

Research Article

# Patronage and Social Integration: A Re-examination of the Struggle of the Orders

Blavo Etsri Babatunde<sup>\*</sup> , Ubani Williams Omokide

Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

## Abstract

In virtually every stratified society known to history, the relationship between the powerful and the powerless has been mediated by intricate systems of exchange, protection, and obligation. The ancient Roman Republic furnishes one of the most illuminating case studies in the dynamics of class conflict and social integration, a reality that has attracted significant scholarly attention. This paper re-examines the social conflict in Republican Rome, known in classical scholarship as the Struggle of the Orders, with a view to identifying how patronage - the clientela - functioned as an instrument of social integration among the various classes of Roman society. The paper argues that the much-examined conflict between the patricians and the plebeians was not simply a destructive confrontation between two hostile orders; rather, it was a prolonged, negotiated process in which the institution of patronage served as both a mechanism of social control and a platform for gradual integration and political realignment. Drawing on the works of Brunt, De Ste. Croix, Saller, and Wallace-Hadrill, among other classical scholars, the paper further demonstrates that the resolution of the Struggle of the Orders did not abolish social hierarchy but rather reconfigured it around a new Patricio-Plebeian nobility in which patronage remained the central organising principle of political life. The paper further engages a theoretical framework distinguishing network integration - in which individuals are incorporated through personalised patron-client relations - from civic integration, in which individuals are constituted as equal members of a shared legal and political community, demonstrating that the Struggle of the Orders was, in its deepest logic, a prolonged demand for the latter. In its comparative dimension, this paper draws illuminating parallels between the Roman patron-client system and the Nigerian phenomenon of godfatherism - the baba kekere, babaogun, and maigida - arguing that both represent culturally rooted expressions of hierarchical social exchange that, when corrupted by elite self-interest, imperil broader social integration.

## Keywords

Patronage, Social Integration, Struggle of the Orders, Patricians, Plebeians, Godfatherism, Clientela

## 1. Introduction

The history of all human societies is, in no small measure, the history of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. It is a history of how those who command resources, privilege, and authority interact - whether harmoniously or antagonistically - with those who do not. It is against

this backdrop that the ancient Roman Republic, with its dramatic and consequential Struggle of the Orders (stasis), offers a richly instructive case study for any scholar interested in the twin dynamics of social conflict and social integration. No

<sup>\*</sup>Correspondence: Blavo Etsri Babatunde (blavobabatunde@gmail.com), Blavo Etsri Babatunde (eb.blavo@ui.edu.ng)

Received: 7 June 2026; Accepted: 24 June 2026; Published: 28 July 2026



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2026. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

doubt, the Roman Republic represents one of the most intensely scrutinised polities of antiquity, and the conflict between its two dominant social classes - the patricians and the plebeians - has generated a formidable body of scholarly literature spanning centuries [2, 5, 6, 12].

This paper re-examines that conflict with a specific and deliberate focus: to identify how patronage - the clientela - functioned not merely as an instrument of elite domination but as a mechanism of social integration across the deeply stratified landscape of Republican Roman society. The paper posits that the Struggle of the Orders was not, at its core, a revolutionary rupture aimed at the dismantling of hierarchy; rather, it was a prolonged, negotiated process of social reordering in which the patron-client institution provided both the framework for conflict and the architecture of its resolution. As Saller [11] rightly observes, the patron-client relationship was distinguished by three essential criteria: the reciprocal exchange of goods and services, the personal and durable nature of the relationship, and the asymmetrical status of the parties involved - a characterisation that captures with precision the structural realities of Roman social life from the earliest Republic to the late imperial period.

Furthermore, the paper engages in a comparative analysis of the Roman patron-client phenomenon and the Nigerian practice of godfatherism. It is important to note, as Onwuzuruigbo [9] submits, that godfatherism, as a form of social exchange and clientelist relation, has characterised the social, political, religious, and commercial networks of indigenous Nigerian groups since pre-colonial times. The parallels between Roman clientela and Nigerian godfatherism are, in many respects, striking; and it is the contention of this paper that the Roman experience of social integration through - and despite - patronage offers a model that Nigeria's scholars and policymakers would do well to interrogate with some seriousness.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The scholarly literature on Roman patronage is extensive and has grown considerably more nuanced in the decades since the foundational studies of Brunt [2] and Saller [11]. It is expedient, therefore, to situate the present paper within this body of scholarship before proceeding to its substantive historical and comparative arguments. This paper draws primarily on four groups of scholars: classical historians of the Roman Republic, social theorists of patronage, political scientists of the Nigerian state, and institutional economists of public sector selection - a combination that, while perhaps unusual, is warranted by the comparative scope of the paper's ambition.

Saller's *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* [11] remains the essential point of departure for any serious analysis of the Roman clientela. His identification of the three-fold criteria of the patron-client relationship - reciprocity, durability,

and asymmetry - has become the standard analytical vocabulary of the field, and it is adopted in the present paper as the primary framework for identifying the structural parallels between Roman and Nigerian forms of patronage. Wallace-Hadrill [13] built upon and complicated Saller's framework by drawing attention to the paradoxical dual function of patronage as both a mechanism of social hierarchy and a mechanism of social solidarity - a paradox that lies at the very heart of the present paper's argument. In a different but complementary vein, Weingrod [14] submitted that patron-client relations constitute one of the enduring features of political life across cultures and historical periods, a characterisation that provides the comparative theoretical licence for the cross-cultural methodology adopted in the present paper.

More recent scholarship has sharpened the distinction between patronage's integrative and exclusionary dimensions. Colonnelli, Prem, and Teso [4] have demonstrated, through rigorous empirical analysis of public sector organisations, that patronage in public employment is a major determinant of the selection of less competent personnel, with measurable negative consequences for institutional performance and public service delivery. While their evidence is drawn from a contemporary context rather than ancient Rome, the structural logic of their finding - that patronage displaces merit and thereby weakens the formal institutions through which it operates - applies with considerable force to the Roman Republican context and, as this paper argues, to the Nigerian context as well. There is no gainsaying, therefore, that the analytical insights produced by modern institutional economics have something genuinely illuminating to contribute to the study of ancient patron-client systems.

In the Nigerian-specific literature, Albert [1] and Onwuzuruigbo [9] have produced the most analytically sophisticated accounts of godfatherism as a socio-political institution. Albert [1] traces the transformation of the institution from a pre-colonial mechanism of social solidarity and community governance into a post-colonial vehicle of elite predation and political manipulation. Onwuzuruigbo [9] similarly contextualises godfatherism within its pre-colonial socio-cultural origins, arguing with considerable persuasiveness that the reduction of godfatherism to a post-independence political pathology has impoverished the scholarly understanding of the phenomenon and obscured its genuine historical functions. Rasak, Oye, Ake, and Raji [10] further contribute to this body of literature by situating Nigerian godfatherism within a theoretical framework of political patronage and clientelism, identifying its structural homology with classical models of patron-client relations. Blavo [3] in his own contribution, examines the cultural relevance of patronage in ancient Rome and contemporary Nigeria highlighting the similarities and differences in the socio-political and cultural experiences of both societies.

Drawing upon this body of scholarship, the present paper adopts a theoretical framework that distinguishes between two analytically distinct forms of social integration. The first is

network integration, in which individuals are drawn into reciprocal patron-client relationships and thereby gain access to resources, protection, and social visibility - but only through the mediation of a personal patron rather than through the exercise of universal civic rights. The second is civic integration, in which individuals are constituted as equal members of a shared political and legal community, with guaranteed access to justice, political participation, and collective goods that is independent of personal connections to the powerful. This distinction - between dependent, personalised inclusion and equal, institutionalised membership - is, this paper argues, the theoretical key to understanding both the Struggle of the Orders and the contemporary Nigerian predicament of godfatherism. The fundamental claim of the present paper is that patronage characteristically produces the first form of integration while simultaneously obstructing the second; and that the resolution of social conflict - in Rome as potentially in Nigeria - has ultimately required the progressive expansion of civic integration at the expense of the personal dependencies of patronage, without entirely abolishing the latter.

### 3. Social Class in Ancient Roman Society

#### 3.1. Social Structure and the Clientela

The ancient Roman society was highly stratified. Each member of the society knew his place in the socio-political scheme of things. Importance was religiously attached to birth and status; as a result, human relations and responsibilities were based on one's background and social standing. Therefore, when one speaks about social class in ancient Rome, one is actually speaking about a social system that is hinged on birth, status, prestige, wealth, and position. A man's social class could be identified through his personal image. In ancient Roman society, this self-worth was referred to as his socio-political status.

In ancient Roman society, the main two classes of people were the plebeian and the patrician. The patricians exercised great influence over the plebeians through the institution known as the clientela, which placed the plebeian client under his patrician patron, who protected him and, in return, enjoyed his services. Thus, the plebeians became the clients of their patrician patrons because they were placed as a trust in the hands of the patricians by making the former to choose their patron among the latter (Roman Antiquities, II.8.1-4) [7]. It is important to note here that this relationship was not merely one of compulsion; it was also one of ritual and moral obligation. The term *fides* - trust or good faith - was the moral cornerstone of the patron-client bond, and it imposed binding obligations on both parties [2].

The patricians alone had the full rights of citizenship because they were regarded as the legitimate sons in families belonging to the *gentes*, the clans recognised by the state. They had personal freedom, the right to hold and exchange property, and the opportunity to participate in the worship of the clan.

The patricians also controlled the business of the city and the administration of public affairs, serving as priests, judges, and magistrates; while the plebeians could not take part in the administration of the city but devoted their time to agriculture, breeding of cattle, and small-scale trading.

The plebeians who served as clients gave social and political support to their patrons, the patricians. It was unlawful for both client and patron to accuse each other in lawsuits or bear witness against each other. Anybody who violated these rules was sentenced to death - a provision that reveals how sacrosanct the relationship was regarded in the early Republic [2]. The clients were expected to escort their patron in public, adding to his prestige in proportion to their numbers, and to vote for him. A client received daily food from his patron, often converted into money - the *sportula*. The clients also provided dowries for their patron's daughter in marriage if the patron lacked sufficient means, and paid ransom if the patron's children were taken as prisoners. The patron, on the other hand, had to explain the laws of which his clients were ignorant, played a fatherly role in all matters relating to money and contracts, and had to protect his clients when they were wronged.

The patron-client relationship was also extended to cities, provinces, and foreign princes. Many communities and individuals had more than one patron. Patronage and clientship existed not only in Rome but also in every colony of Rome and in all allied and conquered cities. As Brunt [2] submits, these bonds of dependence were politically important in the first century BC and must have been considerably stronger in the fifth. Thus, from its very inception, the clientela served as a social architecture that connected the various strata of Roman society into a network of reciprocal obligations - a network that, for all its hierarchical rigidity, provided the social fabric without which the Roman state could not have functioned.

#### 3.2. The Class Struggle

The strong division in Roman society between the patricians and the plebs, coupled with the inability of the plebeians to live beyond their means, resulted in a long and consequential stasis - a class struggle - between the two orders. Right from the start, the key question was: who was entitled to hold the magistracy? At the very beginning of the Republic, a group of *gentes* (clans or families) that pronounced themselves patricians (*patricii*) claimed the exclusive right to hold the majority of political and religious posts [5]. The basis of their claim remains uncertain because, even in antiquity, there was no agreement over the origins of the term "patrician" [5]. It was argued that since they alone possessed the necessary religious knowledge to carry out the duties of the magistrates of the new Republic, they managed, in 450 BC, to pass a short-lived law forbidding intermarriage between patricians and non-patricians - an attempt to transform the patricians into an exclusive priestly caste. The magistrates were drawn mainly from the patrician class, who dominated the senate; they were

a closed order, and the distinction between the orders was one of birth, not of wealth. As property was originally concentrated more in the hands of the patricians, they were held responsible for the miseries suffered by the poor [12].

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Roman Antiquities, II. 9) [7] informed us that all plebeians were originally clients of the patricians, and that by the early Republic many plebeians were evidently free of clientage. The annalists also mentioned that the patricians were often supported by loyal clients against the rest of the plebs. The suggestion by Brunt [2] that this belief may have been rooted in the experience of later times rather than genuine tradition may be correct; but it is no wonder that most men had to have a patron, without whose help they might have had little prospect of redress against a more powerful wrongdoer.

But for its oppressive character, patrician rule might have endured considerably longer. Tradition records grave discontent among the masses owing partly to economic depression in the fifth century BC. Local farmers were constantly falling into debt - *nexum*. According to the Twelve Tables, a debtor unable to pay was liable to be sold into slavery abroad by his creditor. The social strife between the two classes was political and social, but it was also economic. Scullard [12] maintained that the struggles were partly a result of the agrarian troubles anticipated in the Gracchan days; other classical writers maintained that the economic factor was exaggerated to provide precedent for later agrarian legislation. In buttressing the claim that the struggle had a genuine economic dimension, Brunt [2] opines that, though details of the stories of the agitations were doubtless invented in later ages when remission of debts and distribution of public land were once again popular demands, it is very unlikely that there is no truth at all in the tradition.

De Ste. Croix [6] submits that what is certain is that the urban plebs wanted political recognition and protection, while the country plebs demanded more land and greater freedom. The *ager publicus* (public land) was owned by the state but exploited almost wholly by those who controlled the state - the patricians - for their own benefit. In 494 BC, the plebs sat down *en masse* outside Rome and declined to enrol in the army - a dramatic act of collective resistance. This "secession" undoubtedly took two centuries for its full benefit to materialise. By 287 BC, some revolutionary measures were taken that accounted for the concessions the patricians were forced to make, notably the establishment of the *tribunus plebis* - the tribunate of the plebs. The tribunes were ten men chosen among the plebeians, elected annually by the assembly of the people organised in voting units called tribes. The statutory function of the tribunes was to protect the lower-class Romans against oppression by the magistrates through the power of *intercessio* - intercession. The magistrates did not dare touch their persons, who were *sacrosanct*, because the whole plebs had sworn to avenge them by lynching whoever laid hands on them [2].

Having gained concessions against the patricians, the plebs

then clamoured for the unwritten law to be published so that the patricians would no longer be its sole interpreters. A compromise was eventually reached in 454 BC, when three envoys were sent to Greece to study the Athenian legal system. On their return, a commission of ten - the *Decemviri* - was set up to codify the law on ten, and subsequently twelve, tablets, duly approved by the *comitia centuriata*. This was the birth of the Twelve Tables.

What De Ste. Croix [6] explains vividly is that the plebs as a group was not homogenous. Their leaders were wealthy individuals who could aspire to any political position in the city. Their interest was not truly in giving their fellow plebeians access to social and political opportunities; rather, they were interested in obtaining political offices and strengthening their own position. The poor plebeians were disappointed by those who were supposed to be their advocates; since they were unable to meet the financial requirements for elective positions, they had no better choice than to continue attaching themselves to patricians as clients. Furthermore, Brunt [2] observes that in the late Republic, candidates for office seldom, if ever, stood on programmes; they solicited votes for their personal merits, or when these were trifling or unknown, on the services their ancestors had rendered to the state - a state of affairs that reveals the persistence of patronage as the fundamental grammar of Roman political life long after the formal resolution of the class conflict.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Roman Antiquities, IV.11) [7] drew attention to the remarkable restraint exhibited throughout the long struggle. With the passage of the *lex Hortensia* of 287 BC - which gave *plebiscita* the force of law and made them binding on all Roman citizens - the great struggle that had gone on for more than two centuries was formally brought to an end. Both the rich and poor plebeians had united in the struggle for their rights, and they eventually gained access to all important posts formerly enjoyed exclusively by the patricians.

## 4. Patronage and Social Integration in Ancient Rome

Patronage, as a socio-political and economic system, is one of the oldest mechanisms in ancient Roman society. Its establishment as a tool for social interaction can be traced back to the earliest history of Rome. According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Roman Antiquities, II. 8. 1) [7], it was Romulus, the first king of Rome, who divided Roman society into two classes: the patricians, who bore the responsibilities of governance, and the plebeians, who were to serve the patricians as clients. From its very origins, therefore, patronage was conceived as an instrument of social organisation, not merely of social domination.

Saller [11] has argued, with considerable analytical precision, that the essential criteria distinguishing a patronage relationship are three in number: the reciprocal exchange of goods

and services, the personal and durable nature of the bond, and its asymmetrical character - in that the two parties are of unequal status and offer qualitatively different contributions to the exchange. It is this three-fold structure - reciprocity, durability, and asymmetry - that gave Roman clientela its remarkable capacity for social integration. The patron offered protection, legal advocacy, material resources, and political influence; the client offered loyalty, labour, electoral support, and social visibility. In a society without the formal institutions of welfare provision, this exchange was existentially necessary for the powerless and politically advantageous for the powerful.

Wallace-Hadrill [13] has illuminated the central paradox at the heart of patronage: that it was simultaneously a mechanism of social hierarchy and a mechanism of social solidarity. By binding persons of vastly different social positions into durable relationships of mutual obligation, the clientela cut across the rigid distinctions of the class structure, creating networks of interdependence that prevented the complete polarisation of Roman society. In this sense, patronage was not merely an addendum to the political system but its connective tissue. As Brunt [2] submits, the ideal of Roman aristocrats - that the humble look up to the powerful without fear, while the powerful do not despise the humble - was precisely what the patron-client relationship was supposed to realise in the daily life of the city.

This integrative function of patronage became especially critical in the aftermath of the Struggle of the Orders. The new Patricio-Plebeian nobility that emerged from the settlement of 287 BC was as dominant and powerful as the old patrician order, and its oligarchic ideology and economic interests were not fundamentally different from those of the old patrician class. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of patronage did not simply disappear; they were reconfigured and extended. Wealthy plebeians who had secured entry into the new nobility now accepted poor and humbler citizens as their own clients, extending the reach of the patronage network downward through the social hierarchy. Brunt [2] rightly observes that the system of dependence was politically important in the first century BC and must have been considerably stronger in the earlier period. This perpetuation of patronage across the class divide was, in no small measure, the mechanism through which the wounds of two centuries of conflict were slowly sutured.

Furthermore, it is important to observe that the settlement of the Struggle of the Orders did not truly resolve the underlying conditions that had produced social conflict. The substance of the Roman law code had been published, but its procedural rules remained an aristocratic secret; hence the continuing importance of patronage as a bridge between ordinary citizens and the arcane machinery of the law. The noble patricians and the rising plebeians alike sought to secure and strengthen their positions by organising their connections with other nobles individually or on a family basis. The education of the nobles was aimed at assuring for their families a distinguished role in public life from one generation to the next. In

this way, patronage transcended its merely instrumental role and became a central feature of Roman civic culture - a shared grammar of social obligation and mutual expectation that gave Roman society much of its cohesion and much of its endurance.

The foregoing analysis reveals the Sallerian criteria - reciprocity, durability, and asymmetry - at work in the full complexity of their social effects: binding individuals into networks of mutual obligation while simultaneously naturalising the inequalities upon which those networks rested. It is this dual quality of the patronage system - its capacity to integrate and to exclude simultaneously - that makes the transition from the Struggle of the Orders to the new Patricio-Plebeian settlement so instructive for the comparative social analyst. For the settlement was not merely a political compromise; it was a renegotiation of the very terms on which social integration would be organised in the Roman Republic henceforth. The exclusionary dimensions of that renegotiation deserve to be examined in their own right, and it is to that examination that the paper now turns.

#### 4.1. Patronage and Social Exclusion

To assess the full social significance of the Roman patronage system, it would be insufficient - indeed misleading - to dwell exclusively upon its integrative functions without interrogating its simultaneously exclusionary dimensions. The clientela, for all the bonds of obligation and mutual interest that it created, was fundamentally a system premised upon inequality; and an institution premised upon inequality invariably generates, alongside its integrative effects, a series of exclusionary mechanisms that deserve careful analytical attention.

The most immediate exclusionary dimension of the patron-client system was its reduction of the plebeian client's civic identity to a function of his relationship with his patron. The client who lacked a powerful patron was, in a very real sense, socially invisible in the fullest meaning of that term - unable to navigate the arcane procedures of the Roman legal system, which remained an aristocratic secret long after the substance of the law had been codified in the Twelve Tables; unable to secure redress against a more powerful wrongdoer without a patron to advocate on his behalf; and unable to access the political institutions of the Republic on terms of genuine equality with those of higher social rank. In this sense, the inclusion that patronage offered was always conditional, personal, and revocable - inclusion by grace of the powerful rather than by right of citizenship. It is this quality of conditional, personalised inclusion that the distinction between network integration and civic integration is designed to capture. As De Ste. Croix [6] submits, the urban plebs wanted not merely the material benefits of patronage but political recognition and protection in the fullest civic sense - a demand that the clientela, by its very nature, could not fully satisfy, because it could not convert personal dependence into institutional right.

Furthermore, the patronage system possessed a well-documented tendency to obstruct meritocratic social mobility. In a polity in which political connections determined access to public life, magistracies, and the courts, the question of individual merit was rendered largely irrelevant. As Brunt [2] observes, candidates for political office in the late Republic seldom campaigned on programmes; they solicited votes on the basis of personal reputation or, more frequently, on the prestige of their ancestors - a system that entrenched hereditary advantage and closed off the avenues of civic advancement to those who lacked powerful patrons or noble lineage. The structural logic of this finding resonates powerfully with the empirical findings of Colonnelli, Prem, and Teso [4], who demonstrate that patronage in public sector organisations systematically advantages the politically connected over the professionally competent, with measurable negative consequences for institutional effectiveness. In both the ancient Roman context and the modern institutional contexts studied by Colonnelli and his colleagues [4], patronage thus operated simultaneously as a mechanism of selective inclusion for the client and a mechanism of systematic exclusion for the meritorious non-client.

No less significant was the fragmenting effect of patronage upon the collective solidarity of the plebeian order. The clientela operated by attaching individual plebeians to individual patrician patrons, thereby creating competing networks of personal loyalty that cut across the horizontal solidarities of class. Wallace-Hadrill [13] illuminates this dynamic by observing that patronage characteristically bound people together vertically - patron to client - at the expense of horizontal bonds between clients themselves. This vertical integration came at a considerable price: a plebs composed of competing networks of personal dependents was far less capable of sustained collective action than one organised around shared civic rights and common class interests. It is against this backdrop that the secessions of the plebs acquire their deepest significance as moments of social transformation. The secessions were, in a fundamental sense, the plebeians' attempt to transcend the individual, fragmented character of their patron-client ties and to assert a collective civic identity that was independent of their respective relationships with individual patrician patrons. When the plebs withdrew en masse from Rome in 494 BC and threatened to establish their own city, they were not merely bargaining for better material conditions; they were asserting the principle that their social worth was not exhausted by their function as clients of the great patrician houses.

There is no gainsaying, therefore, that the Struggle of the Orders, viewed through the lens of the network integration/civic integration distinction, reveals itself as a struggle over the very terms on which the plebeian majority would be incorporated into Roman social life. What the plebeians were ultimately demanding - even when their most immediate demands concerned debt relief, land distribution, or access to the magistracies - was a shift from network integration to civic integration: from a social order in which their access to justice,

land, and political life depended on the goodwill of individual patrons, to one in which those goods were guaranteed by law, accessible to all citizens equally, and immune to the caprice of the powerful. The successive reforms of the fifth to third centuries BC - from the Twelve Tables to the establishment of the tribunate to the lex Hortensia - represent precisely this progressive institutionalisation of plebeian access, the conversion of personal privilege into civic right. And yet, as this paper has argued, the resolution of the Struggle of the Orders did not abolish patronage; it reconfigured it - embedding it within a newly expanded civic framework that constrained, without eliminating, the most egregious expressions of patron-client dependency.

## 4.2. Patronage, Godfatherism and Social Integration in Nigeria: A Comparative Reflection

Take it or leave it, the foregoing analysis of Roman patronage is not merely an exercise in classical antiquarianism. It has direct and urgent implications for the understanding of contemporary Nigerian society, and it is in this comparative dimension that the present paper makes its most significant contribution. As noted above, it is no doubt that the phenomenon of godfatherism - the Nigerian variant of patron-client relations - has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years [1, 9]. Yet, as Onwuzuruigbo [9] rightly submits, the discourse on godfatherism has been characterised by two major weaknesses: it has focused almost exclusively on the perverse political expressions of the phenomenon, and it has proceeded without adequately emphasising its socio-cultural origins and its positive contributions to pre-colonial social organisation. This paper submits that the Roman experience of patronage provides precisely the comparative framework needed to correct this lacuna.

In many respects, the structural parallels between Roman clientela and Nigerian godfatherism are striking and demand sustained analytical attention. The Roman patron provided protection, resources, and political access to his client; the client reciprocated with loyalty, service, and electoral support. In the same vein, the Nigerian godfather - whether the Yoruba baba kekere (small father) or babaogun (war patron), the Hausa maigida (landlord or broker), or the Igbo ogaranya (wealthy master) - provided similar services of protection, material support, and social navigation to those of lesser status, who in turn offered loyalty, tribute, and service [1, 8]. The exchange was, in both contexts, characterised by the three Salterian criteria: reciprocity, durability, and asymmetry.

Moreover, as was the case in Rome, the integrative potential of godfatherism in pre-colonial Nigeria was considerable. The babaogun of Ibadan, as Falola [8] explains, exercised control over numerous peoples of several scattered compounds, collected taxes, settled disputes, and recruited eligible male members for military service - binding together persons of diverse backgrounds under a shared relationship of obligation.

One is reminded, in this regard, of the Roman patron who similarly drew together dispersed individuals - freedmen, foreign clients, and the urban poor - into the orbit of his household and political influence. Similarly, the Hausa *maigida*, by providing brokerage services and accommodation to traders from distant regions, performed an integrative commercial and social function that bears unmistakable structural resemblance to the services rendered by Roman *patroni* to their provincial clients. What then distinguishes the original institution of Nigerian godfatherism from its Roman counterpart in terms of social function? Very little, this paper submits - and that is precisely the point.

It is important to note, however, that as in Rome, the integrative potential of Nigerian godfatherism has been serially subverted by elite self-interest. Onwuzuruigbo [9] submits that colonialism was largely responsible for the initial distortion of the conventional notion of godfatherism, by restructuring and incorporating indigenous patron-client institutions into the apparatus of colonial administration in ways that divorced godfathers from accountability to their communities. Post-colonial political culture completed this distortion. Albert [1] observes that the political godfather of the contemporary Nigerian dispensation - whether in Anambra, Kwara, or Oyo states - now seeks not to raise leaders of public virtue but to install surrogates who will channel state resources back to the patron, demanding, as Governor Chimaroke Nnamani famously observed, "pounds of flesh" [1]. Is this not precisely the trajectory that Roman patronage itself followed in the late Republic? No doubt, by the first century BC, what had begun as a system of mutual obligation and social solidarity had been corroded by the ambitions of individual magnates - a sobering parallel for the Nigerian political observer.

What ought Nigeria to learn from the Roman experience? This paper submits that the answer lies in the following observation: patronage, in its original and legitimate form, is not inherently destructive. It becomes destructive when it loses its reciprocal and community-oriented character - when the patron ceases to be accountable to the client and to the wider society, and begins to treat the relationship as a private investment in the machinery of the state. The challenge, as was eventually the challenge in Rome, is institutional: to create the kinds of legal, electoral, and civic structures that can domesticate the inevitable reality of patron-client relations, bending them toward social integration rather than social fragmentation. Reducing or eliminating the disruptive influence of godfatherism in Nigerian politics would therefore require entrenching democratic ideals and strengthening democratic processes and institutions, as Onwuzuruigbo [9] rightly recommends - a prescription that the Roman experience, with its long and costly journey from oligarchic privilege to civic inclusion, eloquently corroborates.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has re-examined the Struggle of the Orders in

ancient Republican Rome with a view to identifying how the institution of patronage functioned as an instrument of social integration amid deep and prolonged class conflict. The paper has argued that the *clientela* was not simply a mechanism of patrician domination but a complex and durable system of social exchange that bound persons of vastly unequal status into relationships of mutual obligation, and that this system was central to the gradual and negotiated resolution of the class conflict between patricians and plebeians. With the passage of the *lex Hortensia* of 287 BC, the formal political struggle came to an end; but the patronage system that had both fuelled and mediated the conflict was reconfigured around the new *Patricio-Plebeian* nobility, extending its networks of dependency downward through Roman society and providing the connective tissue of a deeply unequal but remarkably durable polity.

The theoretical framework advanced in this paper - distinguishing network integration from civic integration - has illuminated the limitations as well as the achievements of this resolution. The Struggle of the Orders was, at its deepest level, a prolonged demand for civic integration: for a social order in which access to justice, political participation, and collective goods was guaranteed by institutional right rather than by personal favour. The successive concessions of the patrician order - the Twelve Tables, the tribunate, the *lex Hortensia* - represent the incremental satisfaction of that demand; yet, as the persistence of the *clientela* well into the Imperial period demonstrates, network integration was never fully superseded by civic integration but remained its durable complement.

In its comparative dimension, this paper has demonstrated that the Nigerian phenomenon of godfatherism shares the essential structural features of Roman *clientela*: reciprocity, asymmetry, and the potential for both social integration and social predation. The pre-colonial forms of godfatherism among the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo peoples performed genuine integrative functions analogous to those of Roman patronage. The distortions wrought by colonialism and subsequently by the pathologies of post-colonial governance have, however, converted the institution into a vehicle for elite predation at the expense of the wider society. The Roman experience suggests that the resolution of this tension lies not in the abolition of patron-client relations - which are, as human history consistently demonstrates, irreducible features of hierarchical societies - but in the construction of robust civic, legal, and electoral institutions capable of rendering patrons and godfathers accountable to those over whom they claim authority.

There should be a close congruence between the prestige, power, and material rewards that Nigerian godfathers seek to extract from the political system and the genuine services of social integration and community development that the original institution of godfatherism was intended to provide. For it is in that original vision - the Roman patron who protected the weak, the Yoruba *baba kekere* who mediated conflict, the Igbo *ogaranya* who trained and elevated his apprentices - that the most enduring model of social integration through patronage

is to be found. Nigeria's ongoing struggle to build a cohesive and just polity is, in its fundamental dynamics, not entirely unlike the Struggle of the Orders; and the lesson of that Roman experience is that resolution requires patience, institutional creativity, and the willingness to extend the privileges of citizenship - and the benefits of patronage - to those who have been systematically denied them.

## Abbreviations

BC Before Christ

## Author Contributions

**Blavo Etsri Babatunde:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration

**Ubani Williams Omokide:** Data Curation, Investigation, Resources, Writing – review & editing

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## References

- [1] Albert, I. O. (2005). Explaining 'godfatherism' in Nigerian politics. *African Sociological Review*, 9(2), 79-105.
- [2] Brunt, P. A. (1971). *Social conflicts in the Roman Republic*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- [3] Blavo, E. B (2021). Social Political Relevance of Patron-Client Relationship in Ancient Roman and Nigerian Cultures, *Nigeria and The Classics*, Vol. 33, No 1, 1-18.
- [4] Colonnelli, E., Prem, M., & Teso, E. (2020). Patronage and selection in public sector organizations. *American Economic Review*, 110(10), 3071-3099. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20181491>
- [5] Cornell, T. J. (1995). The beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000-264 BC). Routledge.
- [6] De Ste. Croix, G. E. M. (1981). The class struggle in the ancient Greek world: From the Archaic Age to the Arab conquests. Cornell University Press.
- [7] Dionysius of Halicarnassus. (1937). *Roman antiquities* (E. Cary, Trans., Vols. I-IV). Harvard University Press.
- [8] Falola, T. (1985). The political system of Ibadan in the 19th century. In A. Ajayi & B. Ikara (Eds.), *Evolution of political culture in Nigeria* (pp. 104-117). University Press.
- [9] Onwuzuruigbo, I. (2013). Recontextualisation of the concept of godfatherism: Reflections on Nigeria. *Africa Development*, 38(1&2), 25-50. <https://doi.org/10.57054/ad.v38i1&2.1606>
- [10] Rasak, B., Oye, A. J., Ake, M., & Raji, A. A. (2017). Godfatherism and political patronage in Nigeria: A theoretical overview. *Political Science Review*, 8(1), 77-101.
- [11] Saller, R. P. (1982). *Personal patronage under the early Empire*. Cambridge University Press.
- [12] Scullard, H. H. (1980). *A history of the Roman world: 753 to 146 BC* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- [13] Wallace-Hadrill, A. (Ed.). (1989). *Patronage in ancient society*. Routledge.
- [14] Weingrod, A. (1968). Patrons, patronage, and political parties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10(4), 377-400.