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## ***Explaining ‘godfatherism’ in Nigerian Politics***

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 Nigeria type has the added characterization of conceit, ego, loquacity, pettiness, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

The works of Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, and other classical philosophers are largely focussed on the concentration of political power in the hands of a few in the early Greek and Roman society. Thinkers such as Pareto, Mosca, Michels, and Marx<sup>2</sup> too devoted their political analysis to how power is used and misused by the elite class in different contexts. The domination of power by the hegemonic class in many parts of the contemporary world can thus be said to be nothing new but has a robust pedigree. The main lesson from all these works is that the study of political elites and leadership is very important for understanding the trajectories of development in any society. As Welsh observed,<sup>3</sup> political elites ‘participate in, or influence the making of, decisions that allocate resources within and among social units’. A variety of conflicts are produced in the process.

Discourses on political elitism raise two important questions: hierarchy and inequality. Both of them are necessary for understanding the issues to be raised in this paper. ‘Hierarchy’ has to do with the vertical ranking of people in the society into two categories, namely, those at the top and those occupying the lowest positions. Those at the bottom are assumed to be less important than those on top. These social hierarchies are assumed to be pyramidal in nature. There are more people at the bottom of the hierarchy than those on top. The latter are the *crème du sac* of the society and are responsible for exercise of social, economic and political powers. Their powers consists largely in their ability to ‘articulate ideas, to persuade, to cajole and coerce, to mobilize, to embody and advance symbols top which large numbers of people respond’.<sup>4</sup> It is in respect of this point that the notion of political elite is associated with inequality. The political elites simply organise themselves in a manner that makes them superior to the rest of their society. This inequality makes it easy for us to differentiate between ‘rulers’ (the political elites) and the ruled (the masses).

An important issue raised by Pareto and Marx in their works is that political elites insulate and isolate themselves from their society and try as much as possible to reproduce themselves from within. They do all possible within their reach to ensure that non-elites do not join their membership. To ensure this, the political elites maintain a safe, functional distance from the rest of the society. They reproduce themselves on an individual and selective basis in a process which Pareto specifically referred to as the 'circulation of elites'. The criteria for such elite recruitment are often parochial and the process is usually done in a manner that does not in any way compromise the traditional integrity of the dominant elite class. As Pareto argued, the dominant class often tries to frustrate any efforts at the 'collective circulation of elites' and would rather support individual recruitment. Marx supports this position but argued that an element of revolution is needed for enthroning a new social class or occupational grouping in such a society.

The position of Mosca is slightly different from those of Pareto and Marx. Mosca disagrees with Pareto that elite recruitment is only possible on an individual basis. He believes in the possibility of one social class replacing another. He however disagrees with the Marxists that this is only possible through a revolution. He believes that it is possible for a non-elite member to join the elite class through 'collective social mobility'. The latter refers to the status that people attain as a result of their social, economic and professional efforts. Mosca also believes that there exists already in many societies of the world a group of people that could be referred to as a 'sub-elite'. These are the people that facilitate communication between the elite and non-elite and are thus potential tools for relatively large-scale elite recruitment.

Those referred to as sub-elites by Mosca include all manners of professionals, most especially those public servants who translate the policies of the elites into concrete developmental issues in the society. This sub-elite is, in the modern world, not only interested in facilitating effective communication between the elites and non-elites, but they themselves do all they can to join the mainstream political elite class. What is easily noticed in a developing part of the world, such as Africa, is that the transition of such group of people into the political elite class is facilitated by one or other form of 'godfather' (a prominent member of the elite class). In many parts of the developing world where democracy has not been allowed to have a sound footing, it is still a case of selective individual recruitment, as Pareto and Marx argued. The Nigerian situation, which we seek to examine in this paper, however makes it possible for both sub-elite and non-elite to become recruited into the political elite class, so long as they can meet the parochial conditions for such a recruitment exercise. This paper deals with how 'godfatherism' serves as a medium for such selective elite recruitment in Nigeria. The paper also discusses the implications of such elite recruitment.

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. The word has almost the same meaning in the Catholic Church tradition. A young man trying to become baptised or married in the Catholic Church is expected to have a godfather. The Catholic Church's godfather is simply chosen from among the larger congregation and need not be a relative to the godson. The latter counsels the young person on how to live a responsible life. In France, the term 'godfather of industry' is used to depict corporate titans, that is, businessmen with the most clout, and an intriguing class of people who keeps the economy running. The French 'godfathers' can be broken down into two types: the first are those who manipulate the economy for their own benefit, and the second those that can be referred to as crisis fixers, social reformers, and populist advocates of the poor.<sup>5</sup> Another type of godfather is one often seen in American 'cowboy films'. Such people are associated in the films with mafia gangs. The godfather is usually the 'big boss'; he surrounds himself with all manner of criminal, often violent, clientele. The latter take orders from the 'big boss' and defer to his 'good judgment' in virtually all things. The godfather defends his adopted sons when they run into problems, either with law enforcement agents or members of other gangs. Godfatherism sometimes manifests itself in the politics of developed countries of the world and Latin American countries in terms of some criminal underworld groups sponsoring politicians during elections in return for the protection of contracts. This kind of situation is euphemistically referred to as 'party machine' politics in the American political science literature.<sup>6</sup>

Our interest in this paper concerns political godfathers. They are slightly different from all the others identified above. Such people are found all over the world. They consist of rich men whose contributions to campaign funds of some candidates have helped the latter to win elections. Even in the developed world, such people invest heavily, most especially in the media, to shore up the image of their candidates while at the same time helping to discredit rival candidates. An example is Carlos Slim, a low profile businessman whose financial support helped Vicente Fox break the Institutional Revolutionary Party's seventy-one-year grip on power in the 2000 presidential elections in Mexico.<sup>7</sup> Such power brokers are sometimes referred to as 'godfathers'.

Nigeria has all the above types of godfathers: most especially those who serve others, those who expect the society to serve them, and even those who channel their resources into criminal activities. Our interest in this paper is in the godfathers in the political sector. Dr Jibrin Ibrahim defined this category of Nigerians, during an interview granted to the BBC on 10 November, 2003 as 'men who have the power personally to determine who gets nominated and who wins [an election] in a state'. Governor Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu, who had a running battle with his godfather, Senator Jim Nwobo, for over two years, defined godfather from his own personal experience as follows:

...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.<sup>8</sup>

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. The role of such people is highly injurious to the advancement of popular, participatory democracy in Nigeria. Political godfathers are responsible for most of the pre- and post-election violence that we have seen in Nigeria. It is thus necessary to have a better understanding of their activities as a way of generating new ideas on how to make the political process in Nigeria less violent and more democratic. Our goal in this paper is to problematise how individuals become a basic cluster in patron-client relationships in Nigeria and in the process begin to negatively affect the political process in the country, often negatively.

### **Power, Clientelism and Transactional Leadership**

Political figures in Nigeria often start their career by being accorded important leadership positions in their political parties. This could be as a result of the length of time they have spent in party politics. It could be because of their wealth or ability to mobilise grassroots support. They are accorded prominent positions at party meetings and no important party decisions are taken in their constituencies without taking into deep consideration their often narrow interests. Can we therefore find explanations in leadership theories for the ways they manipulate others within the party machinery?

The relationship between godfathers and their clients reminds us of the distinction that leadership scholars make between 'leaders' and 'followers'. In this case the godfather represents the leader and his client, the follower. As Burns rightly argued, 'the essence of the leader-follower relation is the interaction of persons with different levels of motivations and of power potential, including skill, in pursuit of a common or at least joint purpose'. This interaction, according to Burns, takes two fundamentally different forms: transactional leadership and transforming leadership.

Transactional leadership takes place when leaders and followers interact with a view to exchanging valued things. What is exchanged could be economic, psychological or political: trading of votes, hospitality to a person on the account of a contribution to helping to sustain the leader's position, etc. In other words, both the leader and the follower are familiar with what they benefit from each other, and the relationship is solely based on this. A major shortcoming of this kind of leader-follower relationship is that the parties 'have

no enduring purpose that holds them together; hence may go their separate ways. A leadership act took place, but it was not one that binds leader and follower together in a mutual and continuing pursuit of a higher purpose'.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast with transactional leadership is transforming leadership. Like the former, both leader and follower are tied together by what they benefit from each other, but the two are flexible enough to recognise the importance of pursuing higher levels of motivation and morality that can benefit their larger society. In other words, transforming leadership enables the goals of leaders and followers to fuse: 'Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose... transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both'.

The phenomenon of godfathers, most especially of the type that is seen in Nigerian politics, is a worst case scenario of transactional leaders. They are in a strictly instrumental relationship with their clients. Their main goal is to use their client to attain selfish goals; the latter too do the same. The relationship between the two of them thus has little or nothing with the larger society the two of them claim to lead. The relationship between the godfathers and their clients has little or not no enduring purpose that could hold both of them together. It is thus common to find them going in separate directions shortly after a 'contractual agreement' is reached between them. The problem is that both of them lack a higher goal that could bind them together. Instead, they have often contradictory higher goals.

Richard Joseph's work<sup>10</sup> set the tone for the issues to be discussed in this paper when he described the phenomena of 'prebendalism' and 'clientelism' as two of the most important principles of political organisation and behaviour in Nigeria. Both are mutually reinforcing and affect and even determine the allocation of public goods in the country. He graphically illustrated the two phenomena that led to the collapse of the second republic in Nigeria. The same problem led to the demise of the third republic. If care is not taken, it is going to lead to the collapse of the present democratisation process in Nigeria. Richard Joseph's work is thus an important project that must be read by all those trying to understand not just the past, the present but also the future of party politics in Nigeria.

Joseph developed his thoughts on 'prebendal politics' from the works of Marx on the feudal systems in Europe and China. He presented a 'prebend' as constituting an office of state which an individual procures either through a formal process or as a reward for loyal service to a feudal lord. His work focuses on making the reader perceive prebendal politics from the latter context: namely the attainment and use of public office as a reward for loyalty to a lord or ruler.

Prebendalism, as operationalised by Joseph, thus focuses on the extra-legal activities of ethnic groups in Nigeria in order to capture state power. What are to

be ‘captured’ in this case include appointment into important political positions, employment opportunities, funds for developmental purposes, educational opportunities, etc. The strategies used for capturing the state power are clientelist in nature. It is in this respect that he described clientelism, often referred to as ‘patron-client relations ties’, as an essential tool for advancing prebendal politics. The leaders and sub-leaders ethnic groups or sub-groups trying to capture state power in a divided society like Nigeria would normally establish clusters of patron-client relationships. A combination of the clusters eventually becomes a power base for manipulating the rest of the society. Shedding further light on the nature of patron-client relationship in prebendal politics, Joseph observed that:

An individual seeks out patrons as he or she moves upward socially and materially; such individuals also come to accept ties of solidarity from their own clients which they view as fundamental to the latter’s security and continued advancement as well as their own. Clientelism therefore is the very channel through which one joins the dominant class and a practice which is then seen as fundamental to the continued enjoyment of the perquisites of that class.<sup>11</sup>

In an argument that sets the tone for the issues in the present paper, Joseph suggested that it is a common practice in Nigeria for individuals to seek the support and protection of ‘an *oga* or a “godfather”, while trying to acquire the basic social and material goods’.<sup>12</sup> This kind of political behaviour manifests itself not only in the allocation of state resources but also in the private sector. As those vying to get ministerial or board appointments go shopping for godfathers who can help push their cases, they meet and interact with less privileged members of the society shopping round for those that could help to support their quests for loans, scholarships, licenses, plots of urban land, employment, and promotion. The difference between these clients and their patrons is that the latter have ‘a piece of the state’ in their pockets. The power of the patron lies in his position in government, the number of privileged people he has or has successfully planted in government, and hence his ability to directly or indirectly manipulate bureaucratic regulations. The issues raised above are better understood in the context of the attempt made by Scott to define patron-client relationships:

The patron-client relationship – an exchange relationship between roles – may be defined as a special case of dyadic [two-person] ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status [patron] uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits or both, for a person of lower status [client] who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron... a patron-client link originates in a power relationship, with genuine affective ties reinforce that link.<sup>13</sup>

Further shedding light on the instrumental nature of the relationship between patrons and their clients, Joseph noted that:

To obtain and keep clients, one must gain a prebendal office: and to be sure that in the distribution of prebendal offices an individual or his kin have a reasonable chance of procuring one, clients must be gathered together to make their collective claims as well as to prove that the aspirant patron [or potential holder of prebendal office] is a person of consequence who co-optation would be rewarding to the 'political entrepreneurs'.<sup>14</sup>

Individual clientelistic strategies as evidenced in godfather politics in Nigeria can partly be explained in the context of what Charles Tilly<sup>15</sup> described as a 'security [protection] racket'. In this case, a prominent person or institution creates a security problem and turns around to ask his society to pay for solving the same problem. What a typical godfather does is to create tension in the political system and then present himself to members of the public as the only person that could help others to find their ways out of the 'dark tunnel'. He makes it difficult for members of his political party who fail to recognise his authority to get nominated for elective offices. Those who recognise his 'worth' thus go to him to be 'specially anointed' and things work positively for them automatically.

### **The Emergence of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics**

The word 'godfather' appears in parenthesis in many western political studies. The situation is different in Nigeria. The patron/client relationships that popularised the term in Nigerian politics have cultural roots among many Nigerians peoples. It is not a totally new experience in the sociology of the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo for people to have one or other type of 'godfather'. For example, the word 'godfather' has a local equivalence in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages and these words have been in usage since the pre-colonial era.

A godfather is known among the Hausa as a 'maigida' (landlord or the head of a household). The word 'maigida' goes beyond its literal meaning. Abner Cohen, Paul Lovejoy, and Polly Hill<sup>16</sup> used the term in their works to refer to those who provided brokerage services to Hausa traders in transit in different parts of West Africa. These Hausa traders brought cattle from their homeland to different parts of southern West Africa and took back kola nuts to the North. At the various transit centres where they have to stop to do businesses, they rely on a maigida to facilitate their economic activities. 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. Even in Hausaland, from where these itinerant traders came, this kind of patron/client relationship is popularly known. As Ferguson observed:

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.<sup>17</sup>

The Hausa sell kola nuts by the hundred (k'warya). One kola nut is added to every hundred that is counted or sold. This is what the maigida gets for commission. In other words what a broker gets is just one percent of everything that is sold. This is what is known as 'd'an k'ida' (plural – 'yan k'ida). What is paid as commission to a landlord in cattle trade or other kinds of business is generally referred to as 'la'ada'.<sup>18</sup>

A 'godfather' is referred to in Yorubaland as 'baba kekere' (the small father), 'baba isale' (the father of the underground world), or 'baba nigbejo' (a great help in times of trouble). The most historical of these terms is 'baba kekere'. It was used to depict community leaders with whom people of less social status identified as a way of providing physical, social, political and economic security for themselves. For example, most of the Yoruba refugees who came to settle in Ibadan in the early nineteenth century settled with the 'baba kekere' in the city.<sup>19</sup> These were military chiefs and patrons appointed to be in charge of certain Ibadan colonies by the town's traditional council. The migrants who settled under these Ibadan chiefs paid the 'baba kekere' tribute, part of which the 'baba kekere' transmitted to the Ibadan authorities. In return, the chiefs were obligated to protect those under them against any act of violence that characterised Ibadan at this time.

Dikson Dinia too has observed that the idea of godfatherism is grounded in the sociology of traditional Igbo society.<sup>20</sup> He made reference to the popular relationship between 'Nnam-Ukwu' (my master) and 'Odibo' (the servant) in the Igbo world view. A younger person is entrusted to a more mature and experienced person for training in social, economic and moral adulthood. The role played by the man in this kind of relationship is akin to that of a godfather. The latter is expected to set the boy up in his business after undergoing whatever training the master must have given him.

In the three cases mentioned above, a person of lesser social status attaches himself to another person, usually of higher status, for support, which could be social or economic. The godfather gets something in return from the adopted son for the transactional relationship. It is probably on this understanding that the modern notion of godfatherism in Nigeria is based. In other words, the phenomenon of godfatherism is not strange to the cultural world of the Nigerian people. The giving of kola by a client to his patron is also not strange. What is probably strange is that the transposition of this social or economic system into the political arena and also the ridiculous nature of what patrons now ask for from their clients as compensation for providing them with 'brokerage services'. The present-day godfatherism is a primordial tradition taken to a criminal extent. The phenomenon has far-reaching negative effects on the democratisation process in Nigeria.

The founding fathers of party politics in Nigeria were godfathers of a sort. They were preceded by the first generation Nigerian elites to establish contact with the European in the late 1800s. The leading figures were the traditional

rulers who later became the hub of the indirect rule policy of the British in the country. Between the early 1900s and the late 1940s, the educated, religious and business elite competed for influence with the traditional rulers. These people acted formally and informally as the middlemen between the British colonial officials, European trading houses and the local people. Those who could not read nor write depended on the 'professional' letter and petition writers for making their cases before the colonial officials. The business-minded among this first generation of Nigerian elite competed with European firms for the sale of imported goods. For example, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and a few others invested in the transport business and gradually launched themselves into political activities. It was impossible to reach the Europeans without the facilitative roles of these godfathers. This provided many of them with the opportunity to become gatekeepers or godfathers; they determined who and who could not meet the Europeans. Those who wanted the favours of the white men had to go through these godfathers.

Political godfatherism started with nationalist activities of the 1950s. The educated elite which constituted just six percent of the total Nigerian population championed this struggle for Nigerian independence.<sup>21</sup> The educated elites, most of whom had only primary education, were respected for their knowledge and bravery in confronting the white man. They became idolised by their people and their personal opinions became the formal interests of the ethnic groups they claimed to represent. People who wanted to join in politics went to them and deferred to their 'good judgment' in almost all things. These father figures were the leaders of regional political groups that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s: the Northern People's Congress for the Hausa-Fulani dominated northern Nigeria; the Action Group for the Yoruba-dominated south-west, and the NCNC for the Igbo-dominated eastern Nigeria. The role of the godfathers at this time was to show the way for the other Nigerians in a colonial system. As an Ibadan politician that belonged to this era noted, 'our job at this time was to teach our followers how to disrespect the white man who wanted to rule us for ever'. The political godfathers of this era included the then Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who led the NPC; Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who led the AG, and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC leader. The other elder statesmen that fell into this category in Nigerian politics include Mallam Aminu Kano and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim. These political leaders, up to the point of their death, dictated who could occupy political offices in the geo-political regions they led. They were 'clearing houses' for political opportunities.

The godsons of Sir Ahmadu Bello later became a mythical political cabal, known as the 'Kaduna mafia'<sup>22</sup> in Nigerian politics. The godsons of the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo in South-western Nigeria, collectively known as 'Afenifere' (those who wish others well) included the late Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, and Chief Bisi Onabanjo, all of who were state

governors during the second republic in Nigerian history (1979-1983). Dr Azikiwe's godsons in Eastern Nigeria included Chief Jim Nwobodo and Chief Sam Mbakwe, both of whom were also governors in Anambra and Imo states respectively from 1979 to 1983. Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and Alhaji Balarabe Musa, who were governors of Kano and Kaduna states during the second republic, both recognised Alhaji Aminu Kano as their political godfather throughout his lifetime. 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 money. They also did not demand, figuratively, pounds of flesh from their adopted sons as the present day 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 into office. They also provided the regimes of their godsons with logistical support.

Some of the godsons produced by Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe (most especially Alhaji Jakande, Chief Bola Ige, Chief Jim Nwobodo, Chief Mbakwe, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, Alhaji Balarabe Musa, etc.), later became godfathers themselves, most especially during the ill-fated third republic and the present political dispensation in Nigeria. Many of them however lack the commitment to democracy needed for reproducing the godfathers that produced them. In the South-west, many claimed and still claim to be followers of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. They dress like Awolowo and profess his political ideals but do something else. This duplicity was one of the reasons why the AD 'was allowed' by the Yoruba people to lose the 2003 elections in the southwest to the PDP.

The ACF tried during the 2003 to make the people of the region see themselves as being led by the 'children of Sir Ahmadu Bello'. But the people could see through the smokescreen that most of the people that now claim to represent the 'old North' are in fact individual godfathers who simply decided to cluster together with a view to forging a more reliable platform for protecting their narrow personal interests.

The problem with ACF is with the contradicting interests of the individual godfathers in the group. The interests of M. D. Yusuf, Chief Awoniyi, etc., for example, are not the same. This explains why M. D. Yusuf decided to contest the 2003 election even when ACF had maintained the position that it was going to back another candidate against Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The role of the Muslim leaders who dominate the ACF in the introduction of the sharia legal system in Northern Nigeria and their complicity in the many bloody inter-religious conflicts that took place in the region between 2000 and 2003, made many, including some Muslims, distrust them. The people would rather listen to individual godfathers who could put some immediate benefits into their pockets than to leaders who were perceived only to be interested in using

the people and the now shop-worn slogan of 'One North, One People' to feather their own nests. This is why the people of northern Nigeria are scattered in the many political parties in Nigeria. What the 2003 election results demonstrated is that ACF does not have the political clout of 'individual godfathers' under the present political dispensation in Nigeria. They asked the people of the North not to vote for Obasanjo but Buhari but the people did the opposite.

The contemporary godfatherism in the country is one of the ruinous legacies of the Babangida (1985-1993) and Abacha regimes (1993-1998). The two regimes commercialised politics and made it difficult for people to get anything in Nigeria simply through hard work. Mediocrity and hypocrisy were an acceptable state philosophy.

The problem was at its worst during the Abacha regime. Individuals who were ready to compromise their group interests were needed during this period to run errands for Abacha. The system provided them with sufficient financial resources to enable them build formidable clienteles. Such people spied on their ethnic groups, universities, pro-democracy and human rights groups, military officers etc.; they organised 'rent-the-crowd' solidarity rallies and 'mass demonstrations' in support of the Abacha administration and in the process became 'big men and women'. Some of these people went as far as supplementing what they got from Abacha with criminal activities – sometimes across international borders. Security officers turned a blind eye as these people were let loose by the regime they diligently served. Many of these people were those that took over power during the 1999 elections in Nigeria. They were the ones that released Chief Olusegun Obasanjo from prison and made him the president of Nigeria.

Many Nigerians did not believe that the regime of General Abubakar was truly committed to returning power to civilians in 1999. They therefore maintained a safe distance from the political transition programme. This was how the godfathers took over power. They have been consolidating their grip on power since then. By the 2003, there were more political godfathers in many parts of Nigeria than those interested in vying for public offices. The 2003 elections thus took off with the godfathers fighting it out at party conventions: it was a 'Naira for Naira fight; Dollars for Dollars; Pounds for Pounds'. Most of those who lost their chance of nomination at the party conventions did so not because they were not qualified but simply because their godfathers were not strong enough. The ordinary Nigerians had no voice whatsoever in all the fights; they watched from far off.

The media play important roles in the making of most of the godfathers in the country. The trick is evinced in the popular adage: 'a lie when told over and over again soon becomes a fact'. Godfathers pay media men to report their activities over and over again. They are granted regular interviews and in some cases deliberate efforts are made by the media to help launder the image of these godfathers. There are also situations where the godfathers pay their

followers to place congratulatory messages about them in the media. Such messages are usually concluded with statements on how valuable the godfathers are for advancing the interests of the down-trodden in Nigerian society. In the process, all these godfathers are better known to members of the public and this enhances their public image.

### **Patterns of Manifestation**

Five types of political godfathers are discernible under the present political dispensation in Nigeria. The first type is 'geo-political' or 'ethnic' organisations that arrogate to themselves the right to decide who represent their jurisdiction in government. Such movements under the present dispensation include 'Afenifere', the Yoruba socio-cultural organisation; Arewa Consultative Council (ACF) which presents itself as the authentic voice of the North; Ohaneze, the pan-Igbo cultural group that considers itself to be the only body with the power to determine Igbo interests. The powers of all these organisations have been receding recently. This is to the extent that their candidates for political offices are often defeated by those sponsored by 'individual godfathers'.

The second category consists of 'geo-political' or 'ethnic father figures'. These are some prominent individuals within some geo-political or ethnic organisation who are popularly respected by members of the movement they belong to, as a result of some past 'nationalist activities'. Such people, very few in the Nigerian society, have occupied public positions in the past and were found to have served their people to the best of their ability. Their political opinions are thus much respected. The best known example of this class of godfathers was the slain Nigerian Minister for Justice, Chief Bola Ige. He was the Deputy leader of Afenifere, but his influence in Yoruba politics towered above that of the pan-ethnic group. He was a godfather to many south-western Nigerian governors between 1999 and 2003. He was considered to be a true scion of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. During his tenure as the Executive Governor of the defunct Oyo state (1979-1983), he performed so well that he became idolised by the Yoruba people of south western Nigeria as an embodiment of 'free education, free health' policies of the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. In his lifetime, politicians in south western Nigeria made sure that he was on their campaign train. Even after his death, politicians (most especially members of AD) campaigned under his name. He is believed to have played a prominent role in the choice of the governors of Oyo and Osun states during the 1999 elections. His name consistently came up during the Bisi Akande vs. Omisore conflicts in Osun state 1999-2002 as the godfather to Governor Bisi Akande. One thing with this first set of godfathers is that they are well-known and have the support of grassroots people. The respect people have for them is also tied to concrete developmental issues.

The third category of political godfathers consists of some rich Nigerians who see sponsorship of political candidates as a source of upward social and economic mobility. Such politicians go around, like a typical businessman, looking for 'materials' (not necessarily marketable) to invest their money in. The clients are usually people who are interested in winning elections 'by all means' but who do not have the grassroots support, the money, or the violent dispositions for winning elections. The godfather assures the candidate of easy availability of this possible assistance in exchange for some personal benefits for the godfather after election. Many of these godfathers keep their promise of making the candidates win their elections. This could be any form of electoral malpractice, but is hardly through any honest political activities. Uba, the best-known political godfather under the present dispensations in Nigeria, is a good example of this kind of godfather. He nominated and ensured the victory of Governor Ngege of Anambra State during the 2003 elections.

The fourth type of godfathers consists of those who only deal with rich clients. Such people, for want of appropriate terminology, can be said to be 'political entrepreneurs'. They live on politics. The only asset they have is that they are well schooled in the tricks of winning elections among the grassroots people. They are familiar with all constituencies to be won over in a political contest and what it formally and informally takes to win them over. They often are not rich people but their clients are. The contractual relationship between the two is simple: the client provides the money and the godfather delivers the votes. In other words, this category of godfathers does not invest their own money but that of their clients in politics. In exchange, they are accorded important status in the government formed by their clients after election. They are given juicy contracts as well as slots in ministerial and board appointments.

The fifth type of godfather consists of rich patrons who are willing to provide what it takes for either rich or poor clients to win elections. He is willing to provide poor candidates with money and logistical support to win elections and he is ready to contribute to the campaign funds of rich candidates as well as provide him with logistical support. Dr Sola Saraki of Kwara State has played this kind of role in the past. He supported several poor people to win elections in Kwara State. Governor Mohammed Lawal, the governor of Kwara State with whom he has his major running battle cannot be said to be a poor man. He is a retired naval officer and a former military governor. He was a man of immense means before he was nominated by Saraki to become the governor of Kwara State in 1999.

For godfatherism to flourish with the dimensions that are now witnessed in Nigeria, a number of enabling environments are needed. The first is a profit-motivated political patron, a pliable political process that serves the interests of just a few in the society, a weak civil society and electoral system, some do-or-die office seekers, and a greedy mass media willing to serve the interest of the highest bidder.

Every political transition programme in Nigeria is started with the formation of new parties. The founders of many of these political parties often have agendas, positions, interests and needs that are in most cases kept secret. Those who later come to join the parties thus have to depend on what the 'godfathers' in the party say or do. Those who want to do well in the parties thus have to attend secret meetings in the houses of their godfathers. This provides them with access to 'privileged information' about party processes and how to navigate them. To enhance their own positions in the party, the godfathers ensure that party officials are over-regulated. The regulations in the system are themselves devices for making the political process become easier for manipulation of both state and party officials. To be able to survive under this kind of system, a politician must be very daring and ready to supplant the general will of the people by their own selfish interests. This goal becomes easier to achieve in a society that contains an army of unemployed youths willing to be used to attain criminal objectives. Things work better where the political environment in which all these are taking place consists of a docile 'anything-goes' civil society. The last but not the least important father for godfatherism to flourish in Nigeria is a malleable criminal and social justice system.

The over-regulation of the political process in Nigeria is partly evident in the many hurdles that members of political parties are expected to cross before being nominated for elective office. Every regime in Nigeria specifies who and who cannot vie for a political position. The problem started with General Ibrahim Babangida when he tried to ban 'old breed' politicians from participating in politics between the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was his own way of creating new political culture in Nigeria.<sup>23</sup> Lacking confidence in themselves and ability to successfully navigate the money-dominated Nigerian politics, many of the new breed politicians had to 'enrol' as private candidates of the old breeds who dominated the informal political arena. In addition to this sometimes unnecessary official intervention in the political process, godfathers create all forms of uncertainties in their political parties with a view to making the other members appreciate their worth. They are usually the brains behind the factionalisation of all major political parties in Nigeria. They woo members into their own faction of the party with money and other favours and in the process make pawns out of them.

Leaders of the political parties run their affairs secretly. Dates for party convention, criteria for party nomination, what makes a person to be qualified for a party position, and the like are constantly changed. All these uncertainties make party members lose confidence in their ability to do well in the parties on their own. They rely on personal loyalties, clientelism, all of which makes the entire political process open to corrupt practices. This and its consequences weaken public acceptance of the democratic process. Most of the big parties in the country charge ridiculously high fees for collecting nomination forms. What the candidates are asked to pay for collecting the forms are usually not

realistic given the state of Nigeria's economy. The fees are sometimes as high as what an average Nigerian earns in six months. Some candidates thus have to go and sell some of their property or take loans from friends to raise the money. The most popular alternative is to approach a godfather for support. That a candidate successfully raises the funds for buying the nomination form does not suggest that he would be given the mandate of the party at the party's convention. He needed somebody to help facilitate this process. Party conventions in Nigeria are usually a forum for enthroning new godfathers and dethroning old ones. The competition starts when the regulations for the conventions are being drawn up. Every godfather builds into the process some problems that would later give him an edge over others. Disagreements resulting between godfathers over this explain why party members in Nigeria sometimes go to court to stop the holding of the convention of their parties; it explains why convention dates are endlessly fixed and cancelled, and it explains why Nigerian political parties become more divided after party conventions.

At the party conventions, money, and not necessarily meaningful political issues or questions of integrity, plays an important role in deciding who carries the day. Candidates who want to get the nod of their parties for whatever office, even those vying to the office of the president, must have identified with one prominent godfather or the other. The godfather puts in place 'all it takes' (money, violence, rigging of elections, etc.), for his candidate to win. After getting nominated at the party's convention, the godfather goes from there to ensure that his candidate wins the election 'by all means'. After election, Nigerian public officers are only loyal to the godfather that put them in office rather than to the party they belong to or the Nigerian state they pretend to serve.

A godfather recognises two types of clients. The first consists of those whom he seeks to put in power, and the second are those to be used to facilitate his transactional relationship with his principal godson. I refer to this second category in this paper as 'foot soldiers'. The second type of follower ensures the electoral victory of the godson. Immediately after elections, when the godson had successfully been 'voted' into power, the 'foot soldiers' are sent out once in while to fight in defence of either the surrogate in power or the godfather that imposed him on society. Should a godson fall out with his adopted godfather he quickly raises his own private army whose primary duty is to neutralise the foot soldiers of his former godfather. In many parts of Nigeria, supporters of godfathers and their adopted sons engage each other in bloody encounters. Where a godfather has no problems with his 'son', he deploys the foot soldiers around the godson to provide extra security. In other words, those who suffer under all these situations are the unemployed youths employed as foot soldiers or as a private army. Neither the godfathers nor godsons are directly affected by the physical violence associated with godfather/godson conflicts.

Godfathers of all categories have different strategies for making their clients behave accordingly. A candidate is enlisted as a son to godfathers only when an agreement has been reached between the two on what the latter has to benefit from the relationship. The candidate is expected to talk at party functions, meetings, conventions etc., only when he has been given clearance by his godfather. Even then, he has to speak so carefully that he does not say anything that could injure the interests and needs of his 'mentor'. The closer a candidate gets to the party convention, or the general election, the less freedom of speech he enjoys. He is only free to say or do what the godfather, who is now the 'political strategist', dictates. The godfather becomes a more powerful person as soon as the party has nominated his candidate for election. At this stage, the godfather adds to the list of what his adopted son must do for him once the election is won. Encouraged by the magical ways the godfather helped them to win the party primaries, many godsons would readily agree to accommodate the new conditions. Some godfathers insist on oath-taking at this stage and put in place all kinds of extra-legal structures for ensuring that the godson does not betray them. Speaking on this subject, Governor Nnamani observed that godfathers 'create parallel structures to that of the government to fan the embers of disaffection against the government. If the godfather cannot successfully do this, he quickly propels disloyal projects like suborning non-political organisations to embark on a blitz of blackmails against the godson in government. If other institutional structures are not wielded to create unrest in the system, they begin to fabricate imaginable and unimaginable charges against the godson, using even the most sober and decidedly apolitical institutions to make his point and keep the godson under the most snapping pressures'.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Context of Godfather-Godson Conflicts: Two Case Studies**

Godfathers are powerbrokers in Nigerian politics. People throng into and out of their houses on a daily basis, running errands or seeking one favour or another. The relationship between political godfathers and their adopted sons is usually transactional in nature: it is a case of 'you rub my back, and I rub your back', as Nigerians say. Like every businessmen, godfathers invest in their 'grandsons' and expect returns after elections. This is often through juicy ministerial appointments, contracts, land allocations, sharing of political influence and power with incumbents, and if the accusations against some of them are to be taken seriously, unjustified demand for allocation of state financial resources.

The favours a godfather demands and gets from his godson are for strategic reasons. In most cases, he asks for the right to nominate about eighty percent of those to serve in the cabinet of his godson. Many godfathers also ensure that they control the majority of the members of state houses of assembly in Nigeria. They readily use these people to threaten the governors with impeachment any time there is a disagreement. All these strategic antics provide a godfather with

the effective control of the regime he helped to put in place. Should the godson prove stubborn later, the godfather can always use his nominees in the regime to intimidate him. His nominees in the regime are also another source of money-making. This enables the godfather to 'eat with both hands'. As the principal godsons bring monthly 'kola' ('ransom fees') to the godfather, those imposed as commissioners, permanent secretaries board chairmen, etc., make similar monthly payments. At the end of the day, the godfather makes more money from the political process than any other person. This enables him to become a more powerful godfather and engage in more daring political activities.

Troubles start when what a godfather makes from his instrumental relationship with his clients falls below expectation. As noted earlier, a godfather uses his powers to ensure the electoral victory of his clients. Once in office, the godsons help to further beef up the power base of their patrons. Most godfather-godson conflicts in Nigeria surface immediately after election. This is when the 'arrangee governor' is expected to begin to implement the agreement reached with his godfather. The trouble starts when the godfather becomes so overbearing that the godson is unable to fulfil his mandate to the people. The godson becomes rebellious when it becomes obvious to him that the godfather would not allow him to enjoy anything from the instrumental relationship. The godfather too becomes apprehensive when he realises that the godson does not want him to have all he wants from the government, such as jobs and contracts. Commenting on the difficulties godsons soon find themselves in after getting into office, Governor Nnamani observed that 'The godfather wouldn't take pleas on leanness of resources nor would he take the prayer of the godson for alternative personnel in recruitment into the high level and strategic positions in government because he must extort his "pound of flesh", or power of influence in all cases'.

The first godfather-godson conflict to become public knowledge under the present political dispensation in Nigeria was the one between Governor Mala Kachallah of Borno state and Senator Ali Modu Sherriiff, popularly known as 'SAS'. Mallam Kachallah chose SAS as his godfather during the 1999 gubernatorial elections in Borno state. SAS had two qualities which Kachallah could hardly pretend not be aware of. He was wealthy and influential in All Nigeria Peoples Party (formerly APP), both at local and national levels. SAS was a major financier of ANPP in Nigeria. His opinions mattered a lot to the party on all things. On this account he made Kachallah win the 1999 gubernatorial election in Borno state. He also won a seat for himself at the Senate and rode on this achievement to become senate leader of All Nigeria Peoples Party (formerly APP).

The relationship between SAS and Kachallah did not just start with the 1999 elections. The two of had always been family friends. Kachallah was the best man when SAS's father was married to his mother. SAS thus addressed him as

'baba' (my father). Politics changed all this. By 1999, Kachallah started to accord SAS the status of a godfather and vice versa. Kachallah condescended to this level simply because he wanted power which he did not have the money to acquire. He wanted to become a state governor though he lacked the money and grassroots support needed for winning an election. SAS had all that Kachallah needed, and the two of them entered into a patron/client relationship. Kachallah had what he wanted by winning the gubernatorial election but SAS hardly got what he wanted: 'profit' from his investment.

The conflict between Kachallah and SAS started immediately the results of the 1999 election were announced. Several factors must have led to the problem but the most popularly known was that Kachallah rejected the list of commissioners suggested for his cabinet by SAS and drew up an 'integrated' list consisting of those suggested by his godfather, 'Borno elders', and himself. He was opposed to a situation where SAS would have to dictate everything. The political environment of Borno state became heated as a result. This was to the extent that the last military administrator of Borno state noted before handing over to Kachallah that there were already plans to impeach him.<sup>25</sup> As predicted, Kachallah's problems became more compounded immediately he took over power. He had to contend with a hostile House of Assembly dominated and led by other godsons of SAS. Most of those invited to serve in his cabinet were later found to be die-hard supporters of SAS as well. All these people, known in Borno politics as 'Bama mafia', soon started to attack the governor on different fronts.

SAS adopted a two-pronged approach in dealing with his son. The first was to work with the state House of Assembly to get Kachallah impeached. The second is an alternative to the first: to discredit Kachallah so much that it would be impossible to be given a second term in office in 2003. Supporters of Kachallah had to fight back using political thugs known as 'ECOMOG'. The camp of SAS established its own ECOMOG as well. The opposition party in the state, PDP, which hoped to benefit from the confusion in Borno state, also established its own ECOMOG, thus turning Borno into a violent state. Several lives were lost in the process. The Borno state House of Assembly was also set on fire by ECOMOG. As the ANPP in the state became factionalised, Kachallah went to court claiming that his own faction was the authentic one. The court agreed. The camp of SAS challenged the court judgment and won the case. This enabled SAS to formally take over the control of ANPP in the state. Kachallah had no other option but to decamp to Alternative for Democracy (AD). He contested the 2003 election on the platform of the party and lost. SAS dropped his senatorial ticket and contested the governorship position and won. This was how SAS became the governor of Borno state. He is still threatening to probe the regime of his former godson.

The latest, the most controversial and most celebrated of godfather-godson conflicts in Nigeria is the ongoing one between Governor Chris Ngige of

Anambra state and Chief Chris Uba. Dr Chris Ngige's ambition during the 2003 elections was to become a senator, having lost in his first bid for the position in 1999. He soon came in contact with Chief Uba, who pledged to make him a governor and not just a senator. Ngige was said to have rejected the offer initially, citing the risks, the money involved and the tradition of political violence in Anambra State as his excuse. Uba assured Ngige of all necessary support and encouraged him to accept the nomination. He provided Ngige with all that was needed to become the governor of the state.

Uba and Ngige first became friends in 1993. The two became very close friends by the time Ngige joined politics. Uba supported Ngige when he tried to run for the post of National Financial Secretary of PDP in 1999.<sup>26</sup> Ngige lost the opportunity because the then governor, Mbadinuju, failed to support him. This made Ngige and Uba draw closer to each other. The conflict between Governor Mbadinuju and his godfather, Sir Emeka Ofor created the opportunity for Uba to become the godfather of Anambra politics. Uba was in Mbadinuju's camp – against Emeka Ofor – until December 2002, when it became obvious that Emeka Ofor and the people of Anambra state who accused Mbadinuju of several state offences would not allow the governor to get PDP nomination for the 2003 election. Uba decided to raise his own candidate for the governorship position. He chose Dr Chris Ngige, a medical practitioner, whom he thought he could easily control. The two agreed to work together but Ngige had two other candidates to contend with, both sponsored by the former godfather in the state, Emeka Ofor. Emeka Ofor's candidates were Phil Agbasa and Captain Nnoruka. The PDP primaries in Anambra were thus an opportunity for Ofor and Uba to prove which of them was a greater godfather in Anambra state. The party primaries were held and cancelled several times by the PDP headquarters in Abuja, until Uba's candidate finally emerged the winner.<sup>27</sup>

Getting PDP's nomination was however not going to be as difficult as having Ngige voted into office by the people of Anambra state. There were several complications on the ground. The first was that the supporters of Emeka Ofor, the former godfather of Anambra politics, were going to work against Uba and his candidate, Ngige. The second major problem was that the then governor, Mbadinuju, who was denied the PDP ticket, had now decamped to the Alliance for Democracy and been given the gubernatorial ticket. He was bent on punishing the PDP for humiliating him. This was also a time when a new party, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) started making waves as an Igbo party. The party's presidential candidate, Chief Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, came from Anambra State. It was thus feared that the people of the state might prefer the gubernatorial candidate of the party to the candidates of either PDP or AD. Uba did not see any of these as a problem. He knew how to win the election. He assured his candidate of victory but bargained hard with him. Part of the agreement reached with Ngige was that Uba would get seven out of the ten commissioner positions in the state if Ngige won the

election, and that Uba would identify the juicy ministries to be manned by his commissioners.

Ngige later won the election and Chris Uba, his godfather, announced his success in a grandiloquent manner:

I AM THE GREATEST OF ALL GODFATHERS IN NIGERIA

Because this is the first time one single individual has single-handedly put in position every politician in a state.

- The State Governor and his deputy;
- The 3 Senators to represent the State at the National Assembly;
- 10 out of 11 members of the Federal House of Reps;
- Twenty-nine State House of Assembly members;

I also have the power to remove any of them who does not perform up to my expectations anytime I like.<sup>28</sup>

The present state of political confusion in Anambra state readily shows that Uba is a man of his words. He is no doubt the greatest godfather in Nigeria. The shoddy way in which the Nigerian state reacts to the many problems Uba created shows that the man is truly 'above the law'.

Like many other godsons, Ngige started his administration by doing his best to please his godfather. He started his administration by formally acknowledging the eminence of Uba. We can illustrate this point with what happened on 9 May, 2003 when Ngige was to be sworn in as the executive governor of Anambra state. The crowd that came to witness the event at Dr Alex Ekweme Playground in Awka, was surprised that the event did not start hours after the scheduled time. Many of them wondered what happened. The news went round that the event was held up for an important dignitary that was expected for the occasion. Who could this important person be when the governor-elect himself was already seated? The only answer the people could suggest was Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the President Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian armed forces. But the Head of State was also being sworn in for the second term at Eagle's Square, Abuja and could not have abandoned his own swearing-in ceremony for a lesser one in Awka.

The question was answered minutes later with the arrival at the scene of a convoy of vehicles, including two limousines amidst the shrill blast of sirens. Immediately, the governor Dr Ngige and all the dignitaries at the occasion arose as a mark of respect to the new arrival, Chief Chris Uba who was comfortably seated at the back of one of the limousines. It was only after Uba had taken his 'executive' seat that the others, including the governor-elect, took their seats. For those in the know, they were not only there to swear-in the new governor, but also (and more importantly) to officially unveil the new godfather of Anambra politics, Uba, popularly known as Eselu.<sup>29</sup> Ngige's

inaugural speech at the ceremony further illustrated how important Chris Uba was in the politics of Enugu State. He attributed his victory at the 29 April gubernatorial election to Uba and God.

The conflict between Ngige and Uba started when the latter started making efforts to take over Anambra state from the governor. The problem started immediately after Ngige was nominated at the PDP primaries, and began to gather more steam after his victory at the 27 April, 2003 poll was announced. Commenting on this event, Ngige noted:

I noticed some new developments. At one time, they asked me to resign my nomination. They met in what they called a caucus. Him, Chuma Nzeribe, Senator Abana, Okechukwu Udenze. In fact he formed a caucus of all those who vied with me and failed. The election proper was bumpy. Every time they would bring one problem or the other. However, we went into the election. I came out from the election and the differences widened. They accused me of all sorts of things... Chris Uba will always try to find fault even in my governor-elect position.<sup>30</sup>

Immediately Ngige won the election, his godfather insisted on nominating all the commissioners, special advisers, personal assistants etc. Ngige did not disagree with Uba on this but on the criteria to be taken into consideration in determining who filled the vacant political positions: 'He insisted on appointing for me a principal secretary who does not know what a file looks like, with the result that I, the governor of the state, keeps on writing memo and correcting memo for this so-called principal secretary'. The other source of conflict between Ngige and Uba had to do with how state money should be spent:

Chris Uba took my former accountant-general into his hotel room in Abuja at NICON. And they typed a letter to the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, opening up an Irrevocable Standing Payment Order, ISPO, on his project that has been on before then. He told me that Dr Nbadinuju stopped his ISPO because of the political crisis between them. So he called me to sign this document directing the Central Bank to pay him from the federation account N10 million monthly for the next 87 months totalling N870 million. I said I could not do that for two reasons: First and foremost, I would not be in office for 87 months. I will only be governor for 48 months that is four years. That if I will ever sign an IPSO, it is for 48 months. Secondly, there are no accompanying certificates to prove or show that you are entitled to N870 million. Thirdly, it is wrong for you to bring my accountant-general into a hotel room with a prepared letter by him and yourself and you expect me to sign it for you. He did not like it. He started making trouble... Again, he said his election expenses total N3 billion and that he wanted a cheque from me. I told him that nobody can give a cheque of N3 billion. He insisted I should also sign an agreement. But I asked, 'how did you come about the N3 billion?' He flared up...<sup>31</sup>

It was probably at the end of the above encounter that Uba decided to sack the governor. Ngige could vividly see the problems that lay ahead. He tried to dump Uba but he was already encircled by his men as deputy governor, commissioners, secretary to the government, members of Anambra state house of assembly, private secretaries etc. Not even the Accountant-General of the state was spared. He was always in the company of Uba rather than Ngige.

The attempted 'coup' against Ngige took place on 10 July, 2003. It was facilitated by an Assistant Inspector General of Police, Raphael Ige, who led over fifty policemen to Anambra Government House and arrested the Governor. Ige claimed to be acting on orders from above. Ngige was abducted to a hideout while his 'resignation from office' was read by the state house of assembly at a hurried session. The house 'thankfully accepted' the purported resignation and Ngige's deputy, Chief Chris Ude, was sworn in as the Acting Governor. The snag in the entire set up was that Ngige's 'successor' was not sworn in by the state's chief judge as required by the constitution. The latter disappeared as soon as he got wind of what the house of assembly planned to do. Ngige later came out of where he was detained to claim that he did not resign his appointment. He claimed that he was forced to write the resignation the house considered before he became the governor. He admitted to have signed the letter under duress. The political system in the state started to experience a hiatus that has been escalating since then.

The second major violent event in the state between the followers of Uba and Governor Ngige took place on 10 November, 2004. A band of hoodlums in a convoy of buses invaded Awka, the capital of Anambra state, and also Onitsha, the state's commercial nerve centre, and unleashed violence on the two simultaneously. Counting his losses, Governor Ngige observed that Everything we inherited from the former East Central State and old Anambra State were destroyed in two to three days: Governor's office, other offices, the state House of Assembly Complex, Assembly members' village, the judiciary complex, Women Development compound, Ikenga Hotels, Governor's Lodge, Onitsha, ABS Radio, Enugu-Ukwu, ABS Radio, Awka and ABS Television at Onitsha..It is a setback of a lot of years'.<sup>32</sup> On 30 November, 2004, the government of Anambra state suffered yet another loss. A bomb exploded in Government House, Awka. Once again, Dr Ngige narrowly missed being killed.

What Nigerians found quite baffling, and which readily suggests the kind of influence that Uba wields under the present political dispensation in Nigeria, is that the police just watched as these hoodlums operated for three days in the state. The federal government too maintained an attitude of indifference to everything. Commenting on this, Ogunleye, a popular Nigerian columnist observed: 'If the police's reaction to the Anambra mayhem was shocking, President Olusegun Obasanjo's handling of the matter was, to say the least, scandalous. As far as the President was concerned, it was a political and party affair. Nothing was said of the criminality, nothing was said about the billion naira worth of property destroyed. Pray, what is going on? Did Uba drag Obasanjo to the famous Okija shrine to take an oath

(of indifference)? One does not need a prophet to predict that Anambra will erupt in violence again. Ngige's enemies will not rest until they have taken over the government. The President is conniving with influential criminals to murder sleep in Anambra State.

This is tragic'.<sup>33</sup> He predicted that if things remained as they were in Anambra state, Governor Ngige might eventually be killed by the agents of his former godfather. He missed death by a whisker during the 10 November attack. He was outside Awka when the state house was attacked.

The same fear expressed by Nigerians that President Obasanjo had a hand in the Anambra crisis was expressed by chairman of the ruling party in Nigeria, Chief Audu Ogbe, in a letter addressed to the President on 6 December, 2004. Among many other things, Chief Ogbeh observed that:

It would appear that the perpetrators of these acts are determined to stop at nothing since there has not been any visible sign of reproach from law enforcement agencies. I am now convinced that the rumours and speculations making the rounds that they are determined to kill Dr Chris Ngige may not be unfounded.<sup>34</sup>

### **Impact on Democratic Governance**

Godfatherism in Nigerian politics is a contest between elitism and democracy. Elitism, as Welsh (1979: 10) argued, is a system 'in which the exercise of political control by a small number of persons is institutionalized in the structure of government and political activity'. The typical godfather in Nigerian politics basically seeks to manipulate state officials and institutions for his own interests. Conflicts occur only when their clients refuse to be manipulated. This kind of situation does not augur well for the development and growth of any democratic process. Democracy has to do with the protection of the interests of all and should not only focus on the narrow interests of the privileged in the society. The matter becomes more serious when the intention of these powerful elites is to exploit the state.

The other point that must be made is that true democracy comes from the grassroots and not from the top; it evolves from effective participation of the citizenry in the political process. In a democracy, the governed do not only come out to exercise their voting rights, they also have the right to be voted for. 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. This kind of situation promotes mediocrity and financial corruption as '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'.<sup>35</sup> Any godson who fails to cooperate with the godfather is subjected to all forms of humiliations and political violence, as discussed above.

Godfatherism is one of the most important factors responsible for electoral malpractices in Nigeria. We should not be surprised about this fact given the assurance that godfathers give to their clients on winning elections when reaching agreements with them. The seriousness of the problem here is better appreciated when the fact is faced that there are many godfathers contesting for

recognition at every election. The point was made earlier that the relationship between the godfather and godson is instrumental: the godfather assures the latter of electoral success and the godson uses his political power after winning the election to advance the social, economic and political influence of his mentor. This explains why elections in Nigeria are usually a contest of power between godfathers. They come out with all the tricks that could help to give their candidates victory. The tricks include multiple voting, exchanging official ballot boxes with unofficial ones already filled with voting papers, stealing electoral boxes, chasing voters away from constituencies where their candidates are likely to have few votes, killing and wounding political opponents, etc. Such activities help to produce counter-violence during elections. This partly explains why most elections in Nigeria are violent.<sup>36</sup>

Godfatherism, most especially the type that we now have in Anambra state, can encourage the military to take over power in Nigeria. The Anambra case suggests a drift of the Nigerian state towards anarchy. This point was clearly made in the letter addressed to President Obasanjo by the then Chairman of PDP, Chief Audu Ogbe:

How do we exonerate ourselves from culpability, and worse still, how do we even hope to survive it. Mr President, I was part of the second republic and we fell. Memories of that fall are a miserable litany of woes we suffered, escaping death only by God's supreme mercy. Then we were suspected (by the military who took over power) to have stolen all of Nigeria's wealth. After several months in prison, some of us were freed to come back to life penniless and wretched. Many have gone to their early graves un-mourned because the public saw us all as renegades. I am afraid we are drifting in the same direction again. In life, perception is reality and today, we are perceived in the worst light by an angry, scornful Nigerian Public for reasons which are absolutely unnecessary. Mr President, if I write in this vein, it is because I am deeply troubled and I can tell you that an overwhelming percentage of our party members feel the same way though many may never be able to say this to you for a variety of reasons... I dare to think that we can, either by omission or commission allow ourselves to crash and bring to early grief, this beautiful edifice called democracy. On behalf of the People's Democratic Party, I call on you to act now and bring any, and all criminal, even treasonable, activity to a halt. You and you alone, have the means. Do not hesitate. We do not have too much time to waste.<sup>37</sup>

Chief Audu Ogbe lost his job as the Chairman of PDP for daring to challenge so boldly. The Anambra crisis is still there. The present situation however suggests that Governor Ngige will be in office until 2007 when he is expected to go back to the polls to renew his mandate. The crisis is most likely to become more explosive as we get close to the 2007 elections.

## Conclusion

Godfatherism is a hydra-headed monster in Nigerian politics. It will continue to threaten the practice of popular political participation in the country if no concrete efforts are made to deal with the problem. For now, godsons who have problems with their adopted fathers are coming out into the open to provide

information on how they came to power and the type of problems they are consequently subjected to. This development is good for the growth of democratic governance in the country. Now that Nigerians are better educated on how the elite manipulate elections in the country, they are bound to be better prepared for the future.

We seek to conclude this paper by saying that godfatherism obtains in many other democracies around the world. It is common to have influential people in the society giving strong backing to electoral candidates. There is nothing wrong with it if the goal is to use it to get the best people into public offices. What is wrong with the Nigerian system is that the godfathers have turned politics into a money-making business under which elections are rigged with a view to forcing pre-determined candidates into office. The office-holders are in turn subjected to all forms of indecent manipulations by their mentors. The godfathers in Nigeria see their support to their godsons as an economic investment that must yield superlative dividends by all means. In all cases, the godfathers try to exaggerate the extent of their investment on their godsons and the violent conflict between the two starts from there. We noticed in all cases reviewed above that the two sides raise their own private armies for defending their interests. This led to several unnecessary deaths. Most of those killed are unemployed youths that made themselves available to the two sides.

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