

Fetish Oath Taking in Nigerian Politics and Administration: Bane of Development

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ABSTRACT This article is of the view that godfatherism and fetish oath taking through the use of juju, witchcraft and voodooism have negatively affected the development of Nigeria. In order to justify this view, a brief introduction of the Nigerian State was made, along with conceptual clarifications, which were followed with the review of related literature. Some of the reasons for fetish oath taking were posited, while the impacts of fetish oath taking on development in Nigeria were identified. Seven-point recommendations for the amelioration of the dilemma of development were articulated, and the article concludes that unless there is proper implementation of the posited recommendations, coupled with attitudinal change and adequate re-orientation of the political class and their collaborators, majority of Nigerians will continue to live in extreme poverty and the nation will remain underdeveloped.

INTRODUCTION

Government Houses across Nigeria are now centres for the practice of juju, witchcraft and voodoo (Emeka 2003). What a tragedy for our nation. No wonder why we are not making progress as a nation, despite all the fasting and prayers by the various religious groups, together with the abundant human and material resources available in the country. It has dawned on political aspirants that selection of public office holders had overtaken the constitutional provisions for genuine election, as election in Nigeria is now more of rituals than real voting. Some of our political office aspirants with scant honour and integrity have no option, but to accept whatever their godfathers want them to do in order for them to achieve their political desires, and this includes fetish oath taking and issuing of postdated cheques, just to mention a few (Odivwri 2005). Nigeria as a nation has been lacking honest, visionary and dedicated leadership since independence in 1960, and more recently, since the current enthronement of democratic principles in 1999. Who will believe that in spite of the natural and human resources available in Nigeria, it still continues to be in the forefront of poverty-striven nations of the world? Our present group of leaders acts without the fear of God and as such their consciences have been painted black, and therefore, have decided to enthrone extreme poverty, unemployment, corruption, bad leadership and lack of development in Nigeria, and on Nigerians.

Godfatherism, magnetization of the political process and the rigging of elections by powerful cabals are some of the factors that have compelled desperate political or public office seekers to resort to fetish oath taking or issuing of postdated cheques for them to be assured of winning or occupying the positions of their hearts' desire. The fetish oaths are meant to tie the beneficiaries to the sting of the godfathers. The effect of the above unfortunate situation is that governance in Nigeria at virtually all levels is run by remote controls; formulation of policies is influenced by persons who are far away from government, but have secured the absolute loyalty and allegiance of those who are on the seat of power (Onwuzurigbo 2005).

Furthermore, where sound policies have been enunciated for the purposes of records and public appreciation, their implementations are often subjected to the whims and caprices of those who are pulling the levels of power/government from outside (that is, the godfathers/oath givers) (Onwuzurigbo 2005). The Nigerian people become the immediate losers in this kind of unwholesome arrangement, as development suffers. Regrettably, the fears of deities and fetish objects have replaced the fear of God in the minds of our political leaders and bureaucrats. This is one of the major reasons why Nigeria is retrogressing in terms of income per capita and remains underdeveloped 50 years after independence.

Oath taking in Nigeria is affecting our governance negatively: as oath takers are under bond

not to reveal the secrets of the oath administration even if such is injurious to the interest of the larger public to whom they have sworn by the Constitution to protect (Okorie 2009). A lot of insinuations have been made about Nigeria's underdevelopment over the years. Some people claim that the longer incursion of military rule have been the bane of our underdevelopment, others claim that our attitude to get rich quick and the manner at which we idolize wealth instead of principles are the causes of our problems. Some others are of the opinion that Nigeria's crisis is a result of leadership failure, while others look at it from the angle of corruption and greed on the part of Nigerians (Emeka 2003).

There is no gainsaying the fact that fetish oath taking undermines public interest and results in governance failure, as public office holders will only be loyal to their godfathers and the respective deities that they have sworn to at the expense of the Nigerian state. No society with the above attributes would ever develop because the godfathers and their followers would weaken governance, and do what pleases them at the detriment of the state.

Conceptual Clarifications

Oath taking, according to Odumakin, is a distortion of value in politics to the extent that it transfers allegiance from the system to an individual, who for raw ambition or depravity, decides to take the place of God in the life of the oath takers. It is a sign of degeneracy that oaths are taken, whether for loyalty and/or monetary/pecuniary gain in our politics. It presupposes the harboring of an act that is not for the public good, as no politician with altruistic purpose will subject fellow citizens to oath taking rituals. The ultimate aim is to short-change the public good by privatizing public affairs through a fetish cage (Odumakin 2009).

Okorie sees oath taking in the traditional sense as a situation where absolute loyalty or adherence to certain agreement and conditionality is prescribed and administered in the beneficiaries of the agreement, and the exercise is usually fetish. It is expected that whoever has taken such oath will not escape the punishment or sanction of a certain supernatural force or deity if the oath is flouted (Okorie 2009).

In the process of fetish oath taking, various juju shrines are usually the beehive of their activities. Such shrines include, Ayelala, Ogun,

Shongo, Okija, Ogboni, Asigidi and Oronmila just to mention a few. These are perceived to be powerful deities that majority of Nigerian politicians fear more than their creator – God.

Juju, according to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English is "a charm or fetish activity of some West African people; it is a supernatural power attributed to this activity" (Thompson 1998).

Witchcraft, which is "the use of magic, sorcery or a bewitching charm" (Thompson 1998) is also adopted by godfathers through the use of juju priests to manipulate public office holders in Nigerian Politics and Administration. For example, recently the Chairman of the Board of Niger Delta Development Commission gave the sum of N800 million (US\$5.1 million) to a witch-doctor to assist him consolidate his position as the Chairman of the Board, and one wonders if that amount would not have assisted in the development of public infrastructures in the country (Iyoha 2006). Although the practice of witchcraft is not empirical, the practitioners and those who believe in them are usually very loyal to them at the expense of every other thing.

It is important to state here that, voodooism which is the use of or belief in religious witchcraft as practiced among blacks has become one of the instruments of secret oath taking in Nigerian Politics and Public Administration.

The 7th Schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for Public Office Oath Taking using our various open religious beliefs to protect and uphold the Constitution and the interest of Nigerians whose resources they are to manage on their behalf. Unfortunately and regrettably too, godfathers in Nigerian Politics and Public Administration have shifted attention from the Constitutional provision for public office oath taking to secret and fetish oath taking geared towards their firm grip of all the instruments of governance and by extension perpetuate their wealth at the expense of Nigerians (Okorie 2009). This has continued to militate against the development of Nigeria since independence as over 70% of Nigerians are now living in extreme poverty, despite the huge mineral and human resources that God had endowed the nation with (Transparency International 1997).

Godfather

- (a) Godfather is that man who has enormous resources at his disposal with little or no

credibility, he wants the rostrum of social leadership, wielding the weapon of wealth with his awesome financial influence, and he assumes some vapor-coated charisma. This is the type that nudges the larger majority of society to him, not because of so much belief in his person or ideas, but more because of the immediate pecuniary benefits that rewards such fellowship. Persons in this category of godfathers in Nigeria include: Lamidi Adedibu, Chris Uba, Tony Anenih, Olusola Saraki, Olu-segun Obasanjo, amongst others (Oviasuyi 2009).

- (b) On the other hand, godfather is that man who has enormous goodwill and respect of the people, so much that his belief system represents those of his people. Wherever he points, people follow. His leadership attribute endears him to his people (Odivwri 2003). Persons in this category of godfathers in Nigeria include: Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Late Mallam Aminu Kano, Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Samuel Ogbemudia (before he expired), Jim Nwobodo (before he expired) amongst others (Oviasuyi 2009).

Godfatherism

Richard Joseph defines godfatherism as the process by which an individual establishes links with a given institutional hierarchy in the expectation of favoured treatment (Onwuzuruigbo 2005).

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Adherence to oaths of secrecy among practitioners is often a barrier to academic investigation, a boundary held by the faithful in accordance with the Word, and often repudiated by the historian. Nevertheless, the Oath has endured many forms of scorn, and no doubt shall endure that of the scholar as well.

Oath, from the Anglo Saxon *eoth*, is an explicate pledge invoking a god, spirit, ancestor, place, or sacred object as witness unto the truth of the words sworn, and is among the most ancient forms of ritual solemnity. A much-venerated pagan relic is the Hippocratic Oath, a pledge of medical ethics held in high esteem among healers from the 1st century onward. Its preamble calls forward the gods of curing to bear witness to the oath: "I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all

the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses..." The oath concludes by pronouncing that he who remains true to the oath shall prosper, while he who does not shall attain 'the opposite lot', inviting the scrutiny of the gods themselves upon his actions. Pagan oaths to trees, the sky, and *genii loci* are found at the level of votary practice, as well as swearing by the saints and the hair upon God's head, attested in diverse Christian homilies and penitentials (Schulke 2005).

The gravity of an oath's binding nature is attested in ancient English law, where persons known as "Oath-Helpers" were called upon to vouchsafe the oath of another person in the capacity of witness. The power of oaths endures in modern court proceedings and is bolstered by severe penalties for perjury. Among Christians, the seventeenth-century Protestation Oath, sworn against papist doctrine, fulfilled a function of dividing friend from foe, and was accorded a degree of ritual status (Gaskill 1992). Other Christian sects, such as Quakers and Anabaptists, prosecute taboos on oath-taking, based on the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5 to *swear not at all* (Matt 5:34).

Indeed, oaths of secrecy among practitioners of the magical arts are a feature of sorcery from the most ancient records. As Hans Dieter Betz has observed, certain portions of the corpus of Greek Magical Papyri are governed by a complexity of magical protocols, including concealing divine names and the initiatic concerns of mystery-cults (Betz 1962). The ancient association between magic and oath endures in the Hebrew *shaba*, bearing the dual meaning 'oath' and 'seven'. In some traditions, an oath sworn seven times is fully bound, and idiomatic usages refer to 'sevening oneself' in the context of being oath-bound. Similar concepts can be found in the folk magic of Britain and America, relating to the number three, and those who are *thrice sworn*. Such oaths may be sworn in the presence of trees or stones regarded as local gods, and votive offerings may be given. Pledges taken amid fairy rings, stone circles, or in caves bind the swearer in the presence of the Good Folk, just as the troth of graveyards is adumbrated by the ancestral shades, the presence of the departed serving as 'magical hands' to witness the vow. In other cases, Oaths within the Round of Art may be affirmations of transcarnative spirit-pacts between groups or individuals (Schulke 2005).

Venerated as well are traditions of swearing oaths upon objects bearing especially powerful numina, such as the bones of one's ancestors. By this is the Word vouchsafed in the dark bosom of the Mighty Dead, who may dispense boon or curse in accordance with troth, and worthiness of deed in the eyes of the ancestral spirits. This is an enduring feature of folk magic, be it Christian, Heathen, or of mixed religious pedigree, and serve as a reminder to the Seeker that his or her pledges are binding to the grave, and indeed beyond. Scottish oath-stones, such as the Baul Muluy, a stone amulet used in Arran for oath-taking, well illustrate the power such relics command. The Black-Stones of Iona were so named because of the wretched misfortune which fell upon those who had broken oaths sworn upon them (MacInlay 1978). Within modern forms of Traditional Craft and folk tradition, magical oaths are taken upon cross-roads, Bibles, standing stones, and certain kinds of graves. In addition to their unique occult powers in the capacity of fetish, objects and places so sworn upon forge the fire-brand of the moment's enchantment, becoming a vivified mark bridging matter and spirit. In the medieval and early modern eras, witchcraft persecutors accorded great significance to the diabolic pact, and some modern scholars have been quick to minimize the importance of this historical strand. However, oaths unto spirits, fair and foul, were well known in classic occult literature, such as *The Book of the Sacred Magic Abramelin the Mage*, which sought sorcerous power through ascetic Yahwistic devotion. While condemning various 'witches' encountered in his wanderings for engaging the diabolic pact, the author also presented formulae for animating corpses, unleashing war, and command over various princes of Hell (Schulke 2005).

All oaths are fundamentally a binding, the quintessential modality of the sorcerer, and thereby the witch. The ancient near eastern sorcerer rendered as *hbr hbr*, and variously translated as "binder" or "spell-binder", is thought to stem from a Semitic word meaning "to bind", and in ancient references appears associated with magical oaths (Jeffers as quoted by Schulke 2005).

If an oath is easily broken, it is often the case that the strength and power of its bond were of insufficient integrity to begin with. However, as with all forms of mundane commitment, one's honour, both among the gods and men, is the

issue at stake. In the case of breaking magical oath, the erosion of one's honour before the spirits may result in a self-invoked curse or the spirit-allies forsaking the practitioner. This was well understood in ancient Mesopotamia, for the spirit of oath was *mamitu*, sometimes regarded as a demon, and other times a goddess, having the power not only to threaten retribution upon oath-breakers but also to deliver them a curse (Abusch as quoted by Schulke 2005).

Upon an Oath one does not swear intent, nor aspiration to fulfilment, nor upon what provisions of the Oath seem most convenient. Rather, one's 'life, death, blood and breath' are wholly committed to the fates in entirety, or not at all. It is, thus, wise to embrace the pagan origin of the Holy Sacrament, for the meaning of *sacramentum* is 'oath'. Its original usage referred to the pledge taken, under Roman law, between parties engaged in lawsuit. The *sacramentum* was thus binding before the gods, and those taking oath placed both their lives and possessions in their hands (Abusch as quoted by Schulke 2005). It may be rightly spoken that the acts of oath-breaking and swearing falsely by their nature repudiate belief in the power of the gods and spirits.

REASONS FOR FETISH OATH TAKING IN NIGERIAN POLITICS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Some of the following reasons have been posited on why politicians take to fetish oath prior to election into elective positions or political appointments:

- (1) A candidate would need money to bribe electoral officers to facilitate rigging, hire thugs to hijack ballot boxes and papers, induce police and other security officials not only to look the other way while electoral crimes are being committed, but also to arrest the victims and destroy the evidences of such crimes. It is important to state that most candidates do not have the required resources (money) and influence to get their desired goals in the long run, and as such, they resort to fetish oath to guarantee their achieving such positions. The material conditions that gave birth to this negative culture was the deliberate subversion of the sanctity of the ballot box, the emergence of godfatherism and the erosion of social contract between the voters and politicians/public office holders;

- (2) Godfathers/oath givers in Nigerian Politics and Public Administration are the wheels of the political system and help to give advantage to favoured protégés, especially those who accept to take oath of allegiance to them;
- (3) Godfathers/oath givers have all the capabilities anchored on creating confusion and insecurity prior to, during and after elections; therefore, political office aspirants have to accept their offer of secret oath taking in order to get their desired positions;
- (4) Godfathers/oath givers involved in political manipulations are not mere-financiers of political campaigns; rather they are individuals whose power stems not just from wealth, but also from their ability to deploy violence and computation to manipulate national, state and local political systems. They also succeed in bringing everybody, especially, the politicians under their control and manipulation through the use of their wealth and fetish oath taking.
- (5) Fetish/secret oath is taken in order to keep secret official information between the political office holders, their godfathers and/or oath givers. This had succeeded in achieving perpetuation of fraudulent practices and the looting of the wealth of Nigerians.

IMPACTS OF FETISH OATH TAKING ON DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

The President of the United States of America, Barack Obama recently in Accra, Ghana stated that: "Development depends upon good governance" (See, *The Guardian*, Sunday, July 12, 2009). In Nigeria, self-seeking politicians have continued to misgovern the nation to their own selfish interest, and have since independence of the nation made development elusive to the generality of the Nigerian people. There is no gainsaying the fact that, this cabal who profess to be representing the generality of the Nigerian people have in one way or the other sold their souls/consciences to the devil through initiations and counter-initiations to be loyal to their godfathers even before they assume public office (Okorie 2009).

This has become so pronounced that what we see in Nigeria today are: failed promises, death trap roads, lack of political will, non/inadequate power generation by Power Holding Corporation of Nigeria (PHCN), lack of conducive learn-

ing environment/infrastructure in our tertiary institutions, most of our universities are now glorified secondary schools, without adequate lecture halls, laboratories etc. Recently, all the unions in the public universities went on strike for almost four months and our leaders did not show much concern because their children do not attend public universities. Poverty has overtaken the nations' populace, our health sector is nothing to write home about, as our politicians and their families have to travel abroad for treatment even when they have ordinary headache. The gap between the rich and the poor is immeasurable as the rich are getting richer and the poor geometrically getting poorer everyday.

Nigeria with its current rating as the 6th producer of oil in the world, still imports refined crude oil with virtually no refinery working to capacity. Our leaders have become deaf to the crying and yearnings of the Nigerian people, as all the pleas to them to fix our refineries have been falling on deaf ears. Our political office holders in true sense/reality do not hold their allegiance to the people nor to the Constitution of this great country, but rather their loyalty and allegiance are to their godfathers and the various shrine that they sworn to before assuming their respective offices and this has affected the nation negatively.

In Nigeria today, it is common to see young men engage in kidnappings and ritual murders to extract different parts of human body to fulfill the prescriptions of native doctors in order to achieve certain success or heights in life without working hard legally to realize their aspirations. It is indeed worrisome to note that while the younger generation of other countries including developing countries in Africa are engaged in efforts to make major breakthrough in science, technology and other endeavors, their Nigerian counterparts repose their entire confidence on these primitive and retrogressive method of acquiring wealth, as well as rely on godfathers, to whom they will take fetish oath of loyalty to succeed in life.

The outcome of this is a society that is not regenerative in all sections of the economy and national life. It is not easy to say exactly when we got into this worrisome situation, but we believe the return to civilian democracy and the bastardization of the electoral process resulted in the emergence of super rich and super powerful cabals that have now aggressively polarized Nigerians into haves and have-nots, the rich and the poor.

It should be noted at this point that there are many secrets surrounding governance and lack of development in this country. The politicians are often in the business of covering themselves because they are on fetish oath, the implications are endless and this has been the major factor that has brought Nigeria to where it is today. Such attitude has encouraged complaints, wickedness, occultism in governance, rigging of election results, do or die politics and disregard for the sufferings of the Nigerian people. Poverty has gone to a very high level, so much so that, it is now a matter of do or die for Nigerians to acquire political power. Politics in Nigeria has become so lucrative that people are ready to do anything to be involved in it, as it is the quickest source of wealth, and this has brought about leadership crisis in the country.

A leader is supposed to be felt by his people in their lives, live for them and fight for them. He is expected to have a vision and drive; a tenacity of spirit that pervades the land. He is expected to be pushing the people up the slope of progress. He must not only dare, he must be seen to dare a wise daring. But what do we have in Nigeria today; we have assembled tired legs, weak souls, dead brains and visionless rogues that are bereft of ideas on how to improve the economy. Nigerians are tired of selected; appointed and nominated leaders; many of our past and present leaders are bundles of fraudsters, oppressive and retrogressive.

Furthermore, it should be noted that bold and capable leadership inspires, motivates, encourages, and build into people the faith to move mountains, transform obstacles into stepping-stones and convert stones into bread (if necessary). This has been deficient in Nigeria due to fetish oath taking that has entrenched corruption by our public office holders who now hold allegiance to their oath initiations rather than to the people. The implications of the above on the society are grave, as oath taking has destroyed public morality; it also prevents public office holders from being honest and truthful. It makes good Nigerians to wonder the place of God in the lives of our leaders. The next generation would normally learn the ways of the preceding generation; as such oath taking becomes an integral part of our national life.

A trip to our schools today shows that the children are already learning the bad ways of their bad fathers, as we see occultist groups initiating

their members through fetish oaths. We got to this shameful stage because we have gradually shifted our moral goal post over the years and have turned a full cycle that the new breed are committed to no moral values, but personal enrichment which, has totally taken over our political and administrative lives. In this kind of situation, the people no longer matter, but the personal interest of the oath givers. It is very pitiable to note that while our fellow human beings in other parts of the world are conquering space through modern technology, Nigerian leaders and their cohorts are busy engaging in primitive rituals. What a shameful act?

Leadership in Nigeria as we have it today is a matter of chance and not by qualification or merit. What do you expect from somebody who has no pedigree in life and through godfatherism and fetish oath taking, he becomes not just a member, but also one of the principal officers of the legislature? If a critical analysis is carried out on both members of National and State Assemblies in Nigeria, you would discover that most of them had no track record, and therefore, have nothing to offer, but their means of getting there is through oath taking and blind loyalty to Godfathers. That is why the best do not win elections in the country. Some persons who have not done any useful work in their lives would become political thugs to godfathers and politicians only to be compensated later with a selection to state or federal legislatures and other public offices. When they get there, they are unable to contribute meaningfully to debates on how to move the nation forward, but only resort to looting the nation's treasury to their own, godfathers and oath givers interests, and this has been the bane of development as far as Nigeria is concern. Regrettably, the hope for development that will positively affect the lives of the majority of Nigerians is still very elusive for now.

CONCLUSION

The Almighty God has so blessed Nigeria with all the necessary and needed human and material resources required by her to become one of the most industrialized nations on earth. Ironically, the value system of our political class and their accomplice has been tinted towards primitive materialism since independence. In order to realize their inordinate materialist tendencies, they have resorted to all manners of

negativities, which include godfatherism, fetish oath taking, just to mention a few.

These negative tendencies are responsible for the continued impoverishment of the majority of Nigerians, and the prolonged under-development of the country since independence in 1960. Unless there is proper implementation of our recommendations, coupled with attitudinal change and adequate re-orientation of the political class and their collaborators, majority of Nigerians will continue to live in extreme poverty and the nation will remain underdeveloped.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) If Nigeria must develop in spite of its present state of coma due to reckless leadership imposed on it by godfathers and fetish oath givers, the media and citizens must expose abuses of power, corruption and incompetence of public office holders in high places no matter whose ox is gored. This is where passage of the Freedom of Information Bill becomes very imperative. It is germane to state that the Freedom of Information Bill presently before the National Assembly has become the oldest bill before the Assembly. It is believed that the Legislators are afraid to pass the bill into law, because their atrocities against Nigeria and the productive class will be exposed.
- (2) Nigerians are tired of selection, and are therefore, yearning for election. Consequently, the Electoral Reform before the National Assembly should be vigorously pursued to its logical conclusion. The Justice Mohammed Uwais Electoral Reform Committee's (ERC) recommendations should be adopted to create a favourable atmosphere for credible elections come 2011.
- (3) A legislation should be put in place to aid the setting up of a Regulatory Body, which will be charged with the responsibility of enforcing reforms against the continued recycling of the very old and old brigades of politicians that have consistently perpetuated corruption, favouritism, nepotism, privatization of collective wealth and underdevelopment of the country since independence.
- (4) Political office holders whose allegiance is not to the people by their actions should be shown the way out of office and prosecuted. This can only happen when the people are aware of the true principles of democracy through the use of "Recall" which enables the people to call back their representative in government who are not performing in an idea political system. Nigeria as a prismatic society is encouraged to take advantage of the use of "recall" for non-performing public office holders.
- (5) Any oath taking not constitutionally recognized by the 7th schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is criminal and those who embark on it should be brought to justice to serve as deterrent to others.
- (6) The Civil Society which has regrettably become an extension of the government in Nigeria, should wake up to its responsibilities of mobilizing Nigerians towards the enthronement of credible election and leadership, come 2011 henceforth.
- (7) Nigerians have suffered for too long in the mix of plenty. Transparency International's classification states that about 70% of Nigerians are living on less than US\$1 per day. In the same vein, an animal in Europe is said to live on US\$2 per day. (Transparency International 1997) Mathematically, this means that the lives of 2 (two) Nigerians are equivalent to the life of an animal in Europe. *What a pity for Nigerians?* One may be tempted to state here that the conditions of living of the slaves in the ancient Greece were not as bad as what Nigerians are passing through today. Therefore, it is our recommendation that the time has come for Nigerians to take their collective destinies in their hands.

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