

## MORAL AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN POLITICAL GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

One of the prevailing fundamental and sensitive issues in Nigerian politics that can not be ignored is godfatherism. Before its adoption in circle, godfatherism used to be a Christian religious term. It presupposes placing a young Christian under the tutelage of an older and a more proven one. However, the term has assumed a political coloration as attention is no longer focused on Christian godfathers but political godfathers. Their antics manifesting in willingness to dictate tune to their god sons, self centeredness, holding their areas of influence to ransom among others are discernible and such impact negatively on democratisation and governance as evident in some parts of the country especially in the present dispensation.

Given its sensitivity, godfatherism has been variously reacted to by scholars from political and sociological perspectives. This issue is equally a subject of concern to ethicists. However, this dimension has been largely ignored in the previous studies and this is the gap that this paper aims at filling. In order to achieve this aim, we shall discuss the phenomenon with particular reference to its meaning and historical origin, manifestation in politics with Nigeria as a case study, godfathers and their political activities, the implications of godfatherism for democratisation and development as well as the ethical perspective of it. Recommendations will be made towards resolving problems that have arisen from it in order to prevent their recurrence. This is expected to guarantee an enduring democracy, which has continually been threatened by the activities of political godfathers among other factors.

**Keywords:** Godfatherism, Politics, Morality, Nigeria, Development

### INTRODUCTION

Godfatherism has become an institutionalised phenomenon in contemporary politics in Nigeria and its impact can not be ignored. The activities of godfathers and experiences of godsons/goddaughters are evident and they have always been an issue of concern to scholars in academic discourse. However, the reactions of many scholars have been mainly from sociological and political perspectives. The moral coupled with development dimension, which is our focus in this work, has not been significantly explored. This is the vacuum in scholarship that it sets to fill. In doing this, the following shall be discussed: meaning of godfatherism, its emergence on the political scene of Nigeria, attributes and activities of political godfathers, moral issues arising from political godfatherism, its implications for sustainable development and concluding remarks.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews relevant works on political ethics, sustainable development and godfatherism. Omoregbe (1998) experiments Machiavellism in Nigerian politics, the result of which is the fact that morality has been removed from political activities in the country, hence the high level of social impasse which has continued to plague the country. He notes that the political scene has been taken over by treasury looters and those who want to attain power at all cost. For this reason, the electoral process has been fraught with irregularities. Dzurgba (2004) establishes a link between morality and politics. According to him, immoral practices that have characterised the political landscape in Nigeria are the bane of development and a reason for her bad image in the international community. Familusi (2010) discusses the implications of religious politics for sustainable development in the post-independence Nigeria and concludes that bringing religion into politics is capable both engendering and endangering sustainable development. This depends on the role religion is made to play in politics. In other words, if religious ethical values are imbibed by every stake holder in politics, good governance will be guaranteed. However, evidence abounds of how the infiltration of religion into politics has threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria among other problems that have been encountered. Adelowo (2010) is emphatic that nothing is working in Nigeria; therefore the question of sustainability does not arise. However, he emphasises the need to maintain peace in the milieu of heterogeneity of religion in the country so as to attain sustainable development. This will be possible if adherents of various religions are made to know that they belong to the same God. He appeals to the government at all levels to put a permanent end to perpetual conflicts between Christians and Muslims in some parts of Nigeria. This is imperative because religious dissonance is detrimental to any kind of development. On godfatherism, Albert 2005, Ayoade 2006, Gambo 2006 and Familusi 2012 are unanimous that the concept is an integral part of Nigerian politics. To them, political godfatherism is not a new development but the negative dimension it assumes in the current as it affects the society is a source of worry. The Christian origin of the term as well as its cognate application in some traditional African societies suggests its possible beneficial effects, which are absent in modern-day godfatherism. On the whole, it can be said that there is a link between political godfatherism and sustainable development in view of the negative roles godfathers have played. This is also an issue in morality as shall be established in this piece.

### **WHAT IS GODFATHERISM?**

Before it was adopted in political circle, God fatherism was formerly a religious term, which presupposes placing a young Christian under the tutelage of an older and more proven Christian. The godfathers must endeavour to live up to the expectation of the Church and the parents of the god child. (Obaji 2006). In the Catholic Church tradition in particular, a young Christian trying to become baptised or married is expected to have a godfather, who is chosen from among the larger congregation and needs not to be related to the godson. He counsels the young person in respect of how to live responsibly. (Albert 2005 & <http://Christianline.blogspot.com>) In contemporary time, women are chosen as godmothers to serve the same purpose for goddaughters.

It needs to be noted that godfatherism is not alien to traditional African societies given the role played by elders. Traditionally, parents and elders are revered because they are custodians of customs and traditions coupled with their experience (Lawal 2010). For instance, among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria, godfather could aptly be referred to as *baba nigbejo* that is, someone who is always available and willing to come rescue. They may also mean *alafehinti* – somebody who can be relied on. An adage captures the essence of godfatherism as follows. *Agba ki i wa loja kori omo tuntun*

*wo* – An elder should not be in the market place and allow a child’s head to be disfigured. (Olatunji 1984) .This depicts the relevance of elders who could be understood as godfathers in traditional society. Among the Hausa the ‘maigida’ landlord or head of a household is a godfather in his own right. while the phenomenon is also an attribute of traditional Igbo society as reflected in the relationship between master and servant ‘*Nnam- Ukwu*’ and the phrase *nma ma du*’ – man knows man. (Albert 2005) From the abovementioned, it can be adduced that traditional godfathers are mentors, role models and leaders par excellence. However the term has assumed a political coloration as attention is no longer seriously focused on Christian god-fathers but political god-fathers. Godfatherism has been explained by scholars in various ways. According to Gambo (2006), it is an ideology which is constructed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets party ticket to run for an election and who wins electoral contest. Adeoye (2009) holds that:

Godfatherism, in its simple form is a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and godson. A godfather is a kingmaker, boss, mentor, and principal, while godson is the beneficiary and recipient of the legacy of a godfather. A godfather is someone who has built unimaginable respect and follower (voters) in the community, and possessed a well –organised political platform, and general acceptance from electorate that could secure victory for candidates of his choice.

The view of Ayoade (2006) is that the term godfather is often used interchangeably with other terms such as mentor, financier, and benefactor among others. These terms however mean different things. Political godfathers consist of rich men whose contributions to campaign funds of some candidates have helped them to win elections. (Albert 2005).

### **THE EMERGENCE OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS**

Tracing the history of godfatherism in Nigeria seems an arduous task as it was not initially conceptualised. However from available facts it can be implied. Servant –master relationship has never ceased to be an attribute of Nigerian politics. In this case, the master is a godfather while servant is the godson. The first generation of elite who had initial contact with the colonial masters became nationalists and eventually forces to be reckoned with in their ethnic groups. This development produced people like Sir Ahmadu Bello, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who are still very relevant in the political activities of Nigeria several years after their death. What can be said to be the case during their time was relative understanding and cordiality between them and their godsons. For instance, Sir Ahmadu Bello who led the Northern Peoples Congress willingly allowed his deputy, Sir Tafawa Balewa to become the Prime Minister. In the Eastern Region Drs Azikiwe and Michael Okpara held sway as godfather and godson respectively while the relationship between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief S.L. Akintola clearly typified the issue being discussed. We shall shed more light on this later on this later. Gambo opines that these godfathers did not aim at using their godsons as surrogates to promote personal interest but the developmental aspiration of the people and they were not driven by any sense of enrichment. Thus they could be described as being essentially benevolent and progressive (Gambo 2006, <http://www.kwenu.com/lectures>). Godfatherism since this period has continued to feature in Nigeria the contemporary period being a new dimension

## **POLITICAL GODFATHERS: THEIR ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIVITIES**

There is hardly any section of the country where there are no political godfathers whose philosophy, ideology and activities determine party affiliation, political behaviour and outcome of elections in their areas. To be a successful godfather, the following attributes can not be ignored. The first one is political connection at the highest tier of the government. This is required for his protection (Ayoade 2006). Examples abound of many of them who are simply above the law because their activities are never questioned by any authority. Apart from being politically connected, godfathers must be averagely wealthy or at least be skilful at getting money. Some of them use their personal money to finance election. This money is given to those who they will use as instruments of getting things done as expected. To some people, this is an act of generosity but in the real sense of it, such generosity is shrouded in self-centeredness in that it is a means of recruiting those who will unleash violence when they (godfathers) deem it fit. It follows that violence is also an attribute of godfathers as they train political thugs either to attack political opponents or manipulate the electoral process in their favour. All these are accomplished with impunity because of the connection that has been noted earlier. According to Albert (2005):

For godfatherism to flourish with the dimensions that are now witnessed in Nigeria, a number of enabling environment are needed. The first is a profit-motivated political patron, a pliable political process that serves the interest 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.

In contrast to the first republic godfathers, present day ones are essentially diabolic and rapacious thereby constituting a threat to democratization. At this point, we shall discuss the manifestation of godfatherism in Nigerian politics. The influence of political God-father cannot be over-looked in Nigeria. After the 1959 general elections, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of the Old Western Region became the leader of opposition while Chief S.L. Akintola, his deputy became the premier. Later there was a personality clash emanating from the battle for supremacy between the duo. Chief Awolowo as the leader of the Action Group continued to exert influence on the premier who saw him as a usurper. Chief Awolowo on his own part accused Akintola of being inordinately ambitious. This development was no doubt a war between a godfather and a godson and it in no small way contributed to the fall of the first republic. Chief Awolowo was in control of the politics of the South Western Nigeria during the second republic as reflected in the results of the 1979 general elections; however, his party lost the 1983 governorship election in Oyo State. This notwithstanding, he remained a godfather for the Yoruba people till he died in May 1987. Perhaps his own style of godfatherism was different from what now obtains, or probably his godsons were not rebellious, there was relative peace in his political family. Unarguably the late Chief Bola Ige was the godfather of Alliance for Democracy (AD) governors until his sudden death in 2001 and it was alleged that those governors were taking instruction from him. However, there was no reported case of disagreement between them, consequently, there was stability. Still in the Region, any discourse on godfatherism will be incomplete without making reference to Alhaji Adogoke Adelabu, who was the leader of opposition in the Western House of Assembly and he controlled the electorate especially in Ibadan with demagogic ease and he could turn personality into votes (Jenkins 1967). Over fifty years after his death, his impact is still felt. The same thing can be said of the late Alhaji Busari Adelakun who was instrumental to the victory of an Ibadan man in 1983. He

possessed the attributes of a typical political godfather; however, such wizardry was cut off by the coup of 1983 and his death in detention in 1986.

Chief Adedibu who was christened the strongman of Ibadan politics, featured prominently as godfather. Perhaps, if not for his influence, the Peoples Democratic Party would not have captured Oyo State in 2003. Before the election, he made a categorical statement that former governor Lam Adesina was not coming back to the government house; and it came to pass. Also most of those who were elected into the House of Assembly and National Assembly were his anointed candidates, hence, his influence on many of them. Before this time he had been relevant as he was equally involved in the 1983 Ibadan project and the victory of Chief Kolapo Ishola in 1991 as governor. In Ibadan, the hegemony of Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu was firmly rooted as his residence was a centre of political pilgrimage to politicians not only in Ibadan, but in Oyo state and Nigeria as a whole. His political sagacity earned him the title of “Alaafin Molete”. Infact, a one time governor was said make Molete (Adedibu’s residence) his headquarters, where all decisions concerning the governance of Oyo state were taken during his regime. It was in view of this unconfirmed report that the Alliance for Democracy (A.D) in 2003 printed a postal with an inscription:

Eemo wolu,  
Adedibu di Gomina Oyo  
Ladoja nigba keji re  
Disaster at your doorstep  
Adedibu becomes the governor  
Of Oyo (state)  
And Ladoja is his deputy (Albert 2007).

The implication of this statement is that if his godson should win, Adedibu will be ruling, while he will be a mere rubber stamp. At the end of the day the godson won the election, but contrary to peoples’ expectation, he became rebellious and the result was the political imbroglio which culminated in the of impeachment Ladoja in 2006, the dust of which is yet to settle. Adedibu was angry with his godson because he was not getting enough returns from what he had invested and he queried why he would not be entitled to one quarter of the security vote of Oyo State (Babawale&Ashiru 2006). Though Ladoja regained his seat after eleven month his ambition to return to the government house in 2007 was truncated. His erstwhile deputy became the governor and the beneficiary did not hide his sense of gratitude as he openly prostrated for him during his inauguration.

Adedibu was a political institution in Ibadan and even beyond. He was in full control and had to his credit past governors, senators, members of the House of Representatives, state legislators, council chairmen and councillors as his godsons. He usually recommended those to be appointed as commissioners and board members. He continued to be relevant in politics of Ibadan as he consistently dictated political tune. He was indispensable to many politicians and controlled both the literate and illiterate populace. He was once described by former president Obasanjo as a dry fish, that nobody can bend and the father of the PDP. A popular Dadakuada musician, Odolaye Aremu, while eulogizing Adedibu saw him as “*Ida meji Ibadan, ti an pe leeyan kan soso*” that is, a half of Ibadan that is referred to as one individual. Apart from the present governor who was his anointed candidate, the three senators that represented Oyo State between 2007 and 2011 were singlehandedly given the

party ticket. In fact, one of them is his biological son. One can not say whether any of those elected on the platform of PDP did not pass through him

Godfatherism is not peculiar to Oyo State alone. Some state of the federation have also experienced the consequences of war between godfathers and godsons. The case of the former Governor of Kwara state late Alhaji M.A Lawal and the Waziri of Ilorin, the late Dr. Olusola Saraki is prominent. Prior to this time, Dr Saraki had dealt with Alhaji Adamu Attah who was governor between 1979 and 1983. When the relationship turned sour, he withdrew his support for Attah and shifted it to Chief Cornelius Adebayo who belonged to a different political party and at the end of the day he won. Initially both Lawal and Saraki belonged to the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) as time went on the duo disagreed and Saraki decamped to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), he sponsored his son for the governorship and he defeated the sitting governor. Not only this, his daughter was also elected into the senate. Both the governor and the senator were re-elected in 2007. During the 2011 election there was a move to sponsor his daughter for governorship of the State but his son, the sitting governor did not support him instead he endorsed his commissioner for finance Fatah Ahmed who ultimately became the governor. The father did not hide his feeling as he saw development as a blow to his political career The inference that can be drawn from this scenario coupled with the death of his father not too long ago is that the younger Saraki is an emerging godfather in Kwara State.

In Enugu State, Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani was a beneficiary of Chief Jim Nwobodo in 1999. Shortly after the election, things began to fall apart and this degenerated to major crises. Several attempts were made to impeach the governor but he survived all. He was even re-elected in 2003. A possible explanation for this was his performance in office coupled with popularity among the electorate. Former governors Chinwoke Mbidinuju of Anambra State and Chief Emeka Offor did not have a long lasting cordial relationship. The former paid dearly for this as he failed in his bid to be re-elected in 2003. This paved the way for Chris Ubah and Chris Ngige as godfather and godson respectively. Ngige was rigged in but usual disagreement between domineering godfather and recalcitrant godson ensued, eventually it was revealed that the godson was a beneficiary of a stolen mandate. Peter Obi was sworn in after about three years. Chris Uba, as the godfather of Anambra state boasted in the Sunday Champion of June 8, 2003 as follows:

- 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 Representatives
  - twenty-nine (29) 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 (Albert 2007).

In Borno State Mala Kachalla and Senator Ali Sheriff who had been family friends ended up becoming godson and godfather respectively. Kachalla became the governor in 1999 through the help of Ali Sheriff. Before he was elected as governor; Kachalla was like a father to Sheriff as he happened to be his father's best man during his wedding. Ali Sheriff did not hide did as he used to call Kachalla father (Albert 2006). Ironically, a 'son' became 'father' while father became son in

political sphere. The governor's trouble started when the list of commissioner sent to the House of Assembly was rejected, this seed of discord began to grow and bear fruits. Shortly after the swearing in, Kachalla stopped taking instruction from Senator Ali who fought seriously to have him impeached without success (Albert and Danjibo 2004). The matter was not resolved and the godfather dethroned his godson as he got the party ticket and eventually became the elected governor of Borno State in 2003. The decampment of Kachalla to the Alliance for Democracy did not save him from the onslaught of his godfather.

The case between the former governor of Lagos State Senator Bola Tinubu and the incumbent Mr Babatunde Fashola was a cold war as it was widely reported that Tinubu did not want the latter to go for a second term. Though the matter was diplomatically resolved and Tinubu endorsed Fashola and supported him during the last electioneering process, his deputy was dropped for another party member. It can not be said whether the supposed war is over. Also Governor Theodor Orji of Abia State and his predecessor, Orji Uzor Kalu who unarguably facilitated his election in 2007, have parted ways. On the other hand, the political empire built by former president Obasanjo has clearly confirmed him as a godfather of the moment whose impact is felt in all parts of the country. His activities as president between 1999 and 2007 will linger on in the reminiscences of the beneficiaries and victims. He unilaterally made the late President Yara'dua his party's flag bearer while he can not be exonerated from the outcome general elections especially his do or die political worldview. While we can locate the areas of influence of other godfathers, he seems to be godfather-general of Nigeria. After leaving office he continues to dictate political tune; the emergence of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (his perceived godson) as president may have further strengthened his political authority in Nigeria. His daughter, Iyabo Obasanjo Bello was made a commissioner in Ogun State in 2003 and graduated to the status of a senator in 2007, while a pre-2011 slogan in the state was "*ko somo bi Iyabo*" there is no child like Iyabo. This was not unconnected with the 2011 gubernatorial project, which however did not materialise. Confirming Obasanjo as a godfather, Adeoye (2009) has this to say:

The modus operandi of godfatherism suddenly changed between 1999 and 2007. It got so bad under the watchful eyes of Obasanjo-led government that godfathers assumed different names: gangsters, mafia and criminals. The worst manifestation of godfatherism in Nigeria history came to life under president Obasanjo's democratic rule for one reason; he allowed it.

Contemporary godfatherism impacts on politics in various ways. In fact, one cannot think of its positive impact. It erodes elements of democracy and such may degenerate into anarchy and possible military take over. The purported resignation of Dr. Chris Ngige and the subsequent personality clash between former president Obasanjo and Chief Audu Ogbe, the then Chairman of the People Democratic Party, which culminated in his being sacked can not be easily forgotten in Nigeria. Godfatherism is synonymous with self-centeredness and aberrant political behaviour. As Obaji 2006:35 remarks:

The sole aim of political Godfatherism is self or group preservation through political and economic control. It is a vampire that seeks to serve no other interest other than its own ...The

political godfather looks at the entire political set up as a huge business empire from where endless profit must be made.

The antics of godfathers impact negatively on electoral process. In fact, godfatherism is one of the major factors responsible for electoral frauds in Nigeria. Their role in many states of the federation can only be explained in terms of malpractice using different tricks such as multiple voting, snatching ballot boxes, killing and wounding opponents among others. The foregoing is characteristic of states that are in the web of godfatherism in Nigeria. It has also been stressed that:

Overbearing influence of an individual in electoral process makes the voter's role in the electoral process irrelevant and negates the idea of people having input in their governance. This makes nonsense of any claim to a democratic government as godfathers have in the most brazen, manner hijacked the political machinery at all levels. It means what is called election in Nigeria is nothing but the expression of the narrowly defined will of a few dishonest individuals who feel that they have the power to manipulate the entire electoral process in favour of their anointed sons.(Gambo 2006)

The socio-political implications of electoral fraud can not be explained in isolation of godfatherism since godfathers are major actors in it. One of such is international stigmatization. In as much as democratization has become an issue of global concern, the process is expected to meet international standard. This does not suggest that no country is facing any challenges as far as election is concerned, but what is experienced in Nigeria is a source of international derision. President Barack Obama was said to have avoided coming to Nigeria during his first official visit to Africa on account of this. Instead he was in Ghana where elections were conducted and the opposition party won. This seems a difficult task in Nigeria. The Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton who later paid what could be called consolatory visit indicted Nigeria and advised the government to ensure credibility in future elections.

Apart from rigging, no responsive leadership can be produced through this arrangement as he who pays the piper will dictate the tune. In this case, he is the only one that must be obeyed. Ayoade believes that most successful godfathers are protégés of the Federal Government; they enjoy 'advalorem' treatment and strange avuncular relationship with it (Ayoade 2006). Such will lead to maladministration and retrogression as witnessed in many states and remarkably during the eleven months of Akala in Oyo state in 2006. This is because he was not in control. Confirming this, a source claims that :

Akala abandoned his responsibility to his godfather, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu. The normal weekly routine of Alao Akala began on Monday with a customary visit to Adedibu's Molete palace in Ibadan... Alao Akala would brief Adedibu on his activities for the week. He would then infuse Adedibu's plans into his programme Files were usually brought to Molete for treatment. (The Westerner 2006).

Obedient godson cannot have problem with his godfather but he will definitely fail to fulfill his promises to the electorate. This can be used to explain the ability of godfathers to hold their political territories to ransom and institutionalization of

corruption. For the godson to continue to be in the good book of his godfather, he has no choice but to engage in misappropriation of public funds as consistently experienced in states where godfathers are in control. Any attempt to act other wise often results to serious disagreement, which is interpreted by godfathers as betrayal of trust. One will not be wrong to say that those modern political godfathers have become ‘a threat’ to democratic consolidation thereby losing their relevance. It is only those who do benefit from them that may see them as necessary factors in politics. One wonders if any of them would love to be godson to any godfather. A godfather is like a ‘god’. He is expected to lead by good example. Ironically this is not the case in Nigerian politics because political godfathers have deviated from what religious godfatherism emphasizes. Political godfatherism is a total departure from its Christian conception. For this reason, the roles of godfathers in politics are counter productive. They are not guided by any moral value but self centeredness.

It is an established fact in Nigeria that many god-fathers have ended up becoming the unofficial rulers who dictate the tune of governance to those who have been elected and for their continued survival in governance, they must abide by what their god-father command, many rebellious, political god sons have lost their positions either by impeachment or orchestrated defeat while vieing for second term. It may be interesting to remark that some politicians launched themselves into limelight with the influence of any godfather, but the road was rough for them. Examples of such people are Governors Adams Oshiomole and Olusegun Mimiko of Edo and Ondo States respectively. Both contested on the platform of political parties that were virtually unknown in their states and their victory was not actualised until after a prolonged judicial process. The former made a remark sometime ago that those who were interested in being godfathers should relocate to Anambra State, where they would be relevant. Interestingly, Ngige’s rebellion was a step towards weakening the argument for the inevitability of godfathers in politics because since 2006 when Peter Obi became the governor, there has been no reported case of conflict between him and any godfather, not only this, he was re-elected in February 2010 without the efforts of any known godfather. That the emergence of Mimiko as Governor of Ondo State was not premised on godfatherism has been debunked by many notably members of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), who claimed to be instrumental to his victory at the tribunal through moral and financial support, with an agreement that he would cross to their party. Whether or not this is true, he was able to secure a second term mandate on October 20, 2012 in spite of the gang up against him by both the Peoples Democratic Party and Action Congress of Nigeria. The inference that could be drawn from the foregoing is that Mimiko may be on his path towards becoming a godfather in Ondo State.

Godfatherism has altered also the electoral process in Nigeria. Going by the nullification of the election of Chris Ngige and the subsequent assumption of office of Peter Obi in 2006, the tenure that was to end 2007 did not end until 2010. This means that Nigeria will continue to have staggered elections. This has become a reality because the purported victory of the former was as a result of the game played by Chris Ubah, his godfather. Some states will also have to wait till 2013 and 2014 for the 2011 general elections because of electoral frauds in such states some of which were made possible by godfathers (both within and outside those states) The aforementioned points have largely been responsible for social backwardness, which has wreaked observable havoc on sustainable development in the country.

## **GODFATHERISM IN MORAL PERSPECTIVE**

This section discusses moral issues arising from the subject matter. As noted in the abstract, godfatherism goes beyond political and sociological landscape; it is equally an issue of concern to the ethicist. This is because it involves human activities and morality is concerned with the rightness or wrongness of human actions. It examines the rationale for such actions and brings to light the rational and deliberate aspect of human. The focus is on the fact that human beings act freely after considering various possibilities open to them; and “the obvious reason for morality is the rational nature and destiny of the human person. If man and woman were not to possess the rational faculty, they could not be moral agents and they could not be said to lead a moral life. This explains why it is plausible to say that the sub-human animals are amoral” (Echekwube 1999).

Oyeshile (2004) notes that “Morality in every human society arises from the need to distinguish right or good conduct from wrong or bad conduct so as to ensure harmonious living in society”. The point can be made that both political godfathers and godsons are moral agents. Thus, their actions can be evaluated in light of morality. Besides, godfatherism in Christian thought, where it was borrowed has moral connotation as the godfather’s moral proclivity is assumed. In other words, morality is a criterion to be made a godfather or godmother. It should be noted also that elders in traditional Africa are expected to be people of moral rectitude hence, their being accorded respect. The question that arises at this juncture is how proven and credible are political god-fathers? Experience has shown that they are a bundle of self-centred politicians who want to control their domain politically and economically. Their lives are not in any way worthy of emulation as they are guided by Machiavellian principle of ‘the end justifies the means’. Thus political godfatherism is a case of moral contradiction as it follows the line of separating politics from morality. Buttressing this claim, Omoregbe says that :

We are made to believe that politics and morality do not go together , that once a person starts playing politics he must ignore morality. Hence we often hear it said that “politics is a dirty game”, by its nature, politics involves the use of immoral means. Thus Nigerian politicians have followed Machiavelli in removing morality from politics and in thinking that the best way to be successful in politics is to use immoral means... They have also subscribed to his view that..., there is nothing wrong in using immoral means to grab political power and retain it (Omoregbe 1998).

The alliance between godfathers and godsons needs to be x-rayed from moral viewpoint . Most godsons in their bid to capture power at all cost do throw decency to the wind by being temporarily obedient during which time they and their godfathers engage in immoral and diabolical practices to actualise their dream. All these manifest in their activities, which have earlier been discussed. The point being made is that as political godfathers are not people of proven integrity so also are the godsons. As it is often said ‘like father like son’ so a bad godfather will rarely breed a good godson. Ironically, godsons do have public sympathy when the relationship becomes strained. However, the ethicist will explain the development in terms of betrayal of trust on the part of the godson, whom the godfather expects to abide by the terms of their agreement no matter how bad it may be. Ethically speaking, promise must be kept and agreement must be honoured, but it has been discovered that failure of godsons has always been responsible for conflicts arising from godfatherism. Our point of emphasis

is that it is wrong for godsons to enter into an alliance with godfathers in a bid to get to office. The godfather, who has invested a lot in getting his stooges installed would expect some dividend

Can betrayal of trust be advocated in the interest of the public as godsons have always done? Was the interest not jeopardised before and during election? Why must godsons suddenly become people who have the interest of the masses at heart? All the crimes committed in active connivance with godfathers are not in the best interest of anybody. If betrayal of trust is a reason for disagreement between godfathers and godsons, the betrayer must be blamed for his misdeed and he should be reminded that the end can not justify the means in this case. More importantly, two wrongs can never make a right. In traditional Africa, this act is synonymous with covenant breaking and it is forbidden. It follows that godsons and godfathers should imbibe the principle of non-betrayal of trust or at best they should not enter into any covenant in the first instance. One wonders if this can be possible when the godson wants to get to office at all cost. The Yoruba believe that a covenant breaker is not only worthless but accursed. Hence the saying “Eni ti o ba dale a bale lo” A covenant breaker will disappear with the earth. (Idowu 1996, Dopamu and Alana 2004) According to Akinola (1999), perfidy is reprehensible and vicious, so man is warned against it because of the evil consequences that will befall a perfidious character. This is abominable also in Christianity and Islam; and it is a negation of the moral value of good citizenship. The tragic end of Judas, Aithophel, Joab and Shimei in the Bible was consequent upon perfidy (Familusi 2008).

Another point that must be raised is the need for godsons to count the cost of any alliance before venturing into it. If the godfather suddenly becomes a devil after disagreement ensues, and the public is made to believe as such, it will be wise of them not to wine and dine with the devil at all than to abandon him when it is time to ‘reap the fruit of his labour’. The interaction between godfathers and godsons as earlier established is a form of covenant, which is expected to be kept. One of the tools employed by godfathers is recruitment of youths who are future leaders as thugs. How does this relate to morality? Definitely a godfather who is guided by moral principles will not engage in grooming political thugs. Apart from destroying precious lives, the future of Nigeria is by implication being annihilated. More importantly, how many of their children are among the thugs? A Yoruba saying goes thus “*Omo olomo la n ran nise de toru toru*”. This literally means that when another man’s son is sent on an errand, he could be told to come back late. This is to say that, godfathers do not mind if anything happens to those thugs. This is not expected of elders who are supposed to be mentors. Such elders are the proverbial *agba iya* –worthless elders in Yoruba thought. Though age is associated with wisdom and certain privileges, elders are expected to demonstrate sense of responsibility in their dealings with the younger ones (Lawal 2010). This is never exhibited by many political godfathers. Violence, an attribute of political thugs apart from impacting negatively on democracy and the electoral process is condemned in its entirety in moral context. Political violence which is characterised by intimidation of voters and opponents, and destruction of various forms is condemned and detested in African society, Christianity and Islam (Akintola 1999, Kateregga & Shenk 1985). Those who may not profess any religion can not be exonerated as religion is just one of the factors that account for the moral norms of the people. Other factors include rationality, custom and habit within the society (Oyeshile 2004). This position has been established by Omoregbe (1998) who holds that one must live a moral life because, morality is commanded by God, man is a social being and a member of a

society, man is a rational being, morality guarantees happiness, no one can escape the law of Nemesis and that the way of nature embodies morality.

From the foregoing, political godfatherism has been understood as a moral issue given the factors that qualify one to be a Christian godfather and in traditional Africa coupled with the activities of political godfather in modern day Nigeria. Therefore discussing it in isolation of morality, which is characteristic of previous attempts by scholars, is a wide gap in scholarship that this work has tried to fill. Also focus is not lost of the aspect development. Since the activities of godfathers have continued to impact negatively on sustainable development, one wonders if they are in any way desired on the political scene

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

That godfatherism has come to stay for now in Nigeria politics is incontrovertible. Not only in politics but also in various aspects of life where hardly can anything be achieved without 'connection syndrome'. In view of this efforts should be made to ensure that activities of godfathers do not truncate the present democratic experiment. Monetization of political post has increased the influence of godfathers who now see politics as a viable investment. The remote cause of conflicts arising from godfatherism is money. There is therefore an urgent need to make political posts less attractive and financially rewarding. With this in place, politics will cease to be a do or die affair but an avenue to serve. Consequently, only those who want to serve will be interested in it and not those who want to "eat". The first set of godfathers did not believe that public funds should be monopolised by them. If there is no money to steal, godfathers will devise other means of livelihood.

Godfathers have always achieved their aims with impunity because there is no law forbidding their practices. In Nigeria, they are simply above the law. It is imperative to give the judiciary every necessary incentive to play its role fearlessly. The issue of sacred cow should not arise because the rule of law stipulates equality. Unless stringent measures are taken, godfather will continue to hold their areas of influence to ransom. One would have expected the main actors in the 2003 gubernatorial election in Anambra state to be brought to book for their misdemeanor after it was revealed, but nothing was done. What can we say about the claim that some INEC registration materials were found in the late Adedibu's residence in 2006 and the utterance of the then Inspector General of Police that he was not interested in acting on rumour even when no attempt was made to investigate the allegation?

The problem of poverty contributes to the relevance of godfathers as they are generous in their own right irrespective of the clandestine motive for their generosity. That is why they are in control of political thugs who are used to achieve their aims. On this note, the government is advised to be sincere enough to establish reality-based poverty eradication programmes so that everybody will be able to satisfy the physiological needs of food and shelter. The present attempt at eradicating poverty has not solved and may not solve the problem because they are not properly executed. The programmes are not viable coupled with the fact that beneficiaries are selected on the basis of party affiliation. It is for this reason that some see poverty eradication programmes as poverty escalation, and elongation programmes. Job creation must be intensified so that qualified but unemployed people will be engaged. This will no doubt reduce the rate of crimes as many of those who are

involved in electoral frauds are victims of poverty, who are readily available to be used by money bag politicians and godfathers.

Moral regeneration on the part of all and sundry will go a long way in solving the existing and emerging problem. A morally sane society will produce morally inclined godfathers who will mentor and guide their godchildren as expected. Various ethical orientation and awareness programmes by past governments must be revived while the present attempts at inculcating morality must be executed objectively, fearlessly and with sincerity of purpose.

The Independent National Electoral Commission must demonstrate a high sense of responsibility in handling electoral matters. The alliance between the government and godfathers has always influence the activities of INEC. Consequently, the general public has lost confidence in it; being a perceived appendage of the government. It is hereby recommended that the commission should be absolutely independent of the ruling party or government. Not only that, there is a need for impartiality on its part. Those who are appointed as members should be men and women of proven integrity and their salaries must be charged on consolidated fund in order to ensure efficiency. In other words, the body must be financially independent of the government.

This work has discussed godfatherism as manifested in Nigerian politics from a perspective of morality. Without any doubt, it is a contemporary reality and its devastating effects are discernible. Emphasis is also placed on the question of sustainable development in a socio-political context. Perhaps, one may not be wrong to assume that but for the antics of political godfathers; Nigeria would have been more developed than this. Our recommendations will as a matter of fact help in stemming the tide of socio-political – problems engendered by godfatherism and guarantee sustainable development. Guarding jealously the present democratic structure is a clarion call, which must be pursued with vigour.

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