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Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: Implications

Ugwu S.C. and Ugwuja D. I.

Department of Political Science, Enugu State University of Science and Technology Enugu State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The idea of godfatherism is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria's party politics or systems of governance. However, godfatherism gained currency in Nigeria about two decades ago. The phenomenon has become a fundamental menace plaguing Nigeria's elections and choice of candidates from existing alternatives. Many political analysts and academics have expressed concern over the negative socio-economic and political impacts of godfatherism in Nigerian politics. This paper, therefore, is concerned with explaining the concept of godfatherism, its dimensions, and the social, economic and political consequences of godfatherism on the polity. The process of collection data is by primary and secondary sources. The last section recommends the elimination of the phenomenon through the conduct of credible party primary elections. It also suggests free and fair conduct of elections based on the rule of law. These suggestions will serve as veritable instruments of curtailing the negative impact of the phenomenon on Nigeria's politics.

Keywords: Godfatherism, Politics, Nigeria and implications.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of godfatherism has been variously defined and explained in different ways by different scholars. From the earliest period [1] the concept of godfatherism took root from Christianity. The church is seen as the custodian of morality which is held in high esteem. This is based on the moral parlance where a student, seen as spiritual son, is placed under the care of a spiritual godfather not necessarily his biological father. Such godfather takes care of the spiritual wellbeing of the spiritual son. In fact, in the Christian tradition, a godfather serves as a role model whose life style is worthy of emulation.

A godfather has been defined as a person who sponsors or pays the bill or bankroller of bills. Authors see godfatherism as an influential and powerful person or leader who sponsors another into an elective political position or who helps another person to get a political appointments such as presidency, Governorship, Ministerial positions, Board Chairmanship or membership with the aim to acquire basic social and material goods. In power relations, godfatherism constitutes those who apparently direct the affairs of politics. It also means the boss of an organization, a political outfit. Godfather is simply a self seeking individual out to use the government for his own purpose. The grave consequences are enormous to the state as what usually obtains is that when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other

competing demands. According to Chimaroke Nnamani in his explanation of the concept of godfatherism, he stated:

Strictly, the godfather is simply a self seeking individual
out there to use the government for his own purpose [2].

The Chambers Dictionary defines a godfather as a male grandparent, a sponsor, the head of a criminal organization especially the mafia, any influential leader or powerful figure.

ORIGIN OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

The essence of the concept of godfatherism in the Christian context stem from Baptism which is a sacramental practice of the church. The idea of godfather started even in pre-Christian era. Some people took gods as fathers and goddesses as mothers. This implies that the sources of influence could be either male or female. In Greek religion, Zeus and Homer for instance were taken as gods who could grant favors. In Plato's Republic, he talked of the idea of good and in the Timaeus, the Demurge as fathers. The whole idea of gods and goddesses or God as father is that they care, guide, provide, love and protect. In other words, when human beings act in similar way, they are seen as fathers doing similar acts as gods-thus the name godfather [3]. Politically, godfatherism started during the colonial era with colonial masters as godfathers.

This started when they made warrant chiefs, sided with the hegemonic clubs in different sections of Nigeria, thereby erecting the cult of godfathers. They applied divide and rule which gave rise to northern and southern dichotomy which is still in existence today. At independence, our sons who took over the mantle of leadership became the godchildren of the departed colonial overlords (Britons), they became godfathers. For instance, during the colonial era, personalities like Akintola, Ogbemudia were godchildren of Awolowo. Tafawa Balewa was the godson of Sardudna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello. What of M.I Okpara, Mbazulike Amaechi ?. They were equally godsons of Azikiwe. This trend has continued in the second, third and the fourth republics in Nigeria. We shall now look at the political implications of godfatherism in Nigeria politics.

IMPLICATIONS OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

So long as power is valued as the means to wealth, the helm of the ship will be grasped by man of business whose Bible is her profit and loss account"(Francis Mac Donald Conford). It is well known globally that power and influence pay a tremendous role in the activities of people especially in public affairs. Godfatherism in Nigerian politics to a large extent has become a social problem which has "ravaged and permeated the entire blood stream, of the political system negatively"

According to Chimaroke Nnamani, on the negative implications of godfatherism in politics, stated; The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is what when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined of course, though with limited resources, states in some noted cases get constrained by the ever increasing needs to attain even if minimally, growth and development. If this is embraced, the demand or greed of the godfatherism will certainly not be met. When it is not met, it is definite that the godfather will serve the notice of reminder to contract a new negotiation for settlement [2]. He went further to asset that; The character of the godfather negotiation for settlement has the

obvious strings of brutal intimidation and other terms of manipulation. The godfather wouldn't take pleas of leanness of resources nor would he take the prayer of the godson for alternative personnel in recruitment into the higher level and strategic positions in government because he must exert his "pound of flesh" Or power of influence in all cases [2].

The godfather phenomenon has engendered serious political violence in Nigeria. Instances abound where various political conflicts and open violence and ensured between godfathers and godson. They include: the acrimony that existed between late Dr Olusola Saraki (godfather) and Alhaji Mohammed Lawal (godson), the governor of Kwara State between May 1999 to May 2003. The governors failure to give the godfather adequate government patronage led to the conflict and battle for supremacy between them this resulted in unprecedented violence into the once peaceful state and affected good governance in the state. The governor (godson) eventually lost in 2003 when he was voted out through the political might of Dr Saraki who then installed his own son as governor. The scenario that played out between Dr Jim Nwobodo (godfather) and Dr Chimaroke Nnamani (godson) is also a classical example. But the godson subdued the godfather after a fierce political struggle that nearly led to the impeachment of the governor in Oyo state also, during president Obasanjo administration, Chief Adedibu and governor Ladoja (godson) were pitched in a bitter battle to control the political and economic structure of the state. The godfather was said to have decided to nominate over 80 percent of the new commissioners and special advisers. But the godson refused and lured him out of the country and did all his appointments before he came back. This brought serious political crises which crippled governance in the state on arrival of the godfather from abroad.

Also in Anambra State, the same scenario played out between Governor Ngige and Chief Chris Uba (godfather) which led to the Governor being kidnapped. It also led to the unprecedented violence that ravaged the state capital Awka where public institutions and infrastructural facilities were fragrantly destroyed by armed political thugs.

Another implications of godfatherism in Nigerian politics in the erosion of Nigerian judiciary where some judges rule at the pleasure of godfathers at the expense of rule of law and justice. With the activities of the godfather and the conspiracy of the under democratic Nigerian State, the polity may be heading towards an oligarchy and the future of which may be unprecedented. It is also believed in some circles that the insurgency going on in Nigeria today is backed by some powerful unknown godfathers [1].

The governors are all clients to the patrons that control the party. It is the desires and opinions of the patrons that count. Another implication is that the position of the governors no matter now credible, logical, patriotic and democratic as it may appear remains inconsequential. The patrons are the elites who recruit political office holders and constraints groups for regeneration and continuity.

Godfathers see politics as business of elections as their main pre-occupation. They are the so called full time politicians. They are simply political undertakers and contractors who decided who rules beyond the democratic choice of the people who are supposed to democratically elect who rules. The activities of the godfathers have diminished or eliminated democratic principles in Nigeria politics. The political godfathers place their own continuous existence, reproduction, domination and circulation over and above other values. They are not in any way democratic. Their activities cripple democratic choice which subsequently shrinks democratic space [1].

The sportsmanship which characterizes politics of election has been eroded and sacrificed. Rather, anarchy, insecurity, chaos and violence have been the order of the day. The choice of the people which confers legitimacy on the elected, are thrown overboard as elections are fragrantly rigged with impunity and disregard for the peoples sovereign right and rule of law.

However, recent developments have shown some serious resistance on the part of the godson to the inordinate demands and opinions of their godfathers. The case of senator Ngige and Chief Chris Uba in Anambra State is a clear example. But the question is why is this so in Nigeria?. It could be explained that the emergence of godfatherism in Nigeria could be seen from the fact that Nigeria is a country in which political offices are seen as goldmines. The political terrain is seen as the easiest means to wealth, influence power and relevance.

One of other major sources of Nigeria underdevelopment can be traced to the doorsteps of the godfathers. This is done through the resources conversion skills they place at the disposal of politicians. In order to sustain state rapaciousness, the relationship of the godfather to the state is predatory as the logic of godfather accumulation and success demand that the state be weak and remains dependent on the service of godfather [1].

It should be noted that godfatherism itself is not bad; rather it is the intension of the godfather that calls for scrutiny. Having a godfather could be for positive purposes of support, solidarity and strategy. It has led to imposition in office of surrogates and inexperienced political actors. Consequently corruption has been fuelled in attempt to return the goodwill. Contracts are inflated and awarded to those who do not merit it.

CURBING THE MENACE OF GOD FATHERS IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

The character of Nigeria politics has been grossly eroded by the activities of the so called god father's .this can completely destroy our democratic culture if some adequate measures are not taken to stem the tide. Some of the measures include:

1. An operational independent electoral commission should be established and to be led by people of unquestionable character to conduct sustainable free and fair elections
2. There should be rule of law that are adhered to and respected by all organs of government and the citizens
3. There should be institutionalization of the culture of accountability for all public office holders and the citizens
4. Individuals should be outlawed form hijacking political parties and a ceiling placed on individual donations to political parties
5. There is need to address the issue of poverty and hunger in the country. This accounts to availability of unemployed youths who the godfathers use to execute their evil plans.
6. Youth's empowerment should be given adequate attention.
7. There should be legal, political and social solutions by the government on the issues of godfatherism. There activities should be strictly and decisively dealt with to avoid its negative consequences on our polity. This is to ensure the entrenchment of enduring democratic principles and practices that will meet global standard.

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