

POLITICS OF ZONING IN NIGERIA AND THE QUESTION OF PRESIDENCY FROM THE IGBO EXTRACTION

Cyril Chibuzo Ezeani

Abstract

Zoning as a system of power distribution has since been operational in Nigeria. Different cycles of electioneering trumps up discourse on this reality. As the 2023 presidential election draws forward, talks about zoning has found itself on the political air once again. The Igbos of the South Eastern Nigeria have laid claim to presidency this time, given that it is the only region in the South that has not produced the president. The call is, however, not without opposing voices from other blocs and surprising from within especially among the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) but for other reasons. The present work is therefore poised to examine the concept and practice of zoning in Nigeria with the aim of assessing the call for presidency from Igbo extraction. To do this, the work uses the method of analysis and hermeneutics. The piece maintains that zoning is a contextualized system of power distribution in Nigeria. It first the concept of zoning related concepts of quota system and federal principle and further shows the evolution of the practice in the Nigerian political history. The work then zeroes in on the question of presidency from Igbo extraction. It handles this in the light of the history of zoning in Nigeria and of the Igbos. While it notes that the call for president of Igbo extraction is justifiable, it observes that zoning system by not being enshrined in the constitution is simply left to the vagaries of politicking which could assume the form of realpolitik that care only about beneficial results for oneself sometimes at the expense of justice. This means that the Igbo, while being adamant in their quest, must build bridges with other regions. To do this, they must find a way of integrating the staccato of voices among them, for the purpose of creative symphony and furnishing a common front.

Keywords: Politics, Zoning, Presidency, Igbo

Introduction

Plural and multi ethnic societies have had the challenge of building and maintaining healthy co-existence among the various units. Many of these societies have had to devise means of realizing this. In many cases there have been instances of marginalization, domination, instability, crisis, power struggles amongst others. Most of these arise from real or perceived imbalance in the distribution of scarce resources whether economic, social, political etc. Of all these, political power is paramount. This is because it is key to determining who gets what and to what extent. This has given rise to the concept of power sharing. Discourse on power-sharing assumed great significance with the rising wave of democratic transition especially in Asia and Africa. Many of the societies in Africa are pluralistic and multi-ethnic and this led to the assumption that diversity and differences would

precipitate perennial instability and breakdown of democracy. Ever since, scholars have proffered some models of such power sharing in aid to mutual co-existence. For instance we have consociational model projected in groundbreaking works of Arthur Lewis (1965) and Arend Lijphart (1968); David Horowitz (1985) advocates incentivist model; the tri-polar model is posited by Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie (2003). Nigeria is one of those multi-ethnic societies. It has in her history evolved means of living with the reality of her multi-ethnicity, though it must be acknowledged that it is far from giving a breadth of balance to the ethnic dynamisms and tensions. Zoning system of key power distribution has since been operational. Different cycles of electioneering trumps up the discourse on this reality. As the 2023 presidential election draws nearer, zoning has come up to the political air once again. The Igbo of the South Eastern Nigeria have laid claim to it this time. The call is not without opposing voices from the other blocs and surprisingly from within but on a different ground. The work is therefore poised to examine the concept and practice of zoning with the aim of evaluating the Igbo call for presidency from Igbo extraction. To meaningfully do this the work first examines the concept in with correlates of quota system, federal character principle in order to some nitty gritty for proper evaluation. It then locates zoning system within the political history of Nigeria. In the section that follows it shows that zoning is a contextualized system. Subsequently it addresses the issue of competence and effectiveness of zoning for governance. The last section zeroes in on the question of presidency from Igbo extraction. It handles this in the light of the history of zoning in Nigeria and of the Igbo.

Zoning: An Unconstitutional Political Application of Federal Character Principle

Zoning is a system of power sharing which though not enshrined in the constitution exists between the North-South poles of the country. There seem to be in this arrangement, a rotation from one geopolitical zone to another of the six geopolitical zones as it moves up and down this pole. Essential element of zoning is the rotationality of political office. Precisely the presidency is to be rotated successively among the two poles of the country, namely North and South. This then determines where other top offices of Senate President, Speaker House of Representatives, party Chairman will be moved to. All are geared towards giving each part a sense of belonging in being stakeholders in the affairs of the country. It is also a structure set up to forestall the preponderance and domination of a particular section of the country in the public space.

Zoning is related remotely with principle of federal character and quota system. Yes they are related because it seems that the basic philosophy behind the trio is

that resources and opportunities must be shared equitably among the various constituent groups. The basic assumption is that any group with unmatched advantage would use it to privilege its in-group or to disadvantage the out-groups. This otherwise gives rise to pervasive fear of domination or fear of marginalization. On the other hand, I say remotely because there are distinctions. Unfortunately most often authors use these words interchangeably without highlighting these nuances. I do think that these nuances help to critically assess them and in their respective impact in the polity. The Federal character principle was first enshrined in the 1979 constitution and is retained in the 1999 constitution was to ensure that the composition of the government in all its ramifications whether in terms of its agency or in its conducting of its affairs is such as to “promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states groups in the government or any of its agencies.” (Federal Character Commission, 28) The same thing applies to the state and local government levels which must be such “to recognize the diversity of the people within their area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all people of Nigeria.” (Federal Character Commission, 28) Sani Abacha extended the terms of reference to include the distribution of social and economic benefits when he among other things that “every Nigerian has a right to share in the resources of our country, just like we all must share collectively shoulder the responsibility of her development and progress.” He added that the effective management of the economy entails “the appreciation of the sensibilities and aspiration of the various groups in the country and an acceptance of the dire need for balanced development and equitable access to socio-economic opportunities.” (Federal Character Commission 28-29) From the above, the principle is of a general nature and generally directs that government and institutional compositions at any time must respect the fact of our plurality. This it does without any specification except with regard to appointment of ministers which must come from all the states of the Federation. Federal character principle is in sum “geared towards creating a rainbow nation. It is the taking of deliberate steps to ensure that appointments at federal levels and the distribution of amenities reflect the diversity of the country.” (Adibe, 2016)

This shows that federal Character principle is of a general nature and is to provide a guide and goal of appointments in the praxis. Thus it leaves it to institutional discretion based on justice, fairness and common good holistically applied. In this sense at the level of principle, federal character principle does not exclude merit. The problem comes when the application becomes rigid, and assumes a strict numerical proportional representation of all in every government agency and parastatals to ensure ethnic or regional parity. This is why most of understanding

of federal Character principle is about quota system. And unfortunately this is applied even in such areas like education among other areas where qualification and merit should be the determining factor. This shows application without discretion and without an eye to the common good. Perhaps the reason that federal character principle has come to be limited to quota system is because in country led by unbridled nepotism, merit has become a relative and subjective concept in fractious and low trust society like ours.

Quota system has been there since the aftermath of the independence. It is more of effort at application of the Federal character principle, though it predates the latter. Nevertheless, quota system at least tries to capture the sentiments of federal character. Quota system was geared towards letting the disadvantaged catch up with and come on the same frequency with the more progressive. For instance, Tanko Galadima speaking about the introduction of quota system into the military expresses the view that here being espoused when he writes that “we introduced the quota system in the army thus preventing the possible fear that the army would become unreliable. If any part of the country is not represented in the army, we may harbour some fear that it is being dominated. (Adekanye: 1989) Both quota system and zoning have the same circumstantial origin in the sense of being reactionary. While quota system came up as a result of Southern predominance in education and civil service, zoning system came up as a reaction of the South against the Northern domination in politics and power. Quota system, because of the wider scope it covers even including education, is for the present writer, is an application of the wrong strategy to a real problem. But this is not within the purview of the present paper. It may be good to point out that I do not share this feeling with regard to zoning because at its root, quota system in seeking to create equal opportunity presents a strategy that is wrong basically because it attacks competence at its root for it institutionalizes ceiling of opportunity access to some people on the basis of factors unrelated to merit and ability where merit, ability and qualification should be the determining factor. A quota system “indicates a result that is pre-determined and inflexible.” (Adibe, 2016) Even if it could be applied certainly not in education among other areas that strictly require qualification and merit. Zoning on the other hand seeks to create equal benefits and opportunity for governance for all the major geopolitical zones which for now are lacking in competent hands though it may seem to exclude other competent hands from other regions at a time. Zoning is apart from quota system which has more wider coverage because the former is strictly about key national political offices, the special focus being the office of the president.

Situating Zoning in the Nigeria's Political History

Zoning marked its debut into Nigeria's political history in the 1970s. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which at then in the second republic enjoyed the status of national party adopted zoning at its convention as crucial factor in its electoral process. There was relatively commitment to rigorous implementation of the principle which for them was a strategy of building a national party and as a way of overcoming ethno-regional chauvinism in politics. (Akinola, 1988; Suberu and Diamond 2002). In fact during the 1983 election, zoning was at the front burner and was cited to quell emerging controversies. When Moshood Abiola from the South declared to contest for the presidential ticket against the incumbent, Shehu Shagari (North) the logic of zoning was handy for the party's hierarchy to dissuade and stop Abiola so as to allow Shagari complete his maximum term. Unfortunately, the whole process and arrangement was stymied by the military coup of 1983. The two parties of the unrealized third republic (1989-1993) namely Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Nigeria Republican Congress (NRC) had more elaborate zoning arrangement. In fact, it seems that given the years of Northern rule from the second republic through the military rule, there was an emerging consensus that the time was ripe for a president of Southern extraction. Some leaders of NRC canvassed for zoning the presidential ticket to the South. SDP on its own from the outset allocated its ticket to the South.

Zoning had a powerful resurgence and became more emphatic in the fourth Republic. Given the series of military rule that preceded it, which saw the preponderance of the North in the political space in the 1990s, the South became palpably dissatisfied and agitated. This reaction led to the intro of such phrases as power shift, power sharing, and power rotation in the political lexicology. The PDP particularly showed itself to being committed to power sharing and accommodation of elite groups of ethno regional strata. However, it was not just a PDP affair, it was a popular desire as it were which went beyond party politics. This is given the fact that the North had inundated the political space during the military era. Zoning therefore staged an informal and unconstitutional but powerful comeback assuming the character of an autonomous convention of party politics. The popular demand at the time made the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) as well as PDP to zone presidential nomination and party chairmanship to the South and North respectively. Olusegun Obasanjo of PDP and Olu Falae of ANPP/AD Alliance both from the South West became the presidential candidates while they had respectively Northern Abubakar Atiku and Umaru Shinkafi as the vice-presidential candidates. Zoning was applied in the

electoral process that produced Umaru Yar'Adua as president in May 2007 since the South had had their turn in the preceding eight years. Zoning was at the centre of the imbroglio that preceded the 2011 presidential election with the North claiming that the presidency was zoned to the North while the South-South sticking to the issue of long marginalization for reason to allow their son Goodluck Jonathan to continue his hold on power. The 2015 became a hotbed of the clamour to adhere to the principle of zoning. Not even party allegiance could deter many northerners from securing a president of northern extraction.

There had been attempts to incorporate zoning into the constitution. In fact there were four of such cases. While in two it was specifically opposed and expunged, the others were for other reasons or no reason related to it in particular. The first was in 1979 when during the drafting of constitution by the Constitution Drafting Committee, a subcommittee proposed the idea of constitutionalization of zoning, it met with opposition from among some members of the full committee who were of the view that the constitution should emphasize “only those ideas and values which render the area or ethnic origin of a person irrelevant in determining his quality as an individual.” The 1999 constitution expunged zoning from already prepared 1995 constitution by the government of late Gen. Sani Abacha without giving any reason for it. In 2005, zoning came close to being a constitutional matter but unfortunately with the attempts made to use the said drafted constitution as pretext for elongation of the tenure of the then president, the National Assembly discarded the constitutional review process in its entirety. In spite of this history, it seems that zoning has become the normale of party politics in Nigeria and entire political permutations and psychology. Even in many states of Federation where there are homogenous ethnic group, zoning has also come to be operational.

Zoning in Nigeria as a Contextualized Phenomenon

Ethnic consciousness is a prevalent phenomenon in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Each group conceives itself in its ethnic identity and then as a Nigerian. I do not think there is any problem with this. What is required is a way of managing this unity and diversities. I think the major task is how to live with this multi ethnicity and not to deny or undermine it. In this, zoning for me, is a way of living with our ethnic belongingness. I do think that it is still a long walk to detribalized Nigeria, it at all it is necessary. Most often there is this acclaim of one Nigeria that calls for de-emphasizing our difference. Yet it is also true that this one Nigeria stands on our differences! The challenge is whether actually we have understood our differences. If the oneness is unity and not uniformity, then this understanding of our differences becomes paramount in living as one. And learning to live with these differences and accommodating them are *sinequanon*

for national development. I do not see how zoning emphasizes our difference. Of course there could be abuse as one would also find even instance where zoning is not obtainable. Nepotism could happen in both as well as oligarchic blend! Zoning is simply an acknowledgment of our difference and a strategy of coping with that difference. This cannot happen if we continue to deny and our differences. Yet Nigeria is fundamentally built on this difference by the Founding Fathers. Zik's brand of one Nigeria suffers simply from the mistake of failing to hear the echoes of these differences. From the very outset, Nigeria's brand of nationalism was that of regionalized nationalism. And this regionalization happened along ethnic lines with attendant emotive undercurrent. Obafemi Awolowo once wrote to the effect that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English", "Welsh", or "French". The word "Nigerian" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not." (Coleman, 1986) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa affirmed this when he says "Since 1914 the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite...Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country." (Coleman, 1986) When in 1948 at the budget session of the Nigerian Legislative Council Azikiwe urged a united Nigerian outlook while decrying the attitude that creates ill will among the peoples of Nigeria, the same Abubakar Tafawa Balewa did not mince words when he warns, "Many [Nigerians] deceive themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one, ...particularly some of the press people...This is wrong. I am sorry to say that this presence of unity is artificial and it ends outside this Chamber....The Southern tribes who are now pouring into the North in ever increasing numbers, and are more or less domiciled here do not mix with the Northern people... and we in the North look upon them as invaders," (Coleman, 1986) This was while Zik was canvassing for one Nigeria!

At first Zik had the view of protectorates whose boundaries roughly followed ethnic lines but latter Zik's NCNC advanced the contrary given what they had observed was the divisionist tendencies inimical to the goal of a united Nigeria. They promoted a unitary form of government which for Awolowo was patently impossible. This ethnic consciousness prevails much than ever today. Not a few scholars have taken to criticizing the system of zoning on the grounds that it institutionalizes and reifies ethnic differences in country. For them "power rotation polarizes ethnic groups and therefore dislocates stability." (Barry, 1975) The antagonists of zoning system must observe that ethnic consciousness predates zoning. In fact the long years of preponderance of the North in power has led to an

asymmetric relation of power with other geo-political regions, a situation that would not have arisen were zoning operational all through the years. The antagonists of zoning must do well to relate with this fact as well as the long history of existence of primary allegiance to ethnic nationalities. As Rousseau observes “Most Peoples, like most men, are tractable only in their youth. As they grow old they become incorrigible. Once customs have become established and prejudices have taken root, any attempt at reform is vain and dangerous enterprise.” Nigeria has had a long history of politics of identity and exclusion and this has been handed down right from the very beginning. To antagonize zoning would be to gradually slip into anarchy. For the present writer, zoning does not create ethnicity; it is rather the latter that has created it as a pragmatic way of responding to ethnicity. It is our recognition of ethnic diversity and history of ethnicity that has created zoning in Nigeria. Zoning is a political strategy for coping with this long history. I do share the view of Akinola when he highlights that

Great societies adopt systems which suit their history and ethnological realities; Britain evolved the parliamentary system with the fountain of her unity in the monarch...the Americans...fashioned a presidential-congressional system which has sustained them, uninterrupted, for more than two centuries...the zoning system may prove to be Nigeria’s contribution to her own unity and political stability. It is a realistic approach to the political and psychological integration of Nigerians. (Akintola: 1996)

The truth is that a multi ethnic nation like Nigeria cannot do without power sharing. In this wise Simbine shares the same feeling when he avers that “zoning formula sees to fit into the heterogenous and federal nature of the Nigerian state” According to him it helps to accommodate all groups as much as possible and in this way reduce the complaints of domination and marginalization. It thereby for more inclusivity and in this way supports democratic culture. (Simbine: 2002) Well while I share the view of inclusivity, I do not think that the zoning system in Nigeria has been able to take care of the minorities. It has always been more about the major ethnic groups. This is only an observation limitation not that of jettisoning of a system. How zoning would not be necessary in so heterogenous country like Nigeria, steeped in subcultural conflicts is still very hard to imagine. Even where the ills of that long history ethnic consciousness and allegiance has been remedied, there is still need to have recourse to it before the clouds of marginalization, domination and concomitant feelings begin to gather.

Zoning, Competence and Effective Governance

Zoning has been criticized based on the question of throwing up competent hands for effective governance. Many critics point to the fact that in many cases the products of such system are not competent to the offices they have been voted for. For instance, Agbodike argues against zoning coming to any meaningful purpose in Nigeria. He argues that zoning is simply a Machiavellian tool in the hands of the petty bourgeois who manipulate the policy and procedure for their narrow interest. In this way they get themselves entrenched in power and exercise control over the machinery of the state. While on their elite game plot, the elites project and fan the embers of ethnic differences to the people to win their support in order to entrench themselves in the echelons of power for the major reason of enriching themselves. (Agbodike, 184) Sometimes the region they come from do not even fair better off notwithstanding Richard Joseph's conceptualization of prebendalism.

This is the main line of J. Obi Oguejiofor's diatribe on zoning but with specific reference to zoning in Anambra State. While it may not be explicitly gleaned from Oguejiofor's writing as to whether he is at odds with zoning at the national level, his argument is not different from the general argument against zoning. His argument is predicated on zoning and competence. His conclusion after his scholarly analysis was couched in more general terms thus, "if the aim of politics is ultimately the welfare of the populace, what we learn from all the above is that zoning is not an effective means of achieving that hallowed objective." (Oguejiofor, 2021) He further harps on the fact that zoning, if it is meant to address uneven development many a time is not achieved. He uses the abysmal performance of the current governor of Anambra state, a candidate from the Northern senatorial district, elected in order to facilitate the opening up of that zone as a case in point. For Oguejiofor, the predecessor, Peter Obi did more for the senatorial district much more than the governor that belongs to that region. He continues by observing that Anambra North senatorial district has not witnessed the expected developmental stride that was behind the clamoring for zoning to the North at the time.

With this he draws the conclusion that it is not necessarily the geographic origin of the leader of a government that ensures that dividends be richly allocated to the marginalized and all. Oguejiofor's strand of argument, though limited by the minimal instance given, have been used to dismiss the principle of zoning and to show that zoning has not helped to solve the problem of Nigeria which seem to

have become intractable. Bonaventure Haruna's argument and that of Oguejiofor share some similarity. According to Haruna, the ethnic origin of the president is not the real problematic confronting Nigeria. What is the key issue remains the delivery of goods of governance. He cites the case of the Northern Nigeria which has dominated the political space of Nigeria and observes that in spite of this domination and long years in power, the majority of the North "is still characterized by gross poverty, the highest poverty index in the land, alarming and dismal levels of illiteracy and primary school enrolment, religious brigandage and extremism, teenage marriage, high maternal and infant mortality rate, desert encroachment, urban squalor and negative markings on all indices of Human Development Index (HDI)..." (Olaiya, 2014) This sentiment is captured by Shehu Sani in one of his interview with Tell magazine, February 4 2002. According to Sani, the true beneficiaries of the so called interminable Northern suzerainty have been a few sycophants from the North who had been confederates to the oligarchs from the North. To make it more dramatic and real he beckons, 'go to the villages in the Northern part of the country, come to the cities, you will see what is called underdevelopment in the 21st century. People cannot eat, cannot drink, cannot go to school.'" (Tell Magazine, 2002) In this, Haruna did not mince words to underscore that the ethnic struggle in Nigeria and the all forms of power sharing like zoning is simply a smokescreen pointing to raging inter-class conflict for the control of the power lever of the state for the sake of her resources.

But the question is, is zoning and competence really mutually exclusive? Does zoning actually predispose to incompetence in a way that its absence does not predispose? Or is there a more fundamental factor or other variables that help to churn out incompetent and ineffective and unpatriotic candidates? At the national level do the major geo-political regions suffer from the dearth of competent and patriotic hands and even if there is, is it actually zoning that is the real cause of the dearth. And supposing there is no zoning, could we say that such a system where zoning is not preferred option is connatural with competence? While incompetent hands may find their way to elective positions in the zoning arrangement, it is also true that incompetency could be found where zoning is not obtainable. I do submit here that the problem above is not the consequence of zoning. The point is that zoning like any other form of system of power sharing and forms of government is vulnerable to elitism which for its proponents is the science and structure of any society. G. Mosca (1939) expresses this view in his *The Ruling Class*, when he avers that the various forms of government which Aristotle projected constitute simply legal fronts behind which a small ruling class wielded political power in the society. Here he distinguished between *de iure* authority and the *de facto* authority. While the former is simply the formal structure of power, the latter is the

informal structure which enjoys real power. According to Mosca, while the constitution places sovereignty in the hands of many as is the case in democracies, the constitution places in the case of aristocracy power in the hands of the upper class and in the case of monarchy in the hands of a single person, yet in every case it is always an organized minority who took the real decisions. Robert Michels calls attention to the reality of iron law of oligarchy.

What I have tried to do here is to point out that though the problems have been observed in zoning system, it is not as a result of zoning per se, it is because a more fundamental factor among other variables. It is actually very few that decide who comes out on the platform of a particular region. There is always the tendency of elitist hijack wherein individuals of a small coterie of elites tend to control power on behalf of ethnic, regional groups or whatever group. These try to eliminate competition, impose their candidates and exploit government machinery for private gain. This is all the more when the zoning is realized on the platform of party system which most often are characterized by this oligarchic hijack. Most often in the party system, candidates are churned out most often according to some interest blocs which most often are inimical to the common good. These power blocs have the money, they hold the party structure, the money to sponsor the preferred candidates and could buy off the delegates for the primary elections as well as the electorates who are purposefully kept at the level of stomach politics and so could be manipulated. Unfortunately here in Nigeria, the system of individual candidature is not. Besides no one it seems would be able to fund the campaign and most often the contribution are not transparently accounted for. Even this is not a guarantee. The financiers could also hijack the said candidates. Besides, institutions which are already hijacked by pockets of petit bourgeoisies may be frustrating.

Are there not good candidates in the North? Are there no competent hands in the South? Certainly there are; I do not think that there is dearth of performers in either regions! The danger of oligarchic hijack and iron law of oligarchy remains even where there is no zoning arrangement. It is always a tendency in every form of government! These tend to hijack structures, processes etc. to entrench themselves in power. And power of course is cumulative and concentrated. What I am trying to say is that zoning and competence are not mutually exclusive. If this is true it is also true that non-zoning arrangement and competence are not connatural. I have continued to maintain that arguments against zoning in Nigeria though may be valid in some cases, they are nevertheless uncontextual. Otherwise, can the South bear the long experience of having the North for years in the name of competence or the North having to witness the South for years in the helm of affairs in the

name of same competence? I think what should be harped on is that zoning be founded on patriotism and is operational within the ambience of principle of fairness, equity and social justice. This is true of zoning arrangement as well as all other forms of system if they are to be effective and deliver the goods of governance. For some zoning will no longer be relevant when meritocracy is enthroned and goods of governance are delivered appropriately. There is no doubt that if governance is guided by the common good and not narrow interest, the hues and cries about zoning may subside. In spite of this, the fact is that power is surrounded by murkiness and uncertainties especially given the reality of iron law of oligarchy which most often is lurking, and in the case of Nigeria the reality of ethnic consciousness and sentiments. This is why zoning is not just curative but also preventive of power chauvinism. The North for instance has every socio-political structure to their advantage thanks to their years of dominating the political space: the constitution is skewed to their advantage; they have more numerical strength in the National Assembly; more of federal allocation; demography is in their favour, among others. All thanks to this domination which has created a structural imbalance and inequality between them and other regions. Zoning remains key in the process of neutralization especially if candidates filled could have political guts.

A President of Igbo Extraction: A Critical Stance

The clamour for a president of Igbo extraction is on the political air. There is no doubt that given the unwritten law of rotational presidency which has been followed especially from the turn of the fourth republic, it is a matter of justice as fairness, to use John Rawl's expression that the South East produce the next president of Nigeria. Unfortunately, the feeler is that great majority of the northern politicians are covertly opposed to a president of Igbo extraction. Suddenly many have turned to be advocates of meritocracy which for them must override other considerations and factors. Well it is bizarre that meritocracy is being peddled by the same people who have championed quota system even in education where meritocracy ordinarily counts. Some have not failed to point to the activities of IPOB and argue that the South East are not qualified to field candidates in the midst of what for them are nefarious and terrorist acts. These among others claim that IPOB's stance alienates people from the other regions from rallying around them. In this, while I am critical of some stance of IPOB, this view appears to me bizarre. After all, what could be more ferocious and lethal than the atrocities of Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen, yet the North could stand to contest for election in 2011, 2015 and 2018. This is not to engage in a *tu quoque* fallacy. It is rather to point out that such line of thinking misses the mark. It fails to ask the key question, namely, what occasioned the agitations in the South East in the first place? Does

anyone fail to see that the connection between the agitations and the long history of injustice meted to the South East and which unfortunately came to its crescendo in the light of known history in Buhari's administration? There is no doubt that the tempo of the agitation was set immediately by Buhari's policy of exclusion of the historic five percent and remotely but cumulatively by the history of the ill-treatment and subjugation of the southeast. In fact the subjugation is structural and institutionalized. The South East has unfortunately been turned into a minority in a nation it is supposed to be a major region. It is shortchanged in terms of number of states, number of local governments, in terms of infrastructural development, demography, in terms of educational policies in the name of so called quota systems which favour the North at the expense of the South. It agitates my mind whether it is not time to consider placating the South East in the light of the historic injustice beginning from the atrocities of the civil war. For instance at the turn of the fourth republic the presidency was ceded to the southwest geopolitical zone as a placatory measure to assuage their hurt regarding the invalidation of the presidential election that was presumably won by MKO Abiola, a Yoruba man. It seems there is a conspiracy to keep the Igbo down in the scheme of things in the country.

Now it makes sense to the present writer why inserting zoning into the constitution had been opposed under whatever guise. The truth is that rotational presidency is one of the slim factors that hold Nigeria as one. Not enshrining it into the constitution exposes zoning system to the raw forces and vagaries of political dynamics and politicking such that it could be reneged upon by any group who feels it has the political muzzle. Again, groups could clandestinely come together to oppose zoning to a particular region. That is realpolitik! Which is simply about what works and what is beneficial for a group, not minding where the pendulum of justice swings to.

This notwithstanding, there is a way in which IPOB's mantra of no election in Biafra land which gathers momentum by day cannot just be ignored especially by her leaders or handled with kid's glove. It may be important to point out that such stance which is understandably fuelled by disenchantment with the system. While the work is not particularly on issues concerning IPOB which of course I believe has its positives, it may be important to raise some questions pertaining to the effectiveness of the mantra of no election in Biafra land for Igbo cause. Is the question of boycotting election part of a grand strategy or just one of those spur on the moment decisions? Is there such a grand strategy and what is its nature? One has to recall the census of which MASSOB barred Ndigbo from participating by threats and force. In the words of Uwazurike, after an early morning bomb blast on

the first day of the last census at the premises of Owerri Municipal Council: “Easterners you are warned to boycott and not participate in the forthcoming Nigerian census, this is just a little warning to those who are warming up to take part in the census.” Continuing he makes it crystalline clear that “Any Igbo man, easterner who puts his or her hand in that is endangering him-herself. The ten states of the east comprising Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, AkwaIbom and Bayelsa are warned to stay clear from the census.” He threatens further “Remember what is happening in Niger-Delta and note that it is going to spread in the whole eastern region and any person who will take part in this census should stay clear from this eastern region because we are not part of them.” (Offor, 2015)

The unfortunate thing is that years, down the line after these warnings which led to millions of the Igbos not taking part in the exercise, The Igbos who were purportedly “not part of them” are still part of them. The hard reality is that the results of the census which saw the numerical strength of the Igbo people drastically diminished are supposedly being used in the allocation of resources and evaluation of political strength. My fears is therefore whether the move to boycott the election is a coordinated move and consistent. Otherwise history would repeat itself. What I am harping on is simply creation of grand strategy that works and not just about boycotting census or election per se. What is clear is that the Igbos are in a sociopolitical quagmire as long as the echo of no election in Biafra land continues to reverberate. But it beats my imagination to visualize what this boycott would help achieve if not subjugating us to the result of a process we failed to participate. Can it amount to anything if other parts of the country especially the entire south does not join? What this immediately points out is the presence of elite-contemporary youth divide, with the latter perceiving the former as sell outs to Fulanis. Unfortunately the elites themselves are divided. This points to one thing, namely, bankruptcy of leadership and overarching republicanism which has led to further disintegration of the Igbos who as it were lack common front. This is unfortunate moving into 2023 election. This calls for self-criticism marked by some level of openness to the other’s ideas and intra-regional dialogue rooted on and guided by patriotism. These are important in solving internal questions and contradictions so as to forge a creative symphony and project a common front.

An evaluation of the submissions above shows that zoning though has its chequered history. It does not seem that it would be absolved from such history except it is enshrined in the constitution. There is always opposing voices and opposing moves against zoning at each particular point. For instance Abiola’s move in 1983 was a move wittingly or wittingly to scuttle zoning agreement

though the hierarchy of NPC prevailed. Two times there was a direct opposition when it was about being inserted into the constitution. The North generally is not well disposed to it just as the South are not well disposed to quota system. The whole issue of zoning came to a stall with Goodluck Jonathan's move to vie for the seat after he had finished his surrogate term and even after that to vie for a second term. The Igbos must recall that they did not respect the principle of zoning while they voted massively for Goodluck Jonathan rejecting General Buhari in the two times the former contested presidential election. Some have blamed the Igbos for not being grounded in APC and particularly for voting against Buhari in 2015 see it as a political naivety. In this Offor remarked, "What happened during the 2015 presidential election? Rather than vote for the Hausa-Fulani knowing full well that that was a better option, the Igbos voted massively for a Southerner. How could it be possible to clinch power for a Southerner when every party believes in the zoning policy? Did we not lose out in all ramifications due to selfish interests of our leaders, who were only looking for their personal enhancement?" (Offor, 2015) Well while Offor's remark may point to a political mistake, I do not think that the East's voting massively for Jonathan was the result of selfishness of our leaders. That does not mean that there were no leaders who were motivated by selfish reasons. The Igbos may have been led by the sentiments of Ebere Azikiwen Goodluck Jonathan being one of their own though I am not sure how Niger Delta today would support Igbo presidency today. The Igbos massively voted against him not because they were goaded by their leaders, but because of popular opinion. That was repeated in 2020 to make their point that Buhari stands for everything against Igbo. Again this was not the making of Igbo leadership. In fact any leader that spoke otherwise was simply taken as a sell-out and not taken seriously. This shows that Igbos are unflinching in making their point. They collectively stood against what and who they felt was anti-Igbo. It may not be politically correct but I do think it is a sign of authenticity. Besides, politically incorrect decisions are never popular. Only that time validates that as we are currently experiencing with Buhari.

The reason for this recant of the chequered history of zoning is so that the Igbos be aware that the "Igbo president" cannot be given on a platter of gold. It has to be struggled for. More importantly is that the process of nominating a candidate is not done by the ethnic group as per ethnic group but still within the context of party system. That again makes the pick not just the people's affair or even the elite's affair but a party affair in which all other ethnic group stakeholders of the parties are involved. In fact they determine who is picked not the ethnic group per se. I have taken time to highlight these in the light of the clamour for Igbo presidency among the Igbos and few other voices outside of the region. These considerations

immediately locate zoning within the context of power as struggle especially when none of the group has all it takes in the making of presidency. This calls for mustering negotiating power, dialogue and lobbying in order to woo others on their side. This calls for cooperation. This is directly linked to what Donald Horowitz refers to as vote pooling in his incentivist model of power sharing and cooperation in a multi-ethnic, pluralist society. The incentivist model was proposed by Horowitz to account for the weakness of consociational model posited by Arthur Lewis and furthered by Arend Lijphart. The key element of consociational model key is elite cooperation and here adduces that the political stability is explained in terms of cooperation of elites from different groups which transcend cleavages at the mass level (Lijphart 1977). Horowitz's major contention against consociational model is that it fails to highlight incentives for elite cooperation and inter-group accommodation. He notes that this incentive can spring from modification in the federal and electoral systems. Among other things, Horowitz argues that the electoral system can create incentives for elite cooperation. He notes that the key ingredient of the electoral system which serves as a powerful lever of consociationalism and accommodation is vote pooling. Vote pooling refers to "an exchange of the votes of their respective supporters by politicians who have been conditioned by the electoral system to be marginally dependent on votes by other groups for electoral victory." (Horowitz 2002; 1991) To secure pooled votes, politicians must behave moderately on issues that generate intergroup disagreement. There is no doubt that vote pooling is key to the actualization of president from Igbo extraction. This points to the fact that the Igbos need to furnish a common front and build bridges with other region of course as equals. This is what the elites and the leadership ought to be doing moving forward to the 2023 election. To effectively undertake this, they must fashion and articulate a strategic plan and evaluate their alignments and realignments.

Conclusion

So far, the work has been able to show that zoning is a way of power sharing which is inevitable in a plural multiethnic society like Nigeria. It is a way of ensuring that no one group dominates the political space but that power is equitably shared among various group for a realization of justice as fairness. Given what has prevailed with regard to practice of zoning, the work notes that the call for presidency of Igbo extraction is justifiable. It nevertheless observes that zoning system by not being enshrined in the constitution is simply left to the vagaries of politicking which could assume the form of realpolitik that care only about beneficial results for oneself sometimes at the expense of justice. This means that the Igbos, while being adamant in their quest, must build bridges with other regions. To do this, they must find a way of integrating the staccato of voices

among them, for the purpose of creative symphony and furnishing a common front.

Cyril ChibuzoEzeani

Department of Philosophy

NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka

Email: zanibuzu_cy@yahoo.com

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