A Semiotic Investigation of Philosophical Relations between *Ifá* and *Ayò Olópón* among the Yorùbá People of Nigeria

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*Ifá* is believed to be the foundation of Yorùbá culture. This means every aspect of Yorùbá life, including religion, philosophy, science, ideology, recreation, literature and so on has one link or another with *Ifá*. Previous works on Yorùbá philosophy have neither related *Ifá* semiotic symbols nor elements with *Ayò Olópón* nor established any connection between the two. This study examines the relationship between *Ifá* and *Ayò Olópón* objects and symbols with reference to Yorùbá culture. The work relies substantially on Yorùbá literary texts, especially *Ifá* literary corpus. Semiotics, which is the science of signs, is adopted for the analysis of the data, because, symbolism underlies the *Ifá* divination system. It is found out that, there is a synergy between *Ifá* and *Ayò Olópón* game in terms of the use of moral code. This shows that, African philosophies are expressed through their religious and social symbols, objects and artifacts that are ancient means of Africans communication and writings.

This work examines the relationship between *Ifá* and *Ayò Olópón*, a locally played and internationally recognized Yorùbá traditional

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game, in terms of moral code. *Ifá* has been defined by scholars in different ways that establish the inexplicable and unlimited scope of its knowledge, wisdom and values. Indeed, it is regarded as the bedrock of other aspects of Yorùbá life. Therefore, to simply define *Ifá* as a religion, without exploring its social and cultural links will be inadequate. Akíntọlá (1999, p.1) sees *Ifá* as the philosophy of or wisdom divinely revealed to the Yorùbá deity of *Ifá*, Ôrùnmìlà. According to Farrow (1926, p. 36), *Ifá* is the greatest oracle of the Yorùbá that is “consulted on all important occasions.” *Ifá* is regarded as the spokesperson not only for the gods but also for the living. It is regarded as the living foundation of Yorùbá culture (Abímbọlá 1977a).

Munoz (2003, p. 179) sees *Ifá*’s scope beyond the Yorùbá cultural society when he says “*Ifá* is the most universal divinity among the Yorùbá and other West African people.” *Ifá* is known to different people by different names throughout the world. For example, *Ifá* is known as *Fa* among the Fon of Republic of Benin, *Eva* to Nupes, *Ifá* in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam and Togo. *Ifá* is referred to by the Ewe as *Afa*, *Ephod* by Jews, *Geomancy* by Europeans and Margays (Ọdėyẹmí 2013, p. 5). With these different realizations of *Ifá*’s nomenclature which cut across nations of the world, the prominence of *Ifá* is not in doubt. In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed *Ifá* as one of the 86 traditions of the world to be recognized as masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity (Robinson 2008, p. 1). By this proclamation, *Ifá* joined the league of heritages and therefore requiring urgent preservation. *Ifá*, as a religion, science or literary text, has over time been of great interest to scholars in different areas of human endeavors-like medicine, philosophy, religion, art and culture.

The association of *Ifá* with humans by some scholars involves the two aspects, which are scientific knowledge and religion (Yemi-
Ifá and Yoruba philosophy

Tan and Ògundélé (1970, p. ix; Abimbolá 1976 and Sàlàmì 2000). However, here it will be examined principally as a philosophy.

*Ifá* corpus has been a means by which Yorùbá culture, especially as a philosophy, is propagated at home and in the Diaspora. Scholars have established that *Ifá* influenced every aspect of Yorùbá life as seen in the following quotation:

> Ifá divination literature is perhaps the most accomplished product of Yorùbá traditional culture.... No one who has studied Ifá in detail will fail to see the fact that the people of traditional African societies were not ignorant as we have often been told. The peoples of traditional Africa were largely illiterates to be sure. But they were no fools. Among them were elite classes such as the babaláwo who have preserved all the ingredients of their own culture in an almost completely oral form but in such a way that knowledge is codified and transmitted orally with care, patience and perseverance. Ifá is the Yorùbá traditional thought system per excellence (Abimbolá (1976, p. vi).

The preservation of the Yorùbá culture and philosophy is guaranteed through *Ifá*. All the cultural contents of *Ifá* have been ‘codified’ in one form or the other. These codifications are in *Ifá* symbols in forms of *Odù Ifá* (medium within which *Ifá* corpuses are coded into chapters and verses). Karenga (2012) opines that,

> nowhere is the profundity and beauty of African spirituality more apparent than in the Odu Ifa, the sacred text of the spiritual and ethical tradition of Ifa, which is one of the greatest sacred texts of the world and a classic of African and world literature. Its central message revolves around the teachings of the Goodness of and in the world; the chosen status of humans in the world; the criteria of a good world; and the requirements for a good world.

These *Odù* corpuses are believed by the Yorùbá people in particular and *Ifá* worshippers in general to contain the capacity to solve all existential problems of man. *Ifá* epistles have certain codes attached to them which form the basis of *Ifa* traditional spirituality accounting for the basis of all the Yoruba systems of divination. *Ifá* philosophy has been observed to be unique among world religions; “*Ifá* literary corpus, *Ifá* philosophy has become an exem-
plary figure in the diversity of world religions philosophy” (Ôkùnmákìndé 2010, p. 22). *Ifá* corpus have been “preserved and disseminated from ancient times. It is believed that in this way the texts in *Ifá* literary corpus have been kept free from errors” (Abímbólá 1976, p. 20). It is further observed that, *Ifá* poems comprised a sacred Yorùbá genre that nobody may add or subtract from. Most of the Yorùbá philosophies are entrenched in *Ifá*. Akintola (1999, pp. 3&4) says *Ifá,*

is an intriguingly rich source, in so far it is true that the thought-pattern of the Yorùbá finds its fullest expressions in the *Ifá* corpus. Therefore, *Ifá* is the natural and logical starting point for any meaningful study which aims at identifying, interpreting, analyzing and evaluating these expressions which constitute Yorùbá philosophical thought...In all embracing relevance, the *Ifá* system serves as the architecutonic force portraying the wholeness and completeness of Yorùbá life mode. In fact, in scope, it provides not only the religious and spiritual philosophy, but also the alchemical or kabalaic support for the people. It is the fountain-source of Yorùbá wisdom and the never-dying source of Yorùbá system of thoughts.

The whole of *Ifá* corpus is philosophical in content. Akintólá, (1999, pp. 1&2) observes that, *Ifá* is a “philosophical scripture and unique source of Yorùbá ethics and metaphysics.” He focuses his work on the identification of “ethical, mystical and metaphorical expressions of Ọ̀rúnmílẹ̀”, the codification of which expression is otherwise known as *Ifá*.”

The Yorùbá philosophical solutions are sometimes evinced by verbal code such as, ̀awọn baba wa ní... (Our fathers do say that...). This is called ̀oro ́orọ̀ (words of the elders) in Yorùbá tradition. To the Yorùbá people, ̀oro ́orọ̀ bí ọ̀ sẹ̀ lówọ́sọ̀ á sẹ̀ lọ́jọ̀ alé (elders words must sooner or later come to pass). This is sometimes rendered as: ̀awọn ̣́orọ̀ ní... (The elders say...), ̀awọn Yorùbá ní... (The Yorùbá do say that...) or ̀awọn Yorùbá máa ní pòwe pé... (According to the

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2 Ọ̀rúnmílẹ̀ is the *Ifá* progenitor: The Yorùbá divinity of wisdom, knowledge and a prophet to the divinities and human beings.
Yorùbá proverb (…). This is “generational.” It is handed down from one generation to another. According to Abimbọlá (1977a, p. 31), “In a culture… the wisdom of the past are highly valued and regarded by all.” What philosophy entails is wisdom, as explained earlier. In other words, these sets of words are indisputable in nature. The authority of such words cannot be challenged. Therefore, every aspect of the Yorùbá life must be connected in one way or the other with Ifá, the philosophy of the Yorùbá people, based on their knowledge of the symbols of Ifá, and the symbols of Ayọ Olópọ̀n as one of the important Yorùbá recreational means are to be related in this work. This work will among other things seeks to establish Ifá’s concepts and elements in Ayọ Olópọ̀n as they relate to the Yorùbá philosophy.

Recreation, in any society is an innovation and invention closely associated with people’s values. It “denotes the mental excellence of the people” (Roy 2003, p. 657). This is because, it is a social cultural activity established by the people. While there have been different researches on Ifá divination system, no known attempt has been made to associate Ayọ Olópọ̀n with Ifá divination. This gap is filled by this study. This study will demonstrate the inter-code relationships of Ifá divination with Ayọ Olópọ̀n. The study will further account for the value of Ayọ Olópọ̀n within the Yorùbá sociocultural and religion contexts.

Scholars in the areas of sociology and anthropology of Yorùbá have written about Yorùbá traditional games. Kömọlafé (1978 pp. 178 – 88) estimates there are over twenty Yorùbá traditional games. He categorized them into four: indoor games, outdoor games, children games and adult games. Among all the games, Ayọ Olópọ̀n is, according to Mustapha and Aromọlaran (1976, p. 139), a game that has more materials than the other games. It is the only Yorùbá game that has international recognition; it is also the game that has the most standardized rules and processes—probably because of the game’s association with Ifá.
Ládélé, et al (1986, pp. 1–18), Dáramólá and Jéjé (1967, pp. 8–12), and Mustapha and Arómóláran (1976, pp. 139 & 40) worked on the principles governing Ayó Ọlọ́pón. However, these works did not attempt to relate symbols and codes in the Ifá divination system to those symbols and codes in Ayó Ọlọ́pón. This was probably because their works were more of an introduction meant for illustration and pedagogical purposes for secondary schools. Because of this, there was no mention in these works of any link between the two.

Ayó Ọlọ́pón is one of the Yorùbá traditional games played locally and internationally today. For instance, apart from its popularity among the Yorùbá, it is called Gisoro in Burundi, Oware in Ghana, Achochodi in Ivory Coast, Adjito/Vadjito in Benin, Ayo Eleh in Igbo and Kalati in Sweden (Appiah-Aggy 2013, pp. 1&2). Ayó Ọlọ́pón is first among equals in Yorùbá local games because of its traditional value and importance in the Yorùbá culture. The game plays important roles in some Yorùbá festivals. For instance, it was introduced to the Ôṣùn Ôṣogbo festival some nineteen years ago (Azuh 2011, p. 14). It is “one of the oldest local games among the Yorùbá and has been in existence, since time immemorial” (Faturoti 2015, p. 1).

Ayó Ọlọ́pón is played on the traditional game board containing twelve holes on two horizontal lines (six holes by the right hand and left sides of the players). The game is mostly played by two matured males (from fifteen years of age) in the open and watched by the spectators. It is played in such a way that, the players face each other with the game board at the centre of the players sitting on a bench or object. The game starts with each of the twelve holes occupied by four Ayó seeds, making a total number of forty-eight Ayó seeds. Any of the players takes any four Ayó seeds in a hole from his row. The game progresses in this manner until Ayó seeds containing two or

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3 Ôṣùn Ôṣogbo is a river goddess, worshipped annually by the devotees.
three Ayọ seeds in a hole up to the maximum number of five holes are won in a movement of Ayọ seeds. The winner is determined by the player having more number of Ayọ seeds than the opponent. That is, a player with more than twenty-four Ayọ seeds emerges as a winner, since the total number of Ayọ seeds on the game board is forty-eight. It is possible for the two players to play to a draw. In this case, no winner emerges. This is traditionally described as ọmì (draw game). The game continues until a winner emerges twice. If a loser of Ayọ game is defeated more than twice, he gives way for another Ayọ player to displays his competence with the winner. However, this rule is not rigid, as the players may continue after a player is defeated twice, if there is no interested player to play. “Sowing” in Ayọ Olọpón is carried out when a player drops the Ayọ seeds in his hand one after the other in each of the holes on the Olọpón Ayọ in an anticlockwise movement until all the Ayọ seeds in his hand are exhausted. None of the holes must be skipped when sowing. “Harvesting” or “capturing” is done, when the Ayọ seeds in a hole (after sowing) are two or three up to the maximum of five holes in a single movement or sowing of Ayọ seeds.

It is significant to examine and investigate critically the relationship of Ifá with the game so as to determine with a reasonable degree of accuracy, its value in relation to Yorùbá culture. This is because, “The Yorùbá regard Ifá as the repository of their beliefs and moral values...In traditional Yorùbá society, the authority of Ifá permeated every aspect of life because the Yorùbá regard Ifá as the voice of the divinities and the wisdom of the ancestors” (Abimbọlá 1977a, p. v). A thorough investigation of the link between the game and Ifá will significantly improve our understanding of the values and the importance of the game beyond entertainment.

Consequently, efforts are made to show and establish the semiotic philosophical interrelationship of Ifá divination and Ayọ Olọpón. These levels of relationship are analyzed into or around moral code that provide guides for life and good living. The establishment of
this semiotic element will afford us the opportunity to relate Ayò Olóróǹ’s code to Ifá code. This new semiotic orientation and significations about Ayò Olóróǹ as established in this study will go a long way to help discover and redefine the relevance and importance of the game in the Yorùbá sociocultural and religious lives. Cultural studies that focus attention on these areas, that is, the semiotic interlinks between Ifá, and Ayò Olóróǹ are therefore desirable. Not much (if any) attention has been paid to the sociocultural and recreational aspects of Ayò Olóróǹ, in relation to Ifá.

Ayò Olóróǹ is known and played world wide. The present links between Ifá and Ayò Olóróǹ will be one of the proofs on the originality of the game with the Yorùbá people on one hand and to extend the value of the game beyond social or recreation to philosophical life of the people on the other hand. For instance, the game has been discovered to have medical values such as cure of dementia, hypertension and poor sight (Ọkéwándé 2017). To this effect, a proposal was made by Oyeleke et al (2014, p. 25) on the benefits of inventing Ayò game on social media, “since Ayò is the most ancient traditional board games, it implies that sufferers will once again have the feel of their culture on mobile platforms...Its acceptability by demented people and potential sufferers will not be an issue...These attributes we believe will help African sufferers to recover faster.” This agitation is aimed to have access to the game anywhere. However, their work did not relate the medical value Ayò Olóróǹ with Ifá. For instance, the medical value in Ayò Olóróǹ has been investigated to be derived from Ifá—the source of all medicine in Yorùbá culture (Ọkéwándé 2017).

Likewise, Ayò Olóróǹ is to be further investigated to have philosophical value derived from Ifá—the foundation of the Yorùbá culture. It is noted here that, some Yorùbá social and religious problems are being solved through some statements associated with Ifá corpus and Ayò Olóróǹ philosophies. In the opinion of Ọlatunjí (2008, p. 62), “African philosophy is an attempt by philosophers to
make the folklores, myth, soothsaying, religion and other aspects of African culture relevant to African needs not through any dogmatic attachment to standards used in evaluating the African culture or African culture itself, but through creative critical examination and logical methodologies which are not peculiar to Western culture.”

The excavationists movement in African philosophy plays a vital role here. According to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2017, p. 1), “some of them aimed at retrieving and reconstructing presumably lost African identity from the raw materials of African culture. The scholars under this are called ‘ethnophilosophy’…and they thrived in the early period of African philosophy…Their concern was to build and demonstrate unique African identity in various forms.”

The explorations of African oral tradition, symbols, objects, and artifacts are means by which African philosophy can be established without any foreign influence. The call for the use of African heritages as springboards of development has been made by Walter (2009, p. 160) who argued that, “so long as any African society could at least maintain its inherited advantages springing from many centuries of evolutionary change, then for so long could the superstructure continue to expand and give further opportunities to whole groups of people, to classes and to individuals.”

This research work will show the apparent links between Ifá divination and Ayó Olópó in terms of moral code. The moral virtues are encouraged and vices discouraged, as encoded in Ifá and Ayó Olópó philosophies. “The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of rights and wrong behavior…This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or consequences of our behavior on others” (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017, p. 1). The Yorùbá people express their beliefs on ìwà (character) as stipulated in Ifá. Akintọla (1999, pp. xv and xvi) succinctly express this opinion that:
It is in this sense that we can rightly say that the set of moral beliefs and practices implied in the Ifá corpus has been conditioned by Yorùbá culture and the Yorùbá system of thought from which that the term “Yorùbá ethics” may be conceived as a meaningful and illustrative concept. It is also appropriate to conceive ethics or moral philosophy as the branch of philosophy that is concerned with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong, fitting, right or obligatory to do or not to do...The Yorùbá, too, are not excluded from developing set of rules of conduct regulating inter-personal and general societal conduct.

This present study of the belief of the Yorùbá people on ìwa demonstrates that such moral codes are not limited to the religious aspects of Yorùbá lives, but extends to social aspect of their life. The realization of the moral philosophy of the Yorùbá people beyond religion demonstrates the importance associated with it.

Ayò Ọlọpọ̀n, relates with the social epistemology, “the subfield of epistemology that addresses the way that groups, institutions, or other collective bodies might come to acquire knowledge” (2017, p. 3). This game is one of the ways Yorùbá people acquires knowledge. In this case, moral knowledge associated with the Yorùbá beliefs, based on right and wrong, deemed fit to be justifiable, in a just society are evinced from Ifá in relation with Ayò Ọlọpọ̀n. Ọrọ̀n-Ìfá (Ifá divination board) and Ọrọ̀n Ayò (game board) on which the divination and game process are carried out belong to art works of the Yorùbá people closely associated with epistemology. This is because, such art works are expressions of the Yorùbá knowledge. As a result of this, “there is indeed something about the content of an artwork that can be said to be knowledge producing...Works of arts are taken to possess the ability to give us imaginative and epistemic access to certain kinds of experiences relevant to moral knowledge and judgment. Not only can we respond emotionally to particular moral situations presented through artworks; we cannot help but find ourselves morally outraged or saddened by the plight of certain fictional characters” (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017, pp. 6&7). In this study, the Ìfá philosophies are discussed around or into moral code
to establish that- Ayò Olópó́n philosophies are encapsulated or evinced from Ifá.

**Theoretical Framework: semiotic approach**

Code- is the semiotic element employed for this study. A code is “a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication...The coding takes place simultaneously on different levels, and many other factors, such as memory span and general extralinguistic knowledge, play a part” (Geoffery and Short 1981 pp. 122 and 124). The linkage of signs and their meanings are made known by code. This may be realized in a multi-level coding as in this study, where there is simultaneous or concurrent use of moral code to establish the relationship of Ifá philosophy with Ayò Olópó́n. Code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. Interpretation of code (which hermeneutics is concerned with), is important in the understanding the meaning of a sign, symbol or text. In this case, the interpretation of moral code of Ifá with Ayò Olópó́n is desirable for the understanding of philosophical thoughts associated with Ifá and Ayò Olópó́n elements (see Irvine 2004).

The interpretation and understanding of philosophical thoughts in Ifá texts is to be related to Ayò Olópó́n context. In this case, the interpretation of Ifá as an art work is interpreted as “subsequent art works or supplementary texts” of Ayò Olópó́n. An ethical or moral code is one of the major themes in Ifá corpus; this is informed by the importance the Yorùbá people attached with it. The understanding of the knowledge of moral theme in Ifá can properly be interpreted around codes. This is because- codes are semiotic elements into which the messages of Ifá ethical philosophy can be comprehended. Ethical philosophy is “an aspect of philosophy which examines human actions and conducts inasmuch as they are judged good or bad, right or wrong. Thus it is also a subject that
concerns itself with matters of duty, obligation and moral responsibility of individuals” (Aderibigbe 2016, p. 152).

The meaning of a symbol (including linguistic, object or art work) is revealed by the code of that symbol. “A symbol is a representation of a meaning or a value, an external sign or gesture which by association conveys an idea or stimulates a feeling. All communication, whether through language or otherwise, makes use of symbols” (Maciver and Page 1949, p. 153). This means, communication is made possible by symbol. However, meaning associated with any symbol is conveyed by code. For instance, Ọ̀wà (character), on which is the major concept of Yorùbá moral or ethical philosophy rests, is a symbol. “What Ifá wants us to understand by using this symbol is that every individual must take care of his character” (Abimbọla 1975, p. 400). One can only comprehend meaning of Ọ̀wà in Yorùbá tradition through the moral or ethical code associated with it in Ifá.

Despite the fact that the Ifá text is a culture bound genre, our data is translated into English for the benefit of a wider audience. Some cultural terms or names are not translated to preserve the local or cultural flavor, color and values of African oral arts; this is to avoid misinterpretation and low comprehension “since the indigenous language is more conducive to the interpretation of an indigenous genre” (Iléṣanmí 2004, p. 111). However, such are explained as may be necessary to ensure their understanding.

**Why Semiotics with African Philosophy?**

On one hand, African philosophies have evolved from signs, symbols, objects and artifacts on which the basis of the knowledge of semiotics is established. On another hand, semiotic systems encode and decode the philosophies- and semiotic analysis can be applied to anything connected with humans, including all philosophies. Looking at culture from semiotic perspectives, Irvine (2004, p. 2) defines culture “as the sum of rule-governed, shared, learned and
learnable, transmittable, symbolic activity used by a group in any given place and time." Irvine’s definition is relevant to the context of this work, as it sees culture as a phenomenon that is associated with a group (Yorùbá in this case). The phenomenon also has attributes of ‘rules’ that are ‘learned’ or ‘learnable’ and through symbols, are transmitted from one generation to another. This means that, many cultural systems and the Yorùbá cultural system in this case are codified in objects and symbols. In other words, the Yorùbá cultural system can be studied and properly understood in the use of cultural objects and symbols, and this is reflected in all aspects of Yorùbá life. The challenge of identification or discovery, reading and interpreting Africans symbols, objects and artifacts as they relate with African cultural, religious social and philosophical ways of life among others is open to research, especially for archeologists and anthropologists.

Some social and religious cultural values of the Yorùbá people are yet to be established; such as the cultural significance in Ọlọpón, which has not been related to other aspects of the Yorùbá people beyond relaxation. Since the authority of Ifá permeated every aspect of Yorùbá life (as explained earlier), its relationship with Ọlọpón is important. It is noteworthy that, some things have been taken for granted regarding the traditional game: Ọlọpón and its relationship with Ifá philosophy. For example, it is observed in this study that, some significant symbols on Ọpón-Ifá have been examined within the Ifá divination system alone without relating them with their presence in other Yorùbá social or religious aspects of life. This has denied us the opportunity of having in-depth understanding of Ọlọpón philosophies in relation with Ifá as social organization and practices among the Yorùbá.
Analysis and Discussion

In Yorùbá culture, it is absolutely impossible to talk about moral philosophies without looking at ìwà (character). This is because, the Yorùbá believe that ìwà is the essence of living. There is good character and there is bad character. Virtues of good character such as patience, hard-work, generosity, benevolence among others are encouraged; and vices such as laziness, wickedness, theft, selfishness are discouraged. Many extant Yorùbá values are associated with ìwà to the extent that, it denotes religion- ìwà lèṣìn (character is religion). Integrity of an individual is measured or adjudged by his or her moral- ìwà, known with the person in Yorùbá society.

The moral philosophy associated with ìwà is not limited to when an individual is alive on the surface of the earth alone- but, it is a determinant factor to life after- heaven. In other words, an individual with good character, which the Yorùbá associates with ìwà becomes “makes heaven”; while a person with bad character on earth “loses heaven.” One can say that, there is no any other thing that the Yorùbá value more than good character coded as ìwà rere or ìwà òmọlùàbí. ìwà gains value over riches and wealth.

The Yorùbá believe that whatever may be the achievement of any man on earth, if he does not have good ìwà to go along with it, that person has actually achieve nothing. Many ìtá poems therefore mention the importance of ìwà to human life. Indeed, ìtá divination poetry states that a person who does not have good ìwà while on earth, will be punished in Ōrun after his death...It is the wish of Olódúmarè and the ancestors that human beings should uphold the moral values of the society...This is the reason why the Yorùbá say: “ìwà lèṣìn.” (Good character is the essence of religion) (Abimbọła 1977a, p. 33).

To demonstrate the Yorùbá thoughts and beliefs on ìwà, it is said to connote the ìwà (beauty) of an individual. In other words, an individual with good character has beauty (looks attractive and cherished). As explained earlier, some epistemological philosophies are
encoded in people’s art works. The Yorùbá art works of Ọpọ̀n Ifá and Ọpọ̀n Ayọ, on which Ifá divination and Ayọ game are performed, belong to cultural elements that evinced the beauty, aesthetic and philosophical thoughts of the Yorùbá people. The Yorùbá people give prominence to moral- ìwá, even over money or wealth. This is contained in Ifá corpus- Ṣòbàrà ìwòrì, in Agboọlá (2012, p. 57) (with author’s translation) that,

\[\text{Èni tò bá fèràn ọwọ láfẹjú, ìwá rè a bájé} \]
\[ìwá rere ni èṣo ènìyàn.\]

Those who worship money too much spoil their character.
Good character is better than riches.

Money should be controlled towards implementation of good things for the betterment of the society at large. “The principle of ìwá shows that African traditional religions are based on profound and meaningful philosophical ideas” (Abímbolá 1975, p. 418). It should be noted that, the Ifá moral or ethical code, especially the philosophical ones, are unlimited. In other words, “the thematic contents of Yorùbá Ethics are copiously revealed in several portions of Ifá Corpus...However, too, it is not possible to exhaust the list of themes making up Ṣòrunmila’s Code of Ethics” (Akintọla 1999, p. 99). The inexhaustible moral themes in Ifá are informed by the prominence the Yorùbá people associate with it in their religious and social beliefs.

In order to demonstrate the prominence that the Yorùbá associates with the moral aspect of their life, the moral philosophies are coded through religion such as Ifá. For instance, Sàlàmí (2002, p. 836) notes in Qẹ̀ẹ̀ Òbàrà, showing Ifá’s aversion to ‘greed’.

...Ọlọmọ a ẹ̀ diidi ọdá ṣiṣẹ́ Ọ̀rùnmìlà...
Ọ̀rùnmìlà pè ká ńṣẹ́ṣẹ́ àwọn tí n ń je ń gbọ̀mọ̀;
Ọ̀ sí è mo ọ̀ wọ̀ a bụ i gbọ̀ yín wọ̀n ee dàa.
Ọ̀ sí sugbọ̀n ènì ń ti n ń je diidi;
tí o je èrù mọ ọn,
ipàà wọn ò níi káa.
Ngbà o je pé òọọ̀ọ ń fí ń rìn... 
Njọ ekú kéré kéré kéré.
Diédi N lópéé jẹ́ lá ... 

…Ọrùnmílà said we should notice those that eat with greed ‘wait to see their ultimate end’.

He said ‘their terminal end would never be fine’. 
‘But whoever that eats little by little’ ‘and refuses to take what is not his’ … 
He said that person would never suffer in the hands of his foes. 
Since it is with truth that he does his things …on days of few rats little is what 
Ọpẹ would eat to make wealth ...

It is observed that, the moral philosophies are coded not only through religion such as Ifá alone but, in their social aspect of life as well. Ayó Olópón is one of such social institutions through which the Yorùbá moral philosophies are propagated, preserved and disseminated in Yorùbá society.

Yorùbá (Ifá) philosophy is against greed, as it is one of the vices of omolùòbí (the Yorùbá concept of good character). For example, in the above Ifá verses, Ọrùnmílà warned against any Ifá diviner that is greedy, by taking or accepting those things meant for Ifá oracle: èrù-Ifá (Ifá sacred gifts), converting it to personal (diviner’s) use or gains. This is taken to be a form of manipulation to Ifá divination practice. The Ifá moral philosophical excerpts above are extended to Ayó Olópón as well. For example, as it is forbidden for the Ifá priest to convert Ifá sacred gifts to his personal use, it is equally observed and enforced in Ayó Olópón that- players must not through dubious means- manipulate Ayó seeds for his selfish or personal benefits or gains. That is, as it is unethical for the Ifá priest to eat Ifá sacred gifts refers to as èrù-Ifá. This form of rule is equally enforced on Ayó Olópón. For instance, it is binding on the players against èrù-ṣiše (manipulation by dubious act) during the process of the game.
In Ifá divination, the use of the pre-Ifá divination money as sacrifice (realized in form of èrù-Ifá) is not to satisfy the personal interest of Ifá priest; but it is specified or rendered by Ifá oracle on how it must be used. Therefore, the money realized through this form (pre-Ifá divination) is sacrilegious. It must not be manipulated by the Ifá priest (Okewãndé 2017). Abimbolá (1968, p. 37) explains these symbols of Ifá pre-divination fees as prescribed by the Ifá corpus, Òyékú Mejì that:

Eẹjì: èrù tí ńbo ifá ó gbá.
Eyi jẹ ara owó tí babalawo ní gbá gégé bí èru.
Eṣẹta itẹnì ni owó tí babalawo ó gbá, ko toọ tẹnì latti daju Ifá

Two: for lots is received from client by Ifá priest.
This is part of offering that babalawo receives as gift.
Three: for mat spreading is money that babalawo receives before he spreads mat to perform divination.

The sum total of these symbols is five (5), as a pre-divination obligatory offering or consultation fee that must be paid for Ifá divination to be on course. The two (2)- is a symbol for lots, while three (3)- is a symbol for mat spreading during the process of Ifá divination (as contained in the Ifá corpus above). These figures in Ifá divination are equally connected with figures in the Ayó Olópón. For example, it is observed in this study that, these numbers control the capturing in Ayó Olópón. Two (2) or three (3) only be captured in a hole at a time. The maximum number of holes to capture seeds at a sowing is also five (5) holes (as earlier explained). This means, harvesting of Ayó seeds is possible in any hole containing 2 or 3 seeds between 1-5 holes on a board (including sown seeds). “Each contestant has the opportunity of taking two or three ayó seeds found in any of the holes of the opponent spoils (Orímóógúnjé 2004, p. 39). These numbers (2, 3 or 5) are guided in both Ifá divination and Ayó Olópón by moral or ethical philosophy. While the moral code against fraud by the Ifá priest to convert Ifá oracular gifts described as èrù Ifá (Ifá...
fraud), as shown in the Ifá corpus above- it is referred to in the context of Ayó Ọlọpón as èrú Ayó (Ayó fraud). There is tone variation as a result of change of context-Ifá divination to Ayó Ọlọpón. In both Ifá and Ayó Ọlọpón philosophies, contentment with one’s rights in life is encouraged, while greed is discouraged and abhorred. References to both Ifá and Ayó Ọlọpón show that ‘tenets’ of the Yorùbá are inscribed, entrenched and encapsulated in their various symbols: religious, social, political and economic among others.

In another context, fraud is unethical to the Ifá profession, as in Ayó Ọlọpón. These moral or ethical philosophies are enforced in the knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the outcome of the divination which are exclusively revealed by the Ifá priest. It is widely believed in the Yorùbá religions generally, and in Ifá in particular, that, it is impossible for Ifá to lie, even though, the Ifá priest can manipulate the Ifá oracle’s message to suit his interest. In this case, the voice of Ifá oracle has been manipulated by man, the Ifá priest. However, the god (Ifá oracle)- is not to be blamed of any repercussion as a result of this manipulation. This is because, Ifá’s profession is associated with truth, honesty, and transparency. A kìí ọwọ ká ṣọ (the person sworn to the divination profession mustn’t lie) (Adéekó 2010, p. 287). The symbol of Ọrùnmìlá (Ifá progenitor) symbolizes truth, honesty and transparency. According to Ṣàlámì (2002, p. 660) on Ìwòrí Mèjì verse one:

... A díá fun ópê ìṣègí ìṣègí.
Baale a òṣóò.
Ópê rè, òòó ó ní lọ ... 
ópê ọ gbọdọ puró.
Ópọ̀ to ba sọ ọ níi yín.
Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní o ríi.

... Cast divination for òpê ìṣègí ìṣègí
The chief truth teller.
Ópê tells the truth always...
Ópê would never tell lies
her pronouncements would never be found to be untrue.
It would be exactly as foretold …

Ọpẹ̀ is known as ‘Palm-tree’ which symbolizes Ọrùnmìlä. Ọpẹ̀ is used to symbolize Ọrùnmìlä’s physical ascension to heaven (Abimbọlá 1968, p. 41 and 1977b, p. iv).

This virtue of ọmọluábì is also contains in ÈjiOgbè, that, truth is a positive directive for living. Truth must always be demonstrated in all situations. Akintọla (1999, pp. 140&41) says (with author’s translation):

*Sọítọ*

*Eni sọítọ*

*Ni imọlẹ gbẹ*

Speak truth,
be truthful always
For the gods or divinities
favour only those who
speak the truth

Attitudes such as lying and dishonesty violate moral code and are subject to severe punishment not only by human but, by the divinities as well. In the same manner, Ayò Ọlọpón is mostly played in the open, where everybody will have access to see and comment on the process of the game, since most of the spectators have the knowledge of the game. However, any act of dishonesty is referred to as ọjọọró (Daramọlá and Jéjé 1967, p. 10), and is always frowned at. Ọjọọró is synonymous with dishonesty. The context of use differentiates the word from religion to social life (Ifá divination and Ayò Ọlọpón). The connections in the moral codes of Ifá with Ayò Ọlọpón is informed by their relationship, which is in this study, observed to be an extension of the Ifá philosophies in Ayò Ọlọpón.

The Ifá moral or ethical philosophical thoughts above equally encourage Ifá priests to accept gifts in the name of Ifá minimally. In Ayò Ọlọpón, this is reflected in the harvesting or capturing of Ayò
seeds. For instance, only Ayọ seeds in a hole or those holes that contain two or three or its multiples up to five holes can only be harvested or captured at once. This makes harvesting or capturing of Ayọ seeds to be regulated, in such a way that, the enjoyment values of the game is sustained. Any act of manipulation of Ayọ seeds against this rule is regarded as act of dishonesty. This attitude or behavior is discouraged in Ayọ game, as it violates the established (cultural) rule associated with the harvesting the Ayọ seeds—minimally. Ifá moral philosophy of eating gifts minimally (as evinced from the Ifá quotation above) is extended to the rule of Ayọ Olọpọn philosophy about life. In this case, Ayọ Olọpọn is related in this study to relate with Ifá philosophy that teaches and preaches satisfaction with little things with peace rather than to live in plenteous without peace. The appellation of Òrúnmilà (the Ifá progenitor) attests to this as contained in the Ifá moral philosophy above- Olómo a je diidiẹ (one that is contented with little by little).

The Yorubá believe that téré-téré kẹse sán ju jügbùn-jügbùn pase-literally meaning that, small-small that last is better than plenty for just a while. Ayọ Olọpọn is equally guided and regulated by these moral or ethical philosophical thoughts. The gradual or little by little principle of life that the Ifá corpus encapsulates is coded in Ayọ Olọpọn that: Diidiẹ ni ọmọ Ayọ nđinkù tìtì yoọ fì tǎn pàtà (The Ayọ seeds begin to be reduced little by little until it finishes) (Dáramólá and Jéjé 1967, p. 11). This moral code has shown the influence of Ifá moral philosophy on Ayọ Olọpọn game. One of the values and aesthetics of Ayọ game is lost or eroded, if all the seeds are manipulated by harvesting most of the Ayọ seeds by a player. This is because; the enjoyment of the game that should be shared by both players has been manipulated by one player. For example, if most of the Ayọ seeds are hurriedly harvested by a player, it terminates the course or duration of the game and the cultural value is lost. This is why the game becomes more interesting if the two players are skilled- so that, the process of the game will be long before a winner emerges. In this
case, Ayọ becomes interesting to both the players as well as the spectators, because, there is room for both players to engage each other and show their prowess, relate and interact together. Likewise, life becomes enjoyable and interesting if an individual is not greedy, by manipulating things for generality to oneself. Individual is likely to live longer as a metaphor of Ayọ seeds that are won minimally rather than maximally that put an abrupt termination to the process of Ayọ game.

Ifá moral philosophy is further evinced in Ogbẹ yọnú contained in Agboọlá (2012, p. 46) (with author’s translation that):

kerèkerè leku njawọ
Adíṣà jùn Èrè
Tí yoo šakapò ìjè pé tíiti
Ayé tete ni un o je
Èmì o je wáráwára kí nwaá kú
Ayé tete ni un o je

The rat eats its objects slowly
Cast divination for Ants
Who will associate with the floor for a long period.
I will enjoy life smoothly
I will be patient and not be in haste so that I won’t die
I will enjoy life slowly.

From the Ifá corpus above, moral philosophy is canvassed by the habit of the rat and ant that eat their foods minimally as against greedily. By this gradual and minimal habit of eating, the ants eat for long. In order to broaden our knowledge of the Ifá epistle on moral philosophy, the moral teaching is extended beyond human environment to the animals as well. For example, the rats’ manner or behavior of eating leather is described as minimal. These are done in order to bring the Ifá teaching nearer home as encoded in Ayọ Olọpọ̀n game, as a form of applied Ifá moral philosophy. The moral theme
of the *Ifá* corpus above ends with supporting contentment contrary to the habit of being greedy that result in untimely death.

The minimal capturing of *Ayó* seeds should be done jointly by the players. This prevents a player from monopolizing the game to his own advantage only. For instance, the game only becomes interesting if the two players are harvesting *Ayó* seeds little by little until the seeds are almost exhausted on the game board or when it is certain that the seeds harvested by a player are more than the *Ayó* seeds harvested by the opponent player. At this stage, a winner is determined and continuing the game will not make any difference. However, before this stage, there must be sharing of *Ayó* seeds between the two players because, *Jẹ kí n jẹ níí máyó dún* (Harvesting of *ayó* seeds by both *Ayó* players make the game to be interesting). The Yorùbá believe that, *ajojẹ lọ layé* (life becomes interesting by social enjoyment). This philosophy about life is to discourage selfishness and exploitative habit of manipulating good things to oneself.

The ultimate goal of moral philosophy is to achieve character reformation in conformity with good living so as to create and ideal life worthy of living. To achieve this, one must not be too desperate to acquiring wealth and riches of life. The repercussion of this attitude may results in sudden death. This is why the language used in the course of *Ayó* in a statement like, *jayó pa* (He terminates the continuity of the game) is discouraged as such an attitude terminates the continuity of the game. This is even reflected in the use of the expression: *O o j’ayó pa* (to mean you are not wrong or you have not gone beyond your boundary) in everyday Yorùbá conversations. It is true that it shows prowess and skill, it is not encouraged because, by this individual attitude of selfishness, by harvesting almost all the *Ayó* seeds, it diminishes or sometimes terminates the recreational value and enjoyment of *Ayó*, at that very moment. In the Yorùbá philosophy associated with *Ayó Olópón*, one must not put an end to the enjoyment meant for the good living of the generality, because, *ěníkan kí i jẹ kilẹ fè* (one does not eat to change nature).
The moral or ethical code of Ifá in relation with Ayó Ọlọpóń is an “applied Ethics.” This is because; moral issues in practice are demonstrated in the religious and social aspects of Yorùbá life. In the Ayó Ọlọpóń context, such an attitude is described as, Ọwà ànikàin jọpón (monopolizing the game board). This attitude is unethical to the Yorùbá people. Ayó Ọlọpóń reflects the philosophy of the Yorùbá people as found in the daily use of moral codes in Ayó Ọlọpóń to regulate the behaviors of people in the society. The Yorùbá believe that, whoever monopolizes benefits of generality will in the end, singularly face the consequences in life. This reflects in their philosophy of life in regard to Ifá and Ayó Ọlọpóń that, èni tó ba dáyé je, yóò dá ìyà je (whoever monopolizes the benefits of life to himself or herself will personally face the repercussion); because, benefits of life are for the generality as against simply the individual. Ayé kí i ṣe tènì kankan. (Life is for all). As far as Ifá priest cannot manipulates the Ifá divination on the Ọpón Ifá, against the wishes of Ifá oracle for his own benefits so also it is binding on Ayó Ọlọpóń players to monopolize the Ọpón Ayó meant for the benefits of the two players. These elements (Ifá and Ayó Ọlọpóń) demonstrate transparency, which is one of the moral ethics upheld by Ifá and Ayó Ọlọpóń.

The above Ifá corpus equally encourages thinking about ‘the end.’ Those Ifá priests that are greedy by eating èrú-Ifá don’t think about their end in life. Their end is not always good- ìgbèyìn wọn èé dàá. This code is linked to, ìgbèyìn laláyó o ta in the Ayó context. This means that, it is the end of the Ayó that matters (winner or loser). The Yorùbá believe in ìyín lọ jù (the end matters most) or ìyín laáró (one should always think about the end). These links in the moral code of Ifá and Ayó Ọlọpóń suggest some levels of relationships between the two. It will be recalled from the Ifá corpus above that, the moral or ethical philosophy about the Ifá professionals that convert Ifá sacred gift, èrù Ifá, to their own personal use or gains- ìgbèyìn wọn èéé dàá (their end will be disastrous). Sometimes, ìyín or ìgbèyìn (afterwards or end), is used as metaphor. For example, the relations of
the dead are usually greeted among the Yorùbá that ẹ́yí́n ọkú́ ọ̀̀ọ̀̀́̀́ ̀̀́̀́́árà o (calamities will not survive the demise of the dead). The left behind, especially the family of the dead is metaphorically refers to as ẹ́yí́n ọkú́. The Yorùbá belief about ẹ́yí́n or igbèyín (afterwards or end) is expressed in Yorùbá aphorism, ẹ́yí́n là̀́́ ̀̀́rò̀, which literally means one should bears the end in mind always. This is a philosophical statement used by the Yorùbá people to ensure a just society. Domestic animals such as goats or sheep and dogs are named ẹ́yí́n là́rò̀ so as to bring the memory of moral philosophy “nearer home” in their daily activities. The Ifá moral or ethical philosophies also contain in Ayó Ọ́lópón to bring the memory to their minds so as to reflect in their manners of living.

Sometimes, Yorùbá moral philosophies are expressed in the use of proverbs employed when playing Ayó Ọ́lópón. For instance, Orímoògùnjé (2014, P. 42) notes the importance of proverbs that relate to Ayó Ọ́lópón in the lives of Yorùbá people when he says that, “Ọ́wé (proverb) which are aphorisms through which the Yorùbá give explanation to crucial issues also occur in Ayó-players’ verbal behavior. Through Ọ́wé, one can easily understand the Yorùbá society.” In other words, the intelligence of the society that can be measured by their recreation explained earlier in this work is revealed in Ayó Ọ́lópón to demonstrate further the Yorùbá intelligence in their recreation.

Ifá is an embodiment of Yorùbá cultural life, which is mostly rendered through their proverbs. Some of these moral philosophical teachings are observed in Ayó Ọ́lópón in the form of proverbs. Clement, Vicient and Casanavas (2009, p. 3) observe that:

There are many Yorùbá proverbs using terms like “ayó” and “ọ́mọ́ ọ́yó”, which talks about perseverance, endurance, confidence in one, ingenuity, audacity or wisdom. This fact illustrates how ayò game is very popular and known among the Yorùbá people, as is reflected in various moral and didactic sentences in their language.
Some Yorùbá proverbs preach the virtues of ọmọlùàbí as contained in the quotation above. These virtues are also manifested in the game of Ayò Ọlọpọ̀n. Mustapha and Arómọláran (1976, p. 140), for instance, says that, Ayò títa máa ní fún àwọn tí ní ẹ̀mí ṣùùrù àtì ìrọ̀rì (playing ayò give the players the spirit of patience and perseverance). In terms of the Ifá divination system, Abímbọlá (1977a, p. 11) says, “It is therefore not surprising that an elaborate system of training involving so much time and patience is marked out for all who aspire to become Ifá priests.” The quotation above on Ayò encourages an individual to be patient. This code is believed in this study to be an extension of Ifá philosophy. For instance, the Yorùbá (Ifá) philosophy believe that, ṣùùrù ni baba ìwà (morality is entrenched in patience). According to the Ifá verses contained in Abímbọlá (1975, p. 402):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ìwà rèè} \\
\text{Ṣùùrù lọ bì i.}
\end{align*}
\]

Akọbí Olódùmàrẹ sí ni bábá rè náà.

ṣùùrù, bábá íwà...

And what breeds morality is patience.
It is the first given by Olódùmàrẹ
Patience brings about morality...

It is noted that, ̀ìwà rèrè (good character), is given attention than any other virtues of ọmọlùàbí as explained earlier. It is sometimes believed that, Èní tó ní ṣùùrù ló lóhùn gbogbo. (Whoever is patient has all things). Explaining the concept of ṣùùrù, Abímbọlá succinctly put it that, “the significance of this is that, in order to have good character, a man must first of all have patience…Out of all the attributes which a man with good character have, patience is the most important of them…One must therefore be patient with people and learn to tolerate them in order to have good character” (p. 402).

As earlier explained, Ifá moral or ethical philosophies are unlimited; that is, there are a number of Ifá corpuses that encapsulate
moral philosophical ideas and themes. *Ifá* philosophical concept about life teaches patience in life. One should not be too desperate towards things of life. For instance, one should be patient and of good character when in a reputable position or riches. This is because, life is transient. In this situation, the Yorùbá moral philosophy of īwàpèlẹ́-humility and patience, should be adopted. One in this situation, one should think about ātisùn (death), the ultimate end of all things.

Both systems of *Ifá* divination and *Ayọ Olọpọ̀n* encourage, preach and teach ‘patience’ and ‘perseverance.’ It will be recalled that, *Ayọ* seeds are played in such a way that there are two or three *Ayọ* seeds in a hole up to the maximum number of five holes in a movement, before harvesting can be achieved. This means, *Ayọ* seeds are more associated with numbers or figures. As a result of this, application of the four basic principles of mathematics: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division are prerequisite to win in *Ayọ Olọpọ̀n* game. This means that, it is more of a mental game than physical energy or power (Òkéwándé 2017). The mathematical principles cannot be applied without deep thinking requiring patience, so as not to miscalculate the showing of *Ayọ* seeds. In other words, the game requires strategies. This is connected with the Yorùbá philosophical thought in relation with *Ayọ* game that, ẹni tó pani láyọ lè pani lógun (whoever can win one in *Ayọ* game can defeat one in war). In this regards, defeat in war is not only determined by the weapons of war but, rather on the strategies of using the weapons. Through perseverance, a player that lost once or twice in the game may eventually emerge as a winner. This can only be realized, if he perseveres to continue the game without giving up or quitting as a result of the defeat experienced once or twice. A winner of *Ayọ* game should normally defeat his opponent in two rounds before he can be declared ọta (the winner) and the loser ọpe (the defeated or a novice) will concede at this stage. As a result of this, patience and persever-
ance are moral virtues in *Ifá* and here observed to be related with *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* game.

The Yorùbá believe that, *onisùùrù ni i jogun aye*, meaning that, whoever is patient in life inherits the world. This moral code has given us another insight into Yorùbá philosophies being “retrieved” from *Ifá* elements as proto-code and *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* as a subsidiary or complementary code through symbols. The relationship of *Ifá* moral code with *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* established in this study attests to this opinion that, *Ifá* is the foundation on which the culture of the Yorùbá is laid.

### Conclusion

Analysis of the similar moral codes of *Ifá* and *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* have been explored in this study to establish how the Yorùbá demonstrates their philosophical values in *Ifá* (religion) with *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* (social). It has been found out from this study that, *Ifá* is the foundation on which the culture of the Yorùbá people is consolidated. *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* has been established as having philosophical links with *Ifá*. The findings suggest that, indeed, *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n*’s value is beyond recreation or relaxation as it manifests the Yorùbá philosophy—especially with regards to moral code. This means that, the Yorùbá (*Ifá*) philosophies are encapsulated in other aspects of the Yorùbá life such as *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n*.

Different Africans symbols, objects and artifacts are associated with different philosophies associated with their beliefs and ways of life. Although, Africans generally and Yorùbá people in particular are historically associated with “illiterate societies” there abound historical documents in oral forms, especially in *Ifá*, and *Ayọ Ọlọpọ̀n* game which the philosophies of the Africans in general and the Yorùbá people in particular can be established. This means, there are “traces of the instituted Codes that bear fragments of Ṭrùnmiṃlù’s record” (Adéèkọ̀ 2010, p. 297). It is by these codes one is able to compre-
hend meaning and knowledge of Ifá philosophies in relation to social aspect of Yorùbá life such as Ayò Olópòn.

References


