

Opinion

Restructuring under popular democracy

By Edwin Madunaga

THE last article in this column for the year 2012 (The country "we wish to see" (4), December 20, 2012) embodies a rough sketch of my proposal on the much-debated subject of geopolitical restructuring of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I indicated there that the sketch would be elaborated later. I intend to redeem that pledge in the present essay, and then proceed from there.

The central thesis here is that the various modern governance systems and structures, which Nigeria's educated middle classes regard as models - including, in particular, the American presidential system and the British parliamentary system - are, in origin, products of concrete historical struggles and experiences: concrete, that is, in space and time. They were not offers from the "blues", or products of dreams or sudden inspirations. Put more concretely, the ruling classes of the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, had to initiate civil wars (and in the case of the U.S., preceded by a War of Independence) - mobilising the common people behind them - to fight for, and consolidate, these governance systems. Later on, the struggles and strivings of the common people of America and Britain led to amendments and reforms, which are continuing.

The ruling classes of several countries of the world have adopted or adapted either of these two governance systems, or both of them. Each adoption or adaptation - including that of Nigeria - was also a product of concrete historical conditions, struggles and experiences. Even where there was an imposition, these general statements still hold - because there can be no imposition, properly so called, in a space where there had been no struggle.

At another level of historical analysis, it can be proposed that the governance system or structure in a given nation state reflects the balance of socio-political forces in that nation state. A concrete illustration is what has been happening in Egypt since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

Furthermore, at yet another level of analysis, no system of governance - original, adopted or adapted - comes into being, or has been struggled for, in an economic vacuum, with-

out each group of combatants embedding a desired or preferred economic system in its platform.

The American ruling classes gave the world the modern executive presidential system. Aspects of this system include the endowment of a single individual - the President - with the executive powers of the state, two chambers parliament, the rule of law, separation of powers, supremacy of elected civil authorities, etc. An analyst had suggested that the paraphernalia of office, which the American presidents enjoy, reflect the ruling classes' nostalgic feelings towards the British monarch, their former colonial ruler. Each element of the American presidential system bears the stamp of concrete experiences and desires of America's ruling classes. From time to time, the ruling classes reform, or are compelled to reform, the system to reflect current realities, the shifting balance of socio-political forces nationally and globally and the shifting minimum requirements of continuing class hegemony.

Just one illustration of what I meant when I said, in the preceding paragraph, that each element of America's presidential system "bears the stamp of concrete experiences and desires of the ruling classes". In his article, Atiku's simplistic proposal, Dr. Anthony Akinola, a compatriot based in Oxford, United Kingdom, observed: "America's founding fathers came up with the idea of a bi-camera Legislature as a way of reconciling the fears of small states about the possible dominance and oppression by the larger ones. Hence, states, irrespective of size and population, are represented equally in the Senate". Based on "this important reason", Akinola went on to say, "this philosophy of equality states via a second chamber would have been unnecessary in Nigeria" Why? Because "most of our states are of equal sizes; their historical origins differ from those of the American states". (The Guardian, September 26, 2012). We shall return to this.

Our destination in this essay is the geopolitical restructuring of Nigeria; but I have chosen to approach it gradually. And in doing this, we remain with Anthony Akinola. I encountered the gentleman relatively recently. But within this short period, I have come to appreciate, as I said in the fourth and concluding part of my last series, The country "we

wish to see" (December 20), that at a certain level, I share his views and premises on the question of socio-political restructuring. This, in spite of the fact that he does not appear to be a socialist, nor - I must hasten to add - have I demanded that he be one? He is an informed and cosmopolitan liberal democrat, and I am completely satisfied with that. His main focus in his numerous contributions to our national political discourse is what he calls Rotational presidency.

In one of his latest (and shortest) statements of the "Rotational presidency", Akinola says: "I have argued for more than 30 years that the Presidency, in our (Nigerian) type of situation, should be based on rotation. Such a rotation could be between the states of the North or those of the South, it could also be along the six geopolitical zones. In designing a system of leadership rotation, what we must bear in mind is that the politician could be impatient in matters of selfish interest. Hence, the argument for fewer zones and a short tenure for the President". (Jonathan and the Constitution, *The Guardian*, September 9, 2012, page 9). His premise, summarized in the same short Letter-to-the-Editor, is this: "cleavage, be it that of ethnicity or religion, is the worst of political problems. We are not going to be able to resolve the problem of cleavage by asking others to forget about what they hold very dear to their hearts. It is a problem that will not disappear, but can be managed".

What we can directly deduce from this short presentation is that Akinola's proposal is designed for Nigeria or any country "in our type of situation". It is not a general prescription. For instance, he does not prescribe it for America whose type of "cleavage" the rulers of America have tried to "manage" by several other means, including bicameral legislature with equality of state membership in the Senate. On the other hand, Akinola draws from Switzerland, which operates a system of "collective presidency in which leadership is rotated annually" (Rotational presidency can stabilize Nigeria, *The Guardian*, Sunday, October 28, 2012). He notes that "cleavage problems" in Switzerland are "quite similar to ours" and that the country is "one of the world's most democratic and stable nations". I shall have cause to recall Akinola's theses when I come to my own propositions.

In the opening paragraphs of his Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852), an analysis of the civil wars and class struggles in France in late 1840s and early 1850s, Karl Marx made two statements which used to be very popular not only with Marxists and Marxologists but also with analysts who might not even be aware of the origins or contexts. (Please, check Brumaire in the calendar of revolutionary France). The first statement is the opening paragraph of the book: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."

Marx then illustrates this double-occurrence: "Caussidiere for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the Montagne of 1848 to 1851 for Montagne of 1795, the Nephew for the Uncle. And the same caricature occurs in the circumstances attending the second edition of the eighteenth Brumaire". (Note: The "Uncle" Marx mentions here was Napoleon Bonaparte and "Nephew" was Napoleon's nephew, Louis. Both of them came to absolute power in France through coups d'état). Marx's second statement is in the second paragraph of the book. But the part often quoted is the first part of the first sentence - not even the full sentence. That often quoted part says: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please." The "forgotten" part is: "they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past".

This "law" or "trajectory" of history periodically results in what Marx described as "the tradition of all the dead generations weighing like a nightmare on the brain of the living", continuously offering itself for invocation or imitation by the living: "Thus Luther donned the mask of Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionizing tradition of 1793 to 1795". Readers may interpret these passages in their own ways. But the passages have landed me at my destination: Nigeria.

(To be continued next Thursday).

Opinion

Restructuring under popular democracy (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

WHAT I intend to do here is, first, select a number of current or recent views, publicly expressed, which I think are representative of the main positions on the subject under discussion: geopolitical restructuring of Nigeria. This will be followed by the views of some compatriots who have dwelt on the subject for quite some time and with whom I agree at some levels. Next will be a narrative on the "experiment" in popular democracy conducted in Calabar between March 1988 and May 1989. I shall then, to conclude, expand my own proposition (collective presidency with rotational headship) summarised in the fourth part of *The world "we wish to see"* (4) (December 20, 2012).

Let me start with *The Guardian's* front-page report in the paper's issue of Wednesday, November 28, 2012. The report was titled: "Outrage as governors move against local government autonomy, seek more powers" with a rider "Sanusi urges scrapping of councils, civil servants' sack". The governors' position, formulated at the previous day's meeting of the Nigerian Governors' Forum (NGF), and announced by Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, may be summarised as follows: Opposition to what has been labelled "local government autonomy", but which specially means the right of the country's local governments to receive, directly, that is, without passing through the state governments, their shares of the federally-collected revenues.

The governors are determined to block any constitutional amendment aimed at making direct payment to the local councils mandatory and obligatory. To call a spade a spade, Nigeria's state governors don't want the local councils. They do not want more states, nor do they want the removal of the "immunity clause" from the Constitution. But they want more money from the federation accounts.

For a different reason the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, has advocated the scrapping of local councils, that is, the complete elimination of the "third-tier" of government.

According to *The Guardian* report, Sanusi, speaking in Warri on the same day as the governors' meeting, said that it was a waste of funds for the Federal Government to continue to maintain 774 councils "with their attendant huge financial implication". "Why not just remove the local governments and have only state govern-

ments?", he was reported to have asked rhetorically. The CBN governor has also criticised as unsustainable, the spending of what he considers an atrociously high percentage of federal income on the National Assembly and the federal bureaucracy. To redress this, Sanusi called for the reduction in the membership of the National Assembly, the reduction of legislators' wages and allowances, and the purge of the federal bureaucracy by up to 50 per cent.

Speaking at a public event in Abuja on Tuesday, September 18, 2012, the National Leader of the Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN), Bola Tinubu, was reported to have said: "We have kept complaining about the cost of governance and the recurrent expenditure... but we have never examined the structural problems of even the constitution that we are operating. Why do we need two Houses of National Assembly...? Why not get rid of the Senate? To equip better and effective legislative activities, let us start examining that". (Tinubu calls for abolition of Senate, *Daily Trust*, September 18, 2012, page 3).

At the event in which Tinubu spoke, a former Defence Minister, General Theophilus Danjuma, suggested that the power of state governors be radically reduced. According to him, Nigeria's governors are not only virtual "sole administrators" of their states, no national effort or campaign they jointly oppose can succeed. A former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, proposed the restructuring of the present six geopolitical zones into the federating units of the Federal Republic and the institution of a two-party system. He was also of the view that the present constitution makes the president a dictator. He, therefore, advocated a reduction of presidential powers. The governors concur.

Anthony Akinola, whose views on this subject were introduced in the first segment, believes that rotational presidency would complement and strengthen the country's federal system in constitutionally guarding against the domination or alienation of any section of the polity by either the centre or a group of federating units (states or regions). For him, preventing domination and alienation goes beyond the question of "even development" and "sharing positions" - which can be measured - to that of sub-national psychological feeling of domination and alienation. Rotational presidency, he believes, will contribute to reducing or removing the problem of "cleavage" which, in his

view, cannot be "wished away" in an ethnically and culturally complex society such as Nigeria. It is also on account of this enduring problem that Akinola would not support the elimination of the Senate or the membership equality of federating units, which is a fundamental principle of its composition.

Akinola's rotational presidency, to put the matter more clearly, simply means that, for the election of the president, competing political parties are compelled to select their candidates from the state or region whose turn it is to produce the president. He argues that this is a surer way of reducing the number of parties because to be able to survive beyond a presidential tenure, a political party is compelled to be national - as the presidency moves round. There is, of course, a double-assumption here: that the reduction in the number of parties and that the ultimate elimination of ethnic-based or ethnic-centred political parties are desirable national objectives.

I shall conclude this survey by looking back at what I have called an "experiment" in Calabar between March 1988 and May 1989. It was an "experiment" in radical social transformation where "social" here (with capital S) means social, economic and political. As Nigerians old enough will remember, and others not-too-old would have learnt, there was a national local government election in December 1987 with a re-run some constituencies in March 1988. Officially, the election was on non-party basis. But, as expected, it was not so in reality: the election was run in many constituencies on the basis of undeclared political parties and groups. In Calabar, which then comprised the present Calabar Municipality, Calabar South Local Government Area and parts of the present Akpabuyo Local Government Area, the undeclared platform on which we ran the election was a group called the Calabar Group of Socialists (CGS) in alliance with the Directorate for Literacy (DL).

The first election in Calabar was blatantly rigged. Protests were made to the electoral commission (then headed by Professor Eme Awa). The results were cancelled and a re-run ordered. In the re-run contest in March 1988, the CGS won the Chairship (Bassey Ekpo Bassey) and Vice-Chairship (Effiong Mbukpa) of the council, as well as a comfortable number of council seats. I may now summarise the achievements of the Calabar Municipal Coun-

cil in the 15 months it was headed by Bassey Ekpo Bassey. But I wish to preface the summary with a categorical declaration: The Calabar Municipal Government under Bassey Ekpo Bassey remains the most resourceful and the most successful local administration in Cross River State (and arguably in the whole country) since the local government reforms of 1976 and Bassey himself remains the most popular and the most mass-directed local council head in Cross River State (and arguably in the whole country) since the 1976 reforms.

The first thing the Calabar Council (CC), Calabar Group of Socialists (CGS) and the Directorate for Literacy (DL) did was to create Neighbourhood Organisations across the council area: one or more in each council ward. The functions of the Neighbourhood Organisations whose activities were coordinated by a designated councilor, included: community sanitation, security, maintenance and repair of minor, but very vital, road networks, maintenance and protection of public council facilities (including boreholes for free water supply), adult education, and monitoring, reporting on, and attending to, the needs of the vulnerable and the "abandoned" in the community.

The activities of the Neighbourhood Organisations were carried out through voluntary (unpaid) contributions (financial, material and labour) and 50 per cent of tenement rates collected by the Council. The remaining 50 per cent was retained by the council. There were no other budgetary allocations to the organisations and the organisations retained no paid officials. But the organisations constituted, *de facto*, a level of governance below the local government.

The council, assisted by CGS and DL, dug water boreholes for free water supply, abolished fees in primary schools, abolished sanitation fees by private homes, established several companies, including; Garri Processing Company, Chalk and Exercise Book Production Company, Calabar Cassava Farms, Peoples' Trading Company (run on the principle of cooperative). A general campaign against illiteracy was mounted by the council. It constructed, by direct labour, partly voluntary and partly paid, three big primary schools, which have now been upgraded to Government Secondary Schools: one in Bakoko (Eight Miles), one in Anyahasang and the third in Anantigha, now the headquarters of Calabar South Local Government Area.

(To be concluded next Thursday)

Opinion

Restructuring under popular democracy (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

IN this third, and concluding, segment, I shall, first, elaborate my proposition on five-tier geopolitical restructuring, which I sketched in the final part of my last series *The country 'we wish to see'* (December 20, 2012). I shall then attempt to measure the proposed structure against the representative ideas collated in the first two segments (of the current series) to see how far the proposed structure meets or fails to meet the needs implicit in these ideas. If a short description is required for the structure I am about to re-present, it could be this: A republican, secular and popular-democratic federal system under a collective presidency with rotational headship. It is necessary to emphasise that although I have drawn from several sources to sketch this structure, in the final analysis, the construction has been informed by the Nigerian political history, current realities and debates, the socio-political balance of forces in the country, as well as the direction in which this balance appears to be moving.

General picture: There will be five levels or tiers of governance, corresponding to a five-level geopolitical structure. At the top is the Federal Government responsible for the whole country. There follows, immediately below the Federal Government, the Regional "Authority" whose jurisdiction covers a region. Below the region is the state government. Then follows the local government and, finally, the Neighbourhood Organisations. There are eight regions derived from the present six geopolitical zones by splitting each of South-South and North-Central Zones into two: west and east. The present 36 states, as well as the Federal Capital Territory, as presently constituted, are retained. The present 774 local government areas are also retained. As described in the preceding segment, there will be at least one Neighbourhood Organisation in each local council ward of the country.

Federal Government: There will be an Executive Presidential Council of eight members, one representing a region. The headship and deputy headship of this Council rotate every six months between the members in a given order but in such a way that the deputy head succeeds the head. Thus, suppose the regions are designated A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H. In the first six months of a presidential tenure (expected to be four years), the member of the Presidential Council from re-

gion A becomes head of the Council and the member from region B becomes his or her deputy. In the following six-month period, the deputy head becomes head and the member representing C becomes deputy. This process continues until the last six-month period when the member from H becomes head with the member from A as his or her deputy. Members of the Presidential Council are equal in status and power except that in the case of a tie, the head has a "casting vote".

I am leaving out details from this presentation so that we may capture the general picture. But even to do this, you may need to struggle with the "ghosts of past generations" which, as Marx observed in his Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, continually interfere with the present, supplying it with concepts and language even when the present can fashion or has, in fact, fashioned, its own concepts and language and can become used to them only if they use them.

The incumbent Head of the Presidential Council serves as the ceremonial or constitutional Head of State. The point, however, is that executive federal power is vested in the Presidential Council as a collective. Each member will, in addition to being a member of the collective, also be the minister responsible for a key federal ministry. At the end of a four-year presidential tenure, each member would have served a six-month term as Head of State and Chair of the Presidential Council and a six-month term as Deputy Head of State and Deputy Chair of the Presidential Council.

The two-chamber National Assembly as presently structured will remain. So will the rules governing the composition of the chambers remain? Three particular institutions of the Nigerian state, at the federal level (and perhaps replicated at other levels), should remain (or be created) and be strengthened in whatever ways necessary to discharge their critical functions in the proposed structure. These are the Federal Character Commission, the Human Rights Commission and the Constitutional Court. While the Federal Government retains exclusive control of the Armed Forces and the Police, state policing should be allowed under clear laws and constitutional regulations.

In fact, it will not be cynical to say that multiple state police forces - uniformed (and, per-

haps, also armed) - currently exist in almost all the states. All they do at the moment is harass the people, extort money from them and lend themselves to being used by privileged individuals to settle private scores. They are, more or less, empowered thugs. All that is now necessary is to unify them in every state, constitutionally define their roles and bring them strictly under the law.

Regional Arrangement: The National Constitutional Conference instituted by the Sani Abacha military regime in 1994/1995 included, in its report, the division of the country into (the current) six geopolitical zones. Although the draft constitution in which this proposal was included was never promulgated, the six-zone suggestion has been adopted by governments and political parties for various uses including, in particular, sharing party and government positions, appointments and promotions and locating public projects. This 'zoning' formula has now come to serve as a complement to the federal character provision, and conversely. Furthermore, a process of voluntary regional 'integration' has started in virtually all the geopolitical zones of the country. If you put together all these informal developments and processes, and then bring in the proposed Collective Presidency with rotational headship you will see the outline of the "regional arrangement". The regions will have no "government", but secretariats - the type the Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) and various regional forums now have.

Just as the Neighbourhood Organisations (based on existing local council wards), proposed last Thursday, will be financed by the respective local governments, the Regional Secretariats will be financed through contributions from the states. This arrangement, of necessity, calls for a radical reduction of federal allocation and increases in the allocations to the states and local governments. To those who may complain about the cost of maintaining the five-tier governance structure, I say: "You should look at the structure I am proposing not through the prism of the present predatory system, but through the need and possibility of creating a popular-democratic society, which demands a massive re-deployment of the nation's resources away from predators and in favour of the poor, the marginalised, the abandoned and the forgotten -

including tens of millions of unemployed youths.

Three elements of this redeployment may be indicated: Reduction of the total amount spent on the National Assembly by 50 per cent, without reducing the membership; elimination of the contract system from certain levels and categories of construction and purchases; and the removal of most of the multiple levies, which ordinary people now pay at the grassroots. I would not like to put figures into the comparison: But the cost of running the proposed five-level structure will be much, much less than the cost of running the present structure.

I have so far considered three of the five levels of governance being proposed: Neighbourhood Organisations (the grassroots level considered last week), the Federal Government and the Regional Arrangement. The other two levels - state and local governments - will remain as they are. The problems and questions raised by, and in, the proposed structure notwithstanding - and they are hard ones - it is my view that several concrete concerns and objections raised against the present system and several concrete proposals made for its modification to achieve a more equitable and "truer" federal democracy have been "accommodated" in my proposed structure.

The proposed collective presidency admits into leadership all the "segments" of the country at every point in time; and the rotational headship of the Collective Presidency gets to every "segment" once in a four-year period. The collective-rotational principle can be reproduced at the state and local government levels where agitations for "fairness" and "sense of belonging" and against "marginalisation" are not less intense.

To conclude, we may put together the outline of the proposed five-tier structure under popular democracy: Collective Presidency with rotational headship and rotational deputy headship within a four-year presidential tenure; reproduction of this system at the state and local government levels; 8-region structure; neighbourhood organisation as the fifth tier of government, radical reduction of the federal revenue allocation, increases in the allocations to the states and local governments - to be able to finance the Regions and Neighbourhood Organisations respectively; state police; war on state robbery and corruption; and massive re-deployment of resources to the "wretched of the earth".

(Concluded). Next week: *Issues in popular-democratic restructuring.*