

Rotational Presidency and Power Shift as an Instrument of National Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the concept of rotational presidency as a panacea to the problem of national integration in Nigeria. To a very large extent, there has been a raging controversy that the position of the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should rotate among the various ethnic nationalities and geo-political zones that make up the country. This is not strange as the federal character principle of proportional sharing is entrenched in the 1999 constitution as amended. The paper argues that the issue of rotational presidency from the North to the South of Nigeria has dominated the political discourse in Nigeria over a period of time, far more importantly after June 12, 1993 presidential election annulment. The paper through a historical analytical methodology interrogates major primary and secondary documents to examine the issue of rotational presidency in Nigeria as an impetus for national integration. It concludes that the states that have no tangible changes in the socio-economic indices of the country; instead, the maintenance of the status quo prevails. Overall, if the rotational presidency is an acceptable method of solving Nigeria's political problem, then its *modus operandi* should be entrenched in the country's constitution.

Key words: *Constitution, Election, Integration, Rotational presidency*

Introduction

The origin of rotational presidency is not well known; it can be described to be as old as man's existence in the universe. Records show that the system of rotation was practiced by the Greeks and the ancient Roman Empire. The European Union and Switzerland, also practice a rotational system of government. The presidency of the European Union rotates among the member states while it rotates among the various ethnic groups in

Switzerland. Switzerland and the European Union are among the most stable country and institution in the world. Thus, Switzerland and the European Union are very good examples where rotational system are functionally applied along ethnic and national lines. The idea of rotational presidency started in Nigeria during the 1995 National Constitutional Conference under the regime of former Nigerian maximum ruler, late President Sani Abacha. Six geo-political zones were adopted

during the conference and the national political offices will be filled by candidates on a rotational basis based on the six geo-political zones with a transitional provision of 30 years.

It was agreed that the rotational system was to be entrenched in the then draft constitution and will be applied to all spheres of government. The six geo-political zones which include the North East, North West and North Central in the northern part of the country and the South East, South West and South South in the southern part of the country was introduced as a remedy to the issue of marginalization in Nigeria. It was assumed that the six geo-political zones will bring to an end the issue of monopoly of power by the north. The northern part of the country had dominated the leadership of Nigeria, and they use this position to secure juicy political privileges for their own people at the detriment of the people from the south of the country. This sad experience was climaxed in the June 12, 1993 presidential election annulment. The election was believed to have been won by late Moshood Abiola, a southerner.

Rotational presidency in Nigeria implies that the office of the president was to be rotated evenly among the six geo-political zones of the nation. That was why during the 1999 general election, President Olusegun Obasanjo

contested under the auspices of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Olu Falae vied for All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), thus, two South Westerners contested the presidential slot. The lacuna in the rotational principle was felt immediately after the expiration of President Olusegun Obasanjo's four years term, he initiated plans for a second term in office, which was not mentioned in the agreement on rotational presidency, and this brought about series of controversy. The northerners insisted that power was going to return to them while the southerners maintained on retaining power for another four years, so that power will then move to the North for eight uninterrupted years. The national executive committee of Peoples Democratic Party held a meeting and votes were cast in favour of the South and power continued in the South with an understanding that after President Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure, power should return to the North for eight unbroken years. At the expiration of President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime of eight years saw the emergence of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yaradua from the North, the power was however truncated with the sudden death of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar, Adua in 2010.

The issue of power shift or rotational presidency from North to South has been a

burning one right from the commencement of Nigeria project. From independence in 1960 to 1999, the rationale behind the northern domination of leadership particularly at the national level (the president/head of state) either as military or civilian has been questioned. This development was further fuelled by the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election which was poised to be won by a Southerner and was annulled by a Northern military president. Indeed, the development created the impression directly or indirectly that the North did not want a transfer of power to the South.

From Nigeria's independence in 1960 the North has been accused of dominating the leadership of the country particularly at the federal level. This agitation was buttressed by the fact that in the First Republic (1960-1966), a Northerner; Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was the Prime Minister. When the military took over in 1966 apart from the about three months tenure of General Aguiyi Ironsi; a Southerner, General Yakubu Gowon, a northerner assumed the mantle of leadership up to 1975 when another Northerner; General Murtala Mohammed took over up to 1976 when he was killed and his second in command; General Olusegun Obasanjo, a southerner continued with his programme up till 1979. During the Second Republic (1979-

1983), another Northerner; Alhaji Shehu Shagari won the election as the President, after the termination of the Second Republic with the military takeover on 31st December, 1983 another northerner, General Muhammed Buhari became the Head of State till 1985 when there was a palace coup. The result of the palace coup brought in General Ibrahim Babangida, another northerner as Head of State until 1993 when there was a serious debacle caused by the annulment of the presidential election assumed to have been won by a southerner, Chief Moshood Abiola. Similarly, the interim government put up by Babangida when he stepped aside in August, 1993 which was headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan; a southerner was toppled by another northerner, General Sani Abacha. Based on this development, the North had been accused vehemently as monopolizing power in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

According to Awopeju, Adelusi, and Oluwashakin (2012), the "attempt to ameliorate the volatile situation created by the annulment of the 1993 general election actually led the political parties that contested the 1999 general elections to field only Yoruba candidates for the presidency". Also, Ahmed and Dantata (2016) corroborate thus: "PDP

came about zoning to save democracy in Nigeria". The committee of patriots, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and the Southern Senators Forum are some of the groups that have called for the practice of rotational presidency. The Southern Senators Forum even presented a ten-point agenda for constitutional review which included the practice of rotational presidency. Similarly, Ohaneze Ndigbo, a socio-cultural group has also joined the clarion agitation for rotational presidency to be enshrined in the constitution (Umezina, 2012). Umezina (2012) further maintains that "rotational presidency is good for the country and that is what we are doing in Ohaneze and other organizations that want to build a sense of belonging among diverse groups. It will go a long way in addressing the issue of lopsided power distribution in Nigeria". Umezina (2012) holds the view that the elite in contemporary Nigeria have re-invented the practice of zoning in the context of ethno-regional struggle for power; they also strive to constitutionalise the practice. However, there have been four attempts to incorporate the principle of zoning in the Nigerian Constitution. All these have successively failed.

In 1979, when a sub-committee of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) proposed constitutionalisation of zoning, some

intellectuals within the CDC rejected the proposal. According to Adegami and Charles (2015), these intellectuals were of the opinion that Nigeria's constitution should, emphasize "only those ideas and values which render the areas or ethnic origin of a person irrelevant in determining his quality as an individual". Again, in 1986, some individuals advocated the constitutionalization of zoning in the debates coordinated by the political bureau. These arguments were rejected by the Bureau which claimed that, "a constitutional provision for rotation tantamount to an acceptance of our inability to grow beyond ethnic views", yet another attempt to constitutionalise zoning failed in 1997 and 2005. In the editorial of *This Day* newspaper, (2021), the paper maintains the view that "one big problem Nigerians have in the 1995 draft is the provision for rotational presidency". Although the issue of rotation appeared in every stage of the review or drafting of a new constitution in Nigeria since 1966, some Nigerians have not considered that its negligence could threaten national unity.

This Day newspaper adds that "zoning has never done this country any good; rather it has disrupted every meaningful initiative that could have rescued it from the pangs of maladministration. He cited examples of "late President Yar'Adua", a product of zoning,

emerged as a candidate of his party through subversion of the process. Also, that “we are all victims of zoning in another form called Federal Character that ruined the civil service in this country” To this school of thought, zoning or rotating ‘undermines democracy since it prevents real competition and compromises the way candidates emerge’ (Christian, Abada, & Okeke, 2016). Furthermore, Awoyemi (2012) maintains that “as far as elders of the north are concerned, the ruler or a man in ultimate authority in Nigeria should be a Northerner and Hausa/Fulani”. This partly explained why Alhaji Bashir Ottiman Tofa lost northern support. Although he came from Kano, he was born and bred in Kebbi, a non-Hausa/Fulani town. Eventually, the northern elders apparently willed the then military president, General Ibrahim Babangida to stop M.K.O Abiola from participating in the election or, in the alternative, to have his election nullified. To this end, Awoyemi (2012) posited that:

Due to the inequitable balance of power which the British gave in their favour from the very beginning, the North have so enjoyed the position which the power bestowed on them that they have been doing everything possible, be it by hook, crook, manoeuvres, tactics, strategy and deception to keep themselves or their own, whether civilian or military in power.

Another pro-rotating author Odunze (2012), stresses the importance of zoning when he posits that “the call to abolish zoning seriously underestimates and ignores the complex political character of Nigeria”. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is a divided federation owing to its heterogeneity. The way out for such a country is through zoning and power shift which are capable of abating the power imbalance. It is natural for each component of a federation to want to be at the theatre of power. As Kwasau (2013, p.13) rightly observes, “man is by nature desirous of power. Power is powerful and sweet. Man, not only likes to be at the theatre of power, he also seeks to be at its Centre”. In support of the importance of rotation, Jibrin (2021, p.10) holds that “zoning formula seems to fit into the heterogeneous and federal nature of the Nigerian state, helping to accommodate all groups as much as possible and therefore reducing complaints of domination and marginalization.... It makes the system to be more inclusive (of identifiable groups) and therefore supportive of the democratic culture”. The fact that the issue of rotation and zoning is enshrined in the constitution of the People’s Democratic Party is indicative of the validity of the principle of rotation. Thus, in Article 7 (2) (c) it is provided that “in pursuance of the principle of equity, justice

and fairness, the party shall adhere to the policy of rotation and zoning of party and public elective offices and it shall be enforced by the appropriate executive committee at all levels” (PDP Constitution, 2012 as amended). In pursuance of the above, the constitution of PDP recognizes Nigeria as having six geo-political zones and the party operates within this ambit.

Conceptualization and Contextualization of Zoning and Rotation in Nigeria

Ostensibly, through occupation of the seat of power (both in military and democratic regimes), the northern elite developed an affinity for state power and thus perceived it as their birthright. This perception informed the claim by Usman Bugaje that proponents of the sovereign national conference hated the north and were plotting the collapse of the country (cited in Amuwo & Obiyan 2013). To the northern elite, the Obasanjo presidency was a “loan” to the south to compensate and assuage anxieties that emerged over the June 12 electoral debacle. In other words, the “ceding” of power to the south-west was a force majeure that had to be accommodated and endured while it lasted. This was evident in the eight-year regime of President Obasanjo (1999–2007) with the provocative promulgation of Sharia laws, religious riots and threats of

impeachment, all of which created tension in the body politic. The 1994–1995 constitutional conference clearly demonstrated an understanding of Nigeria’s political problems when in consensus resolved that the presidency should rotate between the north and south, which was dutifully included in section 229 (1–5) of its draft constitution.

Yet the 1999 constitution, which was supposedly a product of that conference, did not contain these provisions. Nevertheless, the spirit of power rotation guided the post-military transition that produced the Obasanjo presidency in 1999. Until recently, zoning and rotation of presidential power have not been deliberate national policies, or political party policy. Earlier attempts at democracy (1960–1966 and 1979–1983) did not consciously include zoning or rotation of presidential power because of the ethnic composition or flavour of the parties. The major preoccupation of these ethnically-entrenched political parties was to gather constitutionally required percentages to enable the formation of a government. In other words, it was considered a given by the northern elite that the majority must always have its way. Because the military had ruled over a long period of time they have been able to manipulate the state patronage system in favour of the north; its elite had

greater resources with which to execute their political agenda. Only Chief M.K.O. Abiola, owing to his unfettered access to state patronage, was able to contest and win the 1993 presidential election.

The impetus for zoning and rotation of power was ostensibly derived from efforts to create a sense of belonging amongst ethno-national elite groups in the face of the inadequacies of the federal character principles. Muhammed (2013) contends that zoning and rotation are suffused with conceptual confusion. Zoning and rotation tend to be confused with federal character principles enshrined in the 1999 constitution. Far more importantly, the principles of zoning and rotation were implicit in section 14 (3) of the 1999 Nigerian constitution, which addresses the federal character principle. This was misleading; the principles of zoning and rotation, and those of the federal character, are entirely different, and relate to different scenarios. While the principles of zoning and rotation are anchored on the delineation of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones for manageability, the principle of federal character references the thirty-six states of the country and Abuja, and is concerned with representation in national government (section 14 (3), first & second

schedules, *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999).

It is necessary at this point to clarify the concepts of zoning and rotation since these concepts are mutually reinforcing. There cannot be rotation unless the issue of zoning is resolved. Constitutionally, zones do not properly exist in the Nigerian polity. Such categorizations as north, south, and other geopolitical zones are fluid and arbitrary terms used in political discourse and are designed merely to serve as guides to confer meaning and boundary.

It is worthy of mentioning to state that the only official document that makes any reference to zones and zoning outside Abacha's summarization of the outcome of the 1994-1995 constitutional conference, presented in his 1995 Independence Day national broadcast, is the PDP constitution (Awopeju, Adelusi, & Oluwashakin, 2012) as earlier quoted. The major organs and structures of the PDP and other major political parties are not patterned after northern or southern zones, but six categorization of zones consists of north-central, north-east, north-west, southeast, geopolitical zones, each having its own congress, executive and working committees. The PDP south-south, and south-west, and from these we can distil definitional criteria for

zoning. The boundaries set by the contemporary wave of debates on the subject are inadequate. The basis for debates on zone, zoning, and rotation of power is purely political and does not include other holistic determining variables. The most important determining variable in national aggregation is ethnicity. Because of the permeation of ethnicity into every sector and stratum of social and political discourse, it has become the primary basis for the distribution of state wealth. For this reason, such categories as gender (men–women), age (youth–old men–women) and class (elite–masses) that constitute distinct zones, are subsumed under ethnicity, because any man, woman, youth, elite personage, or commoner would be asked their ethnic affiliation. Still, any definitional postulation that glosses over socio-cultural and economic factors for zoning and rotation would most certainly be considered analytically weak and unhelpful. It is therefore not adequate to conceptualize zoning merely as the alternation of key national political offices (the offices of the President, Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives) amongst the six geopolitical zones (Opeyemi, Siyaka, & Opeyemi, 2014). Zoning and rotation of power are two mutually reinforcing concepts that connote recognizable delimitation, distribution, and alternation of

key national political offices in such a way that key cleavages in the political system such as gender, age grouping, and socio-economic status subsumed within the ambit of ethnicity are properly categorized, streamlined, and positioned either clockwise or anti-clockwise as the basis for power alternation within the polity. The PDP constitution not only recognized the imperative of zoning and rotation as irreducible requirements for engendering feelings of inclusiveness and belonging, it also implied an order of rotation in 1999. Therefore, contrary to arguments that there was no order or sequence of rotation, there was indeed an inferable order evident within the restrictions imposed by the PDP in 1999. It closed its doors to northern presidential aspirants and only considered presidential aspirants from the south-east, south-south and south-west. The late Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, a north-easterner, who defied the zoning and rotation principle to purchase the presidential nomination form, was refunded his nomination fee and was forbidden from contesting (Opeyemi, Siyaka, & Opeyemi, 2014). This indicates that the PDP operated its zoning and rotation principle not as a tabula rasa, but as recognizing the realities of northern domination of the presidency since 1960.

Evolution of the Principles of Rotation in Nigeria's Political Development

The two main principles guiding the selection of political and bureaucratic officials at the federal level are federal character and zoning. These two modalities work in concert with each other. In the Nigerian context, zoning is the aggregation of states and ethnic groups into a number of regional blocs on the basis of which positions are allocated to each zone. There are two important features of zoning, namely: rotation of offices and power shift. The goal of zoning is to validate a pattern whereby the ethno-regional origin of top political office holders, including the president, alternate from one election or set of elections to another (Omodia, 2012). The concept of power rotation emerged in the late 1990s as an expression of the South's opposition to Northern domination of the country. In Tivland, for instance, the tension among various sub-units led to the evolution of the system in which chieftainship rotates among the sub-units based upon the principle of "eat and give your brother". Zoning was also popular in traditional Yoruba society. It was applied in the selection of the traditional rulers. The question of zoning/rotation re-emerged during the third republic.

The issue of whether a southerner or northerner would be the president was keenly contested within the two registered political parties viz the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention (NRC). At the initial period of the republic, there seemed to be an emerging consensus that it was time to elect a president from the south. In NRC, for instance, key personalities in the party argued that the North had produced sufficient number of presidents. They therefore canvassed for the zoning of the party's presidential ticket to the South (Christian, Abada, & Okeke, 2016). However, the election of Tom Kimi (South) as the NRC chairman dashed the hopes of many Southern politicians. The NRC zoned its political ticket to the North, with the South getting the vice-presidential ticket. On the other hand, the SDP allocated its presidential ticket to the South. In consequence, Moshood Abiola (south) was nominated as the SDP presidential flag bearer with Baba Gana Kingibe as his running mate who hails from Borno State in the North. Contrary to the expectations, the hope of subsequent rotation of the zoning arrangement was again truncated following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election and the reinstatement of military rule in November, 1993.

This one case too many of new situation creating new dynamics in the polity via proliferation of groups and, or personal interests became obvious. The principle of rotation re-echoed in the 1994/1995 National Constitutional Conference (NCC) and eventually in the 1997 draft constitution. Similarly, the issue popped up during the transition to civil rule programme of General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998-1999. Thus in response to the increasing calls for power shift from North to South, all the three registered political parties viz: the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples' Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) zoned their presidential tickets to the south (Liebowitz, & Ibrahim, 2013). Zoning was also applied in the electoral process that saw the emergence of Umaru Musa Yar' Adua as president in May, 2007 with the presidential ticket zoned to the North by the PDP. In a nut-shell, the conception, implementation and continuity of the principles of Federal character and zoning reflect elite power relations in Nigeria. Although the Northern elite are undoubtedly the leading group in Nigeria, they have been unable to dominate the entire polity. The Northern control of political power began after the Northern People's congress won the federal and regional elections. It has been extended since then to most regimes, both

military and civilian. However, the efforts to develop a constitutional office distributional arrangement reveal the contradictions of the Nigerian political system and the ambivalence of the political system in Nigeria (Liebowitz & Ibrahim, 2013). The adoption and implementation of the federal character and zoning reflect attempts by the elite to avoid regional domination and to ensure the stable and equitable allocation of power. The continuity of these arrangements depends upon the preservation of the existing balance of power among regional elite groups in Nigeria. Thus, a shift in the regional balance of power would lead to changes in the country's office distribution arrangement (Federal Republic of Nigeria official Gazette (2011) constitution as Amended).

Rotation of Presidency and National Integration

The failure of the policy of federal character and zoning, as it has not prevented the feeling of marginalization in certain sections of the federation, impels a further search for policy measures to assuage Nigerians over the volatile ethnic conflict-ridden policy and salvage the nation from imminent collapse. This informed the development and inclusion of the principle of rotational presidency/power shift in the 1995 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This was to ensure

national integration in the polity (Federal Republic of Nigeria official Gazette (2011) constitution as Amended). Since the amalgamation of 1914, Nigeria has witnessed several ethnic struggles and conflicts of varying magnitude. The most devastating being the thirty-month-old civil war between 1967 and 1970. Consequent upon these destabilizing ethnic conflicts, various public measures have been enunciated as remedies to the nagging problem of ethnic diversity which include federal character and rotational presidency (Christian, Abada & Okeke, 2016). Invariably, the intense elite struggle for power is a striking feature of Nigerian politics. The key element of struggle has been the tension between elite from the two political blocs in Nigeria (the North and South). The underlying issues behind the political tension are the fears in Northern Nigeria that the more educated southern elite would dominate state institutions whereas in Southern Nigeria there are concerns that their Northern counterparts who are more populous would have advantage during election. The principle of zoning and federal character emerged as modalities for resolving the elite conflicts over distribution of offices. These sharing arrangements express the tendency of Nigerian elite, rising to manage ethnic diversity and promote a Nigerian State project by avoiding divisive

politics and emphasizing unity in diversity – a democratic beauty. This position shows the bases, contradictions and ambivalence that underlie the principle of Federal character and zoning as modalities for sharing power/positions among various zones in Nigeria and, on the other hand, as frameworks and process through which the elite seek to realize their interest within non-violent distributive politics. To this end, Christian, Abada & Okeke (2016) opines that “there are some differences, though interconnected aspects of national integration” viz: territorial and social integration. Territorially, regions and localities are linked closely together by economic and psychological similarities; while socially, the various sections of the society are bound together by common culture, national loyalties, functional specialisation and independence. National integration is best attained where there is a proportional amount of both the territorial as well as social integration. Unfortunately, as also posited by the source, Third World countries like Nigeria “where the elites have succeeded in manipulating the masses, using the ethnic factor to their advantage” lack the fore-mentioned propitious elements. Lamentably, the situation in the Nigerian polity is worsened by non-ideological identity in political parties.

Problems and Prospects of Rotational Presidency

Rotational presidency and national integration are basic concepts relevant to the sustenance of true federalism in Nigeria. But the non-recognition of rotational presidency by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the domineering role of ethnicity within the party as well as non-commitment of political will on the part of leadership constitute major impediments to the realization of rotational presidency and national integration in Nigeria. Several political groups, ethnic and interest groups have been shouting that the next president should come from here or there. It should be noted that rotational presidency is in itself an aberration or a confirmation of the failure of the political process. It is a confirmation that the best candidate for an election will be side-lined for tribal choices. Egbosiuba (2013, p.34) asserts that:

Rotational presidency is limiting, ill-advised and potential descent to mediocrity. It is imperative for Nigerians to come to the realization that we can only succeed if

Nigerians conduct general elections in a manner that will produce the most qualified and forward-looking candidates...a lot of

Nigerians may not be able to look past ethnicity, race, religion or region when they get into the election booth, but electoral behaviour of such people will change with time for the better.

The reality is that we may have much better options from other regions. Why settle for less in such situations? The issue of better representation in government should not be targeted alone at the angle of where the president comes from. Rather the focal point should be representation of the various ethnic groups in ministerial and parastatal appointments. However, the patriots, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Ohaneze Ndigbo (an Igbo socio-cultural organization) and a host of other groups have all advocated for rotational presidency. This may have been because from 1984 upwards, it was perceptible to acute southern observers that the north was beginning to dominate the government. Under the general Buhari's regime (1984-1985), "Thirteen of the nineteen members of the ruling Supreme Military Council (SMC) was northern Muslims, most of whose families are related to powerful local emirs (Mbah & Orjinta, 2020). Nigerians should draw what happens in other climes like the United States

of America. As an illustration, President Barack Obama, a Kenyan, contested for and won election into the White House as the president of the United States of America. Observably, those clamouring for rotational presidency are making an open declaration of their intention to use the post of the president to advance sectional and regional interest rather than the interest of the entire country. This has the potential to bring about disintegration.

Power Shift and the National Question

The leadership question in Nigeria revolves around the possibility of every indigenous ethnic group ascending to the presidency. Structural manoeuvrings over the years, such as the distortion of the federalist principles by successive military regimes, the conferment of super ordinate powers on the federal government, its control of the country's enormous resources, and the ascendancy of a culture of parasitism, have contracted the federal space and made northern Nigeria a hegemonic power centre. The exclusive dominance of the presidency by northerners since Nigeria's independence underpins ethno-national agitations that threaten the polity. Nigeria's leadership question is directly linked to the country's inability to satisfactorily resolve the contradictions of its statehood.

The nationalistic struggle, which pitted eastern and western regions against the colonial administration, created particularistic affinity between colonial Britain and the "docile" north. The British were able to achieve a transfer of power to the north by outright manipulation of the system in two important ways. First, they manipulated the census figures to favour the North by ascribing numerical demographic superiority to it. British colonialists abrogated the principle of north-south parity in the allocation of seats in parliament and, in its stead, introduced a population weighted principle that allocated 52% of the seats in parliament to the north (Olaiya, Apeloko, Amanchukwu & Shiyabade, 2014). Second, they tactically delayed Nigeria's independence so that necessary human capital could be put in place in the north before granting independence. Thus, since 1960, except for the interregna of January-July 1966, 1976-1979, and August-November 1993, the north had held on to power until 1999. The northern elite, who took over from retreating British colonialists, ruled both as military autocrats and democrats for forty out of Nigeria's fifty-three years as an independent state. In the process, they reinvented a skewed Nigerian federal structure that dis-aggregated and domiciled a large

portion of regional power at the federal level. The outcome of this usurpation was the creation of an imperial presidency that was all powerful when determining the socio-economic and political fate of the elite class (the federal government wields monopolistic and unbridled control over Nigeria's wealth).

It would seem simplistic and theoretically barren to anchor the leadership question solely within the realm of ethnicity. Such a mono-analytical typology would be inadequate for appreciating the pressures exerted on both the selection process, and the ascension to the Nigerian presidency. Within the configuration of the Nigerian state, even with distortions and tinkering to its federal system, it is impossible for any of the over 300 ethnic groups to ride roughshod over others to ascend to the presidency. The processes leading to the occupation of the presidency have always been manipulated within elite ranks. the incorporation of a clause of federal character in the 1999 Nigerian constitution is intended to assuage and minimize the tensions that often accompany the sharing of state resources among the elite (section 14 (3) & (4), Nigerian constitution 1999). Fears of marginalization, expressed by the minority ethnic elite in the

pre-independence era, stemmed from the possibility of a majoritarian card being played to their detriment. Their demands consisted of creating separate regions for the western, eastern and northern minorities.

Conclusion

The concept of rotation is by no means an exclusive monopoly of Nigeria. It equally applies to some countries and international organizations owing to the fact that the agitation for presidency generated some adverse criticism. However, Nigeria as one indivisible state is to a greater extent threatened by the issue of rotational presidency. This could be seen in the lopsided balance of political power in the polity. To ensure the unity in diversity in the country, there must be a compromise consented to and respected by all segments of the societies. A sort of time table should also be created to incorporate all the six geo-political zones, each taking its turn at the expiration of five years single term. Finally, the issue of rotation should be seen as a Nigerian-styled democracy in order to curb militancy, injustice, insecurity, underdevelopment and fear of marginalization at all levels.

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