



Book Review

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Tunji Olaopa, The Unending Quest for Reform: An Intellectual Memoir



John Olushola Magbadelo*

Lead Director, Centre for African & Asian Studies, Abuja, Nigeria

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***Corresponding author:** John Olushola Magbadelo, Lead Director, Centre for African & Asian Studies, Abuja, Nigeria, Email: solamagbadelo@gmail.com

Introduction

Many books have been written on Nigeria's Public Service Reforms, and the subject of the book under review is the author of a good number of those books. The Unending Quest for Reform: An Intellectual Memoir is the autobiography of one of Nigeria's clear-sighted and cerebral advocates of public sector reforms. According to the author, Professor Tunji Olaopa, a retired Permanent Secretary in Nigeria's Federal Civil Service, the book was written to satisfy a nudging to document his perspectives on reforms and the several steps taken and encounters he experienced in the pursuit of his passion for the transformation of the country's public service for the benefit of upcoming generations of public and civil servants. As the most recent of the author's numerous publications, it is an attempt to draw the curtain on his pro-reform agitations and intellectual exertions over the years on diverse aspects of public sector reforms. The book begins with two Forewords written by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah and Professor Eghosa Osaghae. The forewords praised the courage of the author for his consistent espousal of bold ideas on reforms over the years, and expressed disappointment and anger at the untimely retirement of the author from the federal civil service when he was serving as a permanent Secretary- a retirement that was roundly condemned by the Forewords among others as "wastage of talents ...on the altar of bad politics" "masterminded by the government in 2015.

In the Prologue, the author's initiation into what he refers to as "policy professionalism" had the impactful influence of Professor Ojetunji Aboyade while his decision to publish his autobiography was to fulfil the counsel given to him by Chief Simeon Adebayo in 1992. The justifications for this Memoir according to the author, include rendering his contributions to public administration over a given period, providing reference resources and generational manual that could guide succeeding generations of public service managers on governance and institutional reform to mitigate the current dearth of same in the Public Service. He considers the memoir as an account of his stewardship to the citizenry and a testimonial on the providential grace bestowed on him.

Chapter one describes the role that books played in the development of the author's intellectual and psychological being, noting the different stages of his education, the choice of books, and the realization of the impact and relevance of knowledge acquisition to the public service and the larger society in the quest for entrenching the value of decency in human society. In Chapter two, the impact of the complexities of the triple heritage of culture, religions and western education on the impressionable mind of the author was evident in the exertions of parental and societal influences which ensured that anywhere he went, from Okeho, Aawe, Akure, Sango Ota, Oyo, to Ibadan, he remained focused on his purpose of acquiring education, not just for self-development but also for making notable and remarkable contributions to the development of the communities that gave so much towards his upbringing. In Chapter three, the political crises of 1965 in Ibadan which culminated in the wilful and violent destruction of lives and property and created so much turmoil that led to other crises that resulted in the dissolution of the first Republic was depicted as an event that spurred the author's interest later in life in investigating Plato's The Republic assertion that the troubles of States would not cease until philosophers are made kings. This revelatory knowledge led the author to dig out more facts in several related literature including Awolowo's the People's Republic, autobiographies of great political thinkers like Niccolo Machiaveli's The Prince, and those of Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello among others. His choice of course of study at the University of Ibadan (UI) in 1981 was largely influenced by his passion and love for books on humanities and related fields to which he had been well exposed, having previously read an appreciable number of titles.

In Chapter four, the author's educational and other activities were highlighted. At the UI during his undergraduate studies in Political Science, the author was attracted to Students' unionism, an activism that badly affected his overall grades in violation of his earlier expressed determination to excel in his academic pursuit.

The brain ailment in 1976 which he suffered and continued into his days at the UI was also contributory to his low academic performance. The agony of the ailment subsided in 1986 when he received some tablets from England for its treatment. His subsequent decision to commence the postgraduate studies in political science almost immediately after the completion of the mandatory one year national service, was in response to the disappointment of earning an unimpressive class of degree at the undergraduate level. And at the end of the Master's programme in Political Theory in 1987 at the UI, he felt a deep sense of accomplishment having been given what he describes as "the essential element of learning and sound judgement", a far cry from what the UI and other Universities in Nigeria offer in contemporary times.

Chapter five details the author's polygamous background and the immense lessons he learnt from his experiential knowledge of the complications and complexities of such conjugal relationship- a realization that significantly influenced his resolve to have a monogamous marriage which was further entrenched by his adherence to Christian faith. The fortuitous contact of the author with the lady that eventually became his wife after the initial hiccups which resulted from the mutual misunderstanding and immaturity on both sides was regarded as a destined course of event because it all happened when the author had just commenced his postgraduate programme at the UI with little financial strength. So many events rolled into the author's life within a short period: the completion of his Master's programme in 1987, the full consummation of his relationship with Funlola, his wife, the birth of the first child, Opeyemi, in February 1988; the relentless search for job that led to his appointment as a research officer at MAMSER at Lagos in August 1988; the birth of the second child, Ademola, in March, 1990; and thereafter, in recognition of the author's writing prowess, he was drafted to Abuja from MAMSERR to work at the Presidency on the orders of President Babangida in 1992. With that transition came remarkable improvement in the quality of the author's family life and the arrival of his third child, Ifeoluwa, in Abuja in December 1995. The success of his marital relationship with his wife was credited to the institutionalized omoluabi values in Yoruba culture which was infused into both of them by their parents.

Chapters six and seven, give a detailed rendition on the author's quest for a spiritual identity from his cradle as a young Yoruba boy growing up under the strong influences of the Yoruba liberal religious outlook in which Christianity, Islam, and traditional religion were coexisting peacefully, to the period when he had become an adult with some critical intellectual disposition that stimulated his search for the probable ecumenical connections among African Christianity, mysticism, occultism, and the 'Ifa oracular practices which had been the Yoruba pathway to divinity for centuries. Although his search for spiritual essence found fulfilment in the Pentecostal theological outreach, he believes that the orthodox churches are more involved in nation-

building for the transformation of citizens' lives as exemplified by the missionary exertions of T.J. Bowen and the Nigerian Baptist Convention- an exemplary ethical tenets which, he opines, the Pentecostal ministry in Nigeria should internalize.

The robust multidisciplinary scholarly exposure and students' union activism of the author at the UI are presented in chapter eight as preparatory processes for his future commitment to the quest for more knowledge on institutional reforms in the public service. Chapters nine, ten, and eleven highlight the challenges of undertaking and promoting reforms in a difficult, volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment like Nigeria's; code of ethics that a reformer should internalize for result-oriented outcomes; the diverse reform assignments of the author in different committees and panels at the Ministry of Education where he facilitated the setting up of the Education Sector Analysis Team, and at the Management Services Office under the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation, where he was instrumental in the establishment of the Bureau for Public Service Reforms, among others. The reform engagements exposed the author to a lot of learning opportunities at Commonwealth Roundtables in London, New Zealand, Cape Town, etc.

In Chapters twelve, thirteen, fourteen and fifteen, the author opens up on his naivety and false assumptions about the prospects of reforming the Nigerian Civil Service that he had in periods preceding his appointment as a Permanent Secretary on 15th December 2010. According to him, the appointment exposed him to the raw counter-reform efforts of entrenched interests which did not allow him to achieve much in all the places he served as Permanent Secretary. He realized belatedly that only the Head of Service (HoS) has considerable political clout to drive institutional reforms beyond its technical imperatives. He expatiated on the dilemma of reforming the Nigerian Civil Service against the backdrop of the stiff resistance of entrenched anti-reform values and systems which he tagged as "Bureau-Pathology" which have continued to cast the Service in grossly unsavoury lights. He, however, espouses a five-point reform agenda which he believes could re-position the country's Civil Service, if implemented (pp. 184-185). He discusses the issue of providing leadership for reforms and suggested the adoption of the Awolowo- Adebo Model, in which the highest authority in the Western Region partnered with the HoS in the region to successfully drive requisite reforms.

In chapter sixteen, the author explains why the hurtful and malevolent decision of the government to retire him untimely in 2015 did not catch him napping. He had reflected on the terrible experience of the 1975 administrative purge of the civil service and had taken cautious note that the incident could repeat itself at any time in the future. Thus, he had nursed the ambition of setting up a policy institution that would create a platform for intellectual exchanges and interactions for policy development similar to the South African's Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) which he came across during one of his official trips abroad

as an officer in the Management Services Office (MSO). He had also previously played a role in the establishment of Professor Aboyade's Development Policy Centre (DPC). Thus, his immediate response to his unexpected retirement was to finalize his plans to establish the Ibadan School of Governance and Public Policy (ISGPP) which is almost a replica of the DPC and the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), where he served in 2020 as a directing staff.

Chapter seventeen provides justification for the author's foray into the academia as a scholar-practitioner and highlights series of his academic activities and achievements since he was appointed as a Professor of Public Administration, and subsequent delivery of the 10th Inaugural Lecture of the Lead City University in 2018. In Chapter eighteen, in his discussion on the future of Nigeria as a nation, he took a swipe at the unbridled greed and egotism of the political elites, who are only motivated by their selfish interests at the expense of the people. He admits that restructuring of the Nigerian State requires revisiting some fundamental constitutional provisions to guarantee Nigeria's federal strength and capacity.

The only notable shortcoming of this book which was published in 2023 is that it omits current and promising developments in the country's civil service since the author's retirement in 2015. This publication covers majorly events that the author took part in as a participant-observer and indeed as a scholar-practitioner. Therefore, references to reforms during the period of his engagement leaves out very important programmes of reforms that commenced in 2016 when the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2017- 2021(FCSSIP21) was developed and implemented to its terminal date. The subsequent development of a successor plan known as Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021- 2025(FCSSIP25) which was immediately commissioned and is being implemented vigorously with empirically verifiable impacts, ought to have

elicited a passing reference by the author.

It is very interesting that the title of the author's Memoir has turned out to be prophetic because barely few months after the book was launched in Abuja on Thursday 6th April, 2023, the author was appointed on Thursday 26th October, 2023 by the federal government as the Chairman, Federal Civil Service Commission- a powerful constitutional body charged with the task of developing and overseeing the implementation of civil service legislations, preparing and issuing civil service regulations and general instructions related to recruitment, performance appraisal, job description and job evaluation, disciplinary measures and salary structure, thereby giving him the opportunity to translate into reality his long-held ideas about reforms in the country's public service which he couldn't operationalize when he was a Permanent Secretary in the Service. With this new appointment, evidently, the author's engagement with reforms is an unending commitment which of necessity entails the futuristic scribbling of additional chapters as postscripts to his Memoir. Obviously, the philosopher is being put to test to determine the practicality and efficacy of his theorizing on public service reforms.

However, this Memoir is an intellectual piece which engages the readers' sensibilities and provokes some deep thoughts about Nigeria's public service, especially the civil service subset. It is an account of the stewardship of one of Nigeria's public service philosophers and reformers whose footprints in all the sectors of the public service that he traversed are indelible. It is a bundle of ideas on how the civil services of developing countries can be reformed, taking Nigeria's case as a reference point. The book is well-written and rendered in very lucid and easily comprehensible language and it is suitable as a reference material for students and teachers of such disciplines as public administration, development studies, public policy analysis, comparative public administration, among others.



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