

# ***Chief Lamidi Adedibu and patronage politics in Nigeria***

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## ABSTRACT

Since the acceptance of multi-party democracy as the most viable alternative to autocracy and military rule in Africa, democratic rule has become the vogue. Nigeria's attempt at democracy was (and is) accompanied by patronage politics, whereby certain personalities exact great influence on the political process. This study spotlights Chief Lamidi Adedibu and his patronage style in Nigerian politics, and shows that Adedibu gained political 'patronic' prominence during Nigeria's Third Republic in the 1990s, through the provision of the survival needs of the poor majority who are, mostly, used as thugs for protection against challenges from opponents and for political leverage. Since then, he has remained a 'valuable tool' of 'any government in power' and politicians ready to provide the necessary goods for onward transmission to clients.

## INTRODUCTION

Along with other African nations, Nigeria embraced democracy in the 1990s as a viable alternative to military rule (Anugwom 2001; White & Taylor 2001). The first attempt in this period was the stalemated Third Republic orchestrated by General Babangida, but forced into the doldrums by the same man through the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election. Nigeria consequently went into military rule under General Sani Abacha from 1993 till his demise on 8 June 1998. The return of the nation to civil rule once again commenced with Abacha's successor, General Abubakar, who initiated the process that brought about the inauguration of the Fourth Republic and civil rule on 29 May 1999.

However, even though civil rule is preferred to the military, patronage – though not peculiar to Nigeria – remains an essential aspect of Nigeria's politics. It involves a sort of social relations in stratified

socio-political systems whereby valued resources are exchanged between the ruling and the ruled (Lemarchand 1981; Stein 1996). Whereas the ruling class may grant 'goods' in the form of projects, gifts, offices and other pecuniary gains to clients, clients yield loyalty in return. And since the electorate (clients) is vital to the political process as seemingly the ultimate determinants of who gets to power, their loyalty, objectified through votes, becomes vital to whoever seeks power. This may explain Joseph's (1991: 116) assertion that only politicians and parties that 'deliver the goods' survive Nigeria's political terrain.

In apparent confirmation of Joseph's position, Olurode (1986), while giving vivid examples, stated that a politician who had served in a higher political office as commissioner in the Western Region, lost the local government chairmanship (mayor) election to a politician of relatively lesser political prestige due to his failure to influence government-financed rural development projects at Iwo, his home town. Likewise, Olurode stated that another wealthy politician from the same town, who was a member of the Constituent Assembly, damaged his political image because he did not initiate or develop projects of public interest in Iwo town. He too, therefore, lost political relevance. Indeed, from Olurode's and Joseph's submissions, clients seemingly exact enormous influence on the political career of the ruling class. However, the fact remains that clients who predominantly live below the poverty line, depend on the rulers (patrons) for access to resources. As long as they do not control the productive resources, they may only change patrons, and thus still remain subservient to the ruling class, out of which patrons emerge.

Literatures abound about the advantages and disadvantages of patronage politics. For example, Randall and Svasand (2002) view it as a militating factor against the entrenchment of democratic principles and good governance in Africa. Likewise, Fonchingong (2004), Marty (2002) and Fatton (1992, 1995) submit that patronage hampers the ideals of democracy and instead entrenches the personalisation of power and autocratic rulers who are protected from the checks and balances that other arms of government are supposed to provide. Wu (2003) posits that patronage politics is sustained in Taiwan, through the activities of local factional groups who exact influence on the electorate and, therefore, help to sustain the Kuomintang (KMT) in power in exchange for economic and other gains. In Latin America, Taylor (2004) submits that patronage takes pre-eminence over important issues such as citizenship, and racial and gender inequality as long as politicians continually provide 'goods' to clients.

Nonetheless, in contrast to the views espoused above, some other scholars view patronage from a more positive perspective. Zappala (1998)

submits that patronage evolved in Australia as a result of the alienation of non-whites and immigrants from the economic and political process. The only avenue available to the underprivileged and minority groups for the satisfaction of survival and development needs is to throw their loyalty behind political parties and politicians willing to assure them the delivery of 'goods' in return for votes. Furthermore, Philp (2001) views patronage as a sort of inbuilt mechanism for accountability in societies where it is accepted as cultural. In such societies, Western democracy may translate to the concentration of power and economic resources in the hands of an elite while the majority is alienated from development. Additionally, Lazar (2004), in his study of a Bolivian community, sees patronage as a social system, which solidifies and confirms the citizenship consciousness of the vast majority of the underprivileged. Otherwise, they seemingly become alienated from the political process, while the Bolivian identity becomes a mirage due to inability to gain access to valued/productive resources.

Irrespective of the divergent views of scholars espoused above, it is important to note that patronage is not alien to Nigeria's socio-political system. More importantly, pre-colonial Ibadan evolved its own form of indigenous patronage system built on the *babaogun* exchange relations, through which valued resources were exchanged between patrons and clients (Omobowale 2006; Watson 2005). The *babaogun* exchange relations were premised on the military/socio-political structure of Ibadan, wherein individuals who had attained political prominence through successful exploits on the battlefield, assumed the position of patron (*babaogun*), and provided protection and military exposure to clients who yielded loyalty in return.

This form of exchange relations continued until Ibadan came under British rule in 1893. Rather than discarding the *babaogun* system, British rulers simply integrated it into the colonial system of local administration through the indirect rule system. Of course, patrons (as chiefs/*babaogun*) no longer had to prove their worth on the battlefield. They simply became ready tools of the colonial administration in ensuring law and order, production of goods needed by European industries and the extraction of tax (Omobowale 2006). Hence, it was compulsory again for every Ibadan resident to identify with a *babaogun* who must be a recognised chief in the Native Authority, and to whom he would be accountable and pay taxes. Indeed, the practice eased colonial administration; it also, however, entrenched and exacerbated political corruption (Tignor 1993).

Apparently, it was on this foundation that modern clientelistic relations were built with the grafting of the educated and economic elites, in preparation for self-governance. The grafting of the new elite class did not

however come without the gradual displacement of the class of traditional *babaogun* who had held sway. As party politics was introduced in 1951, a new set of patrons also emerged. Among this class was Alhaji Adogoke Adelabu. In a detailed account of the man, then popularly referred to as the ‘Lion of the West’, Post and Jenkins (1973) described Adelabu as an Ibadan man, who understood the politics of the emergent socio-political relations, and wittingly used the same to gain political prominence within Ibadan – his main constituency. Through his *Mabolaje* party and active expression of Islamic faith, Adelabu used his ingenuity to appeal to the social consciousness of the Ibadan lower class and Muslim majority, to contest the apparent dominance of perceived aliens (particularly the Ijebu) over Ibadan, through the Action Group (AG). Besides aligning with the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) – the opposition party in Western Nigeria – Adelabu ensured the flow of goods to clients from his personal purse and the state treasury, all for the purpose of securing and maintaining clients’ loyalty in order to retain power. Apparently, it was for his unorthodox style that Post and Jenkins (1973: 272) described Adelabu’s life thus: ‘throughout his entire life Adelabu had been concerned with the basic conditions that allowed any kind of action at all in a rapidly changing system’.

As he sought to ensure the ‘basic conditions’ with which he undertook ‘any kind of action’, Adelabu became enmeshed in financial maladministration while serving as the chairman of the Ibadan District Council. This provided an opportunity for the AG government in the Western Region to accuse him of corrupt practices. The subsequent enquiry carried out by E. W. J. Nicholson (the Abingdon town clerk) found Adelabu guilty of gross financial misconduct, and he was consequently forced to resign his position as the District Council chairman and his ministerial appointment in 1956 (Tignor 1993). Though Adelabu still enjoyed great support and loyalty from clients in Ibadan, he was politically curtailed at the regional and federal levels up till his death in an auto crash in 1958.

Inasmuch as the account of Adelabu’s patronage relations dates back to about five decades ago, Nigeria in general and Ibadan in particular may not be said to have transmuted beyond the vagaries of patronage politics. Of course, the system involves numerous patrons and clients, who actively impact on the exchange relations in one way or another. This study, however, concentrates on Chief Lamidi Adedibu, generally currently regarded as the ‘prime patron’ of Ibadan City in political matters.

The study was carried out as a special case study on Chief Adedibu. Primary data were gathered through oral interviews with Chief Adedibu and three other interviews with politicians that cut across Adedibu’s

supporters and opponents. The instruments used for data collection were specially designed interview guides and tape recorder. All the instruments were used with the consent of the interviewees. Secondary data were generated through the review of relevant literature and media resources. Finally, the data collected and generated on the field were subjected to ethnographic analysis.

#### A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHIEF LAMIDI ADEDIBU

Chief Lamidi Adedibu was born on 24 October 1924 to Alhaji and Alhaja Aminu Adedutan. His parentage was of the Alaafin<sup>1</sup> of Oyo royal family extraction. His grandfather, Olupoyi, was the third son of Kabiyesi Olusile, who reigned as the 22nd Alaafin of Oyo. Olupoyi left Oyo and resettled at Oja'ba in Ibadan and thenceforth, his descendants became natives of Ibadan (Adedibu 1997).

Adedibu was privileged to acquire both Quoranic and some degree of Western education. He started his education at the age of six when he was enrolled in a Quoranic school. After five years at the school, he was enrolled as a student of Mapo Elementary Primary School, which was administered by the Anglican Communion, in the year 1938. From Mapo Elementary Primary School, he proceeded to Ibadan Boys' High School in 1942. At Ibadan Boys' High School, his parents entrusted him to the care of one of the teachers in the school, Mr Samuel Lanlehin, who later became his political mentor. He left Ibadan Boys' High School in 1946 with a G.2 Amended Examination in Standard II. He worked briefly at the Government Catering Guest House at Jericho (now Trans Motel Organisation), Ibadan till 1947, before venturing into business in 1948. He subsequently acquired a petrol station at Mokola, Ibadan in 1949 (Adedibu 1997). The acquisition of the petrol station signalled his economic breakthrough, as he gained control over a profitable means of production, the profit of which he invested in other businesses even as he gained recognition as economic elite.

Adedibu's venture into politics began when he accompanied Chief Lanlehin to Owo for a political meeting in April 1951 (Akinyemi & Laoye 1997a). A Yoruba political elder statesman, Rev. Alayande, was appalled at the presence of the young Adedibu in the political gathering, when he ought to be in school fashioning his 'future'. When Rev. Alayande enquired about his presence at the political meeting, he simply replied that he accompanied Chief Lanlehin (*ibid.*), apparently in order to receive 'training' in politics, which would turn out to be a veritable 'means of production' for him later. From there, Adedibu joined the Ibadan

People's Party (IPP) in 1951. The party won all the elective legislative positions allocated to Ibadan in the year 1951. Afterwards, he cross-carpeted to the Action Group (AG) in 1952 (Adedibu 1997; Awobiyi & Tumo-Ojelabi 1996).

Adedibu steadily gained recognition and support in the Action Group, even as his political career received a tremendous boost with the attainment of important positions within the party and a number of political positions at the 'state' level, either by election or by appointment. First, shortly after crossing over to the Action Group, he was appointed as the Ibadan Division publicity secretary of the party. In 1953, he became the Youth Wing chairman of Action Group in Ibadan Division (*Daily Monitor* 1997). In 1954, he contested a councillorship position in Ibadan District Council and lost. He later contested another election to the Western Region House of Assembly in Ibadan East Constituency in 1956 and lost again (Osunde 2003). In spite of his inability to win an elective position under the Action Group in the 1950s, he was compensated with an appointment as a member of the Western Region Marketing Board where he served between 1957 and 1962.

Lastly, he also served as the secretary of the Ibadan-Ibarapa Branch of the Action Group within the same period (Amusan 1997). Chief Lamidi Adedibu remained very active in the party till the demise of the First Republic, following the 1966 *coup d'état*. He later contested and won election for a councillorship post in 1976 on a no-party basis. Adedibu, however, acknowledged that he won the election with the influence of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with whom he had always aligned since the Action Group days of the 1950s (Adedibu 1997; Osunde 2003).

During the first four-year tenure of the Second Republic, Adedibu's political influence was at its lowest ebb as he joined the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which did not enjoy popular support among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria. He joined the political party in protest against what he termed 'sidelining' by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with whom he joined forces during the First Republic. This was because when Awolowo's new political party, the Unity Party of Nigeira (UPN) was to be inaugurated, whereas Awolowo invited other AG stalwarts, Adedibu was not invited. So, he opted for a rival party, the NPN (Akinyemi & Laoye 1997a; Amusan 1997; *Daily Monitor* 1997), which eventually won at the Federal level. However, even though the NPN won gubernatorial elections in Oyo State during the second four-year tenure, the government lasted in power for only three months due to a military coup, which brought the Buhari-Idiagbon regime to power on 1 January 1984. And so little was heard about Adedibu.

The redesignation of Adedibu's status from a mere politician to an acknowledged political patron commenced in the Third Republic. He joined the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and, through his political manoeuvring, the candidates he supported for the Oyo State SDP chairmanship election and the state governorship poll, Alhaji Busari Raji and Chief Kolapo Ishola, respectively, won (Somorin 1997). The presidential aspirants he supported also clinched the SDP presidential primaries. In recognition of his political influence, Lamidi Adedibu is often referred to as 'the Strongman of Ibadan Politics' and the '*Alaafin*<sup>2</sup> of Yoruba Politics' (Adegbamigbe 1998). And for this, many politicians seek after him.

Whereas he may not be as wealthy as many of the politicians who seek his political support, he has been able to use his own form of exchange relations to win loyalty from clients and use these to support and assist at gaining victory at the polls for politicians who consult him for his support. This is in spite of the fact that as a politician contesting for elective positions at the state level, he lost all but once. But as a political patron, he achieves what he could not achieve for himself. The foundation of his success as a political patron is built in his philosophy of *amala-gbegiri* politics. It is to this we now turn.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF *AMALA-GBEGIRI*  
POLITICS AND ADEDIBU'S PATRONAGE STYLE

More often than not, the exchange of valued resources is accepted as the sustaining factor of exchange relationships. These resources may be in form of offices, pecuniary gifts, loyalty and affection, among other things. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in societies bedevilled by a high degree of poverty with the quest for daily survival being the major concern, goods in the form of food and/or access to the means of production/survival may readily attract the attention of a large number of potential and actual clients. The clientele so built may not be a function of the gullibility of the clients; rather it may be a reflection of the quest to survive at all costs. This submission may be, according to Peel (1983), what attracted the Ijeshas to the NCNC as the party readily provided pounded yam and palm wine to party faithfuls and admirers in the 1950s. Likewise, Barnes's (1986) study at Mushin in Lagos, Nigeria, revealed a class of patrons who attained clientele-based political prominence through the privileges they grant by providing access to loans, market stalls, licences, etc.

More than 50 years after the NCNC success among the Ijeshas, and two decades after Barnes' study in Mushin, about 70% of Nigerians still live below the poverty line in spite of the nation's huge earnings from oil.

Hence, the quest to satisfy daily body nutrition in order to survive and gain the economic ability to satisfy other needs supersedes all other quests. Thus, indeed, Adedibu – a politician of clout with a large following – wins over his grassroots clients by providing for their needs. His method is often philosophised as ‘*amala-gbegiri* politics’ (Sadeeq 2005: 18). He is a man who understands his immediate social and physical environments as they relate to politics and peoples’ survival needs. He knows how to win the loyalty of the vast majority who live under the poverty line. He knows that provided their primary needs are readily taken care of, their votes become readily available during elections. And so in line with a Yoruba oral philosophy, which says: *Ti ounje ba ti kuro ninu ise, ise buse* [Once hunger is taken care of, poverty disappears], he seeks to satisfy the hunger of his clients. This he does by keeping the doors of his house open to all who wish to come in. He feeds them and holds court to attend to their needs and listens to their suggestions.

Specifically, on a daily basis, as clients gather around him for consultations, even concerning family and other social affairs, Adedibu makes provision for a meal of *amala and gbegiri*, which is culturally acclaimed as Ibadan’s preferred dish. As he does this, he is seen as a philanthropist who caters for the needs of the underprivileged. Hence, once again, he satisfies another aspect of Yoruba oral tradition, which says: *A kii ni ahun, ka tun n’yi* [One cannot be tight-fisted (selfish), and be endowed with honour].

As he gains honour and respect from the grassroots, through his patronic (philanthropic) deeds, he also presents himself as a grassroots politician, who depends on ‘bottom-up’ political ideology to retain political patronage. Thus, as he openly identifies with the low class who form the basis of his political structure, he also gains the recognition of those in political power as a key figure in the political process. Honourable Taofeek Oladejo Arapaja (1996: 11), a former chairman of Ibadan South-East Local Government, described Adedibu thus:

As a political gladiator, he never fails to identify with the needs, yearnings and aspirations of his people and satisfy their needs accordingly. Aside Adedibu’s political skills and relevance, the human milk of kindness in him is such that his house is more of a haven to the less privileged than it is habitable to him ... He can be described as a man of many parts, a grassroots mobiliser, and for record purposes, Adedibu is not only prominent in politics, but also in business.

Former Governor Kolapo Isola, a co-political patron of Adedibu, described him as someone who has ‘adopted an inexhaustible list of orphans, layabouts, vagabonds who he feeds daily and sends to school to find permanent solution to their problem ... He is the practical and in true sense a progressive welfarist’ (Amusan 1997: 6). While acknowledging Adedibu’s



'patronic' ability, the late Chief M. K. O. Abiola stated 'He is a cheerful giver and doyen of Amala-Gbegiri politics, which belongs to the commoners. Baba is an asset' (*Nigerian Tribune* 2003). While admitting Adedibu's political prowess, late General Shehu Musa Yaradua, a Third Republic presidential aspirant, declared (*ibid.*):

In politics, by reasonable calculation, you cannot get to the grassroots level without passing through an acceptable leader of the people. You [are] asking me about Oyo State politics, I will refer you to the leader of the people in the state, Alhaji Adedibu to answer political questions relating to Oyo state politics.

In addition, an Adedibu supporter (2006 int.) we interviewed described Adedibu thus:

I will assess him on religious, political and communal fronts. In the religious front, he has always been at the forefront protecting the interest of Islam, however with a bias for people from Ibadan. For example, he influenced the appointment of an Ibadan man as the Imam of the Government House Mosque against a non-indigene who was previously favoured. Apart from that he has always financially supported *Dawah* activities for the propagation of Islam. He gives alms a lot in line with Islamic precepts and sends people to Hajj. In the area of communal relations ... he settles disputes and provides for the poor. Politically ... he has always made his position known. He is an advocate of money politics. He goes with the highest bidder. In most cases, he has succeeded. And he is a very flexible person. He finds it easy to adjust to any situation. But he is not known to be a loser. By crude or crook, he has won most battles he has fought politically.

Another interviewee, a political opponent (Adedibu opponent 2006a int.), puts it this way:

Adedibu is a man who has built a political clout for himself which attracts politicians. That has earned him an edge as a leader ... He keeps his camp together by being generous ... and always keeps money around to give them. At the same time, he sees himself as a political contractor. And when he invests, he expects 'profits' to come afterwards. The 'profit' will come in from the people he helps into positions of power ... His style of politics supports the notion 'the end justifies the means'. That is, any method goes as much as it will earn his goal. It does not matter whether it is ethical or unethical, bribery, money, violence or any other means that will get him his goal can be used.

Truly, as stated by the late Chief Abiola and the late General Yaradua, Adedibu is an asset to the political class because he is a leader even from the grassroots level. Through the interplay of out-show of religious dedication and pecuniary benevolence, he identifies with the grassroots and readily wins loyalty. The loyalty he enjoys is however valuable to the political class. He, therefore, yields the same to any politician who can offer the required pecuniary gain, part of which he directly or indirectly transfers back to clients to maintain loyalty.

However, since political victory may not always be achieved easily just by giving goods in exchange for loyalty, Adedibu also applies what an interviewee described as ‘crude or crook’ to ensure victory. Hence, he empowers himself by building an informal coercive force of thugs and street urchins from the ‘army’ of disenchanting low class who depend on him for survival. These form his ‘foot-soldiers’ who harass potential and real opponents to submission or flight, and ensure the rigging of elections if need be. An interviewee, an opponent, simply described the thugs this way: ‘they are most ferocious during political issues’ (Adedibu opponent 2006b int.).

Nevertheless, Adedibu does not just use the provision of meals and violence to gain relevance. He builds his political networks from the grassroots through local patrons and social groups. His interest in social groups may be because these groups have become especially preponderant within the last 20 years, due to the social capital capabilities with which they satisfy members’ needs and ensure cohesion (Meagher 2005; Moyo 2002). Thus, identifying with a cohesive group as a benevolent patron may translate to easy and direct access to bulk and extensive loyalty. In fact, Adedibu, in an interview, attributed his direct involvement in grassroots social groups as a function of his belief in ‘socialism’.

Adedibu’s conception of socialism is based on the conviction that a good politician must interact with the people at the most basic level of the polity in order to know their desires, wants and how best to satisfy them. This is a way in which a politician may secure their loyalty. And since the people at the grassroots are essentially communal, bringing them into acceptable collectivities (social groups) through which he could gain access to them become vital to his political career too. Thus Adedibu (2005 int.) states:

Social groups have ... influence on politics ... I belong to so many social organisations. They take decent people, men of honour and integrity ... Before partisan politics, there must be social organisations ... They first start out as friends and later they may form social groups out of friendship ... Yes I connect to my political bases through these organisations ... We assemble, associate and eat together.

From Adedibu’s submission above, it could be deduced that he appreciates the importance of social groups to his political career and clientelistic relations. Thus, apart from forming and maintaining influence (control) over these groups, he does not just set them up like that. It happens rather systematically. He identifies with the grassroots and presents himself as a ‘friend’, willing to listen to them and solve their problems. He does not present himself as a ‘high-up’ wealthy elite, who would only be

seen after scaling bureaucratic and security barriers. Rather, he stands in their midst as a 'partner in progress', ready to uplift the poor and down-trodden as the need arises, even up to the extent of attracting projects from the 'state' to satisfy grassroots demands. Thus, in the eyes of the people at the lowest level of the polity, largely alienated from the socio-political and economic process, Adedibu's show of support and concern makes him a 'friend' and 'leader' to be admired and followed.

Thus, as his 'friends' at the grassroots evolve into social groups, he becomes readily available as, seemingly, the best candidate for the position of patron. Indeed, through social groups he gives goods to the grassroots personally and through his influence at the 'state' level, and of course, they yield their loyalty in return. As they yield their loyalty, through interaction with kin and others, they may also present Adedibu as the 'loving father' to be followed so as to secure survival/development needs especially from the 'state'. Adedibu (2005 int.) subtly confirmed this as he stated that members of the social groups he identifies with are loyal to him because 'some people will have family problems, friendship problems, political problems and so on, which I will stand up to solve for them'.

Adedibu (int.) does all this because 'It is all about love. When you are the head of a social organisation and people are committed to you and abide by whatever you say, it is because you have shown them love and they are simply reciprocating by being loyal to you ...'. And so Adedibu's popularity continues to increase at the grassroots as his political power base also swells as he brings the grassroots under his firm control, irrespective of the views of the elites. As stated earlier, he achieves all these as he shows 'love and concern' through the 'goods' he grants.

Furthermore, he takes particular interest in the choice of leaders of social organisations. He prefers those with charismatic qualities, whose leadership will be accepted with little or no opposition by the members of the social groups. States Adedibu (2005 int.):

Leadership in social organisations emerges by the will of God. Before you start the organisation, you will have the command over the selection of the leaders. One will determine who will be number one, two, three and so on. This is determined by the activities, humanity, public relations, commitment and other activities of each member. One does not need to canvass before knowing who the leaders should be. Their works will reveal them.

Once again, a clientelistic chain could be noticed as Adedibu stands as the overall patron, through whom the leaders of the social organisations and local patrons he supports secure their positions as long as they secure the support of their members and yield the same to him. And as they work hard for Adedibu's political machinery, they are granted material and

non-material rewards in exchange for their loyalty. Hence Adedibu (*ibid.*) states:

It is certain that when they work hard they will be compensated. We have been doing that before now. When they work hard and we win our election, among them we choose Councillors, Supervisory Councillors, Chairmen of Local Government Councils, Commissioners and other political appointees.

It is important to note that whereas those so appointed into political offices through Adedibu's influence may have been appointed as a result of their loyalty to him, they also serve as proxies through whom he participates in government and gains access to the economic resources of the state. Hence, commenting on certain politicians who clinched state offices through his influence, Adedibu states: 'They know how to rule the government the way I want. So, I trust them. They represent my interest. When they are there, it means I am there. If they contest election, that means I am the one contesting elections' (Akinyemi & Laoye 1997a: 7). In corroboration of this assertion, an interviewee described Adedibu as 'a king maker who rules through the king' (Adedibu opponent 2006a int.). His main concern is thus to make sure his proxies clinch political power.

He has to ensure his proxies clinch state power in order to continue maintaining the loyalty of his grassroots clients without whom he loses relevance. No wonder, Adedibu while acknowledging the fact that a minister representing him in the late General Sani Abacha regime brings 'returns' to him, retorted 'Nigerian politicians ... are bread and butter politicians. Including myself. I won't count myself out of it' (Akinyemi & Laoye 1997a: 7).

Indeed they have to be bread and butter politicians because survival/development needs may only be secured through access to resources controlled by those occupying 'state' offices. And the groups who have representatives therein secure their 'daily bread and butter' from government through them. Hence, Adedibu seeks to constantly link with those in power. He states 'Obasanjo is there, Atiku is there, I was a friend to Babangida, I know what it means to be a friend to the Federal Government' (Osunde 2003: 15). He also identifies with others who may boost his career and influence in the political sphere. Such people include Chiefs Richard Akinjide, Yekeen Adejo and Kolapo Isola, Adepoju, among others, who control certain parts of Ibadan city. At the national level, he identifies with the ruling parties.

By identifying with Nigeria's foremost political leaders including Obasanjo (the president), Atiku (the vice president), Babangida (a former

military president who ruled Nigeria for eight years, with the supposed intention of coming back to the political scene as civilian president), and the Federal Government entirely, Adedibu shows his connection to the highest level of Nigeria's political power through which resources could be easily drawn in exchange for loyalty. Apparently, for this reason, Adedibu would rather be a political patron than a politician seeking political offices. He states: 'I don't have any other political ambition than to promote and sponsor people to positions, I want to retain my status as a kingmaker ...' (*Daily Monitor* 1997: 20). And as earlier stated, if he would retain his status as a political patron, then goods must continue rolling in from 'state' resources, to distribute to clients and maintain their loyalty. Seemingly it appears that this measures the performance of any politician he supports to attain power. This is evident in his juxtaposition of Governor Ladoja's performance and that of former Governor Ishola. Quoting him at length, Adedibu states '*ad'awo jo r'aja, enikan ninu wa so pe aja mi dipo aja wa*' [we contributed money to buy a dog and someone among the contributors now refers to it as my dog instead of our dog] (Adebimpe 2004: 16).

He goes further (*ibid.*: 25):

Let me tell you, I sincerely say it and I will continue to say it, that there's never been any ruler of this state who has performed better than Governor Kolapo Ishola. He performed so wonderfully that you can assess his job. First of all on education, he did excellently by establishing school of science one at Akinyele Local Government,<sup>3</sup> one in my own Local Government, here at Oke-Bola, one at Elekuro, one in Ibarapa and Oke-Ogun. And he tarred almost every road in all the 26 Local Governments we had then, not patch-patch (*sic*). The record is there that Ishola did better than any other governor that has been in office. What do I know about administration, I don't give them advice on administration, my concern is politics. Those people that laboured, they laboured to reap where they sowed. Take for instance, in the last one-year, the customary court judges established (*sic*) by Lam Adesina are the people that are still there. This is part of the benefits that people that laboured could have reaped and one year has gone Ladoja never changed them, he has never changed any Permanent Secretary, and it's the same Permanent Secretaries being used by former Governor Lam Adesina. Also, the Rent Tribunals established last year by Lam Adesina are still there. On this alone, you can now judge. When Ishola was there, immediately he took over, he established all these and put loyal party members there as Lam Adesina did when he also assumed office by putting his own party members and loyalists. For one year now, the AD people are there leaving other members of the PDP who worked for Ladoja to fold their arms and be looking at what is happening.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, for Adedibu, the 'goods' which accompany the occupation of political offices are not the preserve of those occupying such offices.

They are ‘goods’ that must be shared for the benefits of all who have contributed their loyalty in one form or the other for those in political offices to attain their positions. Anybody who does otherwise has not performed irrespective of the attempts he might have made to improve people’s lives. They simply become insignificant as long as the people are not carried along through the delivery of ‘goods’ in the form of projects, and appointment of loyalists to offices among other things. Notwithstanding this, when government-sponsored ‘development’ projects are to be sited with his influence, he bases his judgement on what he calls ‘socialism’ still. This is concerned with the involvement of the people and traditional institutions on issues pertaining to ‘development’. Adedibu states (2005 int.):

this is where socialism comes in. I can say because Olubadan of Ibadan is in Ibadan let’s take the project to Ibadan ... or we can say Oni of Ife is in Ife, let’s take the project to Ife. Neither of them are politicians. But we can do that to honour them ... (However) the siting is done in conjunction with local inhabitants. That is how the thing can work.

His recognition of the importance of traditional institutions is apparently a function of the realisation of the influence that occupants of indigenous stools may have on the grassroots. By so doing, he in turn secures ‘approval’ from them, with which he gains access to the grassroots for loyalty as he consults with them to win their support in exchange for the project that is coming to them through his influence.

Finally, in spite of the fact that he is regarded as a benevolent patron, Adedibu understands that patrons cannot perpetually go against the wishes of clients. Any attempt at that may only lead to political downfall. Thus he states (2005 int.) ‘I always want to find myself within the thought of the majority ... once you are in the minority in politics, you have failed ... Anyone who succeeds in by-passing his followership will regret it at a later stage ...’. He was apparently talking from experience. A number of times he had lost followers due to political miscalculation by acting against the wishes of his clients. This resulted in dire consequences for him. This is discussed further below.

#### POLITICAL TURBULENCE AND OPPOSITION FROM CLIENTS

Adedibu’s first major political turbulence and loss of clients’ loyalty came during the stalemated Fourth Republic, stage-managed by General Abacha in the 1990s. Chief Adedibu had been a staunch supporter of the acclaimed winner of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, the late Chief M. K. O. Abiola. His unflinching support continued even after the

annulment of the election by General Babangida and subsequent installation of the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Earnest Shonekan. Shonekan lasted only about 90 days in government, as the military struck again and General Abacha became the military head of state. Chief Abiola was consequently thrown into jail after he unilaterally declared himself president and was sworn in, in a secret location at Epe, Lagos. In spite of Abiola's incarceration, Adedibu still maintained his support for him. He even went to the extent of publicly denouncing General Yaradua, a presidential aspirant whom he had earlier supported to victory under the banner of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Adedibu states 'He cannot come, unless the June 12 crisis is resolved. Nobody can come here to canvass for votes, that is what I said. I said Yar'Adua is banned from coming here' (*Third Eye Daily* 1995: 11).

Still on the same issue of 12 June presidential elections, he states: 'There can never be election in the country until the Abiola issue is settled. I am still maintaining that' (Awobiyi & Tumu-Ojelabi 1996: 5). With the hope that Abiola's election would be actualised, he goes further still (*ibid.*: 11):

By the grace of God it will materialise. I am maintaining that ... whoever is against June 12, is an enemy of the country because there can never be peace except if Abiola is released and justice is done on June 12. That is my stand. The people of this country mandated him to be their ruler. They gave him their mandate, contrary to that, we can never witness peace.

Inasmuch as Adedibu's stance on the 12 June issue as it relates to Abiola's election was maintained for a while, he could not sustain it perpetually. Due to the fact that Abiola was imprisoned, 'goods' continually needed to keep his clientelistic base were not forthcoming. This proved a great threat to the loyalty he enjoyed from clients. This he could not toy with, as loss of clients' loyalty might result in the loss of political relevance as well. Thus by March 1996, with the extension of recognition to him by the Abacha regime, another opportunity was opened to Adedibu to extract economic resources from the government in power at the Federal level. This was an opportunity he would not decline. And gradually he started expressing his support for Abacha's policies. First, he made known his acceptance of the Abacha regime's plan for elections at the local government level. Adedibu states (Thomas 1996: 9):

That is the idea of the present administration. I tell you, if we don't want it, what can we do? Except you ... have an answer. But if Abacha says this and that and we don't want it, what can we do? We people that have been labelled as supporters of the government, we know what we are saying. If you can't beat them,

you join them. As we have no alternative to any suggestion from government, we are to agree with government. What can anybody do?

Indeed since he could not beat the government at the centre to the resources at its disposal, he had to 'join them' and become a friend of the Federal government. He identified with Abacha's regime to the extent that he abandoned the 12 June struggle and became the chief campaigner for the 'Abacha for President' project in south-western Nigeria. He justified his position thus 'If Abacha now surrenders his uniform and becomes the civilian President and all the governors for states are civilians, let's write it down it would work ...' (Akinyemi & Laoye 1997b: 8). Thus he submits 'I will vote Abacha ...' (*Daily Monitor* 1997: 20).

Whereas Adedibu may have taken this stance to attract 'goods' to give in exchange for loyalty from clients, as stated earlier, it turned out to be a major political miscalculation for him. Instead of winning clients' loyalty, he was rather rejected by the majority of the clients he sought to provide for. This was because, at that period, the abortive 12 June presidential election had assumed a degree of 'social/cultural consciousness' with which a sort of social revolution was already evolving among the Yoruba who viewed Chief M. K. O. Abiola as one of them being denied his presidential victory by the 'Northern oligarchy' represented by the Hausa-Fulani dominated military and the military ruling class in government. Once again as Laitin (1982, 1986) observed about the Yoruba stand on the Sharia impasse prior to Nigeria's Second Republic in the 1978 Constituent Assembly, tribal culture/origin took pre-eminence over every other consideration among the majority of the Yoruba elite and low-class polity. As the Yoruba ethnic group was gradually being transformed with social consciousness for self-determination and freedom from perceived external forces of exploitation, domination and retrogression (Akinyele 2001), whatever Adedibu had to offer as a 'good' became an 'objectified' item of betrayal. He was not to be spared for this. As he campaigned for Abacha for president, he became an enemy of the 'Yoruba nation' who must be sanctioned.

He was ostracised by his co-political elites and his properties became objects of vandalism by the very clients he catered for. In fact, aside from his business concerns which were attacked, his house was vandalised and burnt down during an anti-Abacha rally in 1998, and his own safety too was threatened (Ola 1998). Thus, the company of clients who daily thronged his home could no longer provide protection for him. Chief Lamidi Adedibu had to rely on armed soldiers and policemen (Ojebisi 1998) provided by Abacha's 'coercive state apparatuses' to ensure his security.



Adedibu's support for Abacha was sustained apparently with continual replenishment from state resources until General Abacha died suddenly on 8 June 1998. Since Abacha's democratic transition programme was unacceptable to the majority of the citizenry, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who took over, had to give some 'goods' too, which would make him acceptable to the populace, which had gained consciousness against the military ruling political class. The first thing he did was to discontinue Abacha's transition programme and start another one that would be acceptable to the Nigerian political elite, who would in turn present it as an acceptable 'good' to the citizenry. Hence, Adedibu's descent into temporary political irrelevance until the second four-year term of the Fourth Republic. This is further discussed below.

ADEDIBU AND PATRONAGE POLITICS IN NIGERIA'S  
FOURTH REPUBLIC

As Adedibu lost out in the new political dispensation, he was ostracised by the Yoruba political class, who organised themselves into the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and won the grassroots by clamouring for 12 June, identifying with the 'Awolowo legacy' and promising the kind of infrastructural 'goods' that Awolowo gave to them during his Action Group government of the 1950s. As the Alliance for Democracy swept into power, Adedibu and the party he identified with, the All Peoples' Party [APP, later All Nigeria Peoples' Party or ANPP] remained in doldrums. He lost his political relevance and had to be silent on political issues at the moment. Adedibu sums it up thus 'In fact under the present state of affairs, the new political atmosphere is so sensitive that a reasonable person would rather adopt silence as the only option when the probability of being misunderstood is high. You do not talk at a time when people will not listen or reason with you ...' (Ogunwusi 2000: 15). Apparently he had finally realised that in contrast to his earlier claim in 1998 at the height of 'Abacha for President' campaign that 'Let them say what they want. The people know who is in control. The key to Ibadan politics is in my hand, no matter what anybody says ... I don't think anybody can displace me ... I am not displaceable by any mortal, no matter the gang up' (Giwa 1998: 22) – real power belongs to the people. And any political figure who desires to win their loyalty must abide by their demands at the political realm (constructed out of the prevailing social consciousness), irrespective of the 'goods' s/he may have to offer for loyalty.

Notwithstanding, by the time the first four-year tenure of the Fourth Republic was drawing to a close, the Yoruba polity in South Western

geo-political zone was dissatisfied with the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the government in power, because they had not adequately given ‘development goods’ as promised. And so loyalty had to be shifted. This was to prove a political advantage to Adedibu, who had changed party from the All Nigeria Peoples’ Party (ANPP) to the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP). This meant once again that he was able to identify with the Federal government through which abundant resources could be attracted to win over and sustain clients’ loyalty.

Hence, by 2003, as campaigns started for another election, and with widespread Yoruba acceptance of Obasanjo whose presidential candidacy for second term under the banner of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) was apparently seen as a sort of actualisation of the June 12 struggle, Adedibu’s star in Ibadan politics rose again. With a combination of granting of goods, intimidation of political opponents, actual violence and support of the PDP (the ruling party at the Federal level), Adedibu ensured victory for the PDP in Ibadan in particular and Oyo state in general. As Obasanjo was elected president, his candidate for the Oyo State gubernatorial seat, Chief Ladoja, won too. Thenceforth, Adedibu has continued to enjoy grassroots/clients loyalty once again. This is simply a confirmation of a statement he made earlier in 1997 that ‘no matter how popular you are, if you belong to a party, which is not popular, people would not recognise you. An unpopular person will defeat a popular candidate if that person belongs to a wrong party ...’ (*Daily Monitor* 1997: 22). Thus, simply put, a patron may not have his way all the time. In fact, a patron who desires to remain relevant in the political system and avoid opposition from clients may have to abide by their expectations. The sustenance of a clientelistic base may, therefore, be based not only on the provision of goods desired by clients or violence, but on identification with their socio-political/cultural consciousness as well.

Indeed, Adedibu enjoys the support of clients most of the time by succumbing to the prevailing social consciousness without which he would lose their loyalty. As long as he enjoys clients’ loyalty, this stands as the base upon which many politicians earn their victories at the polls and/or sustain political offices, especially as it relates to Ibadan politics. To buttress this, recent political happenings in Oyo State provide a good example. Chief Rasheed Ladoja had won the 2003 election to become the governor of Oyo State under the banner of the People’s Democratic Party, through Adedibu’s support. An opponent of Adedibu interviewed described Ladoja’s relationship with Adedibu this way:

Ladoja was more or less like a son to Adedibu. It was Adedibu who brought Ladoja into limelight politically. Although Ladoja was a rich business magnate,

he was nonetheless not a politician. So the defeat of other gubernatorial aspirants and contestants was the handiwork of Adedibu. It was on this basis that Adedibu felt Ladoja did not do what he was supposed to do for him adequately. That was the reason why they fought as Ladoja wanted to dispel the notion that victory for him would translate to the rule of Adedibu. (Adedibu opponent 2006b int.)

This apparently explains why soon after Ladoja was sworn in; he sought to de-emphasise the political relevance of Adedibu, even as Adedibu's demands for 'goods' became insatiable. The political imbroglio between Ladoja and Adedibu lingered on for about two and half years until Adedibu was able to secure the full loyalty of 18, who he probably sponsored through his social networks, out of the 32 members of the Oyo State House of Assembly. In spite of the fact that this number did not constitute the two-third majority stipulated in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the governor was eventually impeached on 12 January 2006, while his deputy, Chief Adebayo Alao-Akala, was sworn in as the new governor. Apparently, Adedibu did not achieve this all alone. He enjoyed covert support from the Federal level, which provided the coercive forces of the state (the police, in particular) to achieve Ladoja's impeachment. Perhaps all the support Adedibu needed had to be granted, because as well as Ladoja's disagreement with Adedibu, he was also against the supposed third-term bid of President Obasanjo. Retaining Ladoja in power meant losing the vital support of one of the Yoruba southwestern states that Obasanjo considered his primary constituency and base of the third-term campaign. And since Ladoja was out of favour with the 'real powers behind the throne', he was impeached, though unconstitutionally.<sup>5</sup> The new governor seems to be wary of the downfall of his predecessor, and thus he presents himself as a 'son' who is ready to do the biddings of his 'father' (for more on the Adedibu-Ladoja imbroglio, see: Adegboyega 2006; Ajayi 2006; Alarape 2005; Fabowale & Awowole-Brown 2006; Odeyemi 2003; Solarin 2006).

Finally, once again, Adedibu has been able to prove a political point, that he remains relevant in the political arrangement of Ibadan in particular and Oyo State in general. This may remain as long as he retains the support of the grassroots clients, irrespective of the views of the elite. The only option open to the elite who oppose him may be, once again (just as during the 12 June crisis), to utilise ideological instruments (for example, the mass media and other relevant means) to stimulate social revolution and social consciousness that would attach meanings of anti-grassroots well-being and development to Adedibu. Otherwise, as long as the grassroots view their development through him, he may remain relevant and be

supported by the party holding power at the Federal level for its perpetuation in power.



In Nigeria's political scene, Adedibu has been able to establish himself as a political icon who may not be easily rubbished. He maintains political influence through the patronage he has been able to build by recognising the 'needs' of 'his people'. As Adedibu is seen as a ready 'tool' in the hands of members of the political class who can pay his price, his excesses are also overlooked, especially as long as he does not go against the wishes of the government in power at the Federal level. Hence, as he attracts goods for the sustenance of his political patronage and intimidates political opponents into flight or submission through violence, the law enforcement agencies simply ignore his excesses while he seemingly breaks the law with impunity. Nonetheless, his ability to achieve these, as shown above, is dependent on the understanding of the social consciousness of the low class (that is, socio-political expectations) in spite of satisfying their needs. This is because any other patron can assuage their socio-economic needs.

Though democracy is supposed to uphold accountability, justice, fairness and the rule of law, Nigeria's democracy simply does not achieve this as regards Adedibu. This may be a reflection of the low-level position the country occupies in democratic transition. And as long as this persists, the hope of attaining democracy consisting of these yardsticks may be a mirage, even as patronage retains its central and pivotal position in Nigerian politics.

#### NOTES

1. *Alaafin* was the title of the pre-colonial Yoruba emperor, whose territory covered the whole of present southwestern Nigeria, some parts of northern Nigeria and parts of Benin Republic.
2. Calling Adedibu *Alaafin* simply depicts his influence in Nigeria's political scene.
3. The school was actually established at Pade Village, the hometown of former Governor Ishola.
4. Adedibu finally influenced Governor Ladoja's impeachment on 12 January 2006, after a flawed process. It was achieved primarily through the active participation of 18 lawmakers loyal to Adedibu and covert support from the Federal level through the Nigeria police.
5. By December 2006, Governor Ladoja was reinstated through a judgement of the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

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