



International Journal of Development and Sustainability

ISSN: 2168-8662 – www.isdsnet.com/ijds

Volume 3 Number 1 (2014): Pages 135-149

ISDS Article ID: IJDS13071705



Rethinking deification, gerontocracy and clientelism in Nigerian political space

Musibau Olabamiji Oyebode *

National Open University of Nigeria, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract

Hitherto, blanket respect, loyalty and veneration are given to the ancestors, living elders and godfathers in all cultures in Nigeria and their celebration in politics has become worrisome. These practices derive from deification, gerontocracy and clientelism. Most of the existing works have romanticised these socio-religious practices and found them sacrilegious but only a few connect them to democratic milieu. Thus, more than historicizing and romanticizing these socio-religious beliefs, this paper employs critical discourse analysis to confirm, legitimate, reproduce and challenge their power relation with the dominated. This paper argues that dogmatic acceptance of the unquestionable powers of these phenomena negatively impact on societal well being. The paper consequently submits that only a few of those hitherto celebrated personalities fit into the space of recognition and respect and that only the living and the dead who are not self-serving and whose interests as well as conducts are not diametrically opposed to societal good deserve veneration. It is suggested that we must free ourselves from avoidable hegemonic control of the seen and unseen powers.

Keywords: Ancestor; Living elder; Godfather; Power relation; Socio-religious practice

Published by ISDS LLC, Japan | Copyright © 2014 by the Author(s) | This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



Cite this article as: Oyebode, M.O. (2014), "Rethinking deification, gerontocracy and clientelism in Nigerian political space", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 135-149.

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* olabamijioyebode@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Inokoba and Ebienfa (2013) affirm that West Africa is one of the poorest regions on earth and that ECOWAS countries have some of the lowest standards of living indexes in the world. They state further that thirteen of the fifteen countries in West Africa are among the thirty bottom listed countries in the UNDP Human Development index in 2009. It is quite clear from the UNDP ranking that as a West African state, Nigerian is also lagging behind in social, political and economic status more than half a century after independence. This is because Nigeria which claims to be the giant of Africa has yet to come out of social, economic and political woes despite her abundant human and material resources. In all nooks and crannies of the country, there is acute shortage of drinkable water, electricity, good roads, industries and employment opportunities for the ever increasing population of teeming school leavers. Most analysts and social commentators blame this situation on bad governance culture and corruption. Painting a gory picture of corruption in Nigeria, Transparency International in 2005 ranked Ghana 50, Senegal 66, Cote d'Ivoire 71 and Nigeria 101 as the second most corrupt country in the world (UNODC, 2006). A retrospective look at the situation would generally raise such questions as:

- How did we get into this mess?
- What have our forbearers done rightly or wrongly to put us in this mess?
- What is wrong with our cultural heritage?
- What are the living elders doing to get us out of the present quagmire?
- What are the plans of the young ones for the foreseeable future?

It is assumed that some of our worthy dead elders or ancestors, so to say, would be upset in their graves with the level of social decadence, political logjam and economic woes in Nigeria while the unworthy forbearers would be complacent and muse at our plight. But even if the forbearers are not happy, what are they capable of doing? This question would sound profane in a society where we generally believe that both dead and living elders have pervasive influence over the fortunes of the living. In the same vein, in cultures where old age and ascendancy have a touch of venerability, elders both dead and living are respected because they are our predecessors who have trodden the path of life earlier than us and have served as purveyors for our existence today. In most cases veneration is general accorded them. It is generally believed in Africa that the ancestors enter into a spiritual state of existence after death. This entry of the dead elders qualifies them to have a say in the affairs of the living. They are seen as intercessors between the Supreme Being and the living. They are perceived as "the font of life and well-being" (Sangree, 1974: 66).

In the same light, Olaoba (2005:57) opines that ancestors worship and veneration presuppose the fact that "the living and the dead are in continual partnership and association in the day to day governance of the society." He sees the living elders as the representatives of the ancestors whose opinions and verdicts on matters must be respected and taken as sacrosanct. Mendosa (1976: 57) extends the argument to social relations when he notes that "the ancestors among the Sisala of Northern Ghana are also perceived as a reflection of social relations quite often extended to symbolic expression". Ray (1976: 147) sees ancestral rites in Africa as a process of ritualizing rules and social relations. West Africans generally believe that the ancestors and heroes still live on and that their interventions in ordinary day to day affairs of man are

incontrovertible. In the process of socialization of the young ones, this belief is passed from generation to generation through folktales, stories, anecdotes, taboos and ritual worships. Evidences abound in most cultures of Nigeria of theatrical pettiness in the ritual worship and veneration of ancestors and living elders on grounds of their forbearance, warfare achievements and physical prowess without reference to the immediate and far-reaching effects of their actions and inactions. For example, Achebe (1958) tacitly refers to this misplaced priority when he reveals that in the Igbo society man is celebrated for his physical prowess not on the strength of his intellect and emotional stability. In Achebe's 'Things fall apart' nobility is conferred on Okonkwo as a mark of his victory in wrestling bout, war gallantry as well as food production capacity. Okonkwo's violence and labour heroism has unfortunately permeated our democratic practices which is now dependent on possession of both state and non-state forces and material wealth.

Arguably, looking at the history of Nigeria, heroism is misplaced on some people (living and dead) whose beliefs, interests and behaviours have impeded Nigerian growth and development. One may ask the following questions:

- How many of the hitherto celebrated heroes have not engaged in egocentric undertakings at the expense of the general masses?
- How many were opportunists who were only favoured by the tide of their times or real achievements?
- How much of good have they delivered to the social collectivity? Beneath their actions what could we fathom-hegemonic pursuit, dynastic rule or liberalism?

Historical revelations in answering these questions are most perturbing. In the recent past, godfatherism has entered the vocabulary of African politics as an advanced form of clientelism. The term refers to an evolving institution of individuals in the political plane whose influences through force, money and manipulation strategically but tragically put them at a vantage position to dictate the pace and space of political practices of their times. Political godfathers are, thus, individuals who possess both economic and political powers to determine who and who are selected or voted into political offices. This is an emerging trend in African politics with its debilitating effect on political development and democratic transitions. In most instances, states are held down by unnecessary veneration of ancestors, living elders and godfathers. For example, the boiling sectarian and ethnic cauldrons that Nigeria represents in the last five decades are probably traceable to our historic past and emulation of virtues and behaviours of unworthy ancestors, living elders and godfathers who fan the ember of disunity. In the light of this awareness.

Albert (2012: 14) rightly notes that "modern African studies rather than just romanticize history of great Mali, would simply interpret the opulence involved in Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 - 1325 as evidence of a pre-colonial example of wasteful foreign trips and financial recklessness that now inflict contemporary African leaders." In order to get out of this problem of misplaced history, scholars argue that we need to have a more critical look at each of these ancestors, living elders and godfathers. For example, Raji-Oyelade (2013) opines that for Africans to forge ahead we need to search our innermost self and severe relationships with those that will hold us down. He opines that rebirth begins from within; it involves a revolutionary twist in the collective mind/consciousness. Above all, the desire to speak truthfully, even if this

leads to the road of self-immolation has become paramount if we have to get out of spiritual bondage. This appears to be the only way to the chambers of a national rebirth and development.

No doubt, individual nations and the African continent at large need emancipation not only from the clutches of imperialism but also from the strangle-hold of a past and present that are not worthy of celebration if we hope to secure a historically eminent future. Thus, this paper utilizes critical discourse analysis in the pattern advocated by behavioural school to confirm or challenge power and dominance in relation to deification, living eldership complex and clientelism. As power relations are salient to society and culture we focus on political development of Nigeria over the ages with reference to the above phenomena. The assumptions are that the problems in the personification of powers conferred in these personalities have mummified Nigerians and that we need to critically challenge them to find solutions to and ways out of our present social, political and religious predicaments.

2. Conceptual and theoretical discourse

Ancestors, living elders- complex and godfatherism will be conceptualized as they are used in this paper. The paper will also benefit from power exchange relations theory. Ancestor worship is a belief system which is a result of the indelible impressions, conceptions and perceptions ingrained in our psyche by experience over time of an existing relationship between the living and the dead. Thus, it is a product of man's mind and notions. Opoku (1973) opines that the ancestors are respected because they are our elders and our predecessors who have trodden the path of life which we, the living, are now treading. Respect, power, fear, protection and imparting of wisdom to the forbearers are central to ancestral system (Mendoza, 1976). Patrimonial perception of human relations is also a key issue in the concept of ancestor belief system and their deification. Fortes (1969: 30) describe the ancestor cult as "the transportation to the religions planes the relationships of parents and children in the ritualisation of filial piety." He notes that others describe it as an extension of human relations to the supernatural sphere or by others as a reflection of these relations and as their ritual and symbolic expression. Ancestors are thus members of the society that we deify after death.

Ancestors are perceived as having dominant powers and this belief creates fear of the unseen in the mind of adherents. Olaoba (2005: 141) opines that "the neglect of the ancestors who need recognition and propitiation can also bring about afflictions which can cause conflicts within the family, lineage, and society." Sangree (1974) and Calhoun (1980) paint the authority of the ancestors as pervasive and absolute. The foregoing positions about the ancestors suggest that there is a power asymmetry between the ancestors and the living. There seems an exaggerated perception of their infallibility even while on earth. It also amounts to arrogating too much power to them at the expense of the living members of the society who ordinarily should be architects of their own fortunes. However, there is no empirical evidence to validate this claim of superiority of the ancestors except that the claim remains in the psyche of men – mostly unquestionable, whimsical and imaginative psycho-social belief. The ancestors have a lot of responsibilities to their families and the divinities in the sociological realm (Clarke, 1930). The question is; how much of these have they dispensed?

Recognition of living elders as custodian of wisdom and repertoire of knowledge is wide spread in Nigeria. Living elders are the ones to be heard in a society where gerontocracy as a style of government dominates the socio-political sphere. This belief system is tagged "eldership complex" (Mendosa, 1976:60). The junior is expected to honour and obey anyone who is senior to him in age. This practice is in conformity with West African culture in which old age has a touch of venerability (Opoku, 1973). The living elders link the present with the past. Thus, respect, power and fear are used to sustain the institution of living elders as representatives of the ancestors on earth. Sangree (1974) avers that by stressing the structural and cultural continuities between elders and ancestors African societies are held together for peace endeavour. Mendosa (1976: 57) differs on the belief that "there is no significant difference between the dead ancestors and living elders in the beliefs and actions of the living". However, Sangree (1974: 70) notes that "indigenous distinction between the living and the dead reflects and reinforces structuring and resolution of inter-generational conflicts." Mendosa (1976: 63) also asserts that "there is a conceptual separation between the world of the living and the world of the dead ancestors, as well as, subtle comprehension of the similarities between the two spheres." He notes further that both living elders and ancestors have authority and power over juniors as both are to be feared and respected. Kopytopp (1971) describes the ancestors as the living elders as well as above living elders of the society who hold authority on behalf of other members because they are forbearers. Calhoun (1980: 313) argues that "the fact that ancestors are dead makes it easier to idealize them, to have them represent lineage values as opposed to personal interests or idiosyncrasies of judgment". In the same light, Oyebode (2012: 36) notes that the mogaji (the lineage head in Yorubaland) as "office-holding elder represents the ancestors of his family and his verdict on conflict issue is sacrosanct." Thus, he affirms that office-holding elder functions as traditional, religious, cultural, judicial and political controller of his people, and as a representative of the ancestors.

Godfatherism is an advanced form of clientelism in African political vocabulary. Whereas, clientelism stands as the intervening linkage between the ruler and the ruled, it is over celebrated in godfatherism. Omobowale (2006) sees political clientelism as a kind of connective cord between the political class and the grassroots. He further agrees with the description that sees the belief a process through which developmental expectations are met through loyalty to the patron and political elite. It is a phenomenon that is sustained through patron-client relationship that is mutually beneficial to the parties involved. Usually there is power asymmetry as godfatherism involves hero-worship and over adulation of the godfather by the godson who depends largely on the godfather's referent powers for the achievement of his political pursuit.

Although godfatherism is not new in Nigeria, it became more pronounced in Nigerian political history during the 2nd republic (1979 – 1983). Money bags, political elites and influential civil servants who benefited from the oil boom of the early 1970s trod the political space with unparallel and unethical imposition of candidates through manipulation of party primaries. These elites used financial and material inducements to win clients who became loyal to them. This trend has continued till date. Omobowale (2006: 106 – 107) avers that "godfathers gain honour and respect from the grassroots through their patronic (philanthropic) deeds." They openly identify with the low-class as well as romance effectively with those in political power. Through their interactions with the grassroots they identify their needs and strive to obtain them from the political class to be able to continue to enjoy respect and veneration. They also dispense favour for loyalty by making

use of their personal wealth to provide such needs. However, godfathers usually perceive the support they give either to their clients or the grassroots as a form of investment that must bring dividends in form of loyalty and material gains. Omobowale (2006) opines that political godfathers usually bring the political godsons to limelight of politics but usually end up controlling the godsons.

Most African cultures allow clientelism as the foundation on which trust and accountability are predicated. Clientelism is perceived as a platform for check and balances in the political sphere. Its provision of linkage between the ruled and the ruling class is incontrovertible. It also enhances social order within the social structures through satisfaction of valued interests of both parties i.e. the patron and the client. Its reciprocal nature ensures the satisfaction of the expectation of both parties thus resulting in inter-dependence which is critical to political relationship.

Power exchange relation theory is defined by Omobowale (2006) as a process involving social beings that interact with one another for the exchange of valued resources. Cook (2000) opines that behavior in this social exchange is a function of payoffs which are reciprocal. Power exchange relation theory presupposes a state of equilibrium whereby the parties in relationship will have mutual benefits. Beyond the ordinary man and man's affairs, relationship with the superhuman is also expectedly mutually rewarding. These rewards may be in form of love, support and provision of needs for the human to continue to feel obliged to continue to service the relationship. God also expects loyalty and worship from man.

However in power exchange relations theoretical frame, power is shared as nobody whether human or superhuman enjoys monopoly of power. Although there may be power asymmetry, Molm (1989) posits that the dominated too may exercise some levels of power to make the dominating conform to their wish provided they have greater punishment power to exercise. Though, the dominating have greater punishment power but he may feel some loss of power or relevance should the dominated withdraw from the relationship. This loss may be in form of loyalty, respect, reverence and worship. Thus, the dominated in unbalanced power relations has legitimate right to withdraw his loyalty. This withdrawal is much easy if the power of the dominating is not really seen but only exists as a conjecture of the mind. For example while the powers of the living elders and godfathers are real and physical, those of the ancestors are spiritual. Omobowale (2006: 30) avers that "if the dominated are deprived and subjected to injustice they may take recourse to opposition value to draw legitimacy for the exercise of power to contend against institutionalized powers (authorities) which have breached the norms of reciprocal and fair exchange." Douglas (1999) cites other authorities to conclude that subordinate entities will usually perceive predominant influence or control, regardless of intentions, as a potential threat and seek to realign the power relationship. Thus, the possibility of freedom from entanglement of dominant powers is explored in this paper using behavioral theoretical model.

3. Dominant power and retrograde politics in Nigeria

Behavioural school is "located in the skeptical philosophy of David Hume, the pragmatic worldview of William James and Charles S. Pierce and the instrumentalist outlook of John Dewey" (Asirvatham and Mistra

2008:803). It is argued that all of them stressed empiricism, voluntarism, individual activity and a practical approach to truth based on observation of an objective, pluralistic world. They state further that behavioural theorists rejected the speculative, idealist mode of thinking and the rationalistic or logical deductive analysis of the political thinkers belonging to the classical tradition. The behavioural point of view is a-historical because it does not accept hook, line and sinker stories passed from generation to generation. Thus, using this a-historical approach, the classification of every dead member of the family as ancestors seems general, abrasive and demeaning of the status of somebody who should presumably be the link between the Creator (God) and the creatures (the living beings). Marx describes unquestionable acceptance of myths as another instance of the man allowing an alien power to rule him which in reality is his own creation (Esirvatham and Misra). In an objective analysis, fundamentally, some dead and living members of the society may not be fit to perform this function of human – God relations officer. The dead or living elders, who erred, shirked their responsibilities and disrupted social order while on earth would not qualify to fit into our revered ancestors as their transformation to the spirit realm may not be beneficial to humanity. This thinking contradicts Olaoba's (2005: 145) position that "their transformation to the ancestral community makes ancestors infallible." It is hereby argued that bad dead members of the family who neither repented nor asked for forgiveness before death may continue to constitute cog in the wheel of progress of the society while in the spirit world. This thinking is in line with the personification of Esu Elegbara as an unrepentant member of the society while alive whose transfiguration further empowers him to unleash more terror on the society. Oyebode (2012: 146) notes that Christians and Muslims see Esu Elegbara as a malevolent spirit. Esu Elegbara is seen as a trickster, prankster or shower of dissension who is feared by both worshippers and non-worshippers. Thus, Esu Elegbara, who incidentally belonged to the early progenitors of man, should not enjoy veneration. However, in some traditional cultures in Nigeria, Esu Elegbara occupies a respectable position in the spiritual consciousness of worshippers who deified and venerate him as a both benevolent and malevolent spirit. Esu Elegbara is thus perceived as harbinger of good and bad. The good is in his benevolence while the bad emanates from his malevolence. The present crops of leadership in the country are perceived to be shuttling in between these paradigms encapsulated in the Esu Elegbara modicum. Thus, whenever they do badly, they blame Esu Elegbara for their action or inaction.

Olaoba (2005) ascertains that the supernatural of which the ancestors belong wields a lot of moral influence on the day-to-day progression of human affairs. This means that those whose deeds were immoral or amoral while on earth should not qualify to enjoy veneration, worship or ritualisation. As noted by Napoleon (2013) ancestors who were locked in perpetual warfare and jaguars, raiding of one another incessantly and who made woman the cause of their warfare would not fit into our social category of influential personalities. In his study of the Yanomanmo of Venezuela and Brazil he tries to answer the question; what were our early ancestors really like as they accomplished the transition from hunter-gathering hands to more complex settled society? Thus, for the purpose of this paper and in line with our rethink on the concept of ancestor, ancestors will at the end of the discourse be limited to only those political and historic figures or deceased members of society whose sojourn, hegemonic or colossus expeditious threading on earth was and is still globally relevant to social, political and economic progress of their people. It is not by ascendancy but by achievement.

Power exchange relation in Nigeria is a concern for scholarship. Most often the dominating lords himself over the dominated. The dominating directly or indirectly controls the apparatus of the state. This control enables him to dole out whatever pleases him from the patrimony. However, Molm (1989) avers that though the 'exchange relation may be unbalanced, its reciprocal nature ensures the satisfaction of the expectations of both parties and this creates inter-dependence." Thus, the patron-client relationship is mutually reinforcing in politics in Nigeria. However, in order to sustain this relationship the patron and the client enter a kind of gang-up relationship at the expense of the masses. In Nigeria, for example, they both steal the resources of the state and concentrate powers in the hands of a few who are ready to dispense favour in return for loyalty. They control the political and resources of the state in ways that are similar to pre-colonial Nigerian experience which was full of actions and inactions by our progenitors and forbears that revealed egocentric power pursuit at the expense of the state. These actions included inter-tribal warfare, marauding and other salvage behaviours.

Going down memory lane, while western cultures were busy pursuing technological advancement, agricultural development and economic revolution, most Nigerian progenitors were engaged in myopic and self-centred pursuits. Their actions and inactions accounted and is still accounting for the nation's underdevelopment. In fact, when the Europeans came they tagged Africa as a "dark continent". Though, this was unfair and exaggerated given the historical and archeological evidences that Egypt was the cradle of civilization. But alas! What have our progenitors now called ancestors done to match the global trend towards better living condition? 16th – 19th century marked the period when civilization was reversed in Nigeria as a result of intra-tribal and inter-tribal wars. Adesote and Ajisola (2012: 36) note that "this was a period when flourishing towns were destroyed". Awe (1964: 140) cites other authorities to note that "the interior tribes were continually warring with each other and that these civil wars and marauding continued intermittently until the definite occupation of the hinterland in 1897".

Although extensive military pacification was required to subdue the restive natives who opposed colonialism, many African leaders were busy fighting wars of supremacy with one another. Individual African political and religious leaders were engaged in expansionist wars within. They did not come together to resist colonialism rather these leaders sought the support of white explorers, slave traders and strategists to engage their kinsmen in wars. They bought guns and ammunitions from European traders in exchange for African slaves. Thus, it was possible to subdue Benin Kingdom in 1897, Sokoto Caliphate in 1903 and Lagos in 1821. Although sovereignty of African states was tactically robbed by the colonial powers with great efforts using the logic of predation, violence and oppression it was made possible with the greed of our past leaders who put self interests above the corporate interests of their nations. This theory is evident in the complicity of traditional political leadership with European powers even till date.

A critical review of events that led to colonization of African nations would reveal bravery, cowardice and complicity with European colonizers. Personalities like King Jaja of Opobo and Ibadan chiefs gallantly resisted western hegemony and only "being browse beaten to submission" by stronger power (Awe 1964:327). However, other personalities like Oba Dosumu of Lagos and Oba of Dahomy and other slave traders condescended to western control with furtive resistance and collaboration in slave trading. Lack of bravery and wisdom on the part of those who colluded with slave traders to rid Nigerians of their freedom

was queried by Duru (2013: 12) thus: "What could make an umbrella to be worth 40 human lives and a medium sized-mirror to exchange for 20 persons? Why would 10 able bodied men and women be worth not more than 10 coral beads? It is simply a language of slavery, oppression and dehumanization". Exploits of western powers led to competition, inequality, expansion and subjugation of African nations with the complicity of a few powerful natives who were before colonialism engaged in inhuman trades. Adesote and Ajisola (2013) rightly note that before the advent of European slave trade, there existed internal slave trade and pawnship (iwofa) system in Yorubaland. This was not peculiar to Yorubaland as all cultures in Nigeria also had ways of enslaving the less privileged members of the society. Alas! Are these traders in human beings the ones we venerate today? Does their inhumanity to man worthy of celebration?

Promotion of African values and cultural practices dominated our struggle for independence, nationalism and post-independence ideologies. Pan Africanist introduced Afrocentric models of development in both our economic and political pursuits. These Afrocentric models were noticeable in Julius Nyerere's Ujama, Nkruma's African socialist movement, Muammar Gadaffi's Jamahiriya, Senghor's theory of African cultural superiority, as well as African communitarianism. Other African leaders who promoted wholesome African cultural renaissance were Patrick Lumunba of Congo, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Sekou Toure of Guinea (Alozie (2012). In the present dispensation, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is still lurked in his struggle with western power over his promotion of land reforms in his country whereby blacks will take over usurped farmlands from whites. Unfortunately, most of these leaders disrupted their ideological pursuits with sit-tight syndrome which later made them loose focus and became unpopular in their countries. For example Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana lost focus as a result of his embrace of occultism to retain power and perpetuate his regime. Thus while Awolowo remains a hero and ancestor of repute, Late General Sanni Abacha continues to attract wide condemnation for his human right abuse records. In the same vein, while Nelson Mandela would easily pass as a legend for promoting transitional democracy in South Africa, General Ibrahim Babangida could not enjoy the same veneration for scuttling democratic ideals in Nigeria for several years.

Oracular consultation of ancestors, deities and gods remains a retrogressive cultural practice in Nigeria till date especially while selecting traditional leaders. In most instances this consultation is skewed in favour of unpopular candidates who merely enjoy patronage of the living elders. Thus ancestor worship becomes a divisive power to cheat the majority. This is parochial and retrogressive power relations. Injustice is often obtained through monetization of political and selection processes. Moneybags often constitute themselves as 'living elders' at the expense of the aged who are poor especially in the Igbo society where wealth is power.

Traditional and political leadership is gradually loosing its pride of place as a result of indiscipline. Although, traditional chieftaincy institutions represented by the Sarkis, Emir, Obi, Obongo, Oba and others typify the height of living elders complex, many actions and inactions of the custodians of great traditional institutions have brought into disrepute their sacredness. Two instances readily come to mind because of media publicity given to them. One was the case of the deposed Deji of Akure, Oba Adesina who fought in the public with his estranged wife. Second was the case of Owa of Ilowa who allegedly raped a youth service corps member and allegedly justified his action. Many of such conducts abound among the custodians of Nigerian cultures. Albert (2012: 157) affirms that "modern political leaders have seen traditional political leaders as rivals and as impediment to their aspirations or as instruments to be manipulated and co-opted to

achieve their goals.” Because of material gains and zeal to remain relevant most of the traditional leaders have become pawns in the hands of the political class. They are co-travellers in the suppression of the wishes of the masses.

It is a common practice in Nigeria to use big ancestors’ names to deceive the populace. While the Northerners use Uthman Dan Fodio and Ahmadu Bello, the westerners bank on names like Oduduwa and Obafemi Awolowo and the Easterners use Nnamdi Azikwe and Odumegwu Ojukwu to continue to gain political relevance. They claim to be adherents of their philosophies during electioneering whereas on getting into political offices they pursue different agendas. Even at death some of these revered personalities remain kingmakers whose names people throw about to gain political favour. In the present political dispensation, offspring of deceased politicians are compensated with plum political jobs irrespective of their progenitors’ contributions to our present state of want. Most times nobody weighed their contributions to know if their children deserve what are being given to them. Most of these children also turn out to be a disappointment like their parents because they lack enviable pedigree.

Marginalization of the youths as a result of recycling of living elders in the political space is widespread in Nigeria. These elders are either retired Military Officers who truncated democracy for twenty nine years or their collaborators who have looted our treasury in the past. Most other living elders are complacent except for a few activists like Wole Soyinka, Bala Usman, Abubakar Umar, Sheu Sanni, Femi Aborisade, Femi Falana and Ogbonaya Onu who continue to resist dictatorship and imperialism. Misappropriation of oil subsidy funds in Nigeria in 2011 revealed complicity on the part of the living elders with their collaborators in government.

Excessive adulation of an individual is foolish and unproductive. Over idolization, glorification, romanticisation and idealization of all living elders is detrimental to our personal and societal growth because they only emphasise the status quos. Thus, when ancestor cult and living elders’ complex roll into one in the psyche of our body politics they tendentiously mummify the political actors either as electorate or contestants. Nigeria’s decline in democratic culture may be traced to the imposition of candidates by the elders as a result of idolatry respect and recognition we give even to undeserved elders. Living elders should be assessed and respected on the values of their intelligence, skill, courage, honour, thoughtfulness, loyalty and fairness in inter-personal relationships. When there is a conflict between what an elder wants for himself and what is best for the society, the resolution must be in favour of the society. Commenting on the historical descent and decadent political experience in Nigeria, Soyinka (2013) notes that:

“Individually and collectively, we are at war, and the enemy is not hidden. Of its own relation it has given itself name, a profile and an agenda. Others have spring up, geared to outdo their obsessed predecessors. Let each community look into its past, and see how both inertia and covert gleefulness have fuelled the raging inferno.”

Some scholars see godfatherism or clientilism as a factor militating against entrenchment of democratic principles cum good governance in Africa. They believe it sustains corruption, autocratic rule, mediocrity, patrimonialism and personalization of power. The case of Anambra state in Nigeria is illustrative of the

negative impact of godfatherism on good governance culture. Between 1999 and 2007 Anambra state has been perturbed with godfatherism syndrome; a cankerworm that ate deep into the polity and economic situation of the state. It endangered the polity as it promoted kleptomaniac diversion of public funds by godfathers who insisted on taking certain percentage of state revenue for personal use. Failure of the godsons to heed their demands at a stage led to their unceremonious exit from government house. Omobowale's (2006: ii) findings on client- patron relationship reveals that political "clientelism has hindered the direct access of clients to resources", yet the patrons seem to be more interested in their individual survival than in that of their clients.

Dependency syndrome no doubt entrenches underdevelopment of the polity. There is a kind of unbalanced power relations between the godfather and the godson which usually creates mutual suspicion and threat to the political well-being of the state. In a bid to retain his position, the godfather sometimes becomes despotic using non-state forces to secure his position. This was exactly the case in the Adedibu-Ladoja saga in Oyo state between 2005 and 2007 which resulted in the impeachment of incumbent governor and installation of godson as a puppet governor for almost five years.

In Nigeria, deification, gerontocracy and clientelism rather than promote good political culture have become umbrella for the promotion of bad governance. They are all related to the cultural model under which spirituality, materialism and dominance cultures are used to perpetrate and perpetuate impunity and injustice. Many dead and living elders promoted and are still promoting ethnic and sectional interests which have hindered Nigeria's journey towards nationhood.

4. Chatting a new course

In real life situation, though the ancestors, living elders and godfathers may possess overwhelming powers because of ascendancy, referent powers or control of resources, yet the clients or adherents of such faith and belief may sometimes opt out of the relationship to improve their lots. This withdrawal could be illustrated with adherents of new faiths (Islam and Christianity) who have abandoned ancestor worship without any obvious proof of punishment or affliction from the dominating power. Also, godfather and godson relationships have witnessed contractual break-ups as a result of the excesses of the dominating power. In Nigerian political history, Chris Uba vs Chris Ngige of Anambra State, Olusola Saraki vs Muhammed Lawal of Kwara State and Lamid Adedibu vs Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo State sagas are clear demonstrations of failure of power exchange relations which are improperly skewed. It must be noted that sometimes revolt against the dominating power results in conflicts or acts of misdemeanor which are usually temporary but necessary to achieve a turn-around in the polity. Historical evidences point to the triumph of the dominated. This thinking is in line with the concept of freedom as non-domination. Soyinka (2013) conceives of this position as theology of freedom which should not submit to the tyranny of the few.

Obviously, what we need in Nigeria today is the management of power relations existing in our past and present socio-economic experience. As highlighted in the review of Dewey's book, *An exegesis of democratic vision*, Rogers (2009) sees a method of managing power relations in Dewey's proposition. According to him,

Dewey's point is that there is transactional relationship among self, others and the world resulting from the movement and disruption in life which he called 'problems'. To him, Dewey insists that faith is an imaginative projection of belief in still-to-be realised potentialities, not just in the existence of divine objects. This belief we must not allow to hold us than in the pursuit of greater enterprise. Rogers (2002) opines that since the care of the self is dependent both prospectively and retrospectively on the seen and unseen of nature, man must act to liberate self. Thus, Dewey's idea of religious experience returns the objects of faith to the natural world and its inherent possibilities, rather than sequester those objects to some supersensible or supernatural realm. It is in our perception of these phenomena as natural that we can liberate our minds and seek justice in our power relations with the dead, the living elders and godfathers. Modern conception of liberal society believes that the most urgent part of human task is to supply a critique of religion and tradition. This critique is intended to liberate political life from the influence of religious or traditional myths or superstition. Thus, the belief that angry ancestors may be responsible for enormous human sufferings, in form of spiritual torment and physical misery, are largely superstitious and must be discarded. Hume (1948) sees this capacity in man to assert himself when he states that whatsoever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as not-existent. In light of the foregoing, he asserts that it is only experience which teaches us the nature and boundary of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another. Knowledge is the source of all human actions and behaviours which we must make to count in this instance.

In order to liberate our minds from cultural practices that will hold us down, Ekeanyanwu (2012: 44) recommends that "we should not mistake this liberation from the past as cultural imperialism." He explains that cultural development is the synchronization of indigenous cultural values and norms with that of the global community for the benefit of the society. In the same vein, the discourse in this paper should not be mistaken as cultural imperialism or total rejection of deification, gerontocracy and clientelism but a recommendation of a cautious selection of those that qualify to enjoy such statuses. Soyinka (2013) opines that now is the time to close ranks among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria and make up for past derelictions in order to protect our hard earned freedom against any threat. The marginalized who have been deceived through the triplet coinages of ancestor worship, living elders' complex and godfatherism need to shed the toga of inferiority. Gramsci's (1971) entreaty is relevant in assuming balance of power. He notes that:

"Power is seldom absolute; groups may more or less control other groups, or only control them in specific situations on social domains. Dominated group may more or less resist, accept, condone, comply with or legitimate such power and even find it natural. Power may become hegemonic if allowed to thrive through laws, consensus or norms."

What Nigerians have done hitherto is to condone, comply with and legitimate such powers of the ancestors, living elders and godfathers. Now is the time to challenge such powers and ask fundamental questions as to the worthiness of individual living or dead in our classification and veneration. These questions border on historical, ideological, interpretative and explanatory discourse of their relevance to societal well-being and promotion of good governance cultures. These questions may include among others:

- In what ways had their pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial conducts enhanced Nigerian development?
- What roles had been played by individuals; dead or living elders that have put us in the present situation, good or bad?
- What is the doctrinal relevance of these practices to liberal democracy?

5. Conclusion

This paper notes that the powers conferred on these venerated personalities have mummified Nigerians and have ingloriously permeated political thinking. The paper also avers that we all share the guilt in the present predicament of Nigeria as a backward looking nation. We are guilty either through our allegiance to a faulty past or our selection of living mentors whose contributions to nation-building have been retrogressive. Raji-Oyelade (2012: 11) notes that:

We all try to react to the sense of a nation, either through denial, appropriation or reversion of the existing or developing national culture. I think we contribute in our own ways to the rebirth, death or stillbirth of our nation, depending on our imaginative response to the concept of nationality.

The foregoing suggests that our greatest undoing is our attachment to the inglorious past and present which we celebrate and venerate. Our failure is in our inability to decipher, separate and distinguish achievements and foibles. We tend to lump greatness with ascendancy and we respect mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy. For us to progress as a nation we need to remove the albatross of fear, affliction and delusion arising from misplaced judgment of who and who qualify to be our reference points in our trajectory towards democratic excellence. We need to create free minds that have the capacity to select or reject elders, ancestors, heroes and godfathers depending on their individual worth. Traits like physical prowess, wealth, possession of force and arrogant display of profligacy should not be part of our criteria for recommending veneration and celebration. Those who developed political estates which later crumbled as a result of greed, selfishness and expansionist ideology should not enjoy a pat in the back. This paper is not a recital of human negligence or foibles that only stirs-up negative memories and feelings of violation of humanity, it celebrates excellence and social relations using ethical framework. The burden of guilt is on the complacent while the martyrdom of the gallant ones remains indelible in the foregoing discourse. Ancestors, living-elders and godfathers who resisted oppression, suppression, colonialism, slavery and dominance of the elites in Nigeria state all fit into our memory of the glorious past, enviable present and bright future.

Consequently, this paper advocates a revolution of mindset, a walk away from the retrogressive and allegiance to integrity, good conscience, self-esteem and service to humanity. Thus, in stirring this debate, this paper argues that merely describing deification, gerontocracy and clientelism as discourse issues in religion and politics is not enough. We must continue to explain these terms as properties of social interactions which constitute mundane and spiritual problems as well as solutions to our political

experiences as a nation. We must be concerned with the way social and spiritual powers' dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted to enhance values in the Nigerian society. Thus the social and political contexts of the existence of ancestors, living-elders and godfathers in our psyche calls for constant review in order to purge ourselves of fear arising from our entanglement to unseen and seen dominant powers.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958), *Things fall apart*, Heinemann, Ibadan.
- Adesote, A. and Ajisola, O. (2012), "A critical analysis of the socio- economic effects of inter-communal conflicts in Yorubaland", Albert, I (Ed), *A History of social conflict and conflict management in Nigeria, A festschrift for Professor Biodun Adediran*, Peace and Conflict Studies Programme in collaboration with John Archers (Publishers) Limited, Ibadan, p. 34 – 43.
- Albert, I. (2012), "Track 5 diplomacy: rethinking African studies beyond the culture and civilization thesis", Paper presented at the Multi-disciplinary discourse, PG School, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Alozie, E. (2012), "Mass media and national development: The ongoing debate on development communication/journalism, Ekeanyanwu, N. Ngou, S and Sobowale, I. (Eds), Critique on application of communication theories, Covenant University Press, Ota.
- Asirvatham, E. and Misra, K. (2008) *Political Theory*, S. Chand & Company PVT. Ltd New Delhi.
- Awe, B. (1964), *The rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba power in the nineteenth century*, Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Oxford University. London.
- Calhoun, C. (1980), "The authority of ancestors: a sociological reconsideration of Fortes's Tallensi in response to Fortes's critics", *MAN*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 304-319.
- Clarke, E. (1930), "The sociological significance of ancestor-worship in Ashanti", *Africa*, Vol. 3, pp. 431 – 470.
- Cook, K. (2000), "Social exchange theory", Borgath, E. and Montgomery, R. (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Macmillan Reference U.S.A., New York, pp. 2669 – 2676.
- Douglas, H. (1999), *Dictionary of conflict resolution*, Jossey- Bass Inc. Publisher, California.
- Duru, I. (2013), "Behold an umbrella worth 40 human bird!", *The Guardian*, January 19, 2013, p. 12.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. (2012), "Theorizing cultural development vis-à-vis cultural imperialism theory." Ekeanyanwu, N. Ngou, S. and Sobowale, I. (Eds.), *Critique on application of communication theories*, Covenant University Press, Ota, pp.28– 40.
- Fortes, M. (1969), *Kingship and the social order*, Aldine-Atherton, Chicago.
- Gramsci, A. (1971), *Selection from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, International Publisher, New York, NY.

- Hume, D. (1948), *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*, Norman Kemp Smith (Ed.), Social Science Publishers, New York, NY.
- Inokoba, P. & Ebienfa, K. (2013), "Interrogating transnational organised crime as a security threat to the West African Sub-Region", *Journal of the Society of Peace Studies and Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 93 – 115.
- Kopytopp, I. (1971), "Ancestors and elders in Africa", *Africa*, Vol xiii No 2, pp. 128-142.
- Mendoza, E. (1976), "Elders, office-holders, and ancestors among the Sisala of Northern Ghana", *Africa*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 57 – 65.
- Molm, L. (1989), "The conversion of power imbalance to power use", *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 44, pp. 151 – 163.
- Napoleon, C. (2013), *Noble savage, dangerous tribes: An anthropologists war stories*.
- Olaoba, O. (2005), "Ancestral focus and the process of conflict resolution". Albert I, (Ed.), *Perspectives on peace and conflict in Africa*. Essays in Honour of General (Dr) Abdulsalami A. Abubakar, John Archers (Publishers) Ltd, Ibadan, pp.47- 63.
- Omobowale, A. (2006), *Political clientelism and rural development in selected communities in Ibadan, Nigeria*, Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Opoku, K. (1973), *West African traditional religion*, Fep International Private Ltd., Accra.
- Oyebode, M. (2012), *The mogaji institution and conflict management in Ibadan*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Raji-Oyelade, A. (2013), *Fluent in(ter)ventions: webs of the literary discipline*, An Inaugural Lecture 2012/2013, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Ray, B. (1976), *African religions – symbol, ritual and community*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Incor., p. 147. 161.
- Rogers, M. (2002), "The undiscovered Dewey: religion, morality and the ethos of democracy", *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, pp. 258 – 259.
- Sangree, W. (1974), "Youths as elders and infants as ancestors: the complementing of alternative generations, both living and dead in Tiriki, Kenya and Irigwe, Nigeria", *Africa*, Vol. 44, No 1, , pp. 65 – 70.
- Soyinka, W. (2013), "Soyinka blames insecurity others on weak leadership: Being extract of acceptance speech at the Inaugural award of the Obafemi Awolowo Prize for Leadership in Lagos, on Wednesday, March 6, 2013." *The Guardian*, Thursday, March 7, 2013, pp. 1 – 2.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2010), *Report on Transnational Organised Crime*.