

## ARTICLE

# The Corruption of A Spiritual Leader: An Analysis of Pastor Pfumela's Betrayal in Xitsonga Narrative Text

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## ABSTRACT

Xitsonga literature is rich with many sensitive literary themes that highlight the Vatsonga experience about life and their understanding of social dimensions. Among these themes is corruption within the house of the Lord. This article examines the theme of corruption in Xitsonga literature through a literary analysis of the character of Pastor Pfumela from the drama *Byi n'wi khele matluka* by M. Malungana. Using a qualitative research approach, this article employs a literary analysis methodology to explore the ways in which corruption manifests in the text. The study draws on the theoretical framework of Rational Choice Theory to examine the power dynamics and moral implications of Pastor Pfumela's choices on corruption. The findings of this study reveal that Pastor Pfumela's corruption is driven by his desire for money and wants, such as cars and phones, and that his actions have far-reaching consequences for the community he serves. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the theme of corruption in the Xitsonga drama book *Byi n'wi khele matluka* and highlights the importance of moral leadership in African communities. It is recommended that religious leaders be held to ethical standards and that moral education be reinforced within communities. Further research is encouraged to examine how literature can be used as a tool for anti-corruption awareness and education in African communities and worldwide.

**Keywords:** Corruption; Consequences; Literary Analysis; Rational Choice Theory; Xitsonga Literature

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# 1. Introduction

In Xitsonga literature, corruption is a pervasive and complex issue that affects various aspects of society, including religion. Literature refers to written works that go beyond everyday communication<sup>[1]</sup>. Similarly, Xitsonga literature plays a significant role in shaping the identity and values of the Vatsonga people. The messages conveyed reflect not only their perspectives on life but also their social experiences within broader societal dynamics. Drama is the enactment of real and imagined events through roles and situations<sup>[2]</sup>. This implies that Xitsonga literature presents fictions that resemble real and imagined events about life. In real-life situations, the argument is that literature serves as a report to society, highlighting issues that may be overlooked. Authors use their work to draw attention to these matters, urging readers to take notice. As for fiction, I also believe that authors use their literary skills to address important and educational topics, aiming to inform and provoke thought within society. Xitsonga is more than just a language; it embodies the history, beliefs, and values that define the Vatsonga community<sup>[3]</sup>. With that said, most, if not all, Vatsonga drama features corruption as a literal theme and is outlined in various aspects of life. This signifies the thoughts and efforts of writers in battling corruption and responding to it as a literary theme. Corruption undermines public trust, while it erodes self-reliance in the rule of law<sup>[4]</sup>. When religious leaders engage in corrupt activities, they not only betray the trust of their followers but also bring shame and discredit to the institution. Corruption refers to dishonest or unethical behaviour involving the misuse of power or authority for personal gain<sup>[5]</sup>. Bhandari<sup>[5]</sup> further asserts that corruption is harmful to societies and economies because it diverts resources away from their intended purposes, erodes public trust in institutions, undermines the rule of law, and perpetuates inequality and poverty. In an observational opinion, corruption has a negative impact within Vatsonga societies as outlined in literary text, since literary text is a societal reflection or mirror; this is one of the causes that holds back societal transformation and development. Examining the corruption literary theme in Xitsonga drama texts is hardly explored in academic spaces. This gap needs to be closed so that people can learn the tactics of corruption in church settings and learn the consequences of such actions. The study

of corruption in Xitsonga literature is significant because it provides a unique perspective on the social and cultural context of the Vatsonga community. The article's objective is concerned with examining the corrupt behaviour of Pastor Pfumela, exploring the motivations behind his actions and the consequences of his betrayal. Through a literary analysis of the text, this article sheds light on the themes of corruption and morality in Xitsonga literature.

Corruption, particularly within institutional and leadership structures, is deeply rooted in the historical, political, and social dynamics of many African societies. In postcolonial contexts, countries such as South Africa inherited unequal political and economic systems shaped by colonial rule and apartheid, which left behind weakened institutions and deep structural inequalities<sup>[6,7]</sup>. These conditions contributed to a political culture in which power is often used for personal gain rather than public service. The transition to democracy in 1994 was met with hopes for ethical governance, but over time, patronage networks and political opportunism have undermined these ideals<sup>[8]</sup>. Religious institutions, once regarded as moral beacons, have not been immune to this decay. Spiritual leaders, like the fictional Pastor Pfumela in *Byi n'wi khele matluka*, represent a broader concern, that even sacred spaces can become entangled in corruption when power is left unchecked. Literature in indigenous languages, across African countries, serves as a powerful medium to critique this moral erosion. Socially, the continued presence of poverty, inequality, and unemployment has fostered a climate where corruption is normalized and, in some cases, seen as a necessary means of survival<sup>[9,10]</sup>. Not everyone views corruption as corruption, those who benefit from it view it as means of acquiring wealth, but as for the victims of corruption, corruption remain as it is. In such environments, authority figures, whether religious, educational, or political may exploit their roles under the guise of service, while reinforcing systemic injustices. This dynamic contributes to a wider ethical dilemma where moral values are eroded, and the public grows disillusioned with institutions meant to protect them. Within the Vatsonga cultural context, proverbs and oral literature historically emphasized communal responsibility and integrity. Yet, when spiritual leaders manipulate these cultural norms for personal enrichment, the impact is not only institutional but also psychological and spiritual. The portrayal of corruption in *Byi n'wi khele matluka* is thus a

symbolic commentary on broader sociopolitical failures and a call to restore moral leadership and trust in both traditional and modern institutions.

## 2. Towards Knowing Pastor Pfumela

The journey of Pastor Jackson Pfumela as a spiritual leader who was loved by his church community because of his dedication to being a pastor at the Church of All Creatures to corruption and betraying the community. Just like his character name, Mufundhisi Pfumela, loosely translated to Pastor Agree, in the *Byi n'wi khele matluka* drama, the character of Pastor Pfumela serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of corruption and the betrayal of trust. As a spiritual leader, Pastor Pfumela is expected to embody the values of integrity, compassion, and morality. However, his involvement in illegal activities, including drug trafficking, reveals a darker side to his character. The involvement of Pastor Pfumela in drug trafficking is a clear indication of the corrupting influence of greed and love of money. As a pastor, he is expected to be a role model and a source of inspiration for his followers. However, his actions reveal a lack of integrity and a willingness to compromise his values for personal gain. This behaviour is not only unacceptable but also destructive, as it undermines the moral fabric of the community. While undermining the fabric of the community, the corrupt activities taking place in the community hold back societal transformation and development.

The character of Pastor Pfumela also highlights the theme of hypocrisy in Xitsonga literature. As a pastor, he is expected to preach against sin and corruption, as well as other activities that contributes to illegal activities, but his own actions reveal a different story. This hypocrisy is not only damaging to the church but also to the community, as it creates a sense of distrust and disillusionment. Furthermore, the corruption of Pastor Pfumela has significant implications for the community he serves. His involvement in drug trafficking contributes to the spread of addiction and crime, which can have devastating effects on families and individuals<sup>[11]</sup>. Moreover, his corruption undermines the authority of the church and erodes trust in religious institutions. Knowing Pastor Pfumela's character provides insights into the themes of corruption, power, and morality in Xitsonga drama. Through a critical examination of the text, this article

sheds light on the ways in which corruption can manifest in different contexts and the consequences that follow. Additionally, this study explores the ways in which Xitsonga literature reflects and critiques the social and cultural norms of the Vatsonga community. Xitsonga literature offers a rich and diverse representation of the experiences, values, and beliefs of the Vatsonga people. By examining this theme of corruption in Xitsonga literature, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of the Vatsonga community.

## 3. Literature Review

This literature review focuses on recent studies highlighting the South African religious corruption and how corruption signifies chronic disease of humanity.

### 3.1. South African Religious Corruption

Corruption erodes public credence in key institutions, distorts dynamic market forces, diverts resources away from essential services and contributes to disparity<sup>[11]</sup>. The corruption of spiritual leaders is a recurring theme in various literary works across different cultures and time periods. Corruption, as a societal malady, has been a subject of intense scrutiny and discourse in academic and literary circles. Particularly in the context of Africa, corruption has manifested in various forms, from petty bribery to grand scale kleptocracy, often driven by factors such as colonial legacies, economic structures, and weak institutions<sup>[12,13]</sup>. Spiritual leadership has long been a subject of academic interest, with researchers exploring the intersection of spirituality and leadership in various contexts<sup>[14]</sup>. However, the literature also highlights the potential for corruption and unethical behaviour among spiritual leaders<sup>[15]</sup>. A review of the existing literature on this topic reveals insights into the nature, causes, and consequences of the corruption of spiritual leaders. One key aspect of the literature is the exploration of the good and bad of spiritual leadership<sup>[16]</sup>. While spiritual leaders are often viewed as moral exemplars, the research suggests that they are not immune to the temptations of power and the corrupting influence of their position<sup>[15]</sup>. Scholars have examined the antecedents of unethical behaviour among spiritual leaders, such as narcissism, power imbalances, and a lack of accountability<sup>[14,15]</sup>. Furthermore, the research has highlighted the

detrimental impact of spiritual leader corruption on followers, organizations, and society<sup>[15]</sup>.

In the context of Xitsonga literature and Vatsonga culture, corruption, particularly among spiritual leaders, is a profound issue in society that deserves critical attention. From a literary perspective, this theme can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal struggles with power and morality, especially within the context of post-colonial Africa. In analyzing the corruption of spiritual leaders, one can apply a lens of literary criticism to explore how narratives of power and morality are often intertwined, creating complex characters who embody both virtue and vice. Authors who address these themes challenge the idealised image of spiritual leaders, revealing the darker undercurrents that exist within human nature. Such critiques not only expose the flaws in spiritual leadership but also serve as a cautionary tale, urging readers to reflect on the ethical dilemmas faced by those in power.

### 3.2. A Chronic Disease of Humanity

Corruption is a persistent issue in developing countries, hindering national development and undermining trust in institutions. It can occur in various forms, such as politics, business, government, and social interactions, and typically involves bribery, fraud, embezzlement, and nepotism<sup>[5]</sup>. Corruption is harmful to societies and economies, as it diverts resources, erodes public trust, and perpetuates inequality and poverty. Bhandari<sup>[5]</sup> further asserts that corruption can hinder economic development, discourage foreign investment, and distort resource allocation. Social corruption, which involves deviations from accepted social norms, values, and ethical standards, can have significant negative impacts on individuals, communities, and society. Addressing social corruption requires promoting ethical behaviour, accountability and respect for social values.

Common forms of corruption include bribery, fraud, money laundering, and bribery/clientelism. To resolve or minimise corruption, a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is required, including strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, promoting transparency and accountability, and implementing mechanisms for citizen participation and oversight<sup>[5]</sup>. Bhandari<sup>[5]</sup> concluded that corruption is a chronic disease that requires collective effort from all stakeholders, including academicians, development practitioners,

international and UN agencies, and governments. It requires a long-term commitment and a comprehensive approach that encompasses legal, institutional, and societal changes.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

One of the most well-known models of human decision-making is known as rational choice theory, which holds that users make choices based on analysing the costs and benefits of their actions<sup>[17,18]</sup>. Therefore, this study draws on the theoretical framework of Rational Choice Theory to understand the power of dynamics and the cultural context of Xitsonga literature, as well as providing a framework for examining the moral implications of Pastor Pfumela's corruption. Rational choice theory states that individuals use rational calculations to make choices and achieve outcomes that are aligned with their own personal objectives<sup>[19]</sup>. This theory assumes that criminal offenders are rational individuals who calculate or consider the benefits of committing a criminal offense and expect that these will exceed the chances of being caught and the severity of punishment<sup>[18,20]</sup>. In this study, this theory posits that individuals engage in corrupt behaviour when they believe it is in their best interest to do so. According to this theory, individuals weigh the potential benefits of corrupt behaviour against the potential costs and make a rational decision to engage in corrupt behaviour if the benefits outweigh the costs<sup>[18]</sup>.

As the study aims, the focus is on Pastor Pfumela, who makes choices based on his goals of getting extra money and having a good life. The character chose the course of corrupt action that led him to the greatest satisfaction of getting what he desired by smuggling drugs. As the theory suggests, it is based on the classic notion that people will try to achieve the greatest benefits for themselves at the least cost<sup>[21]</sup>. This article used the rational choice theory to understand the perpetrators of corruption crimes<sup>[20]</sup> to draw conclusions on the corrupt decision made by Pastor Pfumela in the *Byi n'wi khele matluka* drama. To always bear in mind that rational choice theory is associated with the concepts of rational actors, self-interest, and the invisible hand<sup>[19]</sup>, which is the same as Pastor Pfumela, who is engaged in corruption for self-interest reasons and pretending to be invisibly involved in the initiative.

## 5. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, using literary analysis as the primary methodology. Qualitative research is defined as the study of the nature of phenomena, including their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the perspectives from which they can be perceived, but excluding their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect<sup>[22,23]</sup>. Literary analysis means closely studying a text, interpreting its meanings, and exploring why the author made certain choices<sup>[24]</sup>. Further, with literary analysis, it is about understanding literature through close reading and interpretation of texts, considering how various elements like narrative technique, structure, and language work together to produce meaning<sup>[25]</sup>. Understanding the concepts of the qualitative research approach and literary analysis, the study analysed the character of Pastor Pfumela in Xitsonga literature, particularly *Byi n'wi khele mathuka* drama, examining the ways in which corruption manifests in the text. The most related and closely related text that outlines corrupt behaviour was interpreted and examined. Conclusions on Pastor Pfumela's actions as outlined in the book were drawn based on the outcomes of literary analysis as a form of qualitative research approach, as it provides context and depth to the analysis.

## 6. Analysis

To break down and unpack what transpired about Pastor Pfumela, the analysis is presented as follows: the plan, rational choice, and the consequences and the results.

### 6.1. The Plan

Everything started when the Holy Service group paid a visit to Pastor Pfumela, a pastor at the Church of All Creatures. Members of the Holy service comprised Tshavansimbi, Madlayisani and Cukumetani. The holy service had a plan of selling drugs, but the challenge was the importation. Pastor Pfumela became part of their plan because they heard he orders Bibles from America. Upon their planning, Pastor Pfumela was the solution to their challenge; thus, they had to include him in the process. With that said, they shared their plan with him. For instance:

Tshovansimbi: *Hi ni mbhovo wa mali,*

*hi vone swi antswa ku phemelana na n'wina xinkwa, Vatsonga va ri: Vana va munhu va xekelana nhloko ya njiya...* (I am the source of money, we found it important to share bread with you, Vatsonga says: Children of a person share the locust head/sharing is carrying.) p. 3.

*Mufundhisi Pfumela: (A sungula hi ku n'wayitela) Ndza xi lava xuma, kumbe a ndzi ta nyukanyana. Boxani xihlovo xexo xa mali, kumbe na mina a ndzi ta hoxa xandla. Ndza swi lava ku vempfama emafurheni, tata wa mina u funye buwa a ri xisiwana xa mataya, kumbe mina a ndzi ta hlohloka etikweni. ((He started by smiling.) I want money, maybe I will glow a little. Open that fountain of money, maybe I will put a hand. I also want a good life, my father died a poor man, maybe I would be the one to make it in the community.)* p. 3.

From the conversation, Tshovansimbi used a proverb, *Vana va munhu va xekelana nhloko ya njiya* (Children of a person share the locust head/sharing is carrying), which means people share the little things they have with each other. This was to convince Pastor Pfumela that they really want to share fortune with him. Pastor Pfumela's smiling reaction upon hearing Tshovansimbi talking about having a plan of making money gave courage to *The holy service* crew to continue telling the pastor about their plan. From the conversation above, the use of words such as *Boxani xihlovo xexo xa mali* (Open that fountain of money) and *Ndza swi lava ku vempfama emafurheni* (I want to enjoy myself) shows that Pastor Pfumela was interested in their plan because to him it was all about money as well as a breakthrough, although it was illegal and corruption money. By saying, *Ndza xi lava xuma, kumbe a ndzi ta nyukanyana* (I want money, maybe I would glow a little bit), this emphasises Pfumela's love for money, coming up with reasons such as shinning and rising up to sustain his love for money. The Holy service group took a rational choice to approach Pastor Pfumela about the drug plan; their focus was more on what they would gain from their drug business if the pastor agreed, not considering the possibility of what would happen if the pastor disagreed. Tshavansimbi outlined the plan as follows:

*Tshovansimbi: Good', kungu ra hina ro endla mali ri ta humelela. Swi le ka n'wina*

*leswaku mi lava ku hlawula rifuwo kumbe macakala. Hi lava ntirhisano wo vupfa wo huma eka n'wina. Hina hi xavisa tiphilisi. A hi le ku gevengehi hikuva a hi halati ngati, hi lava ku koka ntambu yin'we na n'wina. Hina hi ta tiendla onge hi va nhlango wa vakandziyisi va tiBibele, hi ta posa tiBebele hi mabokisi hi ri e-Arizona, endzeni ka mabokisi hi ta hoxa na tiphilisi kumbe swidzidziharisi. Hi ta swi posa hi vito ra n'wina, hi ta tirhisa na adirese ya n'wina. (Good, our plan of making money will come to pass. It's up to you whether you want to choose riches or poverty. We want a solid partnership from you. We sell drugs. We are not killing anybody because we are not spilling blood, we want to drag the same rope with you. We will act as an institution of publishing bibles, we will send bibles via the post office from Arizona, and we will insert drugs inside the boxes along with the bibles. We will post these boxes using your name and address.)* p. 4.

This came after Pastor Pfumela's confirmation that he orders bibles from Arizona in America. In short, they proposed that they will pretend to be working for the Bible publishing company so that they can put drugs in Bible boxes when they send it. Sending the drugs along with the bibles under Pastor Pfumela's name would bring fewer suspicions. After explaining the plan that his name will be used for shipping drugs and he'll collect it at the post office, instead of rejecting such activities, at the same time, Pastor Pfumela said he will think about it and revert. This clearly shows interest, because as a man of God, Pastor Pfumela should've rejected the plan and talked to the mafias about repenting.

The plan itself signifies corruption activities. Pretending to work for a Bible publishing company is an act of corruption. Importing drugs is illegal and potentially harmful. In this context it constitutes corruption because corruption typically involves abuse of power or position for personal gain, bribery or inducement to influence decisions, and misuse of authority for illicit purposes. The holy service crew's plan abuses Pastor Pfumela's pastoral position for their personal gain of importing drugs under his name. Using proverbs such as *vana va munhu va xekelana nhloko ya njiya* (Children of

a person share the locust head/sharing is carrying) to influence decision-making upon the situation signifies corruption. The misuse of the pastor's authority to import Bibles from America for illicit purposes, such as inserting drugs in Bible boxes during shipping, is linked to corruption. Further, in this context, importing drugs is linked to corruption because church resources are misused for drug smuggling.

## 6.2. Corrupt Pastor Pfumela's Rational Choice

The holy service group once more visited Pfumela on Friday, the day Pastor Pfumela agreed to revert to them about the plan. Before Pastor Pfumela told them about his decision, Tshavansimbi made some references to other pastors, like Pastor Lumanguluve, who is benefiting from drug businesses. Upon hearing that, Pastor Pfumela agreed to join the group and promise to keep the secret, which even his own wife, Gavaza, will not know, and made some wishes. For instance:

*Mufundhisi pfumela: (A sungula hi ku hlekanyana) Swi ri a ndzi kayela, mi ri ndzi ta alela yini xinkwa ke? Ndza pfumela, xilo lexikulu lexi mina ndzi xi lavaka i mali. A ndzi holi mali yo tala, ndzo kuma mahlanhla hi siku ra muholo. Kumbe a ndzi ta jinga ndzi nyukisa xikhwama xanga. (He laughs a little bit.) It means I have been missing out; why would I reject money? I agree, all I want is money. I am not earning enough money; I am just getting cents on payday. Maybe I would make my pockets shine.)* p. 12.

From the citation above, Pastor Pfumela agrees to join the group of criminals. Pastor Pfumela's laughs and words such as *xilo lexikulu lexi mina ndzi xi lavaka i mali* (all I want is money) show he's lost his morals and signify that he will do anything for money to an extent of corruption regardless of the dangers and consequences of such activities. Pastor Pfumela's words clearly show how bad corruption is. He cares more about money than doing what's right. He thinks getting rich is a missed opportunity, which is wrong. He says he's only paid "cents" to make his greed seem okay. Pastor Pfumela says *ndzi nyukisa xikhwama* (I want to make my pockets shine), this phrase is related to a Xitsonga proverb that says *mali i xihlovo xa ntsako* (money is the fountain of happiness), meaning he just wants to be rich and noth-

ing more, getting money will satisfy him. This shows how wanting money can ruin someone's character and make them abuse their power. This discourse serves as a direct exemplification of how unchecked personal desires can result in the abuse of power and the erosion of institutional integrity, a recurring theme in narratives examining occupational corruption. Rational Choice Theory says that people decide to be corrupt by thinking about what they might gain and what they might lose. Pastor Pfumela wants wealth, so he abuses his power because he believes the benefits are greater than the risks. He gets involved in corrupt activities, like drug trafficking, because he thinks it will help him. However, the risk of getting caught and the rules in place show that his plan is not as safe as he believes. Engaging in drug trafficking or any other illegal activity is unacceptable and corrupt, but Pastor Pfumela went as far as having wishes that he thinks he will benefit from this corrupt activity. For instance:

*Mufundhisi Pfumela: (A sungula hi ku hleka) Loko a ri mina ndzi lava xin'we ntsena, ndzi lava ku va 'mobile,' ndzi karhele ku va nyamilenge. Tatana u lo kala a nghena exivindzini xa misava a ri xisiwana. Mina ndzi lava ku njirimukanyana ka. ((He started by laughing.) I only want one thing: I want a mobile. I am tired of walking. My father ended up dying poor. I want to be stirring ). p. 14.*

Pastor Pfumela's desire for a mobile phone shows his materialistic motivations, which contribute to his moral decline. While this may seem like a simple wish for convenience, it reflects deeper issues in his character. The pastor's need for a mobile phone represents his desire for status, comfort, and an outward display of success, even if it means compromising his spiritual integrity. This desire is in direct contrast to the humility expected of religious leaders, revealing the tension between his spiritual responsibilities and personal ambitions. Additionally, his reference to his father's poverty adds another layer to his character. It suggests that Pastor Pfumela's actions are driven not only by personal greed but also by a fear of becoming like his father—poor and unsuccessful. This fear seems to cloud his judgment, leading him to prioritise material wealth over his moral values. His desire to *ku njirimukanyana ka* (to be stirring) becomes central to his reasoning, indicating that he cares more about outward appearances than inner moral and spiritual well-

being. In this way, Pastor Pfumela's corruption is not just about seeking wealth but also about creating a public image that matches his desires, even if it means abandoning his ethical beliefs.

The corruption of pastors engaging in the drug business is a profound betrayal of trust and moral principles. These spiritual leaders, entrusted with guiding their congregations on pathways of righteousness, instead succumb to the lure of illicit gains. They abuse their positions of authority, exploiting the vulnerability of their flock and undermining the very foundations of their faith. The same applies to Pastor Pfumela's rational choice to join a group of criminals; his profound betrayal of the Church of All Creatures and congregation is motivated by corrupt principles and the love of money. Pastor Pfumela was regarded as a spiritual leader who was entrusted with guiding their congregations morally and ethically.

### 6.3. The Consequences

Pastor Pfumela's character is a stark representation of corruption and hypocrisy through his rational choices. Behind his sacred robes, he conceals a sinister secret: importing drugs into the community for criminals. His actions are a stark betrayal of his spiritual calling, undermining the very fabric of the community he's sworn to serve. Pastor Pfumela's corruption extends beyond his own enrichment. His love for money and materials bought out of drug money, things like a cell phone and a car, destroys families and compromises the safety of his congregants.

*Mufundhisi Pfumela: Ndzi ni ku hlamalanyana, nuna luya a tirhaka le posweni u ndzi vutisa swivutiso swo dzunga swinene. A lava ku pfula mabokisi a kambela leswaku ku na yini? Kambe a nga ha pfulangi. (I am a little concerned; the man that works at the post office asks me sour questions. He also wanted to open the boxes and check what's inside. But he did not open it). p. 34.*

From the citation, Pastor Pfumela's words show the increasing danger and stress that come with corruption. Pastor Pfumela's concern shows that he is becoming aware that his actions might be discovered. Ryaan's sour questions and attempt to check the boxes indicate suspicion and possible

investigation, making it clear that his corrupt activities are at risk of being exposed. Although Ryaan did not open the boxes, this moment highlights how fragile and uncertain his situation is. This interaction between Pastor Pfumela and Ryaan demonstrates how corruption leads to fear and forces individuals to constantly worry about being caught, just like how Pastor Pfumela was scared. It also shows that even small questions from workers, like the post office man, Ryaan, can create pressure and serve as a warning to those involved in corruption. After Ryaan seemed to have suspicions about Pastor Pfumela receiving endless boxes at the post office, more than usual, Pastor Pfumela told Madlayisani and Masirheni. On the very same day that Madlayisani planned to kill Ryaan, Gavaza, Pastor Pfumela's, went to visit Mavis, Ryaan's wife, to borrow some materials to use at church. When they were still talking, this happened:

*Ku twala mpfumawulo wa xibamu, ku biwa Ryaan, Gavaza na Mavis va wela ehansi. Masirheni na Madlayisani va tshinela ekusuhi ku ya duvula va ri kona, hi vunharhu bya vona va raha bakiti* (There was a sound of gunshot; it hit Ryaan, Gavaza and Mavis, and they fell. Masirheni and Madlayisani went closer to shoot again, then the three kicked the bucket). p. 37.

Gavaza, Pastor Pfumela's wife, Gavaza and Ryaan and Mavis were killed by Masirheni and Malayisani because Pastor Pfumela told them that Ryaan began to be suspicious. Pastor Pfumela's actions did not just cost the life of a community member but also cost his wife's life. The use of Xitsonga idiom *va raha bakiti* (they kicked the bucket), which means to pass away, clearly tell us that everyone who was present was shot to death. Corruption harms individuals, communities, and society. The criminals did not care about Pastor Pfumela's wife, they were there to kill. They prioritised their drug business more than innocent people's lives. These are the consequences of Pastor Pfumela's action. Pastor Pfumela's rational choice for keeping quiet was motivated by his desire for money, and by the fact that he was part of the initiative that compromised innocent people's lives; thus, he chose to keep quiet and not report the murders.

Keeping secrets about information related to murders is considered corrupt behaviour. Later the pastor learned about the killing of Ryaan, Mavis and his wife, Gavaza, but he did

not report it to the police because he knew the killers. Pastor Pfumela's withholding such information can obstruct justice as he protected the perpetrators and breached moral and ethical principles. His silence on this matter is complicit in crime, even though he did not participate directly, but the fact that he mentioned Ryaan to Masirheni and Madlayisani cost three lives', which makes him part of the initiative. Pastor Pfumela's behaviour has eroded trust within the community and undermined social cohesion. Pastor Pfumela went so far as to take bribery money from Madlayisani and Masirheni to keep secrets due to fear of retaliation or harm from the perpetrators or his associates.

#### 6.4. The Actions Result

*Hakunene siku ra ngati a ri tshwuki* (Indeed a bloody day does not get red). After the elimination of Ryaan, Mavis and Gavaza and their burials, Pastor Pfumela continued with the illegal business. One day he went to the post office as usual and collected 4 boxes of drugs mixed with bibles. On his way to Madlayisani to deliver these boxes, there was a police roadblock, and the police stopped him. A daydream went from better to worse because the police found the drugs in his car. This happened:

*Phorisa 2: Vonani vubihi etikweni, leti i ti 'drugs'. Ti pfanganyisiwe na tiBibele. Hakunene munhu i xivandzana, a nga ku dya a ku ku bii! Intswini leswi?* (See the wickedness in the community, these are drugs. It is mixed with Bibles. Indeed, a person is a beast and can eat you up! What is this?). p. 55.

On the above citation, the police officer found drugs in Pastor Pfumela's car and was surprised when people declared that Pfumela is a pastor. The use of words such as *vonani vubihi* (see the wickedness) and *leti i ti 'drugs'* (these are drugs) clearly shows and confirms that Pastor Pfumela was indeed transporting drugs. Smuggling drugs is pure corruption. The outcomes of Pastor Pfumela's corruption led him to jail, and his congregation and committee members lost trust in him. After his arrest, Pfumela said to himself:

*Mufundhisi Pfumela: (Mihloti yi ri karhi yi halaka) Yoo! Hakunene swa rivala a swi orhi ndzilo. Hi mina Jackson Pfumela, loyi a hundzuriwaka bolo xana? Vamanana va*



*kereke va ndzi twela vusiwana. Kambe... Maboko na Vugerere a va tikomba va ba swivuvutana etimbilwini ta vona. Ntirho wa vufundhisi wu xaxile, a swa ha lavi thoci sweswo. Vanhu va kereke va ta ku yini? Ku twa leswaku ndzi hoxiwe endzhutini hikokwalaho ka mahanyelo yo vindluka. Yoo swi ta hundzaka xihlekiso etikweni. ((Tears dropping down) Yoo! Indeed, things do happen. Is it me, Jackson Pfumela, who is turned into a ball? Church women feel pity for me. But... Maboko and Vugerere seemed to be cheering in their hearts. My pastoral work has come to an end; it is very clear. What will the congregation say? To hear that I'm thrown into the shadow because of my bad behaviour. Yoo, it will turn into laughs in the community.) p. 56.*

This is the outcome of Pastor Pfumela's engagement in corrupt business. His arrest made him realise that he's going to lose his job, and the dignity of his pastoral life is no more. In the above citation, Pastor Pfumela understood the sympathy the church women had for him, but the fact that Maboko and Vugerere were there to witness his arrest worries him. Maboko and Vugerere are committee members of the *Church of all Creatures*, and they have once asked him about his friendship with the crew of *The Holy Services* and the roamers about selling drugs, but Pastor Pfumela denied everything. Therefore, his arrest is a confirmation to roamers about him engaging with the drug dealers. This is Pastor Pfumela's journey from being a decent man to a corrupt man.

## 7. Discussion

Pastor Pfumela's descent into corruption represents more than just personal moral failure, it echoes broader concerns in African literature about the erosion of ethical leadership and the vulnerability of trusted institutions. In many African societies, spiritual leaders are not only religious figures but also moral guides and community anchors. His betrayal reflects a recurring theme in postcolonial African narratives, where respected positions are corrupted by personal ambition and the influence of materialism. African literature has long served as a mirror to society, exposing how colonial legacies, socioeconomic pressures, and weak-

ened institutions contribute to the moral decay of individuals in power. The manipulation of religious authority for drug trafficking in this case shows how deeply corruption can infiltrate sacred spaces, turning tools of faith, like Bibles, into covers for illegal trade. This aligns with literary critiques across the continent that question the ethical integrity of modern leadership, especially when the church, once seen as a haven for justice and compassion, becomes complicit in societal harm. Furthermore, Pastor Pfumela's actions illustrate the dangerous consequences when leaders fail to uphold their responsibilities to their communities. His secrecy, greed, and eventual downfall underscore how corruption disrupts not only institutions but also family structures and public trust. In African ethical philosophy, particularly within the framework of *ubuntu*, which emphasizes community and shared humanity, such a betrayal represents a breakdown in social cohesion. His story contributes to a growing body of African literary texts that challenge readers to reflect on the moral character of leaders and the cost of abandoning communal values for personal enrichment. The drama ultimately acts as both a cautionary tale and a critique of systems that allow corruption to flourish unchecked, reminding us that ethical leadership is essential for the well-being and stability of African communities.

This narrative aligns with a wider tradition in African literature that interrogates the moral responsibilities of leadership and the social consequences of ethical failure. In Xitsonga literature, as seen in the case of Pastor Pfumela, the dramatization of spiritual corruption contributes to this pan-African discourse by highlighting how positions of power, once rooted in communal respect and service, can become tools for exploitation when leaders prioritize personal wealth over moral duty. By portraying the devastating ripple effects of one leader's moral collapse, the story not only critiques individual choices but also calls for a reawakening of ethical consciousness in African leadership, where integrity, accountability, and service to the community must be restored as foundational values. It is recommended that studies about corruption in religious places be carried out, not only to expose illicit behaviour but also to expose the negative side of it. This will always serve as a warning to people who are tempted to engage in corruption. It is also recommended that Vatsonga should always stay true to their moral values to avoid being engaged in corrupt activities. Future genera-

tions should grow up knowing the ways of culture and how important their traditions are<sup>[26]</sup>. It is important to always follow cultural norms for better living.

## 8. Conclusions

This study sheds light on the themes of corruption, power, and morality in Xitsonga literature. Pastor Pfumela's corruption has far-reaching consequences that affect not only himself but also his family, community, and the church. The study of corruption in Xitsonga literature is significant because it provides a unique perspective on the social and cultural context of the Vatsonga community. In conclusion, *Byi n'wi khele matluka* serves as a compelling critique of the moral collapse of leadership within African societies. Pastor Pfumela's story mirrors real-life struggles where personal ambition overtakes ethical responsibility. It highlights how corruption damages institutions, families, and public trust. Within African literature, such narratives challenge power structures and demand moral accountability. Xitsonga literature, like many African texts, emphasizes the urgent need to restore integrity in both religious and political leadership. Ultimately, this study reinforces the role of indigenous literature in shaping ethical consciousness and social reform.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, N.M., O.R.C. and M.S.; methodology, N.M., O.R.C. and M.S.; validation, N.M., O.R.C. and M.S.; formal analysis, N.M.; writing—original draft preparation, N.M.; writing—review and editing, N.M., O.R.C. and M.S.; supervision, O.R.C. and M.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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