



Recontextualisation of the Concept of Godfatherism: Reflections on Nigeria

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Abstract

Social exchange relations have economic, religious, moral and political implications for both dyadic and group relations. Consequently, some social scientists deploy social exchange theory to explain human actions, behaviour and institutions. The concept of *godfatherism*, as a form of exchange and clientelist relation, has characterized social, political, religious and commercial networks of indigenous Nigerian groups since pre-colonial times. Recent commentaries and analysis of godfatherism, however, erroneously portray the phenomenon as a new form of political interaction, encouraging electoral fraud, promoting intra-party and political conflicts, and consequently stifling the consolidation of Nigeria's extant democracy. This superficial treatment of godfatherism, which presents it in a negative image, has proceeded without emphasizing the socio-cultural origin of the concept and its contribution to the political and commercial growth of pre-colonial societies. The paper re-contextualizes the concept of godfatherism. It captures the positive contributions of godfatherism in entrenching responsive and responsible leadership and promoting development. It also considers the distortions the concept suffered as it evolved from a form of social exchange to a form of political relationship, encouraging political conflicts and corruption in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

Résumé

Les relations d'échange social ont des implications économiques, religieuses, morales et politiques aussi bien pour les relations dyadiques que pour les relations de groupe. Par conséquent, certains chercheurs en sciences sociales déploient la théorie de l'échange social pour expliquer les actions humaines, les comportements et les institutions. Le concept de *parrainage politique*, en tant que forme de relation d'échange et de clientélisme, caractérise les réseaux sociaux, politiques, religieux et commerciaux de groupes nigériens indigènes depuis l'époque précoloniale. Cependant, les récentes observations et analyses sur le parrainage politique décrivent ce phénomène comme une nouvelle forme d'interaction politique, qui encourage la fraude électorale, favorise les conflits au sein des partis et les conflits politiques, et par conséquent entrave la consolidation de la démocratie existante au Nigeria. Ce traitement superficiel du

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parrainage politique, qui en fait un portrait négatif, a été entrepris sans mettre l'accent sur l'origine socioculturelle du concept et sa contribution à la croissance politique et commerciale des sociétés précoloniales. Cet article recontextualise le concept de parrainage politique. Il souligne les contributions positives du parrainage politique dans l'enracinement du leadership réceptif et responsable et la promotion du développement. Il examine également les distorsions subies par le concept au cours de son évolution d'une forme d'échange social à une forme de relation politique, encourageant les conflits politiques et la corruption au Nigeria à l'époque coloniale et postcoloniale.

Introduction

Men who are anxious to win the favour of a Prince nearly always follow the custom of presenting themselves to him with possessions they value most, or with things they know especially please him; so we often see princes given horses, weapons, cloths of gold, precious stones, and similar ornaments worthy of their high position
– Niccolo Machiavelli (2003), *The Prince*.

Social exchange and clientelism are not peculiar to Nigeria. The excerpt from Machiavelli's letter to Lorenzo de Medici quoted above makes a veiled reference to the existence of clientelistic relations among social and political actors in Europe (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, studies of social and political issues confirm underlying clientelistic networks among individuals and groups engaged in social and political interaction. Scott (1972) elaborates on the patron-client model of association and demonstrates its application to politics in Southeast Asia. In similar manner, Lemarchand and Legg (1972) point to the prevalence of clientelistic networks in West and Central Africa and how these networks relate with ethnic politics in the process of nation-building in Africa (Lemarchand 1972). More recent studies of Africa probe the intersection of clientelism and bureaucracy, democracy, civil society (Lemarchand 1998; Berman 1998 and 2004) and so on.

This paper focuses on a genre of social exchange and clientelism in Nigeria referred to as *godfatherism*. There is a sense in which godfatherism can be said to be the buzzword of Nigerian politics since the nation returned to democratic governance in 1999 because very few concepts, if any, have gained greater currency and popularity in contemporary discussions and studies of Nigerian politics and governance (Nnamani 2006; Albert 2005 and 2006; Onwuzuruigbo 2006; Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2007). Indeed, the activities of political godfathers and their godsons have been implicated in several case studies of intra-party crises, fraudulent electoral results, corruption and political conflicts in many states of the Nigerian federation (Onwuzuruigbo 2006; HRW 2007). The failure of Nigeria to conduct credible

elections since 1999, for instance, has been frequently attributed to the menace of godfathers and their godsons while the politics of godfatherism has remained responsible for the seemingly endemic corrupt leadership and political tensions in states like Anambra, Oyo, Enugu, and Rivers, just to mention a few (HRW 2007). These worrisome developments have stirred up increasing scholarly attempts at defining, conceptualizing and analyzing the phenomenon. The paper therefore identifies, in specific terms, the weaknesses inherent in the treatment of the subject matter and seeks to clarify and shed more light on the concept, its evolution and practice.

The gamut of recent scholarly discourse on godfatherism is characterized by two major weaknesses. First, the discourse merely explores the recent political expression of godfatherism; it focuses on the trajectory of the politics of godfatherism on elections, political corruption and conflicts in Nigeria – thus erroneously conceiving and implying that the politics of godfatherism is, after all, a recent development associated with Nigeria's nascent democracy (Nnamani 2006; Albert 2006). Second, because of its emphasis on the perverse manifestation of godfatherism in contemporary Nigerian politics, the discourse, I submit, presents godfatherism only in negative terms (Joseph 1991; Albert 2006; HRW 2007). Put differently, the treatment of the socio-cultural basis of godfatherism which would have complemented its political dimension and provided a holistic and robust explanation capable of revealing the positive aspects of the phenomenon has received very minimal attention. And so, the contributions of godfatherism in promoting harmonious social relations, achieving rapid and sustainable socio-economic development, entrenching good governance and political tranquillity, especially in pre-colonial societies, have been grossly de-emphasised.

These obvious flaws may have occurred because the godfatherism discourse is to a large extent dominated by political scientists. It is yet to benefit from the contributions of political sociologists and anthropologists whose inputs are urgently required to provide the needed socio-cultural perspective to understanding the concept and its context. If we are to achieve a rigorous treatment and holistic understanding of the phenomenon, then the socio-cultural component and historical evolution of the concept must be interrogated. For it is in doing so that we see in sharp relief not only the positive contributions of godfatherism in raising responsible leaders, entrenching responsive leadership and promoting development, but also the distortions the concept suffered in the process of evolving from a form of social exchange and political interaction – facilitating development in pre-colonial societies and dispensation – to a form of political relationships that encouraged political conflicts and corruption in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

Generally, the paper elaborates on the concept of godfatherism. It explores the different levels and stages of metamorphosis, appropriation and incorporation of godfatherism into the political culture, institutions and processes of colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. In addition, it chronicles the alterations, abuses and distortions godfatherism underwent and the potential for generating conflict it acquired in the process. To achieve this task, the paper is divided into three sections. The first section highlights the shortcomings observed in the extant treatment of the concept and the need for a re-assessment. The second part provides a conceptual re-examination of godfatherism. A major concern here is to present an all-encompassing definition and conceptualization of godfatherism among major ethnic groups of Nigeria. In doing so, the historical trajectory of the concept of godfatherism in the social and political relations of individuals and groups in Nigeria is sketched. The third part highlights the alterations that trailed the transformation and incorporation of godfatherism in the politics and administration of colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Some conclusions are drawn in the final section.

Conceptualizing Godfatherism

Godfatherism has been conceived and defined in different ways. I shall start by considering the following excerpts from previous and recent definitions and conceptions of godfather or godfatherism:

... in common parlance 'godfatherism' is the process by which an individual establishes links with a given institutional hierarchy in the expectation of favoured treatment ... An individual seeks the support and protection of an *oga* or a godfather while trying to acquire the basic social and material goods – loans, scholarships, licenses, plots of urban land, employment, promotion – and the main resource of the patron in meeting these requests is quite literally a piece of the state (Joseph 1991: 207).

... 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 2006: 57, 61).

The 'political godfathers' in Nigeria build an array of loyalists around them and use their influence, which is often tied to monetary considerations, to manipulate the rest of the society. Political godfathers use their influence to block the participation of others in Nigerian politics. They are political gatekeepers: they dictate who participates in politics and under what conditions ... Simply defined the word 'godfather' refers to a person who tries to play God (Albert 2005: 82).

... godfathers are not mere financiers of political campaigns. Rather they are individuals whose powers stems not just from wealth but their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate national, state or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor (HRW 2007: 33).

‘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 process of doing this ... is famously known as ‘godfatherism’ (Omotola 2007: 135).

As noted earlier, one common denominator in each of these definitions is the emphasis on political expressions of godfatherism.¹ Regardless of the emphasis on the political aspect of godfatherism, the fact that the concept has socio-cultural foundations and relevance cannot be denied. Yet the socio-cultural dimensions of the concept have been often marginalized and trivialized in the various attempts to define and conceptualise it. To this extent the definitions are, in my opinion, superficial and incomplete. In order not to belabour the point, it is my view that godfatherism should be situated in its proper perspective as first and foremost an instrument of social exchange or relation rather than a form of political interaction. Perceiving the concept as an instrument of political interaction is not only reductionist but diminishes our knowledge of the context in which it is situated and practised *ab initio*. Omotola (2007: 138) drew attention to this very important point when he stated that godfatherism

... 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 politicization would appear to have contributed to the criminalisation of politics.

This summarizes the arguments advanced in this paper: to wit, unless we situate the concept in its socio-cultural and historical context which makes the concept and problem clearer, the etymology of the concept will remain elusive, the genesis of its perverse manifestations in Nigeria’s political culture will remain vague, and its positive contributions to the growth and development of pre-colonial communities will not be fully appreciated. This is the contention and the perspective I adopt in this paper.

How then do we redefine, re-conceptualise and reconstruct the concept of godfatherism? Generally speaking, the godfather is one who commands respect among his people either through his privileged position, knowledge, skill, wisdom and wealth or on account of his popularity and public acceptance. The godfather, in practical terms, is a father-figure, benefactor

and mentor who trains the godson, guides the godson on the path of achieving success, skill and excellence in the aspirations or professional calling of the godson. The godfather supports his godson, not only with his skills, wealth, might and experience, but also his network of connections. Be it in the realm of politics, business or any other sphere of endeavour, the godfather is always committed to the success and progress of his godson. He shields his godson from policies, plans and emergencies likely to hurt or halt the career goals and life ambitions of the godson. In fact, the greater desire of the godfather is that the godson achieves much more than the godfather has been able to do.

Apart from benefiting from the benevolence, kind gestures and good will of the godfather, the godson, on the other hand, reciprocates by remaining loyal and offering general support and assistance to the godfather. The godfather expects unalloyed loyalty from the godson which could be symbolically expressed through gifts. The godson remains loyal to the godfather by paying regular visits to the godfather, intimating the godfather his future plans and course of action with the intention of benefiting from the godfather's wise counsel, relying on his often wide network of relationships and practical help in achieving them. The godson makes himself and his services available for use – though not abuse – by the godfather and gives gifts, which may not necessarily be monetary in nature, to the godfather, particularly on festive and memorable occasions. Exchange of gifts is fundamental in greasing the relationship between godfathers and godsons. According to Komter (2007: 94) 'mutual loyalty, often supported by gifts, connects those involved in collective hostilities towards third parties as well as those who maintain collective friendships' – reciprocity in other words.

The godfather and godson relationships are both unequal and reciprocal because the status of the godfather is higher than that of the godson and the services or objects exchanged are not of the same order. Similarly, they are not jural but personal and informal. Being personal, the relationships usually evoke strong feelings of closeness between the partners culminating in a wide variety of multiple exchanges between the two individuals over time. All of these heighten the capacity of the ties to increase over long periods with increasing levels of indebtedness and obligation (Barnes 1986) that ultimately benefit the parties and their community.

Although the relationship between the godfather and his godson may be strained when either of the parties falls short of fulfilling his obligations, such situations hardly degenerate to recurring large-scale, violent conflicts that threaten the peace and tranquility of the entire society, or incapacitate the instruments and institutions of governance, or impose the whims and

caprices of the godfather on the entire society as is presently the case. More often than not, the godfather and his godson operate a symbiotic relationship which advances the interests of both parties. By raising knowledgeable and skilled individuals in commerce, religion and politics, the godfather and his godson(s) become critical factors in the development agenda and process of the society. Godfatherism can then be seen as a social relationship involving reciprocal exchange between individuals of unequal social status intended to promote their spiritual, political and socio-economic wellbeing for the overall development initiatives of the society as a whole. What this means is that in its original and unadulterated form, godfatherism transcended the realm of politics to include other vital aspects of societal life – commerce, religion, child rearing and training – and consequently contributed positively to the growth and advancement of the society.

Conceived this way, we are able to establish two important facts vital to our understanding and analysis of the concept. One, godfatherism can be located in a socio-cultural and historical context and cannot therefore be seen as an entirely new phenomenon in Nigeria. Situating the phenomenon of godfatherism in a historical perspective, as will be seen later, brings out clearly not only its origin but also the contradictions, perversions and abuses it suffered as it was transformed, appropriated and incorporated into the colonial and subsequently post-colonial political institutions and culture. Two and more importantly, godfatherism cannot also be seen primarily and only as an instrument of political interaction fostered by the logic and dynamics of politics in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. It is possible to conceive of godfatherism as a phenomenon practised in the realm of commerce, religion, politics and other fields of endeavour among various ethnic groups in Nigeria since pre-colonial times.

Godfatherism in Igbo apprenticeship, trade and commerce

Godfatherism was, and has remained, central in driving Igbo commerce and merchant apprenticeship. Quoting Eme Awa, Nnamani (2006: 58) argues that ‘the normal Igbo family seeks out 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’. Exploring the roles of *Nnam ukwu* or *Ogaranya* (godfather) and *Odibo* (godson)² in Igbo merchant apprenticeship, Nnamani further states:

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 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.

The Igbo proverb, *ekpere nna bu na nwa g'aka nwa ya*, meaning that 'the prayer of any man is that the child ascends and surpasses the father or master' best captures the phenomenon of godfatherism in the Igbo worldview. The godfather also exercises social, economic and political leadership which is 'collective, never dictatorial or oligarchic and sometimes almost outrageously democratic' (Uzoigwe 2004: 146).

Glimpses of the practice of godfatherism in the sociology of pre-colonial Igbo society are presented in Pita Nwanna's little book. Written in Igbo language and titled *Omenuko*, the book narrates the story of Omenuko and his apprentices. Omenuko was a wealthy and successful merchant who had many apprentices under his care and training. In one of his business trips, Omenuko lost his entire goods in overflowing river. In order to mitigate his losses, Omenuko sold his apprentices as slaves to another trader and slave merchant in a foreign land. This was a despicable and abominable act that violated the basic principles of Igbo godfatherism and merchant apprenticeship. As such Omenuko's actions were strongly condemned by his kinsmen. Confronted with the severe implications of his actions, Omenuko fled to another land in self-imposed exile (Nwanna 1976). The relevant lesson from *Omenuko* is clear. It is obligatory for the merchant or godfather to equip his apprentice or godson with basic skills and expertise required to excel in his chosen career just as he is expected to protect the life and advance the career of the godson.

This form of godfatherism has continued until modern times and partly accounts for the tremendous success of the Igbo in trade and commerce in Nigeria. Recent research has revealed that many Igbo traders in the city of Jos in Northern Nigeria for instance are in business, courtesy of their '*oga* (godfather) ... who mainly brought them up as apprentice. The key element in this arrangement is trust ... that covers all aspect of life, from politics to business' (Adetula 2005: 225). Both the godfather and his godsons are expected to operate a rewarding relationship that directly and indirectly facilitates the process of development of the community. Neither of the parties is expected to jeopardize the interest of the other. Most of the recent and successful transportation and haulage companies in Nigeria, especially in Igbo-dominated Southeastern Nigeria, are owned by personalities who started as apprentices of the generation of Igbo road transportation merchants like late Augustine Ilodibe, proprietor of Ekene Dili Chukwu Transport Company Limited.

Godfatherism and Hausa/Fulani socio-political structure

In analyzing the Hausa/Fulani culture of 'given away' children or child rearing and training, Feinstein (1987: 8) refers to 'a practice so widespread that it represents a deep-seated cultural variation' which points to the practice of godfatherism among the Hausa/Fulani group. He states:

Custom has it that immediately after weaning, at about two years of age, the first born (and frequently other children as well) is given to substitute parents to bring up, usually drawn from those respected in the community, who may be childless or are in a better position to raise the child.

The notion of godfatherism was also well entrenched in the political and social structure of pre-colonial Hausa/Fulani society. The successful prosecution of the Fulani Jihad ensured the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria. Building on the traditional rulership (*saurata*) institution, the caliphate administration introduced more sophisticated hierarchical levels of administration ranging from the Sokoto administration, those of the emirate, the vassalage and the village to ward administration bound by patron-client or godfather-godson ties. In any event, access to political office was almost equally open to the Fulani and Hausa. However, since the Fulani conquerors had the emirate administration under their political grip, almost all important offices reverted to the Fulani while the Hausa became client to the Fulani overlords. The Fulani mainly appointed kin members and close associates to political offices. This practice almost became the acceptable political norm. Overtime increasingly large number of offices became the preserve of particular lineages (Tibenderana 1989; Shenton 1989: 5). It then was the practice for those appointed to positions of authority to have received some forms of training in politics and administration by serving as clients or godsons of Fulani patrons and senior administrative officials (O'Hear 1986). As Tibenderana (1989: 74) observes 'when in office patrons were expected to reward their most loyal clients with administrative positions'.

The practice of godfatherism was evident in Hausa/Fulani trade and commerce. Apart from its literary meaning of landlord or the head of a household, the term *maigida* in Hausa/Fulani also refers to a godfather. In their separate works on Hausa traders and trading activities, Abner Cohen, Polly Hill and Paul Lovejoy applied the term to refer to those Hausa who provided brokerage services to fellow Hausa traders involved in the cattle and kola trades. The *maigida* helped in promoting Hausa trading activities by providing accommodation, storage and brokerage services to Hausa traders at various trading ports where Hausa traders were involved in business transactions in southern West Africa. This practice had its origin in

Hausaland from where the itinerant traders and their *maigida* came. According to Albert (2005: 86):

In Hausaland when a stranger with kola is staying in the house of one man and a potential buyer is staying in the house of another man they bargain over the kola and on each calabash they set aside two kola nuts, *yan k'ida*, as a gift: one goes to each of the landlords (Ferguson 1972 quoted in Albert 2005: 85).

Many *maigida* became wealthy through the compensation they received from the services they rendered to the traders.

Smith (1960), obviously relying on the workings of his western political system, wrongly described this form of political and commercial clientage among the Hausa/Fulani as institutionalized political corruption. Although it is often difficult to determine the difference between 'gifts given for services rendered' and 'gifts given to induce corruption' or a service in a society where gift-giving and 'generosity is a highly prized quality' (Paden 1986: 61), nevertheless, the Hausa/Fulani has a clear-cut definition and understanding of these two practices in the context of the moral community established by the ideals of the Islamic jihad. Hence, the intention of the gift is important in assessing the gift or any other transaction. In this connection, Paden (1986) asserts that a gift is given to induce corruption, *zalunci* or *ba a hanci*, if it is a 'compulsory gift' given to influence individuals in authority or people around them for the purpose of securing certain favours, services or items, like portions of land. No doubt, these distinctions were not very clear to Smith when he dismissed the Hausa/Fulani commercial and political system as institutionalised corruption.

Godfatherism and Yoruba political institutions

Godfatherism was an integral aspect of Yoruba pre-colonial political structure. The *Baba-ogun* (war patron) played a prominent part in the pre-colonial government and politics of Ibadan. Baba-ogun was a warrior who had distinguished himself in the numerous wars and battles that characterized inter-group relations in Yorubaland, especially in the nineteenth century. He exercised control over numerous peoples of several scattered compounds, collected taxes, tributes and levies from them. In addition he settled disputes in his domain and recruited eligible male members of compounds under his control to be soldiers in his army during periods of war (Falola 1985: 100). Individuals who wanted to become soldiers or pursue careers in the military were usually apprentices (godsons) to a successful Baba-ogun who also served as their patron while he (Baba-ogun) trained them in the art of warfare and soldiering. The Baba-ogun exchange relation was anchored in the military and socio-political structure of Ibadan.

As a military camp, Ibadan attracted not only refugees of the nineteenth century Yoruba wars but young men eager for military adventure and distinction. Most of them settled with the Baba-ogun. Describing the Baba-ogun, Awe (1964:119) states:

He 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. During actual warfare, these men knew their own positions on the battlefield and had always to stick as closely as possible to their chiefs.

Beyond providing military training and leadership, the Baba-ogun protected and advanced the interests of his apprentices, soldiers, and members of his compound in the town council. They, in turn, reciprocated by remaining loyal to the Baba-ogun, providing him with military and farming service and gifts such as crops at festive seasons. According to Awe (1964: 109), prominent Ibadan warriors and leaders like Ogunmola, Fijabi and Aare Latosa began their military careers this way.

On the other hand, there was the *Baba kekere* (the small or little father), *Baba isale* (father of the courtyard/quarter or underground world) or *Baba nigbejo* (a great help in times of trouble) who played the role of godfathers in pre-colonial trade and politics of Yorubaland (O'Hear 1986; Albert 2005: 86). *Baba kekere* was used to refer to local community leaders who provided physical, social and political security for people of lesser social status who, in turn, paid their respect, loyalty and tribute to the Baba-kekere. O'Hear's study of political and commercial clientage in the Yoruba town of Ilorin is an insightful discussion of the relevance of the Baba kekere in the political administration and commercial growth of Ilorin town. The Baba-kekere provided a wide range of services which among other things included interceding on his client's behalf with a higher authority or government official and providing access to land and justice to his clients. In all these, the Baba kekere received no salaries but instead received gifts and accepted gratuities for the services he rendered to his clients (O'Hear 1986). Similarly, Barnes's (1986) study of metropolitan Lagos captured the role of the *Baba isale* as godfather in local political administration of Mushin, a suburb of Lagos.

Godfatherism and contemporary religions

In modern times, orthodox Catholics³ and Anglicans do make reference to their spiritual godfathers (Scott 1972: 94; Scott and Marshall 2005: 484) just as members of the new generation Pentecostal churches have 'Fathers-in-the-Lord'. The spiritual godfather or 'Father-in-the-Lord' is a mature and

successful Christian who epitomizes high moral standards such that he can and is expected to guide inexperienced Christians to attain an equally successful Christian life through his conducts. More often these men are instrumental to the 'born-again' experiences of the Pentecostal faithful or adopted as godfathers by young and immature Christians as they pass through baptismal, confirmation, marriage and other religious rites of orthodox Catholic and Anglican denominations. Among Catholics, the child adopts a godfather at baptism who is supposed to ensure his spiritual and economic welfare. In return the godson supports the activities of the godfather when he requires it. At a more inclusive level, the godfather-godson ties established during baptism give the natural parents of the godson the right to look up to the godfather for material assistance. The spiritual godfather thus occupies a central position in the spiritual development and overall growth of the Christian. In fact, most of Nigeria's prominent Pentecostal preachers are spiritual godsons of older generations of Pentecostal Christians.⁴

Godfatherism is not missing in Islam either. In a way, the *mallams* (Islamic scholars) and *almajiris* (Islamic pupils) in Northern Nigeria can be construed as maintaining a godfather-godson relation. The system operates on the Islamic injunction that enjoins the faithful to seek knowledge as well as the philosophy that Islamic learning without rigour and stoic discipline does not develop a wholesome personality. Having been separated from their parents, the pupils are placed under the tutelage of Koranic teachers. The almajiris receive Islamic training while seeking arms to meet their daily needs and those of their mallam (Adewuyi 1998).

Although there may be variations, the concept and practice of godfatherism was not strange among pre-colonial groups and communities. While godfatherism was never really practised in pre-colonial Igbo politics, partly because of its segmentary and non-centralised 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. However, local groups and communities with centralized or monarchical political structures like Yoruba and Hausa evolved a blend of commercial and political godfatherism in their religious, social and political relations. What is clear in all the cases examined is the positive contributions of godfatherism in promoting the welfare of both the godfather and godson as well as the development, harmony and good governance in the community. Regrettably, the adoption and application of godfatherism in the colonial administrative processes and post-colonial political culture created major flaws in the understanding and practice of godfatherism.

Abuses and Distortions of Godfatherism under Colonialism

The concept of godfatherism espoused so far presents a practice that focuses on stability, growth and development of the community. It seeks to prepare individuals – godfathers and godsons – to be active agents of development of the community. In a social relation characterized by what Durkheim described as mechanical solidarity, the godfather wields power not so much for personal interests and aggrandizement but for the socio-economic wellbeing of individual members of the community and the utmost socio-political development of the community. Benevolence and altruism are basic norms and principles underlining the relationship between godfathers and godsons. The godfather is expected to be a benevolent mentor and patron in the same way the godson is expected to remain loyal and supportive of the godfather. The interest of each of the parties involved in the relationship – the godfather, godson and community – is accommodated and adequately protected. Tibenderana (1989: 74) puts it somewhat differently when he states that ‘political clientage (godfatherism) entailed mutually beneficial relations and solidarity of interests of clients and patrons’.

But godfatherism can be conceptualized in another sense. In *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*, Richard Joseph defines godfatherism as ‘the process by which an individual establishes links with a given institutional hierarchy in the expectation of favoured treatment’.⁵ In what appears to be an explanation of the role of godfathers and expectations of godsons, Joseph states that:

An individual seeks the support and protection of an *oga* or a godfather while trying to acquire the basic social and material goods – loans, scholarships, licenses, plots of urban land, employment, promotion – and the main resources of the patron in meeting these requests is quite literally a piece of the state. Such an argument can easily be made in the case of ministerial appointments or positions on government boards. It also applies however, to individuals within the nominally private sector, since the business world is hemmed in by bureaucratic regulations which derive from the nationalistic and development concerns of post-independence governments (Joseph 1991: 56).

This conception of godfatherism is a departure from the notion of godfatherism identified earlier. It suggests some inherent attributes and motives that differentiate it from the previous notion.

First, Joseph’s definition of godfatherism suggests a practice deeply rooted in individualism and selfishness that discounts and subverts the interest of the community. The godfather is perceived as promoting his interests and those of his godson over and above the collective interests of the generality of the public. In other words, the primary aim is the development of the self (godfather) or patron. To achieve this end, the godfather maintains a selfish

and parasitic relationship with his godson and the community. Not only are the interests of the godson and community abandoned in the fulfilment of those of the godfather, but the godson and community are coerced to work assiduously and make sacrifices toward the realization of the supreme interest of the godfather. Hence godfatherism is conceived essentially as a means of competing for, or capturing public resources for the selfish use of the godfather.

Second, rather than the resources of the godfather, the 'piece of the state', community and electorate are mobilized to grease the parasitic relationship the godfather maintains with the community and state. In the words of Albert (2005: 83), 'The relationship between the two of them – the godfather and the godson – has little or nothing to do with the larger society the two of them claim to lead'. This form of godfatherism is oppressive, malevolent and has become the defining characteristics of relations between political actors – political patrons and public office holders or seekers – in Nigeria. It is the persistent demands the godfather makes on the state that imbue godfatherism with conflict-generating attributes and qualities. While the former notion of godfatherism depicts the traditional and conventional conception of godfatherism, the latter constitutes the redefined and distorted version of the concept. What phenomenon and changes initiated the redefinition of the conventional notion of godfatherism? And what process completed the distortion of the concept?

The process of redefining the conventional notion of godfatherism was consummated towards the end of the nineteenth century, and colonialism was responsible for this change. Colonial political engineering fostered its own 'ideas about government and society, superimposed on indigenous political structures which were not allowed to crumble and disintegrate' (Ajayi 1985: 5). Colonial administrators were tolerant and even receptive of the traditional forms of godfatherism. Instead of dismantling the old system and creating a completely new one complementing the strange administrative doctrines and principles propagated by the colonialists, colonialism merely distorted and incorporated it into its repertoire of administrative mechanisms. As a result aspects of indigenous political structure were integrated into the hierarchy of colonial administrative position and authority. In what became known as Indirect Rule, Native Administration was introduced to involve community leaders and village chiefs in the daily administration of the villages and towns in the districts and provinces. This was done to reduce administrative costs of the colonies, spread the burden of leadership among existing native rulers and extract loyalty from the natives with minimal force.

Thus, in Yorubaland, it was needless for the Baba-ogun to prove his military worth before he attracted the attention of the colonial authorities. The Baba-ogun was simply incorporated into the Ibadan Native Administration

and immediately became an adjunct officer of the colonial administration in the maintenance of law and order and production of goods needed for European industries. It became compulsory for every resident of Ibadan to identify with a Baba-ogun through whom he paid his tax to the colonial administration (Omobowale and Olutayo 2007). Like Ibadan, in Ilorin the Baba kekere was used as an agent of tax-collection by the colonial administration. According to O'Hear (1986: 71) 'in 1912, for example, a British official reported that money from compound tax was handed over to the Baba kekere or patron of the 'maiungua' – some slave of the emir'. In Lagos, the Baba isale, having lost their traditional political functions as chiefs, nevertheless served as unofficial advisors to government figures and dispute arbitrators in the new colonial regime (Barnes 1986).

Where traditional godfatherism was found incompatible with the immediate political and economic considerations of the colonial authorities, it was drastically restructured to suit the needs of the colonizing power. Because they found a less centralized but more democratized political structure and communities in Igboland whose administration would require huge financial and material resources from the parsimonious colonial administration, the colonialists proceeded to create Warrant Chiefs, a few selected from the class of existing godfathers and many from personalities with questionable character (Afigbo 1972). Isichei (1976: 142-143) notes that 'the patterns of traditional Igbo government were hopelessly unsuited to the needs of the colonial state. Its system of checks and balances, its consensus by protracted discussion, its use of religious sanctions and especially, its small scale rendered it impracticable'. Corroborating Isichei, Ohadike (1994: 153) stated that the British restructured the traditional Igbo administrative system and by implication the concept of godfatherism 'because they failed to comprehend the workings of the Igbo political system. The Igbo political systems were inconsistent with British notions of governance, and anything that did not meet European standards had to be destroyed not developed'. As it turned out not a few *ogaranya* and other local leaders, including mean and dubious characters, lacking leadership qualities, who collaborated with the foreign rulers,⁶ were made Warrant Chiefs and Native Authority officials and included in administering the colonial state at the local level (Afigbo 1972).

In Northern Nigeria, the more stratified and centralized political structure of the Sokoto emirate suited Indirect Rule. Although British colonialism, in accordance with its racial thinking, reasoned that the light-skinned Fulani rulers were a superior race who had allowed themselves to be corrupted by mixing with the inferior Hausa race, it insisted that 'nothing must be done to undercut the position of the indigenous ruling class. Rather, if British rule

was to survive, the position of the Sultan, emirs and *hakimai* must be maintained' (Shenton 1986: 28). Except in cases where a co-operative member of the ruling class was empowered and installed as emir in place of a self-confident figure who resisted or frustrated colonial rule, very minimal changes were effected in the political administration of Northern Nigeria (Shenton, 1986: 25). In the words of Atanda (1985: 25), 'what emerged was neither a total destruction of the old society nor the emergence of a totally new one'. What emerged was a coalition and collision of the 'new and the old, an alliance of persons and political groups; an amalgam or a synthesis of ideas'.

The marriage of convenience between the old and the new went on without considering the degree to which European policies proved compatible with the preservation of traditional principles of godfatherism. Local godfathers – *Ogaranya*, *Nnam-ukwu*, *Obas*, *Baba-ogun*, *Baba-isale*, *Baba kekere*, *Maigida* and *Emirs* – now became godsons of the colonial administrators. European godfathers were sought after 'not only because of their political "pull" but because they controlled the technical resources and know-how through which the demands of their clients could be met' (Lemarchand 1972: 79). More especially for the local godfather, dealing with the colonial state was a mixture of opportunity and danger – the opportunity of gaining access to the diverse resources of the state and its agents and the danger of running afoul of its arbitrary and capricious actions. The need to shield himself from the dangerous and capricious actions of the system compelled the local godfather to court the protection and support of his European counterpart to whom he became a client (Berman 2004). Soon a hierarchy of power and authority, establishing novel patron-client in the form of godfather-godson relationships between the colonial state, its Resident and District Officers on the one hand and the chiefs, emirs and local godfathers on the other hand was installed. Yet the emirs, chiefs and godfathers, in the context of indigenous political structure, were expected still to perform their traditional positions as godfathers in the society. This contradiction inherent in the dynamics of colonial administration altered and redefined the notion and practice of godfatherism. Above all, it had profoundly destabilizing consequences for the internal cohesion of the society.

In what ways did the distortions and destabilizations express themselves? Emergent godfathers and public authority figures were no longer persons with sterling leadership qualities and excellent character as defined, identified and selected by the local people; rather godfathers were mostly handpicked, based on the possession of qualities considered by the colonialists to suit the colonial enterprise, and imposed on the people. Even public officers drawn from the category of personalities perceived by the locals as godfathers, in no time became more committed to themselves and the colonial authorities

than their communities. For example, encouraged and protected by colonial administrators, Warrant Chief R. A. Idigo of Aguleri in Onitsha Province unilaterally leased communal lands to European merchant companies without remitting the rents to his community (File No. O.P. 505).

The principles and workings of the new form of godfatherism established by colonialism not only marginalized the interest of the local people but in several ways totally discounted the people and further bastardized existing principles of godfatherism. In Northern Nigeria, Paden (1986: 60) notes that the Hausa indigenous culture of gift-giving required both the godfather and the godson to exchange gifts. Thus, an emir gave gifts to the district heads and village heads who were usually the emir's biological sons and political godsons. Paden, however, adds that gifts by persons of lower status and rank (godson) to persons of higher rank (godfather) were essentially 'to get blessing' and not intended materially to enrich the latter. Things changed drastically in the new arrangement, and these principles of godfatherism, leadership and communalism inherited from the era of the Sokoto emirate, Paden points out, were altered, transformed and adapted to the emerging culture of irresponsible leadership of the colonial and post-independence era in which political godfathers and elites became parasites of the commonwealth and collective resources of the people. The result was a shift of emphasis away from the symbolic or affective import of the rewards and gifts to expectations of material benefits by the godfathers (Lemarchand 1972).

This was necessary because the logic of colonialism ensured that the godfathers and local elites created by colonialism were rendered materially weak even though the same class of individuals was required by tradition to be dispensers of patronage. Prior to colonialism, wealth, measured in terms of standard of living, was fairly equally distributed among the people, with the local leaders only enjoying marginal advantage over the rest of the people. Colonialism discouraged this pattern and in its place instituted a structure that ensured the transfer of ownership and control of resources from the people to the colonial state (Ake 1985). In doing so, colonialism reversed the Marxist proposition that control of political institution derived from control of major economic resources (Barnes 1986). The elite and godfathers were therefore placed in a precarious economic situation which fired their desperate quest for the economic resources of the state. Accessing the state and its institutions – an opportunity available only to the leaders and godfathers – became a point of entry to the resources of the state and a matter of do-or-die for the leaders. Accordingly, the only way in which the chiefs, who lacked traditional legitimacy, were able to keep themselves in power was to extract resources from the state and the people for distribution among their supporters (Tignor 1993).

The few who ventured to observe their traditional obligations to the people immediately invited the wrath of the colonial authorities. One instance was that of M. E. Amete, Umuleri member of Umuigwedo Native Court of Appeal in the Onitsha District, who was among these few. In 1950 his community appointed him secretary of Umuleri Emergency Front that was championing the struggles of the community to claim ownership of Otuocha land in Onitsha District. The District Officer interpreted a letter of petition Amete wrote on behalf of his community as unbecoming of a member of a Native Court and threatened to strip him of his post. To retain his privileged position, Amete quickly apologized to the authorities and thereafter isolated himself from the struggles of the community (File No. 1181). At every point and place 'authority in the community began to move away from working for the people to working for the interest of the colonial masters', and their local agents (Njoku 2005: 104). The new chiefs, local leaders and political godfathers cared less about the interests of their communities. Increasingly, they alienated themselves from the people. 'As there were no popularly elected Councils at the time', lamented Awolowo (1982: 9-10), 'the Obas and Chiefs, instead of regarding themselves as being responsible to their people as before, considered themselves responsible to the white man who in the view of the people was unapproachable as well as unassailable and invincible'. Since they were no longer accountable to the people, incidences of corruption and financial malfeasance became rampant.

The process of redefining godfatherism was completed in 1960 when colonialism was terminated and power bequeathed to a new crop of leaders, who were essentially products of the colonial political structure. Apparently, the new but distorted form of godfatherism provided the basis for modern parasitic clientelistic relations and political interactions among political actors on the one hand and between actors and the post-colonial state on the other hand. The benevolent, altruistic and development-oriented essence of godfatherism gave way to egotism, greed, financial corruption and political acrimony. The posture of a benevolent political godfather committed to raising leaders and, in the case of the Igbo, building enduring democratic culture was no longer attractive to the new-breed of leaders, elites and politicians. Hence, the nascent notion of godfatherism in politics and elections portrayed the political godfather as a mercenary politician who was willing to provide mentorship to his godson only to the extent that the latter could be used to expand and consolidate the power and resource base of the of the godfather, and entrench the parasitic relationship the godfather often maintained with the state. Bitter struggles for state power and economic resources by the elites, godfathers and their godsons became rampant and often degenerated into full-blown political crises. These struggles were worsened by the penchant

of the political elite to privatize the public realm of the new but weak post-colonial state bequeathed to it by the departing colonialists.

Despite these glaring weaknesses, Albert (2005: 88) argues that from the First Republic (1960-1966) to the Second Republic (1978-1983), the practice of godfatherism was guided by selfless service to the individual and community. He contends that notable politicians of the periods like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello were benevolent and altruistic godfathers and the community and electorate benefited from their benevolence. Albert states further:

The only difference between these early godfathers in Nigerian history and their contemporary peers is that they supported and nurtured their godsons positively rather than negatively. The emphasis of this generation of godfathers was on developmental issues and not on money. They also did not demand figuratively, pounds of flesh from their adopted sons as the present godfathers do. These godfathers of blessed memory motivated their adopted sons to higher levels of political morality and made it necessary for them to be accountable to those who voted them in office.

But Albert's claims do not seem consistent with historical facts. The godfathers of blessed memory may have motivated their adopted political godsons to higher levels of political positions and responsibilities but certainly not higher levels of political morality.

On the eve of Nigeria's independence, the struggle for state resources between Nnamdi Azikiwe and his godson Eyo Ita promoted conflicts within the Eastern Regional Government, split the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC), and gave birth to rival political party, the National Independence Party (NIP) (Nnoli 1978: 168-169). Eyo Ita led the NCNC regional government in Eastern Nigeria and was a director of several companies in the Zik Group of Companies. The row between Azikiwe and Ita came to light when Azikiwe tried unsuccessfully to get Ita to deposit some local government funds in the African Continental Bank. Azikiwe and his family members had major controlling shares in the bank. Ita's allegation of financial malpractices against Azikiwe led to the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Eastern Regional Government. The Commission headed by Sir Stafford Forster-Sutton, Chief Justice of the Nigerian Supreme Court, indicted Azikiwe for mismanagement of government funds (Tignor 1993: 192). Expelled from the NCNC, Ita along with his sympathizers, mostly members of his Efik ethnic group, formed the NIP.

In the Western Region, Ladoke Akintola, estranged godson of Obafemi Awolowo, led a faction of the Action Group (AG), a political party headed by Awolowo. The submissions of Akintola's faction to the G. B.A. Coker Commission of Inquiry set up in 1962 to investigate the management of six

Western Nigeria public corporations, revealed outrageous levels of corruption allowed by Awolowo and AG politicians in running the government (Osoba 1996). As in other regions, the politics of godfatherism within the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) controlled government of the Northern Region promoted political and financial corruption (Tignor 1993). In doing so, NPC politicians in the region jettisoned the virtues of leadership propagated by erstwhile Islamic leaders of the region. In their case, apart from discouraging leaders from corruptly enriching themselves, it was regarded as special blessing if a leader died without any estate. Consequently, early Islamic leaders of the region earned their living by simple tasks such as rope-making, even while presiding over authoritative positions (Paden 1986: 63). These austere and puritanical principles of leadership opposed and contradicted the corruption and venality engendered by the phenomenon of political godfatherism within the NPC during the colonial and post-colonial periods (Tignor 1993: 197-199). However, British colonial administration collaborated with the authorities of the Sokoto emirate to keep the issue of corruption among political godfathers and their godsons in NPC from the public (Tignor 1993; Osoba 1996).

On resumption of democratic governance in 1979, political godfatherism became a critical factor in electoral and party politics. In the Kwara State gubernatorial election, Olushola Saraki, then a chieftain of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), had helped his political godson, Adamu Attah, to secure victory over Josiah Olawoyin of the Unity party of Nigeria (UPN). Irreconcilable disagreements over sharing of political offices and state resources between Attah and Saraki, whose political profile had grown tremendously to include the Majority Leader of the Senate, strained their relationship (Onwuzuruigbo 2006). In the 1983 gubernatorial elections, Saraki moved his support to Cornelius Adebayo of the UPN against his estranged godson, Adamu Attah. Cornelius won the election. In subsequent years, Saraki would become a powerful godfather with the highest turnover of political godsons, shifting his support from Attah to Adebayo, to Sabbah Lafiagi, then to Mohammed Lawal, all governors of the state in different political dispensations before settling for his biological son Bukola Saraki, the present governor of the state. Political godfatherism has since remained a critical factor of electoral politics, intra-party squabbles and political crises in Nigeria (Ayoade 2008).

Not even the emergence of military rule tampered with the clientelistic character of political ties in the post-colonial state. Indeed, military rule appears to have worsened the situation. As argued by Berman (2004) the destruction of an open political process and effective elimination of freedoms of speech, information and organization left the personalistic ties of patron-client networks as the only available mode of access to the state for ordinary people and the appropriation of the patronage resources of office as the

only source of support and power for politicians and state officials. Long years of military administration created more political godfathers in Nigeria. In Anambra State, for instance, Arthur Eze, a wealthy businessman and staunch supporter of military juntas, emerged as the indisputable political godfather of the state during the military regime of Abacha. His cordial relationship with the Abacha government placed him in a position to influence decisions as to who obtained political appointments and contracts from the state. Arthur also exploited his rapport with the regime to acquire for himself several fat contracts from the state. Other prominent godfathers who maintained strong contact with the military leaders in Abuja and Awka, the capital of Anambra State, included Emeka Offor and Chris Uba (Makwuzi and Aham 2003; Adebajo 2003). Like Arthur, they too received continuous allocations of contracts from the military government. The military administration of Colonel Mike Attah in the state awarded Uba contracts to build a housing complex, mast and transmitters for the Anambra State Broadcasting Service (ABS), state judiciary complex and the new Government House complex which was awarded for 400 million naira. The contract was later reviewed upwards to the tune of one billion naira (Aiyetan 2003). It is not surprising that both Offor and Uba became godfathers of Chinwoke Mbadinuju and Chris Uba, two former governors of the state since the inception of civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999.

Perhaps no other state in recent times has grappled with the turbulence and instability generated by the politics of godfatherism more than Anambra state. On resumption of democratic governance in 1999, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won the gubernatorial elections in Anambra State. To win the elections, the elected state governor, Chinwoke Mbadinuju, received financial support and relied on the political network of his political mentor and godfather, Emeka Offor. Attempts by Offor to meddle in the administration of the state, especially the award of contracts and appointment of political officers of the state, led to a bitter quarrel between the two men. Relations between Offor and Mbadinuju degenerated to open confrontation and conflict such that engaged the governor for the better part of his four-year tenure and diverted his attention away from the urgent need to develop the state (Albert 2005). On the eve of the 2003 elections, Mbadinuju's performance rating by the electorate and his party was discouraging. Yet Mbadinuju was relentless in persuading the PDP to adopt him as the party's flag-bearer in the next gubernatorial election in the state. In the ensuing political intrigues and manoeuvres between himself and his estranged godfather, who openly opposed Mbadinuju's ambition, the PDP declined to present Mbadinuju for a second term. Mbadinuju finally decamped to Alliance for Democracy (AD) and contested the election on the platform of the AD (Albert 2005; Onwuzuruigbo 2006).

Mbadinuju was defeated by Chris Ngige, the PDP gubernatorial candidate. Once again Ngige's electoral victory derived from the political leverage and financial clout of his godfather, Chris Uba. Like Mbadinuju, Chris Ngige refused to submit his government to the caprices of Uba, particularly in awarding contracts, appointing political officers and sharing state revenue. Uba's hopes of controlling the government and recouping his investment on Ngige's election from the resources of the state were scuttled. As a result, Uba felt deceived and disappointed in his godson. With the active collaboration of the Presidency, Uba mobilized a team of policemen who arrested the governor and attempted to force him out of office on 10 July 2003 (HRW 2007). The episode sparked a gale of legal actions and altercations between Ngige and Uba. Not satisfied with the outcome of the legal tussle which did not go in his favour, Uba, on November 2004, organized a group of thugs who unleashed violence against government officials, suspected supporters of the governor, government properties and people of the state (Onwuzuruigbo 2006; Ayoadé 2008).

All these occurrences suggest that unlike the pre-colonial forms of godfatherism, the contemporary notion of political godfatherism is propelled by the assumption that access to authoritative positions of the state and the personalities occupying such positions translates to access and control of vast public economic resources and power. No wonder post-independence leaders and godfathers are greedy and corrupt.

On account of the politics of godfatherism and the seemingly endemic confrontations between political godfathers and their godsons, Anambra State has never experienced peace and meaningful economic growth since the resumption of democratic governance in 1999. The task of developing the state has been abandoned as administrative ineptitude, infrastructural decay, political and financial corruption resulting from struggles for power and resources overwhelm the entire machinery of governance in the state. As days roll by, so the chances for expanding the democratic space and enthroning democratic culture in the state are frittered away. Anambra is not an exception; it is just a reflection of the political situation in most of Nigeria's thirty six states (HRW 2007).

Conclusion

Godfatherism is not a recent phenomenon as existing literature erroneously suggests; it is rooted in the social and political experiences of many communities and groups in Nigeria since pre-colonial times. Secondly, godfatherism was hardly a source of political crises and conflicts in pre-colonial societies as it is in contemporary Nigerian politics. If anything, it played a prominent role in promoting political stability as well as the

commercial growth of pre-colonial communities. In any case, the virtues of godfatherism came under serious manipulation and subversion in the context of the imposition of colonial rule and subsequent emergence of the post-colonial state. If today political godfatherism evinces evil and negative attributes, it is because of the abuses and distortions it has suffered in the process of its appropriation by and application to colonial administration and governance. These characteristics of manipulative abuses have continued into the post-colonial dispensation, becoming fully rooted in political processes, structures and institutions in Nigeria.

Reducing or eliminating the disruptive influence of godfatherism in Nigerian politics would therefore require entrenching democratic ideals and strengthening democratic processes and institutions. Political parties, for instance, are central to democratic governance. Party management and administrative structures should be democratized in a way that emphasizes the interest of the party over and above the political agenda of individual members of the party. One of the many ways to achieve this is to evolve a viable and sustainable approach to funding parties, particularly their electioneering programmes that could ensure that the rich do not hijack the party organs by way of their financial contributions. In this way the suffocating grip and overarching influence of the godfathers over the parties could be drastically minimized.

There is also the need to reposition the electoral commission to be free from manipulation and interference from parties and politicians. The chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria is appointed by the President while the Commission relies on the presidency for funding. As a result, the INEC has remained susceptible to the caprices of the incumbent president and encumbrances of godfathers of the ruling party. For INEC to be truly independent and empowered to conduct free and fair elections, it must be extricated from the stranglehold of the presidency and political godfathers of the ruling party. This can be realized by evolving a framework that guarantees autonomous sources of funding for the Commission as well as incorporating the opinions of political parties, civil societies and pressure groups in the process of appointing members and chairman of the Commission.

Notes

1. We find this vividly displayed in a recent compilation of articles in *The Constitution*. All the authors – political scientists by training and orientation – and their articles glossed over the socio-cultural underpinnings of the concept of godfatherism. See *The Constitution*, Vol. 7 No. 2, June, 2007.

2. The word *Nnam ukwu* (my master or my big father) is used by an *Odibo* (apprentice or servant) to refer to his master. Most *Nnam ukwu*, especially in olden times were also *Ogaranya* (wealthy, influential or respected people).
3. *Clientelismo* (clientelism) originated from feudal Europe. The European conquerors of Latin America imported patron-client relationship into the political, social and religious life of Latin America. The predominance of Catholicism in Latin America linked this to the system known as *Compadrazgo* (god parenting) which gradually permeated the practices of Catholics in other parts of the world. See (Scott and Marshall 2005: 483-484).
4. Reverend Josiah Akindayomi, founder of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, was believed to be the spiritual godfather of the present spiritual leader of the church, Pastor Enoch Adeboye. See Ukah, A., 2008, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*, Trenton: Africa World Press.
5. See explanatory notes of chapter five in the endnotes of Joseph (1991).
6. The selection and appointment of Warrant Chiefs followed no formal procedure and none was stipulated by the colonial administration. Consequently, the decision to appoint anyone as Warrant Chief depended totally on the whims and caprices of the British colonial officials. Chapter 2 of Adiele Afigbo's work highlights the methods utilised by the officials in appointing Warrant Chiefs.
7. The District Officer considered Paragraph 6 of the petition which stated 'that in the event of unnecessary delay, continued mistake, or refusal to take appropriate actions, we shall not be held responsible for any unpleasant action we may be compelled to take', as 'irresponsible language'.

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