

This is a book that documents politics and governance in Nigeria.

EYE OF POLITICS: The Nigerian Reality

By SALLY ADUKWU-BOLUJOKO

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EYE OF POLITICS

THE NIGERIAN REALITY

PULLING DOWN THE GIANT

SALLY ADUKWU-BOLUJOKO

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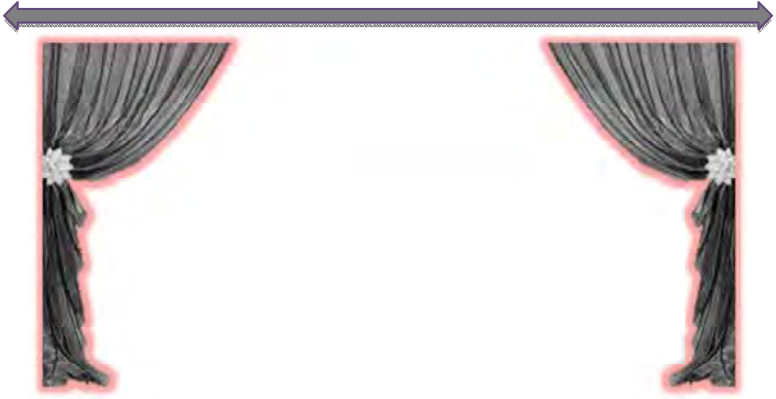
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Chapter One

Early Political Education

“I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished,...The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we have provided enough for those who have too little.”

--Franklin Delano Roosevelt

I was born into an elite ruling family during the colonial era in Nigeria. *That's how old I am, right?* My father's older brother was the court clerk of the Igboeze County Council magistrate court. It was a prestigious job in the largest indigenous community in West Africa. The influence of my uncle's position was vast, giving me the opportunity to see early in life people of importance come and go. But that was just the tip of the iceberg.

Let's face it—meeting the crème-de-la-crème of the society as a child gives you an early head start in life. It

matures you in a way that not many factors, not even university education, can. While still young I was already learning from the masters what my friends would wait to study in class if they enrolled in a political science course in the university. And I was gaining hands-on training by observing the moves of real political actors while my friends would wait for years to fill their heads with theories memorized from assumptions conceived by scholars. How nice! I was growing on the inside without the world noticing it, and I was hardly aware of it. Like Chinese bamboo tree.



In a six-week period the **Chinese bamboo tree** grows to a staggering ninety feet tall – that's right, ninety feet tall! Wikipedia suggests that the **tree** has been measured to **grow** 122 cm (48 inches), in a 24 hour period and can reach a maximum **growth rate** of 99 cm (39 inches), per hour for short periods of time.

That's right, Chinese bamboo tree. That's it up there. It spends the first four years of its life growing or developing underground, invisible to the human eyes. It's a waste of time to the ignorant, but nature is hard to fault. God works in a way that leaves mere mortals completely dazed. The Chinese bamboo tree continues to develop in the soil while the world labels it a write-off, but not for too long; for four years. What happens after four years of seeming latency is a miracle. It astonishes everybody and shuts up their criticism with a phenomenal vertical

growth rate of 90 feet in six weeks. Looking back, I amuse myself to say that I take after the Chinese bamboo tree.

It is not my intention to enter into an extensive monologue on this subject, really. All I want to do is establish how early political exposure shaped my future endeavors. Should you want to satisfy your curiosity on the subject of the Chinese bamboo tree, you know what to do—hit the internet.

See what I mean as I trace my early political maturation further down memory lane. My father began as a civil servant and rose to the rank of Senior Road Overseer under the colonial Public Works Department (PWD) when he resigned to join politics in order to immerse himself in the service of the government and his community. It was then time to accomplish a larger goal—to serve his people, a nation that could be better-housed, better-clad, better nourished. He called it quits from the civil service in 1948. His face turned toward the wind of tougher challenges. His people needed effective representation, and he was armed with the acceptance, readiness, knowledge, sagacity and experience to give it to them.

Upon resignation in 1948, he ran for the office of Counselor of the County Council. He defeated two other candidates in such a landslide that it probably was not a strategic decision that his opponents entered the race in the first place, or so I would later reason. Nevertheless, my father's work was well cut out for him so he needed to hit the ground running, and fast. There was a ton of work to do. And nobody has surpassed the record of his achievements to date. His team built the road network

used in our town today. They built schools, markets and helped to build the Anglican Church. My father encouraged villagers to send their girl children to school, and my sister became the first girl to go to college (Women Training College) in our town. I also became the first woman to receive a university degree in Igboeze North Local Government Area.

I was an infant when my father passed on in 1953, so I had my Court Clerk uncle to thank for a detailed account of his political life. I was like a sponge and I was doing what a sponge does best—absorbing.



The 1950s was an exciting era. I was a young girl growing to witness how the family I was raised in became a Mecca of some sort, teeming with people of the council, ranging from the high and mighty to the little-known man down the street and for good reasons. Because my father and his brother earned the trust of the people who

deferred to them to resolve disputes and give direction on critical matters. They were loyal to the people and they ran a credible, transparent and people-oriented administration.

Our home was a melting pot of all sorts of people from all works of life. People in politics, people in business, people in the civil service. People you would usually find in the media or read about in the papers lived their lives before my father and his brother, who outlived him.

One of such an eminent figure was Nnamdi Azikiwe—Zik of Africa—arguably Nigeria’s most important political figure of all time.

Meeting Zik of Africa

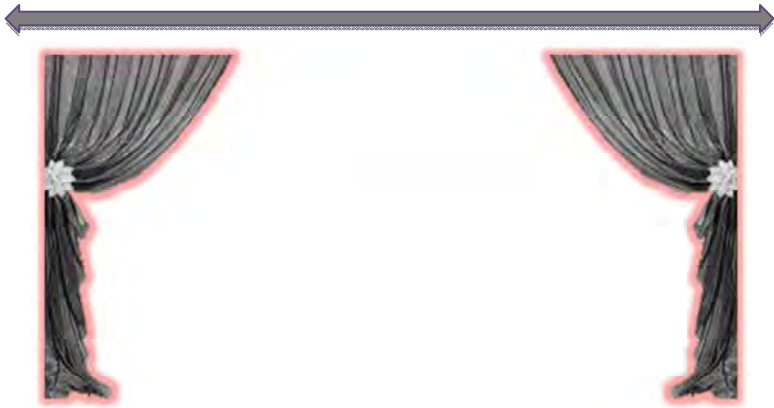
I was a child when politics brought Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to our country home at Amufie in Igboeze North Local government. He needed people who could mobilise the rural people for elections under his political party of NCNC and this quest brought him to my hometown in Nsukka District, making friends with my father and his older brother. Although from Onitsha in Anambra State, Zik ended up making my hometown his home. When it was time to build his country home, my father and his brother were there for him. He even founded University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1955. The institution commenced operations in 1960.s

It was a privilege to have met Nnamdi Azikiwe a number of times. True, he was based in Lagos, but he visited his country home from time to time, which provided a golden opportunity to spend time with him.

Once when he came to our home, he requested that plantains be roasted for him. When my father and his brother sat down to savor the delicacy with him, guess who was invited to join them? Me.

I had this cousin named Rose Adukwu who was Nnamdi Azikiwe's personal secretary and worked at his office in Onuiyi, Nsukka. Sometimes there were days of interesting coincidences, such as when our visit to Auntie Rose happened at the same time when Zik came home on holidays. He would come to the lobby to welcome me and my folks, providing us opportunities to greet him and spend time with him. Auntie Rose once made our visit even more memorable when she gave us a tour of Azikiwe's whole house, including bedrooms and his personal library.

Why am I taking the time to throw up these details? It is to illustrate that my political education was well grounded. It is true that I was a child both when Azikiwe entered my life and when I lost my father, but the persons who survived them—my uncle and people like him—made sure that I did not miss out on the opportunity to binge on the philosophies and the enduring methods and legacies of the founding fathers of Nigeria's democracy. Therefore, from childhood, I developed a keen interest in politics, the study of biographies and the theories and practice of governance.



Chapter Two

Politics Without Bitterness

“We make a living by what we get, but we
make a life by what we give.”

--Winston Churchill

I had learned a mighty lot at the feet of political giants and I was convinced that the time was ripe to invest my wealth of training in my political ambition, giving of myself to the people. The year was 2000. I joined a political party called People’s Democratic Party (PDP). What stood out to me was the party’s manifesto. It declared itself a people-oriented party and one which recognised the pride of place of women in the party’s scheme of things. It encapsulated this philosophy in its adherence to the affirmative action, which says to accord women 35% of all appointed positions of stewardship in government. I quickly became a card-carrying member

and gave huge support to my Ward, and Local Government Chapter.

The years scrolled past and 2003 came. That year, the House of Representative seat for my constituency was vacant, and it had rotated to the turn of my Local Government to fill the position. I threw my hat in the ring to vie for the seat against three other men.

The lessons I learned from the founding fathers of Nigeria's politics was not lost on me. I vowed to play decent politics, one devoid of rancour and bitterness. It fell on me to shepherd my people aright. I taught my followers never to raise a song in abuse of our opponents. Insults were hurled at us, but we did not respond in kind. We had a lot of energy and we made it a point to channel it positively. We stayed on our message of service to the people. Our slogans were:

Politics Without Bitterness.

When I Am There, You Are There.

I was an issue-based politician. I was sure to always discuss principles and not persons; messages not messengers.



Bitter competition

As the day of election approached, my opponents were buying guns in readiness to unleash terror on the electorate. They didn't spare me. I recall occasions when their convoy chased mine on to the shoulder of the road to intimidate me and my team, but I encouraged my people, assuring them that we had something of substance which they lacked: An appealing message that spoke to the heart of the people. They witnessed our rallies and were stupefied at the number and caliber of supporters backing us. They could not stand it, so they had to resort to intimidation.

My youth wing soon became worried that they approached me to offer a solution, namely that I consult a *dibia* who would 'cook' them in such a way that the bullet from a gunshot would not penetrate their bodies. I conferred with my campaign manager and other members

of my kitchen cabinet on the fears and proposal of our youths that evening. We resolved that we would hold a congress to address these matters.

As soon as we settled on a date for the meeting, I did something I believed was unusual. I went to my church to request the senior pastor to prepare for a praise and worship session and a message of God's abiding faithfulness and protection for his people for the meeting that evening. Everyone arrived promptly and the hall was filled to capacity that the electric fans blowing at maximum speed could not expel the stuffiness in the hall.

Way into the praise and worship session everyone was sweating, but charged in the spirit. The choir, which was next to none in the local government, added to the sanctity of the gathering. By the time the pastor began his short exhortation, the soil of our hearts had been tilled, so to speak, to receive the implanting of God's word. The Pastor, an Archdeacon of Saint Luke's Anglican Church, took the text for his sermon from Isaiah 54:14b -17.

It was soon my opportunity to speak. I gave personal accounts of God's protection from the forces of darkness. I told them: "My adversaries are in darkness, and because darkness cannot comprehend the light of God in me, they are unable to affect or afflict me." I concluded by reminding them that my opponents were unable to take my life or harm me because I had not soiled my hands with occultism and like practices.

The worship session had a positive influence on the youths. They stood up for prayers and became strengthened to launch into the campaign. The majority of

the populace believed in us and spoke out in our support, reechoing our message further down the grass root.

Our opponents switched tactics, resorting to smear campaign to discredit me. They said that I was a mere woman, and that I was married to a man from another state and tribe altogether. But the voting public was wiser than the antics of my detractors as their propaganda failed to appeal to the people. You see, the constitution offers the Nigerian woman a dual opportunity when it comes to aspiring to a political office. She is absolutely free to pursue her political career in either her state of origin or in her husband's. The only question she needs to pose to herself is: "In which of the federation's state do I find more acceptance?" Besides, the people knew better than to believe that women were not capable to lead. The media were awash with women giving a good account of themselves in their various political assignments. The results soon began to show. Two of my opponents stepped down for me.

I had one competitor left in the race for the party's ticket. Let me make this clear. My federal constituency was made up of two local government areas, namely Igboeze North Local Government Area and Udenu Local Government Area, earning it the name Udenu/Igboeze North Federal Constituency. My remaining contender was from Udenu Local Government Area (LGA) and by our political arrangement it was the turn of my LGA, and not the turn of the other LGA, to produce a House of Representative member.

Another factor that was working for us was the fact that my local government area comprised of 20 wards

while the other was made up of 10 wards. Whichever way, my campaign organizers were confident that we would win the election. We were on a solid ground. Our campaign team didn't rest on its oars, nevertheless. We added more vehicles to our convoy and sent out more supporters on each campaign day. We drafted a new roster that helped us to increase our coverage per day and ensured we covered every villages and hamlets. Some major towns received two to three visitations. We appointed people of influence in every villages and towns to deepen and consolidate our search. My posters and billboards were designed by Studio 24 in Abuja, so were the photos. The campaign materials were glamorous, and our catching slogan "*politics without bitterness*" sat proudly on everyone. Soon the slogan became a household mantra so that even primary school children began to call out to us: "Politics without bitterness" as my car or campaign vehicles drove past their schools.

Political Rallies

Our rallies were electrifying. Most of my supporters were women. And who doesn't know that it is the place of African women to enjoy the monopoly to entertain at events with their singing and dancing! For every move and every situation there was a song, and the women knew what song to raise to stir the emotion of the people. When the campaign train was on the move, we needed songs that would energize the people, and the women did not disappoint, singing thus:

"Ugbo PDP

Ugbo ndi oma

Obu ya kanyi ge so o

Ugbo ndi oma”

When a dignitary mounted the stage to give a speech, the women were ready with their eulogies to praise the person, pointing at the fellow as they danced to this song:

Nekwe Nekwe noo

Nekwe nno

Yiri anyi oo

This song affirms that the dignitary was one of us.

Political rallies are occasions when men always depend on the women to sing, to dance and to create an atmosphere of merry. Women spend themselves at these events, but when it comes to assigning political offices, the men appropriate to themselves just about every position available. If women are remembered at all, it would be for offices that don't seem to matter. Most states in Nigeria have not gone beyond allocating 20% of political offices to the women.

Whose World: Men or women's?

When it comes to political events, my observation is that men seem to enjoy the monopoly of addressing party supporters. Very rarely would the organisers assign speaking duties to a woman. This was a pattern I resolved not to adopt or support. I made it my business to address the people at any political gathering in my Local Government.

I made sure to donate as much money as the men in order to sustain our party and her programmes. I did not think myself to be inferior to the men, after all, in terms of education and experience, my profile ranked very high compared to the men. Nevertheless, I was not immune to gender prejudice. I know that some of the men sneered, saying: “She is a woman.” “A woman won’t lead us.” “Yes, she is brilliant, but she is a woman still.”

I battled to change this mentality for almost two decades. The more I challenge this discrimination, invoking the laws and guidelines of our party, the more I was confronted with some other disturbing facts.

Many of the women were giving half-hearted support to women like me. They adored male politicians, believed that the men would bring power both by means of bullets and the ballots by all means, and in the end deliver leadership. They wanted to see raw power in addition to political power, and the women believed that I was incapable of invoking raw power, fire power, resulting in killing and maiming opponents, snatching ballot boxes and presenting a do-or-die stance.

How can you blame the women’s reasoning? Blame it on the faulty leadership philosophies that pervade our culture. No, the women are not to blame. Local cultures have reared them to serve the men rather than to believe in themselves. They hardly understand that political leadership of the 21st century is more a matter of knowledge and character than physical combat. Someone needed to educate the women on this, and I assumed the role.

I needed preparation, working hard to refine my motivational skills. I addressed the women regularly to help them achieve a shift in their mentality. More than talk was required. They needed motivation, and I offered this in abundance, giving them gifts of food and clothing. I also gave scholarships to the children of selected widows and the poor among them.

Uncanny powers

Refusing Membership of confraternities was another challenge for me. Trust me, this militated against my bid for a political office in no small ways. It is not news that most Nigerian politicians have membership of various powerful secret cults. Some of the men engage in wizardry and consult mediums. I leant from many of them who confided in me that their membership of confraternities dates back to their secondary school or university days. Some of them urged me to join the cults in order to be protected from harm and to receive help and support from their members. However, my observation proved that they were the ones insecure. They were always afraid of attacks of all sorts and were always quick to seek help from juju men and women.

These politicians get their bodies all mutilated by despicable mediums in a desperate attempt to seek protection from evil. It is like seeking the help of evil to protect from evil. Isn't this laughable? I considered that they were always living their lives on the edge, and their lives were unappealing. But my team had a far superior alternative. We maintained a prayer band of over thirty men and women who met twice a week to pray for our project—my candidacy to the Federal House of

Representatives. I made out time to join them once a week. I also took part in the vigils. I had many pastors at different locations that carried me in their thoughts and prayers. Our morning devotions were always spirit-filled sessions that gave us control of each day.

Nothing to offer

The vast majority of people seeking for or occupying public offices had no focus, no purpose, and no life vision. Most of my colleagues could not articulate any reason for their desire for the political office they were contesting for. Of course, this was aside the desperation to make money and show off. 16 years of engaging politicians in conversations—I did not find as many as one aspirant who talked about service to the people. I once threw the question of service on the face of one politician friend, Iyke, who was also a confidant. His response:

“Look the people are not interested in the promises we make. They know we do not mean what we say. They see us only during elections when we come begging for votes, thereafter we *vamoose* till next season. So, the people don’t listen to our words; they want money. And the highest bidder gets their votes. Period.”

As we got talking, I reminded him that the votes don’t count in most polling locations. Governors appoint who will be voted for at primary elections. The governments in power deploy superior rigging skill at general elections. The governors or the ruling party officials withhold the original result sheets and fill in whatever results they want.

“There you go!” he exclaimed, laughing out loud. “The people know all the manipulations and compromises by the leaders. That is why they only wait for our money and turn their backs just as we do,” he added in a hilarious retort.

“Well,” I said with a frown on my face, “you have been in political office for a while where you looted public coffers and you can afford to throw money around to manipulate these poor villagers and buy their votes. I come with my hard-earned income; I can’t afford to throw it around. But I have genuine love for the people and I want to serve them.”

“I have always told you that you don’t belong here. Your proper place is in the church. You will spoil things here if we give you political office.”

“Hey! Hey!” said Iyke, “I have always told you that you don’t belong here. Your proper place is in the church or among management professionals. You will spoil things here if we give you political office.”

By this time, I was already getting uneasy with the conversation, so I took my leave.


I kept thinking of my discussion with Iyke all evening. He had a pleasant and out-going personality no doubt and he was a frank fellow who would not mince his words.

Doubting My Doubts

My conversation with Iyke got me doing an introspective search. Could it be that I have no place in politics? Did I hear God's response well when I took this project to him in prayer? What is my real motivation? Can my zeal to help my people sustain this journey in the den of lions? I lost sleep and could not find the voice to pray that night. The more I churned these questions through my mind, the more sleepless I got and the more I tossed on the bed.

My anxiety continued till about 3:30am when my spirit began to find some respite. Then it struck me that I had just one competitor to knock out of the race to be my party's flag bearer, and a weak contestant at that. Then I encouraged myself in the Lord, assuring myself of victory. I remembered all the positive prophecies from my men and women of God over the journey so far. By 4am I was already sound asleep till 6:30am.

By the time I got out to the living room, my campaign organisers were already at a meeting, getting ready for the Governor's Meet the People visit to our Local Council, which was scheduled for the next day. The meeting rose with the following resolutions:

 That I make a present of a cow to the Governor

- ✚ That I be listed as one of those who would meet the Governor one-on-one at the council lodge prior to his coming to the rally at the council pavilion
- ✚ That we mobilize our supporters and go with a minimum of 800 of them
- ✚ That we make available large number of party flags and flags printed with my portrait and engage the services of five traditional dance groups
- ✚ That the welfare officer and the PRO should take care of logistics
- ✚ That we contact our press team and camera men to be alert during the ceremony

The budget was presented to me immediately after the meeting and I disbursed the fund.

In Nigeria, very few people trust politicians enough to invest their money in their campaigns. That's the reason most launches for such funds fail to yield positive results. Politics has been so negatively defined in our clime, that ordinary Nigerians believe that only crooks join politics. Yet, there are still a hand full of principled men and women in politics struggling to make real impact.



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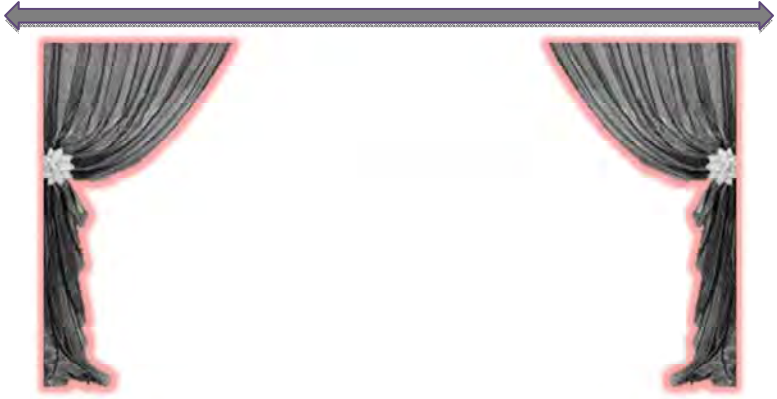
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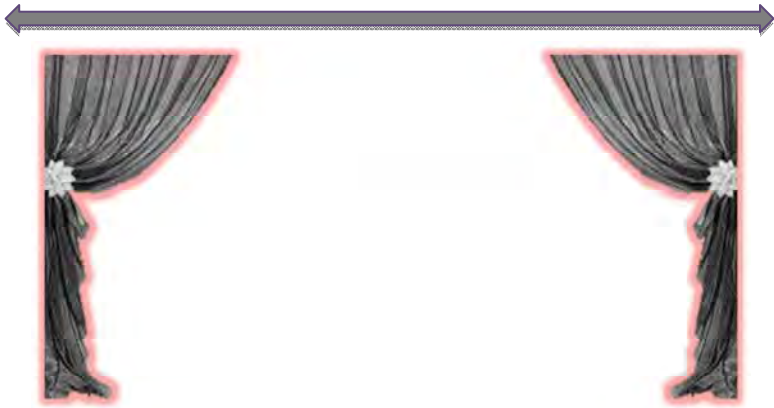
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Chapter Two

Politics Without Bitterness

“We make a living by what we get, but we
make a life by what we give.”

--Winston Churchill

I had learned a mighty lot at the feet of political giants and I was convinced that the time was ripe to invest my wealth of training in my political ambition, giving of myself to the people. The year was 2000. I joined a political party called People’s Democratic Party (PDP). What stood out to me was the party’s manifesto. It declared itself a people-oriented party and one which recognised the pride of place of women in the party’s scheme of things. It encapsulated this philosophy in its adherence to the affirmative action, which says to accord women 35% of all appointed positions of stewardship in government. I quickly became a card-carrying member

and gave huge support to my Ward, and Local Government Chapter.

The years scrolled past and 2003 came. That year, the House of Representative seat for my constituency was vacant, and it had rotated to the turn of my Local Government to fill the position. I threw my hat in the ring to vie for the seat against three other men.

The lessons I learned from the founding fathers of Nigeria's politics was not lost on me. I vowed to play decent politics, one devoid of rancour and bitterness. It fell on me to shepherd my people aright. I taught my followers never to raise a song in abuse of our opponents. Insults were hurled at us, but we did not respond in kind. We had a lot of energy and we made it a point to channel it positively. We stayed on our message of service to the people. Our slogans were:

Politics Without Bitterness.

When I Am There, You Are There.

I was an issue-based politician. I was sure to always discuss principles and not persons; messages not messengers.



Bitter competition

As the day of election approached, my opponents were buying guns in readiness to unleash terror on the electorate. They didn't spare me. I recall occasions when their convoy chased mine on to the shoulder of the road to intimidate me and my team, but I encouraged my people, assuring them that we had something of substance which they lacked: An appealing message that spoke to the heart of the people. They witnessed our rallies and were stupefied at the number and caliber of supporters backing us. They could not stand it, so they had to resort to intimidation.

My youth wing soon became worried that they approached me to offer a solution, namely that I consult a *dibia* who would 'cook' them in such a way that the bullet from a gunshot would not penetrate their bodies. I conferred with my campaign manager and other members

of my kitchen cabinet on the fears and proposal of our youths that evening. We resolved that we would hold a congress to address these matters.

As soon as we settled on a date for the meeting, I did something I believed was unusual. I went to my church to request the senior pastor to prepare for a praise and worship session and a message of God's abiding faithfulness and protection for his people for the meeting that evening. Everyone arrived promptly and the hall was filled to capacity that the electric fans blowing at maximum speed could not expel the stuffiness in the hall.

Way into the praise and worship session everyone was sweating, but charged in the spirit. The choir, which was next to none in the local government, added to the sanctity of the gathering. By the time the pastor began his short exhortation, the soil of our hearts had been tilled, so to speak, to receive the implanting of God's word. The Pastor, an Archdeacon of Saint Luke's Anglican Church, took the text for his sermon from Isaiah 54:14b -17.

It was soon my opportunity to speak. I gave personal accounts of God's protection from the forces of darkness. I told them: "My adversaries are in darkness, and because darkness cannot comprehend the light of God in me, they are unable to affect or afflict me." I concluded by reminding them that my opponents were unable to take my life or harm me because I had not soiled my hands with occultism and like practices.

The worship session had a positive influence on the youths. They stood up for prayers and became strengthened to launch into the campaign. The majority of

the populace believed in us and spoke out in our support, reechoing our message further down the grass root.

Our opponents switched tactics, resorting to smear campaign to discredit me. They said that I was a mere woman, and that I was married to a man from another state and tribe altogether. But the voting public was wiser than the antics of my detractors as their propaganda failed to appeal to the people. You see, the constitution offers the Nigerian woman a dual opportunity when it comes to aspiring to a political office. She is absolutely free to pursue her political career in either her state of origin or in her husband's. The only question she needs to pose to herself is: "In which of the federation's state do I find more acceptance?" Besides, the people knew better than to believe that women were not capable to lead. The media were awash with women giving a good account of themselves in their various political assignments. The results soon began to show. Two of my opponents stepped down for me.

I had one competitor left in the race for the party's ticket. Let me make this clear. My federal constituency was made up of two local government areas, namely Igboeze North Local Government Area and Udenu Local Government Area, earning it the name Udenu/Igboeze North Federal Constituency. My remaining contender was from Udenu Local Government Area (LGA) and by our political arrangement it was the turn of my LGA, and not the turn of the other LGA, to produce a House of Representative member.

Another factor that was working for us was the fact that my local government area comprised of 20 wards

while the other was made up of 10 wards. Whichever way, my campaign organizers were confident that we would win the election. We were on a solid ground. Our campaign team didn't rest on its oars, nevertheless. We added more vehicles to our convoy and sent out more supporters on each campaign day. We drafted a new roster that helped us to increase our coverage per day and ensured we covered every villages and hamlets. Some major towns received two to three visitations. We appointed people of influence in every villages and towns to deepen and consolidate our search. My posters and billboards were designed by Studio 24 in Abuja, so were the photos. The campaign materials were glamorous, and our catching slogan "*politics without bitterness*" sat proudly on everyone. Soon the slogan became a household mantra so that even primary school children began to call out to us: "Politics without bitterness" as my car or campaign vehicles drove past their schools.

Political Rallies

Our rallies were electrifying. Most of my supporters were women. And who doesn't know that it is the place of African women to enjoy the monopoly to entertain at events with their singing and dancing! For every move and every situation there was a song, and the women knew what song to raise to stir the emotion of the people. When the campaign train was on the move, we needed songs that would energize the people, and the women did not disappoint, singing thus:

"Ugbo PDP

Ugbo ndi oma

Obu ya kanyi ge so o

Ugbo ndi oma”

When a dignitary mounted the stage to give a speech, the women were ready with their eulogies to praise the person, pointing at the fellow as they danced to this song:

Nekwe Nekwe noo

Nekwe nno

Yiri anyi oo

This song affirms that the dignitary was one of us.

Political rallies are occasions when men always depend on the women to sing, to dance and to create an atmosphere of merry. Women spend themselves at these events, but when it comes to assigning political offices, the men appropriate to themselves just about every position available. If women are remembered at all, it would be for offices that don't seem to matter. Most states in Nigeria have not gone beyond allocating 20% of political offices to the women.

Whose World: Men or women's?

When it comes to political events, my observation is that men seem to enjoy the monopoly of addressing party supporters. Very rarely would the organisers assign speaking duties to a woman. This was a pattern I resolved not to adopt or support. I made it my business to address the people at any political gathering in my Local Government.

I made sure to donate as much money as the men in order to sustain our party and her programmes. I did not think myself to be inferior to the men, after all, in terms of education and experience, my profile ranked very high compared to the men. Nevertheless, I was not immune to gender prejudice. I know that some of the men sneered, saying: “She is a woman.” “A woman won’t lead us.” “Yes, she is brilliant, but she is a woman still.”

I battled to change this mentality for almost two decades. The more I challenge this discrimination, invoking the laws and guidelines of our party, the more I was confronted with some other disturbing facts.

Many of the women were giving half-hearted support to women like me. They adored male politicians, believed that the men would bring power both by means of bullets and the ballots by all means, and in the end deliver leadership. They wanted to see raw power in addition to political power, and the women believed that I was incapable of invoking raw power, fire power, resulting in killing and maiming opponents, snatching ballot boxes and presenting a do-or-die stance.

How can you blame the women’s reasoning? Blame it on the faulty leadership philosophies that pervade our culture. No, the women are not to blame. Local cultures have reared them to serve the men rather than to believe in themselves. They hardly understand that political leadership of the 21st century is more a matter of knowledge and character than physical combat. Someone needed to educate the women on this, and I assumed the role.

I needed preparation, working hard to refine my motivational skills. I addressed the women regularly to help them achieve a shift in their mentality. More than talk was required. They needed motivation, and I offered this in abundance, giving them gifts of food and clothing. I also gave scholarships to the children of selected widows and the poor among them.

Uncanny powers

Refusing Membership of confraternities was another challenge for me. Trust me, this militated against my bid for a political office in no small ways. It is not news that most Nigerian politicians have membership of various powerful secret cults. Some of the men engage in wizardry and consult mediums. I leant from many of them who confided in me that their membership of confraternities dates back to their secondary school or university days. Some of them urged me to join the cults in order to be protected from harm and to receive help and support from their members. However, my observation proved that they were the ones insecure. They were always afraid of attacks of all sorts and were always quick to seek help from juju men and women.

These politicians get their bodies all mutilated by despicable mediums in a desperate attempt to seek protection from evil. It is like seeking the help of evil to protect from evil. Isn't this laughable? I considered that they were always living their lives on the edge, and their lives were unappealing. But my team had a far superior alternative. We maintained a prayer band of over thirty men and women who met twice a week to pray for our project—my candidacy to the Federal House of

Representatives. I made out time to join them once a week. I also took part in the vigils. I had many pastors at different locations that carried me in their thoughts and prayers. Our morning devotions were always spirit-filled sessions that gave us control of each day.

Nothing to offer

The vast majority of people seeking for or occupying public offices had no focus, no purpose, and no life vision. Most of my colleagues could not articulate any reason for their desire for the political office they were contesting for. Of course, this was aside the desperation to make money and show off. 16 years of engaging politicians in conversations—I did not find as many as one aspirant who talked about service to the people. I once threw the question of service on the face of one politician friend, Iyke, who was also a confidant. His response:

“Look the people are not interested in the promises we make. They know we do not mean what we say. They see us only during elections when we come begging for votes, thereafter we *vamoose* till next season. So, the people don’t listen to our words; they want money. And the highest bidder gets their votes. Period.”

As we got talking, I reminded him that the votes don’t count in most polling locations. Governors appoint who will be voted for at primary elections. The governments in power deploy superior rigging skill at general elections. The governors or the ruling party officials withhold the original result sheets and fill in whatever results they want.

“There you go!” he exclaimed, laughing out loud. “The people know all the manipulations and compromises by the leaders. That is why they only wait for our money and turn their backs just as we do,” he added in a hilarious retort.

“Well,” I said with a frown on my face, “you have been in political office for a while where you looted public coffers and you can afford to throw money around to manipulate these poor villagers and buy their votes. I come with my hard-earned income; I can’t afford to throw it around. But I have genuine love for the people and I want to serve them.”

“I have always told you that you don’t belong here. Your proper place is in the church. You will spoil things here if we give you political office.”

“Hey! Hey!” said Iyke, “I have always told you that you don’t belong here. Your proper place is in the church or among management professionals. You will spoil things here if we give you political office.”

By this time, I was already getting uneasy with the conversation, so I took my leave.


I kept thinking of my discussion with Iyke all evening. He had a pleasant and out-going personality no doubt and he was a frank fellow who would not mince his words.

Doubting My Doubts

My conversation with Iyke got me doing an introspective search. Could it be that I have no place in politics? Did I hear God's response well when I took this project to him in prayer? What is my real motivation? Can my zeal to help my people sustain this journey in the den of lions? I lost sleep and could not find the voice to pray that night. The more I churned these questions through my mind, the more sleepless I got and the more I tossed on the bed.

My anxiety continued till about 3:30am when my spirit began to find some respite. Then it struck me that I had just one competitor to knock out of the race to be my party's flag bearer, and a weak contestant at that. Then I encouraged myself in the Lord, assuring myself of victory. I remembered all the positive prophecies from my men and women of God over the journey so far. By 4am I was already sound asleep till 6:30am.

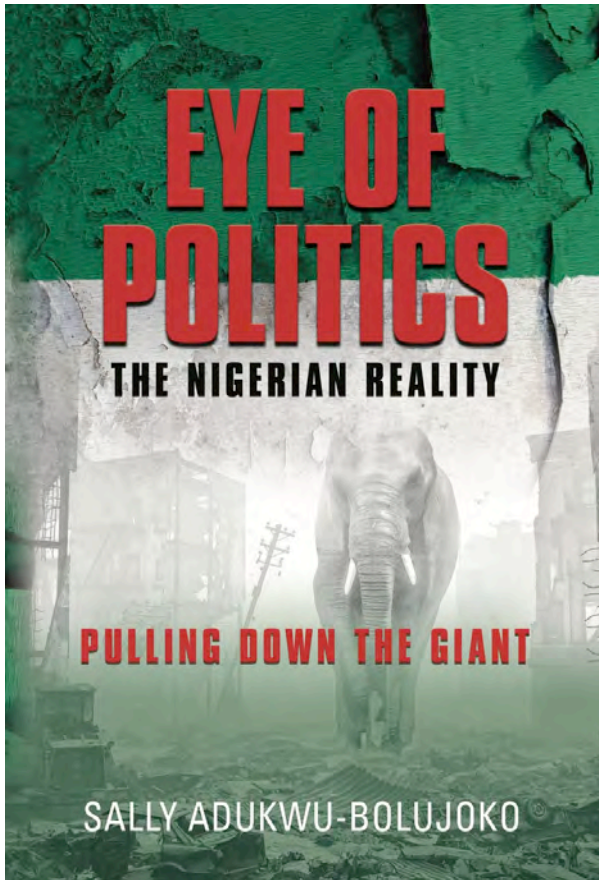
By the time I got out to the living room, my campaign organisers were already at a meeting, getting ready for the Governor's Meet the People visit to our Local Council, which was scheduled for the next day. The meeting rose with the following resolutions:

 That I make a present of a cow to the Governor

- ✚ That I be listed as one of those who would meet the Governor one-on-one at the council lodge prior to his coming to the rally at the council pavilion
- ✚ That we mobilize our supporters and go with a minimum of 800 of them
- ✚ That we make available large number of party flags and flags printed with my portrait and engage the services of five traditional dance groups
- ✚ That the welfare officer and the PRO should take care of logistics
- ✚ That we contact our press team and camera men to be alert during the ceremony

The budget was presented to me immediately after the meeting and I disbursed the fund.

In Nigeria, very few people trust politicians enough to invest their money in their campaigns. That's the reason most launches for such funds fail to yield positive results. Politics has been so negatively defined in our clime, that ordinary Nigerians believe that only crooks join politics. Yet, there are still a hand full of principled men and women in politics struggling to make real impact.



This is a book that documents politics and governance in Nigeria.

EYE OF POLITICS: The Nigerian Reality

By SALLY ADUKWU-BOLUJOKO

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