



Features: SEASON OF POLITICKING: WE ARE VICTIMS

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

I was chatting with one of my classmates some years ago in Washington DC about the frequency and effect of earthquake on his state of California. He told me jocularly that in California when earthquake happens, people simply ask about the magnitude and move on with their lives. They no longer worry about it since they have come to understand that the ecosystem of California is earthquake friendly. The people simple absorb the initial shock and life moves on.

For many years now we have being experimenting on systems of democracy in Nigeria. We tried parliamentary system in the first republic which we ditched for military dictatorship. We abandoned the military for presidential system of government which we copies from the United States of America. We have realized that while the system is good, we do not have the personnel for it because it needs patience and honesty. Our politicians are not honest and patient enough to practice the American system of democracy. Our own democracy is like a Mercedes car carrying German made body but an Indian Tricycle made engine. If not how does one call a democracy that does not allow freedom of choice for the populace? Elective positions are zoned in such a way that if it is not the turn of your clan, tribe, state, region, religion, you contest such an election at your own peril. So we can all know a person who has all it takes to lead this country but the zoning formula does not favor such a person so he cannot contest. He only appears on the television to theorize while the nation salivates at the good governance it is denied of. Political parties

are formed without ideology. In fact the whole country is a single political party with many branches and logos. In Nigeria every politician feels at home in every political party. It just takes you to say, I have defected, and everything about your political ideology changes. Every politician is related that is why when trouble breaks out in a political party they call it a family affair. And they end up sorting themselves out like a loving family. The only problem is the casualty of the army of followers they abandon on the street, killing themselves while they politicians sort themselves out in the comfort of hotel rooms.

The players in the Nigerian political space should know that our political ecosystem has become adaptable to the home grown democratic system of cross-carpeting. The practice of people changing from one political party to another, political re-alignment, changing of political allegiance and association is as old as the political life in Nigeria. It has become a seasonal activity in the Nigerian political system. It is comparable to the summer transfer activity in European Football League. Nigerians can accurately predict who will decamp, defect or be slammed with a real or threat of impeachment. Can we develop this further and make it Nigeria's contribution to political system of governance? It is a very convenient system because you do not need to have an ideology or allegiance to any political party but just the inordinate desire to win every election. Imagine Donald Trump defecting to the National Democratic Party in 2020 because he does not feel comfortable with the National Republican Party again!

My study of the political system and governance in Nigeria has been that in the four years tenure of an elected governor or president, two years was always used for governance and the remaining two years for politicking. Those who are appointed ministers, commissioners, advisers and assistants know it that they have only two years tenure because they have to give way to cabinet members with electoral value. Even local government chairmen and councilors are disbanded six months to election to give way to those with guts and electoral values for the 'war' ahead. But even that system is now obsolete as strange things started happening in our political landscape since 2014. Every season now is election season. There is no difference between governance and politics anymore. Every semblance of governance must translate into political advantage if not it is not necessary.

The situation of anomie started in Nigeria when on May 24th, 2013 the then powerful governors' forum election took place in the River State Governor's lodge in Abuja. Thirty five governors went in to vote for the Chairman of the forum. The governor of Gombe State was absent. One candidate got 19 votes and the other got 16. The government in power then refused to recognize the victory of the one with 19 votes, instead said the candidate with 16 votes won. They were all of the same political party. Was it that they did not understand simple calculation of votes or it was simple mischief? The seed for political parties' re-alignment ahead of 2015 general elections was sown after that.

It was obvious that President Goodluck Jonathan would contest the PDP's presidential primary election unchallenged. The party leaders said that they printed only one nomination form and it carried only his name on it. Others with presidential ambition had to find alternative platforms. None of the political parties on the ballot papers was formidable enough to challenge the behemoth PDP to the contest. It became necessary to form an alliance. The fallout of the Nigerian governors' forum election led to division in the ranks of the ruling PDP. The discontented PDP governors and others who desired elective positions and had no hope of actualizing such in PDP started looking for other platforms. This led five governors, some senators, House of Representative members and stalwarts of PDP to form the "New PDP" (nPDP).

A good number of party stalwarts with most of the House of Representatives, including the then speaker of the House and senators from the five states whose governors belonged to nPDP, joined the group. To actualize a strong front, General Mohammedu Buhari's CPC and Ahmed Bola Tinubu's ACN and a branch of APGA led by Owelle Rochas Okorochoa, governor of Imo State entered into an alliance with the nPDP to form the ALL PROGRESSIVES CONGRESS (APC) in 2014. It was clear to PDP that they had issues at hand. However, the leadership of the Party continued to talk tough.

Fast forward to 2018 and you realize that we are back to the same cycle of political re-alignment and defection. It is curious that almost same set of people that defected in 2014 are at it again. They have returned to PDP for various

reasons. Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue is a special case. He was a minister in the PDP government of President Jonathan but was not a member of nPDP. He only resigned like others who had political ambitions to contest elective offices. He contested the PDP primary election in his state of Benue but lost due to the lack of internal democracy. He sort for and was accepted into APC some few days to the APC governorship primary elections. Through same process of manipulation by godfathers, he won and went ahead to win at the general election in 2015. In 2018, he is at loggerheads with the godfather who told him that he would not be given the party ticket to contest for governorship in 2019. He has gone back with some of his appointees to PDP.

As it was in 2014 so it is in 2018. Even though I said earlier that our political ecosystem has develops shocks absorbers for all these defections at election times, the actors do not believe that the voters are rational beings. The voters are simply used as cannon fodders. The actors meet in cozy five star hotel rooms in big cities and overseas to agree on sharing formulae. If they don't strike a balance they emerge from such meetings and move straight to their state capitals and local governments area with printed placards for voters to protest in solidarity with them. The defection speeches of the politicians do not have voters' content. If the voters' interest is the issue they would have been talking with the voters three years before election year. Why always at the election year? The ordinary Nigerian voter is only a victim of political disagreement.

As it was in 2014, so it is in 2018. When the nPDP group left the main stream PDP in 2014, the party in power kept a straight face as if nothing had happened. Speaking at an Executive Committee Meeting of PDP ahead of the 2015 election, President Jonathan said "I told the national chairman that let us have zonal unity rallies; let us demonstrate our strength so that they will know that one or two persons that left are inconsequential. I am not sure they can win their ward in an election because some of those states are totally PDP states... All what I am saying is that PDP is still solid, PDP is still the dominant party, our rallies show very clearly and surely that this party will win our elections free and fair". We all know the result of the election. Of course PDP lost at the national level and in most of the states.

In July 2018, in a similar fashion, President Mohammedu Buhari speaking on the spate of defections that has hit his

party APC said in Lome Togo to Nigerians during an interactive session; “I am not bothered about the defections. Ordinary Nigerians have developed confidence in us and are defending us. I assure you, majority of Nigerians back home are appreciative of our efforts”. Adams Oshiomhole, the APC national chairman said, “I am not losing any sleep because of those who have left”. Nigerians are waiting.

The political climate change has altered the whole thing that there is no difference between the harvest season of governance and dry season of electioneering anymore. The politician wants the voters to be worried about his political carrier. The tragedy of it all is that he wants to make his enemies our enemies without making our problems his problem. He makes his election gains our dividends of democracy. At an election time such as this period, instead of pointing at his achievements, he points out his enemies as our enemies. We know our enemies and we do not need another enemy of the people to point out his co-enemies of the people.

At the end of it all, it is the ordinary Nigerian that is the victim of this vicious cycle of politicking. In the other news, it is only the artisans who are smiling at this time. They are busy re-painting the party offices to reflect logo and color of new parties. They are the making banners and printing posters. They are making Tee-shirts and polo dresses for party faithful and tugs. For them this is the high season. For us it is another earth tremor, not even an earthquake. We are used to it.

By Rev. Fr. Ojaje Idoko

(Director, Pastoral Affairs Department, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria)