

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY IN TIV POP-SONGS IN CURBING CORRUPTION IN THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

Corruption is not just an endemic evil; it is a pandemic virus that eats away the commonwealth of any society. It is therefore the obligation of the citizens of such a society to seek ways of curbing it. Some of these ways are through the orientation of the citizens, expositions on the evil of corruption through academics, religious homilies, and popular music, among others. Many scholars, political commentators, religious leaders and social influencers have done so much in this regard, lamenting about the ills of corruption and sometimes proffering solutions that are farfetched and completely abstract from the people. This study therefore aims at examining the role of popular music within the context of the Tiv people. The significance of this work is based on the fact that if the philosophy imbedded in the Tiv pop-music is properly analysed, the people will better appraise the evil of corruption on personal basis which is the best way of tackling the menace. Using qualitative method of Ethnography and Phenomenology approaches, the study finds, through the analysis of two Tiv pop-songs, that even though these songs are popular among the people, they have little understanding of the essence of the philosophy they bear. It is recommended that local leaders should do more in educating the people about the core messages of these pop-songs for them to imbibe the spirit of the philosophy behind the songs for a corruption-free-society.

Keywords: Tiv, Popular Music, Philosophy, Corruption

Introduction

Corruption is a virus and it is eating away the fabric of the society and its ubiquitous nature informed this research. The aim of this paper is to work out modalities on how to curb corruption in the society. To achieve this, it analyses the philosophy embedded in two Tiv pop-songs for context. This is not to say that the Tiv people are the most corrupt,

but the thesis of this paper warrants that the efforts towards curbing corruption be contextualised. It is in this understanding that the two Tiv pop-songs are found useful for this paper.

The paper argues that the worship of wealth in the contemporary milieu only encourages and supports corruption as many individuals also want to live affluent lives at the expense of others. It in this regard that the two pop-songs caution that corrupt practices are evil and those engaged in them will not escape retributive justice. It is advised that the society endeavours to approbate honesty and reprobate dishonesty. This way, others will refrain from it and live lives that enhance the common good of everyone in the society.

Conceptual Clarifications

The following terms or concepts are defined in line with the focus of this paper.

Philosophy

Philosophy has several shades of meanings. The most common one by etymology is a combination of two Greek words *philo* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom) literally meaning “love of wisdom.” It is also a course of study in the university. However, its consideration here in the paper is according to the definition of Merriam-Webster Dictionary (online) “the most basic beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group.” Why the authors picked on this definition is that it expresses the focus of this paper as imbedded in the beliefs and attitudes of the Tiv people expressed in the two songs – hence the philosophy on corruption. This definition is germane to the beliefs and practices of the Tiv people towards corruption.

Popular Music

The definition of popular music (pop music) is a little bit elusive. Those who write on it describe its nature, origin, and influence on the society. According to Torres and Dance-Schissel (2023:2), “Pop music is defined by its confluence of different music genres, smooth sound, relatively short duration, and mainly commercial orientation. Pop music is generally simple in subject nature and often revolves around love and daily life.” As operationalised in this paper, pop music, is so considered based on its popularity among the Tiv people and how enthralling it is in its usage. The two songs being considered have enthralled the Tiv nation for as long as the authors have lived. One of them is even used as the Tiv national anthem.

One thing has to be pointed out namely that pop music is only popular because of its meaning and affect, i.e. what it means to the people and how it affects them. This is the concern of Stone in her work *Meaning and Effect of Popular Music*. She argued that popular music has conventional meaning that speak to the context and yield varied

connotations to the audience who are thus enthralled with authentic expressions (Stone, 2016:2).

Corruption

According to Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Okorie (2014: 2-3), “Corruption is the use of public office for private gain. It refers to any behaviour that deviates from the norm or is socially unacceptable.” Yagboyaju views corruption as “any act of a public official, civilian or military, aimed at changing the normal or lawful course of events, especially when the perpetrator uses such a position of authority for the purposes of a personal or group interest, most often at the expense of others.” Broadly, Yagboyaju postulates that corruption entails:

Ethnic and personal misuse of office for accumulation of wealth, unauthorized sale of government property, illegal hoarding of essential and critical commodities, favouritism, nepotism, purchase of loyalty by an illegitimate or out rightly illegal regime through inducement for supporters and victimization of opponents and critics, election rigging, falsification of election results and examination malpractices among others.

The usage of the term in this paper is limited to financial sleaze irrespective of the social status of the individual involved. This is to align the discussion within the scope of the popular music under consideration. This is borne from the belief that corruption in Nigeria is endemic and takes place at all levels of human transactions – from the office to the market square to the homestead.

Literature Review

Corruption in Nigerian society has become a common phenomenon. To some extent, some are likely to think of corruption as a normal behaviour and a praise-worthy thing. This is because the society has tended to worship wealth not minding how it was acquired. It is even more concerning that the church that is supposed to be the light and salt of the world is seemingly neck-deep and an active player in this despicable game. Some church leaders encourage the acquisition of wealth as they see the wealthy as the righteous and those whom are blessed by God. Thus, the poor lament their plight and patiently wait for their turn to be ‘blessed by God.’ This has sadly entrenched corruption in the social fabric of Nigeria. Hoffmann and Patel captured this better in their Chatham House Report titled *Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions* when they postulated that corrupt practices persist in Nigeria because of how people think and react to it:

Corruption is difficult to curb because it is motivated by many factors, including expectations about how other people are likely to behave. Efforts to change the

beliefs of a few individuals are not in themselves enough to induce a sustainable change in collective behaviour. That requires a systematic approach that is context-specific – and that, crucially, is undertaken, owned and sustained by a critical mass of local actors who want to forge a ‘new normal’ (Hoffmann and Patel, 2017: v).

In the same vein, Ochulor *et al* contended that corruption is not and should not be limited to only the people in leadership position but that scrutiny should be extended to all citizens of Nigeria. If the leaders are corrupt, it only goes a long way in exposing the type of society they mirror (2011:1). Similarly, Nomishan *et al* (2022:1) argued that “the value placed on corruption in Nigeria is synonymous to the way cultural values are cherished by people in some nations of the world. It seems that some Nigerians take corruption to be a normal way of life, thereby, equating the vice to acceptable cultural values” concluding that “there is a serious and immediate need to educate the Nigerian public about the consequences of developing a culture of corruption in the country.” This take aligns with spirit of this paper as it regards the philosophy of the two popular songs under analysis.

The reviewed literature has a unanimous agreement that corruption is endemic in the Nigerian society as it is not just limited to those in public offices but even more so to the commoners. They also argued that it is pertinent that all citizens be taught some lessons on how to abstain from corrupt practices in order to live lives free of corruption. While this formed the basis of their recommendations, they did not mention the use of popular music or songs as a means of creating awareness or educating the populace on the menace of corruption. Relative to this yawning lacuna, this paper examines the philosophy of two Tiv popular songs on corruption in particular contexts to the Tiv nation, in particular and Nigeria, as a nation-state, in general. Accordingly, the abridged history of the Tiv people is related below with emphasis on corruption, justice and righteousness.

Brief Tiv History

It is believed that the provenance of the Tiv people is traced to a single ancestor called “Tiv”. “The word Tiv refers to the ethnic group, the land on which they live, and to the language they speak; the Tiv are associated to the Bantu of Central Africa” (Iorshagher and Aande, 2022:2). The Tiv people are located in the Middle Belt area of present Benue State of Nigeria. The Tiv land extends to both sides of River Benue and occupies an area of about 9,861 square miles and stretches from about 6°30 to 8°-10 north latitude and from 8° to 10° east longitude (Rubingh, 1969: 58). Based on the 2006 census, they are estimated to number over 5.7 million people making the fourth most populous ethnic group in Nigeria. Though, they are predominantly in Benue State, the Tiv people are also indigenes

of Taraba, Plateau and Nassarawa States “and the Cameroon” (Ambe-Uva, 2011:1; Agundu and Tughhemba, 2020:7).

Corruption in Tivland

The Tiv nation is known for its hardworking nature. Being blessed with assorted human and natural resources like limestone, fertile soils and highly educated people, it is concerning that it is still mentioned in the league of underdeveloped nations. Timin (2019:1) mentioned corruption among other factors as responsible for this unfortunate state of affairs in Tivland. He argued that corruption in Tivland veers its head through “negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship, jealousy, fear of witchcraft attacks/manipulations (*tsav*), envy (*Iyuhe*), politics of bitterness and communal conflicts” (Timin, 2019:1). Whatever that could have been used for the common good and development of the Tivland has been diverted to private pockets and expropriated by unscrupulous individuals. People such as these, instead of celebrating them, they should be rejected and treated with ignominy by the society.

Methodology

The study adopts qualitative method using Ethnography and Phenomenology approaches. The choice of this method, as explained by Creswell (2017:3), is informed by the fact that qualitative methods are widely used for exploratory problems that seek context variables, the opinions of individuals, and stories that help to explain the mechanisms or connections in the form of theories or casual models. On their part, Denzin and Lincoln, cited by Gerald and Yang, define qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world,” where the researchers are “attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” in natural settings (Gerald and Yang, 2008:142). Given the basics of the topic of this research, the study adopts two types of qualitative methods: Ethnography and Phenomenology.

The main characteristic of ethnography is the study of groups and communities seeking to observe behaviors, culture, ideologies, beliefs, language that are shared by the group (Mol *et al*, nd:5). As an example in the context of this paper, the Tiv people are studied. Citing other scholars, Mol *et al* explain that “phenomenology describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.” For this and other reasons, Mol *et al* concluded that phenomenology is a highly appropriate research approach to study the human experience. In addition, phenomenological method is the emphasis on the phenomenon to be investigated as a single idea or concept (Mol *et al*, nd:5). An example would be the Tiv people, their understanding and response to corrupt

practices as espoused in some of their popular songs two of which are analysed in this paper.

Discussion of Findings

Having established that corruption is endemic in the world and permeates all nations and cultures, there arises the need to curb the menace. This necessitates an analytical endeavour of the two popular songs presented below:

Yo o oo!
Ageba geba vakaa/Iwer kaa
Ôn' mba Tiv cii
Wuha duwe sha tembe yô
Ikyur ior ihembe ayem ve!
Begha ande sha hyande ve!
Inyaregh ki bough ki kume er ka wura yô
Ndyar yough yi yough
(Ikyer, 2017: 7, 13)

Yes, ooo (more like ululation)
Trumpets sound/Shouts abound/ululations
All the Tiv sons and daughters (nation)
Fully dressed, walked gaily to space and so
People scatter, running in awe
Lion has manifested during the game
Evil (bad) money thunders like rain
Walk valiantly, valiantly

This song, popularly known as the Tiv nation's anthem, describes the solidity and valour of the Tiv person. Having established that the Tiv are valiant people that when they make an appearance, all non Tiv nations scatter helter-skelter in awe; in the wonderment that follows the ululation and adulation that are results of fascination and adoration of the Tiv nation. In the light of this seemingly unequalled prowess of the people, the songwriter, who is anonymous, likened the Tiv people to a lion. Normally, humans conceive the lion to be the king of the animals with his majestic fur, even more, his roar.

The songwriter quickly warns about corruption. For him/her, all these eulogies will be naught if the Tiv nation does not refrain from corrupt practices. Thus, the people are cautioned against enriching themselves with evil or bad money. Evil or bad money connotes income that is fraudulently acquired. This expresses the idea of inhibiting

economic justice in the land and that comes with weighty repercussions because such income thunders like (storm) rain. This implies that no matter how long a corrupt person tries to conceal their fraudulent conduct, it shall be well and generously exposed like thunder during rain. Everyone hears it when it thunders.

This warning presupposes that rather than getting one's hands soiled with filthy lucre which shall be thunderously exposed one day to indescribable shame and reprobation, it is better for everyone to be fealty to the common good and development of the nation. In the light of this, abstinence from corrupt practices is the best life for people to live. In real sense, that is what valour is. Cheating is not an attribute of a lion but of a weasel. The popularity of this song in Tivland is topnotch. It is used by some Radio Stations like the Radio Benue, Makurdi; Ashi FM, Katsina Ala and the NTA in Benue state. Other places that attract clusters of people like major motor parks play it as music to enthrall commuters. It is also played during the Tiv traditional gatherings and other social engagements in Tivland. Individuals also sing it with delight and deep emotions and affect.

The second popular song is shorter and straight to the point:

U ya ki bo bo
Usua cica
U ya ki bo bo
U nyia a wamba

You eat evil (bad) money,
you will vomit everything.
You eat evil (bad) money,
you will stool blood.

The song warns that when you eat, i.e. embezzle funds you will vomit everything. This implies that any individual that takes from where they did not gather or fraudulently enrich themselves at the expense of the nation shall vomit it to the last *kobo*. The second line reinforces the first; a literary device that may be called synonymous parallelism. One thing is clear here. The human body has two points of excreting. The first, as expressed in the song is the mouth and the second is the anus. The mouth also serves as a point of entry, from where one can chop money, a metaphor in the local parlance for embezzlement. Thus, anything that goes in through the mouth, comes out through the mouth as vomit or through the anus as stool. In this case, the songwriter announces that the stool that will come out will be blood, more like dysentery. Dysentery is a well-known ailment. Whether it is vomit of dysentery, they are all metaphors for punishment that

come as retributive justice either from the rule of law or the rule of nature. Nature abhors stealing or cheating, which are all forms of corruption.

The popular songs highlighted and discussed in this paper have the connotation of justice inherent in them. This is hinged on the grounded aspects in Tiv cosmology or concept of justice in the understanding of right and wrong. This informed the philosophy of the songs notably that illicit enrichment of oneself is a wrong against oneself and the society as a whole. Agundu and Tughhemba made this a central theme of their work *Justice in the Traditional Thought System of the Tiv People* when they argued *inter alia*:

The concept of justice in Tiv is very central to the understanding of the Tiv *Mnenge u tar* (world view) and *ieren* (philosophy). It is also built on the principles of appropriateness enshrined in harmony derived from the ontological principle of balance and proportion. It means *shainja* which depicts appropriateness. Justice in Tiv therefore, is an act, an attitude, a system, a policy that is appropriate to many societies and the entire cosmic realities. Justice can also be seen in Tiv understanding to mean *shami* (right) (2020: 8).

Thus, an individual that steals the commonwealth to make themselves richer than the people or the society has acted wrongly or inappropriately (*shami ga*) and has run afoul of the economic justice of the Tiv people. This is not without consequences as the second popular song has said:

U ya ki bo bo
U sua cica
U ya ki bo bo
U nyia a wamba

You eat evil (or money that is not yours) money,
you will vomit (repay) everything.
You eat evil (or money that is not yours) money,
you will stool (shit) blood.

This is a warning that when you are corrupt, you should bear in mind that no matter how long it takes, the long reach of the arm of the law will eventually catch up with you. Besides this, by selfishly enriching yourself, you have disturbed the harmony that existed between the *tar* (cosmos) and the realm of the spirit. By this, you are liable for some punitive measures as the ancestors themselves will serve against you, retributive justice – as in stooling blood. You will have to *sôr tar* (repair the cosmos) you have disrupted with your corrupt conduct as implied in the popular song – *u sua cica* – you will vomit (repay) everything. As an antithesis to corrupt practices in Tivland, Iorshagher and Aande

submitted that the Tiv society values virtues like “honesty and decorum as viewed in the light of purity of human life, openness, respect for institutional and societal management.” This presupposes that such virtuous living is “the source from which the foundation of good life among the Tiv is established, it is demonstrable that justice, integrity and honest struggles for livelihood are offshoots of truth.” Truth ensures that hardworking individuals that carry out their obligations in trust and honesty for a rich and steadily grown Tiv nation are rewarded (2022:11-12).

The philosophy of the two pop-songs presents corruption as evil. They do this and cap it by postulating that every corrupt individual will not escape retributive justice, either from the state or nature. By extension, the philosophy entails that those who are corrupt should not be approbated but duly and vehemently reprobated with ignominy. This is in clear antithesis in the present social and cultural milieu that corruption seems to be the norm and the corrupt are lauded and praised to the highest heavens.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the philosophy of two Tiv pop-songs and how it could be used to curb corruption not only in Tivland but in the country as a whole. In the course of the work, it was discovered that corruption is endemic and the people’s reaction to it is lukewarm and sometimes welcoming. This has given the corrupt the boldness to continue in such evil practices. However, the philosophy of the two Tiv pop-songs cautions against this. The people are to be wary of corruption because it does not pay. Those who engage in it will be disgraced and punished for such practices. On the strength of the above, the paper concludes that corruption is not limited to only those who occupy public offices but to all citizens. The notion that man is a product of his own environment is apt and applicable to this scenario. Those who occupy public offices mirror the society they represent. It is therefore plausible to conclude that every individual should refrain from corrupt practices anywhere they find themselves. As recommendations, the paper avers that: More local musicians drawn from all the ethnic groups in Nigeria be encouraged to produce such pop-songs that hit against corruption as opposed to the hip-hop style that mirrors the corruption of the West and promote wealth without recourse to hard work. In places where such pop-songs already exist, they should be made popular for people to absorb. The teaching of such pop-songs should be added to the curriculum of nursery, primary and secondary schools in nursery rhymes, poetry and music respectively. Inculcating the behaviour that is free of corruption into young children will go a long way in moulding them into formidable incorruptible leaders of tomorrow. The philosophies of such pop-songs should be analysed and taught to even adults so that they too will understand the words of the songs and not just end up dancing to the lyrics alone. The paper strongly

believes that when these are achieved, there will be a drastic change and drop in the cases of sleaze in the country. Everyone should be involved in this fight to curb corruption for the common good of all.

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