

Book Review

**TITLE: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP FOR NIGERIA’S
DEVELOPMENT: AN IBIBIO ETHICS AS
PARADIGM TO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP**

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Tolerance or rejection of corruption in a given society according to Adekunle and Ishaya (47) is a function of the economic system, the character of the state actors, the social structure as well as the dominant social values and laws of the country. Etymologically, corruption is derived from the Latin word *corruptus*, which means broken or destroyed. Thus, corruption literally means a breakaway or departure from the norm, from morality, ethics and civic virtues. A further analysis of these terms will reveal that morality implies principles, values, goodness, decency, probity, honesty and integrity while ethics connotes moral code, beliefs, traditional practices, habits, conventions, customs, laws, rules, decrees, and commandments. Civic virtue, on the other hand, implies public opinion of merit and quality. Thus, corruption is the destruction or breakaway from what is good, from laws and from merit. It is the subordination of the interest of the larger society for personal interest. Interestingly, after many years of political independence, corruption has proved to be a virulent national pest in Nigeria, easily defying every measure aimed at tackling it. The general assumption is that everybody knows what it is and that it is bad and killing the nation which is why every government has always declared its intention to vigorously tackle it. The big questions however are ‘how did we get here and how can we get out?’ (Okpo, 9).

It is against the background of the above questions that one can really begin to appreciate Dr. Odumayak Okpo’s philosophical cum ethical exposition of the perverseness of corruption in Nigeria and his articulated strategy(s) to halt its debilitating effects on the overall development of the nation in his book: *Rethinking Leadership for Nigeria’s Development: An Ibibio Ethics as Paradigm to Ethical Leadership*. The book thus joins a plethora of others in exposing the degrading effect of corruption in Nigeria and the possible solutions to overcoming the menace. Dr. Okpo’s book is however quite unique in his approach; his suggested strategy for curbing corruption in Nigeria will awaken the reader from

the ‘dogmatic slumber’ of seeing corruption as ‘our way of life of which nothing can be done’. Dr. Okpo believes that something can be done by inculcating Ibibio ethics into the nation’s leadership recruitment process.

The first chapter, as one would expect in this thought provoking book introduces the reader to the leadership and development quagmire the Nigerian state has found herself. The author x-rayed the proliferation of scandals concerning unethical behavior of leaders in every sector of the society – governmental, educational, political, business, institutional and even religious organizations and wonders at the kind of development that can take place in a society deeply rooted in corruption. He, just like so many others including Chinua Achebe is of the view that “one of the major hindrances to development in Nigeria is corruption by leaders” (1). The questions according to him that should be answered before one can begin to proffer solutions are; how did we get here? And how can we get out?

In chapter two, the author takes a microscopic survey of the past and present leadership of the nation and concludes that several of them are ‘selfish’ and ‘self-centered’ (11). For him, the leaders appear to lack the understanding of leadership, making them see leadership positions as an opportunity to amass wealth. This is why it is hard to explain how a country richly blessed with human and natural resources still has more than seventy percent of her population living on less than a dollar per day. The explanation can however be found in the dearth of ethical leadership which is a critical limiting factor in national development. With this background, the author outlined his objectives in undertaking the task which includes exploring how Ibibio ethics can help in curtailing corruption thereby spurring development; and also establish the fact that ethics in leadership is germane to winning the war against corruption.

In chapter three, the author took time to explain and make clear some of the concepts that is employed in the book in order to clear doubts or ambiguities as the case may be in regard to use and context, and most importantly, “to reduce vagueness” (13). Some of the concepts explained include Leadership which he warns readers to note that in his context, does not only refer to political or governmental leadership but embraces the totality of persons that have the capacity to exert influence on others, both in public, ministries, departments, agencies and private organizations. In clarifying ethics, the author says that ethics concerns itself with the morality of human conduct where human actions and conduct form its core subject matter. It is the study of the standard for determining what behavior is good and bad, or right or wrong. The next concept is Development which he sees as not an entirely economic phenomenon but rather as a many-sided process of improvement in the entire economic and social system. For him, any notion of development that fails to address poverty, unemployment, and social inequality can hardly be considered as development.

Chapter four is a review of related literatures. Beginning with ethical leadership, the author examined the views of other writers that are concerned with finding

solutions to the problem of ethical misdemeanors by leaders that are besetting most developing societies. He pays particular attention to who is an ethical leader and how such a leader can lead in an ethical and moral manner. For example, he cites Trevino, Hartman and Brown's paper entitled *Moral Manager: How Executives Develop a Reputation for Ethical Leadership* where they identified two dimensions of ethical leadership – 'moral persons' and 'moral managers'. The moral person has characteristics such as honesty, caring, and ability to make principled, fair and balanced decisions. The moral manager on the other hand is characterized by individuals who clearly communicate ethical standards to followers and use rewards and punishments to ensure that standards are maintained. On African ethics the author narrowed his review to Ibibio ethics which he believes belongs to the category of virtue-based ethics/theories. It is a type of ethics in which morality is internal and the key to good conduct lies not in rules or rights, but in the traditional notion of moral character. This ethics strives to produce excellent individuals who both act well, out of unprompted virtuousness and serves as example to others. The Ibibio uses the *Mbiam* (oath taking) system to curtail deviance. *Mbiam*, according to the author was a very useful instrument of social control and it is believed to be capable of discerning between the innocent and the offender even in judicial cases thus discouraging social and other acts of misdemeanor against an individual or the society. The Ibibio's use of *Mbiam* is thus a classic example of the *moral manager* dimension of ethical leadership

In chapter five, the author x-rayed development and the leadership question in Nigeria. After a comparative analysis of submissions of Chinua Achebe (1), Nasir El-Rufai, (71) and O.D. Egun (1) amongst others, that the trouble with Nigeria is traceable to the failure of leadership, the author made a startling observation from the analysis of the submissions of Achebe and others. In his words:

The implication of these assertions is that Nigeria's developmental challenges and present situation is traceable to poor leadership...the emphasis here is political leadership, but if leadership is tied to political office holders, that will be wrong. It is a fact that at the heart of any development sits leadership. Similarly, political leadership alone cannot bring about the desired development in Nigeria (28).

With this observation, the author has thus brought a new perspective to the debate about the challenges the nation is facing especially about the issue of corruption. The point is that it is not just the political leaders that are corrupt, the followers and the led are equally guilty of same. And that is why in terms of perception and image, Transparency International (TI) ranked Nigeria 148th most corrupt country out of 188 countries polled in 2017. The author concludes this chapter in a rather sad note by cataloguing the various efforts made by different administrations since 1979 to stop the malady. For example, the Shehu Shagari administration came up with Ethical Reorientation as a means of changing public attitude. The Buhari/Idiagbon military government introduced the War Against Indiscipline (WAI). The Babangida government had Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance,

Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). The Abacha administration introduced War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAI-C). The Obasanjo civilian administration set up the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Despite these measures, the author thinks there is a missing link that has made it impossible to achieve the objectives of curtailing the devastating effects of unethical behaviors by past and present governments. The implication of this lacuna to Nigeria is extreme underdevelopment (31).

Chapter six is a chronicle of past leaders – both public and private - that has been investigated and found wanting for unethical behaviors while serving as leaders. Entitled *Cases of Moral Leadership Failure in Nigeria*, the author begins from pre-independence Nigeria. In 1956 Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who was the Premier of Eastern Region of Nigeria was investigated and found to have compromised his position by not severing his links with the defunct African Continental Bank (ACB). In 1962 Chief Obafemi Awolowo was investigated and found guilty of corruption for not sticking to standards in the running of Western Region Marketing Board. After General Sanni Abacha expired in office in 1998, it was discovered that he looted the Nigerian treasury to the tune of over \$5 billion. Stashed in different parts of the world, the loots are still being returned to Nigeria. Other cases of leadership failure include the arraignment of Mr. Stephen Oronsaye – former Head of the Civil Service of the Federation. He was investigated for his role in a N123 billion fraud under his watch between 2009 and 2010. Mr. Abdulrasheed Maina – former chairman of Presidential Task Force on Pension Reform was investigated and found to have corruptly enriched himself to about N195 billion. There is the case of Cecilia Ibru, former Executive Director of the defunct Oceanic Bank who pleaded guilty to official corruption and was handed a six months jail term including an order to return \$1.2 billion in cash and assets to the government for her role in the mismanagement of Oceanic Bank. Others include former state governors; many are still undergoing trials in various courts in the country. Some like Joshua Dariye – the former governor of Plateau state has already been sentenced to a 12 years jail term. No sector of the Nigerian economy is spared of unethical behaviors by those entrusted with the responsibility to lead including judicial officers. Following from the above, the author is of the opinion that tangible development has eluded Nigeria based on the avalanche of cases of unethical behaviors perpetuated by those that should lead in the way of moral sanctity.

Chapter seven is the concluding chapter of the book. It is akin to a denouement in literary works in which there is a resolution of any remaining conflict in the plot. All the loose ends of the plot are tied up in this last scene; secrets are revealed which in a way produces a sense of catharsis for the reader. Thus, in this chapter, the author reveals the missing link between leadership and development. ‘The missing link is ethics in leadership’. And this ethics is located in *Ibibio* virtue-based ethics and specifically, in the use of *Mbiam* in the administration of oath for those assuming leadership positions whether public or private. For the author,

Mbiam should replace the Holy books in the administration of oaths of allegiance for all political and institutional leaders including the judiciary. Among other proposals that include *Mbiam*, the author recommends the establishment of *Institute for Ethical Leadership* which should be based on home-grown ethics for the grooming of every category of leaders in the country (45).

The organization of the book is quite excellent even though it follows the guidelines specified by its sponsors – Tetfund. Each chapter begins with a critical survey of the subtheme that leaves the reader without a doubt as to the intentions of the author to build a sound, logical argument to support his thesis that ethical immorality is the bane of development in a developing society like Nigeria. The author strikes a chord by deviating from the popular practice of previous authors to lay all the blame at the foot of political leadership for the underdevelopment of the Nigerian state. His insistence that everyone is involved - including the led, is a novel perspective to the corpus on the fight against corruption in Nigeria. However, his suggested strategy (s) may only be applauded by those in his cultural and philosophical constituency. Readers outside this group may have to seek a further explanation of *Ibibio* ethics and the workings of its *Mbiam* concoctions. Also, the author should have explained what he means by home-grown-ethics. Furthermore, a critical reader may be shocked at some of the sweeping generalizations of the author in the book. For example, the author claims in page 38, paragraph 3, that “the Turn Around Maintenance (TAM) and repairs of the refineries have become a conduit pipe for different administrations in the country to embezzle, misappropriate and steal public funds”. This is a fallacy of converse accident. The author must however, be commended for working very hard to eliminate *typos* even though some stubbornly refused to obey his command.

Dr. Odumayak Okpo has incensed philosophical scholarship with a book that is destined to be a corner stone for studies in ethical anthropology in the humanities and my minor criticism does not in any way take away the fact that he has brought a new and refreshing perspective to studies in leadership and corruption in Nigeria. The book should be a must-read for researchers as it beams its searchlight over many ethical issues which a short review can hardly do justice.

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