

## Rethinking Zoning Formula as Political Panacea for Ethnic Conflict and Governance Crisis in Nigeria

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### Abstract

As a nation of highly diverse ethnic and interest groups, Nigeria's march towards nationhood has been marked with conflict and dissention not particularly untypical of a plural society. To address this, various measures have been put in place to recognise the rights of individuals according to his/her regional/ethnic background with a view to ensuring that benefits percolates accordingly. This paper examines Nigeria's political history since pre-independence and the various mechanisms that have been used to instill peace in the country's political space. The paper reviews these instruments and their challenges within the framework ability to achieve the desired goal of peace and good governance and the subsequent adoption of the zoning formula for key positions as well as rotational presidency. Considering the records of stability of the political system in Nigeria, which the zoning formula and rotational presidency appeared to have engendered since 1999, the study found evidences of improved and strengthened ethnic relations, albeit politically. Consequently, such affirmative political strategy in which the interests of the various sections of the country are factored into the political space has become critical to enhanced ethnic relation in the Nigerian polity.

**Keywords:** Dissention; Conflict; Zoning; Governance crisis

### Introduction

Of the multifarious factors that appeared to have fostered uneasy calm on the Nigerian polity the question of ethnicity is undoubtedly prominent. Prominent also is the question of religion, which when considered within the methods and medium often utilised for its prosecution would pale behind ethnicity. In Nigeria, ethnicity and all its purveyors and manifestations are well defined and well defended. Such have been the cases since the colonial period, when the various political developments have been indexed on ethnic background of the leaders that were to later emerge, both in the various regions and the center. However, Nigeria is not a basket case. As Olaiya and Iroju (2013) pointed out, a striking similitude exists in the emergence of states in Africa where ethnicity is made manifest and national consciousness is largely lacking. They argued that in almost all the states of the continent, 'the endurance of the nation-state culture as an overarching political culture is closely tied to how ethnicity is produced, transformed and manipulated in response to different circumstances and situations' Olaiya and Iroju (2013:20. As various authors have also identified, ethnicity or ethno-regional fervor afflicts virtually all the modern states of Africa (Deng, 1997; Crowder, 1976). Yet, the native Africans that took over after independence also saw a good factor in ethnicity to attain power and entrench themselves therein. In *Interrogating regional loyalty and national interest: the questions of nationalism and governance in Nigeria (1952-1999)*, Olaiya and Iroju (2013) argued that the emerged Africans post-independent leaders accepted the states as constructed by colonial fathers as constituting their countries, yet never possessed the true spirit of nationhood. Rather than interrogate the states that emerged, as to their wellness and the compatibilities of the ethnic groups, the post independent leaders saw the opportunities to project the interest of their ethnic groups over the existing others.

Historically, Nigeria, Africa's most populous country came into being in 1914 when the two separate but adjacent British protectorates were amalgamated by Frederick Lugard, the British administrator. Generally agreed to have been inspired by the British and consisting of diverse peoples, there was and continues to be a doubtful feeling about her viability and long term survival as a single political entity. This cynical belief is coming against the background of the severe acrimony and upheavals between the diverse elements which have severely rocked the unity of the Nigerian federation; as for example, and most destructive, the civil war which raged intermittently from 1966-1970. These crises amongst other disagreements have caused the promulgation of six federal constitutions (1960, 1963, 1979, 1989, 1995, 1999), the abrupt departure from Westminster system of government into the presidential system, and a rather awkward drift, until fairly recently, between democracy and military authoritarianism (Suberu and Diamond 2002).

In the post-civil war era, rather than engage each other in the sort of adversarial behaviour that had precipitated the civil war in the first place, Nigerian ethnic elites, across board, resorted to power sharing mechanisms among the contending ethnic blocs. Power sharing mechanisms such as the quota system, which was already in existence before independence, were constitutionally solidified in 1979 constitution (Bach, 2004).

The colonial experience of many states created in them a new form of identity, perhaps with the intention to undermine their primordial ethnic identity. Hence, the 'nationalists' identified themselves as Nigerians rather than Yoruba, Hausa or Ibo; Gold Coast rather than Akan, Ewe or Guan; Senegalese rather than Wolof; Ivorians rather than Baoules (Crowder, 1968:405-407)

### **Paramount Issues in Systematic Paradigm**

#### ***The quota system and Nigerian politics***

The history of politics in Nigeria can be summed up in a single phrase- ethnic struggle- and the quota system was a by-product of this struggle. The quota for A.E Afigbo (1989) has been with the country, in various hues and shades since 1898 when the British decided on the administrative amalgamation of the entity later called Nigeria, practiced albeit on a less intense scale. On his part Ekeh (1989) has isolated three epochs in Nigerian history. The historical imperative which was marked by North-South rivalry, the political imperative which encompasses the evolution of Nigerian federalism, which was dis-aggregative in nature and which Ekeh notes has made the federation more oriented towards resource distribution rather than its generation. The sociological imperative refers to the various ethnic communities which bestride the Nigerian federation. Analyses of the three imperatives, for him, form the basis of the federal character principle. Added to the structural imperatives has been the belief that the federal character was orchestrated by the North due to its growing inadequacy in relation to the South. Fully aware earlier, that it could not compete with the South on normal terms the North had sought involvement in government and its paraphernalia based on quota.

#### ***The quota system as a fore-runner to the federal character principle***

With the rapid approach of independence and the imminent departure of its protector and friend, the British, a bewildered North at the 1950 Ibadan constitutional conference, demanded and received quota allocation in military recruitment and the central legislature (Agbaje, 1998; Orji, 2008; Olusanya, 2004:531). A quota is a system that requires that a specified proportional share of some benefit go to a favored but socially disadvantaged group. 'Quotas limit advancement for some individuals and ensure advancement for others. They alter the results by taking into account factors unrelated to ability' (Janda et al, 2008: 494). The main emphasis of *the quota* is to allow the disadvantaged areas to catch up with the more progressive areas in employment and education. Unlike the federal character which presents privileges and benefits, the quota system presents opportunities (Ekeh, 1989). Defending the use of quota system in America, which is there termed Affirmative Action, President Lincoln had noted that:

You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race, and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus, it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity; all our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates (Janda et al, 2008: 494).

At the Ibadan Constitutional Conference of 1950, the Emir of Zaria seconded by the Emir of Katsina raised the issue of equal representation for the North in the forthcoming central legislature or in the alternative the secession of the North (Osuntokun, 1979: 101). The system adopted in 1950 called for army vacancies to be divided in the proportion 50%, 25% and 25% to the North, East and West respectively, although in 1963, 4% was deducted from the share of the West for the newly created Mid-West region, a formula which subsisted until the 1966 coup (Adekanye, 1989). The quota has not always been popular with the South but it was helpless in the face of overwhelming Northern political strength and determination to curb the growing influence of the South. The key underlying reason behind the adoption of the quota system had been to prevent political hegemony by the South. Speaking at a senate debate on May 1, 1965 minister of state for army affairs, Tanko Galadima gave expression to the philosophy behind the quota:

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: 237).

Several years later this philosophy was also used to rationalize the quota system when it made its appearance officially under the guise of the Federal Character.

#### ***Origin of the federal character***

In the aftermath of the internecine civil warfare, the principle of the federal character was inserted into the constitution in order to mitigate the perennial tension over ethnic domination and hegemony. In another wise, it may be rightly viewed as a power sharing system 'conceived to unify all the different quota arrangements in Nigeria' which had existed both in pre and post independent Nigeria (Orji, 2008: 164). Thus it became 'the

formal successor to the informal quota system which was applied in the composition of federal concerns from the late fifties right up till the mid-seventies' (Osaghae, 1988). In a third sense, the federal character principle may be seen as the logical culmination of the British intent for her colony (Ayoade, 1998).

There is no general agreement among scholars on how the phrase 'Federal Character' was derived. Afigbo (1989) tells us the term originated from the deliberations of the constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated by late General Murtala Muhammed on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1975. Differing from their academic comrade, Ekeh (1989) and Nnoli (1995) note instead that the phrase was first used by the late head of state, General Murtala Muhammed, in his inaugural address to the committee on 18<sup>th</sup> in October 1975 in which he warned the distinguished members to make sure that 'the choice of members of the cabinet should also be such as would reflect the *federal character* of the country' (emphasis not in the original) (Ekeh 1989).

For Ekeh, two points are decipherable from the head of state's use of the phrase; One, the states were to be the operative units in any political arrangement and two, federal character was to be used in reference to the executive branch of government alone. The CDC, however, wittingly or unwittingly, altered the connotation of the term on both terms. The CDC broadened federal character considerably to encompass every diversity imaginable even down to local government administration within the same ethnic group. This gaping lack of a rule of engagement had caused the CDC to assume, within the context of the head of state's address, power distribution and maximum participation by all interests in national institutions (Adebisi, 1989).

It was this *Carte Blanche* that had also primarily accounted for the balkanization of the CDC into contending groups on the issue of representation (Ayoade, 1998) - the 'ostrich posturers' and the 'brutal realists or pessimists'- the one against the reification of ethnic balancing and its fossilization in the constitution, the other resolutely in favor of having constitutional assurances as a safe guard against ethnic domination. Thus the federal character principle was finally defined as:

the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national belonging and giving every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FDR Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, 1976: ix).

In section 14(3) which outlines the fundamentals objectives and directive and principles of state, domination of government by a section of the country was outlawed. In several other sections attempts were made by the CDC to operationalise the term (section 135(3) (section 157)(sections 197-199)(section 203(b). (Third Schedule, Part 1). Thus the full constitutional entrenchment of the federal character has allowed the North, even with its paucity of manpower, to attain some level parity with the South in the bureaucracy and other government establishments.

### ***The quota system, federal character principle and northern Nigeria***

As the data in the table below shows, the North lagged behind in the establishment and enrolment into schools beginning from the pre-independence era but this failure was almost wholly abetted by colonial policies which restricted missionary educational enterprise in the North (Albert, 1998), in order to pacify the Emirs and the Ulama.

**Figure 2** The Regional Imbalance in Education

Year	Southern Nigeria Pop. 13.2 Million (1952 Census)				Northern Nigeria Pop. 16.8 Million (1952 Census)			
	No. of Schools		Pupils in Attendance		No. of Schools		Pupils in Attendance	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
1906	126	1	11,872	20	1	0	A	O
1912	150	10	35,716	67	34	0	954	O
1926	3,828	18	138,249	518	125	0	5,210	O
1937	3,533	26	218,610	4,285	539	1	20,269	65
1947	4,984	43	538,391	9,657	1,110	3	70,962	251
1957	13,473	176	2,343,317	28,208	2,080	18	185,484	3,643
1965				180,907		77		15,276

Source: Coleman 1958:134

This educational anomaly has persisted right into independence. In the 1969/70 academic session 19% of students in Nigerian universities were from the North while the West alone had 48% (New Nigerian, 2 February 1974).

**Figure 3** Admission into Nigerian Universities by Region, 2000/2001 Session

Region	No of Candidates Admitted	% of Total Admission
<b>Northern Region</b>	<b>9,917</b>	<b>19.7</b>
North	4,320	8.6
Middle Belt	5,597	11.1
<b>Southern Region</b>	<b>40,317</b>	<b>80.1</b>
Yoruba	8,763	17.4
Igbo	19,820	39.4
Niger Delta	11,734	23.3

Source: Mustapha (2004:12)

As observed in the foregoing, the major reason for the educational backwardness of the North was the colonial dualist policy of allowing Christian missionaries free rein in the South while barring them in the North under the guise of shielding the Islamic North from the ravages of modernization and the influence of the ‘decadent South’ (Kastfelt, 1994, Abubakar, 1998, Mustapha, 2004).

This deprivation had a cataclysmic effect on the ability of the North to produce skilled manpower for the public service. By the mid-1960s, for example the North could only boast of 7%, 4%, and 3% of the engineers, doctors and accountants in Nigeria respectively (Osemwota, 1994: 86).

**Figure 4** Spread of the Ethnic groups in the Public Service

Region	No. of Staff	% of Total Staff
<b>Northern Region</b>	<b>70,966</b>	<b>37.7</b>
North	35,977	19.1
Middle Belt	34,989	18.6
<b>Southern Region</b>	<b>116,992</b>	<b>62.2</b>
Yoruba	47,349	25.2
Igbo	30,490	16.2
Niger Delta	39,153	20.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>187, 958</b>	<b>99.9</b>

Source: Federal Character Commission 2000:2

This glaring superiority of the South has been behind the Northern agitation to check it politically and thus preserve itself from eternal political and economic subservience. In this regard, everything had been thrown into the struggle. Northern media organizations have been in the forefront of the struggle to ensure the implementation of the federal character principle (Agbaje, 1989). Muhammed Haruna, Managing Director of the New Nigerian Newspapers declared in 1985 that it [New Nigerian] ‘would continue to fight for the introduction of Sharia, the application of quota system or federal character in all spheres of national life’ (Kukah, 1993: 78). The North had also argued, through Tafawa Balewa, that the Southern elite must be committed to making collective, and if necessary personal sacrifices (Mustapha, 1986: 89). This viewpoint had ensured that even though the federal character principle has now lost salience as a tool of equity among the ethnic groups, and is presently riddled with contradictions it will long remain part of Nigeria’s constitution.

#### ***Federal character in practice; issues arising***

For its supporters and friends, the federal character principle has led to an equitable distribution of offices among the ethnic groups. Gboyega (1989) notes that, its adoption had led to a perceptible increase in the representation of minorities in the federal cabinet and a better spread of cabinet positions among the ethno-regional groups. This is essentially the philosophy behind the principle; the entrenchment of a widely acceptable mechanism for ensuring ethnic equity (Ekeh; Yolo; Gboyega; 1989). Another argument in favor of the federal character is its inherent ability to serve as an efficient conduit for the accumulation of legitimate prebends, which refers to the willful and deliberate acquisition of public goods through the occupation of state office.

Nigeria has come a long way in establishing the notion that public office attracts special privileges that are of significance not just to the individual alone but also to the group he or she purportedly represents.

When this is contravened it often leads to allegations of political domination (Utume, 1998: 204).

Unfortunately, despite its lofty ideals it quickly became apparent that in practice, beginning from the Second Republic, the principle had fallen far short of expectations. Uroh (1998: 197) tensely notes that after all was said and done, ‘when one weights the principle and practice of federal character on the scale of social justice and fair play one finds it weighting so low’. It has been suggested that the popular outcry that has trailed the federal character principle since inception is because significant sections of the country were dissatisfied and dubious about its ability to ensure fair and equal participation in politics (Onyeoziri, 1998). It is instructive to note that

within the first few years of its operation strident calls were already abroad, especially from the Southern part of the country, for the adoption of a confederal system of government (Osaghare, 1991; Suberu, 1988: 432; Onyeoziri, 1989). A confederal system of government is one in which the units were far more powerful than the centre, controlling every sphere of policy save for foreign affairs and the military. In making this call for a confederal system in 1983, Governor Onabanjo of Ogun State in South-West Nigeriapungently captured the political despondency that was rapidly engulfing the beleaguered South:

It is a sad fact of our national life today that favoritism and preferential treatment for selected groups have become institutionalized through the quota system and the brazen abuse of the policy of reflecting the federal character (Suberu, 1988:432).

From 1984 onwards it was perceptible to acute Southern observers that the North was beginning to dominate the government using the federal character as its hand maiden (Osaghare, 1989; Suberu and Diamond, 1988). This willful manipulation of the principle, although apparent in the fallen civilian administration (1979-83), gained momentum under the Buhari regime (1984-85) as:

Thirteen of the nineteen members of the ruling Supreme Military Council (SMC) [were] Northern Muslims, most of whose families are closely related to powerful local emirs. (Ekwe-Ekwe,1985: 625).

Became a source of distress to the South during the Babangida regime (Osaghare, 1991 fn:44) and climaxed with the Abacha regime with all the major offices in government being held by Northerners (Tell, 1998). Thus by the late 1980s it was clear to all but it's most fanatical supporter that the federal character principle was faltering badly. The only group, if there were any at all, who could claim any victory, apart from the now politically ascendant North, were the minorities who had made some significant incursions into the federal cabinet (Osaghare, 1991). However, even at that, whatever victory the minorities claimed was pyrrhic. In this regard the principle threw up another fundamental flaw. In what amounted to political naivety according to Oyeoziri (1989: 414) it expected that the mere 'participation of all communities in decision making is an effective anti-dote to domination'. But the example of the minority oil producing areas made it clear that it is not. Although, they were visibly seen to be participating actively in all governments since the adoption of federal character yet resource derivation as a mode of revenue distribution was downgraded, oil assigned to the federal government and their eco-system shattered. For Oyeoziri, formal participation is only a poor copy for effective or substantive power.

The intentions of the military regime in 1975 may have being for the application of the principle to the executive arm alone but the CDC in its own wisdom expanded it to include every sphere of endeavor in the public realm (Ekeh, 1989; Ayoade, 1998). In the Second Republic heralded by the cry of federal character, local governments were fragmented and exclusiveness created even within even the same ethnic group. Although they were later reconstituted by the military, the deed had been done and the feelings they had spawned 'lived on in the predispositions and behavior of citizens' (Gboyega, 1989: 406). Thus in willfully atomizing the Nigerian society the principle weakened solidarity among the disparate peoples in Nigeria (Gboyega, 1989).

By the late 1980s, subjected to double jeopardy by reason of their going political sterility and under pressure from the ravages of the federal character principle (Ayoade, 1998), the politically besieged ethnic groups in Southern Nigeria counter-attacked using the 1994 National Constitutional Conference (NCC) as a veritable vehicle. The reign of the federal character principle as the premium tool for ethnic balancing in the country was now almost at its end. Thus, when the 'redemptive' Abacha Junta called the NCC to seek a palliative to the misguided action of its predecessor, the aggrieved Southern elite as one demanded the entrenchment of zoning and rotational presidency into the constitution.

### **A cursory examination of literature on zoning system**

The advert of orthodox democracy in Africa, whose societies are principally pluralistic in nature, has been shadowed by an increase in internecine wars and insurrections (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008: 233). This has been largely attributed to the vicious multi-ethnic or pluralistic dissensus over the political inheritance of the state. A pluralistic society is one that is sharply divided along religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or racial lines into virtually separate sub-societies with their own political parties, interest groups and media of communication. Usually such societies are polarized by ethnic differences and require careful power distribution and social engineering to avoid outright failure (Lijphart, 2008: 67, 75). To deal decisively with this new international malaise, scholars have long advocated overt political engineering as a way of mitigating conflict and enhancing democracy in such deeply divided societies or post conflict countries (Sartori, 1968: 273).

### **Consociation as a mode of ethnic accommodation**

Derived from the Latin term *Consociatio*-meaning to associate in an alliance- the term "consociational" is derived from Johannes Althusius's concept of consociation in his *Political Methodice Digesta*-1603-(Lijphart, 1977: fn 2). David Apter was the first modern writer to use the term 'consociational' in his work *The Political*

*Kingdom in Uganda: A Study in Bureaucratic Nationalism* (1961). The rationale behind the consociational approach is to mitigate the blatant inequity inherent in orthodox western liberal democratic thought (Lijphart, 1984). Lijphart is the dominant writer in this genre of political science beginning with his major work *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (1968) which was expanded in later works (1969, 1977, 1985, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2002, 2008). The major thrust of his thesis is the belief that ethnicity must be officially incorporated into the political system of multi-ethnic states. In 1977, in his work *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Lijphart expanded the applicability of consociational democracy, which he had started in 1968. He defined his model in terms of four characteristics: the grand coalition, segmental autonomy, proportionality and minority veto, but the Segmental Autonomy and the Grand Coalition for him are the most 'crucial' of all (Lijphart, 2008: 4).

A Grand coalition is a political arrangement in which all the political leaders of all the significant segments in a plural society cooperate in its leadership. In its prototypical form the grand coalition is represented by a collegial system, i.e. the Swiss seven member executive body or by approximation the parliamentary system. However because of the immense influence of one person under presidentialism, Lijphart has suggested the use of the diachronic grand coalition (Lijphart, 1977: 33). The diachronic grand coalition refers to concepts such as rotary leadership in which the headship is alternated among the contending groups. It is under the grand coalition that power rotation and zoning can be situated.

### **Zoning in Nigeria: An Exposition of Differing View Points**

Zoning, from Nigerian political perspective refers to the aggregation of the country's states and ethnic groups into smaller numbers of political blocs on the basis of which powerful political positions of state may be allocated on rotational basis (Suberu, 1988: 433, Akinola, 1988: 441). Consociation according to political scholars appears to be indigenous to the African traditional political environment. In traditional Africa, as Rupert Emerson succinctly observes, "the inclination is generally toward extensive and unhurried deliberation aimed at ultimate consensus. The gradual discovery of areas of agreement is the significant feature and not the ability to come to a speedy resolution of issues by counting heads" (Lijphart, 1977: 162). In the same vein, Lewis has pointed out the variance between West African societies and British pluralist system: "The tribe has made its decision by discussion, in much the way that coalitions function; this kind of democratic procedure is at the heart of the original institutions of the people" (Lijphart, 1977: 167).

Thus in Nigeria also, as observed by these two erudite scholars, the practise of zoning has long been a key feature of many of the country's traditional society's political life. Zoning is widely used in Yoruba land to select traditional rulers. Both the kingmakers and the entire citizenry participate in determining who should be selected from among the competing candidates (Akinola, 1988: 445, fn.19). In Tiv land, in North-Central Nigeria, recurrent tensions among various subunits of the society led to the evolution of a system in which chieftainship rotate among the subunits based on the principle of 'eat and give to your brother'- in this way a balance is kept among the subunits of the Tiv society and agreement is easily reached on how to share political benefits among them (Orji, 2008: 167, fn.118; Anifowose, 1982).

Zoning possess two main characteristics which are: rotation of political offices which is often used interchangeably with the principle itself and 'power shift' which stemmed from Southern disenchantment and frustration with the untoward political ascendancy of the North in the mid-nineties. According to Ibrahim (1999), the term 'power shift' had been coined by Alex Ekwueme, Vice President during the Second Republic, 'to embody an alternative to the concepts of zoning and rotation that had dominated the National Constitutional Conference of 1994-1995' and was largely distasteful to the North. Altogether, for Akinola (1996) the principle is hinged on alternating major political offices including the presidency among the ethnic groups from one election to the other. In his seminal work on zoning, *The Search for a Nigerian Political System* (1986), Akinola has isolated a number of advantages derivable from zoning, among which is its ability to serve as an avenue for equitable distribution of power in Nigeria. Firstly, for him the issue over the time taken to rotate the offices could be resolved by a reduction in the duration of tenure, 'such that the period of waiting is not long' for the office to go round (Akinola, 1986: 30). However its most important advantage, for him, was that zoning reduces the salience of ethnicity in elections because only individuals from a given group can hope to contest the elections at any given time. Some cases in point are the 1999 and 2007 elections that were contested largely by two Yorubas and three Northerners respectively and consequently were much less ethnic polarising than the 2011 election, which was contested between a Southern Christian and a Northern Muslim. In fact, the run up to the 2011 election engendered so much tension and ethnic animosity that the election itself ended up polarizing the country along its traditional ethno-religious fault line (see Punch, April 9 2011). Indeed, it was an electoral re-enactment of the famous North/South dichotomy or what has being labelled most appropriately as the 'census type election' (Horowitz, 1991: 97-98).

But under the zoning regime as Akinola has pointed out above, and herein lies the beauty of the concept for its supporters, such a scenario will be far-fetched because only candidates from the same area or ethnic stock are

presented for elections. For him, when the primordial voter is faced with contestants who are not from his place he would have no alternative but to 'pocket' his tribalism if his 'townsman' is not running in the election. Furthermore he observed that voters are likely to pay more attention to the personal attributes of the candidate rather than his/her ethnicity when all the candidates are from the same ethnic stock. This 'engagement' of ethnicity will then by degrees inspire truly national political parties and may even in the process serve as an effective anti-coup device because citizens would feel obligated to defend a political system that constitutionally guaranteed leadership change.

In a revealing study carried out by Obiyan (1998) across the three major ethnic groups of Ibo, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and the minorities, 79.31 percent of the respondents surveyed agreed that the presence of their ethnic representatives in government inspired emotional feelings for, and attachment to the country. 77.80 percent said they would feel estranged and neglected if the system denied their groups opportunity of attaining the presidency. More revealing, to this immediate question the minorities were largely indifferent. A state of resignation no doubt brought on by their long years of political exclusion and economic exploitation up to fairly recently. Finally, 77.69 percent of the total respondents remarked that power rotation and zoning promoted a sense of national belonging in the citizenry. This grassroots support for zoning has therefore greatly emboldened its advocates.

Zoning is a well thought-out philosophy for national stability and integration and the only guarantee that every segment of Nigeria enjoys a sense of belonging by being represented in all the decision making organs of the government of Nigeria (Except of a PDP statement, Punch June 8, 2011).

Thus Matthew Hassan Kukah, a catholic priest, mediator and political analyst has noted that Nigeria as a complex society, with big and small ethnic units is in dire need of a mechanism 'that creates some kind' of emotional attachment to the state and promotes this sense of belonging. More critically, he notes the symbolic and prebendal attribute and tendency of political offices and the economy in Nigeria respectively, which inspires fierce struggle for resources (interview with Father Kukah in African Confidential.com, February 9, 2010). He has also noted that politics in Nigeria possesses a prebendal bent which, however, given the country's Socio-political reality may be an unavoidable social behaviour. David Utume (1998) has concluded that in Nigeria indeed 'there can be legitimate prebends accruing from public office'. These prebends or dividends of public office, and even the mere office itself (that is the symbolic function), even in the face of the dearth of the expected facilities, provides a feeling of belonging and security to the ethnic group that it is not an inconsequential unit of the federation. The term 'prebendalism' was coined by Richard Joseph to explain this political dynamic in Africa. For him prebendalism as a system of governance is one:

in which the offices of state are allocated and then exploited as benefices by the shareholders, but also as one where such a practise is legitimated by a set of political norms according to which the appropriation of such offices is not just an act of individual greed or ambition but concurrently the satisfaction of the short term objectives of the subset of the general population (Joseph, 1991:67)

In this regard one cannot help but note the 'heavy projects' that have found their way into Bayelsa since the onset of the Jonathan administration such as the University, the Air Force base etc. It has also been observed that the enormous powers of the state over economic resources, in essence what the people want, and its disproportionate influence in the distribution of these facilities have made the state a target to be captured at any cost:

The reason why identity matters in African politics is because schools, hospitals, roads need to be built, people need to make state money, employment needs to be provided. Sadly, because we are still unable to design the architecture that can create a sense of belonging and a sense of wholeness, is why every public official is like a big chief; his responsibility is to his community... although this is not ideal that is a reality we have to live with (Father Matthew, interview with Africa Confidential).

Thus in Nigeria because:

The government is the only substantial employer and the output of school leavers continually outstrips the number of new jobs available. This makes politics ruthless, office a livelihood not only for a politician but for his extended family and beyond that, his village, town and tribe (Luckham, 1971: 109-10).

Despite the so called advantages as enumerated by zoning proponents and supporters, a strong and virile and robust opposition has arisen in their wake. Some scholars, with good reason, have denied that zoning predisposes the ethnic groups to any legitimate prebends. In fact, Dauda Abubakar out-rightly dismissed zoning's utilization of prebendalism as the harbinger of the debilitating patronage politics which had characterized the body polity in the Second Republic- and ultimately helped in destroying it. The zoning principle adopted by the NPN government had allowed it to appoint 'trusted prebends' to office who then proceeded to manipulate such offices for selfish ends (Abubakar, 1998). Corroborating this view point Richard Joseph, the originator of the concept of 'prebendalism', commented that:

the demise of the Second Republic can be explained not so much on the basis of the imperfections in its written constitution or institutional structure but rather on its inability to survive the machinations of those empowered by the elections to act and speak in its name (Joseph 1991:129).

Due to the fact that zoning institutionalizes and reifies the ethnic differences in the country the reactions, over the years, of successive governments to it has understandably and decidedly been hostile towards it. In 1987 the Political Bureau rejected it out-rightly because apart from being a fetid reminder of the country's ethnic quagmire and sullied inter-ethnic relations in the past, it connoted an 'acceptance of our inability to grow beyond ethnic or state loyalty' (Government's views on Bureau's report 1987: 23). Furthermore, there are strident and continuous admonitions, which many a government have hearkened to, from scholars that 'power rotation polarizes ethnic groups and therefore dislocates stability' (Barry, 1975: 503).

The North on its part, with good reasons, has always felt the zoning principle as anti-North, anti-democratic and an attempt to constitutionally derive the North of its only balance, in the face of overwhelming Southern preponderance in education and the economy, against Southern domination (see interview with Mahdi Adamu: New Nigerian Newspapers (Kaduna) January 26, 1987; Suberu, 1993: 44). The level of disdain by the North of the zoning principle almost derailed the 1995 Constitutional Conference as the Committee on Power Sharing polarized into two with Southern delegates voting in favour of the principle and Northern delegates generally against it (Agbaje, 1998: 124). A Northern delegate to the 1995 conference, Hassan Kpaki had objected to zoning and power rotation on the basis that to entrench zoning and thus by implication re-regionalize the country 'will amount to starting an exercise of introducing, once more, a unitary system and the fears of the minority would be rekindled' after all the abolition of the regions was meant to protect the minorities in the first place (C.C Debates, October 31, 1994).

For some writers, their criticism of zoning stems from their perception that the principle may disharmonize both intra and interstate relations. Since none of the states is completely homogenous, the possibility exists that zoning may lead to conflict among states over which state is to produce the candidates (Tekena, 1998: 21). This fear was highlighted by Olugbade (1992: 320) who noted the possibility of zoning introducing further 'structural and logistics problems' into Nigeria's troubled federation. While for others, rather than seeking to restructure the country through alternative power sharing such as zoning, they have suggested that the perennially oppressed people of Nigeria be economically and politically empowered so that they can become the real 'agents and essence of development' (Abubakar, 1998: 173).

Bonaventure Haruna in a thought provoking paper '*A preliminary Assessment of Rotational Power Sharing in Nigeria: Implications for Democracy and National Integration (1997)*', noted that the real problematic confronting Nigeria is not the president's place of origin but whether good governance has been delivered. For him, even though the agitation for zoning had come to the political fore in the light of a perceived political domination by the North, yet the vast majority of the North itself, for all its years in power, 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); 'go to the villages in the Northern part of the country, come to the cities, you will see what is called underdevelopment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. People cannot eat, cannot drink, cannot go to school' (Tell, Feb 4 2002 p.34 'interview with Shehu Sani democratic activist and campaigner'). Sani further averred that 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. 'If you look at it clearly, you will see that they are mostly concerned about power sharing, power shift, about issues that are of no relevance to the masses' (Tell, Feb 4, 2002 P.33).

For Haruna, the ethnic struggle in Nigeria together with all forms of power sharing like zoning is a smokescreen for the raging inter-class conflict for the control of the power lever of the state for the sake of her resources. Those clamouring for zoning and power rotation have only fallen out with the establishment and therefore have not been co-opted to witness in the 'primitive accumulation' associated with governance in this part of the world.

Other scholars have strongly suggested that consociationalism opens the door to ‘elite initiated conflict’ as politically besieged elites in a bid to maintain their positions at the grand coalitions and retain political relevance or improve their bargaining positions simply opt to foment crises in the polity (Tsebelis 1990). For Steven Burg consociationalism is the ‘ultimate form of elite manipulation and control’(Sisk 2001:6). This argument can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the tragic story of Nigeria’s First Republic. It was the elites who had seized upon their electoral losses to incite their followers against other ethnic groups in the processfully utilising the institutions afforded them by consociation in wilfully leading the country into a civil war. Thus consociationalism as a model of power sharing is of greater benefit to the elites than the masses.

Furthermore rather than the presidency being seen as the focal point of the country’s unity as intended by its founding fathers, under zoning the incumbent’s national image is not only tainted (Suberu, 1988), the presidency itself will be widely perceived as an avenue for rapid and primitive ethnic gratification, more so as Nigeria’s so called acclaimed election distribution formula has so far failed to ‘nationalise’ the presidency in the eyes of Nigerians. Shehu Shagari and indeed all successive presidents never did pass the test of ‘ethno-regional’ neutrality (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 413). Following this view, Ihonvbere has suggested that zoning fossilizes ethnic differences and opens the country up to continuous sectional economic plunder (Ihonvbere, 1996). The above scenario was enacted recently when the National Chairman of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Bisi Akande, called on the Southern minorities who have long agitated for resource control, to seize the opportunity presented by their son’s occupation of the presidency to further their cause (Resource Control) or ‘forever keep silent’ (Guardian, 2011, May 13).

For social and political critics like Patrick Wilmot a renown sociologist, political commentator and scholar, zoning and its acolytes are unusually geared toward the attainment of power to the detriment of all else. His view on zoning and other means of power sharing, perhaps, neatly captures the reservations and the minds of all zoning opponents:

the advocates of...North, South, East and West as loci for the presidency...have not explained what they plan to do for the Nigerian people if elected. They have been deafening on the need for power to be handed to them but silent on what it is to be used for. There have been no programs, no analysis of problems, no suggestions of solutions. Instead pot-bellied civilian and military politicians who have failed woefully in the past demand the right to fail even more woefully in the future (Wilmot, 2007: 95).

### **The advent of zoning into the political process**

With the evident failure of the quota system, federal character and state creation to stem ethnic rivalry in Nigeria the zoning formula had rapidly taken front seat. Its journey in Nigerian politics had begun in 1979 when a sub-committee of the CDC suggested that zoning should be codified. This proposition was rejected by the intellectual bloc within the committee which argued that the constitution should only emphasize ‘those ideas and values which render the area or ethnic origin of a person irrelevant in determining his quality as an individual’ (Panter-Brick, 1978: 314). Though snubbed by the military government, however, it was accepted as a convention by the National Party of Nigeria, thus by deploying the zoning principle, though informal and unconstitutional, the NPN was ‘the only party to achieve a truly *national character* in the second Republic’ (Suberu, 1993: 47), and it also became a ‘crucial factor in the electoral success of the NPN in the Second Republic’ (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 420). Similarly;

The two parties of the unfulfilled third Republic adopted even more elaborate zoning procedures. In the SDP, the presidential candidacy went to the southwest, the vice-president to the north-east, the national chairmanship of the party and the deputy senate president to the south-south, the senate presidency and the post of party publicity secretary to the north-central zone, the offices of the speaker of the House of Representatives and party treasure to the south-east and the posts of party secretary and deputy-speaker of the House of Representatives to the north-west. The rival NRC, for its part, zoned its presidential nomination to the far north, the vice-presidential candidacy to the former eastern region, the party chairmanship to the old western region and the post of party secretary to the north-central zone (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 421).

Like the NPN in 1979, the PDP emerged as a national party in 1999 committed to power sharing and the willingness to accommodate various ethno-regional elite groups (Orji, 2008: 198). Despite the inexplicable abrogation of the zoning principle from the constitution on the eve of the transition, it staged an informal powerful resurgence:

Rotational zoning resurfaced as an autonomous convention of party politics, rather than an explicit principle of constitutional stipulation with the emergence of the PDP, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) because of the demand for power shift...all three parties zoned their presidential nomination and party chairmanship to the south and north respectively (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 422).

Because of the national feeling that the South-West had taken the brunt of the military's vexations, the two candidates for president in the February 1999 election were both Yorubas from the South-West, Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP and Olu Falae of the ANPP/AD alliance, who paired with vice-presidential candidates Abubakar Atiku (North-East) and Umaru Shinkafi (North-West) respectively. The return to democracy in 1999 or the advent of the Fourth Republic more or less took the country back to the Second Republic era.

### **The Practice of Zoning since the Advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999**

Like the NPN in 1979, the PDP emerged as a national party in 1999 committed to power sharing and the willingness to accommodate various ethno-regional elite groups 'in contrast, the opposition, particularly the AD and ANPP, offered different packages from the ruling PDP's catch-all package' (Orji, 2008: 198). The national and clientelistic appeal of the PDP caused the failure of the ethno-regional appeals of the two other competing parties (Irukwu, 2007:231). It zoned the senate presidency to the South-East, the post of Speaker of House of Representatives to the North-West, the Deputy Senate Presidency to the North-East and the posts of Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and Secretary to the government to the South-South.

However by the turn of the Obasanjo first term, the North began making subtle noises about wanting power back due to what it termed ethnic 'marginalization' but the majority feeling among the Northern elite was that for 'power shift to be truly meaningful, it must accommodate second term in order to strengthen national unity' (Tell, April 22 2002 p.31). Eventually the PDP zoned the presidency to the South, and the primary became a straight fight between two Southerners Obasanjo and Ekwueme with two Northern 'outsiders' (Tell, Jan. 13 2003 p.17). With the Northern elite largely keeping faith with him, Obasanjo handily won re-election and the PDP retained its old zoning formula. Thus, with the informal institutionalization of the zoning formula within the political parties, a country that has never been able to manage a transition from one civilian administration to another civilian administration due to severe ethnic conflict, was finally able to do so at last. In 2005, attempts to constitutionalize the zoning principle crumbled after it appeared it was being used to stage manage the 'third term agenda' of the President (The Guardian, 23 May 2005: 1-2). That notwithstanding the formula still persisted and the parties honorably maintained their earlier concordant.

In the run up to the 2007 elections, there was little or no rancor about which zone was to produce the president, the earlier gesture of the North towards power shift was sportily reciprocated by the South and all the major political parties dutifully fielded Northerners; the PDP was represented by Umaru Musa Yar'adua while the AC was represented by the erstwhile V.P Atiku Abubakar and Muhammadu Buhari represented the ANPP (Orji, 2008: 179).

We are now at that stage when the caprices of nature would interlude and disturb an otherwise tidy political arrangement. The illness suffered by the late president Umaru Yar'adua, mid-way into his administration on November 2009 put the zoning convention into dock of not only local but international scrutiny. The entire country almost grinded to a standstill economically and politically as the elites of the various ethnic groups split into the famous North/South dichotomy, differed vigorously over the right of succession of his Southern deputy to the presidency (The News, May 17; Nov. 15 2010).

Even before Jonathan declared his candidature for the presidency in the 2011 general polls, which had originally been zoned to the North, the North almost over-reached itself in offering up eloquent arguments why his candidacy was damned and an anathema because of its conflict with the 'gentleman's agreement' reached in 1999. However, for Adamu Ciroma, former minister and Central Bank governor, zoning was beyond 'a gentlemanly agreement as its spirit was captured in Article 6 Section 2(3) of the PDP constitution'.

There was a meeting of the National caucus of the PDP in 2002 where it was decided that zoning should continue. Till today, the national caucus of the party has not met to review the decision on zoning of public offices within the party. Even if they have met, nobody can change the decision because it is in the party's constitution (The News, Sept. 20 2010 p. 22).

An editorial in Tell, a Lagos based magazine, aptly captured the mood of dissenters in the South:

As rights go, Mr. Jonathan may well be eminently qualified to run for election as president...though we are no sharers of the policy of his party to zone elective positions in order to appease political blocs, we believe

that it is all the same honourable to respect the creed of an organisation on which platform he got to office (Tell, May 10 2010 p. 19).

Thus as a deluge of objections poured forth from across the country, Jonathan's home region of the South-South rallied to his defence and began to conduct a valiant rear guard battle on his behalf. Edwin Clark, former information minister and a foremost Ijaw nationalist urged Jonathan to contest as God had decided 'that these people who produce the wealth of this country have not been fairly treated' and will now give them the presidency (The News, Sept. 20 2010 p. 22). Thus ably backed by his ethnic base and abetted, albeit surreptitiously, by his party, Jonathan turned away from these requests to contain his ambition and abstain and contested the elections; his eventual election victory saw the North roil angrily for several days (The News, May 02 2011).

Nevertheless, faced with this quagmire but remembering that, 'in conducting informal ethno-political exchanges, Nigerian political elites have derived enormous inspiration and encouragement from the formal power-sharing institutions' (Orji, 2009:26). The ruling party skilfully reconfigured the power sharing format with the South-South and the North-West holding the president and the Vice-President's positions respectively. The position of the Senate President was zoned to the North-Central; the Speaker of the House to the South-West; the Deputy Senate President and the post of Secretary to the Federal Government to the South-East; the North-East got the Deputy Speaker and the PDP Chairmanship (Tell, June 20 2011).

### **Discussion of Data Collected**

The senate is made up of 109 members; the House of Representatives 360 members. The sampling instrument (questionnaire) was randomly distributed to 150 respondents. From the empirical study of the national assembly it was found that a majority of the members were overwhelmingly in favour of the entrenchment of the zoning of important national offices into the constitution. This was on the grounds, however, as suggested by 71.7% of the members that the extant mode of power sharing had all but lost salience with the political elite. In addition to this 73.7% of the legislators submitted that without the zoning principle the likelihood of the government apparatus being manipulated to the desires of an ethnic group was present. Thus, in conclusion, 85.1% of the legislators were of the view that given the ignoble role ethnic contentions had caused the country's democracy in the past, zoning principle had the wherewithal to lay it all to rest- once and forever.

### **Final Observations and Conclusion**

With the approach of the 2015 general elections the Nigerian political field is currently awash with all manner of subtle intrigue and even violence as we have seen for instance in the River's State political crises. The seemingly intractable question of which political zone succeeds to the presidency- Should the South-South have a full 8 years? Should the North be the rightful inheritors in 2015 given that their man (Yar'Adua) did not even manage a full term? Should the South-East make a strong bid in 2015? - must not be allowed to cast the zoning system in evil colours. Rather than 2015 becoming the waterloo of zoning nay Nigeria let 2015 become its watershed; thus in 2015 the political elite will be well advised to let anyone from the entire geo-political zones of the country contest and contend one with the other and from whoever wins let Nigeria begin the rotation albeit zoning of political offices anew. By this we mean that if Jonathan of the South-South wins that means in 2019 the Igbos of the South-East must stay their hand as power should rightfully return to the North. If Jonathan loses, however, to a Northern contender then the South-East should not be abashed in making its intentions clear even before the end of the Northerner's term, thenceforth power may then oscillate from one group to the other.

The little brouhaha experienced with the zoning formula due to the death of Yar'Adua is not enough justification to allow the enemies of the principle to toss it over-board. If Nigeria gets it right with the arrangement it would not only be for her sake but also for the sake of other plural, strife stricken countries around the world. Furthermore we must not be too squeamish as to the adoption of the principle as;

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 (Akinola, 1996: 21)

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