

Civil Rule, Power Shift and Survival of the Nigerian State

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Abstract

The recognition of the unity in diversity inherent in the Nigerian socio-political framework was one of the major factors that made the architects of the 1979 second republican constitution to opt for the presidential system of government. Secondly, to forestall the revival of the centrifugal forces that characterized the first republican leaders that led to its collapse. Typical of the above scenario was the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential elections acclaimed to have been won by a southerner. The return to civil rule in 1999 had a Southerner as President perhaps to balance the political equation of North-South slot in power shift thesis. One of the greatest threats to Nigeria's unity in diversity is the quest to occupy the presidency pre and post 1999 at all costs. This is the crux of power struggle that has led to the instability of the political system. The study attempts to find out the factors responsible for the fall out of power shift authors in the polity. Data were drawn from secondary sources including books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. Our findings show that power shift or zoning is elitist, ethnic, and sentimental to elicit blind support from malnourished leadership and followership. This is orchestrated by the patrimonial rentier mono-economy that is non-transcendental. We recommend that since Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state; no one ethnic group should superimpose itself. Let there be caution, moderation, statehood, nationalism among the political class not to steer Nigeria into conflict galvanized and driven by personal aggrandizement.

Key words: civil rule, power shift, election, Nigeria, mono-economy.

Le Regime Civil, Le Changement De Pouvoir Et La Survie De L'état Du Nigeria

Résumé

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La reconnaissance de l'unité dans la diversité inhérente dans le cadre sociopolitique du Nigeria était l'un des principaux facteurs qui ont rendu les architectes de la deuxième constitution républicaine de 1979 à opter pour le système de gouvernement présidentiel. En second lieu, pour prévenir la reprise des forces centrifuges qui ont caractérisé les premiers chefs républicains qui ont conduit à son effondrement. Le scénario typique de ceci a été l'annulation du 12 Juin, 1993 des élections présidentielles revendiquer et avoir été gagné par un Sudiste. Le retour à un régime civil en 1999 a eu un Sudiste comme président peut-être pour équilibrer l'équation politique de la balance dans la thèse Nord-Sud. L'une des plus grandes menaces pour l'unité du Nigeria dans la diversité est la quête d'occuper à tout prix la présidence avant et après 1999. Ceci est le point crucial de la lutte de pouvoir qui a conduit à l'instabilité du système politique. L'étude tente de trouver les facteurs responsables et les auteurs de la chute de changement de pouvoir dans le système politique. Les données ont été tirées de sources secondaires, y compris des livres, des revues, des journaux et des magazines. Nos résultats montrent que le changement de pouvoir ou le zonage est élitiste, ethnique et sentimentale pour obtenir le soutien aveugle de l'élite dirigeante et suivisme malnutris. Ceci est orchestré par la mono-économie rentière patrimoniale qui est non-transcendantale. Nous recommandons que, comme le Nigeria est un état multiethnique, pas un seul groupe ethnique ne devrait se superposer. Qu'il y ait la prudence, la modération, un Etat, le nationalisme au sein de la classe politique de ne pas orienter le Nigeria en conflit galvanisé et entraîné par l'orgueil personnel.

Mots clés:le régime civil, le changement de pouvoir, l'élection, le Nigeria, la mono-économie.

Introduction

The rather bizarre elevation of the phenomenon of power shift within the geopolitical matrix of Nigeria tangentially reverberates the very primitive and parochial propensities which give rise to the politicization of ethnic origins and the ethnicization of political aspirations reminiscent of the regional politics of early independence years. It was this scenario that formed the remote confusion which resulted in the sudden collapse of the walls of the first republic, engineered the first counter-coup and have conditioned the continued administrative despoliation of the nation's political realm.

It is fundamental to state that political power which is the central and critical impulse of politics has assumed a veritably high status of a means of production in Nigeria so much that it is used as a tool for the determination of who gets what, when and how; and who does what to whom. Moreover, it is worth establishing that an unequalled proportion of this power is vested in the political centre of the country.

Since the extant political culture among Nigeria's politicians is characteristically parochial reinforcing what Ene (2010) has dubbed primitive political posturing which in turn reinforces what Amin (1974) has referred to as "primitive capital accumulation", then, the area, region or zone, the possessor of this political power or right to same, is domiciled, or better still, hails from, becomes not only of strategic consideration but has become the sole determinant of the conduct and culture of the army of political gladiators in the Nigerian political environment. This situation which has also made politics a do-or-die or

zero-sum matrix has concomitantly brought about a reality in which according to Maduka (2003,p.54) in Chikendu (2005,p.89) ‘our country has been economically raped, politically stifled, culturally eroded and our moral values turn to shreds.’ This is because, brinkmanship, chauvinism, vanity and outright ethnocentrism, all of which have only succeeded in deepening the disadvantages of the already relegated Nigerian masses, have become the order of the day.

To this end, the Nigerian political elites continue to delude the Nigerian people by flaunting all manners of primordial cleavages and insignias primarily in a bid to advance their own pre-meditated political desiderata which have constantly revealed themselves as not conducive to the overall social, economic, political and cultural aspirations of the generality of the Nigerian citizenry.

More than that, obvious realities have shown that whether in conflict or compromise, the actions of Nigerian political elites have only had adverse effects on the average Nigerian citizens which have been the beasts of burden, bearers of the brunt and chief recipients of repercussions emanating from the behavioural conduct of those supposedly elevated to representatively defend their interests. Now, since these leaders believe that to defend the people's interest is to endanger their personal ambitions, they then systematically abandon the people and rigorously, but tacitly, pursue theirs.

It is in this light that Kalu (1981,p.5) has contended that claiming representation for their tribes, they (the politicians) eat (or better still,) on behalf of the wretched inhabitants of their ethnic homelands. They thus “drug themselves with champagne, tear the meat with their teeth and swallow it hastily with their eyes bulging in their sockets, they are merely hustling to get an adequate share of the national wealth”.

Upon the above plinth then, the politics of power shift assumes a character that depicts it as a sordid mechanism for the continued perpetuation of the self-aggrandizement agenda, vindictive or vendetta disposition of some politicians. Lacking independent ideological frame of mind these political seafarers therefore elevate the shifting of power to their regions, areas or zones so as to be able to highjack same for the sufficing of their highly rapacious egocentric intent. At the same time they unwittingly deny the supremacy of the Nigerian constitution which guarantees in unquestionable terms the right to vote and be voted for to every Nigerian citizen and which is also supreme to any other constitution or legal instrument in the Nigerian political clime.

It is in the above regard, that it is argued in this paper that for Nigerian national leaders to enjoy needed and necessary national support and acceptance, they must be national and not zonal in outlook. This is the only most probable way the consolidation of democracy in the country can be guaranteed. That is why the transition from military rule to civilian government in 1999 with uninterrupted elections to date, signals a democratic process, where mistakes are made, lessons learnt towards its maturity is welcomed by Nigerians.

Method of study and Theoretical Framework of Analysis

This work made use of secondary sources of data and content analysis methods. Using these methods the research evaluated comparatively, and incisively studied the contents of diverse relevant and related scholarly and official materials: books, journals, periodicals, articles in newspapers and magazines, documents, reports and other Internet sources as well as constitutional documents. It employed that the content analysis methodology to critically but carefully examined the materials collected with a view to extracting relevant data or information fundamental to the study.

Theoretical Framework

The research employed the power theory as its framework of analysis. The choice of the theory is influenced by several reasons. First, it should be pointed out that for the analysis of the phenomenon of politics, power theory helps to explain the factors of who gets what, when and how (Lasswell, 1936). Politics is a game, albeit not just a game but a game of power, a game of number and a game of choice. Since it is a game then there are going to be players. Whereas Easton's (1964, p.12) definition of politics as the "authoritative allocation of values for society" revealed the power-dimension of politics, Shively's (1999, p. 65) definition of it as "the making of common decision for group of people showed the 'choice' and 'number' dimensions of politics.

Yet, power remains the central nucleus and core necessitating impulse of politics; it is the audacity of politics, the wherewithal and the strategic import that it embodies. Without power politics becomes useless, and to say the least, it dies when power becomes excluded from its totality. It is in this light that Onyekpe (2003,p.14) candidly posited that politics refers to both the "struggle for power" and "the actual use or exercise of power". Power therefore is what determines virtually everything in politics, it conditions the soul of the players, it suggests the clout of the government that eventually emerges, and situates the strength of the State in its overall status.

Then, to capture power automatically makes the captor omnipotent in that he is able to have whatsoever he desires and desires whatsoever the State can offer; and even attempt to dream what the State may not be able to provide because of his greed or avarice. Having given this general background; what then is power theory?

Morgenthau (1948,pp.: 4 -14) is the leading proponent of this theory. However, earliest theorists of power include Nicolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. In the 20th century power theory doubled to include E.H Carr, Martin Wight, Kenneth Waltz, Karl Deutsch, Stanly Hoffman and a host of others (Echezona, 1993, pp.: 114-6; cited in Ochim 2011,p. 107)

Morgenthau (1948) defined power as 'Man's control over the minds and action of other men'. To him, power is seen as the ability of an actor to direct other actors to bend towards his whims and caprices, or to extract habitual compliance or obedience, bring others to submission and also the ability to dominate. Also Morgenthau (1965,p192), asserts that men and women are by nature political animals; they are born to pursue and to enjoy the fruits of power. He speaks of 'animus dominandi' ie the human 'lust' for power. The quest for power dictates a search not only for relative advantage, but also for a secure political space within to maintain oneself and exert considerable influence, free from the dictates of others. The '*animus dominandi*' inevitably brings men and women into conflict with each other, that ultimately creates conditions of power politics. (Morgenthau, 1965,p. 192; cited in Ochim 2011,p.108)

This theory submits that the central thrust why people participate in politics is to be in position to garner power in the interest of advancing their political frontiers. One of the popular power theorists is Hans Morgenthau who specifically attempted to show that the reason why

nations engage in cross-border politics is to be able to capture superior political power to dominate other nations or sovereign states in the international system or arena. By the possession of this power nations dread one another, and the course of motion in the global circle is determined.

On the local or national ambience, especially in a multi-religious, multicultural, and multiregional one like Nigeria, and indeed most of African states, the quest to initiate any parameter, barometer or paradigm in the political template is usually conditioned by the primary motive to suffice sectional interests, and not really the overall development of the entire body politic. This is even more noticeable in a country where the notion of patriotism or the spirit of love for the country is yet to be fully of firmly concretized in the sub-consciousness of the citizens.

It is in the above light that the introduction or re-introduction of the phenomenon of zoning or power rotation in democratic Nigeria has elicited tirade of conclusions. Applying this theory to the subject matter of this discourse, it is worth noting that zoning is not an end in itself, but a means to some avaricious and pre-calculated ends campaigned by politicians with zoning inclination more for self rather than for state or citizens. In this case, an attempt to study or examine the subject matter of politics of power shift would amount to an attempt to situating the multidimensional causes and effects of the practice of zoning in the Nigerian political landscape, and why.

A Critique of Power Theory

One area where the power theory has been criticized is the fact that it places too much emphasis on the issue of contest for power without looking at how this power could be used to bring peace to society. In other words, it does not emphasize the aspects of compromise as much as it stresses the areas of conflict.

Democracy and Power Shift: Some Conceptual Interrogation

It is pertinent to note that democracy as a form of governance has become like a wildfire which intensity is blowing vehemently across nations of the world. It is celebrated, praised and clamoured for in most political gatherings. It has, to this extent, become the bride and pride of the world especially beginning from the late 1980s when the defunct USSR imploded; and the 21st century which coincided with the act of disembarking from the political horse-backs of military dictatorship in Africa. When therefore, issues like disease, poverty, environmental degradation, insecurity, crime and criminal acts and other social vices are discussed, they are done within the ambit of the necessity for the enthronement of good governance which in actual sense is meant not to be divorced from democratic doctrines and practices. The democratization of the political space and public realm of nations is then seen as a veritable key for the rapid procurement of developmental gains and the deflation of those balloons which have hitherto caused unwanted pains and agony to members of these nations.

It is in the above knowing that Shively (1999, pp139,155) attempts to define the concept of democracy as essentially "a state in which qualified citizens vote at regular intervals to choose, among alternative candidates, the people who will be in charge of setting the state's policies". The import of this definition is that in a democracy the peoples' power always gains sway to the end that if this is not the case then a miscarriage of democracy would be looming or the enthronement of another form of governance becomes the manifest reality.

Also, It is in the above light that Adeyemo (2001, p. 86) projects three interconnected definitions of the concept: first, he notes that democracy is a "political system in

which the people are the source of authority and in which the institutions enable the majority to dictate major policy outcomes or decisions". Second, it is defined as "a system of government where decisions on matters of policy and on the laws which are to put that policy into effect, are made by the elected representatives of the people". Third, it is defined "as government based on the free consent of the governed or the electorate." From these tripartite definitions of Adeyemo, it becomes glaring that a state or society can only be said to be democratic if the government is popularly elected and is responsible and responsive to the electorate thereby vesting sovereignty in the people. It may even be necessary here to state that it is in the realization of the above position that the makers of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly declared in section 14(2) (a) that "Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution derives all its powers and authority."

Furthermore, and drawing plausible strength from this provision, Izu (2009) clearly asserts that a democratic government basically emphasizes mass rule via popular sovereignty, political equality, supremacy of the constitution, free and fair elections, guarantee for a vibrant opposition, independent judiciary, freedom of the press, and the provision for fundamental human rights. In the same vein, Busia(1967,p. 2) posited that: "everyman, according to democratic belief, should have certain civil liberties without which no social order can be characterized as democratic". More than, that, Busia (1967, p. 2) noted that:

Within broad limits every man should have a say in how he is governed and by 'whom he is governed ... he should be free to express his views according to his own lights'; he should be free to associate with others with whom he chooses to associate, in order to gain a better hearing for his views, to register his complaints, or seek to implore his conditions.

Then, it becomes pertinent for us to add the simmering but candid submission of Okafor (1999, p. 184) in respect of the concept. In his considered opinion democracy is simply a:

Form of government and way of political life in which the ruling power of state is constitutionally vested not in any particular class or classes but in the members of the state as a whole and the people exercise the power through their representatives in free and fair elections.

More than that, Busia (1967,p.2) asserted that democracy is simply "government by consent". Kaunde (1966) posited that "democracy is first, and last, and all the time sovereignty of the people, or it is nothing", and Sartori (1987) asserted that in democracy "the government exists for the people and not vice versa". The bottom line of this discussion is that in a democracy the people are the linchpins, the central necessitating impulse, the grease that lubricates the wheels, and the refinery that purifies statecraft thereby making it useful to the overall wellbeing of the people.

So, we can boldly agree with the evergreen definition of democracy by that former President of America, Abraham Lincoln who believed and asserted that democracy is nothing but "a government of the people by the people and for the people". In a democracy, the people are everywhere; they are actively involved in everything and

they respond to everything either via their heartily chosen representatives or through other civil society groups and organizations.

At this junction; it is strategic to state the definition projected by Justice C. Oputa in Maduagwu and Mohammed (2006,p. 53), that “democracy is a form of government in which the supreme power of the state is vested in the people collectively and is administered by them or by officers appointed by them”. The noble jurist further submitted that “the distinguishing badge of democracy is the acceptance and recognition of the essential equality of all before the law. This in turn dictates equality of rights and privileges, be they social, political or religious”. In the opinion of the learned judge therefore, “there cannot be any meaningful democracy without justice, liberty and freedom”.

In his erudite manner Dunmoye (2010, pp.: 1 - 3) noted that the concept of democratic consolidation or the consolidation of democracy which is critical to the survival of democracy, "involves the widespread acceptance of rules to guarantee political participation and political representation". He goes further to enunciate that it " ...means nurturing and reinforcing a democratic culture through popular participation, respect for rule of law, and constitutionalism, (and) vibrant civil society".

In the above light, it could be averred that the consolidation of democracy covers all the processes involved in the firm institutionalization of the tenets and ethos of democracy, and their conscious sustenance so as to guarantee perpetual flow of the dividends of democracy to those who have chosen to embrace this system of governance. It means the formalization or entrenchment of those institutions and cultures of democracy thereby making the governed and the governors, the leaders and the led to consciously conduct their political affairs on the basis of majoritarianism all of which attempts to signal the arrival of socio-political cum economic justice, fairness and equity.

To this end, democracy as a form of governance will collapse and die like an unprotected infant without conscious effort at its consolidation, entrenchment or sustenance. Moreover, Akinsanya (2001, pp.: 44-5) has noted that a "consolidated" democracy guarantees such benefits as predictability, transparency and accessibility vis-à-vis the generation and distribution of public goods and gains as posited by Nelson (1999, pp.: 47-48):

The more fully consolidated the democracy, the more likely it is to function on the basis of rule of law. Unlike military dictatorships, such democracies cannot arbitrarily decide to change policies on the basis of a decision by top members of a military junta or the conspicuous wish of a single dictator. They must follow established rules and procedures.

This view is further enhanced by Diamond (1996,p2) when he cleverly posited that in consolidated democracies there are always arguments, there may even be intense conflict, but no significant political or social actors attempt to achieve their objective by illegal, unconstitutional or undemocratic means. It is therefore of clear relevance for us to state that democracy that is not consolidated is vulnerable to collapsing like a blighted shrub that lacks the political photosynthesis that should guarantee its continued vitality and health. It is not

enough then for democracy to be enthroned; its consolidation is even of a greater importance.

Furthermore, whether it is called zoning, rotation or shift the act of transferring political power from the politicians or political elite of one zone or region to another has proven itself to constitute emblems of injustice to the Nigeria populace and the subversion of their sovereignty as guaranteed in section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. But the nationalization of zonal desires or the *zonalization* of national interests and security has not been advanced by selfless political well-wishers who want to ensure the unity-in-diversity of Nigeria's public life. The phenomenon of zoning in Nigeria has been heavily politicized to sooth the panting hearts of some individual political buffalos who shout 'zoning'! not for the ultimate good of their wretched people but actually to boost their ego and so as to court some form of political relevance and can be called 'brief case politicians' or Ojetunji's 'incantationists'. In the face of this scenario it is unequivocal to note that the phenomenon of nascent democracy especially in emerging marketized global democracies becomes threatened if we agree with Abraham Lincoln that democracy is a government of the people by the people and for the people. In the views of Jibril (2003, p. 142), the concept of power shift simply "means the transfer of the mantle of leadership from the control of one group to another within a political setting". He further notes that it represents a theory which postulates that at least "...the executive position especially that of the president in Nigeria be rotated on geo-ethnic and even religious basis among the various ethnic enclaves in Nigeria".

Also, and as implied in the submission of Jacob (2006, p. 39), the concept means a situation in which it is believed and argued that the powers of "...the presidency should be rotated among the different ethnic groups in the country". The beauty of Jacobs's position is that, unlike Jibril who tried to shy away from giving the "group" the specific colouration it possesses, it identified the group as being "ethnic". In his perception, Jacob further asserted that in most post-colonial societies especially in Africa the source of crisis after independence was the concept of power sharing among contending ethnic groups that make up these societies. He also noted that "the phenomenon of who has access to political power is responsible and indeed the most viable explanation for coups and counter-coups in most third world societies after independence". Then, in these societies especially that of Nigeria, several contentious groups have argued and advocated for the imperative of power sharing or shift within the nation's political matrix. Among these groups, two major ones stand out in the context of Nigeria. These are the North and the South. Just as the South has advanced reasons for the transfer of political power from the North, the North has also given reasons why power should remain with it.

At one end, the Northerners according to Onyekpe (2003, p. 34) have ceaselessly desired to cling onto power because "...economic power is in the hands of the South and so the North cannot relinquish political powers to the same South". In other words, the North's strong disposition to power is in order to forestall any attempt by the south to gain hegemonic super-ordination over them hence they use or employ all means possible to perpetuate their hold on power so as to guarantee or ensure some form of balance in the political economy equation of the nation. This feeling of possible marginalization or even colonization becomes very

understandable when we consider the fact that the strength of Nigeria's economic mainstay originates chiefly from the expansive crude oil deposits in the Southern part of the country.

Onyekpe (2003), further argued that since it is unnecessary to stress that political power means everything in Nigeria as it has meant access to strategic appointments and also the exercise of monopoly over the decisive voice in the formulation and execution of policies, the Northern section of the country, and in particular, its leading political actors, have used their control of political power to enormous advantage.

On the other hand, the South has explained and advanced several reasons why the North must relinquish power. They have noted according to that the North has held on to political power of this country for too long - this is in itself a form or manifestation of sit-tight rulership. That is, the North has dominated the political and economic realm of the country, at the expense of the South. Oyatope lucidly enumerated some areas in which the North has been considered as over-bearing on the South.

One, the word "North" was emphasized in the 'names' of their parties of the first republic. The parties were Northern Peoples' Congress (Janiyyar Mutanen Arewa) and Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). Two, the 'motto' of the NPC also emphasized the oneness of North namely, "one North, one People, one Destiny". Three, the interference of the N.P.C-led Federal Government in the Action Group (AG) crisis of 1962 was intended to weaken the opposition party of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Four, the overthrow of Ironsi's government by northern army officers and the installation of Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon, a Northerner, instead of Brigadier Ogundipe, a Westerner, was done to restore the "Stolen power" to the North. Five, most Nigerians did not believe that President Shehu Shagari won the 1983 re-election. His installation was seen in many quarters as a "fraud" to perpetuate northern domination. Six, the cancellation of June 12 election by General Babangida, a Northerner, which M.K.O Abiola, a Westerner was poised to, win landslide victory, was seen as a fraud to marginalize the other region. Seven, the refusal of Babangida to "retire" Abacha when he stepped aside for Ernest Shonekan was a calculated fraud to ensure "an easy opening" for the "northern assault" to recover the 'stolen power'. Eight, the formation of Northern Governors' meeting and the Arewa Consultative forum (ACF) were all designed to keep the unity and oneness of the North as an indivisible entity of "one north", "one people", and "one destiny".

It would be noted that prior to the 2011 general elections, the constitution of a panel of some northern "elders" to select a northern consensus candidate for the presidency is another indication that the people of the north consider power as their 'natural heritage.' It is exactly in this light that the Southerners have firmly asserted that the North has been an overbearing challenge to the South. More than that, Akinola (2009) has submitted that rotational presidency(or zoning) can stabilize Nigeria because the country is essentially a mosaic, that is, having different categories of culture, traditions, religions and peoples with varying ancestries.

However, a scholar like Odunze (2010,p 13) contends that "rotational presidency or zoning of the office of the president is nothing but rotational looting" . In this regard, Odunze believes that when power or the presidency is rotated or zoned, it is usually done among the elites or few

political demagogues who use this rotated or zoned presidential power to suffice or wet their endless and rapacious appetite at the expense of common Nigerians. He argues, and correctly also, that these political demagogues or better still, bourgeoisie, expertly manipulate the malleable minds of the masses by increasingly bombarding them with the feigned relevance of ethnic or identity politics. This view is further strengthened by the argument of Jibril, (2003, p. 93) that "The seeing of Nigeria's problems from ethno-religious and regional dichotomy does not and will never provide a realistic understanding to its problems and the ability to find panacea or therapy to its pathologies".

In a most candid manner, he notes that it is worth noting that the unpatriotic elite cry of marginalization when their personal and selfish interests and not national or collective interests are at stake. In a highly forceful fashion, Kalu (1981,p5) has clearly identified the chief consequence of the above conflicting realities between the claims of these political bourgeoisie and their oblivious followers. He noted that whenever the (political) bourgeoisie overfeed, their ethnic supporters suffer from constipation. In a clearer term, Kalu (1981, p. 6) noted that:

...politicians overfeed. Their extensive stomachs derive from the overconsumption of luxury goods. They have more than their fair share... on the other hand, the large abdomens of peasants in rural areas and of workers in urban enclaves, are signs of ill health and disease.

So, when these political bourgeoisie "are gathered for merriment and feasting, they assume that the whole nation is gathered with them". To this end, "claiming representation for their tribes, they eat on behalf of the wretched inhabitants of their ethnic homelands. The bottom line of Odunze's, Jibril's and Kalu's arguments is that the banner or emblem of rotational presidency or zoning is only waved or raised by politicians whenever they want to misguide members of their descent so as to score cheap political points for their own selfish interests. This in itself has the potent clout to demystify the quintessence of democracy.

Situating the North/South Dichotomy: A Critical Appraisal

It was Machilca (2003, p. 73) who once attempted to periodize the phenomenon of power shift in Nigeria. He carefully categorized it into five periods or what he calls era: the first era (1960-66); the second era (1966-79); the third era (1979-83); the fourth era (1984-99), and the fifth era (1999 to date - that is the fourth republic). According to him, the first era saw the shift of power from the departing colonialists to the nationalist leaders. It was an era of parliamentary democracy. This era came to an end when power was involuntarily shifted from the civilian politicians to the military hierarchy which also meant a shift of power from the North (Tafewa Balewa) to the East (Aguiyironso). The second era began with the snatching and shift of power from the East back to the North, which is from Ironsi to Gowon. This was also the period of top civil servants - the super permanent secretaries and technocrats, created by the succession of the military in politics. This era also witnessed the solemn shift of power from the North to the West as a result of the taking over of power from Gowon by Murtala, and the latter's eventual death in 1976 paving way for the ascendancy to power by Olusegun Obasanjo who was deputizing Murtala before his death. The third era witnessed a shift of power back to the North in 1979, that is from Obasanjo who is from the West to Shagari, a member of the northern hegemony. The fourth era which began in 1984 saw another shift of power from civilian politicians to military dictators (Buhari, Babangida, Abdu salami) all of whom are northerners. This era also saw the foiling of legitimate attempts to

shift power to the West by virtue of the rude and crude annulment of the June 12, 1993 general elections by a northern military leader, Ibrahim Babangida - and the sham elevation of Ernest Shonekan, another man from the West. And the last era began from 1999 when power was shifted from the north to the west and in this order, from the West back to the North, and from the North to the South-South.

It is now relevant to note that the contemporary history of the phenomenon of zoning or power shift is traceable to the period immediately succeeding the dictatorial nullification of the June 12, 1993 presidential polls (Jibril, 2003,p147). This nullification produced the incessant calls for the shift of power again from the north and this time around to the south west where Chief M.K.O., Abiola acclaimed winner of the 1993 presidential elections, hailed from.

In the above light, Ibrahim (2010,p. 1) contends that “zoning and power shift became major issues in Nigeria because of the major transformation regarding identities and power in the country”. According to him, “regional power was substituted by federal power and the only ‘cake’ in Nigerian politics became the presidency”. He specifically asserted that:

The turning point in the debate was the June 12,1993 presidential election that was annulled midway through the announcement of the results, just at the moment when it had become clear that M.K.O. Abiola, a southern Yoruba Muslim had won a landslide victory over Bashir Tofa, a northern Kano Hausa.

In this regard, the politics of Obasanjo’s emergence in 1999 cannot but be situated within the context of the politics of the June 12, 1993 presidential election annulment. Jibril (2003, p.147) submits in this regard that the ascendancy of Obasanjo to the nation’s presidency “without any doubt, was a political scheme by some northern power brokers of the retired military officers so as to pacify or placate the aggrieved Yoruba elite.”

But, no sooner had Obasanjo ascended the president’s seat than the North began to complain of clandestine and highly unacceptable efforts by the president to marginalize its sons from the scheme of things. This outcry was in two-fold. First, the immediate purging of the military officers of northern origin by Chief Obasanjo in the wake of his assumption of office was seen by the north as first, an act of ungratefulness. Second, as an attempt to make the president sit-tight in power and third, an attempt to allow Yoruba military men to be his successor in the event of any military coup as all the then General Officers Commanding (GOCs) were Yoruba (Jibril, 2003).

The north also accused the president of placing Yoruba people in sensitive areas as they accused him of giving them lion share in terms of political appointments. It is even axiomatic to note that the series of impeachments attempts on President Obasanjo were not unconnected with the above suspicions and feelings of betrayal and marginalization. But the political melodrama was not ended yet. After Obasanjo’s first term (a period during which he was still the favourite of the north who also made it tacitly clear that Atiku Abaubaka, his vice president was going to succeed him after his two terms) Situations dramatically changed. In the views of Akintide (2010,p4) “he (President Obasanjo) spent much of his second term telling the north to make haste slowly, as there would be no vacancy in Aso Rock until he had had a third term.” Atiku Abubakar being frustrated became the arrow head of the Northern Opposition to Obasanjo whom the north felt had overstayed his welcome in the presidential villa. Obasanjo, however, proved to be an equal match if not more, to the north. Even though he failed in his third term bid of which Atiku was among the frontline politicians who foiled the attempt, Obasanjo ensured that the representative of the northern opposition, Atiku, did not smell the presidency as full president. In short, at a time, Atiku literally was dropped as vice president, that is, his seat was declared vacant by President Obasanjo. More than that, Atiku was driven from the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP). All

attempts were made to frustrate his qualification and his bid to contest in the 2007 presidential elections. Obasanjo in his characteristic manner, mobilized all incumbency powers and propaganda to make the political tide tough for Atiku, and for any other disliked opposition candidates, to dare the political terrain.

While Atiku Abubakar was undergoing such political sojourn, Obasanjo as though to prove his independence of any northern hegemony went ahead to unilaterally pick Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to contest as the PDP presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2007 general elections. So mobilizing all political and electoral arsenals within the PDP and the presidency these two were declared the winners of the presidential elections. To this end Atiku lost in the bid and went into a temporal political Siberia preparing to re-launch his political aspirations.

But, it is not so much the substitution of Atiku Abubakar with Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the preferred candidate during the 2007 presidential election that generated political tension and re-awakened the consciousness of zoning or power shift within the geopolitical matrix of Nigeria. It was not even because it was perceived that the new president, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was going to be a mere toy or stooge in the hand of the president to manipulate; the major and sole factor was the elevation of the vice president, Goodluck Jonathan to the position of the president, immediately after the death of President Yar'Adua in May 2010. This elevation sparked off several political quarrels.

Increasingly, it is pertinent that we ask a very critical question here. When we talk about the north clamouring that power be zoned back to its political hemisphere, what north are we referring to? Is it the entire 'North' that is involved or some few political elements have formed themselves into a determinate cabal to front for their own personal aspirations and dispositions in the guise of northern agenda? Is the quest to 'zone' or shift power to the north a truly northern aspiration or the desire of certain individuals?

To be sure, after Obasanjo and some other elements within the Peoples Democratic Party had given a nod to Goodluck's freedom to contest in the 2011 presidential elections, four northerners in the persons of Atiku Abubakar, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, Aliyu Gusau and Abubakar Bukola Saraki who initially and individually made their political ambitions known for the president's seat, came together, assuming themselves as representatives of the north, to produce a consensus candidate that could unseat President Goodluck Jonathan in the PDP's primaries and eventually in the 2011 presidential primaries.

So, Atiku was produced by the Adamu Ciroma selection panel. Atiku therefore slugged it out with Jonathan in the PDP primaries but was defeated by the president with a margin of 2,736 to 805 votes cast. To this end, Jonathan became the standard bearer of the party in the 2011 presidential election, and later elected as the nation's president. While formally accepting the mandate to lead the country, President Goodluck Jonathan (2011) observed that his "mandate is as unique as it makes a decisive statement in the history of our great nation. The statement is that our people have chosen the unity of our country above all other considerations.

"Above other considerations" indeed and of course this includes the issue of consensus candidate and the excessive elevation of the zoning idea. But, one very striking thing as reported by all the dailies was the fact that no sooner had Goodluck Jonathan emerged as the presidential mandate bearer of the PDP than other leaders of the north, including the chairman of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), extend their congratulations and applause to him. This singular act went a long way to question the foundation of Atiku's emergence as northern consensus candidate as released by the Ciroma-led election panel. Moreore than that, Atiku's position that "power must

be zoned to the north” were ignored even by northerners who went a long way to show that the quest to compulsorily zone power to the north was not a truly ‘northern’ affair. If not, how would one explain the emergence of Mohammadu Buhari and Nuhu Ribadu, who are northerners and Muslims, as the presidential standard bearers of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) respectively; or how would one explain the fact that Atiku Abubakar lost in his own state, Adamawa, in Saraki’s state, Kwara; in the former president’s state, Katsina and some other core northern states? And finally, how do you explain the fact that immediately Jonathan emerged as the winner of the elections, IBB who had been an arch-apostle of the zoning mantra published an open written letter of felicitation to Jonathan?

The above questions simply reveal that the zoning phenomenon is only an attempt to curry the support of their people for themselves on the basis of primordial sentiments, a situation which reverberates the destructive clout of regional or sectional politics in Nigeria. More than that, it shows that like in the days of the 1993 presidential elections, Nigerians have come to realize, against the wanton deceit of their greedily sectarian leaders as noted by Osundare in Machilca (2003, p. 93) that:

We stand in dire need of leaders who can match dream with action, who will love Nigeria passionately, possessively, but also rationally. Leaders who can spell out words and clauses in a grammar of values that goes into the construction of a positive nation being. Leaders who will build to last, for too long dealers and not leaders have ruled us, state men and not statesmen.

And Nigerians have come to know that these quality leaders abound both in the south and in the north thereby revealing the poverty inherent in the *zonalization* of national interests and security. It is in this light that Ene (2010) has posited that the zoning of the presidency is not only a primitive political posturing but indeed an “unconstitutional, undemocratic and unsustainable” bid to drag the nation again into the cesspits of un-gainful regional politics.

In true democracy, according to Usman and Abba (2000,p10) “...nobody can represent his kinsmen, simply because they are his kinsmen”. To this end, they argue that in the notion of power shift or zoning of the presidency it is sentiments that hold sway while in a democracy, it is issues that take the front burner. In other words, each time we talk about power shift, vital issues that are central to the existence of man and the consolidation of democracy are always neglected. Issues like accountability, transparency, and good governance; issues like mass participation, abhorrence to bribery and corruption, are not given serious attention. Above all, when notion of power shift is given greater impetus than the right of all men to participate in their public affairs, the dictum that reigns is “if it is us it is right, but if it is them it is wrong”. It is an obvious reality that in this kind of atmosphere, democracy can hardly be fully enthroned let alone consolidated. If anything will be consolidated in this kind of realm or circumstance it will be primordial political posturing or the *zonalization* of national ‘cake’ or wealth sharing, and because this will only help to further put a knife in the things that have held us as a nation together, the center can no longer hold, and when this happens in the thinking of the erudite and evergreen Nigeria literally giant, Chinua Achebe, “things” will definitely “fall apart”.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

It is therefore left for us to conclude by reiterating that the echoing and re-echoing of the notion of zoning or power shift in contemporary Nigerian politics is a sufficient explanation for the reality that the Nigerian political elite are yet to mature or grow beyond tendencies of parochial,

primordial and benighted political posturing which disfigured the very foundations of the Nigerian state right from the first republic when it manifested as regional or ethnic politics.

Power shift elevation has the capacity to substitute mass participation with mass apathy, national leadership mentality with zonal or sectional leadership mentality, and patriotism with nepotism, it becomes clear that in the face of power shift or zoning the very existential prerequisites of the implantation and consolidation of democracy will be grossly threatened or at any rate made bleak.

It is also a clear indication of the failure of politicians to manage the resources of the state to the benefit of the citizens, thus a clear weakness on the part of Nigeria's political leadership. And so, a manifestation of that politics in Nigeria is still at the level of personal aggrandizement with the emphases of "I" and not "We" in continuum. This has also given rise to massive corruption evident in the looting of the commonwealth of Nigeria by a monolithic few.

Most importantly too is the fact that Nigerians are yet to have a choice in elections, which is the hallmark of democracy. This fact cannot be glossed over. Also, it is elitist; a conspiracy against the poor and vulnerable masses of Nigeria that in any way does not benefit them and so Nigerians should be educated on it and rejected out rightly.

What we need is good governance and service delivery and not the clamoured dividends of democracy that makes a mockery of the people of Nigeria. In addition to the above, it breeds fears on common Nigerians especially during pre and post elections in Nigeria. It also deepens suspicion and hatred among the vulnerable Nigerians orchestrated by the impoverished, malnourished and insensitive political leadership.

Recommendations:

In the face of the above, it becomes imperative for us to put forward some recommendations by which the very tortuous path towed by Nigeria to re-secure the credentials of democratic rule do not become a blighted reality or a pursuit in futility, some of these suggestions are;

The Nigerian nation –state should strive to have an ideology as an organizing concept with a vision and mission, a road map to accomplish the ideals and values of the people epitomized in leadership style of 'we' and not 'I'

That the misadventure called zoning should be removed from parties' constitution especially of the PDP and replaced with a word like "competency index" or "democratic antecedent". Hiding under the federal character principle enshrined in the 1999 Nigeria constitution which is already a huge albatross to the country administratively is not plausible either.

That during elections, right from the parties' primaries, candidates with traits of religious, regional, ethnic or gender bias should be immediately dropped. And this process should also be monitored by INEC.

That the Federal government through its agencies like National Orientation Agency, bodies like Ministry of Information and Communication, and well-meaning NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should intensify efforts at political and civic education so as to instill in Nigeria virtues like patriotism, moral rectitude, accountability, transparency, unity in diversity, brotherhood and sincerity in order to create a solid moral basis for the nation's stability, prosperity and security. Political leadership should be careful not plunge the Nigerian nation state into crises.

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