

# **AWO AND HIS POLITICS: A SILVER JUBILEE INTIMATE REMINISCENCE**

**BY**  
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Nigeria's political landscape shook to its roots on 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1987, when the most unexpected happened. The earth-shaking occurrence was the transition to glory of Chief Jeremiah Oyeniyi Obafemi Awolowo (OA). With such a massive blow, Nigeria's Progressives on the political divide lost Obafemi Awolowo, the most prized and valued possession, and the man for whom Chief Emeka Ojukwu spun the most enduring epithet, "The Best President Nigeria Never Had". Indeed, OA was the best President Nigeria never had, thanks to the deliberate and conscious conspiracy of ultra-reactionary elements and agents of Right-Wing foreign socio-economic and political leeches.

With the benefit of hindsight, we cannot but marvel at the last 100 days of OA. He displayed some signs, which we took no notice of at the Time-T. Lets us commence the journey from his last birthday on March 6, 1987. While OA's guests were just having the usual breakfast at Efunyela Hall, OA enjoyed social interaction with those present. Mama, HID was also seated.

At about 10am, I, as a personal Aide after Rotimi Abe got incarcerated for appending his name to OA's convincing response which proved that contrary to General Idi Agbon's assertion that UPN's Governors have confessed to embezzling state funds to service the UPN party, none of them had been interrogated by the SIP as at that time I was called out to meet with a delegation from Oye Community now in Ekiti State. They brought a gift, a carved statue of OA. It was a spectacular work of art. It was very heavy, to the extent that it took the collaborative efforts of about five healthy men to bring it down from the Peugeot pick-up van, with registration **No. OD613AA**, used to transport it to Ikenne. Just as the effigy was successfully placed on the rostrum, OA indicated that he would like to go and have his own breakfast.

One amazing thing happened on that day. As I was seeing off OA to the house, some of the people he had sponsored to Jerusalem on Christian pilgrimage lobbied me to allow them have personal and group photographs with him. For several of them, it was a lifelong dream being fulfilled. And people took that opportunity to be seen together with the legendary Nigerian leader. Some of those pictures made it into the newspapers. To enable them enjoy their moment exclusively, I distanced myself from them and watched the photo session. After members of the last group had their turn, OA turned to me. He requested me to also pose beside him for photo session with him. And I jumped at the unique opportunity. Deacon Ayo Oloruntoyin from the Nigerian Tribune, who was one of the photo journalists on ground that day, snapped away, and he later obliged me with a unique copy. In my houses in both Lagos and Offa, that copy adorns my walls. The photograph remains a cherished possession, a record of that memorable day in my life. I was thrilled with the array of colleagues present at the occasion. While I was busy with the OA birthday, I never knew that my mother, Mrs. Sarah Wuraola Opadokun, had passed on to glory on the same day, March 6, 1987. It was Dr. Olu Onagoruwa, his wife and Retired Commissioner of

Police Onagoruwa who came to my house to break the sad news to me at about eight, in the morning of the following day, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1987.

When OA returned to Efunyela Hall, he directed that I should organize a formal reception for the carving from Oye Ekiti. I did, and the guests were happy. OA in response remarked that if it was the little contributions that he has made to the society was the reason for the spectacular love and affection he enjoys from many people and communities, and particularly from members of Oye Community who had come to present him with such a unique art work, he would wish that he performed excellently far much more in life after death. OA informed the guests that he had lost a book titled **"Life after Life"** and that he craved for another copy from anyone who has a copy to oblige him for his quick reading again. There and then, OA rendered a few extracts from that book. Blind admirers that we were, all of us failed to realize he was giving us advance notice of his transition. But we never took notice.

It was after OA transited to the great beyond that we knew that he had again prophesied his own death and other events. But we had taken no notice. Sunday Times, however, provided Nigerians an historical excursion on OA in order to remind us of some quotable quotes out of much of what Chief OA said on his last birthday.

Another of those events was OA's last visit to the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University in 1987. OA's visit was to honour the doyen of Nigeria theatre, Chief Hubert Ogunde, who was to be given an Honoris Causa by the University. Along with Mama HID, We arrived at Ife a day ahead of the event. OA and HID were guests at the palace of His Royal Majesty Oba Sijuade Okunade, Olubuse II, while he booked me into a suite at his Sijuade Motel in Ife.

I was the Public Relations Consultant to Chief Ogunde in the last five years of his highly productive life. And he had broached to me the need for a stage presentation and film on the life and times of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. After consulting with OA, I had very refreshing discussions with Chief Ogunde, who asked me to formally apply for OA's permission and approval. Ogunde and I jointly took a breakfast with OA to further explain why we thought the film was germane towards filling a void in our situation in Nigeria. Eventually, OA officially approved our request to do a full- course film on him. Just about the same time, Dr. Ola Balogun pleaded with me to put in a word for him on the same project. I pointedly reminded him about the contributions Chief Ogunde had made to Awolowo's political life and therefore Ogunde must remain first choice for executing the project.

Three months after OA gave his endorsement, there was a command performance on the grand stage of the National Theatre, Iganmu Lagos to test-run what to expect in the movie. Actors that played the characters of Alhaji Jakande, Chief Enahoro and Pa Alfred Rewane were adjudged look-alike carbon copies of the characters they were representing. However, the actors who played the characters of Alhaji L.K. Jakande and Chief Bola Ige were the most appreciated by the audience. Unfortunately, the sudden death of Chief Ogunde himself on April 4, 1990 frustrated work on the

production of the full-fledged stage presentation and film on the life and times of Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

Meanwhile, the award of Honoris Causa conferred on Chief Hubert Ogunde commanded an immense live audience, a huge crowd of respected Nigerians, including staff and students of Ife University. Again, we never noticed OA's departing conduct after the events. Large team of the Staff and Students' Unions and over twenty five thousand crowd again exhibited their love, affection and loyalty to OA. And for the last time, OA had to climb the tail-board of his utility six-door Mercedes Benz to address the huge crowd with his two-finger victory sign. It only dawned on us after OA's transition that even though we never realized it, the sage had given the university community a glorious GOODBYE.

OA's trip to Warri, which was his last public outing was to honour the new Olu of Warri, billed to be given the staff of office by the then Military Governor of Bendel State. It was another momentous event. OA and HID had enjoyed great relations with OA's admirers, particularly the Itsekiri people, who are cousins to the Yoruba. The visit also was equally to honour a dependable ally of OA, Papa Alfred Rewane who was the godfather of the Olu of Warri. Papa Rewane and HRM were of the same lineage and in fact Papa Rewane sponsored HRM to local schools and University in Europe. In fact, in 1999 and 2000, as the General Secretary of Afenifere, I had to put the Ijaw people on notice that the Pan Yoruba political platform had taken note of the outrageous violence being unleashed on the Itsekiri by Ijaw people. And we notified them that any further attack on the Itsekiri was an attack on the Yoruba nation. Such attackers, we said, must be ready for appropriate responses from the Yoruba nation. Instantly, the combatants shelved their sword and sanity had prevailed ever since.

On another occasion, OA was present at the University of Lagos Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos for the first memorial lecture to honour the Late Chief J.F. Odunjo (the writer of the Alawiye book series). The occasion turned out to be the last time that OA and the late doyen of public service Chief S.O. Adebayo would meet. Professor Akin Adesola, who was then the Vice Chancellor of UNILAG, was in attendance. I invited Alhaji Ganiyu Dawodu, Mr.Ojekunle Ferreira, Professor Afolabi Olabimtan, then Director of COSIT, UNILAG, Chief Taiwo Alimi, Chief Dipo Jimilehin, to accompany OA. The children of Chief Odunjo were also present at the lecture.

At the event, Chief S.O. Adebayo privately expressed regrets to OA that the Nigerian Public Service had of late turned a disappointment; more so as the reported official misconducts were much more for personal gains rather than for public interest.

There was also the most significant opportunity for OA to meet face to face with Yoruba leaders of the Conservative political divide. On February 18, 1987, Awo had his last encounter with Retired Justice Adetokunbo Ademola, Chief H.O. Davies and Dr. Koye Majekodunmi, the Administrator of Western Region during the state of emergency imposed on the region by the NPC/NCNC led Federal Government. This meeting came as part of the implementation of the resolution of a peace

and reconciliation meeting of Yoruba leaders of various shades of opinion. From October 1985, Yoruba leaders and captains of industries and professionals, particularly many in the Metropolitan Club, had persistently sent emissaries to Chief Awolowo, pleading with him to intervene over the raw deal they were suffering in their various business activities. Such emissaries were initially facilitated by Prince Babs Oyekanmi. For example, they lamented that they were having difficulty securing government approval for some of their business requirements, except when they enlisted one or two far Northerners into their board membership. They sought a meeting with Papa in the greatest interest of the Yoruba nation.

But first, there came an interregnum.

After General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew his boss, he quickly returned Chief Awolowo's International Passport within one week. Col. John Shagaya, the then Minister of International Affairs, ensured the delivery of the instrument to OA. General Buhari and General Idiagbon had unreasonably and disrespectfully seized OA's passport without any known reason. To add insult to injury, security operatives of the government had embarked on a brazen search of Awo's home. Even though the Buhari government claimed that the disrespectful searching OA's house was not authorized and that it was the work of filth Columnist, their explanation remained feeble and condemnable.

Returning the passport enabled Awo to finally travel as he wished. On the eve of Papa's annual leave and medical check-up abroad (which the Buhari-Idiagbon regime blocked for one and half years), Papa instructed that on his return, he would be willing to consider another meeting with his rivals, Yoruba leaders on the other side of political philosophy. OA asked me to compile a list of two leaders of our own per each Yoruba state. Based on my list, he would hold a preliminary meeting with these dignitaries. They were Senator Abraham Adesanya and Chief J.A.O. Odebiyi from Ogun State, Chief Adebayo Adefarati and Dr. Nathaniel Aina from the old Ondo State, Alhaji Busari Raji and Canon Emmanuel Alayande represented the old Oyo State, Alhaji Ganiyu Dawodu and Alhaji Rafiu Jafojo represented Lagos State. Chief C.O Adebayo joined me from Kwara State. On Papa's return, Prince Oyekanmi and I exchanged notes, and we fixed the meeting for January 21, 1987. The Metropolitan Club big shots choose Chief Molade Okoya Tennis Club House at Onikan for the meeting.

A very significant resolution of that meeting was that the two broad political divides in Yoruba nation should collaborate on any major matter, which affects the Yoruba nation. The meeting therefore decided that a meeting between leaders of the two groups was imperative and a necessity in order to unite the Yoruba folds. A unique reconciliation of the followership was intended. An interesting part of the proceedings of the meeting was the contribution of Chief Ayorinde, the Ekerin of Olubadan Ibadan land. He proverbially stated that OA should know that it was time that he stopped being in opposition. He said in Yoruba: "Ma ja, ma sa laa makikanju l'ogun; Akikanju to moo ja ti ko moo sa, iru won maa mbogun ibomiran lo ni". Literally, he meant

that he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day. And that a great warrior who does not know when to retreat is most likely to be part of the spoils of war.

Befittingly, Senator Adesanya retorted "Mi o le w'aku, k'oni je oye ile baba e". in English, that translates into: Anyone who fears death when a throne is at stake can never lay claim to a hereditary throne. At a breakfast talk with Papa the next morning I informed him (OA) of the eagerness of one of his former close lieutenants from Ogun State, who began to pile pressure on me to be allowed the hosting of the meeting. Information reached us has confirmed to me that this man was a mole, an undercover police informant secretly reporting Papa to his paymasters. I was sensitive to the fact that it was possible for this double agent to install electronic gadgets at his proposed venue to make a full recording of the meeting for instant transmission to Dodan Barracks. Determined to frustrate the mole's evil plan, I sought the permission of His Royal Majesty, Oba Sijuade Okunade, Olubuse II, to allow us utilize one of his Ikeja houses to hold a series of possible meetings. He obliged. The said mole was a former parliamentary secretary that was close to (OA) as the Premier of the Western Region. OA as a Finance Federal Commissioner under Gowon became curious when he suspected a voucher he was to sign for payment. On investigation, it was established that the mole had always been a police informant.

Tactically, His Royal Majesty Oba Sijuade privately wrote to inform Gen. Babangida that the Yoruba people were preparing for reconciliatory parley; that peaceful co-existence among Yoruba people would generate greater peace and reconciliation in the country altogether; and one of his Ikeja's houses was going to be the venue for all such meetings.

Thus on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1987 Rtd Sir Justice Adetokunbo Ademola, Chief H.O. Davies, Dr. Koye Majekodunmi and Prince Babs Oyekanmi, on one side, and had Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Senator Abraham Adesanya, Chief C.O. Adebayo and I, on the other side. Senator Abraham was asked to moderate the dialogue.

Two Metropolitan Club leaders spoke at the occasion. First, Sir Ademola spoke, followed by Chief Davies simply said they were totally committed and willing to work for the unity of the Yoruba nation and that they will be willing to make reasonable sacrifices for the achievement of peace, mutual trust and unity among the Yoruba people.

Chief H.O. Davies said they had always known and accepted that OA was in control of over 90 per cent of the Yoruba nation, but that they were in control of the traditional rulers, along with the remaining 10 per cent of the people. He therefore recommended that it will be in the greatest interest of the Yoruba nation for the two groups to unite and begin to build enduring good legacies for posterity. The moderator of the dialogue, Senator Adesanya, then requested Chief Awolowo to respond. The Sage initially hesitated to speak. Eventually, however, Chief Awolowo, in his usually gifted oratory, took on each of the trio. First, OA addressed Justice Ademola. Let me paraphrase.

"Justice Ademola, you will remember that you made frantic efforts to literally eliminate me physically and politically. You will also recall that you came to talk to me in Calabar Prison where

you suggested to me to renounce Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the Action Group, promising that you will thereafter ensure my immediate release from prison? Of course, you will remember that I totally rejected your offer. And I said that Egbe Omo Oduduwa, unlike your Egbe Omo Olofin, was not a private club owned by Awolowo. You will recall also that after I was released by the government of General Yakubu Gowon, Yoruba elders organized a reconciliation meeting to reunite us. I accepted that the political difference between us was over. Furthermore, I would also like to remind you that on your retirement from office as the Chief Justice of Nigeria, I organized a reception to celebrate you. In spite of my practical demonstration of love to you since then, I will like you to tell this gathering what further offence I have committed to warrant your renewed and total opposition to me in the 1979 general election. In the polling booth very close to your house, it was proved again by eye witnesses that you voted for the NPN? Also, if its true that you want the progress of the Yoruba people, why should you again spearhead deep enmity between your very small group and me?

Chief Awolowo again went on to remind his Yoruba kinsmen at the meeting that other nationalities never tired of blackmailing him with suppositions that if Awo were to be elected President or Prime Minister, he would concentrate more developmental programmes on Yorubaland. When such suspicions continued to remain a stumbling block to his life-long aspiration for national leadership, why should he again suffer "multiple jeopardy" with the high level opposition marshaled against him within the Yoruba nation leadership?

Mesmerised by eloquence of Awo's address, Justice Adetokunbo only suffered to make one interjection, asking: "Was the lady (Adetokunbo's wife) present at the party you organized for me"?

Chief Awolowo replied in the affirmative and, to prove it, he directed me to hand over to Justice Adetokunbo a copy of the photo album produced of the reception. Justice Ademola was visibly dumfounded as he browsed through the collection. In preparation for the meeting, Chief Awolowo had asked me to visit his Library (now donated and managed by the Obafemi Awolowo University) and requested the Senior Librarian to assist me in locating the particular photo album and other related photograph of that reception. I got the Album of that reception and it was handy. It was a coup de grace. It effectively deflated Justice Adetokunbo's ego. There and then, he apologized for the unnecessarily stress that their relationship had suffered.

OA then took on Chief Davies. OA reminded the Chief that after the reconciliation meeting, which he also attended, there have not been any issue between them that could have warranted the renewed bitter enmity that Chief Davies harboured against him. OA now threw a bombshell. "You, Chief Davies, were the Originator and Author of 12<sup>2/3</sup> to be interpreted as 12 states and 2/3 of a state. Chief Richard Akinjinde was just the mouthpiece as the official advocate of the NPN and later became the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of the NPN Government.

Chief Davies neither admitted nor denied OA's accusation. Instead, he reiterated his position that the meeting was conveyed to settle out dispute and wrongs causing disharmony between the elder

statement. He promised that in the twilight of his life, he would be committed to giving everything within his power for total realignment of forces among Yoruba leaders.

Finally, OA turned to Dr. Koye Majekodunmi. Awo wanted Dr. Koye Majekodunmi to reveal if he had again offended the Medical Doctor after the major Pan-Yoruba reconciliation meeting. Reminiscing, OA asked the Former Administrator of Western Region to remember that as a political detainee, Awo had requested that the Administrator should not yield to the proposition of the NPC top hierarchy to detain him at Lekki, Epe area, reputed to be teeming with various killer insects and dangerous reptiles. In spite of the Administrator's promise never to send Awo to such a place, a few days later, OA was restricted to the most dangerous quarters of the Lekki Island waterside. OA also revealed that in spite of his underserved travails, as orchestrated by the conspiracy of the NPC and NCNC, he readily forgave the apologetic Yoruba leaders at the major reconciliation meeting.

Recalling that he and his entourage, including Alhaji Ganiyu Dawode and Chief Ojekunle Ferrewa arrived very early for the opening ceremony of St. Nicholas Hospital, established by Dr. Majekodunmi, OA reminded the Doctor that people who sighted him at the venue took offence and questioned why he had honoured the invitation of a "traitor" who had collaborated with the evil agent of the NPC to humiliate and oppress him. This angry horde mobilized to burn down St. Nicholas, but for OA's strong and laborious appeal that Yoruba Leaders had reached a resolution for forgiveness and unity among the leadership and the followership. OA also wanted Dr. Majekodunmi to tell the meeting why the Physician should be part of another gang-up against him. Dr. Majekodunmi also simply responded that by-gones be by-gone, as the current meeting had been called to broach a reconciliation among them as identified Yoruba greats.

With all the dirty linens put away, the atmosphere took a friendly and lively turn, with free-dealing of jokes and banter amongst these doyens of the Yoruba race. The leadership of the two sides decided that the meeting should adjourn and they should leave there to brief their different camps. They reached a resolution to regroup for a follow-up meeting on April 18, 1987. Subsequently, OA and I guided Chief Davies to his car, as he had already lost his sight by then.

Unfortunately, the follow-up meeting for April 18, 1987 never happened. Just two weeks after the primary meeting, Chief Davies lost his first child, the Chief Executive of Rod Publicity, an advertising agency. To stabilize him from the devastation that his son's death inflicted upon him, Davies himself was rushed abroad. To make matters worse, there came the paralyzing death of OA himself. The efforts geared towards re-uniting the Yoruba nation thereafter hung in limbo until Papa Micheal Adekunle Ajasin naturally took over as the Leader.

Awolowo's excellence in planning and executing policy decisions remain unequalled. That was why he blazed the trail or scored first in the formulation and execution of spectacular matters; first to introduce free universal primary education in Nigeria; first Television in sub-sahara Africa; first standard stadium (now Obafemi Awolowo), first tallest storey building in Nigeria (Cocoa House, Ibadan), biggest firm settlements in Nigeria etc.

Awolowo's leadership qualities include unequalled industry and intellect, courage, value for time and choice of excellent thinkers. Always, he surrounded himself with experts in various disciplines. That way, he never lacked resources for the purposes of getting an all-inclusive position on any particular subject matter. The positive and negative sides of every viewpoint were keenly debated and finally resolved before he or his organization took a position. OA remained current on contemporary matters till the end. I was always amazed at OA's consciousness of modern trends. In fact, before anyone else, OA in 1986 one early morning, as soon as he cited me, from his normally closed window informed me of the newly-released Christian lyrics of the Ilesha-born Evangelist Niyi Adedokun titled "Amona Tete Wa". OA's notable thinkers which included the University of Ife collectives among others were: Prof. Hezekiah Oluwasanmi, Prof. Sam Aluko, Prof. David Oke, Prof. S. Banji Akintoye, Prof. Akin Mabogunje, Prof. Ambrose Alli, Chief Wumi Adegbonmire and others to mention a few which my memory can instantly recollect.

The reality was that once Awolowo spoke on a subject matter on Nigeria, public opinion writers and leaders, as well as University academics, would usually break into two broad divisions – for and against Awolowo's particular viewpoints. But he never did deliberately stir up the hornets' nest of controversy. *Awolowo utilized the value of silence to the maximum effect.* Except his commentary would improve or advance positively the topical issue of the day, Awolowo would not speak. That was why whenever he chose to address the media, they would severally declare that "Awolowo has finally broken his silence" upon such-and-such a matter. After any speech, the development has always been that his contribution quickly turned into the subject of analysis, debate, criticism or commendation for long. For example, when in his Chancellor's convocation address at Ife in 1973, he scientifically discredited the population census count of that year and proved that the result was fraudulent and unacceptable, the caption of that speech by the most widely read Sunday Times then was "CENSUS, A BARREN EXERCISE" BY OBAFEMI AWOLOWO. Positive reaction to his speech was wide and instantaneous. The Sunday Times in those days when Chief Gbolabo Ogunsanwo was the Editor was selling over 250,000 copies daily.

There is no doubt that Awolowo, for all he was, generated passionate love and hatred in equal measures. For example, a significant segment of the Igbo community will, till tomorrow, continue to accuse him of instigating cross-carpeting just so that he could prevent Dr. Azikwe from leading an NCNC Government in the Western Region in 1951. Alhaji Ganiyu Dawodu's book has reasonably provided evidence to discredit their ridiculous claim. The Ibadan Peoples Party and or the Mabolaje Grand Alliance were never in any written and or official alliance with NCNC. When the then Electoral umpire officially asked all political parties contesting in Ibadan election to submit the names of their candidates, the NCNC never submitted the names of the IPP or the Mabolaje Grand Alliance as contesting on their platform.

One wonders, where is the sense of fairness, justice and equity of the anti-Awolowo rabble, when Dr. Azikiwe's party had already formed an NCNC Government in Eastern Region. What the NCNC party attempted to do was to rubbish the Yoruba Nation by trying to make it look as if the Yoruba

nation could not find one of her own best materials to lead a government for the Western Region. You can appreciate what would have been the implications of such reality on the psyche of the Yoruba folks.

During the 1979 campaigns, the windscreen of OA's helicopter was stoned, forcing him to hurriedly leave Igboland because of the hostility. Part of this hostility sprouts from some elements from the Igbo platform, who apart from other private reasons, have claimed that Awolowo pauperized their people during the Civil War by directing the Central Bank of Nigeria to give natives of defeated Biafra enclave, just one or two pounds in compensation for all their deposits in banks. Serious-minded people know that if there was government policy to that effect, OA was just implementing such policy and should not be held guilty for such because he was then Deputy Leader of the Federal Executive Council and the Federal Commissioner of Finance. Finally on these allegations, they claimed that OA said that starvation was a weapon of war. They equally took that out of context.

The Yoruba people have proven time and again that they can be accommodating to other Nigerian nationalities that have come to ply their trades and businesses in Yorubaland. It is only in the Yorubaland that some State Governments appoint Igbo and Hausa people into their prominent cabinets positions or make them heads of various departments. What Yoruba rejects are the instances of where people they have graciously accommodated subsequently trying to lord it over our people. It is equally typical of an average Yoruba offspring that one of the greatest Yoruba Military Leaders Col. Adekunle Fajuyi offered to be assassinated along with his Commander-in-Chief, General Aguiyi Ironsi when the mutineer came to Ibadan Government House to take away Ironsi. Is there anything more than the supreme sacrifice a Yoruba leader can pay in defence of his Igbo boss?

Many of the established far Northerners have, individually and in groups, in private discussion and at important meetings involving me, admitted that they never doubted that Awolowo was the best presidential materials; but they did not work for his victory because Chief Awolowo had always formed his political parties (the Action Group and Unity Party of Nigeria), before inviting them to come and join, with the sole purpose of getting him elected as Prime Minister and or President.

Awolowo is the only former Nigeria leader whose name has repeatedly opens and closes doors in the Nigerian political firmament, even after a quarter of century of his transition to the great beyond. And for all intent and purposes, the Awolowo's phenomenon will continue to shape the political divisions among the Yoruba people and their cousins in Delta and Edo States as well as among the Yoruba people of Kwara and Kogi States because of the unprecedented life of discipline, courage, enterprise and development that were vintage Awolowo.

The absence of Awolowo has led to the emergence of political parties without ideological leanings and preferences. It is difficult to differentiate between the political parties philosophy and actions, except with the star like excellent performances of Raji Fashola, Adams Oshiomhole, Rauf Aregbesola, Kayode Fayemi, Abiola Ajimobi, Ibikunle Amosu of the current ACN Governors and two

or three PDP Governors like Rotimi Amaechi, Sule Lamido and the likes. Nowadays, contestants merely talk about their 12 or 10 or 9 or 7 or 6 or 5-point programmes. There is virtually no prescribed benchmark against which elected people are to be assessed by the voters as either having performed or not. In fact, within the same political party, each candidate will usually present individualized promises, leaving the voters confused. For example, it is difficult for any positively disposed person to reproach or contradict the Four-Cardinal Programmes of the Unity Party of Nigeria, (UPN) namely:-

Free Education Programme;  
Free Medical Services;  
Gainful Employment; And  
Integrated Rural Development;

All that any UPN Candidate needed to do was just to subscribe to the above and work towards executing them while in office.

There is no diligent general discussion, debates and conclusions on party policy options. Party supporters ordinarily should be well equipped with the party's policy on the economy, power, education, welfare programme, agriculture so that they will be foot soldiers to propagate and popularise the party's positions etc. In the UPN days, we spent two to three days discussing and concluding on the party's policies. We equally used to have goodwill messages and contributions from social democrats political parties globally.

Since 1999, party conventions have become nauseating scenarios, where government and party bigwigs exhibit personal wealth. Elective Conventions are much more bizarre because there is usually the presence of out-spent and out-bribed delegates who usually become praise singers at these events. For example, there were revelations of how delegates to the last PDP convention to choose presidential delegates were bought. The story, as revealed by some delegates, was that one of the aspirants bribed each delegate with 10,000USD while his less-endowed rival could only afford 2,500USD.

When Awolowo was here, the choice of candidates for political offices were democratic and at very little cost. Till 1982/83 for example, none of the UPN governorship candidates could claim that he spent ₦20,000 of his own money to become a Candidate and a Governor-Elect. The party searched among its ranks and adopted the relatively best candidates to run. Interested party men only needed to formally notify the party of their interests. In fact, Chief Bisi Akande in 1998, (now National Chairman of ACN became the Alliance for Democracy (AD) Candidate for Osun in that same manner. He was not interested to run, but Chief Bola Ige literally forced him to run because he (Akande) remained such a decent, principled personality. His legacies in Osun remain yet to be beaten. The utility and befitting Secretariat he built remains an enviable contribution of unimpeachable leadership in public service and without borrowing a dime. Until the arrival of Oranmiyan and the symbol (Aregbesola) into the coveted office of governor, those who rigged him (Akande) out have no significant land mark as their legacy except ruins and hopelessness. But with the emergence of Aregbesola, an unusual governor, governing in an unusual style, the fortune of

Osun people had started to change for the better. The symbol (Aregbesola) and his other colleagues, Fashola, Oshiomhole, Fayemi, Ajimobi and Amosu have turned their states into construction sites on roads and schools. Each one is positively taking concrete steps to uplift agriculture to a promising level so that each state can become self sufficient in food production and generate employment for the young people. I have it on good authority that they are all embarking on scientific and technologically driven agriculture works so that our country will on its own produce the raw materials and process them into semi and or finished products that can also be exported.

But today, anyone with cheap money just needs to establish his own structure within a party on which he wishes to run. Sometimes you may have up to 30 aspirants for one particular post-particularly the executive ones. Thus, there is the usual factionalisation within the party along the aspirants' various structures. Reconciliations sometimes are difficult to achieve.

Elected government officials who ran under the UPN, acted in fact as party representatives in government offices. It may be unbelievable, but it was true, that Alhaji L.K. Jakande, as Governor of Lagos State, fortnightly, always showed up at the UPN State Secretariat in Mushin to interact with Lagosians of all political leaning. Anyone in Lagos, who had any matter to relate with the Governor, had the right to personally talk to the Governor about it at that forum. The policy was first-come-first served. The interaction usually lasted till late in the night sometimes, Chief Bisi Akande, as Osun State Governor between 1999-2003, devised his own IDI ODAN, a sort of PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, to interact with the voters and the electorate. His other colleagues, Tinubu, Adesina, Osoba, Adebayo and Adefarati, devised other methods to regularly interact with their constituents who genuinely put them in office.

It was a fact that in 1978/1979, there were incidences of bitter rivalries and unending confrontations in the UPN party primaries. With particular reference to the case in Oyo State; delegates' primary was repeated thrice before Chief Bola Ige emerged as the party Candidate. Arch- Deacon Emmanuel Alayande, who among others contested and lost against Bola Ige, later became the Special Adviser on Education to the Governor.

In Lagos, Alhaji Ganiyu Dawodu who had become the political talisman of Lagos politics (the G-O-D of Lagos), simply read the mood of OA, realizing quickly that perhaps the sage would prefer to compensate any of those who had suffered with him in the unjust prison incarceration of the First republic. G-O-D, therefore, tactically withheld his hat from the ring; even though he was the next senior active politician after Chief Akanbi Onitiri, who by then had lost steam. Thereafter, Alhaji Jakande, a distinguished journalist and renowned editorial writer, was nominated and won election as the Governor of Lagos State. OA gave him an appellation; he usually called him "Harbour Master".

Also as early as 1981, there had been whispering campaign by deputy governors who wanted to succeed their governors in the UPN in Ondo, Oyo and Bendel states. Because of such ambitions, those states literally became war zones within the UPN states.

In Ondo State, Chief Akin Omoboriowo wanted to replace Chief Michael Adekunle Ajasin; in Oyo State, Chief Sunday Afolabi was rooting to replace Chief Bola Ige; and in Bendel State, Chief Damas Akpofure wanted to replace Professor Ambrose Alli. There was also the political war-like scenario in Kwara State playing out between Chief J.S. Olawoyin and Chief C.O. Adebayo, the latter wanting to replace the former. The conflicting interests of the gladiators led to some spectacular negative consequences. The events of the 1982 UPN National Executive which witnessed the "NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES" in Yola remain a painful recollection. The fact that both Chief S.M. Afolabi and Alhaji Busari Adelakun ("Eruobodo"), had alleged that Chief Ige enlisted General Obasanjo to help settle their intra-UPN dispute generated emotion and bad blood over whose turn it was to run for governorship, remains one event that one will not want to remember a fresh.

Chief Omoboriowo, from October, 1, 1979, was reportedly hoping that Chief Ajasin would not last more than two years before passing on. In fact, it was believed that when Chief Ajasin had to travel to England for medical treatment, Chief Omoboriowo had so positioned himself to be sworn in as the Governor just in case of any eventuality.

In fact, Chief Omoboriowo had successfully cultivated most members of the Ondo State House of Assembly through falsehood and various dubious claims. It became known that Omoboriowo had told the legislators that as Governor, he would turn around their fortunes positively by granting them various kinds of allowances which Ajasin had denied them. Also, the legislators attempted to impeach Chief Ajasin as a result of Chief Omoboriowo's prompting.

OA political declarations were usually taken seriously because they were not made whimsically. Except this one. There was an emergency National Executive meeting of UPN in December 1982 at the National Theatre, Iganmu and I was the Recording Secretary. OA in his address said that of all the Deputy Governors except Akin Omoboriowo who were insisting on party primaries for the sole purposes of unseating their governor bosses were so vehement because they wanted to replace their bosses so that they would be able to steal public funds. Unfortunately, Omoboriowo disappointed OA and decamped into the NPN along side of Chief S.M. Afolabi from Oyo state. Omoboriowo recently died unsung and unheralded. He turned out to be an unfaithful Awo's adherent who even wrote a book titled "AWOISM". It was a painful realization that he was never genuine even as many of his likes have been even today.

The fact remains that OA's August 1983 statement is gradually proving prophetic, to the effect that if the general election of that year was rigged, it would be unlikely that our generation will ever see democracy again. The total corruption and perversion of politics generally, and the political institutions established by President Babangida with their ultimate objective to help him succeed himself, have done extreme damage to our corporate body polity. This has been followed by President Obasanjo's "politricks" that saw him single handedly dismissing and appointing four PDP party chairmen, namely Chief Solomon Daushep Lar, Chief Audu Ogbe, Engineer Banabas Gamade

and Dr. Ahmadu Ali, within his eight-year tenure illustrates the tempestuous state of the party under Obasanjo's watch. The brigandage with which he engineered removal and replacement of the chairmen of other political parties were sufficient evidence to reasonably state that for Obasanjo, party cohesion, resilience and popularity were strange commodities that the PDP President did not give any significant regard.

One can state, without any reservation, that, what Nigerians have today (in terms of political parties) are no more than party platforms for electoral contests. And that is why, since Babangida commercialized and monetized politics, aspirants have been compelled to source and steal (where possible) to win their elections, because they will have the key to the public purse once they get into office.

The fact of the matter is that Nigeria's academic, analysis and writers have failed to do enough to unravel and dissect Awolowo as a mystical phenomena, deserving of painstaking study and analysis by all manners of scholars without forgetting the good works of Rev. Father Francis Ogunmodede and a few others. Nigeria unfairly deprived him (OA) to utilize his divine and personal gifts, talents and endowments to help Nigeria establish an egalitarian and developed society. I cannot but salute the governors of the South-West, Edo State and a few other states, who are doing a yeoman's job to improve the quality of lives in their states. However, reeling from the hangover of IBB's 1990s monetization of politics, the current Fourth Republic finds itself incapable of delivering genuine democratic credentials because the process of contesting election is predicated on the depth of contestant's pockets. Once such Candidate wins, he becomes uncontrollable and unaccountable. Such elected public servants usually disregard the electorate they believe has received its dues, pre-election; and they free themselves of their worries until another election is close by. It is for that purpose that the more petro-dollars our government receives, the worse the living conditions of Nigerians become.

To redeem the country of our birth from imminent revolt by the marginalized, the cheated and the disadvantaged, Nigerians should stop their opportunistic collaboration with evil regimes and their evil pastimes. Chief Awolowo had always reminded us that when the people are ready to take their destinies in their hands, leadership will emerge. No society can achieve development or progress when the preponderance of its elite and its people are pleasure-lovers and fun-seekers.

The emerging Young Turks in Yorubaland, who are currently adding some values to what Awolowo did and left, should not relent. They should radically turn their given spaces and spheres of authority into genuine democratic governance. The fact that they are already establishing Nigeria's First Welfare Programme e.g- ₦5, 000 each for people over 65years old and other variants of elders who are not on any pension scheme, "Itoju Agba" and the likes – represent a quantum leap from the recent morass of unproductive governance. The spirit of Awolowo lives on. The fact that my brother and friend, Ogbeni Aregbesola, has, from Day One of its administration, mobilised the people of the State of Osun with the Anthem of the Unity Party of Nigeria (whose words were written by Chief Awolowo himself, with lyrics supplied by Chief Hubert Ogunde) rekindle our hopes

and aspiration. Our people at the present are being galvanized for popular participation in governance and execution of lofty programmes to improve on their well being.

With such promising glimpses, Awolowo will smile from beyond on performing governors and those who, despite the whimsical phase of corrupted Nigerian political contests, help to assist quality people get into offices.