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## **Money and social interaction in Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* and Audu Wazirin Danduna's ballad *Tsakanin Dan'adam da Kudi***

*Abstract:* The paper juxtaposes the Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* with Audu Wazirin Danduna's ballad and emphasizes a point of convergence between them. It shows that the import of Wazirin Danduna's popular ballad, *Tsakanin Dan'adam da Kudi*, is akin to Simmel's schematic-philosophical analysis of the nature or character of money in modern society and how it affects human interactions or, generally, social life. The paper demonstrates that both Simmel and Wazirin Danduna see money in a modern society as an object facilitating our understanding of social life. Simmel and Wazirin Danduna describe money as being characterized by reification, growing individual freedom, a blasé attitude and impersonal relationships. They envisage money as a means fast becoming an end, which informs the greed and heightened craving for money characteristic of human society today. The paper also argues that poetry as a creative work enables us to appreciate the complexity and dynamics of human society and, therefore, the contributions of poets should not be ignored by social scientists for simply not conforming to empirical rituals.

*Keywords:* philosophy of money, social interaction, Wazirin Danduna's ballad, Hausa, *kudi*

### **Introduction**

In a rational bourgeois system, human action has become instrumentally oriented. In other words, rational calculation has become the defining attribute of human conduct in the epoch of advanced capi-

talism. Both Simmel and Wazirin Danduna try to expound on the influence money exerts on human conduct and social action. This paper demonstrates the points of convergence between Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* and Wazirin Danduna's ballad *Tsakanin Dan 'adam da Kudi* (Money and a Man). Specifically, it shows that the main concern of the two abovementioned works is to demonstrate that nearly everything, including abstract things, has assumed monetary value. That is, both Simmel and Wazirin Danduna describe money as being characterized by reification, growing individual freedom, a blasé attitude, and impersonal relationships.

Poetry, which is a form of creative work, allows us to appreciate the complexity of social life. For instance, in the nineteenth century, when the discipline of sociology was still emerging, poetry had contributed to its development as evidenced by the influence of Romanticism on German and France's sociological traditions – both in particular as well as in social theory in general. Romanticism, according to Rundell (2001: 14), “encompassed a wider cultural movement of not only literature, especially poetry, art and music, but also blurred the boundaries between these forms of expression and philosophy itself.” Romanticism embodies creative works that reacted to the anarchy that followed the French Revolution and the consequent political reforms, and, also, critiqued the excessive rationalization of values that typified modernity. However, as aptly observed by Rundell (2001), the legacy of Romanticism in social theory has been downplayed or suppressed in the history of social thought. This, arguably, explains, at least in part, the failure of contemporary social theorists to recognize creative works, particularly poetry, in their works. Plus, their obsession with empiricism has deflected attention away from the import of poets' exposition of social world, its complexity and dynamics.

### **The core of Simmel's sociology**

Georg Simmel (1858-1918) was one of the leading German intellectual figures of the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although he saw himself as a philosopher (Frisby 1984: 25), his analyses have traversed both sociology and history and, above all, are unique. Until

recently, social theorists have not paid much attention to his works, despite his sound intellectual contributions. The neglect or mistreatment of Simmel's works was in part because of his being denied a position in academia until later in life – this in spite of his sound intellectual contributions. Consequently, his sociology has been given different typologies: interactionism, conflict, and informal sociology.

According to Turner (1999), Simmel's sociological perspective is situated on three fundamental premises, namely: relationalism, sociation and social forms. The first premise denotes that all elements of human society are inextricably entangled or, as Turner (1999: 148) succinctly puts it, none "can be understood in isolation, but only in terms of its interrelatedness with the totality." This interconnectedness of societal elements implies that no element is trivial; rather, it allows us to appreciate the way society works and how society, in turn, provides a platform to examine the character and importance of such an element.

The second premise, sociation, shows that unlike the structuralists whose intellectual interests rest on social structure and, therefore, "see society as having a reality outside or independent of the existence of the interacting individuals who compose it" (Appelrouth and Desfor, 2008: 236)," Simmel was primarily interested in interactions (sociation) among conscious actors, along with the forms of these interactions. He sees society as a sum of interactions among individual actors that comprise it. He says "society is a mere collection of individuals. Society is not an absolute entity which must first exist so that all the individual relations of its members [...] can develop within its framework or be represented by it; it is only the synthesis or the general term of the totality of these interactions (Simmel [1907] 1978: 187)." He also maintains that society requires reciprocal interactions among individual actors, and that is what transmutes the mere collection of isolated individuals into a single whole (society). Therefore, social interaction can be construed as a form of reciprocal exchange. This exchange "is the purest and most developed kind of interaction, which shapes human life when it seeks to acquire substance and content. [...] every interaction has to be regarded as an

exchange: every conversation, every affection (even if it is rejected), every game, every glance at another person” (Simmel [1907]1978: 86).

The third, according to Turner (1999: 149), deals with “the forms of social life – groups, families, networks, exchange relations and so forth – which emerge out of the endless sociation of individuals.” Simmel makes a distinction between **content** (purpose, motives and interest) of interaction among social actors, and **forms** (modes of interaction) through which people pursue and satisfy their desires. Social interactions take on the forms of super-ordination and sub-ordination, or conflict and cooperation. That is to say, they are characterized by domination and control; the super-ordinate issues commands to, and exerts obedience from, the subordinate, while the subordinate accords respect and obedience to the superior. This form of relationship may be either conflicting or cooperative. Examples are interactions among family members (husband and wife, father and child), employer and employee, etc.

### ***The Philosophy of Money***

Simmel was one of the early sociologists who demonstrated interest in understanding and analyzing the role of money in human interaction. However, prior to his popular work, *The Philosophy of Money*, two mesmerizing pre-existing German intellectual traditions, Marxism and Weberism, had dealt with the instrumental character of modern society. Therefore, Simmel was greatly influenced by these divergent traditions, and his work on the philosophy of money straddles Marx’s theory of alienation and Weber’s action theory. Simmel ([1907] 1978) sees money as an integral element of life that enables us to appreciate the totality of life. “He treated money as a specific phenomenon linked with a variety of other components of life, including exchange, ownership, greed, extravagance, cynicism, individual freedom, the style of life, the value of the personality, etc.” (Ritzer 2008: 174). In a money economy, almost everything can be bought or sold. The fact that money is a medium of exchange (it pays for food, cloth, shelter, entertainment, etc.), it expands our access to so many desires, social networks (through monetary transactions

with others) and, above all, we tend to become more dependent on it and less on others. Money facilitates a wide range and endless exchange between actors, long-term loans, large-scale enterprises, which used to be impossible in a barter economy — where exchange ends once one object has been exchanged for another. In a money economy, individuals may be under obligation to many more people than in a barter economy, which goes a long way in widening the scope of social interaction and enhancing individual freedom. Hence, in money society, people become more cultivated (i.e. participating members of society). While barter gives little or no room for the pursuit of individuality and individual freedom, money does so by expanding social networks beyond geographically isolated areas, tradition and kinship.

As the number of objects exchangeable for money grows ceaselessly, things continue to succumb to the power of money. Simmel ([1907] 1978), therefore, sees money as the purest quintessence of means becoming an end. In a primitive social setting, when objects exchangeable for money were limited and money only served consumption, it was considered as a means not an end. As society transformed from primitive to modern-industrialized one, the ‘teleological role’ of money has grown beyond mere consumption of necessities. This suggests that money as an ultimate purpose (an end in itself) is determined by the culture of an era. Once money becomes an end in itself, an insatiable crave for money, or to use Simmel expression, “greed and avarice”, inevitably surfaces. Since every object surrenders to the power of money defenselessly; it has become an “ultimate purpose” and the desire to have more and accumulate it increases among people. Simmel ([1907] 1978) posits that in spite of the fact that greed for material possession predates modern time, it is more pronounced in this epoch (money economy) than in any period in the past. In other words, although there is no defined threshold in which gauging greed begins, it is comparably higher in a ‘money economy’ than in a ‘primitive’ one, and the reverse is often the case for avarice.

Simmel, like Marx, was highly concerned with the problems of capitalism. But unlike Marx, whose thesis is predicated on historical materialism, he concentrates on the impact of money on culture, or

what he calls ‘the tragedy of culture’, (the growth of objective culture over subjective culture and the tension between them). Objective culture, the products of human creativity (technology, science, arts, and language, etc.), exerts a domineering influence and tends to be coercive on the subjective culture, the individual mind, or what Douglas and Kathleen (1994: 2) called the “human capacity for self-reflection, which allows for the self-conscious construction of action and identity.” For instance, money is a product of human creativity and people today become dependent on it to the extent that life without it is almost impossible. To put it slightly differently, money, a human creature, has assumed an autonomous life from, and has become coercive to, the humans who created it through sociation. The fact that people inevitably need money in order to live, causes money to exert an influence on them, and “the locus of dependency shifts from people to money” (Appelrouth and Desfor 2008: 244). Simmel sees this problem as an inherent part of human life, contrary to Marx’s ([1844] 1932) conception of alienation, which predicted that a radical departure from capitalism to socialism will end the problem.

Money has reduced everything, including qualitative phenomena, to mere quantitative expressions; or more precisely it results, to use Simmel’s ([1907] 1978) phraseology, in reification. Thus, in a money economy there is no clear distinction between qualitative and quantitative domains; abstract things are treated as existing, tangible or concrete objects. For instance, money pays for love, truth, beauty, respect, loyalty, education, justice, faith, membership in a union, etc., which used to be non-material things. Above all, money has reduced human value and dignity to a mere monetary expression. To buttress this argument, Simmel ([1907] 1978) cites wergild (atonement of murder by payment of money) as a glaring example of the relationship between human value and money value. He also mentions “marriage for money” in today’s money-driven society, where material motive or consideration rather than genuine personal affection influences the selection of a marriage partner as another example. To further illustrate his argument that money is an equivalent of personal values, he examined the “terrible degradation” of human dignity in-

herent in prostitution. Simmel ([1907] 1978: 408) argues that “it certainly signifies the nadir of human dignity if a woman surrenders her most intimate and most personal quality, which should be offered only on the basis of a genuine personal impulse and also with equal personal devotion on the part of the male, for totally impersonal, purely extraneous and objective compensation.”

The fading away of a quality-quantity dichotomy in a money economy, or the reified nature of money, leads to a blasé attitude. According to Simmel ([1907] 1978), since money can acquire all of the possibilities that life can offer, i.e., since everything and everybody is purchasable, people would necessarily become blasé; certain valuable attributes would be less attractive and unworthy of being excited about. Simmel ([1907] 1978: 275f.) argues further that:

The more money becomes the sole centre of interest, the more one discovers that honour and conviction, talent and virtue, beauty and salvation of the soul are exchanged against money and so the more a mocking and frivolous attitude will develop in relation to these higher values that are for sale for the same kind of values as groceries, and that also command a ‘market price’

Money also brings about what Simmel ([1907] 1978) refers to as a “calculating character.” The infinite divisibility of money into denominations allows for maneuvering and exact quantification of equivalents and limitless quantification of human activity. The arithmetic precision and exact measurement that characterized modern time transcends money transactions, entering into all other spheres of human activity. In other words, this calculating character of money results in improved intellectuality via promoting a mathematical mode of thinking not only in financial transactions but also in all spheres of life. For instance, in elections or in sampling public opinion, the majority will always have their way, and the minority will succumb to the majority view. This indicates that the individual’s opinion is reduced to an absolutely quantitative expression. Also, the calculating character that typifies a money economy has taught peo-

ple to systematically weigh the cost and benefit or pleasure and pain of whatever action(s) they plan to undertake. Simmel ([1907] 1978: 482) argues more fittingly:

The money economy enforces the necessity of continuous mathematical operations in our daily transactions. The lives of many people are absorbed by such evaluating, weighing, calculating, and reducing of qualitative values to quantitative ones. Gauging values in terms of money has taught us to determine and specify values down to the last farthing and has thus enforced a much greater precision in the comparison of various contents of life.

Moreover, money makes relationships among social actors impersonal. Today, relationships exist and persist not on the basis of blood or social ties or personal qualities, but on the basis of material possessions. Appelrouth and Desfor (2008: 245) observes that “money breeds relationships based on rational calculation and instrumental purposes as opposed to the ones based on personal ties of family or attraction to another’s individual, subjective qualities.” Money has, therefore, transformed the nature of social interaction from one based on traditional, blood or kinship ties to one based on rational calculation. Douglas and Kathleen (1994) laconically summarize this point when they argue that Simmel views modernity as an epoch in which tradition-bound social obligations briskly fade away, freedom of action grows due to de-personalized relations between people resulting from the abstract character of money exchange. Since one’s reputation in society is determined more by the objective, impersonal issue (material position) than personal attributes, tradition, or even ethnic background, age and gender — money conceals peoples’ ill repute. In other words, people who are affluent are often not avoided for their immoral attitude in our interactions as colleagues, neighbors or relatives, on the ground of their affluence.

### **Wazirin Danduna and the Hausa oral tradition**

Hausa traditional songs are broadly classified into two, namely: written and oral. The former, as the name suggests, is written poetry and is didactic, doxological, admonitory and seeks to enlighten. A written poem, according to Muhammad (1979) cited in Furniss (1996: 131), “has regular stanzas, line-end rhyme schemes, and operates with Arab-derived meters.” Hausa written poems are usually religious, espousing Islamic teaching and values, and sometimes political: raising political consciousness of the masses or simply narrating the complexity of human social milieu or an exposition of a particular social problem.

On the other hand, oral song is non-written, and is often accompanied by an instrument. Furniss (1996: 131) argues that it is “often sung by a group with lead singer and chorus, and is performed without reference to anything written down.” Oral song is usually composed to either praise or mock someone. Praise singers (*maroka*) are panegyrists; they praise their clients in return for money. The subject matter of the songs (praise songs) could either be a “courtier, an emir, a wealthy person, an infamous person, or simply iconic interpretations of the mutability of life” (Uba 2010: 95). It may also involve mockery or satire; that is, it is composed to mock a fellow singer, a singer’s perceived enemy or his client’s enemy, or a wealthy individual or traditional leader considered stingy by the singer.

The two preceding paragraphs imply that Hausa songs, whether written or oral, have a varied subject matter/thematic focus – for instance, some focus on contemporary social issues, such as changing patterns of social relations, modernity, prevailing social problems in society, among other things. Examples are *Wakar Karuwa* (A Song about a prostitute) by Mu’azu Hadejia, *Duniya da Wuyar Zama* (The world – a difficult place to live in) by Audu Wazirin Danduna, *Wakar Kudi* (Song on money) by Ibrahim Yaro Muhammed. Others deal with religious issues, enjoining Muslims to live a life according to the dictate of Islam, or espousing Islamic dictums governing Muslims’ lives. Aliyu Namangi’s *Imfiraji* is a notable example of these songs. Still others focus on occupations, such as *Wakar Farauta*

(Song on hunting), *Wakar Noma* (Song on farming), etc. (Gusau, 2008 and Idris, 2011). There are also songs of praise or vilification (Ojaide, 2010).

Audu Wazirin Danduna is a popular Hausa traditional musician of Northern Nigerian origin. Like many other Hausa traditional musicians, his songs can be classified as oral. He is also a praise singer, as the subject matter of his songs is mostly a traditional ruler or a wealthy person, who, (as his client), is praised in return for material gain. However, some of his songs, like *Duniya da Wuyar Zama* (The world – a difficult place to live in) and *Tsakanin Dan'adam da Kudi*, express his understanding of the complexity of social life and the changing pattern of social interaction that characterized modern society. This suggests that while he is popularly referred to as a praise singer, the thematic focus of his songs sometimes transcends praise singing.

### **Thematic focus of the ballad *Tsakanin Dan'adam da Kudi***

The etymology of the term “ballad” indicates that it was coined from a French word, *ballade*, which originally means dancing song. The meaning and usage of the term evolved over time. A ballad is a poem composed in a narrative or lyric form, sung or unsung, sentimental or satire, religious or secular, which could be performed with or without instrumental accompaniment. A ballad can also be conceptualized as a traditional song composed to tell a story in short stanzas usually accompanied by a chorus or refrain and, sometimes, musical instrument(s). According to Strand and Boland (2000: 73), a ballad “is a short narrative, which is usually — but not always — arranged in four-line stanzas with a distinctive memorable meter [...] and the ballad maker uses popular and local speech and dialogue often and vividly to convey the story.” However, sometimes embellishing language is used to convey the message in the ballad.

Wazirin Danduna uses choral music, with a group of chorus boys repeating the same stanza throughout the song. A traditional drum (*kalangu*) is used to accompany the song. As is the case with most Hausa traditional music, he, as the choragus, narrates the stanzas and the chorus boys recite the chorus after every stanza he sings. His

philosophical narration of the fundamental character of his society in this song demonstrates his understanding of that society and, also underlines the role of poetry in enriching our understanding of the complexity of human action. Wazirin Danduna lucidly reveals the growing rationalization of human action or, put simply, the influence of money on social relationship among human actors. Therefore, the core concern of Wazirin Danduna's *Tsakanin Dan' adam da Kudi* is to show that human relationship in modern society is impersonal and instrumentally oriented.

### **The point of convergence between Wazirin Danduna's ballad and Simmel's *Philosophy of Money***

Wazirin Danduna, in this ballad, *Tsakanin Dan' adam da Kudi*, portrays his perception of the character of money in modern society. His skilful vignette of the character of money and analysis of how it transforms social relationships was similar to Simmel's philosophy of money. He, like Simmel, sees money as a component of life that aids an understanding of the totality of life. He is of the view that reification, cynicism, a blasé attitude, and impersonal relationships and individualism characterized social life in a money economy. Wazirin Danduna repeatedly narrates, in different stanzas, that money creates and expands social networks among individuals and its possession is inevitable for an individual's continuous social existence. For instance, he sings:

Hausa:

Wazirin Danduna: *Yanzu ba ka mutane sai kana da kudi*

'Y/Amshi: *Tsakanin Dan' adam da Kudi*

English:

Wazirin Danduna: People relate with you only if you have money

Chorus: Money and a man

Hausa:

Wazirin Danduna: *Yanzu duk wata harka sai kana da kudi*

'Y/Amshi: *Tsakanin Dan' adam da Kudi*

English:

Wazirin Danduna: Every deal nowadays is traced to money

Chorus: Money and a man

In the two stanzas above, Wazirin Danduna also expresses the tragedy of culture; people indispensably need money (the objective culture) in order to relate with others and be functioning members of society, which paves the way for self-reflection and development of self-consciousness (the subjective culture). This means that money has assumed a life of its own, exerting independent influence on the humans who created it.

The impersonal nature of money has also been stressed by Wazirin Danduna. He, like Simmel, affirms that people are connected only by an interest that can be expressed in monetary terms. He also indicates in the stanzas following that money, rather than individuals' personal qualities and social ties, shapes our everyday dealings with others. In other words, it depersonalizes relationships between individuals; it makes an individual's personal attributes, other ties, etc. immaterial. For instance, when he says 'no deals without money' and 'every deal nowadays is traced to money', he underestimates the influence of blood and social ties or, more precisely, envisions them as withering away in modern time. Wazirin Danduna says:

*Yanzu ba wata harka sai kana da kudi*

'No deals without money'

*Yanzu duk wata harka sai kana da kudi*

'Every deal nowadays is traced to money'

*Akan so mummuna saboda kudi*

'Someone ugly is desired because of money'

*Ka ga ana kin kyakkyawa saboda kudi*

'And someone beautiful is rejected because of money'

Wazirin Danduna was also interested in analyzing the reification that characterized a money economy. He identifies certain attributes that were hitherto non-monetary, but are nowadays treated as if they are concrete or material things. He specifically emphasizes respect, truth and love as abstract things that are tied to money in the stanzas quoted beneath:

*Ko girma ma sai kana da kudi*  
'Prestige is only tied to money'

*Kuma akan yi rashin girma saboda kudi*  
'And one falls from grace because of money'

*Ana daukar magana saboda kudi*  
'Command is obeyed because of money'

*Ana kin magana saboda kudi*  
'And command is disobeyed because of money'

*Ana raba ka da girma saboda da kudi*  
'You can be snubbed without money'

*Karamin yaro saboda kudi*  
'A boy with money'

*Ana masa ban girma saboda kudi*  
'Is respected because of money'

*Ana take karya saboda kudi*  
'a lie is often covered-up because of money'

In the stanzas above, Wazirin Danduna explicitly shows that respect and disrespect are associated with money. He also shows that lies can be covered up and treated as truths because of money. This means that respect and truth are treated as if they are commodities that have prices. To further illustrate this point, he narrates that:

*Ko Alhaji ya zo sai ka na da kudi*  
'Alhaji's presence is recognized only if he is affluent'

*Alhaji ko baya nan don saboda kudi*  
'Alhaji's absence is noticed because of money'

In the preceding stanzas, he shows that Alhaji's (used in this context to refer to a head of a family) presence or absence is recognized even by the members of his family only because of money. This means one's position in the family does not determine the respect accorded to him or his influence on other members of the family – what determines these things is his or her material position.

Wazirin Danduna also shows that reification has resulted in a blasé attitude; people are unperturbed by certain virtues, they are rather concerned with excessive materialism. To stress this, he, like Simmel, uses marriage for material gain as an example. Wazirin Danduna demonstrates that material consideration assumes more prominence in choosing a marriage partner than genuine personal affection, state of health, temperament, physical appearance, and other non-material virtues possessed by the chosen partner. Wazirin Danduna explicitly shows this in the stanzas below:

*Ana auren gurgu saboda kudi,*  
'A paraplegic is often married because of money'

*Ana kin mai kafa saboda kudi*  
'And yet a healthy person is disliked because of money'

*Ana son mummuna saboda kudi,*  
'Someone ugly is desired because of money'

*Ka ga ana kin kyakkyawa saboda kudi*  
'And someone beautiful is also rejected because of money'.

The aforesaid staves indicate that physical deformities, ugliness and

beauty are ignored or, to put it differently, are less important in selecting a partner. What is most important is the material status of the partner. This means money has made people develop a blasé attitude with respect to these virtues (beauty, truth, temperament, fitness, etc.)

### **Conclusion**

It is clear from the preceding analysis that Wazirin Danduna's perception of the character of money in his popular ballad, *Tsakanin Dan'adam da kudi*, is similar to Simmel's schematic-philosophical analysis of the nature of money and how it affects human interactions, or generally, social life. Both see money in modern society as a component of life that facilitates our understanding of the entirety of social life. They demonstrate that reification, impersonal relationships, a blasé attitude and growing individual freedom are the fundamental characters of a monetized society. Consequently, money is fast becoming an end rather than a means to an end. The paper further argues that poetry as creative work helps our understanding of the complexity and dynamics of the social world. Therefore, the contribution of poets should be recognized by social scientists rather than be jettisoned for simply not complying with empirical demands.

Although Simmel and Wazirin Danduna clearly understand the impact of money on society and social relationships, it could be argued that they exaggerate the power of money and its teleological roles in modern society, and, by extension, underestimate the value and influence of social and blood ties on the relationship between individuals. Moreover, certain personal qualities like intelligence, beauty, and decency are still revered and people who possess them are given due regards, contrary to the view that these values have withered away in our society. There is still some iota of respect for elders in our family setting or to put in another way: family values have not yet completely withered away, contrary to Simmel's and Wazirin Danduna's positions.

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