

# Mediating an intra-elite struggle for power and privilege in Nigeria: the police and the Oyo State political crisis, 2005–2007

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*the period before, has been a zero-sum game. It is also a fact that politicians and political office holders engage in intense struggles to sustain themselves in power and to liquidate the opposition by all means possible, fair or foul. Similarly, the emergence of political godfathers with tremendous clout has remained an essential feature of politics in Nigeria, the same way that the police have remained a pawn on the chessboard of the political class in Nigeria. The emergence of 'godfathers' and the brazen ways in which they justify their existence may be the most defining feature of Nigeria's democracy since 2003. The crisis between Rashidi Ladoja, the governor of Oyo State from 2003 to 2007, and Chief Lamidi Adedibu was only one of many such cases. Yet it typifies Nigeria's politics by the manner of police involvement. This paper situates the role of the police in a historical context of their being an instrument of power since colonial rule. It explores how the new manifestation of this character in the Ladoja–Adedibu crisis underscores the contemporary form of Nigeria's politics.*

## ABSTRACT

*It is not new that politics in Nigeria since the attainment of political independence, and even in*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the era of active decolonisation in 1951, politicians and political office holders

have found in the police a necessary and useful tool and accomplice in their pursuit of, and sustenance in power. Structured in this way by colonial rule, Nigeria's political class has retained the police as an instrument of power and control. Rotimi (2001, p. 129) lists the significant roles of the Nigerian police to include: being the authoritarian instrument of an authoritarian State; protecting the ethnic power bases of the ruling elite; and more importantly (for our purpose), showing off power in a bid to limit challenge from the political opposition. Thus throughout Nigeria's history, the police have been identified with the ruling party and the politically dominant region. This has often reduced opposition parties and contending regions, which are sometimes coterminous with the major ethnic groups, and individuals in the ruling party who challenge the status quo, to victims of the police. Underlying the do-or-die contest for power in which the police have proved useful was mad ambition, sheer greed and other selfish individual and class interests which usually cut across ethnic or regional divides. Tools often employed in such contests in addition to the police included wealth, hooliganism and oratorical power.

This political role of the police not only ensures unconstitutional security of tenure and successes in elections for the ruling party, it also destabilises the opposition in many ways. The most significant way is that it produces a number of actors as political kingpins who are able to access the instrumentality of the police to dominate politics at more local levels. Usually allied with the ruling party and concomitantly the federal government, these local elites get away with criminal and political crimes, and maintain militias of thugs, the activities of which the police often appear incapable or unwilling to control or challenge. While this has

been a regular feature of Nigeria's politics since Independence, it assumed a more disconcerting dimension in Oyo and Anambra States where, between 2003 and 2007, the police brazenly acted in support of political godfathers against the democratically elected political office holders. This political misuse of the police appears the more complicated because, in these cases, it occurred within the ruling party.

The particular case of Oyo State raises fundamental questions which underscore the ideological shifts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic in nuanced departures from the previous eras. Why should the Chief Security Officer of a State be hounded by the same police force that should have provided security for him? Why should it be difficult for the governor to guarantee the security of lives and property in a place where he was the chief executive/chief security officer, whereas the same police force was at the beck and call of a potentate who did not hold any political office? Why did the police act in the way they did, supporting or withdrawing support for the parties to the crisis depending on situation and circumstance? Why did some police officers show greater loyalty to politicians than to the force or its leadership? Why did the police vacillate in taking decisions even when it was obvious that certain laws had been breached? What are the implications of 'godfatherism' on the structure and performance of the police? These and other pertinent questions engage the attention of this paper.

### **POLITICS IN OYO STATE UP TO 2003**

Oyo State was created in 1976 by the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo, following the splitting of the old Western Region into three States, namely Ogun, Ondo and Oyo (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976; Adejuyigbe 1979, 1989;

Nwosu, 1995). With the return of party politics in 1979, the State came under the control of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) founded by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. In 1983 the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), following an election which many think was massively rigged by the ruling party at the centre, took power in the State. Another factor for which the UPN lost the State may have been sub-ethnicity struggles between the leading Yoruba groups in the State, one of which allied with the Hausa-Fulani-dominated NPN to access 'federal power'. Therefore a central paradigm in Oyo State politics has been the struggle between Yoruba nationalism and unity against the influence of the (usually) Hausa-Fulani-dominated ruling parties. This dynamic saw the Alliance for Democracy (AD), obviously a Yoruba-dominated party, lose to the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in 2003 (Kew, 2004; Adesoji, 2006).

Arising from the above, a number of characteristics about politics in Oyo State could be identified. Generally, it is apparent that the electorates were very docile and politically naive or perhaps unconcerned. Not only were they not asking questions, they were not protesting about imposition, manipulation, unpopular acts or stage-managed choices. While it could be said that they were not carried along nor kept away from the core democratic process, it could also be argued that they were aloof or did not fully integrate themselves into the process, believing that the core political processes belonged to a dominant, vocal, wealthy or troublesome few. Implicitly, the weakness of the electorate is a major feature of politics in Oyo State as in other parts of Nigeria.

Also, despite the homogeneous nature of Yoruba culture and language, intra-ethnic considerations dominated politics. Apart from the tenure of Chief Bola Ige

(1979–83), an Ijesa married to an Ibadan woman, politics in the old and new Oyo State (after the creation of Osun State in 1991) has been dominated by Ibadan indigenes with Omololu Olunloyo (October–December 1983), Kolapo Isola (January 1992–November 1993), Lamidi Adesina (1999–2003) and Rashidi Ladoja (2003–2007) as governors. The emergence of Chief Adebayo Alao-Akala, an Ogbo-moso man, in 2007 was made possible by the high level support, thuggery and manipulation from an Ibadan man in the person of Lamidi Adedibu. Beyond intra-ethnic consideration, the emergence of Chief Adebayo Alao-Akala was an outcome of the effort by Chief Lamidi Adedibu to liquidate the political albatross that Chief Rashidi Ladoja represented, as a way of gaining unfettered access to the State treasury. Thus a combination of personal and economic considerations was central to his emergence. Related to this is that Oyo State politics has always been dominated by a cabal whose members have sought to control the machinery of government for personal benefits. Where the cabal does not 'anoint' leaders for elective offices and support or finance them when the relationship between them is good, it causes trouble for the leaders, acts as a counterpoise or a parallel government, or even orchestrates their removal when the relationship turns sour (Abati, 2006a; Kolawole, 2006; Olaniyonu, 2006). Thus, from Adegoke Adelabu in the old Western Region, to Busari Adedibu, to Lamidi Adedibu and to other lesser known men of influence, Oyo State politics has been dominated by powerful kingmakers who have always colluded or acted alone to enthrone or dethrone as political expediency dictates.

Oyo State politics was characterised by tremendous stress and strain arising from the chicanery associated with all the efforts at imposing, manipulating or controlling and

removing leaders. This was the case during the 1983 election that brought Omololu Olunloyo to power as governor and the 2003 election that brought Senator Rashidi Ladoja to power. It should be noted that whereas the features identified above are not peculiar to Oyo State alone, they are rather dominant there. This was the background against which Senator Rashidi Ladoja emerged as governor in 2003.

### **THE LADOJA-ADEDIBU RELATIONSHIP: FROM HARMONY TO DISCORD**

Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja, a senator in the aborted Third Republic, was elected governor of Oyo State in April 2003 on the platform of the PDP with Adebayo Alao-Akala as his deputy. Lamidi Ariyibi Adedibu claimed that he literally installed Ladoja as the governor (Shirbon, 2007). Known variously as the ‘Strongman of Ibadan politics’, ‘Garrison Commander’, ‘Lord of the Manor’, ‘Godfather’, ‘Exponent of *Amala*<sup>1</sup> Politics’, ‘Big Bully of Ibadan Politics’, ‘Stormy Petrel of Oyo State Politics’, ‘*Orisa Molete*<sup>2</sup> (god of Molete), ‘Tiger in Molete’ and ‘*Alaafin* (Ruler) of *Molete*’,<sup>3</sup> Adedibu claimed to have been involved in politics since the 1950s during the Action Group (AG) era (Obadare, 2007, pp. 115–116). Adedibu claimed to have contested election in 1954 on the platform of the Ibadan People’s Party but was defeated by Yinusa Ladoja, father of Senator Ladoja, who rode on the support of Adegoke Adelabu’s National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) (Adeniyi 2006; Martins, 2006). It would appear that, during these formative years as one of the small-time organisers of thugs for the AG, Adedibu cut his political teeth and was adequately prepared for the roles he played in later years as an ardent party supporter and grassroots mobiliser (Obadare, pp. 115–116). The demise of other stronger men, the decline of their

influence and Adedibu’s fraternisation with different leaders over time were crucial factors in his emergence as a strongman. His association, for instance, with Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha is an open secret, and the emboldening effect of these relationships on him was of tremendous importance. In terms of pedigree, while Governor Ladoja was a successful businessman, urbane and literate, Adedibu was a politician all his life; barely literate, crude but resolute in the attainment of set objectives and goals. Significantly also, both belonged to the same political party, both were Muslims and both were Ibadan high chiefs (Adeyemi, 2006a)

Until September 2005, when the Adedibu camp made a concerted effort to impeach Ladoja, nothing much was heard about the crisis, perhaps because it had not become an open issue. It would appear that, until then, Governor Ladoja had been amenable to control by Adedibu and in the process had prevented a crisis, or that efforts were made to conciliate the contending groups such that it did not become an open crisis until much later. Meanwhile, following the reconvening of the Oyo State House of Assembly on 13 December 2005, 18 members (out of 32) loyal to Adedibu suspended the Speaker of the House, Hon. Adeolu Adeleke, for refusing to reconvene the Assembly after its 15 September 2005 sitting, ostensibly due to his loyalty to the Ladoja camp (Obadina, 2005; Lawal, 2005). Five other pro-Ladoja legislators were also suspended. The disruption of the meeting by the pro-Ladoja legislators led the pro-Adedibu group to reassemble at the D’Rovans Hotel, Ibadan. They served an impeachment notice on Governor Ladoja the same day and also mandated the Acting Chief Judge of Oyo State to constitute a panel to probe the allegations of gross misconduct levelled against the Governor (Ajayi, 2005; Lawal, 2005; Ojo, 2006).

The legislators claimed that they were acting in accordance with section 188(2) of the 1999 Constitution. Some official reasons included in the 14-point allegations given for the impeachment of Governor Ladoja were: maintenance of the State account with a bank where he was a director even after he had been sworn in as governor; fraudulent diversion of 1.99 billion naira (Nigerian unit of currency) belonging to the 33 local governments in the State, into his personal account with the Standard Trust Bank contrary to Schedule 5 of the Constitution; establishment and funding of the State Road Maintenance Agency (OYSTROMA) in 2004 without the approval of the State House of Assembly. Other charges were: the award of contracts for more than the amount budgeted for without recourse to the House; operating a foreign bank account with the National Westminster Bank of London even as a serving governor, contrary to the provision of paragraph 3 of Schedule 5 of the Constitution; increasing the number of government Ministries and parastatals from 12 to 15 without the approval of the House; organising/sponsoring armed attacks on State legislators and undermining their constitutional powers; undermining the integrity of the judiciary by refusing to obey court orders; general mismanagement, dereliction of duties, nepotism and ineptitude in the running of the affairs of the State (Idowu, 2006; Oyedele and Oni, 2006; Ubani, 2006).

Despite the efforts by Ladoja's camp to stop the impeachment notice through a court process, the impeachment process continued. Three legislators, namely Hassan Ogundoke, Babatunde Olaniyan and Jacob Oyekunle who were loyal to Governor Ladoja, filed a suit at the State High Court on 3 January 2006 which succeeded in extracting an undertaking from the Acting Chief Judge of the State, Justice Afolabi

Adeniran, that as a defendant in the case he would not take actions that would jeopardise the motion on notice for interlocutory injunction (*The Punch* Editorial February 6, 2006). Governor Ladoja was eventually impeached by the 18 factional lawmakers loyal to Adedibu on 12 January 2006 on the basis of the report of the seven-man panel (headed by Bolaji Ayorinde), which the Acting Chief Judge inaugurated on 4 January 2006 (*The Punch* Editorial February 6 2006; Okanlawon, 2006). Adebayo Alao-Akala, Ladoja's deputy, who was in hiding while the impeachment process lasted, was sworn in as governor in place of Ladoja on the same day. Also on the same day, Justice Bolaji Yusuf, apparently reacting to the Acting Chief Judge's flagrant disregard for the suit pending before her court challenging the impeachment, annulled the impeachment as well as the processes that led to it (*The Punch* Editorial February 6 2006).

The thinking and utterances of the main contenders in the crisis and those of their supporters, show that there was more to the impeachment than the official reasons given. The labelling of Governor Ladoja as Vice-President Atiku Abubakar's protégé did a lot to attract the support of President Olusegun Obasanjo for Lamidi Adedibu, the 18 factional lawmakers and the impeachment process (Ishekwene, 2005; Ojo, 2006). This was a time when the crisis of confidence between Vice-President Atiku Abubakar and President Olusegun Obasanjo had not only become an open matter, but had also reached a crescendo. Whereas Vice-President Abubakar was not interested in the third term agenda of President Obasanjo, Abubakar's interest in succeeding Obasanjo threatened the latter's third-term bid which was already being launched through a constitutional amendment process. Besides driving a wedge between the two men, the disagreement polarised the ruling PDP such that party

chieftains and office holders were either subjected to a witch-hunt or rewarded, on the basis of the side they supported. Thus the labelling of Governor Ladoja as being opposed to the third term agenda facilitated his political liquidation.

Governor Ladoja insisted that he and Adedibu shared different views on politics and governance. Whereas Governor Ladoja claimed to see governance as service, Adedibu saw it as business (Gbadamosi, 2006). It is obvious that Adedibu sponsored Governor Ladoja for the governorship seat in 2003 (Shirbon, 2007). Indeed, while the impeachment process was still going on, Adedibu vowed to use the same system, which thrived on thuggery and hooliganism, through which Governor Ladoja got to Government House and which he later scorned, to take him out of office (Ojo, 2006). More importantly, in his relationship with Governor Ladoja, Chief Adedibu alleged that:

Ladoja is too greedy. He was collecting N65 million [naira] as security votes every month. You know (sic) governors do not account for security votes. We had agreed he would be giving me just N15 million out of it every month. He reneged. Later people intervened and he reduced it to N10 million, yet he did not give me. Then if he is saying that I wanted the state treasury and he did not give me the key, we should now tell people what he has done with over N160 billion he has collected in the last 30 months (Adeyemi, 2006a)

The indications are that Governor Ladoja had done things in the past to placate Adedibu as his political godfather and to oil their relationship in order to prevent friction. Although Chief Ladoja claimed not to have entered into any revenue-sharing formula with Chief Adedibu, it was clear that the process of his emergence as governor,

with the active support of Adedibu, placed him on the defensive, given the latter's desire to reap in cash what he had invested in political capital. Adedibu had also sought to dominate the government by nominating many political appointees into Governor Ladoja's cabinet, but the governor did not oblige (Oyedele, Oni, Owete, Fabiyi and Oyeboode, 2006; Adeyemi, 2006b).

Governor Ladoja's impeachment was voided by the Federal Court of Appeal on 1 November 2006 on the ground of non-compliance with constitutional provisions. (Oyedele et al, 2006, *The Nation*, January 17 2007). However, Ladoja was not restored to office as governor until the Supreme Court ruling of 11 December 2006 (Oyedele, Amokeodo and Soniyi, 2006; Sanni, 2006).

For the period that the crisis lasted, the police played a very active role, either in aiding and conniving, or in abdicating their responsibility. The involvement of the police in the political crisis forms the focus of the next section of this paper.

### **THE POLICE AND THE OYO POLITICAL CRISIS: NEUTRAL STATE AGENT OR BIASED ACTIVE PARTICIPANT?**

The involvement of the police in the Oyo political crisis pre-dates September 2005 though it became public knowledge from that period. Following the adjournment of the legislators' sitting on 15 September 2005 and the brewing crisis between the Ladoja and the Adedibu camps, the police took custody of the mace, the symbol of legislative authority, with a promise to release it to the full executive committee of the Assembly when needed. The Commissioner of Police, Alhaji Audu Abubakar, had given conditions for the release of the mace. These included that: (1) all the principal officers of the House, including the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Majority and

Minority Leaders, Clerk and Sergeant-at-Arms must be present; and (2) they must come with a duly signed application, requesting the release of the mace (Sanni, Adeyemo, Peter-Omale, and Ogunmade, 2006). But it was the 18 factional lawmakers who secured the release of the mace from police custody because it was needed to facilitate the reconvening of the Assembly where the issue of the impeachment of Governor Ladoja was topmost on the agenda (Obadina, 2005). The claim of the police was that the mace was released to those who came to claim it. This was contrary to the promise made earlier by the police authorities in Oyo State. Besides, the Speaker, who was the head of the House, was not a part of those to whom the mace was released, which raised a fundamental question as to who had the authority to collect the mace from the police.

Armed with the mace, the 18 pro-Adedibu legislators reconvened, took control of the Assembly complex and were given adequate security by policemen led by Assistant Commissioner of Police, Frank David (Obadina, 2005). Efforts by the pro-Ladoja legislators to resist the sitting of the 18 legislators resulted in violence in which some of them, namely Olufemi Josiah Idowu, Titilola Dauda and Babatunde Olaniyan, were allegedly stabbed and had their clothes torn even in the presence of the police (Lawal, 2005). When the 18 lawmakers eventually were led to D'Rovans Hotel, Ibadan, ostensibly to continue with the impeachment case, three anti-riot policemen, led by Jeff Allah, were on hand to protect them. At the same time, eight policemen attached to the Speaker, Hon. Adeolu Adeleke, were withdrawn by the police authorities on the ground of his alleged suspension from office (Lawal, 2005a). Furthermore, at the sitting of the seven-man panel constituted to probe allegations of gross misconduct against Governor Ladoja, the police mounted a

tight security around the court premises, ostensibly to ensure that the panel sitting was not disrupted in any way (Adeyemo, 2006). In a similar manner, the police provided security at the court hearing of the case filed by 14 lawmakers against Governor Ladoja's impeachment and frisked people entering the court premises (Alli, Obadina and Oyedele, 2005). The case was later dismissed on 23 December 2005 by Justice John Olagoke Ige on the ground that the impeachment process could not be challenged in court and he therefore declined jurisdiction in entertaining the case (Ajani and Ajayi, 2006; Adebisi and Adeyemo, 2006). Also, following the controversial impeachment of Governor Ladoja,<sup>4</sup> his security aides were withdrawn and, after his threat to resume office following Justice Bolaji Yusuf's declaration of the impeachment and related processes as illegal, Governor Ladoja was warned by the Inspector General of Police (IGP), not to go near Government House; the IGP claimed that his directive was to forestall anarchy. Indeed, Governor Ladoja's request for the restoration of his security aides was turned down by the Oyo State Police Command on the directive of the IGP, claiming that they were meant for State governors and government officials (Onojovwo, 2006). Security was also beefed up with the stationing of armoured personnel carriers in strategic places within Ibadan, the State capital, ostensibly to forestall anarchy (Nigerian Tribune, 2006; Arowolo, 2006; *The Punch* January 17 2006).

The intimidation by the police notwithstanding, some pro-democracy groups<sup>5</sup> still braved the odds to protest about the controversial removal of Governor Ladoja from office. This met with severe reprisals from the police who unleashed terror on the protesters on the ground that the organisers did not apply for a permit to hold the rally which, the police also

claimed, could easily be hijacked by hoodlums (Ita and Omokaro, 2006; Onojovwo, 2006). But while the police harassed and terrorised pro-democracy activists, thugs believed to belong to the Adedibu camp came out forcefully to challenge the protesters and were neither curbed by the police nor arrested despite their heavy presence in the area. (Onojovwo 2006; Okanlawon, 2006). Arguably, the partisanship of the police became a pattern for the period that the crisis lasted. For instance, it was a common sight for thugs, mostly those loyal to Adedibu, to carry machetes and other weapons all over the city of Ibadan, vandalising properties and attacking the opposition. Remarkably, these thugs were backed by the police who either looked the other way or gave them cover while they committed their atrocities, supported them in unleashing terror on people particularly political opponents and/or their supporters, or facilitated their escape to a safe haven after the perpetration of their heinous acts. It was also common for anti-riot/mobile policemen to accompany Adedibu as though he was the governor (*The Nation*, 2006; *Vanguard* Editorial, December 15 2006; Adeyemo, 2007; *The Nation*, February 7 2007; *The Nation*, April 7 2007). There was a particular incident when Governor Ladoja's lawyers were harassed by Adedibu's thugs at the Federal Court of Appeal premises in the presence of policemen. Adedibu was given red-carpet treatment at the same venue. (Adeyemi, 2006).

As they did during the earlier court and panel sittings, the police provided adequate security at the Federal Court of Appeal premises when the court gave its ruling on Governor Ladoja's impeachment (Sanni, Adeyemo, Peter-Omale, and Ogunmade, 2006). Ironically, the same ruling was derided as 'a toothless bulldog' by Sunday Ehindero, the IGP, perhaps in response to the clamour for its enforcement. While it is clear that the Supreme Court had the final

say on the matter in the case of the appeal as declared by the Attorney-General of the Federation and the Minister of Justice, the IGP allegedly betrayed his partisanship in his derision of the judgment as a toothless bulldog (*The Punch*, November 15 2006). In a remarkable discharge of their statutory responsibility, the police were fully on hand at Government House to ensure Governor Ladoja's reinstatement. More importantly, the police exchanged gunfire with people suspected to be supporters of Governor Ladoja's deputy, beginning at the court premises. In addition, 25 of the hoodlums, including a prominent member of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), were arrested (Oyedele, Amokeodo and Soniyi, 2006). This development was a clear case of the changing nature of police support for the parties to the crisis.

Following his reinstatement by the Supreme Court in its ruling of 11 December 2006, Governor Ladoja's attempts at settling down to the business of governance were interfered with by the pro-Adedibu legislators, and their thugs with the backing of the police. A very good example was the attempt by the pro-Ladoja legislators to consider the list of nominees to the State cabinet. They also planned to investigate the accounts of the 33 local government councils during the 11-month administration of Alao-Akala, in addition to reviewing the contracts awarded by him. Whereas the 18 anti-Ladoja lawmakers pledged their loyalty to Governor Ladoja, they vowed to prevent the Assembly from sitting. This they did with the active support of policemen who acted in league with hoodlums from the Adedibu camp and on two other occasions forcefully took over the Assembly (Lawal, 2005a; *The Guardian* Editorial, January 7 2007).

While the police provided security for the Adedibu men and cover for their thugs, at the same time they harassed the Ladoja



camp on trumped-up charges ostensibly to silence them or to make them know that they were on the wrong side of the political divide. For example, on 12 April 2007, about 32 mobile policemen stormed the Ardis Farm located at Lalupon in the Lagelu local government area. The farm was owned by Dele Adigun, Secretary to the Oyo State government under Governor Ladoja. Their mission was to inquire about, and impound, two trailer loads of ammunition allegedly stockpiled by Adigun in the farm, allegedly to be used to cause mayhem during the 14 April 2007 gubernatorial election. After three hours of searching, the police found nothing incriminating there (Adeyemo, 2007; Hanson, 2007).

The festering nature of the crisis also led to its spread to Akure, the Ondo State capital, during the presentation of the campaign flag to PDP flag bearers in the South-West zone on 3 February 2007. The presentation of the flag for Oyo State to Adebayo Alao-Akala in the presence of the then incumbent Governor Ladoja and the singing of abusive songs by both the Ladoja and the Adedibu/Akala groups, led to the clash which left some people dead, some wounded and some vehicles belonging to the Oyo State government and the PDP destroyed. It took the police time and sustained effort to bring the clash under control (Johnson, 2007). The bitter feud spread to Ibadan where it resulted in more deaths and destruction before it was brought under control by the police (Lawal, Bello and Alabi, 2007). One direct outcome of the Akure and Ibadan clashes was the summoning of Adedibu to the police headquarters at Abuja by the IGP to give an undertaking to refrain from fomenting trouble during and after the April 2007 general election in Oyo State (Fabiya and Soniyi, 2007; Alarape, 2007). Another major outcome of the clashes was the arrest and reposting of five policemen and the aide-de-camp (ADC) to Governor Ladoja, Deputy Superintendent

of Police (DSP) Fola Ogunkoya. The allegations levelled against the ADC were that he did not search the car in Governor Ladoja's entourage before it was taken to the venue of the rally and that five guns comprising two pump-action guns, two English pistols and one locally made pistol and 133 cartridges which were later recovered at the Akure stadium, were concealed in the pilot car. He was also alleged to have allowed a civilian to drive the pilot car occupied by mobile policemen, which constituted a serious offence (Fabiya and Soniyi, 2007). Besides, he was blamed for his inability to control policemen attached to the governor during the Akure rally. The IGP therefore accused DSP Ogunkoya of being more loyal to his principal than the police force, an offence the IGP himself might be accused of. For all these allegations, four of the policemen were given orderly room trial (*The Nation*, February 20 2007).

The recovery of six Direct Data Capture machines belonging to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from Adedibu's house, as well as the alleged police involvement in the episode, raise concerns about the police partisanship. Whereas the INEC claimed to have reported the matter to the police who should have instituted a case against Adedibu, the police for their part denied ever being officially briefed on the case and in fact maintained that the case was not formally reported (Agency Reporter, 2007). Consequently, the Oyo State Police Commissioner, Jonathan Johnson,<sup>6</sup> threatened to arrest Alhaji Isyaku Maigoro, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for misleading the public on the issue and stressed that the case was only used by the REC to create a scandal concerning the Oyo Police Command since the police were not involved in the case from the outset (Sanni, 2007). The puzzling aspect of the story was the insistence of the INEC on the prosecution of the suspects, who were mainly ad

hoc staff caught with the machines, while the chief culprit got away free (*The Nation*, January 24 2007; Oyedele, 2007). Despite his invitation and questioning, the claim of the IGP was that Adedibu had not committed any offence under the law (Fabiya and Soniyi, 2007). Surprisingly, the same police turned round to deny knowing anything about the case.

The gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections held on 14 April 2007 in Oyo State, as in many other States in Nigeria, were marred by large-scale violence, thugery and widespread electoral malpractices (Adejumobi, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2007, pp. 19–22, 24). Among the 50 suspects arrested for electoral malpractices were four policemen. They were particularly accused of aiding the snatching of ballot boxes, some of which were intercepted by the General Officer Commanding, 2nd Mechanised Division of the Nigerian Army, Major Gen. Muhammed Saleh. Ironically it was the police who were expected to provide security for electoral materials and INEC staff in order to protect them from intimidation by thugs (Oyedele, 2007).

After losing out in the renomination bid, Governor Ladoja attempted to install, in the dying days of his government, local government officials who would be loyal to him and not to the incoming government of Adebayo Alao-Akala. The Oyo State Independent Electoral Commission (OYSIEC), constituted by Governor Ladoja, had insisted on conducting elections to the 33 local government councils a few weeks before the expiration of the tenure of Governor Ladoja as governor on 29 May 2007. Obviously the intention was to spite the Adedibu/Akala camp which vehemently opposed the conduct of the election, citing inadequate preparation and wrong timing as their reasons. It was in an attempt to frustrate the preparations for the election and its eventual conduct, that thugs from the

Adedibu camp were led in an attack on the OYSIEC office by the deputy governor-elect, Taofeek Arapaja, who was arrested along with nine others by the police (Ajayi, 2007; Omole, 2007; Sanni, 2007; Oyedele, 2007). As was to be expected, the police tackled the Adedibu/Akala camp on this occasion. Taofeek Arapaja was granted bail on his own recognisance, while the other nine remained in detention with the police who promised to charge them (Omole, 2007). The case eventually fizzled out, particularly with the swearing in of Taofeek Arapaja as the deputy governor. Remarkably, the action of the police was an indication that the hunter could turn into the hunted some of the time, depending on the circumstances.

Arising from the involvement of the police in the elite struggle for power and privilege, it becomes necessary to examine closely the nature of the Nigeria police force, its authority structure and its amenability in the hands of the political elite in or out of government, and also its contribution to the growing phenomenon of ‘god-fatherism’, as well as the challenges which the development poses to meaningful and orderly conduct of politics in Nigeria.

### **THE POLICE, THE ELITE AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: THE OYO STATE EXAMPLE**

Arising from the involvement of the police in the Oyo State political crisis, it is possible to assess the Nigerian Police: (1) on their performance as paid officers of the State performing their statutory duties; (2) as tools in the hands of the elite in government and their supporters outside government; and also (3) in the abdication of their duty or general non-performance.

As paid officers of the State, the police are expected to be neutral in the performance of their duties of maintaining law and order. Even in crisis situations, such as in

Oyo State between 2005 and 2007, the police still played this role actively, as seen in the provision of adequate security for the seven-man panel that investigated Governor Ladoja on the allegation of gross misconduct levelled against him. The police also provided security at the various courts where cases related to the impeachment were heard. Furthermore, security was generally beefed up in the State each time a ruling was to be given, to the extent of stationing armoured personnel carriers in strategic places in the State capital. All these, it would seem, were meant to prevent the breakdown of law and order. But the presence of the police and the performance of their duties did not prevent thugs and hoodlums from laying siege to the State, attacking opponents, destroying properties and generally causing commotion. This development raises pertinent issues, prominent among which could be the possibility of thugs being too difficult for the police to handle or, more realistically, a case of the police giving tacit protection to the hoodlums because of the instructions they may have received from their superiors. In the extreme, it could be that both worked together, having been commissioned by the same interest or working for the same master. Whichever is the case, it is clear that as officers of the State who were being maintained with tax-payers' money, the police did not act as neutral State agents; rather they did the bidding of those who had control over them. The deployment of soldiers on major streets in Ibadan on the eve of the gubernatorial election on 14 April 2007, ostensibly to assist the police in manning the various flashpoints and to crush hoodlums, is no doubt a sign of the failure of the police as paid officers of the State with primary responsibility for maintaining law and order (Ajayi, 2007).

The police were a potent tool in the hands of the political elite. Where they were not quelling protests that did not favour the

elite in power, they were aiding the snatching of ballot boxes. In particular, the release of the House of Assembly mace to 18 out of 32 lawmakers, despite the conditions earlier given by the police authorities, showed that the police were pawns in the hands of the political elite. Similarly, the provision of police protection to politicians and/or their followers who were either out to truncate the performance of legal and official business by others, or to vandalise offices or destroy public property, all in the name of protesting government policies and decisions, amounted to aiding hooliganism and giving undue promotion to individuals and groups.

By being a tool in the hands of the political elite, the Nigerian police have remained what they were known to be: notorious, barbaric, brutal, corrupt, easily manipulated and indecent (Hills, 2008). People outside government like Lamidi Adedibu had unfettered access to the police, while government officials like Governor Rashidi Ladoja, the Speaker, Adeolu Adeleke, and others were denied police service as seen in the withdrawal of their police orderlies. The closeness of Adedibu to President Olusegun Obasanjo and the inner core of the ruling party, the PDP, accounts for this development, among others. But it also raises another issue, the operational control of the police force. Section 215(2) of the 1999 Constitution states that:

The Nigeria Police Force shall be under the command of the Inspector-General of Police and any contingents of the Nigeria Police Force stationed in a State shall, subject to the authority of the Inspector-General of Police, be under the command of the Commissioner of Police of that State (Federal Military Government, 1999).

Also, section 215(3) of the Constitution empowers the President or a Minister (in

this case, Minister of Police Affairs), as may be authorised, to give the IGP such lawful directions on the maintenance and securing of public safety and public order as may be considered necessary, and the IGP must comply with those directions, or cause them to be complied with.

It is clear from these provisions of the Constitution that the control of the Nigeria police force falls squarely within the jurisdiction of the federal government. The little influence that a State governor has over the police is further limited by the fact that clearance must be sought from the President of the Federation. It is evident that the gladiators in the Oyo political crisis, particularly the camp favoured by the federal government and the PDP leadership, realised their advantage and exploited it to the full.

Ironically, section 176(2) of the 1999 Constitution states clearly that, 'The Governor of a State shall be the Chief Executive of that State' (Federal Military Government, 1999). Implicitly, the governor of a State functions as the Chief Accounting Officer as well as the Chief Security Officer of his State, hence his entitlement to security votes among other perquisites. The reality, however, is that the Chief Security Officer has no control over the security agents. This clearly was the dilemma of the Oyo State as it is with other States in the federation. The abduction of Dr. Chris Ngige, a serving governor in Anambra, by a powerful police team led by Assistant Inspector-General (AIG) Raphael Ige, supposedly acting on 'orders from above', drives this point home more succinctly (Olarinmoye, 2008). At the end of the scenario, AIG Ige was made the sacrificial lamb as he was forced into untimely retirement. He died a few months after (Ndibe, 2005). The case of DSP Fola Ogunkoya was also similar. His removal as the ADC to Governor Ladoja by the IGP, on the allegation of his being more loyal to his political

boss than the police force, had the capability of jeopardising his career. The clamour by the States, particularly those controlled by the opposition or those that were not favoured by the federal government or the ruling party leadership, for State police could not be completely divorced from this and similar experiences that pre-dated it.

Beyond not being impartial and faithful agents of the State, the police were also found to have deliberately abdicated their responsibility or pretended that nothing had happened, even in the face of grave dangers to life and property. The attack by hoodlums on pro-democracy activists protesting against the illegal removal of Governor Ladoja, was not repelled by the police in any way. In addition to being terrorised by the police, the protesters were also victims of harassment while the police remained passive. Similarly, when three legislators loyal to Governor Ladoja were allegedly stabbed and their clothes torn within the legislative chamber in the presence of the police, the police did not apprehend the attackers. Significantly, the harassment of the citizenry in general and political opponents in particular by thugs, was more of a pattern than isolated occurrences in the State for the period of the crisis. Yet Jonathan Johnson, who succeeded Alhaji Audu Abubakar as the State Commissioner of Police, maintained that there was no violence in the State (Oyedele, 2007).

The enormous influence wielded and exercised by political godfathers could not be completely divorced from the support given by the police. The Ladoja-Adedibu conflict in Oyo State, like the one between Chris Uba and Chris Ngige in Anambra State, showed clearly that the notorious prominence which the likes of Adedibu and Uba attained, could have been whittled down or checked without the active role of the police in projecting and shielding them on the one hand and terrorising their opponents on the other. Although not a

recent development, 'godfatherism' assumed a notorious dimension in the Fourth Republic politics (Aziken, 2006; Ogundele, 2006). These powerful, unelected figures, who use a combination of patronage and the threat of violence to ensure political success for their chosen candidates and thereafter expect rewards once their protégés are in office, seem to have moved beyond being contented/pacified with crumbs to seizing the State purse. According to a Human Rights Watch Report (2007), these godfathers are not mere financiers of political campaigns, rather their power stems from their wealth as well as their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor.

Obviously, the political crisis that resulted in Oyo State, as in Anambra State, has to do with either the refusal to placate the godfathers indefinitely, or to honour their growing demands. Aided by the availability and effective deployment of the instruments of violence in which case the police became very useful, Lamidi Adedibu was able to move against Governor Ladoja for refusing to 'cooperate' with him. As argued by Ayoade (2008), many godfathers are protégés of the federal government which is the ultimate law enforcer. Understandably, Lamidi Adedibu, by virtue of his having the police at his beck and call courtesy of the federal government support, perpetrated many crimes and got away with them. Significantly, and as observed by Okoye (2007), political godfatherism in electoral politics and governance in Nigeria corrupts and criminalises Nigeria's politics, throwing up in the process all sorts of political criminals and miscreants, elevating mediocrity over and above merit and reason and generally providing a breeding ground for crime and criminals which the police could not check due to their open bias or

partisanship. This was the situation in Oyo State between 2005 and 2007.

## CONCLUSION

The Nigerian police have remained the proverbial leopard that has refused to change its spotted skin. Obviously, the factors that make the police amenable to use by politicians have remained largely the same despite the change in dispensation and personnel. The Nigerian Constitution has not helped matters either. The desperation of the politicians for elective or even appointive political offices, coupled with the docility of the electorate, have all combined to make a monster out of some individuals with political clout and acting under the cover, or with the connivance of the federal government. The emergence of godfathers with the sufficient backing of the police has therefore meant that democratic politics, beyond being a game of numbers, is more that of the survival of the strongest. Beyond exposing further the inherent weakness of the police, it has also exposed the inherent nature of the political class and its propensity to act without any consideration for due process, justice, decency or what is morally right. The support which the supposed godfathers enjoy from the police is a pointer to the alarming degeneration of the contest for power and more importantly the extent to which the police have remained a pawn in the hands of the politicians.

## NOTES

1. Amala is a staple meal that is popular and commonly eaten among the Oyo subgroup of the Yorubas. In the context of Oyo State politics, it signifies being reduced to living on handouts on the one hand and feeding fat on the State

resources on the other. The first interpretation relates to Chief Adedibu's followers who could be sent on any assignment, no matter how demeaning or dangerous, because of the rewards involved and because of loyalty to the master. The second interpretation relates to drawing as many resources as possible from the State to enrich oneself and to promote populism.

2. This is a Yoruba name for a deity that should be appeased or placated all the time to avoid its wrath. Molete is one of the areas in Ibadan.
3. Alaafin was a prominent traditional ruler in Yorubaland whose influence in the pre-colonial and colonial periods was tremendous. The equation of Chief Adedibu with the Alaafin depicts him as a parallel government or a potentate whose counsel must be sought and his friendship courted for the real leaders of government to be properly established or rule peacefully.
4. The bid by the police to prevent Governor Ladoja's sympathisers from staging any protest led to the release of huge quantities of tear gas into the air around the State House of Assembly. The effect of the fumes, covering a radius of about three kilometres, made many residents abandon their homes for the greater part of the day (Adeleye, 2009).
5. The pro-democracy groups that were involved in the protest included the United Action for Democracy, Citizens' Forums, Civil Liberties Organisation, Oodua People's Congress, Federation of Yoruba Consciousness and Culture and Yoruba Revolutionary Movement.
6. C. P. Johnson was a contemporary of Adebayo Alao-Akala and Ladoja's deputy (and PDP's gubernatorial candidate in the April 2007 election) when Akala was in the force. Akala took early retirement as a chief superintendent of police in 1995. Johnson's partiality towards the

Akala/Adedibu group in discharging his responsibility as police helmsman in the State can be appreciated (confidential oral communication with two retired Inspectors-General of Police with one of the authors).

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