

NIGERIAN POLITICS OF ZONING: QUESTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE

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Executive Summary

Nigerian political history has survived many stages of development ranging from democratic to military phases. The present democratic dispensation which started from 1999 is characterized by the process of 'power rotation within the geopolitical zones' of Nigeria called 'zoning'. Though zoning system is a political party affair, it was for

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the purposes of all-inclusiveness and deepening of democratic principles in the Nigerian society that the zoning system was initiated. But the challenge as observed today is that zoning has reinforced a style of politicking characterized by ethnicity and religious bigotry in the system and in the consciousness of Nigerians. By this, it has reinstalled mediocrity and production of incapable leaders in the Nigerian polity. In addition to this, the question is: has zoning truly saved democracy in Nigeria? Has it actually succeeded in ensuring all-inclusive government? When there is a change of power from one party to another, what is the fate of justice in zoning system? It is based on this that the paper defends the thesis that zoning has encouraged, among Nigerians and in Nigerian politics, political injustice hence non-inclusiveness and high consciousness of ethnicity and religious bigotry than nationalism and patriotism. However, the expectation from this paper is an exposition of the rudiments and initial aims behind zoning ideology and how it could have been the best political mannerism to ensure justice and all-inclusiveness for a new born democratic, multicultural and religious society like Nigeria. It will by extension show the consequences of the failure to explore the democratic rudiments of zoning which today explain why and how the Nigerian politics has become characterized by ethnicity and religious dominance. The paper shall adopt analytic and comparative methods in this discussion.

Keywords: Nigeria, Politics, Zoning, Justice, Democracy, Religious Bigotry, Multi-cultural

Introduction

Since the emergence of the Nigerian state and political emancipation from colonization, Nigerian political history has passed through democratic and military leaderships concomitantly. However, beginning from 1999 till date, democratic leadership albeit only captured in principle has sustained. It is in an attempt to reflect the democratic tenet of participation, given that the Nigerian polity is a conglomerate of diverse culture and religion and in view of the uncertainties and fear of terror experienced by her past tribalist military regimes, that a system known as Zoning, and aimed at ensuring an all-inclusive leadership, was introduced. This system was to guarantee that political power and leadership rotate among the Six (6) geo-political zones of the country and to instil the principles of democracy in the minds of Nigerians beyond mere acceptance to living it. At this, the possible questions that follow are: what is the initial rationale behind zoning and how has that initiative been sustained in the Nigerian polity together? What gains have Nigerians drawn from zoning. How democratic is the system and is it even a Nigerian constitutional matter? It is an attempt to address these raised research question that this paper maintains the view that zoning system which provides an enabling ground for inclusiveness should have been a better option to drive Nigerian

democratic leadership but unfortunately, it has turned to a way through which politics of bitterness, dominance, ethnicity and religious bigotry has been played in Nigeria. In taking up this discussion, the paper will adopt analytic and comparative methods to not only analyze the Nigerian political trajectory, but also to compare the Nigerian democratic system to other democratic practices so as to ascertain the level of good in the Nigerian politicking labelled 'democracy'. This paper holds high expectations to include: 1. The exposition of the style of politicking practised in Nigeria under the cloak of democracy. 2. To show how, instead of the expected good from the system of zoning, it has ironically bred a sort of politics characterized by high, irrational, unjustifiable and uncontrollable consciousness of ethnic dominance and religious bigotry which have engulfed Nigeria with human extortion and all acts of inhumanity.

The paper is put in sections to bear an abstract that presents a brief summary of the paper; an introduction that contains a bit more elaboration of the abstract; after this comes a section that interrogates zoning as a Nigerian peculiar political ideology. Another section dialoguing with democracy as a global political system follows. Following this is a section discussing zoning as a political ingredient to the Nigerian brand of democracy and then how the two features of Nigerian polity feature justice. Finally, a section of evaluation and conclusion comes. It is imperative to state that this was first presented at the conference of Association of Philosophy Professionals of Nigeria (APPON) held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (30th-3rd December 2022), at the General Studies (GS) Building. Critical interrogations of the paper by scholars at the conference must be recognized as they helped to strengthen the paper thus far.

Zoning as a Nigerian Peculiar Political Ideology

As the name implies, Zoning refers to the act of sharing turn by turn within a set of zones of an entity. In Nigeria, it refers to the sharing of political power within a set of geopolitical zones of the country. It is a style of power shifting from one to zone to another within an agreed period or political tenure. That is to say that if one zone produces a candidate who will come into power to lead the country on behalf of his/her zones-men within a stipulated period, say one or two consecutive tenures in accordance with the codes of the Nigerian constitution, then every zone that make up the country will go the same process. The moral perspective of such practice as equity and justice demand is that, even if its fault has become too obvious on the rotational process, it ought to go round all the zones before dropping the system.

Nigeria as a political entity is primarily divided into two major parts (protectorates): the Northern hemisphere and the Southern hemisphere. Subdividing these two protectorates leads to the geopolitical zones: from the Northern protectorate, the country counts the North-East (N/E), North-West (N/W) and North-Central (N/C).

From the Southern protectorate the country counts the South-East (S/E), South-West (S/W) and South-South (S/S). Giving more analysis about the nationalities of the country, starting from the Northern hemisphere, the country counts two major nationalities which are the Hausa Nation and the Fulani Nation. Of course, in addition to these are other minor tribal nationalities like the Tiv, Jukun, Nupe and other very minor one like the Kabba, Gwari, and others. From the Southern hemisphere, the country counts two major nationalities which the Igbo Nation and the Yoruba Nation. Again, adding to these are other minor tribal nationalities like the Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, among others. One significant point here is that always, in all the Easts and Wests of the two hemispheres respectively, reside the major nationalities; while in the Central and South of the two hemispheres respectively, reside the minor tribal nationalities.

A point necessary to be put straight here is that, if it were not because of jihadism (a religious reformation propagation based on conquest and imposition of the conqueror's religious culture on the conquered which the Hausa Nation experienced from the Fulani), the Fulani Nation would not have been a Nigerian nation today. The emergence of Fulani in the geographical entity called Nigerian was through a 15th century Senegalese immigrant scholar from Futa-Toro in the Toronkawa clan, called Muhammad Fodiye who was to become the father of the Islamic jihadist, preacher, reformer and conqueror of the Hausa Nation, Uthman dan Fodio.¹ Islam in Nigeria has always grown by the force of the sword and on the 'conquest and take over' orientation; and to seal this Islamic struggle in Nigeria, Dan Fodio conquered the then Gobir State and its capital city, Alkalawa, and from there, through the force of the sword, expanded to the other pure/real Hausa States (Hausa Bakwai) and to the other impure/unreal Hausa States some of whose Kingdoms dated from even the 11th century during the reigns of some Kings like Gunguma, and then institutionalized Islam therein, through imposition. To sustain the structure and in allegiance to the ancestors, the Fulani Nation, the Caliphate and Emirate till today in Nigeria still maintain this ancestral institutionalized structure that no Hausa National can become the Sultan or Emir of any Islamic caliphate and/or emirate in whose land of nationality these caliphates and/or emirates are located. The caliphate in Sokoto is headed by the Sultan, a socio-politico and religious position Dan Fodio assumed until his death and the Emirate in Kano is of same socio-politico and religious position but headed by his son and these two cities take a place of pride in the Northern socio-politico and religious affairs. Thus, the Fulani nation is not originally and indigenously a Nation within the region called Nigeria today, but by the virtue of religious conquest, has become a Nigerian Nation.

¹<https://www.britanica.com> Usman dan Fodio/Fulani leader- *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed on 13/06/2022

However, in all today, a total of six geopolitical zones are the subdivisions into which the two protectorates are broken. The States and their capitals in the *North-Eastern* (N/E) zone include Adamawa (Yola), Bauchi (Bauchi), Borno (Maiduguri) Gombe (Gombe), Taraba (Jalingo) and Yobe (Damaturu). Those of the *North-West* (N/W) include Jigawa (Dutse), Kaduna (Kaduna), Kano (Kano), Katsina (Katsina), Kebbi (Birnin Kebbi), Sokoto (Sokoto) and Zamfara (Gusau). Those of the *North-Central* (N/C) include Benue (Makurdi), Niger (Minna), Nasarawa (Lafia), Plateau (Jos), Kogi (Lokoja) and Kwara (Ilorin). Those of the *South-East* (S/E) include Abia (Umuahia), Anambra (Awka), Ebonyi (Abakaliki), Enugu (Enugu) and Imo (Owerri). Those of the *South-West* (S/W) include Ekiti (Ado-Ekiti), Lagos (Ikeja), Ogun (Abeokuta), Ondo (Akure), Osun (Osogbo) and Oyo (Ibadan). Finally, those of the *South-South* (S/S) include Akwaibom (Uyo), Bayelsa (Yanegoa), Cross-river (Calabar), Delta (Asaba), Edo (Benin) and Rivers (Port-Harcourt). Applying the principle of justice and equity in the balkanization of Nigeria into geopolitical zones, it is seen that the N/E has six States, the N/W has seven States, and the N/C has six States. But it must be noted that the *capital city* (Abuja) which possesses 95% features of a State is located in the N/C; and by this, invariably, making the geopolitical zone a seven States-structure. The S/E has five States, the S/W has six States and the S/S has six States. Observably, it is seen that the N/W is the most *beneficiary* of marginalization while the S/E is the most *victim* of marginalization. Significantly, the N/W geopolitical zone is where The Hague (Caliphate and Emirate) of Islam is located in Nigeria. Does this send any signal about Fulani/Islamic domination of the Hausa indigenes and their traditional religion? However, ironically, the amalgamation of the different nations into a political entity called Nigeria and again dividing it into Northern and Southern protectorates was a helpful initial step towards the actualization of ethnic nationality dominance. It also nurtured too-consciousness of ethnicity, religious superiority and orientation of 'conquer-and-rule' and the ideology that Nigeria is for the most powerful and domineering nation, and those with the pre-orientation and pre-disposition with the idea that they are born, destined to rule have exploited the further division. Also, the further division into geopolitical zones makes the ideology more glaring and easier for and through the Islamic jihadism. Zoning on its own have served as the fuel that is added to a blazing fire— fire of higher and uncontrollable ethnicity consciousness, religious dominance through jihadism whose effects are at the apex today in Nigeria as the question of Nigeria-Fulanization *cum* Islamization agenda is on every lip of Nigerians, Africans and indeed the world at large. The swim in the realm of this created consciousness is the why behind tribal domination of the 90% of the sectors in the country. Appointments in Nigeria from 2015 lead to the exposure of this fact.

Since the political independence of Nigeria in the 1st of October, 1960, the Nigerian polity has never been stable with a particular system of government as democracy and

military leadership kept interfering till the 29th of May, 1999 when democracy finally surfaced and sustained for 23 years now. After all the politicking strategies of political parties that participated in the 1999 general election, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which won the election, after all the calculations zoned the presidential leadership to the then South-Western aspirant in the person of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, from Ogun State precisely, and that of his vice to the then North-Eastern aspirant in the person of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, from Adamawa State. Other positions of leadership in the party were zoned too, however, the eight years of two consecutive tenures (four years each) were completed by these individuals. During the 2007 general election, the party then zoned presidency to the North-West aspirant in the person of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, from Katsina State precisely and then zoned the vice to the South-South aspirant in the person of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan from Bayelsa State. However, the death of the president, Alhaji Yar'Adua on the 5th of May, 2010 scuttled the process. At this, it became a constitutional matter that the vice would complete the tenure, and that made it just a tenure to the North. Upon completion, the party zoned it again to the South during the 2011 general election, which went to the South-South aspirant, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, and then his vice to the North-Western aspirant in the person of Mohammed Namadi Sambo from Kaduna State precisely. Eventually they won. Then came the 2015 general election and the South went for a second tenure through the South-Southern aspirant, Dr. Jonathan and his North-Western vice Mohammed Namadi Sambo. But unfortunately, they lost to another political party, APC— All Progressives Congress's North-Western aspirant, in the person of Muhammadu Buhari from Katsina State and his South-Western vice, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo from Lagos State precisely. These people are at the verge of completion of their two tenures (8 years, i.e, 4 years each tenure). Following the zoning trending in the political parties under which the leadership of governance in Nigeria has operated, the featuring parties are the PDP and the APC. For the 2023 general elections, the two prominent political parties have done their primaries in which delegates from all the 36 States including Abuja the capital city would gather to conduct an intra-party election for the party's flag bearers. The PDP has filled a presidential aspirant, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar from Adamawa State, North-East geopolitical zone and his deputy in the person of Ifeanyi Okowa immediate past Executive Governor of Delta State, South-South geopolitical zone. The APC has equally done it, and a South-Western aspirant in the person of Alhaji Ahmed Asiawaju Bola Tinubu from Lagos State, South-West and his deputy, Kashim Mustapha Shettima, former Executive Governor of Borno State and senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from Borno Central Senatorial District, North-East, emerged. Today, Mr. Tinubu and Mr. Shettima both of whom with identity, education, moral and character questions, are the president and vice president of Nigeria respectively.

From this brief history of the Nigerian political zoning system, it is observable that political powers have rotated between the major two protectorates into which the country is divided. But is it all-inclusive by reaching to all the six geopolitical zones into which the two protectorates are broken? If yes, then the next question is whether every component zone enjoyed the power to an equal tenure like the others. But if no, then which geopolitical zones are remaining? From the Northern hemisphere, for the presidency, the West completed a total of 11 years, and for the vice presidency, the East and the West completed a total of 14 years, 9 (and still counting till 2027 under Shettima's vice-presidency) and 5 years respectively. From the Southern hemisphere, for the presidency, the West and South have completed a total of 14 years, 9 (and still counting till 2027 under Tinubu's presidency) and 5 years respectively. For the vice presidency, the West and South completed a total of 11 years, 8 and 3 years respectively. From this statistic, in both the presidency and vice, only the Central zone has not, at least, featured at all for both the presidency and the vice in the Northern hemisphere, let alone talking about tenure equality. From the Southern hemisphere, only the East as well has not featured at all for both the presidency and vice, let alone talking about tenure equality. Following the Nigerian slang that 'at all at all, na him worse pass', the principles of equity and justice lament heavily for the sidelining and marginalization of the North-Central and South-Eastern zones from feeling whether positive or negative, the act of ascending to both the Nigerian presidency and vice through zoning. It is a sole responsibility of equity and justice to evaluate the extent of justice and democracy inhered in zoning and how all the geopolitical zones of both the Northern and Southern hemispheres have tasted its rudiments.

But why the initiative of zoning in the first place? Does it mean that Nigerians do not know how other versions of democratic leadership in the world are managed? What is the peculiarity of zoning and what rationale is behind it? To adequately answer these all-important questions is to point out certain factors in the political history of the country.

First, Nigeria is a multicultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic society, and in this consciousness, there are intense doubts of even the possibility of co-existence among the peoples of the amalgamated Nations and other minor tribal nations that make up the political entity called Nigeria. Even the blended Nigerians themselves, even the so tagged 'founding fathers' or 'nationalists' never believed they would co-habit the geographical entity peacefully, and this fear was clearly expressed by even the so tagged 'founding father' of the country. The inherent point is patriotism and allegiance to the component nations, instead of the Nigerian nationhood. Suffice it then to say that "where the component parts of the nation are divergent and of different cultural backgrounds, loyalty to the immediate subgroup or tribe may interfere or even

appropriate the loyalty due to the larger nation.” By this, the whole finds it difficult as the parts will triumph in gaining patriotic position in the minds of the people; however, some have taken to the religion of the prophet (Mohammed) as the only possible factor of unification. From the first Federal Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, it is said:

Since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their background, 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 country²

For him, the entity Nigeria is a British product, hence an imposition of nationhood on different nations amalgamated through the colonial supremacy. And even sounding more personal and surprised at the deceived Nigerian peoples to believe they are now one political entity and could exist as such, Sir Bello says: “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 the Chamber.”³ He concluded by blending the Southerners ‘invaders’ and that nothing possibly can unite the two hemispheres except by the religion of the prophet (Mohammed). It is still in this realm of consciousness that Awolowo describes the country as a mere geographical expression, hence there is no a people like Nigerians as could be said of many European countries, and consequently, the Nigerians are bound to identity crisis. “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 “Nigeria” is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.”⁴ This heterogeneity of Nigerians leads to identity crisis among Nigerians. It has equally paved escaping roots for crime perpetrators.⁵ This informs Madiebo’s assertion that owing to the effectiveness of the heterogeneity, “the federation of Nigeria, as it exists today, has never really been one homogenous country, for its widely different people and tribes are yet to find any basis for their unity.”⁶ And from Gowon in conclusion to this point, it is written that “putting

²www.thisdaylive.com edited 28/2/2020

³ James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (1958), 361

⁴ Obafemi Awolowo, *The Path to Nigeria’s Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 47-8

⁵ Anayochukwu K. Ugwu and George O. Abah, “The Role of Philosophy in Insecurity and Good Governance in Nigeria,” *Sociology Study*, 10, no. 6, (Nov-Dec 2020). 288-97. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5526/2020.06.004>

⁶ Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran Civil War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1980), 3

all considerations to test-political, economic as well as social- the base for unity is not there or is so badly wrote [sic], not once, but several times.”⁷

Second, following the facticity of cultural and background heterogeneity among the blended Nigerians, even if it becomes possible that the amalgamated nations would exist as one political entity, there is this intense fear of one nation dominating and taking over the national management in all spheres of endeavour to include economy, agriculture, education, commerce, technology, labour and employment, and the provision of other social amenities without which Nigerians humanly find it difficult to live. Put differently, there is fear of tribal dominance over the national affairs of the country. It is in the reality of this that today, tribal patriotism and allegiance prevail over the national versions. Stressing this, Nze puts it this way:

Nigeria as it is today is essentially an anarchic society where the cult of narrow mindedness, ethnicism and brute individualism has ousted all unifying national forces... Nigeria today threatens to be a mere geographical entity where patriotism has been completely isolated. Ethno-politics has permeated our politics... our government is ethno-government... admission to the Universities is ethnically worked out; our military is ethno-military; Our social and economic administrations are ethnically compromised⁸

Today, ethnic consciousness has overpowered national consciousness. The domination of these sectors in Nigeria from 2015 till date under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari is a manifest. But that is no surprise for tribal allegiance has always prevailed in honour of the tribal forefathers who have earnestly admonished the growing generation never to keep in vain, their labours, just as was reiterated by Sir. Ahmadu Bello, the then Sultan of Sokoto thus:

The new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the north as willing tools and the South as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us and never allow them to have control over their future⁹

⁷ Joseph N. Agbo, “Hundred Years of Britain’s Nigeria: A Historico Philosophical Analysis of the Idea of a “Non Negotiable” Unity,” edited by Martin F. Asiegbu and Jerry C. Chukwuokolo, *Nigeria, Hundred Years After: Issues and Perspectives in Philosophical Discourse* (Enugu: Jones Communications Publishers, 2016), 48

⁸ Bernard C. Nze, *Patriotism: A cultural emanation*. (Onitsha: Veritas Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1994), 10-11

⁹ Benilily, ‘Sir Ahmadu Bello’s Statement’ made in *The Parrot Newspaper* on October 12th 1960, Days after Independence. Accessed from

The “we” here referred to his Fulani kith and kins whose progenitor was Dan Fodio who promulgated religious violence and inhumanity through Islamism in the belief in Jihad. After all, the Fulani nation have been disoriented under Islamism that it is their destiny and birth right to rule and own Nigeria, and no Fulani nationalist have never hidden in declaring this. Having found the truth and likening his position to that of Sir Bello, Ojukwu notes that “Nigeria never was and can never be a united country. The very nature of Nigeria inevitably gave rise to political power groups, goaded by sectional rather than national interest... Nigeria was not united, the Nigerians knew it.”¹⁰ Little wonder why the then Sultan of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello in expressing his perception of Nigeria has this to say: “North for the Northerners, East for the Easterners and West for the Westerners.”¹¹ Drawing insight from this reality of an ethnic dominance over all others, Offor writes that “If the truth must be told, Nigeria is not one and can never be one, unless political power remains in the North and bureaucratic officialdom to the Yoruba in perpetuity.”¹² It is after judging these expressions in every possible scale that this paper doubts the truism of Obasanjo’s subtle ‘national’ statement that reads: “Our first sacred duty is the preservation of the co-operate entity of Nigeria with different identities being recognized and preserved.”¹³

Third, there is the factor of sudden emergence of the country. Put differently, the nations that forced through the polished grammar (amalgamation) were never consulted to negotiate if they could exist as one political entity. To find peace in such an environment is an impossibility following the peoples’ heterogeneity in cultural, tradition, religion, backgrounds generally. Reiterating this, Nze writes:

where a nation happens to be forged from quasi-independent and divergent nations with different historical-cultural ancestry, as in Nigeria, the development of a national character and nation-building become a challenge... that the success or failure of the task of nation building has a lot of implications for the future existence of the country¹⁴

<https://www.nairaland.com/1977382/sir-ahmadu-bellos-statement-made>
2/10/2018

¹⁰ Chukwuemeka O. Ojukwu, *Biafra: Selected Speeches of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 1, 5; Cf. Agbo, “Hundred Years,” 48

¹¹ Nze, *Patriotism*, 7

¹² Anthony I. A. Offor, *Legends of nationalism* (Enugu: Silmark Publisher Limited, 2015), 3

¹³ General, Olusegun Obasanjo, *The Guardian*, 9(5745), (1993)

¹⁴ Nze, *Patriotism*, 4

Thus, the emergence of Nigerian is an imposition of nationhood or country-hood on different nations (countries). Thus, following this no-consensus leading to the emergence of the country, a quasi-independence, the nations which have found themselves into such speechless situation that has already weakened them to swiftly swim into action for rejection of such merge, the peoples resorted to patch the nationhood of their country. Hence the people have been forced to form a country, and following the superiority of the colonizers and the meagre level of formal form of literacy among them, they decided to take their future into their hands and began to give meaning to the situation in which they have been thrown. This describes Nigeria as a country of 'patch-patch' even in the reality and impossibility of peaceful co-existence of the nations. This point is a central feature of the national anthem and pledge. Nze notes this no-consent from the nations and writes that

there was no referendum; the people were never given the opportunity to indicate whether or not they wanted to be unified. The amalgamation was (totally) rather a heterogeneous device fashioned by the merchants of civilization who were fired with anxiety to serve colonial economic and administrative interests¹⁵

Crowder notes this point and puts it this way that "in the case of Nigeria however, union was so sudden, and included such widely differing groups of peoples that not only the British who created it, but the inhabitants themselves have, often doubted whether it could survive as a political entity."¹⁶ These are factual as long as the existence of Nigeria as a political entity remains and they have been issues of high concern. "These are facts which all the "peoples- supposed different countries" blended "Nigerians" know well."¹⁷ These issues here are as important as any national issue because if Nigeria cannot find these, then there will be no genuine patriotism for "a common language and cultural unity had become an essential part of republican articulation of nationality". Thus, a "common culture therefore, becomes a strong defining feature of national identity; for without this common outlook, the oneness of the nation or its existence as a unit serving collective interests, would be jeopardized."¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid, 16

¹⁶ Michael Crowder, *The story of Nigeria*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), cited in Oguejiofo C. P. Ezeanya, *Tribe and tongue in Nigeria*. Enugu: Professor's Press, 2010), 28

¹⁷ Anayochukwu K. Ugwu, "A Critical Approach to the Problem of Nigerian and the Struggle for Nation Building," *Sociology Study*, 10, no. 5, (Sept-Oct 2020), 241. <https://doi:10.17265/2159-5526/2020.05.005>

¹⁸ Nze, *Patriotism*, 3

Fourth, another point of importance is the fear, tremble and shock experienced from military regime. The people have become too weighed down by the whims and caprices of the executive personnel piloting the affairs of the country under military rule. Thus, to ensure its never-return to the national political domain, the people accepted democracy under any form with the hope for future amends regarding the people's rights and public participation provided military regime is gone final and never returned. So, in whatever form/brand with whatever feature, be it zoning system the intended democracy could be found practised provided military regime never return and military operations in the activity of securing the State are subjected and guided by constitution, then the people were eager, willing and ready to accepted such democratic rule. These four among other possible reasons were the rationale behind featuring the brand of Nigerian democracy with zoning system. However democratic the zoning system could be, it is thus necessary to interrogate the concept of democracy from a more perspective of global practice and scholarship.

Broadly, zoning takes two phases: inter-zoning and intra-zoning. Inter-zoning is a wider range of zoning between two or more geopolitical components of the country. From the uppermost level, it occurs when zoning is between the North and South hemispheres. At a bit lower level, it could occur when, for instance, the Southern protectorate zones a political power to may be the East or West or Central components. It could also occur among various political parties, and equally when the political zones a particular position to a certain geopolitical component. But the intra-zoning peculiarly exists in State level. Above the State, it can also occur when a particular geopolitical zone tries to be democratic to the core by ensuring turn by turn, that every State comprising that zone gets a taste of that same position. Before a cycle is reached in such zoning situation, it may take centuries depending the political tenure involved. But the final point is to make every unit composite of the whole entity to feel what it takes to belonging to a particular political entity making up the bigger one under which it exists in. Even in a State, intra-zoning could still exist when a particular position rotates round all the senatorial districts of the Sate as typicalized in senatorial state intra-zoning in each Nigerian State. Some positions in the State it goes round through zoning to all the Local Government Areas of a particular State or even in a Local Government Area, it rotates round all the Councils that make up that particular Local Government Area or even the Wards that make the particular Council or the Communities/Towns constituting a political Ward, or the Villages making up the Community/Town, and in that order, could go to the Village level or Clan or Family and singularly down to each individual constituting a particular Family.

It must be noted that the Nigerian political democratic system of zoning is a party affair, precisely the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the first party that gained power after

the uncertainty of Nigerian political leadership since 1960 that has been interfered and truncated between military regime and democratic leadership. So, as a party affair, the PDP takes the glory of its initiative and practice, and inscribing it into its constitution. It was the first party to reinstate and inculcate the system or culture into the party affair to ensure the steadiness of democracy and its stronghold in the Nigerian polity and ensure military never returned again, zoning became a PDP constitutional affair. It became not just a mere political style adopted by PDP but to be applied in the democratic process of the country. It is based on this constitutional status of the system that it became a perversion of justice and equity to deny a component geopolitical zone the right to taste the political power as other parts have tasted, hence turn-by-turn system. But seeing its underlining aim which is all about peace, right observation, bringing to the door steps of every geopolitical zone, the sense of belongingness and democracy at the root level, other parties adopted the same structure. Another possible reason behind other parties adopting same structure is to also inhere same structure to tactically counter the ruling party (PDP) and win them out from power, because aspirants into the party maybe afraid of domination if it does not take such structure so that all will be included actively in the system.

But comparatively, the Nigerian constitution never called it ‘zoning’ but has reinstated a very similar structure seeing the level of divergences among the peoples of Nigeria and the possibility of ethnic domination. In this foresight, the Nigerian constitution in chapter 2 and section 14 subsections 3 reemphasized the necessity for rotation of power among the geopolitical components, or tribes (nations) that make up Nigeria as a political entity to ensure unity, justice and equity. The PDP constitution in its article 7 made it clear that the party governs on the principles of zoning as a fundamental structure which helped the party, and the re-instalment of democratic spirit in Nigeria and to reinvigorate the party and deep-root it in Nigeria so as ensure the no-return of military rule. The All-Progressives Congress (APC) specifically emphasizes the necessity to promote and foster the unity and political stability of Nigeria which is attainable (as captured in Article 7 of its Aims and Objective) through the development of economic policies that guarantee public participation in the control of the major means of production, distribution and exchange. Succinctly, it is deducible that APC seeks to enthrone unity by promoting all-inclusiveness via the introduction of policies that encourage participation. This perhaps explains why items vii and viii of the referred Aims and Objective seek to “observe Affirmative Action in all elective and appointive positions and ensure that youths, women and persons living with disabilities (PLWD) are properly represented across all party organs and government” and “to promote and protect the interest of farmers, workers...” Critically, it is unreasonable to quickly refute the claim that permitting participation would engender a sense of inclusiveness and by extension unity, however, given that the nature of inclusiveness

mull-over by APC only has bearing on the working, the gender, the youth and the physically challenged demographic distribution of the Nigerian citizenry, it does not translate to what national unity especially as advanced in this context portrays. National unity connotes 'unity of nations' attainable through the practice of inclusiveness among the different nations that constitute the Nigerian State. Beyond concentration on the workers, the youths and the physically challenged, it is meant to produce a feeling of sense of belonging among the geographic segments and the demographic distribution of the different ethno-tribal groups and regions that make up the Nigerian multicultural State. Suffice it therefore to distinguish between the concept of a nation and a state. A Nation is constitutive of group of people of ethno-tribal affinity and cultural consanguinity while a State which best describes the Nigerian polity, is characterized by people of not necessarily common descent, occupying a territory, and possessing a government that helps protect its sovereignty. A Nation is natural in view of the fact that it is ontologically given; but a State on the other hand is artificial, given that it is a product of contract between people of possibly different nations. Membership of a State is by choice, implying that its members reserve the right to opt out when deemed necessary. Seceding results in the disintegration of the states, hence the need to forestall integration by engendering national unity through the promotion of inclusiveness among its constituting nations— the ethno-tribal demography and not merely its gender, working, age and youthful demographic distribution. Now the question is: how real and possible is the realization of this 'national unity' without all-inclusiveness in the democratic system through a structure that would allow every component to actively participate, and equally in the leadership of the country under the party? Will there be national unity when one nation or geopolitical zone produces the national leadership? Or does it imply that only the domineering nation has the capable hand to pilot the leadership affairs of the country? Another question bordering on this is: is the APC not subjected to domesticate the working principle of the Nigerian constitution which bears on power shifting to every component geopolitical zone that make up the country? If the country's constitution proposes a power shifting among all the tribal components of the country, political parties which form the platform that produces leaders that pilot the affairs of the nation should see it as a duty to enshrine the principles that will foster the national unity of the Nigerian state. They must see it as very necessary, obligatory and constitutionally binding to obey the principle of power rotation as gateway to actualizing inclusiveness which is indispensable to the actualization of Nigerian national unity.

The Concept of Democracy as a Global Practice¹⁹

The term 'Democracy' etymologically is Greek: *Demos* meaning 'people' and *Kratia* meaning 'rule/government', hence, democracy means the 'people's rule/government'. However, as a common term, it is always simply defined in line with the Lincolnian thought: 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. The prepositions- 'of', 'by' and 'for' imply that it is all the peoples. Put differently to mean a government indigenous to the people, managed by the indigenous people and for their own good. For the Igbo (the freedom-seeking-man) it is all about *ochichi onye kwuo uche ya* (a government where everybody comes out to freely say his/her mind). Significantly, 'saying' your mind in democracy refers to one of the central characteristics of democracy upon which every other stand and that is 'popular participation'. A democrat participates in the decision-making time like electioneering, civic responsibility, social or community service, meaningfully contributing ideally, when necessary, etc. Remarkably, it must not be forgotten that in democracy, 'saying your mind' is not the problem, for the minority will always have their say, but the majority will always have their way in democracy. This is a reference to the democratic hallmark of number or popular opinion which counts greatly in the people's popular participation and social service and decision-making time. Another vital point of note in the Igbo concept of democracy is that every democratic process is direct. This is in the very opposite of the western concept where there is indirect or representative democracy where there is democracy after democracy. Put it to imply that the western classical engagement with democracy is that after the direct comes the indirect/representative democracy where democratic powers to decide is left with the few products of the direct democratic engagement. This is a brand of partial democracy. However, making a scholarly review on democracy as a political concept, it is observed that Mayo takes a stand that seemingly aligns with the Igbo concept of democracy. He writes that democracy is the "direct control or making of political decision by the assembled citizens, political equality of all citizens: the liberties including the freedom to oppose and the taking of decisions by majority vote. The citizen had no master, no autocrat to rule it."²⁰ This conveys the fact that democracy is a participatory government even though the indirect version where the vast interests of the citizens are now represented by certain elected few people from among the people has prevailed

¹⁹ Anayochukwu K. Ugwu and Leo C. Ozoemena, "Restructuring, Ethnic Agitation and the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria," edited by Alloy S. Ihuah, Anthony Idachaba and Mark I. Shenge, *Philosophy, Security and the Challenges of Development in Africa: Issues, Problems and Prospects* (Nigeria: Eagle Press, 2019), 217-37

²⁰ Henry B. Mayo, *Introduction to Democratic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) 41

because all can no longer be contained in an assembly to discuss certain issues and take certain decisions affecting them like in the olden days village assembly when and where democracy was open to all and all participated in self. In another version of definition, it has been termed the government of the 'majority carries the vote'. But the fundamental question to be asked in the spirit of democracy is: who are the majority? What is the rationale/motive behind being or forming the majority? What is the reasonability in their political-majority-activities? These are democratically fundamental because according to Popper:

The theory of democracy is not based on upon the principle that the majority should rule; rather the various equalitarian methods of democratic control such as general elections and representative government are to be considered as no more than well tried and in the presence of a widespread traditional distrust of Tyranny, always open to improvement and even providing methods for their own improvement²¹

The implication here is that it is not enough to see democracy as the majority rule, but that it must recognize periodic elections and the equality of all people, which now enquire into the rationale, 'whyness' and 'howness' behind 'forming the majority'. Again, another observable inseparable fact about democracy is that freedom (a universal destiny) is a rudiment of a sincere democracy. As significant as it is, Justice Oputa says that

when we talk of freedom, it should not be confined merely to emancipation from arbitrary restraint of authority... when we talk of freedom... we will definitely include freedom from want and dependence... poverty and destitution... illiteracy and ignorance so that everyone, irrespective of accident of birth, or possession of wealth, may have equal opportunity for economic gain, for self-advancement and self-fulfilment²²

Human freedom especially in a democracy should be holistic so as to enhance vigorously self-realization and advancement in every sphere of human endeavours. Nwabueze observing the 'naturalness', fundamentality and inseparability of freedom from man, analyses the concept of democracy thus:

Liberty is basic and essential to democracy because it is natural to man... Democracy does indisputably require that basic human rights should be... granted to all on the basis of equality. The principle is predicated upon on

²¹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol. II High tide of Prophecy*, (5th ed.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 132

²² Chukwudifu Oputa, "Democracy: What is all about?" *Democracy and the Law, Vol. II* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Justice, 1999), 41

our common human nature which consists of body, soul and mind for everybody... The fact of a common human nature therefore gives to everyone equal claim to the fundamental right to life and personal liberty, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression, including freedom to receive and impart ideas and information, freedom of association and movement²³

Freedom is a product of nature, and that is why for the existentialists, like Sartre, it is identical with the facticity of existence. That presupposes the fact that existence precedes essence and so, no positive law should brag being the 'giver' of freedom to man for it inheres in existence. Thus, here lies a fundamental obligation of the man-made laws to therefore protect, with all the available means, this nature-bestowed-gift (freedom) on man and other creatures. Here again portrays a moral and ethical obligation on man to be humane, protective and never to infringe on man's natural-gift for it proceeds from his existence. In reiterating this fact of obligation on man in regards to the protection of freedom, Dipo posits:

Freedom in all its ramifications cannot be enjoyed except the state initiates certain social prerequisites which will aid the fruition of negative freedom... People do not become free simply because they have choice. A starving and an uneducated man will hardly be concerned with his freedom because of poverty and ignorance and thus they cannot be said to be free as those who are rich... to be free to do X includes within its meaning to be able to have the means and to have power to do X²⁴

What is here deducible again is that the authority has a lot to do for citizens to be able to enjoy their freedom. There must be conducive environments as requirements, starting from educating the people, ensuring good and purely democratic governance, upgrading the economy, ensuring a peaceful society and making the standard of living for the people to be affordable, for the people to enjoy freedom as well as democracy. So, if there is no good environment to enhance the enjoyment of the dividends of democracy by the people, therefore, there is no democracy in practicality. All these will necessitate the citizens' realization of who they are and their freedom and making good use of it and then using the necessary potentialities in it to upgrade their lives and give them meaning. At this point, if this observation of human freedom and respect for human consent/volition is the case having proceeded inseparably from human nature and not status/qualities, as Locke opines, then

²³ Ben Nwabueze, "A Constitutional Democracy and Democratic Constitution," *Democracy and the Law, Vol. 11* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Justice, 1999), 71

²⁴ Trele Dipo, "The Concept of Liberty," edited by Felix A. Adeigbo, *Readings in Social and Political Philosophy* (Ibadan: Claverianum Press, 1991), 71

no one can be put out of his estate and subjected to the political power of another without his consent. And thus that which begins and actually constitutes any political society is nothing but the consent of any number of freemen capable of majority, to unite and incorporate into such a society. And this is that, and that only which did or could give beginning to any lawful government in the world²⁵

This shows the necessity of human consent in a democratic society. Without consent of the whole involved individuals especially as it concerns democracy, there is no real democracy. This concept of consent is a reference to the conscious participation of the people in a democratic process. Generally, it could be drawn, the features of democracy without which one could say that there is no real democracy in a process. In a democratic setting, the first feature is the people. The 'people' here is not in an oligarchic form, but from a point of view of majority through whom popular participation/opinion emerge. Following this comes the second feature which is the recognition that it is within these people that power lies. Any power that does not lie with the people contextually described above in a democratic dispensation is no real democracy in practicality. The third feature is the recognition of the people's (popular) opinion as an outcome of their popular participation. By doing this, their consent is seen and accepted and the power instituted by this consent/power must recognize the people as its real source. The fourth point is a periodical change of power. This must be recognized. By this, all-inclusiveness of every component of the democratic body is recognized as important as every other. The fifth feature is not only the existence but also functionality and supremacy recognition of the constitution. The constitution inheres the modalities at which democracy works which include the sense of division and separation of power, the rule of law, provisions for human rights, the sense of checks and balances, division and operations of the constitutional authorities, et. This will help curtail inhumanity, free exhibition of the animalism of human nature and exploitation as well as hope for posterity through punishment on offenders' violence-bent citizens. The sixth feature is the recognition of human freedom and those unalienable rights bestowed on man by nature. The reality of this makes life worth living which explains why the existentialists like Sartre for instance, would identify existence with freedom. The seventh and last feature in this paper is the activeness of the representative as modernity has necessitated it. The trend in modern democratic dispensation incorporates the brand of indirect/representative democracy where from the direct participation; the people elect delegates who would carry out the indirect version on their behalf. But then, this brand of democracy poses a huge question of the

²⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning the Original Extent and End of Civil Government* in *Great Books of the Western World*, 33, edited by Adler J. Mortimer (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Incorporated, 1990), 54

reality of popularity/majority feature of democracy, justice and the drive to ensure good for the people and not just for the delegates as the Nigerian practice shows the very opposite. However, having analyzed this idea thus, the paper will engage democracy and zoning and how they possibly feature justice and equity in the Nigerian practice.

The Concept of Democracy in Dialogue with Zoning to Feature Equity and Justice

The leading questions in this section include: one, how democratic is zoning? Two, how has zoning provided the sense of equity and justice in the Nigerian polity? Comparatively, both democracy and zoning aim at one thing: to ensure all-inclusiveness in the national polity that no component nation/part making up the whole of the country is left behind in the political management of national affairs. Democracy could be described as highly competitive comparable to zoning. This is because in its objective perspective, it engages the whole population of the country in quote. But when it is by zoning system, the whole country has willingly bestowed the power to produce a capable hand to pilot the affairs of the country on one nation/component (geopolitical zone) making up the Nigerian federation. Thus, the zoning system is more relaxed, less heated than when democracy throws such opportunities open to the whole population of the country. At a certain level of comfort, the component to which the country has zoned power, will go inside itself, scrutinize aspirants and bring out the best among the better to rule the country and uniquely set a good record track to even beat every administration piloted by every other component. It is a democratic power given in a platter of gold as it is left for a zone to meet and from within send out its identity and level of IQ which will play out in the personality of the produced candidate. The produced candidate from this perspective ontologically becomes the mirror to view what the zone has and or can produce. The produced candidate becomes the zone and its identity and whatever happens during the person's administration whether glorious or blaming, is attributed to the zone and its people and becomes its national identity. So, zoning is in principle, in tandem with the tenets of democracy. This is not to argue that even though zoning falls in line with democratic principles, it has no inherent disadvantages of its own when in practice. With the zoning system, the political importance of every component zone is recognized, is made to have the sense of belonging, and taste of the leadership of the country. By this, equality and justice prevail, happiness, joy and fulfilment and healthy politicking propagated, the sense of political unity and strength reinstated and takes the atmosphere.

But the Nigerian zoning system and the question of equity and justice has not come into accomplishment. Zoning in Nigeria would have been the best political mannerism to address the issue of multiple nature of Nigeria in terms of culture, tribe, tradition, religion, etc. By zoning, every tribe and religion and culture would have been given an opportunity to prove its richness in whatever good from whichever face it could have

provided the country with. Unfortunately these good political qualities of zoning never materialized in Nigeria because of many factors to include greed, over consciousness of tribe, shallow mindedness following the level of literacy in Nigerians, the Nigerian understanding of politics and democratic system as all about 'who gets what, when, when and how' and number respectively, religious fanaticism and the zeal to be led by religious orientation to dominate the country and generally, what Francis Bacon identifies as the 'idols'. From the little zoning practice, it is clear how the North-Central and South-Eastern geopolitical zones of the country suffer marginalization *cum* political dominance. Practically, the three individuals who led Nigeria for 23 years now at least, not from the time of independence, under the capacity of the presidency are all of Fulani nation extraction and from two States (Katsina and Adamawa) out of the nineteen States plus the capital city (Abuja) in the Northern hemisphere. Same scenario was the reality from 1960 till 1999. Such history is same with all the Northern governorship leadership, Sultans and Emirs. Fulani rule themselves and rule you too, you never rule them. Coming to the Southern protectorate, justice cries at the level of marginalization in zoning perpetuated against the South-Eastern zone. Zoning starting from the South, justice and equity demand that in the 2023 general election, the PDP should zone the presidency to the zone, even if the party would decide to do away with the system after the forthcoming 2023 general election. But just as it has been a typical style of Nigerian politicking, the characteristic is that the table can be shaken and shifted at any time because of greed and impatience. So, zoning has not achieved the expected products which include justice and equity.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The paper has tried to make a presentation based on the Nigerian system of politicking and style of governance. It is an exposure of the Nigerian polity and the Nigerian political mannerism which, as a factor anyways, proceeds from their conceptualization of politics and the democratic style of zoning through which politics is played in Nigeria. It has equally interrogated the Nigerian political mannerism of zoning, and expositively enunciated the inherent positive outcomes of the zoning system as the differing peculiarity of the Nigerian brand of democracy. It has further interacted with the enquiry into how democratic is the zoning system and how the system has produced justice and equity across every component nation described as geopolitical zones that make up the country. By the exposition, it is seen that the zoning brand of democracy as practised in Nigeria has its unique shortfalls as to the fulfilment of realizing justice and equity in every geopolitical zone of the country. But there are some factors to be considered as being behind the zoning shortfalls towards the realizability of justice and equity.

What criteria guide the zoning principle—elderliness among the zones (if it could be detected) or population or according to the alphabetical order of the names of the zones or number of States in each zone or number of nationalists or number of political elites or intellectualists from zones? Let it be assumed that a party initiated and started the practice of zoning and continued in the principle and another party comes to bridge the flow thereby winning it out from power, just as typicalized in the Nigerian situation. Is it morally (or legally perhaps) justifiable for the new party emerged in power to continue in the old structure of zoning of the lost party? What would now become the political fate of the zone left to experience the equity and justice in the zoning process which has been distorted? It must be expected that even if the new party in power embarks on zoning, there is a possibility that the remaining zone would queue till it gets to its time while seeing others grabbing opportunities twice. And if the flow gets distorted again, the zone will keep waiting till ad infinitum. Perhaps, the zone ought to wait till the initial party wins back power. What if the question is reshuffled to read: must the initial party win back power with an individual from the zone so as to continue in the old zoning structure to ensure equity and justice? Knowing what value is number in the Nigerian polity, the party may go back to use a zone that has number influence but has utilized its own zoning time to lead the country. The possibility of such a situation is there knowing that strategically, using the remaining zone practically may make it impossible for the party to win the election. At this, it calls for necessity for the party to re-strategize so as to win back power.

From another angle, what if any attempt of using a zone makes it difficult for a party to keep losing in election knowing the value of number in Nigerian polity? What of a situation where a particular zone loses, will the zone be given another chance and support to win and lead its own tenure? What if it becomes impossible winning back the power with same zone? At this, the zone will be kept aside for another zone with numerical strength to win back. What could be deduced from these series of questions is that zones and precisely individuals are bound to embark of political parties' prostitution knowing that for Nigerians, after number, another available characteristic of politics is interest. The consciousness of the fact that all are not in the same political party, and so reduces the chances of a particular party to maintain a clear flow of zoning as it loses the numerical strength by which it can win power, should guide the Nigerian political awareness. When a political party loses, cross-carpeting, defection from the lost party to the ruling party becomes the order, and when this prevails, to maintain its initial zoning structure becomes highly difficult following the emanation of possible factors arising from the points enumerated here as they relate to zoning in the Nigerian polity.

It has been pointed out above that zoning system allows a zone to look inside to sieve out a capable candidate, bets among the better. Multiplicity of number of humans and human participation and of course, the political parties into which they would belong, characterizes democracy. Thus, it becomes a duty for every candidate to bring out the best. Among a people, political parties struggle for the best. The implication is that one who is better and is rejected for the best candidate is bound to become the best for another party to be taken as the best. And who is the best in a real sense of the term? What if the party considered best candidate does not wish to contest in the capacity or the time the party wants him/her to?

On a general evaluation, zoning system deters the core of democracy. It inheres the sense of disenfranchisement of zones and individuals of a country. It affects the reality and core practicality of democracy following its limitation of political power to a set of individual. By this, it has encouraged nationality domination over other nations that make up the country as a whole. It has reinvigorated the consciousness of ethnicity and invariably disunity among a people of a country as typalized in the Nigerian situation.

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