

The Ethics of Work in Sholla-Allyson Qbáníyì's *Márosè*

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Abstract

African art forms, whether as music, novel, film, play or dance are usually expressive in the sense that they reflect what obtains in the physical and social spaces where the artist showcase their talents. The music of Sholla-Allyson Qbáníyì could be regarded as an exemplification of this position. This paper undertakes a philosophical analysis and critique of Sholla-Allyson Qbáníyì's idea of work as a human virtue as rendered in her song, Márosè. The paper examines Sholla-Allyson Qbáníyì's view that work is virtuous and that there is a causal link between laziness and poverty. The paper observes that this is a traditional conception of work, but argues that this conception of work has been downplayed by industrial society as encapsulated in capitalist and neo-liberal political and economic systems that have rendered work to be a curse in the sense to be explained in the paper. The paper canvasses the view that a conceptual framework that sees work in relation to leisure and play could be used to rectify the state of affairs that has been responsible for the degradation of work from its traditional conception as a noble human activity.

Keywords: Ethics, Work, Sholla-Allyson Qbáníyì, *Márosè*

The Concept of work: A Philosophical overview

There is much ambivalence about issues relating to the concept of work. This ambivalence is reflected in one or more questions relating to the concept of work. In the first instance, there are many definitions of work of which hardly are anything which they have in common except only when we invoke the Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance. A second exemplification of the ambivalence relates to the received belief that work is virtuous; a view that has been implicated by another belief that work is a punishment from the Creator for the sins of our forefather and mother, Adam and Eve. Furthermore, it is also believed that work is an instrumental good; that is, good that is not valuable in itself but valuable in respect of what we can achieve through it. This ambivalence surrounding the concept of work is responsible for the disagreements amongst scholars and authors who have studied and written about the concept of work. For instance, in relation to the matter of definition, Burke observed that *The Random House Dictionary* lists fifty-three different meanings of "play" and thirty-nine of "work" (1971: 33). However, in the midst of such disagreements, one thing seems to be clear – that work and leisure/play are purposive human activities.

One central thread that runs through the various attempts to discuss the concept of work is that work is not treated in isolation from leisure and play. The classical position that illustrates this view was that of Aristotle who made a distinction between work and leisure. For Aristotle, work is done for the sake of leisure. In other words, work has an instrumental value;

whereas, leisure is intrinsically valuable. Given the ethical views of Aristotle as espoused in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999) in which happiness is the ultimate value, it is not difficult to understand why leisure is considered as having an intrinsic value; after all, it is sought for its own sake. Once again, another exemplification of the aforementioned ambivalence rears its head. This is connected with the ordinary understanding of leisure as “free, unobligated time” (Simpson and Yoshioka, 1992:221). But if work is virtuous, how then, it can be asked, does leisure come to be what work aims at? The key to unravelling this question is to look further into Aristotle’s conception of leisure.

According to Aristotle (Newmann, 1950) work or occupation was the drudgery of the activities necessary for survival, and leisure was the freedom from having to engage in such activities. However, Simpson and Yoshioka observed that when this is a correct view of Aristotle’s distinction between work and leisure, it represents an over-summarisation in the sense that Aristotle made a clear distinction between work and leisure. According to them, limiting the Aristotelian view of leisure to activity other than work does violence to the elevation of leisure to the lofty status of the basis of culture and the source of the good life (1992: 221). According to Simpson and Yoshioka, so closely is work related to leisure in Aristotle’s view, that both could be defined complementarily. Thus, there are two types of work – subsistence work and leisure work. Subsistence work is for survival and moderate comfort; leisure work is for attainment of the good life. Both are called work

because they require dedication, intensity, sacrifice, and may have nothing to do with entertainment (Simpson and Yoshioka, 1992: 222)

The Aristotelian linkage between work and leisure as interpreted above is more likely to shed light on the received belief that work is only related to paid labour while leisure is about refraining from work. The Aristotelian view saw both work and leisure as purposeful human activities. In this connection, Hemingway (1988) holds the view that Aristotle saw leisure as arena in which the virtues of character are sought, demonstrated and refined. This, according to him, gives leisure a far more central place in the lives of people in themselves and in their communities. For him, *understanding* leisure is an activity extending considerably beyond the provision of service.

What is of utmost significance in the Aristotelian view about leisure is its application to the concept of education. For Aristotle, it is the responsibility of the state to educate its citizens in the proper use of leisure. Within the Aristotelian system of government, education has two purposes. The first is to produce a fine citizen of the state and the second is to prepare the soul for that right enjoyment of leisure which becomes possible when practical needs have been satisfied. Practical need is here interpreted as work. For Aristotle, as peace is the end of war, leisure is the end of work. Commenting on the Aristotelian view, Simpson and Yoshioka observed, "failure to educate for leisure leaves a citizen unskilled at contemplation, insensitive to moderation and unaware of productive activity. An illustration of this is the recently retired person who is at a

loss as to what to do with his or her time. Retired or not, this lack of education forces people to engage in meaningless diversion as the only alternative use of their undelegated time (1992: 221). What a lesson for our retirees and those about to retire!

The lesson to be learnt from Aristotle's distinctions is that he has opened the way for what is later to be a workable framework for conceiving work not in isolation from leisure and play. For instance, Dewey observed, that "both play and work are equally free and intrinsically motivated, apart from false economic conditions which tend to make play into idle excitement for the well to do, and work into uncongenial labour for the poor" (1916: 205-6). Burke is also in alignment with this tradition when he observed,

I wish to maintain... that the most satisfying kind of work shares in the freedom and plasticity of play; that the most satisfying kind of play (in the long run) is purposeful and disciplined, like work: and that the good life for both individuals and societies must include plenty of both kinds of activities (1971: 33)

I shall suggest later in the paper that this is an additional perspective that can enhance Sholla-Allyson's conception of work.

One philosopher that has interrogated the conception of work from the perspective of contemporary African societies is Gbádéḡeṣin (1991), who made a distinction between many human activities that are productive and others that are works. According to him, the need and *raison d'être* of work is embedded in both oral and written narratives across cultures.

Gbádégeşin observed that work is one of the essential activities of the human condition. Through work, nature is transformed in various ways, directly or indirectly, to produce the material conditions of life. For Gbádégeşin, work has been categorised as manual and non-manual. This can further be divided into two according to the degree of freedom of choice and operation which the worker enjoys, as well as the amount of satisfaction s/he derives from work. Manual workers are either wage labourers, working for a person or an organisation and artisan/crafts people who are on their own. Non-manual workers can also be divided into two – those who are often called white collar workers who work either in the private or the public sector and persons who make use of their talents toward their own unique development of their potentialities. Whether a person works for himself/herself, another person, organisation, or for development of talents, the commitment to what one is doing in form of work is always valued and cherished.

Scholars, across different ages and cultures, have disagreed about what constitutes the meaning of work. While some have identified work with the physical exertion of the body, others believed that it is only the mental exertion on nature that constitutes work. Experience shows that both manual and non-manual works are essential to transform nature for the production of the material conditions of life. What is important is that human beings are made up of physical and mental attributes and it makes sense to suggest that both attributes play important roles in the transformation of the natural and social environment for the production of the material conditions of

be enjoying himself without doing any work and for whom everybody else appeared to be working, had in fact worked hard all his younger days” (1995: 67).

Nyerere also believed that everybody must work in order to contribute to the public wealth. Consequently, apart from the child, the elderly and the infirm, nobody is expected to be an idler.

However, a critical examination of the literature on work, shows that there has been a twist in this noble conception of work. This relates to the situation in modern and contemporary societies in which work has been regarded as an activity that is not worth undertaken and consequently it has been regarded as degrading. Thus, according to Burke, “Critics of industrial society from Fourier and Mark to Daniel Bell and Hannah Arendt have stressed the dehumanising nature of modern labour and the need to provide workers with more scope for imagination and creativity (1971: 46). It is this extension of the critics of the industrial society that informed Gbádégesin’s view that work is a curse – a terrible thing to be avoided (1991: 215).

In chapter nine of *African Philosophy: Traditional Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* (1991), Gbádégesin analysed, explained and justified a conception of work akin to the critics of the industrial society alluded to in the last paragraph. According to him, the social structure in which workers carry out their activities in contemporary societies engenders an attitude of regarding work as a curse. This attitude, in turn, has negative impact on the social structure, thus

perpetuating a vicious circle. Gbádégeṣin's task is to suggest how to escape from this vicious circle in order to reinstate the value of work to that enviable condition of which it has been conceived in the days of yore.

Gbádégeṣin considered three perspectives under which one can examine work as a curse. The first relates to the Judeo-Christian account in which our biblical forefather and mother, Adam and Eve, were cursed by God as a result of their disobedience and consequent fall from grace to grass. The second is that there are persons that are frustrated due to persistent poverty in spite of the fact that they toil day and night to ensure that they are lifted out of poverty. The third group of workers see the socio-economic system as unjust in the sense that it promotes conditions in which hardworking persons suffer while the lazy ones enjoy.

In order to situate Gbádégeṣin's argument in relation to these three perspectives, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word, "curse". *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Pearsall 1999:352) defines curse as follows: (i) a solemn appeal to a supernatural power to inflict harm on someone or something; (ii) a cause of harm or misery and (iii) an offensive word or phrase used to express anger and annoyance. Within the context of Gbádégeṣin's discussion, the first two of these definitions are more relevant than the third. This is because the first is linked to the Biblical curse on Adam and Eve by the supernatural being, God, while the second relates to the harm and misery resulting from work when it is seen as degradation from its initial virtuous nature. This means, as rightly accounted

for by Gbádégeşin, that there was once upon a time when work was regarded as a virtuous thing. However, I will like to point out that there should be a further inquiry about the antecedent of work as a virtuous activity. I will like to go through this route in order to respond to Gbádégeşin's suggestion that the first perspective of work as curse is indefensible.

The claim that work is a human activity that is tailored to the realisation of human existence is a purpose driven hence forward looking conception of work. However, this does not completely answer the question why work, in the first instance, is a backward looking conception. In order to further expatiate on this distinction, I will invoke the Aristotelian notion of cause in which he sees cause as an explanation. According to Aristotle (Ross, 1923), there are four types of cause: efficient cause, material cause, formal cause and final cause. The efficient cause, which links explanation to an agent, aligns with the first of the three perspectives of the conception of work as a curse. Here, there is a divine agent who initiated, from the beginning of times, the necessity to work. In Genesis 1: 16-17, "God commanded the first man and woman, "of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shall surely die" and the curse itself is contained in Genesis 3: 17c, where God cursed the ground and in Genesis, 3: 19, 23, God cursed Adam that, "In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread". These curses accord well with the idea of manual labour. Thus, any inclusive conception of work will have to recognise the manual aspect of work as constituting

a significant aspect of any conception of work. It is a credit to Gbádéḡeṣin's account of work to have recognised this.

The assumption here is that there was a time that human beings had no need to work. Work came as a result of disobedience. But if human beings did not need to work, how would they eat, cloth themselves, house themselves and in modern societies, fulfil all the basic needs of life? Gbádéḡeṣin's argument here is that even when human beings do not need to exert their labour to work in order to produce what is needed to sustain them, they still need to make effort to access the materials and this is a kind of work. Gbádéḡeṣin's further argument which dismisses the first perspective of the conception of work as a curse was based on an illustration from his research, where *Babaláwo* Ifátóògùn was quoted as saying that if work is a curse, then it will mean that God has cursed Himself to work. There is a need to respond to this line of reasoning. My response is that one will be making a great mistake when God is compared with human beings. The act of creation is an act of pronouncement by a necessary being. This activity is different from the act of putting pieces of materials together as it is done in the act of manufacturing which is essentially a human activity. My response is buttressed by Lawal's view that "the very fact that some beings are divine, places them above the concept of morality" (1974: 242).

The insight from the preceding paragraph relates to the previous section in this paper where classical, modern and contemporary philosophers made distinctions between work and play/leisure (Aristotle, 1950; Dewey, 1916; Burke, 1971). Thus,

if human beings did not work in the beginning of creation then they must have played. This is evident in the Biblical account before the fall. In Genesis 2: 15, God only expected Adam to dress and keep the Garden of Eden. On Gbádéğęsin's view, this will be an activity but not work. This is because it is not freely chosen neither was it aimed at consciously for the purpose of producing material for human existence. That Adam and Eve should tender the garden suggests that they should make it beautiful and therefore they must have engaged in a purposeful human activity even when it was not meant to produce a material condition for human existence. Consequently, it is not the case that work became a curse; rather, work and curse became coterminous and contiguous. If we take the tendering and dressing of the garden as purposive human activity then its aim must be aesthetic, a phenomenon that is intrinsic to human existence and hence a human ideal. This is what is insightful about the Aristotelian conception of leisure, according to which just like work, leisure is a purposeful human activity and it is an exemplification of the good life. The fall from this good life makes it a curse just as the unfavourable environment makes an otherwise ideal attributed to work to be degraded resulting in the conception of work as a curse.

If our line of argument makes sense, then it sheds light on the other two perspectives of the conception of work as a curse. In the first instance, it shows that the factor of agency is as equally important as the natural and socio-economic factors that are responsible for the conception of work as a curse. Secondly, it shows that the conception of work as a curse

suggests a situation in which certain positive or negative actions were responsible for the degradation of work from its essentially virtuous nature to a situation in which it is now conceived as a curse. Even when God knew that Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent, He still went on to hold them responsible and in this regard, there were personal curses as follows: To Adam, that he will henceforth eat from his sweat; to Eve, that she will go through the travails of childbirth and to the serpent, that it will henceforth crawl with its belly and dust will henceforth be its food. The point I am making here is that the three interpretations of curse given by Gbádéḡeṣin are all important for an overall analysis of the conception of work as a curse and consequently, whatever could be done to mitigate the conception of work as curse applies to all the three interpretations.

This suggests that even when the socio-economic conditions of work are not conducive to the ideal of work and hence making work a curse, human beings still play some roles in the process. It has to be noted here that philosophical traditions that favour social determinism also has a place for human choices as exemplified in Marxism. Marxist philosophy recognises the role of agency in the class struggle from capitalism to socialism through the process of revolution which is spearheaded by vanguards and the proletariat.

A possible response to the above position is that can we actually attribute the power of agency to Adam and Eve? If the answer is no, then it will seem unfair for God to curse them because then God would have attributed responsibility to

persons who were not *ab initio* free. However, as it was suggested earlier, one should not conceive God in form of human attributes. God is a divine and necessary being whereas; human beings are natural and contingent beings. It is part of the definition of a necessary being that He must possess certain attributes that make His being, *being as such* and as it were, such features are unknown to mortals and hence His ways are unfathomable. For instance, they refer to God as, *Ọba a ẹ̀yí ó wù ń* (The king who does what He likes).

By these initial clarifications, I think the road is now clear to further understand the reason why work has been conceived as a curse, given the relevant meanings of curse as identified earlier on. The thesis here is that work is not intrinsically a curse and it is only through the degradation of the ideal of work through certain spiritual, human, natural and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the conception of work as a curse. I shall begin with the example, to recognise that work is virtuous as shown in the following poem:

Iṣẹ̀ loògùn iṣẹ̀	Work is the antidote of poverty
Múra ẹ̀sẹ̀ ọ̀rẹ̀ mi	My friend take your work seriously
Iṣẹ̀ la fí ń dẹ̀ni gíga	It is work that uplifts a person
Bí a kò bá rẹ̀ni fẹ̀yìnti	If there is no supporter
Bí ọ̀lẹ̀ là á rí	One appears like a lazy person
Bí a kò bá rẹ̀ni gbẹ̀kẹ̀lé	If there is no one to rely upon
A tẹ̀ra móṣẹ̀ ẹ̀ni	One takes his/her work seriously
Ìyá rẹ̀ le lówó lówó	Your mother might be wealthy
Kí baba lẹ̀sin léèkàn	And your father exceedingly rich
Bí o bá gbójú lé wọn	If you rely on their riches
O tẹ̀ tán ni mo sọ̀ fún ọ	You will be terribly disappointed
Ohun tí a kò bá jìyà fún	What we do not suffer for
Kì í le tójó	Does not last

Ohun tí a bá fara ọ̀ṣẹ́ fún	It is what we work for
Ni í pé lówó ẹ̀ni	That stays long with us
Ìyà ǹ bọ̀ fọ̀mọ̀ tí kò gbọ̀n	Suffering awaits the unwise child
Èkún ǹ bẹ̀ fọ̀mọ̀ tó ǹ sá kiri	Tears await the unthinking child
Má fàárò ọ̀rẹ́ ọ̀rẹ́ mi	Do not joke with your early days
Múra ọ̀ṣẹ́ ọ̀jọ́ ǹ lọ	Be hardworking, for time flies.

However, there are certain beliefs and expressions that tend to conceive work as a curse. The metaphysical belief in *Ori* as the bearer of one's destiny might be used as an illustration. According to the theoretical explanation (Abímbólá, 1976: 117), the myth of the choice of *ori* relates to the ability of a would be chooser to consult Ọ̀rúnmilà before heading to the vineyard of Àjàlá to make a choice of *ori*. Persons who do not make consultations with Ọ̀rúnmilà might likely choose bad *ori* and such persons would not succeed in life no matter how hard working that person is. The only remedy is that if such a person decides to find out from Ọ̀rúnmilà, through the process of divination, the cause of her failure and what could be done to rectify the situation. Unless this happens, such a person will consider work to be a curse. The saying that *Kìrà kítà kò mólà, ká ọ̀ṣẹ́ bí ẹ̀rú kò da ǹkan, Olúwa ló ǹ gbéni i ga* (Struggle does not translate into wealth, it is only God that blesses and uplifts) is an analogous of this view because it suggests that no matter how hardworking a person is s/he still requires the blessing of some gods or God to succeed. If this is the case, then a hardworking person who works beyond the call of duty but does not fully realise the fruits of his/her labour is likely to see his/her activity as curse on the belief that s/he does not have the favour of the Almighty.

Just as it was observed by critics of the industrial society, in modern and contemporary times, there is no doubt that the ideal of work has been degraded by both external and internal social and economic factors. It is no gainsaying that colonialism and the colonial experience had affected the conception of work. The colonial experience actually divided the work force into two: the agrarian workers whose occupation is to manually till the ground and the urban workers who are supposed to have gone to the colonial institutions to learn how to read and write (Osterhammel, 2005: 74). This division is still replicated in post-colonial times. As Gbádégeşin explained, manual workers, in virtue of how they are always treated by the ruling class, are always condemned to a life of misery.

As I write, there are still farmers in Nigeria who do not have access to good roads, water and electricity; yet they are the ones producing the food which the urban people consume. Sometimes, the efforts of these farmers are often vitiated by natural, social and economic factors, like drought, too much rain, lack of good soil, worms, lack of incentives, lack of good storage facilities and abysmally low prices. In such conditions as these, farmers could consider work as a curse. Consider the case in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where a farmer committed suicide because all his yam seeds got burnt for lack of rain (Achebe, 1958: 17). This is the kind of experience replicated in the farmer of Gbádégeşin's (1991: 223) example who bemoans his situation when a commissioner asked young people to stay in the farm because farming is profitable. As a matter of fact, certain renditions by some musicians give

credence to the farmer's position. Ebenezer Obey, for instance, sings about working a little and having a bountiful product (*ká ṣiṣé kékeré ká rí èrè púpò*). Others sing about having not just a work but a work that puts end to poverty (*iṣé tí ó n tán iṣé*).

When one considers the Western modern conception of work, the story is similar; but now, it is coined in a different language. Adam Smith (2003) and John Locke's (1959) theories of value will be used to illustrate the modern view that is similar to the conception of work as a curse. In *The Wealth of Nation*, Smith defines work as an activity requiring the worker to give up "his tranquillity, his freedom, and happiness" (Magdoff, 2006: 2). According to Smith, wages are the reward the labourer receives for his or her sacrifices. It is clear from this view that Smith does not see any intrinsic value in work apart from the wages that are the rewards of such activity. In a way, Smith's and Gbádéḡṣin's conceptions of work are similar in the sense of the teleological assumption embedded in their conceptions. But whereas Gbádéḡṣin sees work as valuable given that it expresses something significant about human existence; Smith, in light of the fact that he conceives work as an act that requires humans to give up their tranquillity, freedom and happiness, does not see any intrinsic worth in work apart from the wages it engenders. If this is the case, then a situation advocated by Smith, where human beings are supposed to give up certain things that are significant to their existence could as well be regarded as a curse.

John Locke's (1959) doctrine of labour theory of value seemed not to fare better in relation to the conception of work

as a curse. For Locke, it is labour that creates value and the value of labour is the property it engenders. When one mixes his/her labour with nature, the ensuing product becomes one's property by right (1959:134). However, Macpherson observed that Locke's theory of property is a theory of ownership in the sense that one owns himself/or herself absolutely. Thus, self-ownership is translated to a commodity to be exchanged. This exchange takes place at the market and as Macpherson suggested, persons then become series of exchanges, and relationship between persons becomes that of market relations in which we treat each other merely as means rather than ends (1962: 269). The type of process that gives rise to this relationship could be justifiably regarded as condemnable and if it is work that is responsible for such a process, then it can, with justification, be conceived as a curse.

The Marxist conception of alienation is analogous to the harrowing experience of the farmer in *Things Fall Apart*. For Marx, even when work is central to human existence, this meaning of work was altered when society came to a point when there is private property which separates people into classes. As Magdoff (2006) recounted the accounts of Marx and Engels in their account of the social division of labour, the first social division of labour was between industry and agriculture; town city versus the country (periphery); ownership of production versus workers; while the second social division of labour involved the division of work into manual and mental workers. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (2000). Marx gave a graphic account of how this alteration of

the ideal of work has given rise to a situation in which work has been turned to misery. In the section entitled, ‘alienated labour’, Marx explained how the worker becomes poorer as a result of more wealth s/he produces. For Marx, the object produced by labour stands opposed to it as an alien being as a producer independent of the producer. This is what Marx termed the objectification of labour. On this account, Marx observed:

The performance of work is at the same time its objectification. The performance of work appears in the sphere of political economy as a vitiation of the worker, objectification as a loss and as servitude to the object, an appropriation as alienation... from political economy the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and to a most miserable commodity; that the misery of the worker increases with the power and volume of his production.

(Ebenstein and Ebenstein, 2000: 656-657)

For Marx then, work has become a curse as a result of social division of labour.

Bertrand Russell, a contemporary British philosopher’s conception of work also has an implication for conceiving work as a curse. In his book, *In Praise of Idleness* (1958), Russell suggested that a great deal of harm is being done in the modern world by belief in the virtuousness of work, and that the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organised diminution of work. According to Russell, work is of two kinds: first, work involves altering the position of matter at or near the earth’s surface relatively to other such matter; and the second involves that act of telling other people to embark on such alteration. For Russell, the first kind of work is unpleasant and ill paid while

the second is pleasant and well paid. Russell continues by observing that in Europe, there is the third class of human beings who possess land and are able to make others pay for the privilege of being allowed to exist and to work. Ironically, this is the class of human beings who Russell was willing to praise because they are idle! The idleness of this group of human beings, according to Russell, is historically the source of the whole gospel of work. Russell gave a graphic account of the experiences of workers prior to the Industrial Revolution where workers toiled so hard to produce what is required for their subsistence and that of their families. However, the little surplus which should have constituted an added value beyond bare subsistence was not left to those who produced it, but was appropriated by warriors and priests.

Russell's position is a restatement of Smith's view that work is unpleasant because it robs workers of their freedom, tranquillity and happiness. It is also an allusion to Aristotle's division of work into manual and contemplative where the slave is condemned to manual work. His position also reflects Marx's view of surplus value. All these constitute negative conceptions of work in which the virtue of work has been turned to a curse because of certain unfavourable social and economic arrangements instituted by persons against other persons.

I had mentioned earlier that the factor of agency is also important in order to fully understand the conception of work as a curse. This is where my own account of work as a curse varies slightly from that of Gbádégesin. Certain accounts of work have factored in the roles played by workers in whether work is a

virtuous activity or whether it is a curse. Davidson and Cadell (1994) identified three forms of work in relation to the attitudes of people to what they do. The first is work as a calling, work as a career and work as a job. According to them, the more benefits such as full-time employment, job security, and relatively large incomes are associated with work, the more people are inclined to think of work as a calling or a career. On the other hand, when there are fewer rewards, people are more inclined to think of work as a job.

Drawing certain inferences from Weber's conception of predestination in which the elects of God are persons of good works, Davidson and Caddell extended the Weberian position to the idea that some people could be influenced by religion into accepting that work is a calling thereby extending same to the secular conception of work which entails giving full commitment to what they do irrespective of any reward that accrues from it. On the other hand, those persons who see work as a job will seek for adequate remuneration and benefits that accord with what they do.

As I was writing this paper I asked one of my co-workers to share her experience of the work she does – whether as a calling, a career or a job. Her answer is that even when she is not satisfied with the remuneration attached to her present work, she considers it as a calling and a career because she is happy and has a sense of fulfilment in doing it. On the other hand, she said the only reason why she could call her work a job is when she is undervalued; when she is ignored by the authorities in relation to certain basic requests that can make her to be happy.

Such denial can even make her miserable, in other words, at that stage; she is ready to conceive work as a curse.

The conception of work as a calling might have its own negative effects. Workers that are committed to their job might go beyond the call of duty to overwork themselves to the point of developing stress conditions. This is what is referred to as *Karoushi* in Japan. *Karoushi* is defined as “death from overwork” (Tubbs, 1993: 879). But according to Tubbs, instead of translating *Karoushi* as “death from overwork, he prefers to call it “stress death” because the condition is related to feelings of helplessness. According to Tubbs, *Karoushi* is not directly caused by overwork. Rather, overwork is only one factor, and that stress-death is actually caused by the cumulative, long – range effects of working in a situation where one feels trapped and powerless to effect any change for the better, which in turn leads to attitudes of hopelessness, attitudes which are exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, by environmental and managerial factors (869). This is the point where leisure becomes important as a complement of work. It is also an allusion to the old adage that, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”. In other words, no matter how we love and are devoted to our work, we should give room for leisure, which according to Aristotle, is a human activity with an intrinsic value.

The point that is worth stressing therefore is that I am in agreement with Tucks’ view, just as I also concur with Gbádégeşin’s view that certain external factors can be responsible for regarding work as curse. My own addition is

a remedy for saving the concept of work from the degradations which have resulted from contemporary social and political ideologies.

In other words, it might be the case that it is this conceptual work that can better serve as antidote against work as curse. We would recall that the concept of leisure does not mean idleness; rather, in the Aristotelian and the Deweyan views, leisure and play are conscious human activities that enhance human virtue. It is this conceptual framework that can complement Sholla-Allyson Obaniyi's conception of work as rendered in her lyrics, *Márosè*, which goes as follows:

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| 1. Òrè mi má rosè | My friend do not delay |
| 2. Má fàṣìkò ṣòfò, múra gírí
ṣìṣé rẹ | Waste no time, do your work
with all seriousness |
| 3. Má dúró, má rosè | Do not tarry, do not wait |
| 4. Iṣé loògùn iṣé, múra ṣìṣé
òrè mi | Work is the antidote for
poverty, take your work
seriously |
| 5. Bí a kò bá rẹni fẹhìntì, bí
òlẹ là á rí | If one does not have a
supporter, it will appear that
one is lazy |
| 6. Bí a kò bá rẹni gbẹkẹlẹ, a tẹra
móṣé ẹni, | When there is no one to rely
on we face our work squarely |
| 7. Ìyá rẹ le lówó lówó, kí baba
lẹṣin léèkan | Your mother might be
wealthy while your father owns
a costly horse |
| 8. Bí o bá gbójú lé wọn o tẹ tán
ni mo sọ fún ọ | If you rely on their riches you
will be disappointed |
| 9. Tètè tẹra móṣé | Please, work very hard |
| 10. Ẹni tí ó lápá tí ò fí ṣìṣé | One who has hands and does
not work with them |
| 11. Aṣọ iyà ni ó fí bora sùn | S/he will be clothed with poor
dress. |

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| 12. Má fàsikò sòfò múra sísé
ojó n ló | Do not waste time, time is
moving fast |
| 13. Oré mi má rosè | My friend, do not delay |
| 14. Iṣé la fí n dèni gíga, apá lará
Ìgún pá niyekan | One is uplifted through hard
work, one's hand is one's
relation and the elbow is one's
family. |
| 15. Onísé ìjoba tepá mósé, a
kii síséèjoba láágùn | Civil servants work hard,
do not buy the idea that one
Does not need to sweat while
doing government's work. |
| 16. Onísé owó tepá mósé | Artisans, take your work
seriously |
| 17. Iṣé diè, oorun diè, ònà iṣé
niyèn | Little work and little sleep
paves way for poverty |
| 18. Onísòwò múra sísé rẹ | Business person, take your
work seriously |
| 19. Má fòlẹ kolẹta sẹbìtà | Through laziness, do not
signal to poverty. |
| 20. Èmi sọ tẹmi | I have spoken |
| 21. O ò níṣé lówó, wón pe
aláààrù oò sáré ló | You are not employed and
somebody calls you to carry a
load and you failed to respond. |
| 22. Wò ó ebi á pa ó ẹnu rẹ á
gùn dé Ìbàdàn | Look, you will be harshly
treated with hunger and your
mouth will stretch as far as
Ibadan. |
| 23. Tètè múra sísé | Take your work seriously |
| 24. Ọlẹ jí lówùúrò, ó yí aṣọ mórí | A lazy person wakes up in the
morning but lies in bed,
covering himself/herself up. |
| 25. Ọsán pón ó sáré kiri | The lazy person starts to run
helter-skelter only in the
afternoon |
| 26. Ó di ojú alé ó n sáré kiri | Running helter-skelter also in
the evening |

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| 27. Èniyàn mi ẹ ẹra mósé | My people take your work seriously |
| 28. Ẹni tí ò bá ẹisẹ kò gbòdò jẹun | He who does not work should not eat |
| 29. Ọrò Olúwa ló wí bẹẹ | This is the word of God. |
| 30. Oníyán n kẹ ẹ wójú iyán | The pounded yam seller advertises her pounded yam |
| 31. Ọlóbẹ n kẹ ẹ wójú ọbẹ | The soup seller advertises her soup |
| 32. Àtíjẹ àtímu ni gbogbo wa n wá kiri | All of us seek what to eat and drink. |
| 33. Ọlẹ tí ò fi nńkankan ọlẹ | A lazy person who does not plant anything |
| 34. Kín ni Elédùwà máa búsí? | On what would God send His blessing? |
| 35. Rírí lónsaájú jíjẹ | Seeing comes before possessing |
| 36. Ẹni tí kò rí kan kò le jẹ nńkan | Without seeing something you cannot become something |
| 37. Èniyàn ẹ ẹra mósé | My people, work hard |
| 38. Işẹ loògùn işẹ, ẹ ẹra mósé | Work is an antidote to poverty, work hard |
| 39. Ọjọ n lọ ẹ ẹra mósé | Time is moving work hard. |

Analysis and Critique of Sholla' Allyson Ọbáníyì's Ethics of Work in *Márosè*

In this section of the paper, the preceding analysis of work will serve as evaluation and critique of Sholla-Allyson's views about the ethics of work in her lyrics, *Márosè*, a tract in her album, *ADUN* (Galaxy Music, September, 12, 2012). In the tract, Sholla-Allyson Ọbáníyì expresses the ethical view concerning the necessity for human beings to engage in productive activity, thereby illustrating an aspect of the classical, modern and contemporary conceptions of work. What

is lacking in Qbáníyì's song is the analysis of how work has turned into a curse and the attendant remedy of the situation.

The lyrics is agent centred. It suggests that work is based on the assumption that it is the individual that has to work in order to prevent poverty. Consideration is not given unto ontological and social realities that might be responsible for poverty even when an individual is hard working. In one of her albums, *Gbéjé Fóri*, Allyson Qbáníyì makes allusion to the metaphysical doctrine of determinism, especially as it relates to the conception of *orí*, inner head. In that song, Qbáníyì draws attention to the need for an individual to accept his/her condition in this world given the belief that it is one's *orí*, the bearer of destiny, that is responsible for a given existential situation in which an individual has found herself/himself. Such deterministic position betrays the need to struggle to attain self-realisation by means of hard work. By the same token, the social structure of a capitalist and neo-liberal mode of production might prevent individuals to realise the full potentialities that are engendered in work. We have seen in the first section of this paper how the capitalist mode of production has produced a worker who has become alienated from his/her work. In this connection, work has become a curse. The plausibility of Qbáníyì's rendition, however, is that it makes allusion to the factor of human agency as discussed in my earlier analysis, in the ideal or otherwise of work as a human virtue.

Having said this, I shall endeavour to analyse the song, line by line.

Lines 1-3. In these lines, Sholla-Allyson Ọbáníyì exhorts her audience about the need to work and the obligation to shun laziness.

Lines 4-6: Ọbáníyì stresses the human virtue of autonomy as a means to self-fulfilment. According to Benson, “autonomy is a mean state of character with regard to reliance on one’s own powers in acting, choosing and forming opinions” (1983:5). Autonomy is a human virtue which enables a person to critically and rationally think about his/her situation and makes the necessary choice to achieve life goals.

Lines 7-9: The artist emphasises the ethical position that persons should be independent through hard work and that they should not wholly rely on the achievement of their progenitors, especially their immediate parents. In the African society, it is always regarded as self-deception when a young man/woman wholly relies on the wealth of parents in order to make it in life. This is evident in the traditional conception of property acquisition. According to Fádípè (1970; 2012), a young man undergoing apprenticeship under his father is allotted a parcel of land to cultivate for his own account. This is to suggest that even when the son is entitled to an inheritance of his father, he still has his own property to show which is a product of his own efforts. It is often said that, *oko kùí jé tí baba jé tí ọmọ kí ó má ní ààlà* (A farm does not belong to the father and the son without demarcation).

Lines 10-12: Ọbáníyì stresses that poverty is a logical outcome of laziness and given that poverty is a negative human experience, persons should work in order to avoid poverty. On a

critical reflection, however, these lines are oblivious of the fact that poverty may not necessarily result from laziness; rather, poverty may be as a result of one's destiny as reflected on the choice of the type of *orí* one possesses. In addition, the structural relations between persons in a capitalist society which gives rise to inequalities in income and earning might be responsible for why some persons are poor while others are rich.

Lines 13-15: *Ọbáníyì* stresses the fact that there is dignity in labour and that a person who believes in hard-work is an ethically regarded person. That there is dignity in labour is a value that has been cherished in pre-industrial society. The advent of industrialisation when there was a social division of labour, brought in its stead certain negative human conditions like alienation, exploitation and oppression perpetrated by the rich against the poor. This has the unintended effect of regarding work as a curse.

Lines 16-20: *Ọbáníyì* does not discriminate between the commitment to work in whatever situation we find ourselves, whether as a self-employed person or as a civil servant. This is an admonition to certain civil servants who entertain the belief that public service is a means to cheat given the fact that whether one works hard or not one is going to get paid at the end of the month. This attitude to work is reflected in the saying that, *Ọ̀gọ̀ tà ọ̀gọ̀ ọ̀ tà owó aláàárù á pé* (whether the salt sells or not, the wage of its carrier will be complete). This negative attitude to work might be the outcome of the frustration which workers encounter when they see their work

as a job and not a calling. As was pointed out in my earlier discussion on this aspect of work, a worker who sees what s/he does as calling will not pay much attention to whether s/he is poorly paid. As long as a worker is happy with what s/he does, then the objective of work, to some extent, has been achieved. This is an allusion to Burke's view that it is not necessary to define work in terms of pay (1971: 44).

Lines 21-23: In these lines, Qbáníyì draws attention to the need for the unemployed not to shun any employment offer. This is because as the saying goes, "half bread is better than none". This is an admonition to the young graduate who is insisting on a particular job as the only alternative to unemployment.

However, this advice flies in the face of reality, especially the contemporary view that one should engage in a job that can mitigate poverty, *isè tí ó n tán isè*.

Lines 24-26: In these lines, Qbáníyì draws attention to the consequences of laziness. According to her, laziness is the cause of lack of achievement and the consequence is that such a person will live an unfulfilled life. Again, it is apt to reiterate that laziness is not a sufficient reason for poverty.

Lines 27-29: Qbáníyì emphasises the necessity to work as a universal experience given the fact that work is an injunction which dates back to the beginning of time and which is still regarded as a defining attribute of the human person. When this is still true in principle, the experiences from natural and social factors influencing work has negatively affected the ideal of work.

Lines 30-36: In these lines, Sholla-Allyson Ọbáníyì recognises the metaphysical doctrine of cause and effect. For her, one who does not work cannot expect any material thing which can add to the quality of human life. This also stresses the importance of human freedom in our world where persons sometimes pray to God for the good things of life without necessarily putting enough effort to transform nature in order to produce the material conditions of life.

Lines 37-39: Finally, Ọbáníyì re-emphasises the fact that work, productive work, is the only antidote to poverty. However, as it has been illustrated in this paper, poverty is not necessarily an effect of laziness on the part of a given agent. Rather, poverty could be as the outcome of natural and socio-economic factors that are engendered in the contemporary capitalist neo-liberal society where workers are not rewarded according to their inputs and where workers are not always motivated to put their best in what they do as producers of material conditions of life.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this paper centred on the application of the theory of work to explicate Sholla-Allyson Ọbáníyì's rendition about the need to work. It shows how the work of an artist can be given a scholarly interpretation and application which the artist does not necessarily intend. On a philosophical dimension, the paper illustrates Paget Henry's (2000: 4) view that philosophy is embedded in works of arts like music, film, sculpture and that it is the task of the philosopher to excavate these embedded features and explicate them into a philosophical

system. This might be a very contentious view about philosophy and its practitioners. But this paper has tried to show that artists are philosophically perspectival and scholars in the discipline should continue to pay attention to their work in order to relate them to the existential situations in contemporary Yorùbá society. Specifically, in relation to Shola-Allyson Obániyi's views about work as rendered in *Márosè*, it is suggested that the conceptual framework that provides for a place for leisure and play could enhance her views about work thereby making her views to synchronise more with the classical, modern and contemporary conceptions of work, which sees work not in isolation from leisure and play.

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