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A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SOME SELECTED YORÙBÁ PROVERBS AS ANTIDOTES TO CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The incidence of corrupt practices that is ravaging the Nigerian nation is increasing day-by-day despite various efforts to eradicate it through the activities of anticorruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and the Whistle Blowers. This suggests the need to look elsewhere and inward in fighting this epidemic. Since solutions to every society's problems reside primarily with such society's culture (literature inclusive), this paper, therefore, examines the roles of Yorùbá proverbs in curbing and eradicating corruption in Nigerian society. This is achieved through a thematic analysis of some randomly selected (sampled) Yorùbá proverbs with particular reference (special bias) to the themes of instruction, warning (advice) and correction. The paper argues that Yorùbá proverbs are useful tools (weapons) for instructing towards best practices, warning and advising individuals against corrupt practices and guiding and correcting individuals against corruption, and emphasising the implications of corrupt acts. The paper concludes that Yorùbá proverbs are indeed, vital (crucial) in fighting corruption in various sectors of the Nigerian nation. This paper avers that individuals with in-depth understanding of Yorùbá proverbs and their implications for corruption would appreciate and seek to promote a corrupt-free society. Such individuals would not engage in corrupt practices and would run away from (guide against) actions and inactions that would promote corruption.

KEYWORDS:
Thematic Analysis, Yorùbá Proverbs, Antidotes, Corruption, Nigerian Society

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INTRODUCTION

The Concept of Corruption

Corruption is a pandemic phenomenon; though its extent and degree could vary from one country to another, it is prevalent in most countries of the world. Corruption is a dishonest or unethical conduct by an individual or group of individuals entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. It could also be described as a partial or total deviation from what is considered as acceptable practices of a particular society. In other words, corruption is a societal evil where the quality of service is lost for unaccounted benefits. Emmanuel (2017) classifies corruption into eight namely: judiciary corruption; political corruption; business corruption; corruption in law enforcement; corruption in education; health care system corruption; corruption in government; and administrative corruption.

Corruption has great impacts on the economic and societal development and has permeated through entire portions of society and economy (Dimant & Tosato, 2017). The scholars describe corruption as a complex phenomenon and the motivations engage corruptible acts are multifaceted and it is the result of interactions at the micro and macro levels of the society. Wherever there are corrupt practices, there is always a negative impact of such on the society. Hence, every member of such a society is a victim of corruption.

A corrupt society would give birth to a corrupt and weak governance which in turn could fuel organised criminal network and promote criminal acts such as stealing, bribery, drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, counterfeiting, extortion, embezzlement, among others. Similarly, corruption weakens the safety and security structure of the nation. For instance, Boko Haram insurgents have been ravaging the Nigerian nation for almost a decade now without an end in sight. The growth and development of any nation where corruption prevails is under a great threat.

Yorùbá Proverbs

Proverbs otherwise refers to as words of wisdom remain an integral part of the Yorùbá language. These words of wisdom guide the Yorùbá people in their dealings in difference circumstances Proverb is an adage, a saying in phrasal or sentential form expressing a general truth about a particular set of people (folks). Yorùbá proverbs are wise sayings through which norms, values, ideals, wisdoms, tradition, worldview and cultural heritage of the Yorùbá people are projected. It is an integral part of the Yorùbá culture and its use is always reflected in their communication. It is a wisdom-lore which is used to express thoughts and feelings about human and non-human and apply such thoughts and feelings to various situations as occasion demands. Yorùbá proverb could

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also be regarded as instructional tools that remain vital means of communication among the Yorùbá people. Adéyẹmí (2013) opines that proverb is a wise saying which is usually in phrase, sentence or statement form that contains morals, lessons, advice and instruction regarding life.

Proverb expresses the nature of Yorùbá wisdom and it is capable of bringing peace where there is hatred and giving hope where there is despair (Akínmádé, 2012). The importance of proverb in Yorùbá society and other African societies cannot be overemphasised. It is a major means of communicating the indigenous wisdom of the Yorùbá people from one generation to another. This wisdom-lore encompasses experience, knowledge, perspective and philosophy of the Yorùbá people (Owómóyèlá, 2005). There are five forms of Yorùbá proverbs as identified by (Ọ̀ṣọ̀bà, 2014). These forms include literal, figurative, metaphoric, concrete and hyperbolic forms.

The literal form of Yorùbá proverbs according to Ọ̀ṣọ̀bà (2014) involves the use of some allusion or picturesque forms of speech which represents thoughts in a simple, direct and straightforward way. The figurative form of Yorùbá proverbs involves the use of direct simile for comparison. In the third (metaphoric) form, metaphor is used in bringing out the figurative qualities of the proverbs. In other words, comparison in this form of proverb is evoked metaphorically. Abstract ideas are conveyed through concrete solution which provides just a single example of general point in the concrete form of Yorùbá proverbs. Ọ̀ṣọ̀bà (2014) describes the fifth (hyperbolic) form of Yorùbá proverbs as one with element of overstatement.

Since every society (Yorùbá society inclusive) has ways of projecting its cultural heritage, beliefs and traditions among others, one of such ways through which the Yorùbá people project their cultural heritage, philosophy, traditions, wisdoms and worldview among others is proverb. Ọ̀mọ́bọ́lá (2013) opines that Yorùbá proverbs are the expressions used for rhetorical, appreciative, aesthetic and regulatory purposes. They (Yorùbá proverbs) are also capable of moulding character, instilling discipline and giving encouragement. In the same vein, Yorùbá proverbs could signal unity, confidence, and disappointment and give alternative direction. Similarly, they could be used to praise the spirit of hard-work, condemn social vices, declare intention and express beliefs. In addition, they are a means of summarising an elaborate idea or message (Ọ̀mọ́bọ́lá, 2013). The use of proverbs is one of the factors that ensure the survival of the Yorùbá language. Like other figurative devices, the use of proverbs should be appropriate, judicious and in suitable situations such as in speeches and informal conversations.

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Methodology

Sixteen (16) Yorùbá proverbs were randomly selected from the written collections of Odùjìnrìn's (1979) *Modern Lessons in Yorùbá Part II (Advanced)*, Ọláwuyi's (2010) *Àkójọpọ̀ Ẹ́ẹ́dégbaàje Òwe àti Àṣàyàn Ọ̀rọ̀ Yorùbá* and Ọláoyè's (2012) *Principles and Concepts of Yorùbá Language and 1122 Yorùbá Proverbs (Second Edition)*. These selected Yorùbá proverbs were subjected to thematic (content) analysis. Thematic or content analysis concerns itself with "the use of replicable and valid method for marking specific inferences from texts to other states or properties of its source" (Adémọ́wò & Balógun, 2014:41). In the context of this study, thematic analysis involves succinct interpretation or explanation of the selected (sampled) proverbs using their contextual meanings with the aim of drawing reasonable inferences/implications from them in the context of corruption fighting in the Nigerian society.

The selected (sampled) proverbs were interpreted with a view (purpose) of explaining how their day-to-day use can serve as antidotes to corrupt practices in Nigerian Society. The sampled proverbs with their explanations and implications reflected their use in corruption fighting in the Yorùbá society. The rationale behind this is to ensure that the selected Yorùbá proverbs represented the worldview of the Yorùbá people in respect of corruption fighting.

Literal Meaning, Explanation and Implication of Some Selected Yorùbá Proverbs

1. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ìtẹ́lọ́rùn ni baba ìwà* (Ọláwuyì, 2011, p.294).
   Literal Meaning: Contentment is the father of Character.
   Explanation/Implication: This implies that someone's character is mainly (chiefly) determined by his/her level of contentment. Contentment is the ultimate in everything that one does. If someone is contented, s/he would be satisfied with whatever s/he has/possesses. Hence, lack of contentment could lead individual to engage him/herself in corrupt practices. This proverb urges individuals to be contented with their positions, works, money, wealth, etc.
2. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Orúkọ rere sàn ju wúrà òun fàdákà lọ* (Ọláoyè, 2012, p.146).
   Literal Meaning: Good name is better than gold and silver
   Explanation/Implication: Though, gold and silver are valuable assets to individuals, good name is more valuable than these two items. By implication therefore, individuals need to guide/protect their names

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jealously. As one protects gold and silver from being stolen, individuals' names demand more protection from being soiled.

3. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ìwà rere lẹ̀ṣọ́ ènìyàn* (Ọ̀láoyè, 2012, p.115).
   Literal Meaning: Good character is one's adornment.
   Explanation/Implication: Someone who possesses good character is believed to be a balanced, complete and total person in all ramifications. Hence, what beautifies one's actions and inactions is good character. The proverb aims at encouraging individuals who have their names to protect and wants to have their good character intact not to engage in corruption of any kind.
4. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ọmọ rẹ ò sàgbàfò, ó ń kásọ wọ̀lú, ẹ rójú olè, ẹ ò mú un* (Odùújìnrìn, 1979, p.68).
   Literal Meaning: Your child does not engage in laundry services but usually brings clothes into the town. The identity of a thief is known but you decide not to arrest him.
   Explanation/Implication: This proverb is used to warn individuals against harbouring criminals (suspects). It implies that if there are enough evidences against individuals engaging in corruption, such individual(s) should be exposed to the public and allow such person(s) to brought to justice.
5. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ọmọ rẹ ò sògbìn kòkó, ó ń gbàgbàálé, ẹ rójú olè, ẹ ò mú un* (Odùújìnrìn, 1979, p.68).
   Literal Meaning: Your child does not engage in cocoa farming but goes borrowing. The identity of a thief is revealed but you fail to arrest him.
   Explanation/Implication: Like the fourth, this proverb is also advising the society to call a spade a spade irrespective of the personality or relationship of the victim to us. The import of this proverb is that cocoa, a cash crop was a major source of income in Yorùbá land before the oil boom/discovery of oil. So, if someone has a considerable cocoa plantation, he can go borrowing, hoping to pay the debt when cocoa is harvested. However, individuals who do not have cocoa plantation are not expected to borrow. If they do, it is assumed that such individuals would not be able to pay the debt, unless they steal.
6. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Èpè kì í jẹ́ kí ọmọ olè ó yè* (Ọ̀láwuyì, 2011, p.53).
   Literal Meaning: Curse would not allow the children of a thief to survive/strive/prosper.
   Explanation/Implication: Curse has a strong weight in the Yorùbá society. Whenever individuals steal and do things against the norms, ideals and values of the society, such individuals are cursed and may even be banished depending on the gravity of the corruption

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perpetrated. By implication therefore, the curse is believed to be on the heads of the culprit's children. Such children would not be able to move freely in the society and no member of the society would like to be associated with the thief or his/her children. This will definitely prevent such children to prosper in the society. This societal weapon (proverb) warns individuals against corruption. It could also prevent individuals from perpetrating /engaging in corrupt practices because of the implication therein.

7. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ọba tó jẹ tí ìlú rójú (tòrò), orúkọ rẹ kò ní paré (parun)* (Odùújìnrìn, 1979, p.68).
   Literal Meaning: The name of the king whose reign witnesses (experiences) peace will be forever/evergreen/indelible.
   Explanation/Implication: This proverb aims at advising individual to always do good in whatever positions they find themselves and whenever individuals are entrusted with (put in helm of affairs) powers, they should be fair, just, firm and corrupt-free. They should not rob Peter to pay Paul. By implication therefore, whatever one does today (good or bad) will remain evergreen in people's memories; hence, corrupt leaders are frowned at in the society.
8. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ẹṣin kì í jẹ koríko abẹ rẹ* (Ọláwuyì, 2011, p.55)
   Literal Meaning: A horse does not eat the grass underneath (under it). A horse does not eat the grass it supposed to protect.
   Explanation/Implication: This proverb aims at warning/advising individuals (superiors) who hurt, maltreat and harass their subjects (followers/subordinates) instead of serving as their protectors/guardians/advisers and role models. The proverb equates lords and subjects (leaders and followers), senior and junior officers with a horse and the grass beneath the horse respectively. The horse is supposed to give adequate protection to such as a grass, not to eat it. By implication therefore, individuals who abuse their offices/powers/authorities are regarded as corrupt persons and are frowned at by the society. This proverb would sensitise those in higher positions to thread gently and run away from illegal/immoral acts.
9. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *A kì í ru ẹran erin lórí, kí á tún máa fi ẹsẹ dẹ ihò ìrẹ̀* (Oláwuyì, 2011, p.19).
   Literal Meaning: We should not carry a load of elephant on the head and still dig cricket's hole with our foot/feet. Digging crickets' hole (searching for crickets) with a load of elephant on the head is forbidding.

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Explanation/Implication: This proverb aims at equating what one has in his or her possession on one hand and what one is searching for on the other hand with a load of elephant and a mere cricket respectively. This proverb warns against greed and selfishness and that individuals should avoid trying to appropriate all available things to themselves. This implies that, individuals are warned and advised against self-centeredness. If someone has enough (more than enough) food to eat, s/he should not obstruct/deny those with meagre ones to feed on.

10. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ilé tí a fi itó mo, ìrì ni yóò wó o* (Odùújìnrìn, 1979, p.67).
    Literal Meaning: A house built with spittle will be pulled down by dew.
    Explanation/Implication: This proverb aims at advising individuals to lay a solid foundation for anything they want to do because weak or bad foundation could make life-time achievements to be easily destroyed. Whatever individuals acquire illegally/fraudulently will vanish/disappear within a twinkle of an eye. The implication of this proverb is that whatever individuals want to obtain should be done/obtained legitimately- due process should be followed.
11. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Ẹni báá jalè léẹ̀kan, bó bá dàrán borí, aṣọ olè ló dà bora* (Oláwuyì, 2011, p.55).
    Literal Meaning: He who steals once and covers him/herself with expensive velvet cloth only covers him/herself with a thief's cloth.
    Explanation/Implication: The implication of this proverb is that it advises individuals to distance themselves from stealing because whoever steals once would be looked upon as a thief forever; even if s/he does not steal anymore.
12. **Yorùbá Proverb**: *Ọkánjúà òun olè, déédéé lórí* (Odùújìnrìn, 1979, p.68).
    Literal Meaning: Greed and thief are equal (cognates).
    Explanation/Implication: This proverb equates greed with a thief – the two are synonymous. In Yorùbá society, covetous individuals and the greed are looked down on and they are often tagged as thieves. This implies that there is a social stigma hanging around the necks of the greedy ones and thieves. The proverb suggests that individuals should not be greedy irrespective of the situation.
13. **Yorùbá Proverb**: *Ẹni Olórun fún lórúko, kò gboṣòṣ tún máa wá oríkì kiri* (Odùújìnrìn, 1979, p.68).
    Literal Meaning: He who God has given (granted) real name should not be searching for praise name (an adjunct)
    Explanation/Implication: In Yoruba society, individuals' real name supersedes all other names or adjunct names. The real name is regarded

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as main, major or core, while all other adjuncts are minor. Hence one's real name should be enough for every individual. The proverb is metaphorically suggesting/advising individuals to always hold to the details rather than running after irrelevant that could eventually land them into trouble. By implication therefore, individuals should be satisfied with what is considered to be legitimate and normal rather than going after illegitimate, illegal and abnormal things. Whatever God gives is the supreme/ultimate. Individuals with good reputation should not indulge in illegalities, excessive and extravagant acts that could tarnish/spoil their good reputation.

14. **Yorùbá Proverb:** *Àwòdì jẹun èpè sanra* (Ọláoyè, 2012, p.54).
Literal Meaning: Hawk feeds on cursed food and gets fat with it.
Explanation/Implication: Hawk always feed on stolen chicks and this action usually attracts incessant curses from the owners of the chicks. This proverb aims at sensitising individuals who are feeding fat on other people's food that they would be receiving frequent curses from those who are robbed of their rightful things.

15. *Àìtètè mú olè, olè ń mú olóko* (Ọláoyè, 2012, p.34)
Literal Meaning: The thief was not timely arrested; the thief arrested the owner in turn.
Explanation/Implication: The proverb is advising individuals to be prompt in their attempt to arrest suspected thief before the thief turns the table against them (the rightful owners). The implication of this proverb is that individuals need to be vigilant and quick in their reactions against corrupt people and their activities. Therefore, every corrupt act needs timely interventions.

16. *Ẹni gbé epo ní àjà kò jalè bí ẹni tí ó gbà á kalè* (Ọláoyè, 2012, p.92).
Literal Meaning: He who stole palm oil from the ceiling is never a thief, but the person who assisted him in collecting and placing it on floor.
Explanation/Implication: This proverb is suggesting that no one can single-handedly steals palm oil (which is usually puts in clay pot and preserves in the ceiling) without broken the pot and loosen the content (palm oil). However, if such individual succeeded in the stealing, it means that someone else has assisted him or her to achieve his or her corrupt act. By implication therefore, individuals are warned against covering corrupt people. Also, individuals are advised against aiding and encouraging those who engage in stealing and other criminal acts. Such corrupt individuals should be exposed to the public.

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Conclusion

Corruption of any nature remains one of the main contributory factors that are hindering the growth and development of the Nigerian nation. It is a clog in the wheel of economic, social, educational, political and technological development of this nation. The Yorùbá people frown and condemn it in totality and severe penalty awaits those who are found engaging in this ungodly and illicit act. The sampled proverbs among many other Yorùbá proverbs and their implications emphasise that proverbs are essential tools that can be used to minimise, cure, eradicate and even prevent corruption in Nigeria. In a nutshell, the sampled Yorùbá proverbs could serve as antidotes to corruption by sensitising individuals towards engaging in agreed norms, ideals and tradition of the society and thereby shun various ills and vices that constitute corruption in order to build a just and egalitarian society.

Yorùbá proverbs could play a significant role in the spread of anti-corruption norms as well as increase the social cost of being publicly shamed for corrupt practices. Hence, Yorùbá proverbs could serve as an anti-corruption measures because proverbs build character and the level of individual's character would determine his or her level of tolerance for corruption. This wisdom-lore remains one of the bases for a fair and equitable Yorùbá society. Using various institutions such as literature (proverbs inclusive) could serve as one of the most effective antidotes to corrupt practices.

This study supports Oláoyè's (2012) view that Yorùbá proverbs have continued to function as a living vigorous and current rhetoric device for transmitting morals and wisdom, and a tool for advising, criticising, instructing and correcting people, events and situations. In other words, Yorùbá proverbs are social charters used to criticise, warn, correct and fight individuals who engage in corruption in the society. The study also corroborates Adéyẹmí's (2013) position that Yorùbá proverbs are used to guide and instruct individuals on social values of life, respect for selves, honesty, cooperation, hard-work, tactfulness and other desirable behaviours that befit typical *Ọmọlúàbí* in the Yorùbá context. Therefore, individuals who exhibit good character in all ramifications would not engage in corruption and would always fight against it.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the selected proverbs and conclusion drawn from the analysis, this paper thus recommended that proverbs be applied to every situation and at all times in Nigerian society where corruption is noticed. Relevant indigenous proverbs should be used to warn against, correct and

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fight corruption in every sector of the Nigerian nation. Since, Nigeria is a multilingual nation other ethnic nationalities aside Yorùbá should also emphasis the implications of some of their indigenous proverbs in respect of corruption fighting.

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