

THE ROLE OF MAGICO-SPIRITUAL POWERS IN UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY AND LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT: *The culture of impunity and lack of accountability on the part of the Nigerian politician is simply incredible. While democratic tenets, the world over, presuppose uncompromising observance of the rule of law, accountability and transparency, the Nigerian experience stands as classical case of irony and paradox. Thus, it deserves much more than a cursory interrogation, but an in-depth study. In order to understand the Nigerian situation, many researches have been carried out. Their conclusions point out corruption, weak institutional and legal framework, ethno-religious bias and inclinations as well as lack of free, fair and credible elections as factors responsible for the current state of affairs. However, the believe and indeed the practice of the Nigerian politician to indulge (almost incurably) in magico-spiritual activities in order to invoke powers that will enable them evade justice, mute public scrutiny and veil their culture of impunity and lack of transparency has received little or no deserving scholarly attention. Therefore, this paper examines this phenomenon and its impact on the body polity. Politicians and their allies, members of election petition tribunals, personnel of anti-graft agencies and magico-spiritual jobbers themselves attest to the endemic nature of the phenomenon. Interviews with these constitute primary source for this paper. Laced in segments of this paper are suggestions on how to put the practice of magico-spiritualism on the proper cause that will not be on a coalition part with democracy and good governance in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: magico-spiritual, democracy, good governance, impunity, conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian state is not new to democracy. This is because the nation came in contact with democracy from independence in 1960 till it was interrupted in 1966 by a military coup. By 1979-1984, the nation was again matching on the path of democracy along other African nations. After that came the longest period (1984-1999) of military disruption of democracy in the country. During this time, democracy suffocated under the military regimes of General Muhammadu Buhari, General Ibrahim Bodamasi Babangida, the short lived days of Interim Government headed by Alex Shonekan after the annulment of the acclaimed most credible elections in Nigeria that saw Moshod Abiola as the winner in 1993. After this period, military regimes continued under the headship of General Sani Abacha and General Abdulsami Abubakar.

However, by May 29, 1999 the nation was once again back to democratic tract and has remained on it till date, thereby making it the longest uninterrupted history of democratic experience in Nigeria. What it means is that from 1960 -2018, the nation has a total of 28 years of democracy. This is reasonable time, even for the purpose of learning. Suffices it to say that

even though Nigeria is not a novice to democracy, yet it is very far from ideal democratic culture. Some keen observers have attributed this to the 29 years of military regime that the nation had witnessed; during which impunity was the order of the day.

To my mind, there is a phenomenon that underpins impunity in Nigeria. This phenomenon nourishes impunity and nurtures near-lack of accountability, irrespective of whether it is military regime or democratic dispensation as we are currently having in the country. The phenomenon is the believe and indeed the practice of the Nigerian politician to indulge (almost incurably) in magico-spiritual activities in order to invoke powers that will enable them evade justice, mute public scrutiny and veil their culture of impunity and lack of transparency.

In another related development, Obafemi (2005) worries about the manipulation of sacred emblems and magico-spiritual influences, borrowed from the ancient cosmologies of power. He states that “in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, there is the belief in a cosmology in which the material and the spiritual are closely interconnected, intertwined and can be manipulated... As a result, the material can be spiritually invoked to burn a house without kerosene or petrol, kill somebody without gun or any weapon, and make a person blind, lame or mad, poor or rich, bring rancour or make people fight, or cause war among party members, cause a motor accident or plane crash, make a thief to enter or not to enter into somebody’s house, send epidemic into a community and many others.”

In this work magico-spiritual power means a motivated central force and mystical inner strength that enables an individual to control him- or herself, other people, and the environment without the use of somewhat physical, political, or material force and yet achieving same as an end. In examining the role of this phenomenon on the Nigerian body polity, the time frame of 1999 (when Nigeria returned to multi-party democracy) till date will be considered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To many, magico-spiritual power and its influence is something absurd. Therefore, can there be a theory explain absurdity? In answering this Junod (2013) clarifies that under any belief of a human group, there is a philosophical conception of some kind that explains why such a belief has taken hold on the minds of the community, no matter how ridiculous the conception may be. However, it needs to be mentioned at this juncture that negative use of magico-spiritual power breeds conflict in many respects.

Propounding his conflict theory, Marx (1957) is based on dialectical and historical materialism. The theory assumes that society is composed of inherent contradictions and struggles between those who control resources (bourgeoisie) and those who work to earn a living (proletariat). In the struggle the bourgeoisie takes the chunk of the societal resources living the majority of the masses with few resources to scramble for. Marx argues that there are dialectics associated with this struggle. The elites who take the lump of these resources also compete among themselves for control, while the masses also scramble for meagre resources simultaneously. On the whole there is division of the society into two dominant classes over access to resources, and then, there is competition for these resources within the classes

Taking cue from the above, magico-spiritual power from conflict perspective could be linked to struggle for resources and domination of man. These resources could be physical or

otherwise. Those who control these resources also control and manipulate nature and man for their benefit, hence the use of magico-spiritual power by politicians.

MAGICO-SPIRITUAL POWERS AND GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

The African world has always been involved in magico-spiritual activities. This is due to the fact that the African is unshakeably rooted in religion and incurably religious. It is against this background that ... suffices it to say everything in African has its roots in religion: economics, social life, and politics among others. It, therefore, stands to reason why governance on the African continent was firmly tied to one form spiritualism or the other. There is gainsaying at this juncture that the foray of the African world by Europeans after the Berlin conference of 1888 was resisted using the instrumentality of religion, especially the means of magico-spiritual powers. As a matter of fact, Magico-spiritual power became a potent tool of wedging war against the colonial masters with a view to attain emancipation; which subsequently was the case with the independence of African countries from late 1950s.

On the use of magico-spiritual power, the revolt against colonial subjugation in the present day Tanzania and Kenya are shining examples that needs no retelling. In Tanzania, the natives turned to African spirituality and magic to drive the Germans out of Tanzania. The leader of the rebellion was a spirit medium named Kinjikitile Ngwale (d. 1905), who called himself Bokero and claimed to be possessed by a snake spirit called *Hongo*. The revolt was named after a medicine called maji that purportedly gave African fighters immunity to German bullets. Although this 'war medicine' was in fact nothing but water mixed with castor oil and millet, the dissemination of the maji ideology spread a message of common opposition and resistance to German colonial rule. Informants quoted by Becker (2004) describes Ngwale as "*mpiganajihodari* an accomplished fighter, and *kiongozimkubwa*, a great leader, who had organized resistance"

Believing that they were empowered with this medicine, Bokero's followers began the Maji Maji Revolt. Armed with cap guns, spears, and arrows, and wearing millet stalks around their heads, they set out from the Matumbi Hills in southern Tanzania and attacked German garrisons throughout the colony. Along with the Matumbi, the Mbunga, Kichi, Ngoni, Ngindo, and Pogoro joined the rebellion in German East Africa. In East-African country of Kenya, the situation was not very different. Gudaku (2013) observes that "1952 to 1956 saw the mau-mau revolt that changed the socio-political landscape of Kenya", thereby paving way for the country's independence in 1961.

What was never considered as an issue of invaluable importance on the part of the Africans at this point was the legitimacy of the use of magico spiritual powers against the colonial masters. However, immediately after the exit of colonial masters after independence, the tested and trusted magico-spiritual powers were used against political opponents as African political leaders laid the foundations of nationhood. An informant in Andaha opines that the faulty foundation of African nations is partly due to the influence of magico spiritual powers that African political leaders exerted on themselves. Muller's (2005) hint on modes of gaining powers by politicians in Cameroon that seems to confirm the aforementioned view. According to him "politicians will call into service a *nganga* (healer) who will protect them, making them politically stronger. The presence of these "witches" creates a sense of disempowerment on the part of the people who feel that the intervention of such experts and their powers removes their

power”. This interplay hindered objectivity and obscure accountability on the part of the politicians.

MAGICO-SPIRITUAL POWERS AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Party Recruitment and followership: What every politician strives to achieve is to have an increasing followership and people who are committed to their political ideology. In other (civilized) climes, principles and sound ideological inclination are what makes a politician popular. However, in Nigeria this is often not the case. For instance, some politicians go into covenants and oath-taking as means of recruiting and maintaining followership. Obafemi (2005) says eating Yoruba local meal called *amala*, which is made from yam flour and local soup *gbegiri* could be a kind of spiritual entanglement than just an ordinary local delicacy that nourishes the body.

Relying on his experience during the Adedibu-Ladoja political saga in the ancient southwestern city of Ibadan, Obafemi argues that “the eating of *amala* and *gbegiri* is a covenant which nurtures, sustains and maintains the magic of followership and the struggles for political power... Once you eat the *amala* and *gbegiri*, you are bound to shun the politics of ideas and follow what is generally referred to as the politics of *amala*. Every occasion of eating together among the Yoruba is a sacrament and a pledge of belonging.” In itself, this would have no serious consequence to warrant thorough examination. However, the magico-spiritual component that hoodwinks anyone who eats of such *amala* and *gbegiri* to be an uncritically faithful follower is what calls for questioning.

Away from the Yoruba of south-west Nigeria to the Igbo of South-east, Iroegbu (2010) says his informants on this subject matter pointed out that associates of one Imo State popular politician Senator Arthur Nzeribe used to bring in a powerful oracle with a healer in his approach for swearing to keep and to enforce the loyalty of his political supporters and followers during campaigns in the local polity. The same was ferociously mentioned of the late House Rep. Member, Hon. Maurice Ibekwe of Okwele during his campaign tour and negotiations with the local leaders and populist individuals in Mbano area of state.

It is also common phenomenon that political juggernauts popularly known as political-godfathers/mothers have always entrap their political-son/daughters using magico-spiritual powers. When such are ensnared and sufficiently intimidated by brazen show of magical power, then the political god-fathers/mothers make scandalous demands of their political prey; including the demand that state funds be given to them freely and arbitrary. The celebrated example in Nigeria is the case of former governor of Anambra state, Chris Nwabueze Ngige and his estranged erstwhile godfather, Chris Uba. Governor Ngige was under magico-spiritual power, at the instance of Okija Shrine to remitting state monies to Chris Uba for no reason than availing magico-spiritual powers believed to have catapulted Ngige to the coveted seat of the executive governor of Anambra state. This case is just one among many others in the country.

Campaigns and electioneering process: Political campaigns are a critical moments in any electioneering process. It is actually the time during which parties and their respective candidates present their manifestos to the electorates. All parties involved in the political contest know that convincing the voting populace on the intended policies and programmes is

key. Therefore, no stone is left unturned in this wise. While this is laudable and commendable, informants, who have served as state campaign coordinators of the 2015 presidential elections in Rivers, Kano, Benue, Nasarawa, Bauchi and Taraba states confess to the fact that magico-spiritual powers are required during campaigns to convince the electorates.

In Kano, for instance, a spiritual doctor with numerous clients who are high-ranking politicians in the country revealed that thousands of politicians at all levels present date palms to him to perform magico-spiritual ritual on them, and that when this is done, all that the politician need do is to eat date palm just before he enters the campaign arena. Whatever he says will be greeted by thunderous applause from the gathered crowd addressed. The implication is that the crowd is usually hypnotized; thereby deny them the opportunity to ask the critical questions that will propel development, reminiscent of a democratic era.

Something revealing happened in Makurdi, the Benue state capital when one of the presidential hopefuls visited the state during campaigns of the last elections. A source that resides in high-level area of the state capital alleged that magico spiritual ritual known as *kyohol-ior* (literally meaning gather people) was performed a night before the candidate visited and at the instance of a federal parliamentarian. When the candidate eventually visited, he was greeted by an astonishing mammoth crowd that sent shivers to the opposition party. A public affairs analyst, Agber (2016 in a verbal discussion with Gudaku) intimated that this gave the party a wide margin at a public opinion poll conducted few days after the visit. He observed that the visit made a huge impact on the voting populace and made many to switch camps as reflected by the public opinion poll.

The most notorious problem that seems to defy any solution at the moment that is associated with elections in Nigeria is ballot snatching. Adebayo (2015) a verbal discussion Gudaku) stated that during the 2015 governorship and presidential elections in Niger state political gladiators in the state magico-spiritually 'sanctified' their thugs that no one could ordinary stop them from snatching ballot boxes except with superior magical powers. In such an instance, the security personnel mandated to ensure law and order were simply incapacitated to operate in the sacra- spatial political landscape. In Lambata town of the state, a politician who was desperate to win election, had his thugs presented for magico-spiritual ritual that would make them disappear without hindrance in almost same manner like *hayaki* (smoke). In order to achieve this, the ritual consist of covering a basket over a burning hen that is yet to lay eggs, for as long as the smoke lasted. The initiate is then handed the basket to put his right leg into while sleeping for seven nights. During this time, he is expected to drink water that is used in washing slippery cat fish. It is believed that the ritual has the potency of making the initiates have the capacity to escape from any attempted arrest.

It is obvious that nurtured in this act that undermines laid down electoral laws and other extant laws of the country, the thugs will certainly constitute a cog in wheel of the rule of law that democracy is known for. Any nation that perpetrates impunity in violating its laws is just some steps away from anarchy. Conversely, an ordered society is one that takes pride in keeping its laws religiously as the touchstone of communal living.

Informants from north-central states of Kogi, Kwara as well as south-east states of Imo and Enugu say that politicians use magico-spiritual powers to attack themselves. Buttressing this

point and demonstrating that this is an old feature of Nigerian democracy Iroegbu (2010) posits that Chief Jim Nwobodo and Chief C.C. Onoh had magical and ritual clashes, as to who should occupy the State House at Enugu during the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) and NPN election struggle in the 1980. The unfortunate thing is that these magical and ritual clashes have always claimed lives and property and the perpetrators are never brought to book. It would therefore appear that magico-spiritual powers encourages impunity to fest and to reign supreme over the rule of law that is a creed of any democracy that worth the name.

Election Petition Tribunals: Elections are not only keenly contested at the polls but also at the tribunals. The contest at the tribunal is simply a reflection of what is obtained at the polls. What it means therefore is that magico spiritual powers are invoked in order to influence judgement. In an interview, the secretary of one of the Election petition Tribunal Panels for one of the states from South-South Nigeria said the panel had to relocate to Abuja instead of the state capital not just because of physical threat on their lives but also due to the overwhelming magico-spiritual influence and manipulation they were subjected to. He said strange objects were umpteen times found in the court despite the fact that the place was usually under lock and key after the close of each day. In his opinion as a judge, political contestations are most challenging cases to handle. He revealed that disputants and their lawyers will do everything possible to ensure judgement is delivered to their favour. Among the things politicians and their lawyers do include handsome cash bribes, promises of contracts among others. The secretary lamented that all these are not as dangerous as the magico-spiritual manipulation of judgement that each disputant usually engage in.

While witnessing the 2007 Nasarawa State Governorship Election Petition Tribunal in Lafia, the Nasarawa state capital, in which a candidate of All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) was challenging the victory of the candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the chairman of the tribunal, declined to sit on her official designated seat but rather ordered for another, alleging that the seat was not 'safe' enough for her. Since the seat was in good condition physically, pundits interpret that she would have probably perceived some magico-spiritual power in connection with the seat that would have compromised her position as unbiased umpire of the electoral-judicial contest that was before her court of competent jurisdiction. If this narrative is anything to go by, then chairman's action reveals that judges themselves are in touch with spiritual realm that antidotes them from undue manipulation and influence by providing them with some kind of 'sensor' for danger as was in her case. This explains why the chairman could dictate that sitting on the chair will not auger well with her as far as fairness and justice in the case before the tribunal was concerned. Hence, she declined.

Audu (2018) in an interview with Gudaku confirm that use of magico-spiritual powers to influence judgement at election tribunals. According to him, this is a common place phenomenon, practised both by politicians and lawyers. He clarifies further that politicians do not only have a team of lawyers to reclaim or defend their mandates, but also have team of magico-spiritual experts doing what they know best for same purpose.

Serving office term: Most elective positions in Nigeria are considered juicy; meaning the positions are money making opportunities. Little wonder, Nigerian politicians are said to be among the highly paid in the world. Granted that the politicians are well paid and some live up to expectation, it is also on record that most of them are involved in gross abuse of office in a

manner that violates public trust. Whenever, there are attempts to scrutinize the stewardship of such politicians, they do everything possible to dodge the scrutiny. One sure way of doing this is via the use of magico-spiritual power.

In Adamawa state of north-east Nigeria for instance, an informant who served as a police officer in the government house exposed that one of the impeached governors could import spiritual jobbers from Mali and Senegal to placate him from public scrutiny, especially the state house of assembly that was in possession of all the facts warranting his impeachment. While the game lasted, some other interest bloc within the state got stronger magico-spiritual source that unknot all that the governor did; which paved way for his subsequent impeachment that was considered by many as long overdue.

An erstwhile governor of Benue state who lost election in his bid to become a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is reputed for using magico-spiritual powers to evade prosecution even when it was very obvious that he was siphoning public funds for personal business. Dio (2015 in a verbal discussion with Gudaku) claimed to have remained close with political elites in the state and admitted that the same governor had to place numerous spiritual specialists on his payroll to solicit their help to enable him escape justice over a certificate forgery saga that was in court and could have not only cost him his job but put him behind bars. Related cases of this kind abound in almost every state of the Nigerian federation.

General political acrimony: It has been argued in some quarters that the death of Bola Ige, a prominent politician and former Attorney General of the federation, was politically motivated. The removal of his cap in a public gathering has been explained as a ritual device through which his power could be emptied so as to make it easy to kill him. Another case in point was the hot debate on the removal of former speaker of the house of representative, Mrs Patricia Etteh, which led to the death of a member of the house. In her home town at Ikire, Osun State, it was reported that there were ritual killings to forestall the removal of Etteh as the speaker. According to Ukiwo (2003), it is estimated that at least 50, 000 people have been killed in several incidents of violence since the return to civilian rule. This will imply that communities that host politicians and have their sons and daughters as top politicians are groaning under yoke of all forms of impunity.

DISTURBING NUANCES OF THE GROWING TREND AND ITS IMPACT ON GOOD GOVERNANCE

In the opinion of many Nigerians, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) are grossly underperforming in their mandates of prosecuting offenders. The two agencies, if functioning as they should have the capacity to restore probity, accountability and transparency as means of checkmating impunity in the public service. They are to gadfly public office holders and indeed the Nigerian populace into shunning corruption that has become a cankerworm in the country, thereby denying the nation its opportunities of growth and development.

However, Audu (2015 in a verbal discussion with Gudaku) admitted working with EFCC when he said, investigating and prosecuting politicians and top government functionaries is a herculean task. While acknowledging the determination of the anti-graft agencies to live above board and deliver on mandates, he expressed worry over the attitude offenders, particularly the

political class who use every means, magico-spiritual powers inclusive to frustrate their investigation, interrogation and prosecution. Essentially, in the Lagos office of ICPC, Yahuza (2015 in a verbal discussion with Gudaku) whinged that the negative use of magico-spiritual power in the country is alarming and endemic. He wonder how some politicians and other top government civil servants would not act in accordance with the rules of their engagement but choose the contrary, believing that magico-spiritual powers can handcuff the arms of the law from performing its duty. The disturbing fact is that an attempt at curtailing the law; which is the life wire of any democratic society from its full operation is tantamount to making the nation moribund.

It is the considered view of the paper that negative use of magico-spiritual power is leaning towards the Hobbesian state of nature that breeds anarchy. As a matter of fact, magico-spiritual might should never be seen as right and reason for evading the law that is the soul of democracy. For there can be no better of way of entrenching the culture of impunity than this. All citizens should be made to face justice, irrespective of the magico-spiritual power that such an individual proud of.

As a matter of fact, the Nigerian state is conflict ridden. Some of these are magico-spiritual powers. Among the Tiv of North-central Nigeria magico spiritual powers are associated with *tsav* (which loosely translates as witchcraft and its accompanied instruments such as *imborvungu*). Agber, Ugbagir, Mngutyo and Amaakaven (2014) believe that witchcraft is what it is and not a particular concept embodying one phenomenon and that witchcraft is something as fresh as spring verdure that works with an intensity that burns like a steady flame. They reiterate that the Tiv Tsav divides into *il ú tsa* (Black magic or witchcraft, which is good) and *Tsav mbu pupuu* (White magic or witchcraft, which is bad). *Imborvungu* is seen as magico-spiritual instrument of power and influence and is highly sought after by the political class within the Tiv locality. On the conflict between neighbouring Tiv sub-clans of Shangev-Tiev in Konshisha and Masev in Gwer East local government areas of Benue state, Gudaku (2015) reported that the ShangevTiev raided Masev homes and in the process took away *imborvungu*.

However, Geri (2012) states that taken from a woman, while Gbatsorun (2014 during a verbal interview) hinted that Kudu Awuna of Shangev- Teiv killed a Masev man. Kudu's brother, Agia who went with him on the raid took the dead man's bag in which *imborvungu* was later discovered. The Masev want their *imborvungu* back, but the Shangev Tiev have not so far demonstrated any willingness to return it. This is the reason for which the Shangev Tiev and Masev are always up in arms against each other. This is one armed conflict that has causative roots in Tiv metaphysical realm of *Tsav* and *Akombo*, (ritual practices for power) that remain the predicate of Magico-spiritual powers among the Tiv.

Following the arrest and detention of the former National Security Adviser, (NSA) and subsequent revelations on his disbursement of funds to stalwarts of Peoples Democratic Party on the threshold 2015 general elections, the former governor of Sokoto state, Attahiru Bafarawa shocked the world by stating that the millions of naira he received was meant for spiritual purpose(s). This attests to the fact that politicians in Nigeria use magico-spiritual powers in desperate attempts to win elections. It is to this extent that analysts are of the view that magico-spiritual powers are great political capital that no politician takes for granted.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian state has unquantifiable potentials for growth and development. However, peace, growth and development will continue to elude the country until its political class and other top government functionaries as well as interest groups are liberated from the addiction of negative use of magico-spiritual powers. As at now, the practice is endemic and is indeed a course for concern, especially that the magico-spiritual tradition is put on the course that is producing perplexing suicidal results as majority of politicians who use it to win elections are men of broken focus and crooked minds. What, therefore, can we do to put the practice of magico-spiritualism on the proper cause that will not be on a coalition part with democracy and good governance in Nigeria?. This is the question that begs for answers and calls for further research.

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