of patronage on the socio-political space of the Nigerian society. Many of the scholarly works have condemned, in its entirety, the concept of godfatherism.

In ancient Roman society, also, patron-client relationship was fundamental to the development of that society. Unlike the case in Nigeria, patron-client relationship was socially accepted and have a legal backing. It is simply a relationship between two unequal parties in which the weaker party looked to the stronger for protection and the stronger expected the weaker to show gratitude, loyalty and respect.

In view of the above, this study will examine the socio-political relevance of patron-client relationship in ancient Roman and Nigerian cultures by exploring the parallels between the two cultures. The paper will also explore patron-client relationship as a resource for positivistic political organisation and discuss how its use can be modified to engender overall development in core sectors of the Nigerian polity.

Keywords: Political patronage, Roman republic, Nigerian political system, Godfatherism, Juvenal's Satires.

Introduction

Patron-client relationship as a socio-political concept has always been an interesting discourse. This is because the concept finds parallel in different cultures of the world. In ancient Rome, for instance, a man was obliged to relate with an individual of superior status and influence under whose guide and protection he would be. One important reason for this is that the Romans never believed that all men were created equal. They preferred to organise their lives on the assumption that certain men were born to lead and others were natural

followers. In most classical literatures, like the works of writers and satirists such as Cicero, Seneca, Horace and Juvenal, attention is given to the social relationship between a *Patronus* (patron) and a *cliens* (client) or what modern classical scholars have conceptualized as patronage.

Blavo (2016) while explaining the importance of a social relation in ancient Roman society cited Cicero. According to Blavo, in ancient Rome of Cicero's time 'none can dispense with the help or support of his fellow. This is because he ought to have friends to speak to. But if you are not looked upon as a good man, no one will have the slightest desire to talk to you.'¹

The above statement gives an insight into the workings of social relations in ancient Roman society. It also reveals the socio-political contributions of patronage to that society. Cicero's opinion reflects the social realities in his time where patrons competed for clients in order to have a better social and political standing. In ancient Rome, this sort of association was accepted socially.

It is also clear from Cicero's statement that in ancient Roman society, a man was obliged to relate with another Roman of better and superior status. And once such relationship is introduced, they are maintained by the exchange of resources, which may be material or non-material. This kind of relationship is tagged *patronus-cliens*, patron-client relationship. This relationship, called *patronatus* on the side of the patron and *clientele* on that of the client, could be hereditary on both sides. The patron-client relationship was an important characteristic and lasting feature of Roman culture, and it later on determined the development of modern society, politics, and even relationships among nations.²

Thus, in late Roman Republic and early empire, citizenship was based on a dependent relationship between two citizens in which the difference in power and status between the two parties was acknowledged. It was importantly a personal voluntary relationship on the initiative of the dependent, in gratitude for a certain benefaction. It was hereditary and brought no stigma to the client. There was mutual exchange of services and there were no imposition and exaction and it was multi-purpose rather than confined to specific aids. Although some services and reciprocal obligations became customary, yet there was no prescribed legislation for the bond, thus, everything was flexible according to the needs and status of the two parties.³

¹See Blavo E. B, (2016). 'Historical Perspective of Patron Politics: Echoes from Ancient Roman Society' in Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies, Vol. 26, No 2. See, also, Cicero *On The Good Life*, trans. 1971, Michael Grant, Penguin Books Ltd, England. p.140

²Wallace-Hadrill, A. (1989), Patronage in Ancient society, in *Patronage In Ancient Society* (ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill), T.J Press, Cornwall

³*ibid.*

In defining what patronage is, most scholars subscribe to the tripartite definition offered by Saller (1982). Following Saller, patronage must possess the following characteristics: (i) reciprocity, involving exchange of services over a period of time between two parties (ii) personal, as opposed to commercial and (iii) asymmetrical, that is, between parties of unequal status. However, we may also include a fourth characteristic added by Garnsey and Woolf, namely, that it is voluntary, not legally enforceable.⁴

The above definition has gained a wide acceptance from most classical scholars. And the most important ingredient in the relationship bonds was based solely on *fides*, trust or loyalty. In addition, patron-client relationship did not involve any formal ceremony and did not confer any formal power over the client's property on the patron. The patron did not possess *pater potestas* on the client's property. The client ultimately remained in charge of his own affairs with his own household, property and item; he was not obliged to participate in his patron's family cult nor did he become part of his patron's *familia*, lineage.⁵

Patronage in Nigeria is evident in a concept called godfatherism; a system in which a man of immense wealth and influence uses his position to secure political offices or other positions for his dependants. Scholars (particularly those in Nigeria) have tried to trace the origin of patronage to one community or religious institution or the other. Albert (2005), Familusi (2012), Omobowale and Olutayo (2010) and Onwuzuruigbo (2013) have maintained that the origin of godfatherism has socio-cultural roots in every society of the world. Albert, for instance, averred that a godfather in Europe is similar to a 'cuddly uncle'. He goes on to say that in a Roman catholic church, a godfather refers to a member of the congregation who 'serves as a role model and counsel a new convert on how to live a responsible life.'⁶

Albert's submission is equally true in the case of 19th century America where the function of patronage lies not only in the reciprocal exchange of goods and services between patron and client, but also as a strategic method for the reproduction of structure in which a few of community leaders dominate the socio-political life of the state. Riordon (1967)⁷ sheds more light on this when he illustrates that patronage was evident in the socio-political activities of the 19th century America. He explicated that George Plunkitt, a Statesman and leader of Tammany Hall was a patron of many clients:

⁴See Saller (1982), *Personal Patronage under the early Empire*, Cambridge

⁵*ibid.*

⁶ Albert, O.I. (2005) Explaining 'godfatherism in Nigeria Politics', in *African Sociological Review*, 9, (2),

⁷See Riordon. L.W.(1963). *Origin of Godfatherism and Partisan Politics in Government* (An America example), Introduction xvii

You went to the district leader (Plunkitt) with your personal problems, and all he asked in exchange for his help was vote. He was the man to see for a job or a pushcart license, a bucket of coal when there was no money to buy one, help in making out of citizenship papers, or in bailing a husband or son out of jail. There is no need to go on; Plunkitt supplies the details and his concluding chapter, in particular is a classic of its kind.⁸

From the above excerpt, it is obvious that in the earliest period of America's socio-political history, there had been cases of political figures with pocket of clients as supporters. An important thing to note, also, is the fact that patronage is made possible by the inequality in the socio-economic status among individuals and the resultant effect is the exchange of goods relations.

Furthermore, a glimpse of patron-client relationship is seen in other European countries. Philip (2001) notes that patron-client relationship evolved because of the isolation of non-citizens and immigrants from the economic and political processes in Australia. Also, Lazer (2004), while exploring the importance of patron-client relationship in Bolivia, maintains that patronage is a system that enables the vast majority of underprivileged to gain access to valued resources. In all the above instances, it is obvious that patron-client relationship takes a centre stage in socio-political issues like citizenship or gender inequality.⁹

Socio-Political Relevance of Patronage in Ancient Rome

In the late republic, patronage served as a model when conquerors or governors abroad established personal ties as patron to whole communities, ties which then might be perpetuated as family obligation. The Marcellus family, for instance, after conquering Syracuse and Sicily, decided to extend rights of citizenship to municipalities or provincial families as a way to add to the number of its clients. Also, the close bond between patrons and freedmen meant that the latter could be used as pledges of his good faith and even exchanged as hostages.¹⁰

On a more elaborate scale, Augustus sought to establish his legitimacy not only by restoring social order, but also by demonstrating his own supremacy in it through the traditional modes of patronage and beneficence. Through the instrument of patronage, he distributed his benefits individually to those that have access to him and, also, to favoured groups, notably the Roman plebs and the

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹See Lazer (2004)

¹⁰Mouritsen, H. (2011) *The Freedman in the Roman World*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. p.38

army. Proximity to the emperor opened up to a privileged circle, including friends of high rank, relatives, and several members of his household, a wide range of benefits from offices and honours to financial assistance to citizenship and the right of tapping the water.¹¹

Numerous events in imperial Rome gave this type of patronage a special importance in the Principate. When Augustus became *Princeps*, for example, he took on the role of the *paterpateriae* and symbolically became the patron of all Roman citizens. The rise of the empire coincided with the decline of patron-client relationship of Republican Rome. In the Republic, clients flocked to the houses of their patrons in the hope of attaining political favour, but with the abolishment of popular elections, patrons no longer had use for clients to help insure their political positions and instead turned their attention to Augustus. Former patrons became clients of the Empire and sought political position not from the masses but from the Emperor's appointment.¹² Paternal support was essential in the recruitment of the imperial *elite* because no bureaucratic mechanisms were developed to supply the next generation of aristocratic officials. 'The emperor's role in making these appointments is often emphasized, but in the absence of training schools or application procedures, the emperor had to appoint those brought to his attention by senior friends like Cornelius Rufus.¹³

Emperors, however, did not and could not monopolize patronage. They did not pretend to be universal patrons to all their subjects, since universality would have undermined the incentive for personal gratitude on the part of the subjects. Rather than suppressing the patronal networks of the aristocratic houses in ancient Rome, the emperor only encouraged them positively by providing them the resources needed to reward their clients.¹⁴

The Patron-client bonds were also extended to the provinces. For instance, the emperors, governors and other officials representing his power had a paternal role. As the provincialization of the Roman aristocracy progressed in the late first and second centuries, a steady increase in the number of provincials had fellow townsmen well placed in Rome to serve as paternal mediators between themselves and the Roman rulers. This gave them alternative means of access to the benefits distributed from Rome. It also served as a means of influencing the administrators sent out to rule them.¹⁵

¹¹See Konstan. D. (1995) 'Patron and Friend', *Classical Philology*, Vol. 90, No. 4..328-344, University of Chicago press. Chicago.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

On a social level, the image of the patron as a paternal figure who would continue to guide and control the freedman after his release from slavery was in many respects merely an ideal which in the nature of things would often have been different from the reality. The Roman patron did not hold any formal authority over his freedmen, nor did he enjoy legally enshrined *potestas* over them.¹⁶ Though the patron had no defined powers over the freedman, he did enjoy certain rights and privileges. The client was socially prohibited from damaging the patron's reputation, attacking his reputation, or using verbal abuse, let alone physical violence, nor was he generally entitled to sue the patron or his children.¹⁷ More appropriately, the patron was entitled to *obsequium*, dutiful respect, from his freedman. In practice, it involved treating the patron and his family with consideration, and abstaining from any action which might harm them.

As opined earlier, evidence of patron-client relationship is reflected in works of Roman satirists. Juvenal in his *Satires*, for one, vividly illustrates the patron-client relationship. In the time of Juvenal, however, the patron-client relationship was no longer what it used to be. The satirist complained bitterly that the relationship was no longer based on loyalty on the part of the client or fatherly benevolence on the part of the patron but purely on materialistic consideration that has replaced the once humane values of the past. In the earliest Roman tradition, client and patron had a genuine mutual relationship, based on trust, obligation and service: now all we see are 'retainers whose friendship was bought with a meal-ticket stashed in their wallets'¹⁸ The Romans of Juvenal's time worshipped money. Clients are ready to betray their patrons when 'their palm is greased with ample bribe'.¹⁹

Similarly, Juvenal, in his *Satires*, presents to us a world in which the distinction between *amicitia* and *cliens* is intertwined because of the decline in the concept of *amicitia*. He states that it is impossible not to write a satire in a city so corrupt with vices and the once cherished *amicitia* has been degraded to a mere financial exchange. Juvenal's *Satires* is a bitter complain about the decline in interpersonal relationships. It states that the decline is represented through direct comparisons to the relationship between Augustan writers and their generous patrons. The vocation of poetry did not produce income in itself- at least the poet could not rely on it as the only source of income- but it did provide other opportunities for poets

¹⁶ Fabre (1981), pp. 222-223, though that the patron's authority included the right to kill the freedman, but see the sensible comment by Watson (1975)

¹⁷ Watson (1975) pp. 104-5

¹⁸ See Juvenal's *Sixteen Satires*, translated by Peter Green (1974), Penguin Books Ltd. England

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

through their assimilation into the upper class circles of the society and their attachment to a wealthy *amicus*.²⁰

A critical look at the works of Juvenal and Horace exposes social tensions as a result of unclear distinction between *amicitia* and *cliens*. The first is that while *amicitia* relationships were personal, they were also unequal. The inequality in Horace's relationship with Maecenas, for instance, was that of concern to him. Juvenal further complained about most patrons' lack of consideration and esteem for their clients. The relationship is supposed to be personal and disinterested but we see doles handed out in great quantities to masses of undifferentiated clients and poets try to woo various patrons just to make ends meet. Juvenal reflects a world obsessed to a greater degree than their Augustan predecessors did with the increased professionalism of poetry and its place within social exchange.²¹

However, these complaints are not unique to Juvenal. Plautus in his play *Menaechmi*, also expressed the same feeling. The play, which was written immediately after the Second Punic war, presents the protagonist as returning from the forum, tired and frustrated. Menaechmus has been hired to represent a client in a lawsuit, though he regards the client as a rogue and the suit as a nuisance. But just like other members of his class, he has no choice: 'what a stupid, irritating practice we have, and one the best people follow most! Everyone wants lots of clients. They do not bother to ask whether they're good men or bad; the last thing that counts is the loyalty of the client, and how reliable he is. If he is poor and is no rogue, he is viewed as a good- for- nothing; if he is a rich rogue, he is treated as a client.'²²

What Juvenal is suggesting here is that patrons no longer perform their pledged obligated role as demanded by patron-client relationship. LaFleur while analysing Juvenal's *Satire V* observed that 'the union between patron and client has become...venal, contemptuous, even hostile.'²³ In the same *Satire V*, Juvenal goes on to describe Trebius as awakening anxiously at the first crack of dawn so as to be among the crowd that greets Virro at his door each morning. This is a standard feature in accounts of popular patronage, where the conventional payment for such a show of support is a basket of goodies.

Emergence of Godfatherism in Nigeria

²⁰ Pass, A (2012). Juvenal, Martial and the Augustan: An Analysis of the production and Reception of Satiric Poetry in Flavian Rome (M.A Thesis submitted to the Department of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Victoria)p.

²¹*Ibid*

²²See Plautus' *Menaechmi* (trans.) Walting. E.F.(1963) Penguin Books, London

²³See Lafleur

Albert (2005) explains that the word ‘godfather’ conjures up different meanings to different people. In many parts of Europe and America, it is simply associated with a cuddly uncle. In the Catholic Church, the word ‘godfather’ is enshrined in the church tradition. A child or man who wishes to be baptized or to marry into the Catholic church is expected to choose a godfather among the congregation, who will serve as a role model and counsel the new convert on how to live a responsible life²⁴.

Nevertheless, the thrust of this part of the study is to explore the socio-political significance of patron-client relationship in Nigerian setting. To start with, godfathers can be seen as ‘men who have the prerogative power to determine who gets nominated and win (an election) in a state’. The political patron in Nigeria like the patron in ancient Rome build array of loyalists around themselves and use their own influence to manipulate the rest of the society. They also use their influence to hinder the participation of others in Nigerian politics.

Family and Kinship

The family unit in the traditional Nigerian society is defined by kinship ties linked by blood and by marriage. These links could occupy a common household or separated households. In Nigeria, family is a social group and a social institution. The family as a social group is made up of a man, his wife or wives and children living together in the same household, interacting and influencing the behaviour of one another in a more intimate manner than with others who do not belong.²⁵ On the other hand, family as a social institution implies that it is a formalised, regular, and patterned process. This patterned process underlines other social institution systems such as marriage. It also establishes norms guiding the marital practice. Among the Yoruba and Africans generally, for example, incest taboos prohibit sexual intercourse with blood relations, and this necessitates the rules of exogamy.²⁶

There are two types of family in the traditional Nigerian society;²⁷ the nuclear and extended family. Extended family evolves from polygamy while nuclear family evolves from monogamy. Extended families usually have more members than nuclear family. Hence, extended family produces more labour to sustain the agricultural system. The family system in Yoruba traditional culture, for instance, is rather complex. It does not only include members who have biological ties or the same bloodline, but also members who are not related biologically. In Yoruba

²⁴Albert, I.O. (2005). Explaining Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics. *African Sociological Review*. 9(2):79-105

²⁵Oke (1986).

²⁶*Ibid*

²⁷*Ibid*

tradition, it is generally clear that a familial household occupies a large compound where families of different genealogies from two or more generations are living together as one indivisible family.²⁸

In order to explain clearly the complexities in a Yoruba family, it is important to examine the concept of a family in Yoruba culture. The Yoruba word for a family is *Ebi*. Another similar word is *Idile*²⁹. There are two similar meanings of the word. On the one hand, *Ebi* means members of a family living in a household; on the other hand, it connotes family bond beyond the natural family. That is, it includes other family connections outside one's immediate family.³⁰ Elliot and Gray add that:

The family is not necessarily, or even essentially, a biological unit. It is a social construct. The 'myth' of biological relation has been used in argument about property and inheritance but has little relation to the way people operate in terms of family.³¹

Family in the Yoruba traditional society is a household that consists of hierarchy. Each basic unit of the household is headed by a *Baba* (father). As the head of his immediate or nuclear family, the *Baba's* decisions were final. He oversees the day-to-day activities of his immediate family. He maintains discipline among the family members, and also settles quarrels. If there are any challenges he could not handle, the *Baba* will consult the *Olori Ebi* for help.

A very significant and basic notion in the discourse of the Yoruba traditional family system is the idea of *Olori-Ebi* (head of the family). The *Olori-Ebi* is the oldest man in the household, *Idile* or *Agbo-ile*.³² He exercises authority over all member of the household. He manages, regulates and oversees all affairs in his family. He is, in fact, the *paterfamilias*.

Fadipe (1970) affirms that:

it is the duty of the *Baale* (the *Olori-Ebi*) to preserve peace and order within his compound, a duty he probably owes, in the first place, to members of the (family) compound and secondarily to the large compound... It is his duty to see that the members of his compound are of mutual benefit to each other and interact with a minimum of friction.³³

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ See Elliot and Gray

³² *Ibid*

³³ Fadipe, N. A. (1970). *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan.

Any resolution of conflicts was usually seen as a social responsibility of the elders of a community. Accordingly, it is a social duty of any head of a family (whether a *Baale* or *Olori-ebi*) to mediate whenever tension mounts among members of the family. The ability of the *Olori-ebi* or any other unit heads to manage conflict in traditional Yoruba society was a function of some moral principles. According to Fadipe (1970), one of such principles is the fact that the *Yoruba* accord great respect for intellect and expertise for the use of language, particularly, the appropriate use of proverbs; an elder (head of a household) ought to demonstrate adequate skills and knowledge of this capacity.

Although the focus of this section is to explore the socio-political experiences of Nigeria as a nation in order to show that the concept of patronage is fundamental to that experience, the traditional family unit that we have briefly examined serves as a basis for understanding the socio-political significance of patronage under discussion. As we have seen, the traditional family head in Nigeria possesses some paternal roles that reflect the larger society.

Furthermore, the following segments of the study will examine the various shades of patron-client relationship in some traditional Nigerian societies. This will enable us in order to expatiate the socio-political and even economic significance of patron-client relationship. For this purpose, we shall examine the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa socio- cultural settings.

Patronage in Yoruba Socio-Political Institution

The Yoruba family unit examined above shows that the family unit is an autocratic and hierarchical one. The most important member of the family possesses a significant role, not only within his family but also in the larger community. The head of the family, either the *Olori- Ebi* or *Baale*, serves as a protector of his family. He represents his family members in the community by protecting their interests and seeing to the overall progress of his family members and that of the community as a whole.

In tracing the origin of patronage to the pre-colonial Yoruba society, Omobowale (2007) explores the *Babaogun* exchange relations. The *Babaogun* played a significant role in the government and politics of pre-colonial Ibadan.³⁴The *Babaogun* is a warrior who had distinguished himself in battle. He had control and dominion over numerous people of different family units. Because of his military prowess, members of his community pay homage, tribute and tax to him.³⁵ Furthermore, he settled disputes in his communities and recruited eligible

³⁴ Omobowale, A. O (2007) *Babaogun Exchange Relations and Grassroots Politics In Ibadan, Nigeria*, International Journal of Social and Management Sciences, Vol. 1 No.2, Pp.143-163

³⁵*Ibid*

young men to be soldiers in his army.³⁶ While buttressing the paternal role of the *Babaogun*, Omobowale explains:

Ibadan's preference for *babaogun* may have been as a result of the war-like nature of the town in pre-colonial times. The attributes of *babaogun* were as enshrined in the *baba-isale* exchange relations. Individuals aspiring to successful military careers had to attach themselves to notable military leaders who would serve as their patrons and expose them to arts of warfare.³⁷

Aside his military authority, the *babaogun* also provided adequate protection for his followers (clients) and his community. In addition, the *babaogun* protected the interest of his followers at the town council meeting while his followers reciprocate the gesture by being loyal. Awe (1964), in her contribution to the discourse opines that:

He (*babaogun*) had under him a host of ambitious young men receiving military training in his army. To keep all these men in trim, he was allowed to go on private expedition with the sanction and approval of the town authorities and to keep part of the booty to feed his soldiers and buy guns and ammunitions for them.³⁸

The above excerpt suggests that patronage existed in pre-colonial Ibadan and that the *babaogun* exchange relation was inherent in the military and socio-political structure of Ibadan land. One important point to note, however, on the significant role the *babaogun* played in his community is that *babaogun's* relationship with his clients depends on trust and respect for his personality.

Furthermore, O' Hear (1986) in his study of political and commercial clientage in Ilorin, a town in North Central zone of Nigeria, also presents a clear evidence of patron-client relationship in the socio-political and economic life of the indigenes of Ilorin town. According to him, the *Baba Kekere* (the small father) was a very famous and influential community leader who provided the socio-political as well as physical security for people in the community especially those with a lesser status. The people (clients) in turn paid respect, tribute and loyalty to him. This insight provided by O'Hear is similar to Omobowale's *babaogun* relation in the socio-cultural history of Ibadan.

O'Hear explicates that the *Baba kekere* provided 'a wide range of services to his clients.' These services include mediating between his clients and other higher authority, providing access to land and justice and so on. Similarly, Barnes (1986)

³⁶*Ibid*

³⁷*Ibid.* pp.150-51

³⁸See Awe, B. (1964) *The Rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba Power in the Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D Thesis Sommerville College, Oxford University.

affirms O’Hear’s submission in her discussion on the paternal role of the Baba Isale in Mushin, a town in the suburb of old Lagos. Barnes gives the illustration of a Baba Isale who was the godfather ‘in local political administration of Mushin.’³⁹

Patronage in Socio-Economic Institution of The Igbo

Unlike the evidence of patron-client in the Yoruba socio-cultural life, the concept is more conspicuous in trade and commerce of the Igbo people. Although it comes in different shades, patron-client relationship was not strange among the people of pre-colonial Igbo communities. Onwuzuruigbo (2013) explains that:

While *godfatherism* (patronage) was never really practised in pre-colonial Igbo politics, partly because of its segmentary and non-centralized political structure which stifled the development of large-scale political institutions on which political godfatherism thrives, the same cannot be said of Igbo trade and commerce. *Godfatherism* appeared to be the hub around which Igbo trade and commerce revolved.⁴⁰

Nnamani (2004), while narrating the influence of godfathers in trade and commerce among the Igbo people of Nigeria, states that a ‘normal Igbo family seeks a guardian, a sort of godfather, for the sons who are expected to be inspired and motivated by the streak of perfections, deftness, contact, courage, experiences and accomplishments associated with the master.’⁴¹ Onwuzuruigbo, however, explains that the term *Nnam ukwu* or *Ogaranya* in Igbo language is synonymous with the word godfather just as *Odibo* is to a godson. Every parent in traditional Igbo society would send his child to be trained by a more successful and respected member of the society. Nnamani observes that:

To leave the child to fend for himself or to let him live and grow with the dangers of his father’s light-handed upbringing is akin to undue pampering which is like disaster at the commencement of the journey of life for the youngster. One was not left in doubt about the utility of the master, may be a godfather sort of, who had a challenge in bringing up the

³⁹For more detail on patronage system in colonial Lagos, see Barnes, T. (1986.). *Patrons and Power: Creating A Political community in Metropolitan Lagos*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. Also see, O’ Hear, A., (1986). “Political and Commercial Clientage in Nineteenth Century Ilorin”, *African Economic History*, 15: 69-83

⁴⁰Onwuzuruigbo .I.(2013) ‘Recontextualisation of the Concept of Godfatherism: Reflection Nigeria’, *AfricaDevelopment*, Vol. xxxiii, Nos. 1 &2, Pp. 25-50

⁴¹Nnamani.C.(2004).The Godfather Phenomenon in Democratic Nigeria: Silicon or Real? *International Journal of Philosophy: 1.1*

child but who must go to sleep in the wake of the exhibition of the prowess he inculcated in the rising star as the kid is under compulsion to bring to play, his own version of life.⁴²

Furthermore, Nwanna cited by Onwuzuruigbo, explains that one can also find evidence of godfatherism in pre-colonial Igbo society. He gives a classical example of this by narrating a story from Pita Nwanna in his classic book. It is a story of a character, Omenuko, a wealthy and successful merchant who had several apprentices under his tutelage. One day, Omenuko, while on his usual business trip, lost his entire goods in a river. However, in order to cover for his loss decided to sell off some of his apprentices as slaves to fellow traders and merchants from other towns. Omenuko's action was vehemently condemned by people in his community and his relatives. Having realized the enormity of his evil action, Omenuko fled to another village on a self-imposed exile.⁴³ One important lesson which can be drawn from the short narrative is that the Igbo custom placed an obligation on any merchant or godfather like Omenuko to equip his apprentice or godson with the wherewithal that will enable him to succeed in life.

This practice has continued until recently due to the clamour for western education. Both the *Nnam-Ukwu* and the *Odibo* (godfather and godson) are obliged to operate a rewarding relationship that facilitates the rapid development of the community. The key element in the relationship is trust. And the trust, according to Adetula (2005), 'covers all aspects of life, from politics to business.'⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Onwuzuruigbo (2013) posits that most of the successful Igbo businessmen, particularly those in the transportation and haulage companies in Nigeria, started out as apprentices of first generation Igbo merchants or business godfathers.⁴⁵

Patronage in Hausa\Fulani Socio-Political Structure

Patron-client relationship was also evident in the socio-political structure of pre-colonial Hausa\Fulani society. The first glimpse of patronage is seen in trade and commerce of the Hausa\Fulani people. Abner Cohen, Polly Hill and Lovejoy, in separate papers, used the term *Maigida* to describe a godfather in the Hausa\Fulani society. According to them, the *maigida* provided brokerage services to fellow Hausa traders involved in the cattle and kola trades.⁴⁶ Albert (2005) elaborates this claim:

⁴²*Ibid*

⁴³*Ibid*

⁴⁴Adetula (2005)

⁴⁵Onwuzuruigbo (2013)

⁴⁶See Abner

...Hausa traders brought cattle from their homeland to different parts of West Africa and took back kola nuts to the North. At the various transit centres where they have to stop and do businesses, they rely on a *maigida* to facilitate their economic activities.⁴⁷

Albert proceeds:

The *maigida* provides them with accommodation, storage and brokerage services. The *maigida* receive compensations, for their services and many of them became rich from the number of clients they had.⁴⁸

It is clear from the above excerpts that the *maigida* helped in promoting trading activities among the Hausa. He provided accommodation, storage and brokerage services to Hausa traders at various trading ports where fellow Hausas were involved in business transaction.

Modern patron-client relationship in Nigerian politics: Discussions and Modifications

Take it or leave it, the archetypal godfather in Nigeria is more than the ruthless Mario Puzo's kingpins in the Italian Mafia setting. While the fictional godfather is characterized as 'a shadowy, dare-devil recluse, who combines immense underworld financial muscle with near mythical powers of enormous proportions', which is to attain a further greasing of the ever-increasing vast financial empire, the Nigerian type has the added characterization of conceit, ego, loquacity, pettiness, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion (Nnamani, 2003). Liberalism, as we have experienced in Nigeria, promotes extreme elitist democracy and money-inspired electioneering system, leaving the masses as 'onlooker'. The belief that the dual forces of liberal democracy, and market capitalism are the sure path to development has been shaken by the success of the East Asian Tigers, and the incessant underdevelopment, hopelessness and acute poverty of the vast portions of Sub-Saharan Africa, South America and South Asia (Hyung-Gon, 2007:24). Could we attribute our failures to the manipulations of the tenets of liberalism, which kept denying Nigerians the much-needed institutional, socio-economic and political advancement? (Akinola, 2009)

⁴⁷ Albert, I.O. (2005). Explaining Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics. *African Sociological Review*. 9(2):79-105

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

The forceful amalgamation of many nationalities, with its resultant ethnic cleavages was responsible for the absence of national political leaders that commands respect throughout the country (Sklar, 2006). Ethnic groups therefore became the primary lens through which the public views social and political events. Leaders in each zone built strong political base and became godfathers, who commanded enviable followers based on resourceful politics and tried to provide good leadership and not 'leadership of the belly'. These leaders continued to promote godfatherism in the second republic (Onwumere, 2007). Erudite politicians like Obafemi Awolowo in the West, Azikwe (East), and Aminu Kano (North), held the aces as regional godfathers in the 1979 electioneering process. The failure of these godfathers to live above ethnic politics aided the ascendancy of Shehu Shagari as Nigeria's president in 1979. Awolowo tried in vain to install Pa Alayande during the old Oyo State governorship race against the younger Bola Ige; Jim Nwobodo declared Azikwe as his godfather, while Balarabe Musa triumphed under the tutelage of Aminu Kano (Onwumere, 2007). They knew the relevance of such names in winning election, and there was peaceful coexistence between the two parties. These leaders never imposed their interests on the godsons in a thug-like fashion, instead, both worked harmoniously for the entrenchment of good governance. Fast forward to the 2020s, do we want to compare the godfatherism discussed above to that of the Tinubus, the Adedibus, the Danjumas, the Wammakos, the Ladojas, the Obasanjos and the Wikes? This is a godfatherism that births the ascendancy of thugs and hoodlums into the political space; a godfatherism that grants truants the privilege to harass civilians by the ammunition powers they wield. The worse manifestations of godfatherism in Nigerian history came to life under President Obasanjo's democratic rule for one simple reason: he promoted and allowed it. Some of the godfathers truly possessed all the characteristics of mafianism, many of them behaving like Al Capone in a criminal world; but these set of godfathers perpetuated their criminality in enduring political environment.

Godfathers reign across all spheres of the society: academics, legal, and religious environment. There are professors who determine who joins the academics. The relationship between godfather and godson in politics claims the monopolistic use of the term godfatherism; the 'ism' makes it political. Godfatherism thrives across the globe. There is hardly any state devoid of the existence and influence of godfathers, though the level of such influence varies. A cursory look at the phenomenon of godfatherism reveals that nothing is wrong with the globally acclaimed idea. In fact, it helps to nurture democracy and provide opportunities for upcoming politicians to attain political power. However, patron-client relationship has become a pestilence to democracy in Nigeria. It denied the people the opportunities of political participation. There is high tendency for the emergence of patron-client politics in an elitist democracy, where the society is hierarchically patterned like a pyramid.

Powerful political elites stand at the top and wield power in their different domains. The power flows from godfathers and they determine the power structure below them. This made politics to become riotous, difficult to manage with anarchic patterns of operations and flagrant abuse of power by both parties. Politics should be made attractive to honest and resourceful individuals who do not want their clothes stained by the dirt of politics. It would be difficult for godfathers to easily undermine their godsons, if such enjoyed legitimacy built on good performance in office. There should be equality before the law, but in Nigeria, godfathers seem to be above the law.

To minimize the problems of godfatherism politics, the following formatives are recognized (by Bernard 2009), and should be deployed to minimize the monstrous effect of godfatherism in Nigeria: (i) There is a need for political awareness campaigns to put an end or to minimize the negative impacts of political godfatherism. (ii) All elective positions in Nigeria should be made unappealing. The impression of paying huge allowances and salaries to elected leaders should be halted. (iii) All political parties should categorically specify time and venues for the primary election to avoid confusion and misleading the electorates. (iv) Godfatherism should not be treated as a party affair, but should be offered political, social and legal treatment by the government and the stakeholders. (v) Power of incumbency should be restricted by employing provisional government in place of incumbent President, Governor and Local Government Chairmen shortly before the commencement of succeeding elections. (vi) All political parties should adopt the principles of direct primary elections at all levels. This would give room for every interested citizen to contest and participate in politics. □ All political parties should reduce the price of nomination forms to the barest amount; this would create an avenue for the masses to contest in their various constituencies.

Conclusion

The investigation into the socio-cultural and political spheres of the three major tribes in Nigeria reveals that patronage was fundamental to the traditional societies under discussion. It has also been made clear that the patrons from the two cultures examined, that is, ancient Rome and Nigeria, were people of integrity, and that they freely commanded respect from the members of their respective communities. The advent of the colonial masters, for example, in Nigeria saw to the emergence of a new set of patrons.

In addition, a good observation of the relationship that exists between a patron and his client in ancient Rome and a godfather and his godson in Nigerian socio-political space shows the instruments both normally employ. In the first stage of godfatherism, a godfather tries to carve a niche for himself as someone with good reputation. Most godfathers choose not to appear desperate in self-defence. They rather work hard to establish the reputation for outstanding qualities in the areas of wealth, connections and cunningness which they sell to

the people through generosity tied to the state treasury. Thus, generosity is the beginning of politics of godfatherism. It makes the beneficiaries make positive remarks about the benefactors and the aura created around them instil respect, and even fear in others.

Finally, this paper posits that patronage (godfatherism) is obtained in many democratic societies of the world. It is very usual to have people of great influence in the society who supports candidates during elections. There is nothing basically wrong in this if the goal is to get the best people into elective positions. What is wrong in the Nigerian case, however, is that godfathers have turned politics into a money-making business whereby elections are rigged with a view to forcing pre-determined candidates into office.

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