



UWS Academic Portal

When ethical leaders are 'no longer at ease'

Kasonde, Mukuka; Reynolds, Kae

E-pub ahead of print: 30/09/2020

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kasonde, M., & Reynolds, K. (2020). *When ethical leaders are 'no longer at ease': the role of social vice in corruption through the lens of a Nigerian novel*. Paper presented at British Academy of Management 2020 Conference in the Cloud, .

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact pure@uws.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**When ethical leaders are '*No Longer at Ease*':
The role of social vice in corruption through the lens of a Nigerian novel**

Mukuka Kasonde*, University of Huddersfield

Kae Reynolds, University of the West of Scotland

Queensgate

Huddersfield

HD1 3DH

United Kingdom

*mukuka.kasonde@hud.ac.uk

**When ethical leaders are ‘*No Longer at Ease*’:
The role of social vice in corruption through the lens of a Nigerian novel**

Word count: 6592

Abstract

This paper addresses the social context of corruption through literary analysis of Chinua Achebe’s (1960) novel *No Longer at Ease*. By exploring the societal influences that may lead an individual to engage in unethical behaviour, the analysis challenges the more predominant view of ethical failure as individual vice and reframes corruption as socially embedded. The analysis unfolds with a brief synopsis of the story, mapping out key plot points of leader-follower relationships and the process of the protagonist becoming corrupt. Secondly, an analysis is presented of the protagonist as a leader and in the role of follower applying knowledge from the field of ethical leadership/followership. Finally, parallels are drawn with the recent, real life case of Kweku Adoboli, a Ghanaian banker convicted of fraud in the UK. Insights from the literary analysis are applied to a to highlight their relevance in the real world and broader understanding of corrupt leadership.

Keywords

Chinua Achebe, arts-based inquiry, corruption, ethical leadership, social exchange, African communitarianism, ethical followership

Africa is facing a leadership crisis (Agulanna 2006; Olalere 2015; Moghalu 2017; The Sunday Independent 2017) and corrupt leaders on the continent are viewed as one of the greatest hindrances to development in African nations (Uroku 2018). However, concerns about unethical leadership are not confined to the region and can be considered relevant to the surmounting evidence of unethical practices of powerful leaders in any cultural-economic context. Regardless of location, claims about unethical leaders are characterised by underlying assumptions of individual blame, largely neglecting the nature of human behaviour being socially embedded. Whilst the fundamental understanding of leadership as a linear process of a single person or group of people exercising influence in a social context (Johnson 2016) continues to prevail, scholars such as Kellerman (2007), Schindler (2014), Koonce *et al.* (2016), and Reynolds (2016) have highlighted the reciprocal, if not crucial role that followers play in this process. This paper contributes to the growing trend in leadership scholarship toward reframing leadership as a fluid and relational process (Crevani 2018), as opposed to being an attribute that manifests itself in virtuous (or nefarious) individuals, by extending discussion to the social exchange process of corruption (Lawler & Hipp 2010) in leader-follower dynamics.

The purpose of this paper is to present a case analysis that addresses the role of social vice in corruption through the lens of the novel *No Longer at Ease*, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1960) and the real-world case of the Ghanaian investment banker, Kweku Adoboli. Analysis and discussion explore broader notions of corruption, virtuous and relational leadership depicted in postcolonial African fiction, apply observations to a real-world case, and consider their relevance to a global society. In order to offer an alternative interpretation of the individual ‘corrupt leader’ that is more commonly presented in the leadership discourse, our analysis demonstrates how personal and societal influences may cause an otherwise virtuous individual leader to engage in unethical behaviour. The case study is conducted using arts-based method for leadership and organisational inquiry as advocated by Beyes *et al.* (2019) and Colton (2020). Our discussion theoretically extends work on corruption as social exchange of authors such as Lawler and Hipp (2010) by contributing an analysis of corruption as a social vice through an analogy of a fictitious case and a contemporary real-world case. In doing so, we build on examples of Sanka *et al.* (2018), Kareem (2017), Ahmed (2014), and Gosling (2017)—who have considered the social embeddedness and systemic essence of corruption and leadership in other novels by Achebe—and enhance this body of work through the component of a real-world analogy.

A number of scholars have wrestled with issues of corruption in the political, economic, and societal context of African nations (Adeyele *et al.* 2020; Ojeka *et al.* 2019; Nicolades & Duho 2019; Ojo 2018; Kgatle 2018; Mishra & Maiko 2017; Dangiwa *et al.* 2016; Uwak & Udofia 2016; Mukhtar *et al.* 2016). The insights of these studies acknowledge the unique context of postcolonial Africa, the leadership challenges faced in terms of corruption and ethics following independence from western powers, and contradictions between remnants of western systems and local cultural norms arising in the postcolonial context (Adeyele *et al.* 2020). They also highlight contradictions between Africa’s alternative paradigms of communitarian ethics and individualistic western models of leadership and ethics (Adeleye 2020; Nicolades & Duho 2019; Mishra & Maiko 2017). It is, however, important to note that our contribution is not about ‘corrupt Africans’ or ‘corrupt African leadership’. Instead, we draw on a literary artefact of African culture using arts-based inquiry and develop a parallel case analysis with a real-life person. The intention is to provide insight as to how more widely accepted concepts of virtuous/relational leadership and corruption can be informed through highlighting the deeply socially embedded exchanges portrayed in an example of postcolonial African literature and the postcolonial experience of an individual from an African nation in a western context, and

allow the reader to develop their own interpretation of how social environments create and sustain corruption.

For the purposes of our contribution, it is worth mentioning that great care has been taken to avoid a discussion on the cultural interpretations of leadership and corruption. Drawing on Wesche *et al.* (2010) we purposefully adopt a broad definition of corruption as acts that violate either legitimised social norms (e.g. laws) or espoused social norms. Therefore, in this paper corruption is understood as it is depicted in Achebe's novel: as the act of bribery that results in criminal punishment. This contextually specific concept of corruption is not meant to downplay or exclude any other culturally appropriate views of corruption. We also draw on a purposefully broad understanding of virtuous leadership (Adewale 2020), as a widely held belief that individual character may determine linear ethical leadership processes, and leadership as a relational process of mutual influence (Reynolds 2016). We do not limit our discussion to the political, business, or community context but open it up to a wider notion of leadership and followership as a relational process, as we see these contexts are intertwined through individuals and their networks. The authors acknowledge that it is impossible to separate the culturally and socially constructed meanings of leadership or corruption. Culture is recognised for our purposes as the underlying societal influences, rather than the means by which to determine whether the protagonist is corrupt or not, or to establish criteria of ethical leadership.

The case study unfolds with a brief synopsis of Achebe's story, mapping out key plot points that illustrate leader-follower relationships, interactions and moments leading up to corruption of the protagonist. An analysis follows in two parts: firstly, we examine the protagonist, Obi's, roles as leader and follower and how his relational interactions influence the decision to engage in corrupt acts. Secondly, in order to highlight their relevance in the real world, we apply insights from the literary analysis to the recent, real fraud case of Kweku Adoboli, a Ghanaian banker who has been referred to as 'biggest rogue trader in British history' (Fortado 2015). We conclude with summarising commentary on the duality of leader/follower roles as well as ethical/unethical character, and the social embeddedness of moral action.

Synopsis

No Longer at Ease (Achebe 1960) tells the story of a morally upright civil servant, who in his struggle to reconcile conflicting values and lifestyles between 'old Nigeria' and the 'new Nigeria' he hopes to help create. The narrative is set in Nigeria during the period when the nation is transitioning from colonial rule to self-rule. The novel opens with the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, on trial for corruption and the case has captured the attention of the city of Lagos. The spectators are captivated because Obi does not fit the image of a corrupt individual. The reader is then taken back and through the events that have led to this day on which Obi appears in court. From an early age, Obi exhibits strong academic abilities and he receives a scholarship from his village that allows him to study in England. He spends four years away from home at Cambridge pursuing a degree in English, and the Nigeria to which he returns is markedly different to the country he left. Obi's first encounter with 'corrupt Nigeria' begins at the port and does not end there. Throughout the story, he comes face to face with the corrupt behaviour of those around him. These encounters with corruption increase when he takes a senior role in the civil service as Secretary of the Scholarship Board. At first, Obi is successful in resisting the temptation to compromise his values and makes it a point to challenge the views of those who believe corruption is an acceptable part of society.

As strong-willed as Obi is, his personal circumstances and the pressures exerted on him by society soon take their toll. He grossly underestimates the impact his relationships with his family, tribesmen, the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU), and his girlfriend have on his values,

as well as the financial obligations that come with being a high-level civil servant in Nigeria. When Obi receives his first salary, he rushes out to buy a brand-new car and gets engaged to his girlfriend. Seeing the financial strain his parents are in, Obi offers to pay his younger brother's school fees and pledges a monthly contribution to supplement his parents' meagre income. He takes on these financial responsibilities in addition to his mother's medical bills as well as the amount he is obligated to repay to the UPU for his scholarship. When Obi realises that he has over-stretched himself financially, he resolves to ask the UPU to delay starting to pay back the loan, but things do not go as planned. When he is cautioned against getting caught in the 'sweet life' of Lagos, Obi angrily refuses to accept the delayed repayment if the consequence is that his tribesmen will have a say in his personal affairs. As his expenses continue to pile up, Obi takes out a loan from the bank, much to the displeasure of his fiancé, who insists on lending him the money so he can clear the loan. However, when he leaves the money in his car, it is stolen, pushing him to new levels of despair.

Obi's troubles are not limited to his financial situation. His parents and tribesmen are strongly against his choice of marriage partner. His mother's reaction in particular is a blow to Obi and weakens his spirit and resolve. As a result, his fiancé breaks off the engagement but hints at being pregnant—a situation that must be resolved. Obi then borrows more money and arranges for an abortion, which does not go as planned, and results in Obi's love cutting off all ties to him. Shortly afterwards his mother passes away, but he cannot afford to travel for her funeral, opting instead to send the little money he has left to assist with the burial rituals. In this difficult time, his tribesmen offer their support, which comes as a comfort to Obi. The death of Obi's mother presents a turning point in his life, and when the next scholarship season starts, Obi is a changed person. He begins to take bribes and accept sexual favours in return for recommending candidates to be reviewed by the scholarship board. Word quickly spreads that he 'gets the job done' and he is soon able to pay off all his debt and has the added privilege of sleeping with numerous young women. Despite this, he is 'no longer at ease' with himself and resolves to stop. It is at this point that he is arrested for bribery.

Analysis of No Longer at Ease

Obi as a leader

Despite not having a formal position in the UPU, Obi can be considered to be a leader in his community by virtue of his ability to influence others through his achievements, his strong values and position on the scholarship board. However, he ends up engaging in corrupt acts that shock his community and the city of Lagos. The analysis below dissects Obi's leadership and followership to understand why. Elements of power, character/credibility, and moral reasoning, ethical fallibility, and hubris are highlighted in the analysis of Obi's role as leader, then contribution of role models, group identity, and dialogue to ethical fading and self-deception in the role of follower are considered.

One must have power in order to lead (Lloyd 2000; Johnson 2016) and this power must be accepted or legitimised by followers. Power can be broadly understood as an essentially neutral force in the process of influence and a fundamental aspect of the leadership process (Reiley & Jacobs 2016). Because it can be exerted through the ability to coerce others through pressure or threat, to reward or punish (Lunenburg 2012) power is often negatively associated with corruption (Reiley & Jacobs 2016). Power is also exercised by through a legitimised status or position, the possession of knowledge or expertise, or by being viewed as a role model (Lunenburg 2012). In Obi's case, his power comes initially from possessing knowledge and expertise. As a young boy he demonstrates his academic aptitude by receiving the top mark in his province which allows him to get a scholarship to go to secondary school that he completes with all distinctions. These achievements make Obi the obvious choice for the village

scholarship and he becomes the first person from the village to gain a university degree. As a result, he is also recognised a role model for the young men in his community. Following his return, Obi, through his ‘unprecedented academic brilliance’ (Achebe 1960, p. 28) and by virtue of his post in the government, has brought honour to his village and is seen as ‘invaluable possession’ (p. 29) who will advance the villagers’ opportunities in the civil service.

Sankar (2003) proposed that a person’s character is linked to behaviour and is an important determinant of leadership excellence. This view aligns with the concept of virtuous leadership (Adewale 2020). Obi possesses the values and virtues that would be expected of an ethical leader with regards to corruption. He demonstrates morally appropriate feelings and engages in morally appropriate behaviour (Price 2008) on numerous occasions. For example, in the scene during which he deals with Mr Mark, a man who appears to be encouraging Obi to compromise his values. Obi quickly brings their meeting to an end when he senses that Mr Mark intends to offer him a bribe. After the incident, Obi feels elated that he was able to deal with the matter in such a virtuous way.

Credibility in leaders, according to Kouzes and Posner (2012) and Johnson (2016) comes in part through modelling desirable behaviour; whether consciously or subconsciously leaders are role models and enact their role as moral managers through their own behaviour. Role modelling and management of morals can be observed in Obi’s character as he takes every opportunity to express his values to those around him. During one dialogue in the novel, Obi explains his reasoning to a friend such that, Obi sees virtue as something that can be practiced and therefore can become a habit. Obi’s thus directly links his values and his perspective on ethics as grounded in virtue ethics, that is the notion that character can be built through practice and will result in virtuous acts (Dion 2012; Johnson 2016). Furthermore, Obi’s worldview holds that an individual will benefit in practical and pragmatic matters by being ethical rather than unethical; a view based in part on the consideration that there is a link between ethics and effectiveness (Ciulla 2003). The link between emotional engagement and the positive psychological effect of moral congruity inferred from dual-process theory models (Evans 2008), like the social intuitionist model (Haidt 2013) and the integrated ethical decision making model (Schwartz 2015) is observed in Obi’s response to his refusing bribes, as it gives him joy and allows him to carry out his role on the scholarship board effectively.

Obi displays behaviour that can be recognised as Kohlbergian post-conventional moral reasoning (Johnson 2016; Gibbs *et al.* 2007). Kohlberg’s model of moral reasoning (Fig. 1) is based on developmental stages (Weber 1990; Johnson 2016). Kohlberg asserted that individuals from birth progress from one stage to another, cannot skip a stage or regress. Most adults develop to stages three and four (see Weber 1990; White 1999 and Johnson 2016 for a detailed breakdown of the stages and research findings). Although there are aspects of Kohlberg’s model that are subject to controversy and inconsistency (Gibbs *et al.* 2007), its universal and cross-cultural applicability has been extensively researched and is widely accepted (White 1999; Gibbs *et al.* 2007). Based on this model, it can be argued that Obi’s reasoning transcends some of the prevailing ethical values of his social environment. By avoiding taking bribes, he is able to see beyond his own needs and those of his tribe, and thus pursue the greater goal of to securing his country’s future. Obi can be considered to have reached the highest level of development, stage six. This ability to reason at the post-conventional level comes at the expense of personal pleasure, for example when Obi refuses sexual favours, and can also tolerate drawing the open disapproval of others.

Despite these positive attributes, it is arguable as to whether Obi is an effective leader. To begin with, he does not seem to be fully aware of the importance of his leadership role nor exhibits a desire to hold leader status in his community. Obi looks down on his followers, because he is more educated and espouses values that he considers to be superior. A contributing factor to his feelings of superiority comes from his childhood situation that is one

of ‘privilege and entitlement’ (Price 2008 p. 18), due to his achievements which also prompt his tribesmen to condone certain behaviours. For example, the incident in which Obi wrote to Adolf Hitler when he was in primary school, and his emotional outburst during the meeting with his tribesmen. Through these attitudes, Obi displays ethical fallibility as defined by Aitken (1968); by thinking he is correct all the time Obi does not open himself up to understanding the point of view of those around him and closes himself off to the possibility that others may have different yet valid views. This self-absorbed stance leaves no room for him to self-regulate in terms of the actions that will later lead him to financial hardship.

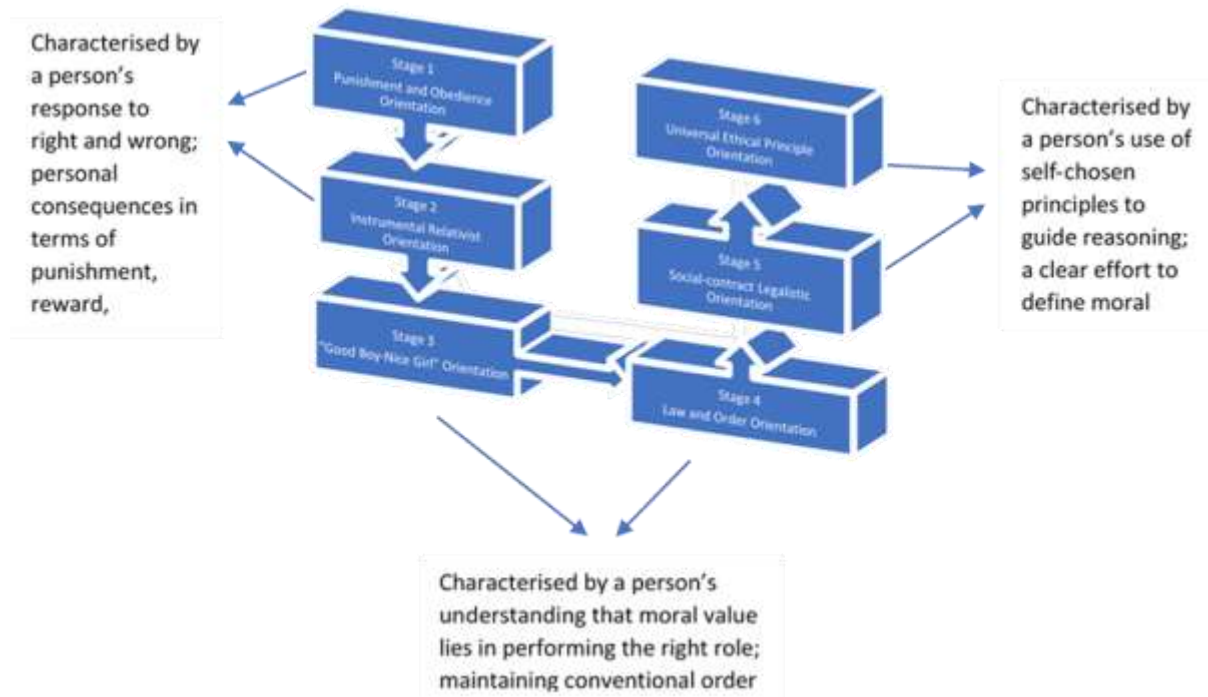


Fig. 1 Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development adapted from: Weber 1990

Apart from this attitude of superiority, Obi displays hubristic tendencies and other destructive behaviours that make him a toxic leader. His hubris limits his ability to see his tribesmen's well-meaning intentions and the possibility that they can have an effect on his ethical behaviour (Claxton, Owen, and Sadler-Smith 2015; Sadler-Smith *et al.* 2017). Although Obi eventually calms down after his outburst, he has damaged the relationship with his followers, and they lose respect for him. Whereas he was once well-positioned to take on a transformational influence process or leadership style that would have allowed him to change their attitudes and values (Mendonca and Kanungo 2007; Koonce *et al.* 2016), he instead has in effect greatly eroded the level of ethical influence he can have on them. Obi's actions demonstrate that he places his personal interests above the interests of his fellow tribesmen. Overall, Obi has the potential to be an ethical leader in his community as seen by the fact he possesses the power to influence, moral reasoning and value system on which to base his process of influence. However, his personal shortcomings, desire for independence and pleasure get in the way of moral action.

Obi as a follower

It is widely accepted that leaders have an influence on their followers; however, the extent to which followers influence leaders is less commonly acknowledge or understood

(Reynolds 2016). Furthermore, the leader and follower roles can exist together and intertwine in various aspects of life. Obi's role as a follower is explored in two levels of his life: as the Secretary of the Scholarship Board (professional) and as a member of the UPU (personal). The varied social influences (Pitesa and Thau 2013) presented by these two roles come into conflict and lead Obi to change his thoughts and behaviour. The first source of influence is seen in his professional role on the Scholarship Board, in which Obi is answerable to Mr Green. Although Mr Green does not overtly encourage corruption, neither is he portrayed as corrupt, he displays tyrannical leadership behaviours and exhibits several more faces of negative leadership identified by Kellerman (2004): rigidity, intemperance and callousness. Mr Green makes and defends sweeping and demoralising statements such as 'The African is corrupt through and through.' (Achebe 1960, p. 3) and has a demeaning manner towards his colleagues. According to Kaptein (2013), studies have shown that self-image affecting behaviour and phenomena such as the Pygmalion effect and the Galatea effect, have an impact on the conduct of people receiving these behaviours, and exemplify the outcomes of socially embedded expectations (see Eden 2012). Mr Green's attitudes and behaviours toward his followers, Obi included, create a negative Pygmalion effect, and certainly influenced Obi's journey toward corrupt behaviour. Given Mr Green's knowledge and experience in the civil service, it would have been appropriate for him to take on a mentorship role (Bongard 2012) to prevent Obi from making the decisions that led to his financial hardship. Instead, he opted to hold on to his views of the 'corrupt African' in order to maintain his moral and cultural superiority.

The second source of influence is Obi's membership in the UPU. When Obi first arrives and gets a senior post in the government, his status affords him the privilege of a comfortable situation and the ability focus inwardly on his values. Despite the danger that those in positions of power face by having more opportunity to be tempted and being more susceptible to temptation to abuse their power, having legitimate power and status afford Obi the 'luxury of being ethical' that is embedded in a sense of security and moral superiority and (at least initially) drive him to resist social influences to take bribes. However, as a member of the UPU, Obi finds himself in a negative ethical climate (Plaisance 2014; Uhl-Bien and Carsten 2007) in which he is the only one who considers corruption to be wrong. In addition, Obi slowly begins to lose the power he once held due to some of his perceived negative personal attributes and financial pressures which result in him making ethical exceptions (Lammers and Stapel 2009) to live up to his societal expectations. He finds that his internal focus leads to hardship and it is only when this shifts that his burdens begin to ease.

Social dominance theory (Rosenblatt 2012) provides a framework for a deeper understanding how the UPU influenced Obi's choice to begin taking bribes. The UPU make it clear what is expected of him: to assist his fellow tribesmen and maintain their positive image. Through increased in-group identification with the UPU, Obi began to view the world as they did, clearly separating himself (and his tribe) from other Nigerians. He was also motivated to maintain the group's dominant status by ensuring that he, the source of that status, continued to live up to it.

The social-psychological viewpoint (Popper 2014) sheds light on why the death of Obi's mother was a turning point, especially in relation to his UPU membership. According to this theory, willingness to follow is linked to a person's identity or hierarchies of identities. Important events that evoke an emotional reaction can affect this hierarchy. In Obi's case, his identification as a member of the UPU is weak following the meeting where he storms out, but after losing his fiancé, the source of conflicted identity is removed. In addition, his attachment to the group is revived through further interaction. Despite their strained relationship, the UPU visit Obi after hearing of his mother's death and in effect, stage a funeral for her. The UPU attends the funeral for Obi's mother, and Obi's friend Joseph steps in to buy drinks to save Obi the embarrassment of not being able to host the UPU properly. These acts result in Obi

developing a sense of gratitude and obligation that ties him more strongly to this social identity. According to Zdaniuk and Levine (2000) a heightened sense of group identity leads individuals to exhibit higher levels of loyalty behaviours and Obi soon begins to adhere to the social expectations, eventually putting these above his own personal values.

Obi's friendships through which he learns of the 'sweet life' in Lagos are also a source of social influence. The dialogues with his friends underpin the source of Obi's ethical fading and self-deception (Tenbrunsel and Messick 2004). When Obi recounts his encounter with Miss Mark, who was ready to provide sexual favours in return for Obi's help, his friend tells him that sexual favours are not akin to bribery and admonishes him for his naïve and sentimental views. Obi's defence to this is weak; his friend goes on to point out that since the young woman came to him voluntarily, and she was due to appear in front of the scholarship board anyway, she probably ended up sleeping with other members of the board, and Obi's action did her no good. Such is the reasoning Obi employs when he starts accepting bribes and sexual favours. He reasons that if he only helps those who have the minimum educational requirements, his actions have minimal negative consequences.

Discussion

From the preceding analysis it can be seen that Obi's relational interactions, both positive and negative, influence his ideas about corruption and also his actions. When reviewing his predicament, Obi resolves that, ultimately, his troubles started with the loan that he was obligated to repay to the UPU. One can then be tempted to conclude that his money troubles are the reason why he began to engage in corrupt acts. However, as demonstrated through further consideration in analysing his social context, this view would be too simplistic and focus on the outcomes of corrupt acts as individual failure alone without considering socially embedded influences.

Obi's own analysis belies the fact that the financial strain he was in had as much to do with his decisions as it did with the loan he had to repay. The UPU can be justified in their view that the money he earned was enough for him to live comfortably and still fulfil his loan payment obligations. He could have adjusted his expenditure by doing away with some purchases or even finding alternative ways to fund them. However, his pride and arrogance of youth were a hindrance to this type of reasoning. In addition, an observation from one of the older members of the UPU supports the inadequacy of such a conclusion when he posits that money, though important, does not talk, rather it is the actions of an individual that portray a message. In the same way, money though an important factor in Obi's decision-making was not the only motivation for his actions.

The dichotomous presentation of society, both overt and tacit, is a great source of conflict for Obi. The expectations he has internalised as a Western-educated civil servant, for example to not take bribes, is presented as being in direct contrast or opposition to what is expected of him as an Umuofian: to assist his fellow tribesmen to progress. It can be argued that Obi himself embraces this dichotomous view during his interactions with Mr Mark, during which he switches from using his tribal language Ibo, to English. With this act, Obi is using language to symbolically distance himself from his fellow tribesman and corruption. In creating this clear separation, and thus linking corruption to being Ibo or Nigerian, society presents an impossible choice to Obi, for it is not possible to separate himself from his tribe. Put another way, it is not possible for his tribe (society) to separate themselves from him. As such, it is not possible to dissociate the unethical acts of individuals from the socially embedded nature of implicit and explicit expectations, observed behaviours, and the emotional process linked to decision-making.

The preceding analysis of personal and societal influences that affected Obi can provide insight into real world situations, in which an individual who by many accounts may be a morally upright citizen, and virtuous leader, may nevertheless be drawn into corruption. One recent example that demonstrates an analogous context is the case of Kweku Adoboli. In the following, we highlight analogous contributing factors to ethical fallibility—power (e.g. expert and legitimate), character/credibility, and hubris—as well as the influence of role models, group identity, and in-group relationships on ethical fading and self-deception.

The case of Kweku Adoboli

In September 2011, the 31-year-old UBS trader, Kweku Adoboli, a Ghanaian national educated in the United Kingdom from the age of 12, was arrested on charges of fraud linked to a £2bn trading loss (FT Reporters 2011). The media-provided accounts depicting the story of Adoboli revealed interesting parallels between Achebe's character and the trader's experiences. Adoboli, like Obi, came from a good family, his father being a senior United Nations official, was academically gifted and able to attain a well-paid position in a prestigious organisation after completing his education at a British university (Rayner *et al.* 2011). A relatively short time into his promising careers, Adoboli is believed to have made unethical decisions that eventually led to his conviction and ultimately to his deportation back to Ghana (Taylor 2018). The UBS fraud case drew the attention of the public who express feelings of disbelief at how such a promising individual and otherwise 'good' person could commit such acts (FT Reporters 2011; Russell 2012; Fortado 2015). Indeed, Adoboli expressed his own disbelief:

Now imagine where I was four years ago, walking through Wandsworth Prison, or in a cell with a Polish kid who spoke no English, trying to understand how I got to that place in my life. How did I get here? What choices did I make? What's happening? (Adoboli as cited in Fortado 2015).

In Adoboli's case, the primary assumption is individual failure: it was a matter of hubris, corporate and personal greed supported by lax financial sector regulation. However, considering the insights from Achebe's novel, it may not have been as simple as an ambitious man who was full of himself and not properly supervised. Adoboli likely did not begin as a corrupt individual who evolved into a rogue trader. Notable accounts presented by Fortado (2015) in the Financial Times as well as by other journalists in further media outlets, discount an oversimplified assumption, pointing to socially embedded expectations as contributing factors in Adoboli's situation as well.

Like Obi, Adoboli unites the roles of leader and follower, affiliated with social and professional groups. When his actions were unveiled, he was stigmatised as 'the biggest rogue trader in British history' (Fortado 2015). The term 'rogue' provides insight into how those accused of unethical behaviour are regarded and the process of scapegoating and dissociation of these individuals. A 'rogue' by some definitions describes an animal that is 'vicious and solitary'. Such a label can be considered ironic, however, given that Adoboli's actions were intended to earn and maintain his place in the group. Through his professional skill and expert power, Adoboli became known as the 'go to' person and by his own account, worked to 'make his bosses as much money as possible and lessen the wider burden on [fellow] traders' (Fortado). Umphress and Bingham (2011) refer to these motivations and actions as 'unethical pro-organisational behaviour' where an individual's actions though violating laws, standards or moral norms, works to the benefit of an organisation. One way to illuminate unethical pro-organisational behaviour is seen through the lens of hierarchies in ethical principles (Harrington and Dolgoff 2008) as an individual will adjust behaviour depending on the

situation. Furthermore, coping mechanisms such as ethical fading (Tenbrunsel and Messick 2004) come into play. Although Adoboli's actions may not have been completely selfless by these standards, he may have fallen victim to his own hubris and self-deception. He benefitted in terms of social status, in-group status, as well as financially through promotions and bonuses, whilst seeking to accomplish deeds which he framed in an email published in 2012 by The Telegraph as an attempt to right a wrong.

Adoboli, perhaps involuntarily and yet by virtue of his success, took on a formal and informal leadership role in his organisation. Management encouraged other traders to work with and learn from him. After a colleague left the team, Adoboli became the most senior member further cementing his legitimised role as a leader; one whose actions are valued and behaviours are to be emulated. This status likely placed a great deal of pressure on Adoboli, pressure associated with being a trusted expert and linked his character and credibility, and the expectation to sustain his successful trading record.

In terms of the role of follower, a striking observation in the Adoboli case concerns his identification and affiliation with his superiors. Adoboli described the relationship as one in which he openly received praise when things were going well, thus reinforcing his in-group identity; people were happy to associate with him and reluctant to ask too many questions. However, when things began to go wrong and the negative consequences of his actions came forward, Adoboli's superiors abandoned him and worked to dissociate the firm from him. This behaviour demonstrates how social dominance theory (Rosenblatt 2012) comes into play in the case of leader-follower relationships and highlights how leadership practice fails when followers are held solely responsible for ethical wrongdoing.

Fortado's (2015) account insightfully pointed to a few character flaws in Adoboli as well as societal influences as contributing factors in his case. Adoboli had a genuine desire to help others, perhaps even a naiveté in his altruism, but also displayed hints of hubris and belief in his own infallibility (being able to recover while still taking more and more risks). Socially, he experienced a strong affiliation to the organisation, a high level of trust (his behaviour is left unchecked), and he is applauded for his contributions to the group – if not put on a pedestal. However, in the Adoboli story, there is a noticeable lack of real role-models, a mentor or an older guide. Rather than exploring the underlying assumptions and root causes that led to the situation, his superiors scapegoat and abandon Adoboli. In the wake of his actions, arrest, conviction, prison service and battle to avoid deportation, Adoboli has experienced mental anguish, exhaustion and losing the will to fight. Indeed, he finds that he is 'no longer at ease'. Although as spectators in the Adoboli case the public does not enjoy the profound insight into the character in the tale that the literary genre of the novel affords readers, the intimate portrayal of Obi may give voice to the complex social environment of Adoboli as well as the complex individual person.

Conclusion

Illuminating the complexity of the social context of corruption through the lens of literature offers an opportunity to unpack the dichotomous conceptualisation of the ethical/unethical leader as an individual and the ethical/unethical social environment. Despite being written over half a century ago and being set in Nigeria, the social influences observed in Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease* are still of interest today. The tensions of identity, society and ethics which are presented through these African characters provides useful insights into how social vice can infuse otherwise ethical individuals and has relevance for other contexts. In this highly acclaimed work of fiction, Achebe has challenged colonial depictions of African life, portraying the African village with an African voice (Franklin 2008) that is neither glorifying nor critical.

In our analysis, not only can the leadership process be seen as strongly characterised by relationality, the roles of both leaders and followers can be interchanged and take on multiple forms in different situations, whether in professional or social lives of those involved (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Price 2008; Lapierre 2014). The ambiguity of corruption makes clearer how current views of unethical leaders are often simplistic (Price 2008; Koonce *et al.* 2016), placing too much emphasis on the extremes of heroic versus villainous leaders (Price 2008). Furthermore, such polarised perspectives are deficient in that they seem to downplay the relationship between leaders and followers, as well as societal influences on these interactions. Although power can place individuals into situations in which they are more susceptible to corruption, not all leaders do engage in unethical practices or descend into corrupt behaviours in their roles, despite temptation. The conditions surrounding such phenomena warrant attention and call for further investigation into social factors and multi-level influences that enable otherwise virtuous leaders as ethical individuals to engage in unethical behaviour.

Achebe's novel gives voice to postcolonial accounts of the tribal experience and cultural tensions with modern urban life in Nigeria resulting in shifting identity tensions – from feelings of superiority to the rejection of being condemned for breaking the norms, to the desire for reconciliation with the group out of obligation. Similarly, the Adoboli case demonstrates shifting identity tensions in the non-African social context. He found himself in an environment that created unethical influence in which the desire for affiliation led to a reckless pursuit of belonging and excelling, and the misplaced focus on individual accountability led to identity tensions and dismissing the role of group influence to the point of scapegoating, abandonment and banishment. As an alternative interpretation of the 'corrupt leader' as a rogue, it is proposed that the corrupt leader is the product of a complex web of conflicting social influences with varying power structures and fluid identities.

In considering the ethical failures of individuals such as those observed in case of the fictional Nigerian civil servant, Obi, and the real-life Ghanaian trader, Adoboli, a number of considerations can be made. Firstly, ethical issues by virtue of their relational nature are highly complex. Unethical behaviour is often a result of a varied mix of influences that cut across time and extend beyond an individual's professional life. It is also important to consider that there is a difference between moral reasoning (level) and moral action and this constitutes a gap in our understanding of ethical or unethical individuals. Therefore, efforts must be made to consider these when discussing situations of ethical failure and possible preventive measures in a social context. Secondly, there is a need to acknowledge the fallibility of the individual. A leader is at some point also a follower, whose positive traits do not exclude negative ones for as shown, both heroic and villainous traits exist in any individual. Rather than ignore or rationalise negative character traits or behaviours the challenge for ethical leaders (and followers) is to strive for reconciliation and continue to examine underlying assumptions and root causes of ethical failure. Finally, an individual's ethical failure is to be understood as much the fault of their social environment as it is one's own. Any person, who has a meaningful relationship with or can exert influence on another individual, shares accountability, at least in part, for that individual's behaviour.

In the closing paragraph of the novel, Achebe alludes to the enigmatic nature of corruption, implicitly calling out the necessity for deeper analysis and consideration of multiple perspectives when evaluating the social context of corruption:

Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr Green did not know either. (Achebe 1960, p. 154)

Not only Africa faces a leadership crisis: the world is facing a leadership crisis. Western societies can also no longer feel at ease by detaching themselves from incidents of corruption throughout the globe any more than the Ibo tribesmen can dissociate their influence from Obi. The reaction to cases such as Adoboli's should not be one of disbelief, judgement and distancing from the individual. Instead, it must be taken as a reminder to reflect both as leaders and followers on the relational nature of ethics, leadership, and corruption. Corrupt leaders do not only hinder advancement in developing regions; they hinder human advancement globally and serve as a warning to examine the role society plays in creating (un)ethical leaders and followers.

References

- Achebe, C. (1960). *No Longer at Ease*. London. Heinman.
- Adeleye, I., Luiz, J., Muthuri, J., and Amaeshi, K., (2020). Business ethics in Africa: the role of institutional context, social relevance, and development challenges. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 161, pp. 717–729. doi: 10.1007/s10551-019-04338-x.
- Adewale, A. (2020). A model of virtuous leadership in Africa: Case study of a Nigerian firm. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 161, pp. 749–762. doi:10.1007/s10551-019-04340-3.
- Africa's crisis of ethical leadership. (2017, April 2). Sunday Independent [South Africa], p. 19. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A488030285/GPS?u=unipais&sid=GPS&xid=f7b63792> (Accessed 26 February 2020).
- Agulanna, C. (2006). Democracy and the crisis of leadership in Africa. *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, 31(3), pp. 255–264. Available at: <https://search.proquest.com/openview/0812e4f3fbf42ec41200bd30d1308d0f/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=22044> (Accessed 26 February 2020).
- Ahmed, K. (2014). A question of power: The leadership question: Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* and the global future. *An African Journal of New Writing*, 52, pp. 70–79.
- Aiken, H.D. (1966). Morality and ideology. In R. T. De George (Ed.) (1968). *Ethics and society: Original essays on contemporary moral problems by Henry David Aiken and others*, pp.149–170. London: Macmillan.
- Beyes, T., Costas, J., and Ortmann, G. (2019). Novel thought: Towards a literary study of organization. *Organization Studies*, 40(2), pp. 1787–1803. doi: 10.1177/0170840619874458.
- Bongard, W. (2012). It's up to mentors to help young professionals stave off youthful arrogance. *Financial Post*, 5 November. Available at: <https://business.financialpost.com/executive/c-suite/its-up-to-mentors-to-help-young-professionals-stave-off-youthful-arrogance> (Accessed 26 February 2020).
- Ciulla, J. B. (2003). *The ethics of leadership*. Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Claxton, G., Owen, D., and Sadler-Smith, E. (2015). Hubris in leadership: A peril of unbridled intuition? *Leadership*, 11(1), pp. 57–78. doi: 10.1177/1742715013511482.
- Colton, R. G. (2020). Modeling leadership in Tolkien's fiction: Craft and wisdom, gift and task. *Journal of Business Ethics* 163, pp. 401–415. doi: 10.1007/s10551-018-4052-6.
- Crevani, L. (2018). Is there leadership in a fluid world? Exploring the ongoing production of direction in organizing. *Leadership*, 14(1), pp. 83–109. doi: 10.1177/1742715015616667
- Daskal, L. (2018). *The 100 Best Leadership Quotes of All Time*. Retrieved from <https://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/the-100-best-leadership-quotes-of-all-time/> (Accessed 26 February 2020).

- Dion, M. (2012). Are ethical theories relevant for ethical leadership? *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 33(1), pp. 4–24. doi: 10.1108/01437731211193098.
- Eden, D. (1992). Leadership and expectations: Pygmalion effects and other self-fulfilling prophecies in organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 3(4), pp. 271–305. doi: 10.1016/1048-9843(92)90018-B.
- Fortado, L. (2015). ‘Kweku Adoboli: A rogue trader’s tale’, *Financial Times*, 22 October. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/0fa0b42a-783a-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7> (Accessed 26 February 2020).
- Franklin, R. (2008). ‘After empire’, *The New Yorker*, 26 May. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/26/after-empire> (Accessed on 26 February 2020).
- Gibbs, J. C., Basinger, K. S., Grime, R. L., and Snarey, J. R. (2007). Moral judgment development across cultures: Revisiting Kohlberg’s universality claims. *Developmental Review*, 24(7), pp. 443–500. doi: 10.1016/j.dr.2007.04.001.
- Graen, G. B., and Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), pp. 219–247. doi: 10.1016/1048-9843(95)90036-5.
- Gosling, J. (2017). Will we know what counts as good leadership if *Things Fall Apart*? Questions prompted by Chinua Achebe’s novel. *Leadership* 13(1), pp. 35–47. doi: 10.1177/1742715016680675.
- Harrington, D., and Dolgoff, R., (2008). Hierarchies of ethical principles for ethical decision making in social work. *Ethics and Social Welfare* 2(2), pp.183–196. doi: 10.1080/17496530802117680
- Johnson, C. E. (2016). *Organizational ethics: A practical approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Kaptein, M. (2013). *Workplace morality: Behavioral ethics in organizations*. Bingley: Emerald.
- Kareem, B. B. (2017). A political analysis of *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 2(1), pp. 55–64.
- Lawler, E. J. and Hipp, L. (2010). Corruption as social exchange. In S. R. Thye, and E. J. Lawler (Eds.), *Advances in Group Processes* (Vol. 27), pp. 269–296. Bingley, Emerald. doi: 10.1108/S0882-6145(2010)0000027013.
- Kellerman, B. (2004). *Bad leadership: What it is, how it happens, why it matters*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kellerman, B. (2007). What every leader needs to know about followers. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(12), pp. 84–91.
- Koonce, R., Bligh, M., Carsten, M., and Hurwitz, M. (2016). *Followership in action: Cases and commentaries* (1st ed.). Bingley: Emerald.
- Lammers, J., and Stapel, D. A. (2009). How power influences moral thinking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(2), pp. 279–289. doi: 10.1037/a0015437.
- Lapierre, L. M. (2014). Why and how should subordinates follow their managers? In L. M. Lapierre, and M. K. Carsten (Eds.), *Followership: What is it and why do people follow?* pp. 157–169. Bingley: Emerald.
- Lloyd, B. (2000). Leadership and power. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 21(5). doi: 10.1108/lodj.2000.02221eab.001.
- Lunenburg, F. C. (2012). Power and leadership: An influence process. *International Journal of Management, Business, and Administration*, 15(1), pp. 1–9.

- Mendonca, M., and Kanungo, R. (2007). *Ethical leadership*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.
- Moghalu, K. C. (2017) Africa's leadership conundrum: Global innovation in leadership. *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 41(2), pp. 171–192. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/forwa41&i=331> (Accessed 26 February 2020).
- Olalere, A. (2015). Complexity and leadership crisis in Africa. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 11(3/4), pp. 180–191. doi: 10.1108/IJPL-08-2015-0021.
- Pitesa, M., and Thau, S. (2013). Compliant sinners, obstinate saints: How power and self-focus determine the effectiveness of social influences in ethical decision making. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(3), pp. 635–658. doi: 10.5465/amj.2011.0891.
- Plaisance, P. L. (2014). Virtue in media: The moral psychology of U.S. exemplars in news and public relations. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(2), pp. 308–325. doi:10.1177/1077699014527460.
- Popper, M. (2014). Why do people follow? In L. M. Lapierre, and M. K. Carsten (Eds.), *Followership: What is it and why do people follow?* pp. 109–120. Bingley: Emerald.
- Price, T. (2008). *Leadership ethics: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rayner, G., Hough, A., and Evans, M. (2011). 'From Ghana to the City: The rise of a trader who had it all', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 September. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/banksandfinance/8767097/From-Ghana-to-the-City-the-rise-of-a-trader-who-had-it-all.html> (Accessed on 27 February 2020).
- Reiley, P.J., and Jacobs, R. R. (2016). Ethics matter: Moderating leaders' power use and followers' citizenship behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 134, pp. 69–81. doi: 10.1007/s10551-014-2416-0.
- Reynolds, K. (2016). The interplay of follower and leader ethics: A case study of the film "The Wave". In R. Koonce, M. Bligh, M. Carsten, and M. Hurwitz (2016). *Followership in action: Cases and commentaries* (1st ed.) pp. 153–161. Bingley: Emerald.
- Rosenblatt, V. (2012). Hierarchies, power inequalities, and organizational corruption. *Journal of Business Ethics* 111(2), 237–251. doi: 10.1007/s10551-012-1204-y.
- Sadler-Smith, E., Akstinaite, V., Robinson, G., and Wray, T. (2017). Hubristic leadership: A review. *Leadership*, 13(5), pp. 525–548. doi: 10.1177/1742715016680666.
- Sanka, C. G., Gustafson-Asamoah, P., and Isaaka, C. A. (2018). The postcoloniality of poor African leadership in Achebe's fiction: A close reading of *Arrow of God* and *A Man of the People*. *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies*, 6(2), pp. 84–92. doi:10.7575/aiac.ijclts.v.6n.2p.84.
- Sankar, Y. (2003). Character not charisma is the critical measure of leadership excellence. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9(4), pp. 45–55. doi: 10.1177/107179190300900404.
- Schindler, J. H. (2014). *Followership: What it takes to lead*. New York, NY: Business Expert Press. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>.
- Schwartz, M. S. (2016). Ethical Decision-Making Theory: An integrated approach. *Journal of Business Ethics* 139, pp. 755–776. doi: 10.1007/s10551-015-2886-8.
- Taylor, D. (2018). 'Kweku Adoboli deported to Ghana on flight from Heathrow', *The Guardian*, 14 November, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/14/kweku-adoboli-rogue-trader-ubs-deported-ghana-heathrow> (Accessed on 27 February 2020).

- The Telegraph (2012). 'UBS 'rogue trader' trial: Kweku Adoboli's 'deeply sorry' email ...', The Telegraph, 14 September. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/.../UBS-rogue-trader-trial-Kweku-Adobolis-deeply-sorry-email.html> (Accessed on 27 February 2020).
- Tenbrunsel, A. E., and Messick, D. M. (2004). Ethical fading: The role of self-deception in unethical behavior. *Social Justice Research*, 17(2), pp. 223–236. doi:10.1023/B:SORE.0000027411.35832.53.
- Uhl-Bien, M., and Carsten, M. K. (2007). Being ethical when the boss is not. *Organizational Dynamics*, 36(2), pp. 187–201. doi: 10.1016/j.orgdyn.2007.03.006.
- Umphress, E. E., and Bingham, J. B., (2011). When employees do bad things for good reasons: Examining unethical pro-organizational behaviors. *Organization Science* 22(3), pp. 621-640. doi: 10.1287/orsc.1100.0559.
- Uroko, F. C. (2018). Civil disobedience and the survival of democracy in Nigeria: lessons from reboam's leadership. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 4(5), 112–127. Available at: <http://igwebuikejournals.com/pdf%20created/4.5.9.pdf> (Accessed on 26 February 2020).
- Weber, J. (1990). Managers' moral reasoning: Assessing their responses to three moral dilemmas. *Human Relations*, 43(7), pp. 687–702. doi: 10.1177/001872679004300705.
- Wesche, J. S., May, D., Peus, C., and Frey, D. (2010). Leadership corruption: Influence factors, process, and prevention. In B. Schyns and T. Hansbrough (Eds.), *When leadership goes wrong: Destructive leadership, mistakes, and ethical failures* (pp. 305–353). Charlotte, NC: IAP Information Age.
- White, R. D. Jr. (1999). Are women more ethical? Recent findings on the effects of gender upon moral development. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 9(3), pp. 459–472. doi: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024418.
- Zdaniuk, B., and Levine, J. M. (2001). *Group loyalty: Impact of members' identification and contributions*. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 37(6), pp. 502–509. doi: 10.1006/jesp.2000.1474.

We thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions.