

The Selling of birth right in Genesis 25:29-34 and vote-buying in Nigerian elections: Interrogating the role of poverty.

Emmanuel Chijioke Ogbonna
Nigerian Army University Biu,
Borno, Nigeria

Eleazar Enyioma Ufomba
Religious Studies Department,
Adeleke University, Ede,
Osun State Nigeria

Abolaji Solomon
Department of Political Science
and Public Administration,
Adeleke University, Ede,
Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Money politics and poverty are intertwined ordeals that stand against democratisation in most African countries. Elections remain the most significant ritual in the democratization process. In the case of the Nigerian state, the effort at avoiding the menace of vote-buying and vote-selling remains one that is in urgent need of critical attention. Several studies have been carried out on how best the process of true democratisation that is devoid of politicians wooing the electorate to surrender their votes to them as a result of economic exchange can be actualised. The study utilised existing relevant literature combined with brief exegesis of the biblical passage (Genesis 25: 29-34) that talked about how Jacob's hunger and survivalist strategy to undo Esau shares a contiguous analytical frame in interrogating the practice of vote-buying during elections in Nigeria. From its findings, the paper posits that vote-buying in Nigeria is a woeful phenomenon that bedevils both the electorate and the struggle for democratisation. A market of poverty and ignorance where the political merchants woo the poor masses to surrender their civil rights as citizens in exchange for either a few cups of rice, scornful petty sums of money and other materials. The study agrees that vote-selling is a product of sick and deficient civic dynamics, where the citizens misappropriate political priority. The paper, therefore, advocates that vote-buying should be discouraged at every quarter and the masses should educate on the perils of surrendering their votes to politicians and their agents on the premise of cash and other material inducements.

Keywords: Birthright, Vote-buying, Elections, Poverty, Citizenship

Introduction

The narrative of the birthright transaction between Esau and Jacob as enshrined in the Old Testament Judeo-Christian scripture (Genesis 25: 29-34), depicts an ugly setting of how hunger, hardship and ignorance can reduce



people to servitude and protracted suffering when they had potentials for good living. In the case of governance and democracy in Nigeria, vote buying is a prevalent social phenomenon that is currently dominating the 'electoral market' and impairing the process of political elections where the electorate auction their rights in exchange of a plate of rice, a bottle of drink or certain ridiculous amount of money that does not worth a day's wage. A cross-national data examination on vote buying in Africa by Kramon suggests that the practice of vote-buying in Africa seems to be grafted in the pattern of democratic trends within the continent.¹ Such finding affirm to many assertions which subscribes to the fact that vote buying is most prevalent in societies where parties are either least organized or institutionalized, coupled with low credibility of both voters' perceptions of politicians and politicians' less preparation to serve the masses from a genuine commitment.

The worse of it, is that citizenship is a veritable democratic asset. It is the one asset needed to construct civil rule, initiate good governance and keep governments and political leaders in shape towards living and acting at the instance of the masses. According to Ogbonna, "citizenship is an incontestable democratic asset with the singular capacity of instituting a movement away from both authoritarian reversal and consolidation of illiberal democracy".² It is on this understanding, that it is further argued that followership imperative in negotiating governance cannot be over emphasized. In a democratizing setting, the citizens reward good governance and punish fundamental transgression³; this makes the ordinary citizens, and especially as electorates the most significant actors needed to strike a progressive balance in the democratization dynamics⁴. If then, this asset is mortgaged to the highest bidder without consideration of the implications of same, the country would have found itself sliding towards irreparable civic conditions.

Birth Right and Citizenship

The concept of birthright could be explained in terms of things being due to persons based on the fact of their birth, or in respect to the order of their birth. These include rights of citizenship on the account of the place where the person was born or the citizenship of such persons' parents.⁵ Birthrights also have to do with inheritance rights to property owned by parents or willed by others. Similarly, citizenship has to do with the possession of the formal status of membership of a political and legal entity with its attending rights, benefits and

¹Kramon Eric, Vote Buying and Accountability in Democratic Africa A dissertation Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science (2013).

²Ogbonna, E. C., *Social Mobilisation and Critical Citizenry in the Democratisation Process: The Evolving Nigerian Experience*, Ibadan: Depet Publishers (2020).

³Ogbonna, E. C., Ogundiwin A. O, and Uzuegbu-Wilson E; "Followership Imperative of Good Governance: Reflections on Nigeria's 'Second Chance' at Democratization", *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, Vol.4, 2012. pp 65-80

⁴OGBONNA, Emmanuel Chijioke, "Democratic Deficit and Political Economy of Critical Citizenry: Nigeria in Perspective", *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR/JHSS)*, Volume 1, Issue 3 (Sep-Oct. 2012), Pp 1-7

⁵Caramani, D and Grotz, F. *Beyond Citizenship and Residence? Exploring the Extension of Voting Rights in the Age of Globalization*, Taylor and Francis (2015).

obligations.⁶ The foundation and understanding of citizenship dates back to ancient Greece and Imperial Rome respectively and then later developed into what came to be termed the 'republican' and 'liberal' practice of citizenship. In the context of the rights of citizenship, the use of term birthright does not only signify the membership that is acquired at birth or on accounts of birth, but also membership which presumptively elucidates lifelong status for the individual and continuous across generations for the citizenry as a group of people.⁷

Theoretical Framework

As an analytical frame, this study adopted Maslow's theory of hierarchy of human needs. In a pyramided illustration, Maslow place the basic needs at the bottom with the intangible needs at the top. He opined that people can only move on to addressing the higher-level needs when their basic needs are adequately met. The sphere of higher needs begins with esteem, which are also referred to as ego-driven needs. The primary elements of esteem have to do with self-respect, which entails the belief that a person is valuable and deserves dignity in all dealings. This is followed by the concept of self-esteem which emphasizes confidence in one's potential for personal growth and accomplishments. Maslow specifically notes that self-esteem can be divided into two categories: esteem, which is based on respect and acknowledgment from others, as well as esteem, which is based on a person's own self-assessment. Independence and self-confidence are usually built on this latter type of self-esteem. However, the lack or loss of self-esteem results into lack of self-confidence and determination, hence leading to social and political malpractices such as vote-buying. Since low self-esteem manifests in chronic dependence on the state coupled with its myriads of poverty and unemployment, it is inferable that vote-selling in Nigeria could be traced to low self-esteem developed by the people overtime.⁸

Brief Exegesis of Genesis 25:29-34

The Hebrew term *ya-ep* (Gen 25:29) which is translated "famished" or "faint" has the same connotation with the verb *yefa* which means "exhausted", "weakened", "impoverished", shows the extreme lowly level which Esau was naturally placed at the time of his return from hunting. The Greek equivalence of the verb *ya-ep* which is *ekleip on* (being in the state of ceasing or passing out), in the context of the handing over of the birthright by Esau to Jacob suggests that hunger and hardship constitute strategic trap to rid people of their justiciable or legal rights. The phrase "And when Jacob had cooked or boiled (*zid*) stew" (Gen 25:29) is of utmost significance in the passage. The verb *zid* is used eight times in reference to a proud personality, and three of the

⁶Beliamy Richard, "Citizenship, Historical Development of". *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2015), pp3-17

⁷Karamani, D and Grotz, F. *Beyond Citizenship and Residence? Exploring the Extension of Voting Rights in the Age of Globalization*, Taylor and Francis (2015)..

⁸Emler Nicholas, *Self-esteem the costs and causes of low self-worth*. York Publishing Services Ltd, (2001).

derivatives are used only in that connection.⁹ The basic idea is pride, a sense of self-importance, which often is exaggerated to include defiance and even rebelliousness. For instance, in Proverbs 11:2 and 13: 10, the "proud" person is set over against the humble or the weak. In application, those holding material wealth and means of survival use it as trap to disenfranchise the weak and poor populace. Again, *zid* is frequently used to refer to three specific aspects of pride.¹⁰ Such as presumption; when a person is proud and presumes too much in his own favour especially in matters regarding of authority. For example, Babylon is said to have claimed too much for herself as against the Holy One of Israel (Jeremiah 50:29). Also, the Egyptians assumed the same in subjecting the Israelites to bondage (Nehemiah 9:10). The second usage has to do with rebellion and the third use is of ones 'willful decision without minding the position or welfare of others. The term *bakar* in Hebrew or its Greek equivalent *prototokia* or *protokeia* which is often translated as "first born" or "birthright" has deeper meaning in its usage.¹¹ In both Hebrew and Greek large understanding and practice of *bakar* (rights, heritage and the position of first born) it connotes rights and heritage of bonafide indigenous person or a citizen. The concept of merchandise in English word is highly rooted in the Hebrew term *maker* or *meker*, "to sell" "to make merchandise of". This was strongly used in condition given by Jacob to Esau. "First sell me your birthright." (Gen 25:31). The Greek *protokeia* (birthright) and *politeima* (citizenship) are used to explain the rights that belong to citizens in their land of habitation. Apostle Paul used the term *politeima* in Philippians 3:20 to explain the rights the believers possess in entering the heavenly kingdom. The use of *protokeia* and *politeima* became popular from the time of Plato in describing the civic obligations and benefits of the people of the land. In essence, Genesis 25: 29-34 presents Jacob as one who stole Esau's mandate, rights of citizenship with just a plate of food. In the Nigerian context, the electorate sell their voting rights as citizens to political vote merchants in the exchange of few cups of rice, tomato and onions or petty cash. As Esau sold his birthright because of a plate of food (*broseosmias*) without minding the future consequences (Heb. 12: 16), so do the electorate regret in the hand of selfish politicians who had bought their rights with economic exchange.

Citizenship Practice in Nigeria

Citizenship is the status of possessing socio-political identity.¹² The core understanding of citizenship is dated back to classical times. Two broad understandings of citizenship stem from ancient Greece and Imperial Rome respectively. This, according to Richard later evolved into what came to be termed the 'republican' and 'liberal' accounts of citizenship.¹³ Though the Greek model of citizenship was the privilege of a minority, it provided a considerable degree of popular control over government. Interestingly, Greek citizenship was

⁹Harris R.L. et al, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Moody Publishers (2003).

¹⁰Harris R.L. et al, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. (2003).

¹¹Holladay Williams, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (CHALOT), Brill Publishers (2000).

¹²Heater Derek, *A Brief History of Citizenship*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press (2004), pp 1-5

¹³Beliamy Richard, "Citizenship, Historical Development of". *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2015), pp3-17

appreciated by many later thinkers as the epitome of a true situation of political equality, in which citizens have equal political powers and so must treat each other with equal concern and respect.¹⁴ A proper understanding of citizenship often starts with the theoretical approaches, which includes liberal, communication and civic republican approaches. These perspectives are groups of perceptions which should be seen as common structuring dimensions, not necessarily the categories into which particular idea around citizenship can be properly fixed. However it is still useful to give brief summaries of the dominant and core elements of these approaches as a route to understanding some of the divergent thinking in and around the concept and practice of citizenship. The various schools of thought could be summarized from the aspects of earlier thinking leading on to contemporary theories, and how they are creatively synthesized. For instance, liberal theories of citizenship promote the idea that citizenship is a status which grants individuals to a specific set of universal rights permitted by the state. The central notion to liberal thought is that the individual citizen act in rational ways in order to advance their own interests and that the role of the state is just to protect citizens as they exercise their rights.¹⁵ On the other hand, civil republican perspective tries to engage the elements of the liberal viewpoints. This occurs in the sense that the same formal rights is understood to promote equality through making a person's political and economic power 'irrelevant' to right claims. Here the emphasis is on what binds people together as a community of people not on individual status. Similarly, Gaventa and Jones observe that the communitarian view of citizenship implies that the exercising of rights is seen as the choice of citizens, on the premise that they have the necessary resources and opportunity as a people that are in equal existence.¹⁶ In the real practice and understanding, the central idea behind citizenship is to empower the right of the masses to have rights. The idea of group rights is null and void since the overall interest is to discourage some sets of people from regarding themselves as superior to others. Nigeria is among the countries of the world that base their citizenship acquisition on an explicitly ethnic background. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which provides the framework for acquisition and forfeiture of citizenship, is heavily dependent on the idea of membership of a 'community indigenous to Nigeria' as the grass root qualification and determinant of entitlement to citizenship.¹⁷

The Challenges of the Practice of Citizenship in Nigeria

The Nigerian state seems to face the challenge of the lack of knowledge of the definition, role and respect of citizenship at the grass root level.¹⁸ This condition of confused citizenship concepts affects both the governance and civil

¹⁴Beliamy Richard (2015)

¹⁵Adrian Oldfield, *Citizenship and Community Civic Republicanism and the Modern World*. London: Routledge (1999), pp

¹⁶Gaventa John and Emmanuel Jones, *Concepts of Citizenship: A Review*. Sussex, (2002), pp 5-25

¹⁷BronwenManby and Solomon Momoh, "Report on Citizenship Law: Nigeria". *European University Institute* (2020), pp. 1-5.

¹⁸Florence Anumba, "Citizenship Education in Nigeria: For the Young, or the Old?" *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. Vol.2 No 10 (Rome: MCSER Publishing, (2013), p 38.

responsibility of the masses. Lack of proper citizenship orientation and practice blurs the citizens from being conversant with the general knowledge of the constitutional providence in regards to their rights as well as their civil obligation and the consequences of violations.¹⁹ Nkang asserts that citizenship education is relevant, as it helps in addressing the needs of the society on how to respect the rights of fellow citizens from time to time. Nigerian state has roles towards its nation-building and therefore needs capable role players for a strong and reliable nation. To perform their full potentials, the citizens need relevant citizenship education. No one gives what he does not have or know.²⁰ Therefore, effective and relevant education for citizenship is compulsory for all and sundry in a society, particularly the youth in the contemporary society who easily initiate, participate or fall victims of jungle justice. This is very important course to achieve, since in recent years, insecurity and crimes in Nigeria have taken the form of partial revolutions. Measures at fighting them should include concrete and effective citizenship education spread out to reach the entire citizenry, especially the young.

Corbin opines that many negative citizenship factors and myths have been allowed to operate vulgarly in many societal frameworks in Nigeria, factors that are dragging and tending the society towards a situation of social disorder.²¹ The predicaments of faulty citizenship in Nigeria manifest in social vices such as; economic injustice, ruthlessness, problem of imbalance and inequality, youth restiveness and misplacement of values of national ethos, forces of intolerance, hatred, pain and misfortune and the loss of the power of sound judgment are precursory to the prevalence of mob justice. Obanya asserts that citizenship orientation which ensures a greater tendency to evolving uniform ways of conducting respect to sanctity of life and human affairs can better address the Nigerian hard citizenship experience.²² These problems of "negative citizenship values and myths" have grave militating issues against Nigeria's march towards effective and sustainable political, social and moral development since her independence which she obtained about Sixty years ago. Ikem opines that are certain anti-citizenship and unwholesome behaviours exhibited by Nigerians obviously negate national growth and development. Such behaviours as extra-judicial killing and lack of respect to human dignity pose threat that damns the practical longings for lasting nation building and development

Vote-Buying during Elections in Nigeria

Vote buying has been defined and described by Oladapo, et al, as "the exchange of private material benefits for political support".²³ The practice of buying of votes is sometimes referred to as a contract, an action in which suggests that the electorate make merchandise of their voting right as citizens. In this

¹⁹ Anumba, "Citizenship Education in Nigeria: For the Young, or the Old?"(2013)

²⁰Nkang in Anumba(2013)

²¹Corbin in Okam and Ibrahim, "Exploring Emerging Myths and Realities in Citizenship Education In Nigeria: Towards Overcoming The Dilemmas of Nation-Building". *InternationalConference on Teaching, Learning and Change* (2011).

²²Obanya Pai, *Education for the knowledge economy*, Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers (2004), pp 10-40

²³Oladapo, S.O, et al Influence of Vote Buying among Electorates: Its Implications to Nigeria Future Democracy, *Higher Education of Social Science*(2020), 73-78.

exercise the voter sells vote to the highest bidder. The issue of vote buying has become a problem in the nation's polity. The inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in monitoring the involvement of finance in Nigeria during political party campaign is raising questions on the credibility of elections in Nigeria. Matenga argues that the Electoral Act in Nigeria has some significant inconsistencies.²⁴ But Nwankwo asserts that the Nigerian Electoral Act of 2002, 2006 and that of 2010 seem to have positioned democracy in the Nigerian state on the right path by enhancing the legal structure to check financial malpractices regarding elections, but there are potential gaps that need to be addressed.²⁵ The phenomenon of vote-buying has introduced tension in the Nigerian political arena and raises apprehension in the minds of the masses who are at the receiving end of what politicians and their supporters deliver. In the Nigerian state presently, it is assumed that political actors employ every means, both legitimate and illegitimate to make sure that their political ambitions are achieved before election, during election and after elections so as to return to them financial benefits that should have been used in developing the society. The phenomenon of vote buying manifests in different forms in every society.²⁶ It could take the form of direct payments to voters in getting them ready to vote for the one that has bought them or in its literal sense, an attitude of simple economic exchange where party candidates "buy" the citizens and the citizens "sell" their votes, the way they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets.²⁷

The business of vote buying could be likened to a contract, or perhaps an auctioneering process whereby voters surrender their votes to the highest bidder in economic exchange. Regarding vote-buying in Nigeria, Kramon opines that while the ballot secrecy is not legislated, distributing money to voters is perceived efficient and effective as a campaign strategy on the account that politicians and their agents directly monitor cash recipients to make sure they are getting votes for their vote-buying investments.²⁸ In as much as the ballot is formally secret, contrarily, voters are free to accept cash handouts and make their voting decisions based on such transactions. Before the beginning of 2007 general campaign even began, Bratton observes that several fulfilled predictions were made regarding how diverse powerful figures had calculated their personal interests to dominate the election season and campaigns through the merchandising of the electorate.²⁹ There were concerns on how the polling days, April 14 and 21, 2007 would end.³⁰ Consequently, voting for President and

²⁴Matenga, G.. "Cash for Votes: political legitimacy in Nigeria. Open Democracy" (2016). Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/gram-matenga/cash-for-votes-political-legitimacy-in-nigeria> (Accessed 4/6/2021)

²⁵Nwankwo F. C, "Vote Buying in the 2018 Governorship Election in Ekiti State, Nigeria". Open Political Science, (2018) ; 1: 93-97

²⁶Nichter, S. Conceptualizing vote buying. *Electoral Studies*, 35, (2014), 315-327.

²⁷Mohammed, A. B. *The Menace of Vote Buying and Selling in Nigeria and Ways Forward* (2020).

²⁸Kramon Eric, *Vote Buying and Accountability in Democratic Africa* A dissertation Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science (2013).

²⁹Bratton M, "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns" (2019). Working Paper No. 99

³⁰"Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns" (2019

National Assembly did not take place in certain polling stations in some states in the Southeast and Northeast given the non-delivery of electoral materials. In numerous and diverse locations across the Nigerian state, it was observed that ballot papers were either misprinted or had late arrival. In the Southern Niger Delta zone, armed militias violently stole ballot boxes or even substituted their own pre-stuffed ballot boxes. Oladapo, et al, observe that the 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed an explosion of the phenomenon of exchange of monetary gift to woo the electorate.³¹ The use of the term "vote buying" became proverbial even within academic circle as well as among media operation.

The place of poverty in the selling and buying of votes in Nigeria

It has been argued that beyond the biased legal system, there is slack in the monitoring of the use and movement of money during campaigns, that due to mass poverty, several attempts to remedy the challenge of money politics via the instrument of law have failed. Onapaje, et al opine that the persistence and prevalence of vote- buying during elections in Nigeria is as the result of booming oil economy. Such opinion is based on the fact that many political actors in Nigeria are directly or indirectly connected to oil wealth which induces strong competitive contention on the political battlefield as wealth is lavished by the aspirants. However, the greater fact remains on the enticements of political office and even the fact that political actors are not seeing the occupation of political office as a call for service but a place to recoup their investments in electioneering in multiple folds.

In this sense, the citizens seem to be wooed to believe that the token of finance received by the political merchants who buy their votes and their civil rights is tantamount to their own share from the "national cake".³² Herbert argues that socio-economic factor, with poverty being the topmost, accompanied by unemployment and illiteracy are the major enhancers and promoters of vote-buying business in the Nigerian political market.³³ Whereas scholars have assessed the ethnic impact on voting, and have noted the role of observable ethnic identity in serving as a heuristic device helping voters to make preferences about the likelihood of a candidate that would help them in the future.

Kramon maintains that illiteracy which manifests and leads to low information in many environment accurately describes the situation in many developing countries, describing why elections are likely to be more prospective than retrospective in nature.³⁴ In countries in Africa where the party system is

³¹Oladapo, S.O, et al Influence of Vote Buying among Electorates: Its Implications to Nigeria Future Democracy, *Higher Education of Social Science*(2020), 73-78.

³²Onapaje, H. et al "Oil Corrupts Elections: Political Economy of Vote-buying in Nigeria". *African (Studies Quarterly!)*"Volume"15,"Issue"2 (2015).

³³Kitschelt Herbert

"Linkages"between"Citizens"and"Politicians"in"Democratic"Polities.*Comparative Political Studies*" (2000) 33.6/7:"845!79."

³⁴Kramon Eric,Vote Buying and Accountability in Democratic Africa A dissertation Submitted in partial satisfactionof the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science (2013).

usually unstable and party members continually defect and changing from one election cycle to the other, low information is usually compounded by the fact that party agents convey very little information about the extent to which a politician will serve and deliver in the interest of the electorate or preferred policies. In such environments, citizens struggle to make inferences and speculations about which candidate has the likelihood of benefiting them and render the dividends of democracy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that vote buying is an act of disservice to self, criminality and unpatriotic attitude of both the seller and the buyer. Vote buying is a major setback and ordeal that stampedes and benumb the true process of democratization in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Vote buying explains the ridiculous level of mediocrity and corruption a state can be struggling with. The attitude of vote selling and vote buying makes democracy less serious and the people less important even in the minds of the politicians. When the electorate sell their votes, they have handed over their birthright and citizenship to the callous politician who ignores their welfare and treats them as slaves or prisoners of war.

Recommendations

This article therefore recommends as follows:

1. There is a critical need for content-based and continuous citizenship orientation for the people at the grass root level, with the aim of reaching the masses with the message of their contribution to the failure of the state when they sell their votes. This is a task that the whole agents of social mobilisation must undertake in their dealings and activities.
2. Stringent rules, laws and penalty for vote selling offenders and related offences of electoral malpractices on both the politicians and the electorate should be enforced so as to deter people from venturing into such odious social acts. Section 131(1&2) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria included vote buying as an electoral offence punishable by Law.
3. The Power of education should always be made an overwhelming phenomenon, with the aim of delivering the population from being cheap and being fooled by corrupt political parties and their agents and flag bearers.
4. This is a clarion call for political reforms in the infrastructure and human resource employed in the process of elections in Nigeria, with the view that the deployment of the right persons for the right job will amount to uncommon credibility on both the democratisation and electoral processes in the Nigerian state