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## **ROTATIONAL PRESIDENCY IN NIGERIA: THE ISSUES AND REALITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*As the search for strategies for unity and stability in Nigeria lingers the clamor for rotational presidency among the elite class in Nigerian politics has in recent years gathered momentum. The absence of true statesmen and charismatic leaders and the quest to remain politically and economically relevant have driven the elites into embarking upon ethnic politics a condition that makes Nigeria to remain a segmented national society. The elites claim that if rotational presidency is formally adopted it will ease political tension and create sense of belonging among various groups and interest that make up Nigeria as well as enhance national unity and stability. The study, however, revealed that the call for rotational presidency by the elite class is a strategy for acquisition of state power and not a device for national unity and stability. A portion of Nigerian political history scrutinizing various devices used by the elites in a quest for state power is analysed and matters arising from the call for rotational president are also examined. For tactical reason and ease of manipulation, the work adopted inductive-diachronic method.*

*It concluded with a call for true statesmanship and evolution of integrative national institutions at the centre that is capable of incorporating and balancing disparate needs and claims as a way forward for the achievement of the needed unity and stability in the country.*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The idea of a rotational presidency for Nigeria is not entirely new in Nigerian political history. In actual fact, however, it falls in line with the series of centrifugal strategies that have been adopted and used by the elites in the country since colonial days to the present in order to gain control over power and resources and to avoid or dodge the ever-pressing need for nation-building policies and genuine commitment to them.

Whereas zoning means a division into parts, rotation implies to proceed in a fixed routine of succession and in the Nigerian political parlance such a division is meant to be for the purpose of rotating major offices. Akintola (1996) sees rotational presidency as an attempt to formalise a pattern whereby the geo-ethnic origin of the national leader alternates from one election to the other. It is a form of socio-political contract. The idea of rotational presidency was brought formally by the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) in 1978 when it proposed that representation in federal and *mutatis mutandis*, state agencies be achieved by dividing the nation into four zones, two in each of the 'North' and 'South' – thus recognizing the main postcolonial lines of political cleavage in the county( *New Times* ,1983).

The CDC's recommendations was implemented by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) when it institutionalized its national character by adopting, in all essentials, the zoning system proposed by the Constitution Drafting Committee as a means of regulating the presidential elections. The scheme was important, not only as a political party tactic, but for what it suggests about the federal character and the realities of rotational presidency in the Second Republic.

The suggestion for adoption of rotational presidency was repeated when General Babangida instituted a Political Bureau in 1986 for the purpose of collating views on a constitution that would lead to an indigenous political system. The Bureau refused to be persuaded by the arguments for zoning on the ground that a constitutional provision for rotation amounts to an acceptance of the nation's inability to grow beyond ethnic or state loyalty. The Bureau was of the view that the two-party system it recommended would mitigate the need for such a provision (Akintola, 1996).

Nigerians again tried to implement rotational presidency evolutionally by the memorable June 12 election of a civilian president. This process was thwarted. From the way it happened, including the way the courts were used and the demonstrations precedent to the annulment, one finds it difficult to resist the conclusion that the nullification of the result of the June 12 presidential election was a function of those who harbour a master race consciousness. They arrogate to themselves the right to rule Nigeria, as if divined.

The experience and the failure of the previous attempts to implement zoning system in the country and the contending issues bordering on its implementation cast doubts on the success of rotational presidency in Nigeria. This work highlights the factors and the real motive behind the call for the rotational presidency and analyses the contending issues which make the execution of the rotational presidency an uphill task.

## **THEORETICAL ISSUES**

The quest for rotational presidency is to be understood within the framework of dialectic of ethnicity and class struggle (Barongo, 1978). From colonial period the Nigerian state was consciously prevented from the formation of a national bourgeoisie through the policy of indirect rule among other things. No effort was made by the colonialists to ensure unity among various ethnic groups through projection of similarities of social organisation and cultural interconnections. As Graf

(1988) opined, in contrast, an awareness of separate identity or ethnicity was consciously fostered and perpetuated as well as creation of series of regionalized and tribalised bourgeoisies who could be manipulated according to the strategy of divide and rule.' After independence, Nigerian elites gravitated towards the state in order to use it to achieve economic and social power. Nigerian elites became, as it were, first, an essentially non-productive successor elites removed from direct ownership of the means of production, the condition that compelled it to look to the state apparatus as its primary source of elite formation and consolidation. Second, a non-revolutionary class lacking a historical *raison d'être* behind its own consolidation, it had to seek out and deploy ersatz ideologies in order to retain a mass following and to forestall social reform. Here tribalism the condition for which had already been created presented itself most opportune.

Prospective elites, as Sklar (1972) pointed out use ethnic rather than communalities in gaining access to political and economic power because the latter do not offer them sufficient scope. This sets a pattern of ethnic salience which is maintained because their position requires it. Self-interest soon leads them to accept that ethnic or sub ethnic identification can open the gates of opportunity; patronage is being dispensed and they might as well as get their share.

With this, possession of political power or access to government funds thus represented the sine qua non for the good life: status, security, honours, benefits and, above all, wealth. Since wealth was largely a function of government office, Smythe (1962) argued that politics centred around competition for top positions, and political activities were geared to gaining access to state power and the allocation of revenue and the patronage connected with it. The elites, lacking a real, dynamic, mass-based and progressive function, turned to latent, regressive and colonial-induced tribalist

appeals such as federal character, zoning etc. with most recent one being the agitation for the rotational presidency.

## **THE MAKING OF NIGERIA**

Nigeria as a sovereign nation is anything but homogeneous. Such terms as and 'the geographical expression' describe Nigerian political sociology and represent conceptual attempts to come to terms with this fact (Graf 1988 and Magstadt, 2006). Before the advent of colonialism, the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria lived and related as distinct nations in their separate territories. Their varying indigenous political structures and cultural organizations catered for their political, administrative, and social needs. They exercised full control over their lives and all their affairs.

It was not until about the 15<sup>th</sup> century that the Europeans started to make their inroads into the territories of these people. They came as adventurers, explorers, missionaries, merchants, merchant companies, scientists, and government officials. As the Europeans penetrated these ethnic areas, they used flattery, cajolery, intrigues, and violence, among others, to extort what they called treaties or agreements of friendship, trade, protection, or cession from the people. Quite often, they signed such agreements with anybody across whom they came in their scramble for territory without regard for whether or not such individuals were the legitimate leaders or rulers of the people or had any right to sign agreement to subject the people and land to such commitment (Arikpo, 1967).

With the heinous decision of the European nations at the conspiratory Berlin Conferences of 1884 to share up Africa among themselves, political domination which provided a protective umbrella for full imperialistic exploitation of the continent superseded all other European motives and pretensions in Africa (Mundt and Aborisade 2004). By the terms of that same Berlin Conference, Coleman (1958) maintained that European nations constructively conceded to Britain the area that is now known as Nigeria. Accordingly,

British interests in the various ethnic territories of the area – missionaries, merchants, naval fleets, British officials, etc – joined in an unholy alliance for a ruthless rape of the peoples' sense of self-esteem, their pride, their culture, and their personality. Upon the ruins of all these, Britain established her colonial suzerainty and racial superiority while continuing her violent suppression of people who resisted that domination (Sodaro, 2001).

In November 1913, the Nigerian protectorate order-in-council was issued by the British government. That order brought under one central administration the separate ethnic groups already connected with Britain through a network of treaties and agreements or compelled to do so by the latter's use of brute force, flattery, deceit or intrigues in what were formerly the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The order took effect on January 1, 1914 and constituted what is known in the Nigerian political history as the Amalgamation. Thus modern Nigeria was born (Guy 1978).

Whereas the 1906 event brought together two laterally juxtaposed areas administered under separate authorities by Britain, the 1914 act juxtaposed all such units under one stratified administration and policy orientation. Nigeria, as Hunter (1966) observes became, as it is today, a conglomeration of ethnic nations that also constituted those territories. It was, at best, a forced association of many nations. In retrospect, therefore, and without the least anticipation by Britain, the amalgamation of 1914 appears to assume the stature of the first significant act of nation – building and attempt at national integration in the political history of Nigeria.

While colonialism, acting through its officials, undeniably served as the efficient cause of the country, without the ethnic nations, there would have been no Nigeria. They served as the materials for the formation of the country. In Aristotelian terms, therefore ethnic nations created Nigeria materially.

## **COLONIALISM AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA**

Colonialism constituted and superimposed on the ethnic system in the country a new administrative and executive class dominated by British officials. This structure supervened over and worked through the indigenous ethnic administrative system under the leadership of the chiefs to control the society. Much of the indigenous patterns of authority and structures for social control were left fairly undisturbed. This style of administration was described as the indirect rule.

The British colonial officials adopted this style of administration for obvious reasons. A handful of British officials could not successfully rule the vast ethnographically diverse country directly. For that reason, the chiefs were used and their authority preserved. Moreover, such an administrative structure enhanced the attainment of colonial's goals which did not, in the beginning of colonialism, at least, include nation-building.

A primary concern of British colonialism in Nigeria, as elsewhere at this time, was to rule and to keep order so as to give full rein to effective imperialistic exploitation of the society. Bretton (1962 : 10) opined "If there were existing local rulers who could be used, the colonial power ruled through them. If there were many languages and cultures the languages were left intact."

Furthermore, the indigenous systems proved to be as Whitaker (1970:27) asserted a "more effective means of law enforcement and general administration than direct intervention." This was, indeed, consistent with the economic interest of the colonizers. In view of the traditional relationship between the chiefs and both the local ethnic institutions and the indigenous forms of government, to rule through the existing chiefs was a cheap method of controlling the colony.

From the forgoing, it is common knowledge that the Nigerian state is a by-product of colonialism. The system's mission was not nation-building but organization of the area



and its people to facilitate economic and political exploitation. Its policies were only such as could allow for the reign of law and order. Anything approximating nation-building policies was only auxiliary to the main mission.

From the years of nationalist activities through independence to the present, the policy thrust of Nigerian governments as well as constitutional development has been largely maintenance of law and order in a national set-up of disparate peoples. There has been no serious attempt to imbue the peoples with a sense of unity and oneness. There is wonder whether or not when the people at Katsina, Calabar, Badagry, Lokoja, and Maiduguri say Nigeria, they mean one and the same thing (Umoh, 1995).

The underling motive of colonialism was thus to ensure the effective and unchallenged exploitation of the colony to the benefit of British finance and industry, and indirect rule was intended as the best means of accomplishing this end. There was no effort by the colonialists to unite the peoples, say by providing mass education and training or by instituting forms of equal participation in profit – making or governing. Of course as Graf (1988) opines this would, from this point of view, have been positively dysfunctional and destructive to colonialism. The scholar maintains that indirect rule actually thrived upon and derived its effectiveness from the perpetuation of inter- ethnic and inter- regional differences. The traditional rulers' authority rested largely upon their ability to maintain intact their ethnic group cohesiveness, tribal customs, and distinctiveness from adjacent groups. Indirect rule tended to reinforce the most conservative aspects of traditional political organization while shutting out pre-colonial tendencies towards supra-ethnic group co-operation and perpetrated structural factionalism (Oyovbaire: 1979).

Indeed, the colonial policy of indirect rule was predicated among other things upon the assumption that the colonized peoples (or 'tribes) were fundamentally and qualitatively different from one another. As Graf (1988:17) opined commonalities among groups- African personality,

similarities of social organisation, cultural interconnections were never considered as possible sources of unity. The scholar maintained that

*Instead, an awareness of separate identity or ethnicity was highly functional in terms of colonial interests, for it placed a formidable ideological and psychological barrier in the way of the evolution of a mass-based, supra-regional and unified anti-colonial movement. In particular, ethnicity, by creating 'tribal' rather than national power bases, helped to divide and fragment the educated elites, who of course constituted the leadership and motive force of the independence movement.*

While the adoption of indirect rule as the method of administering the country established and sanctioned multi-ethnicity as the fundamental character of Nigeria, the administrative structure planted the seeds of federalism whose germination and process spans the history of constitutional development in Nigeria.

Accordingly, Nigerian political history up to the present has been one long drawn of inter-ethnic juggling for advantage or dominance. The state creation exercise, the civil war, zoning system, the independence constitutional crisis and parliamentary upheavals, and even the current fantasy called WAZOBIA, the division of Nigeria into six geo-political zones and rotational presidency are expressions of the indomitable resist of the multi-ethnic nature which is the real characteristic of the Nigerian nation-state.

This characteristic is exhibited in all sectors or social strata of the society and even more so among the elites than the people in the middle or lower ranks of the society. The country functions as a series of ethnic power groups. Nigeria is not a melting pot. It is not likely to change to this soon, for and as Peil (1976:72) put it,

*Neither the police nor the army has proved to be a 'melting-pot' which would transform ethnicity into true nationality, since both soldiers and police men maintain contacts with their communities of origin and are responsive to attitudes of the wider population.*

She made reference to the events of 1966 and deduced from them that soldiers demonstrated in those incidents that they shared prevailing ethnic projections and were willing to share in communal violence. Gutteridge (1969) agreed with Peil. The coup of January 15, 1966 was, in his view, "about the distribution of power in Nigeria which appeared to be about to shift farther to the disadvantage of the opposition groups. He did not hide his "belief that the Army's intervention in politics was only an assertion of Ibo aspirations". The Daily Time opinion of September 3, 1985 discussed tribal unions and the army. It made reference to the existence of tribal unions within the Armed Forces presently.

## **THE ELITES AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

The mere facts of physical –territorial barriers, ethnic plurality, separate historical experiences, different customs and languages uneven levels of development and social class cleavages are not in themselves necessary causes or facilitators of conflict and competition. Indeed, the ostensible centrifugence of these interacting elements as Graf (1988) maintained, can equally, be viewed in terms of centripetence, that is, of a fundamental unity in all this diversity.

Unfortunately, harmony, co-operation and unity as one should have expected have manifestly not characterized social and political life in post-independent Nigeria. No effective formula has been found to bring ethnic competition, class conflict, social diversity and the like into a higher productive synthesis. Not even the great compromise, federalism has been able to integrate the Nigerian states. Most adult Nigerians have directly and poignantly experienced

protests, riots even massacres, civil war and coercive military rule resulting from either faulty integration or lack of it.

In a neo-colonial capitalist socio-economic order whose primary function is to preserve elite hegemony, the stability of the political system is directly related to the degree to which it is integrated. Integration implies a process of consolidation and co-ordination of the many sub-units of society, economic and policy. Rosberg and Coleman (1964) saw integration as a broad subsuming process consisting of two main dimensions, namely political integration, which occurs when the gap between the elite and the masses is reduced and a participant political community created, and territorial integration, involving a reduction in culture –regional tensions and the establishment of a homogeneous territorial political community. Further, Graf (1988) added another dimension which is economic integration. This is to ensure that a solid economic foundation exists upon which inter-class solidarity and broad political participation can grow, and to reduce inter-territorial and inter-cultural antagonisms. It is, however, argued that this separation of political, territorial and economic integration can be achieved at the level of theory, in practice these aspects are interrelated, interdependent and at times overlap.

It is evidently clear that the survival and development of Nigeria in the form of a nation –state depended on the evolution of efficient integrative, national institutions at the centre capable of adequately balancing and incorporating disparate needs and claims. Such integrative national institutions are lacking and where they exist are not allowed to function. With this, Nigeria still remains segmented national society, with each elite's power base being confined to its regional or ethnic –group support, without charismatic leaders with an appeal cutting across various segments of Nigeria.

In the absence of a well defined class consciousness, or of a charismatic leader with an appeal transcending region or ethnic groups, ethnicity presents itself as the most effective and readily available ideological appeal to mobilize and retain

as many of one's constituents as possible. Factionalism and segmentation are then used among the conflicting elite groups to gain control over the allocation and possession of material resources. Ethnic or tribal identity and solidarity are used by the elite members, of ethnic groups as means of mobilizing groups for corporate, action against other power, jobs, and other materials rewards.

Beside this, there is the need for stability and progress as against the fundamentally destabilizing nature of elite behaviour as manifest in ethnic politics. Stable government, and with it, an effective spoils-distribution system and growing wealth and prosperity, are evidently all in the long-term interests of the political class. Yet their appeals to ethnic sentiments and resentments, by fragmenting and dividing society, prevented the realization of these aims. The political elites as a class became the crucial agency of fragmentation. In Dudley's (1973) terms, they failed to respond to their foreseen role as 'conflict managers' and degenerated instead into 'conflict generators' or the chief proponents and purveyors of parochialism and particularistic values, in Nigerian political life.

## **HISTORICAL SETTING FOR ROTATIONAL PRESIDENCY**

The establishment of the Nigeria Colony and the imposition of indirect rule during colonial rule and fragmentation of Nigerian society by the elites after independence as earlier explained, however, had largely marginalized the minority ethnic communities. This in effect had led to underdevelopment of the minority regions. Indeed in the transition to independence in the 1950s the so-called ethnic minorities voiced their concerns to the departing British that they were largely peripheral in a Nigerian federation dominated by three ethnic majorities of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo (Peterside and Ogon, 2001). Ethnic identity was then transformed into mobilizing element not only for contesting access to state and oil power with the context of competing and conflicting ethnicity but also a modality for organizing social forces to resist alienation, extraction, and exclusion by

the hegemonic coalition of the ethnic elites (Obi 2002). This understanding prompted Ikime (2004) to say that nationalities began to identify themselves, first in the context of the colonial state, and second in the context of the Nigerian multinational state, as they were forced by changing circumstances of history to act politically in defense of their perceived interest vis-a vis the interests of other competing groups.

The division of the nation into three regions in the mid-1940s left the minorities at the mercy of the more preponderant dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria. Besides, as Obi (2002) admitted, the linking of representational power to population size also implied that the minorities stood little or no chance in either regional or central government, nor in making demands over access to resources or developmental projects. Sequel to this, many ethnic and regional groups emerged to press for separate states that would ensure the development of their areas (Udoma 1967). Towards independence the ethnic groups adopted many strategies including alignments with the opposition parties in their regions to press for self determination.

In spite of the adoption of the great compromise that is, federalism, as the model for administering the country, enshrined in the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution the dialectical consequences of all this were not a few. Nigerian politics turned hegemonic under the goad of inter-regional and inter-ethnic rivalry. Smaller ethnic groups agitated for their own states. The military made an incursion into politics by coup d'etat. States were created as the nation plunged into a civil war. Other social evils were injected into Nigerian political practices in quantum greater than hitherto.

In the end, it can be said, these events increased the political awareness of Nigerians and accentuated their ethnic differences but had not made the country any more united in realistic terms. Instead, they create a loophole for the emergence of a misconceived "master race" consciousness in some sections of the country. This is the historical setting or background for the rotational presidency being contemplated.

## THE ROTATIONAL PRESIDENCY: THE CONTENDING ISSUES

To rotate as applied to the presidency here means to proceed in a fixed routine of succession. If this rendition is accepted, Umoh (1995) questioned what the fixed routine of succession would be. Though some suggest zones and maintain that the country is to be zoned for the presidency, here, again, there is the problem of how the zones should be constituted. In other words it is not settled whether the basis for rotation will be states, geo-political zones or ethnic groups

Writing on the Federal character theory as enshrined in Article 14 subsections (3) and (4) of *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979*, Nwabueze(1994) proposed years ago that the principal took the ethnic group rather than the state as the parameter for national character. He argued this to avoid a situation, in a multi-ethnic state, where all representatives of a state could come from only one group.

In *Nigerian Politics: The People's View*, Peil (1978) opined that any Nigerian who holds a public position has to favour his people. If he does not, others who succeed him will favour theirs. The relations of the former officer will lose out and cannot complain, because when their man was in post, he did not help them. Peil (1978) might have exaggerated the issue, but certainly, she was not altogether wrong.

At least two attitudes follow from here. Many Nigerians do not feel that they belong in a government set-up in which they think they are not represented. Another is the this-is-our-chance syndrome. Often enough, when a sociological organ captures the government, the group members heave a sigh of relief in the expectation that their turn to enjoy the benefits of citizenship has arrived. These attitudes neither make for unity nor encourage stability. Rotational presidency will not escape these attitudes.

Yet to be determined is where the presidential rotation will start. Even if it was proposed that aspirants should not

enlist from any states that had produced presidents, whether civilian or military there is still doubt if there would be any consensus among various units that make up Nigeria where the rotation should start. Moreover, there is the issue of the tract. What tract the rotation would follow as a fixed routine of succession is not certain.

Having regard to the two attitudes earlier discussed, it will take one hundred and forty eight years for the presidency to rotate at four-year one-term tenure through the thirty six states of the federation and Abuja. Double this, if the term is two. Furthermore, the state that is on the tract has to produce the candidate in its due turn whether or not it has a presidential staff. It was equally not clear whether the vice-presidency will rotate in the same manner as the presidency itself. Similarly no explanation is made in event that the president is incapacitated due to sickness or died or removed from the office whether it is the rotational principle or the constitutional provision which paves way for the vice president to take over as next president that will be followed. Not to be discarded is the possibility of the emergence among the states or constituent ethnic groups of discontent with the tract or the policies of the incumbent president. This breeds disharmony which is inimical to unity and stability.

Let it be recognized that rotational presidency, by itself and like some of the earlier constitutional provisions, sanctions separateness but not national unity. Each state or whatever parameter that could be used has to orchestrate its identity and individuality so as to remain available to take its turn and have its chance. This is not how to build a solid nation.

The military factor should not be ignored. Each time there is a successful coup d 'etat, the junta tends to retire all officers in ranks above the members of the group. In a few years time, they find themselves at the top echelon of their professions. Thus, the coup makes professional upward mobility in the Armed Forces fast and easy. It is likely that for many years to come there will still be found in the Nigerian Armed Forces some ambitious officers who would also like to



reach the top even via a coup d'état which has become a beaten tract.

For another, as Umoh (1995) contained not many professors or supreme court judges retire from their public service posts into personal estates or large farms or general wealth and command continuous unebbing national prominence after their tenures as a junta. Participation in successful coup d'état and a successful tenure in a junta seem to provide a short-cut to wealth and fame. In a capitalist oriented and materialistic society, which Nigeria has become, any means that brings wealth is attractive. After all, the society has swallowed hook, line, and sinker the Machiavellian principle that the end justifies the means. In the light of all this and having regard to the absence in the country of a citizenry which can use its votes discreetly to infuse scruples into its leaders, the nation cannot claim to have seen the last coup d'état. Even if it successfully took off, rotational presidency would still face the threat of disruption by a military coup d'état.

In spite of the desirability of the idea of rotational presidency in the Nigerian context to help infuse a sense of belonging in the state project in all segments of the Nigerian polity, Olaitan (2000) lamented that it is regrettable that its adoption and reality bespeak a monumental non-appreciation of the grave responsibilities accompanying state – building efforts. For the state –building process, properly conceived, has to accommodate the varying interests in a polity, to give them adequate expression, in order to reach acceptable national compromise and conclusions about the institution and workings of the state; it cannot, in a meaningful sense, be characterized by dictation, obfuscation, doubts and impreciseness as it is meant to assuage fears and complaints of segments of the polity pertaining to the control of state institutions.

There is also doubt if Nigerians could be easily persuaded to alter their tendency to vote along ethnic lines, to avoid a situation where voters could either 'split-vote' in favour

of ethnic candidates in other political parties, or that impatient members within the party might attempt to redirect their supporters via another political party. Moreover, advocates of the rotational presidency and other political offices within a particular political party that wins elections seem to assume that the presidency is for keep. Otherwise, it is unclear if standing an election without winning will satisfy the rotation.

The fact is that as Aina (1982) asserted Nigeria has no social conscience that is common except corruption. A common feeling of pride and belonging in Nigeria is lacking. Parochialism reigns. National leaders with whom Nigerians across ethnic and state lines can identify are lacking. Nigerians do not believe that their circumstances will be protected and that the nation will cater for them no matter who rules. This is what the nation needs. It has to be cultivated. It is a reorientation of nationalism and negates the ideas of rotational presidency. Rotational presidency constitutes internal assault to national integration and represents the unwillingness of political leaders to labour to achieve national unity as well as the absence of true statesmen in Nigeria.

A view widely held by many political thinkers is that nation states are founded upon the free and voluntary association of self determining, rational, enlightened human beings (Carter and Herz (1961). This theory predisposes a state of democracy and explains why the latter is a way of life. For that reason, democracy finds its fullest expression and hinges on majority rule, elective mechanism, and on representative transmission of power. It is not something as Williams (1965:67) observed "way off yonder ... nor is its most important privilege the right to vote somebody ... Democracy is the way the ablest members of the group carry out their responsibilities when chosen as leaders." Admittedly, the principle of rotational presidency is antithetical to democratic requirements as expounded above. It must, however, be added that what distinguishes democracy from other forms of government is not that it is representative but that it is

responsive. This is an area where successive governments of Nigeria, civilian or military, have failed most woefully. They have paid no regard whatsoever to the yearnings and self-respect of the various groups that make up the country.

All efforts to stabilize Nigeria including introduction of rotational presidency will be wasted unless the masses of the people are steadily led to realize that they are individually and collectively free and taken along a path in which they feel that this is their home and their country. They have to realize and accept that it is their responsibility to work for the future of the nation, including selecting their rulers and influencing the decisions and policies of this country.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this discussion started with a proposition that rotational presidency is not a mean to attain national stability and unity but it is a strategy by the elites to acquire political power and access to public fund. A relevant portion of Nigeria's political history was highlighted to support the thesis. The historical background of rotational presidency itself was highlighted in the light of the experiences in Nigeria and the Nigerian attitudes. It argued that the survival and development of Nigeria on the form of a nation-state depended on the evolution of efficient, integrative, 'national' institutions at the centre capable of adequately balancing and incorporating disparate needs and claims. The work ends with the view that the country needs true statesmen with whom Nigerians across the nation can identify and who can give them a sense of belonging and oneness regardless of where in the country they live.

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