POLITICAL CLIENTELISM AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF POLITICAL OFFICE HOLDERS IN NIGERIA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Money-bags have hijacked the political process and party politics in Nigeria. They finance party activities and sponsor candidates for high political offices in the country for financial and other returns that are inimical to national development but only self-centred. Until this problem is tackled, Nigeria cannot witness development through the provision of democratic dividends to the electorate.

Keywords: Clientelism, independence, development, political office holders.

Introduction

Globally, the seeking, obtaining and holding of political office of a state by a citizen is a very noble endeavour. This is nobler when a person seeks and holds this office through a free and fair democratic process whose most important elements are, popular participation, equitable representation and accountability.

To this extent, democracy provides wide opportunities for the citizens to make inputs in the policy process or meaningfully contribute in the making of decisions that directly affect the lives and economic wellbeing of the generality of the citizenry.

Until recently however, Nigeria’s political history has been dominated by military rule with civilian rule that have allowed the emergence of clientele politics in the body politics of the nation. According to Joseph (1991:57) clientelism, patronage systems, patron-client and godfatherism are cluster of terms that are used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon which is a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of a 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 Scott 91972:92), explains that political clientelism is a mutual informal relationship in which a wealthy politician (Patron) finances the electoral aspirations and fortunes of a political offices seeker (Client) in exchange for economic support and political rights.

Clientelistic politics in Nigeria has been characterised over the years by the dominance of ‘electoral machines’ (Political Parties) controlled and managed by political entrepreneurs comprising largely but not exclusively of wealthy former military officials and their civilian comprador business class (Tignor 1993:15).

The major parties in Nigerian politics today are little more than grand conglomeration of the respective electoral ‘machines’ of the leading political patrons. Many Nigerian emergent
politicians are “sponsored” by local and regional power brokers cum political entrepreneurs who financed their campaigns and elections for public office. The ‘sponsorship’ is effectively a business transaction in which a patron effectively recovers his ‘investment’ in the form of public works and procurement contracts, prebendal appointment of cronies to public offices and other forms of prebendal activities by the ‘client’ Politian on assumption of public office. In case where the patron and the client failed to define with clear and sufficient precision, the dimensions of the return on ‘investments’, or the client backs out at fulfilling the agreed terms, the fallout would lead to an unimaginable violence and political destabilisation.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the clientelistic mode of analysis will be used as framework in the understanding of the patron-client matrix.

The basic clientele conceptual analytical framework is derived from anthropology and has many available formulations. But the one that is clear and explicit is that of James C. Scot in his work “patron-Client politics and political change in South-East Asia”. According to Scot, the Patron-Client relationship is an exchange relationship between roles which may be seen as a special case of dyadic (two person) ties involving largely “instrumental friendship in which an individual of a 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 socioeconomic assistance, including personal service to his patron” (Scott 1972:92) above all other considerations. This explains clearly the role which the Nigerian political patrons play in Nigerian politics of sponsoring political office seekers that when they (office seekers) finally got elected they give more attention in satisfying their patrons than the welfare of their people.

Clientelism in Nigeria

During the 1998 – 1999 transition, following the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, political entrepreneurs comprising ex-military officers and their civilian business cronies effectively seized control of the Nigeria political scene and have monopolised it as an enterprise. Although retired military officers have participated in Nigeria’s politics since the second Republic in the 1980’s, the fifteen (15) years of military dictatorship from 1984 – 1999 decimated and destroyed virtually every autonomous sector or institution in Nigeria, including the trade unions, academia and the private sector specifically the military regimes led by General Ibrahim Babangida (1985 – 1993), Sani Abacha (1993 – 1998) and Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998 – 1999). These regimes were widely perceived as the most corrupt and despotic in all Nigeria’s military history. This perception is even reinforced and proved by this table showing the amount of money some accumulated during their respective administrations and their cohorts.

<p>| 1. | Ibrahim Babangida | ₦2462.35 billion |
| 2. | Gen. Abubakar Abdusalami | ₦6493.85 billion |
| 3. | Mike Akhiobe | ₦5496.45 billion |
| 4. | Jerry Useni | ₦805.9 billion |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Amount (Trillion)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ismaila Gwarzo</td>
<td>₦517.0 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Umaru Dikko</td>
<td>₦894.65 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Paul Ogwuama</td>
<td>₦530.0 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sani Abacha</td>
<td>₦1218.137 billion</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mohammed Abacha</td>
<td>₦210.7 billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Abdulkadir Abacha</td>
<td>₦338.42 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Wada Nas</td>
<td>₦237.4 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tom Ikimi</td>
<td>₦252.553 billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dan Etete</td>
<td>₦237.4 billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dan Etiebet</td>
<td>₦567.47 billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Al-Mustapha</td>
<td>₦1997.73 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Anthony Ani</td>
<td>₦688.95 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Bashir Dalhatu</td>
<td>₦555.49 billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>General Wushishi</td>
<td>₦2286.95 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hassan Adamu</td>
<td>₦130.5 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>T.Y Danjuma</td>
<td>₦342.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ishaya Bamayi</td>
<td>₦94.0 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>₦11,130,657 Trillion.</td>
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Nigeria, under these people was routinely described by scholars of African political economy as a prebendal or patrimonial state (Joseph 1991:193-200). Public office and government patronage became the only game in town (Lewis 1996: 79-103). Retiring military officers deployed the massive wealth generated from the proceeds of grand corruption to creating and financing the political networks that formed the nuclei of several of the political associations that sought registration as political parties. The 1999 electoral campaign which brought the government led by President Olusegun Obasanjo to power in May 1999 was largely financed by the former military officers cum political entrepreneurs. Deploying their massive financial resources, they were able to install ex-military officers and their civilian business cronies in control of the largest political parties and in high federal and state public offices.

Political movements representing the interest of the poor and the disadvantaged that could have adequately served to moderate the influence of the dominant political parties have all been systematically excluded from participation in the political arena by a combination of legal instruments, and their relative paucity of huge resources as compared to the vast financial resources available to the dominant parties. A net result is the disempowerment of the generality of the Nigerian people that could have made a difference in political practice.

The dominance of unrepresentative ‘machine’ parties quickly alienates the electorate and prevents the evolution of an accountable government, because political leaders are primarily
beholden to the party financiers and the electoral machines rather than the electorate. The cumulative result is a serious distortion and inertia in Nigeria’s democratic development.

The nascent regulatory regime on financial party politics in Nigeria is ineffective, obsolete and rarely enforced, hence the notorious ‘godfather’ scandals which have bedevilled governance in Nigeria since 1999 is growing and spreading speedily and destructively in Anambra, Enugu, Kwara, Oyo, Ogun, and lately Benue State, vividly illustrate the deleterious impact of unregulated political finance on democratic development in Nigeria (Obiorah 2004:vi-viii).

**Political Clientelism and the Independence of Political Office Holders**

Auyero (2000), in attempting to differentiate between political finance and money-bags in Nigerian politics asserted that financiers are different from money-bags, who are overtly political and fund the political process in order to derive direct personal benefit for himself. While financiers are to a very large extent apolitical, money-bags are politicians who deploy money to hijack political positions and decisions but financiers spend money to get strangle hold on politics.

According to Auyero (2000), the money bag is not a godfather, although some also spend money to affect political decision. It is the express intention of the godfather to rule by proxy. So he circumvents the law by installing their protégé and consequently all aid is tied.

Explaining further, he pointed out that the relationship between a godfather and a godson is not free floating. It is contractual and the contract is sometimes written and even sealed spiritually with oath, or at the extreme in a shrine (The Uba-Ngige relationship was sealed in the Okija Shrine in Anambra State).

This enables the godfather to rule the physical and spiritual political worlds of his client thereby rendering him dependent on him (the godfather) for all his (godson) political actions and inactions.

Having financed the political holder (godson) to office, the godson returns the gesture hundred fold to the point that the godfather then becomes an inscrutable parasite in the affairs of the godson in governance. Thus the initial support given by the godfather then becomes an investment with colossal rate of returns because the godfather becomes the “de facto” political office holder.

The godfather makes major critical political decisions, appointments and is a recipient of major juicy contracts or earns inordinate stipends. Godfathers sometimes reverse executive decisions. They even ‘decree’ to the utter embarrassment of their godsons. When the godson tries to assert his independence, he (godson) is summarily punished by either making his state ungovernable or flushing him out of office (Emeka Offor and Mbadunguju in Anambra State politics). The godfathers traverse the polity as a colossus seriously benefiting from anti-democratism.

Arguing in the same vein, Akpan, as quoted by Gambo (2006:87), in “Godfather and Electoral Politics in Nigeria” stated that Godfather do:

_Finance political party activities and individual electoral campaigns as an astutely thought out investment outlet to be recovered through frivolous and bloated government contracts appointment of cronies into public offices and other prebendal returns by the beneficiaries._

Gambo further posits that many Nigerian politicians uphold the belief that without getting connected to local godfathers, they may not realise their political ambitions. In the process of cultivating the favour of political godfathers, political office seekers and holders are robbed of their independent and rational sense of judgement and personal integrity, they become a mere
surrogate and reconstructed in such a way that they are totally and completely subservient to their godfathers. Godsons are always willing to do the complete bidding of their political godfathers so as to count on their support at all times.

**Clientelism, A New Phenomenon?**

Levine, (1966), while studying social stratification and mobility in the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba before the emergence of British rule, stated that clientage and its attendant patterns of subservience and obedience were inescapable aspects of social life in traditional and contemporary Nigerian Society. That clientage is a system which strongly favoured qualities of servility respect for authority, allegiance to the powerful, and rejected qualities of independent achievement, self-reliant action and initiative.

The clientage system found in feudal system is the dependency type which consists of a highly formalised, legally sanctioned, and having a permanent hierarchical relationship. The value expectations underlying this relationship were those of “unfaltering devotion” and deference for the lord, matched by a commensurate affection of the lord for his vassal. The submissions of a vassal to his lord entailed the grant of a “benefit” from one to another, that is of a “fief” in exchange for the vassal’s services (Lemarchand and Legg 1972).

Clientelism as a relation entails unequal actors-slave and master, serf and lord, sharecropper and Landowner, worker and manager, voter and party boss as well as a financier and public office holder, who enter into a relationship that is both voluntary and, from the less-powerful member’s vantage point exploitative. In the words of Kitschelt (2000:849), “clientelism involves reciprocity and voluntarism but also exploitation and domination”. Bath (1959) explained that gift-giving and hospitality are potent means of controlling others, not because of the debts they create but because of the recipient’s dependence on their continuation. A continuous flow of gifts creates needs and fosters dependence and the threat of its being cut off becomes a powerful disciplinary device. Therefore, clientelism in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. It has its roots embedded in the social relations of many traditional societies in Nigeria and it is only asserting itself during this democratic experience in Nigeria.

**Money and Politics in Nigeria**

Politics in Nigeria is expensive, especially now that democracy has failed to deliver its dividend for the benefit of the people. Even after many years of democratic practice in Nigeria, Nigerians are still drinking water from the wells that are infested with frogs. The roads are mostly unmotorable and health care services are beyond the reach of the common man. Therefore, the electorates want bridges to be built in their palms, so also are roads and other social amenities. Because these things have been promised by many a politicians that never came. So the people prefer “money for hand back for ground politics” in Nigeria today. Therefore, high expenditure outlay for involvement in politics makes it imperative for both new entrants and the incumbents in the political landscape to prepare to and expend stupendous amount of money on achieving ambitions. At times funds are sourced from friends, family, and business associates, but it can also be borrowed, all with the belief that it can be re-cooped and paid back once in office. To a large extent this is politics by peons-godfatherism-in- Nigeria. Elections in Nigeria are principally determined by how much money candidates have. The electoral process has become so expensive that only the rich or those dependent on the rich backers can run. There is also a
disturbing trend of questionable business people that backed candidates with “Grey money”. Beside, the increasing influence of godfatherism in contemporary Nigerian politics can be linked to the influence that money has in electoral politics through uncontrolled party financing as was witnessed in both Anambra and Oyo states where state Governors have had to “negotiate” and “renegotiate” peace with “godfathers” and “money-bags” politicians who claimed helped them (Governors) to win election “by all means” (Adetula 2006:168). This state of affairs has made those that have acquired political offices in Nigeria to accumulate as much as possible so that they also would play the role of godfathers to those that they would anoint for political office. A sample as released by Newswatch magazine of November 3, 2008 revealed that former Governors Turaki (Adamawa) has been accused of embezzling ₦30 billion. Rashid Ladoja (Oyo) ₦4.7 billion just to mention a few of them.

This shows that if measures are not taken quickly Nigeria would be torn apart by these godfathers of Nigeria politics for their selfish ends. This is shown by the renewed activities of these godfathers that are inimical to the political development of the country as can be seen in the political tension that has engulf some parts of the country like Enugu, Anambra, Taraba, Benue, Osun, Ogun, Adamawa, to mention but few states, that is threatening the political stability of Nigeria after primary elections in the country. It is left to be seen how this scenario will play itself out during the April 2011 general elections. Meanwhile Nigeria has stagnated since the re-emergence of democracy in the country.

Conclusion

With massive corruption in Nigeria, some retired military and government officials amassed stupendous wealth and with the return of party politics in Nigeria in 1999 have hijacked the political process in the country. Taking control of party politics in Nigeria, these groups of people have been dictating and directing the affairs of the nation through their surrogates that now occupy the decision-making positions of the country. Because of the godfather-godson relation that has been established, these financiers and their godsons, the country has been generally and totally taken hostage by these godfathers for their personal gains and benefits, at the detriment of national development. This is because these public office holders are not independent to take decisions that can have direct benefit to the people rather they are trying to satisfy the insatiable demands of their godfathers thereby neglecting the electorates that should have been the direct beneficiaries of their (public office holder) efforts for national development.

Recommendations

This paper reveals that the inability of the Nigerian people to enjoy much needed democratic dividends and hence development is because office holder whose responsibility it is initiated and implement developmental projects are not doing so because their power to do so has been mortgaged to the financiers of their elections whose interest they are serving while in office.

Moreover, the introduction and promotion of money politics in the country is due to the emergence of clientele politics in Nigeria.

Therefore, we recommend that, parties instead of individuals should be encouraged to finance the elections of political office seekers to avoid the hi-jacking of their independence by the financiers. This is because as the saying goes “he who pays the piper dictates the tune”. 
The poverty gap that exists now between the few rich and the many poor should be looked into so as to discourage blind loyalty.

Electoral Act 2006 as amended should be re-amended to accommodate stiff punishment for money-bags who hijack party machinery and electoral process.

Election campaigns by political parties should be strictly based on their ideologies as enunciated in their manifestoes and programmes.

If these recommendations are strictly carried out, public office seekers would be released from the fringes of financiers and the Nigerian politics would witness positive results and generational development.

References


MAGAZINES: