



Investigating Religious Ethics and Sociocultural Relationships in-between Ifá and Ayò Ọlọ́pọ̀n among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria¹

A Critical Comparative Study

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Abstract:

In Africa, ethics are encapsulated their various religious and social activities. Among the Yoruba, ethnical codes are propagated in religious activities especially, Ifá and in socio-cultural activities such as ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n. Ifá, the springboard on which Yoruba culture rests have specialized formal and informal rules regulating its activities. This informs why violation of rules guiding Ifá profession is regarded as ethical misconduct; the punishment of which may attract severe spiritual and/or human sanctions. Likewise, ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n- indigenous Yoruba sociocultural board game have informal ethical rules. However, despite the national and international nomenclatures of Ifá and ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n, no study is known that undertakes ethical interrelationship between the two cultural elements together. Employing code- a semiotic element, a channel through which communication is encoded. Ethical code of Ifá is compared with ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n. It is found out that, there are affinities between operational rules guiding against Ifá divination profession and rules guiding against ayò game. This study concludes that, among the Yoruba, ethical codes of Ifá and ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n are activated for sustainability of peace and development. Ethics of Ifá and ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n are found related and therefore, ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n ethical code is an extension of Ifá ethical code.

Keywords:

Ifá; ayò ọlọ́pọ̀n; code; culture; ethics; semiotics.

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Introduction

Generally, “ethics is a component of philosophy which is committed to the study of the formulation of theories underlying our socially acceptable behaviour as human beings (Bamişaye, 2001). Among the Yoruba, there are formal and informal cultural ethics by which a society is governed or controlled.³ Formal or informal, ethics has to do with philosophy relating to ensuring good behaviours capable of propagating peace and development in a society. On the one hand, formal ethics are written constitutions and rules guiding the behaviours and practice of organization, group and profession. That is, they are sets of formal norms, also known as *mores* and *laws*. They are standard behaviours regarded to be important in any given society. Violation of such formal standard behaviour attracts a severe punishment or sanction. On the other hand, the informal ethics has to do with norms, customs, folkways and taboos realized as informal cultural ethics. That is, informal norms refer to standards of behaviours that are considered less important, but still influence how we behave in a society (Maciver&Page, 1950 and Alake, 2004). Meaning that, ethics has to do with morality and virtues that promote good behaviours. In the opinion of Ejizu, “morality derives directly from the Latin, *MOs mores*, which means custom or way of life of a people. It has its equivalent in Greek- *ethos* from which the English word ethics is derived” (2008, p. 4-6). In this study however, ethics covers more than morality, but includes code of conduct guiding operation in doing things or profession. That is, it goes far beyond religion but to socio-cultural life of people.

Etymology of the word- Ethics, is described to be rooted in “the formulation of such terms as *ethos*, *ethics* and *moral*. *Ethos* is defined as character, sentiment, or disposition of a community or people, considered as a natural endowment; the spirit which actuates manners and customs, ...*Ethos* is a Greek word corresponding roughly to “ethics.” Something is moral if it pertains to right rather than wrong and ethics is the study of moral issues” (Szucs, et al, 2012, p. 1499). Ethics is concerned with the science of morality. It involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of rights and wrong behaviour...This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or consequences of our behaviour on others. Generally, ethical code has been mostly used in religious context. However, while it is reasonable to associate ethics with religion, it is also logical and appropriate that some people and activities that are unrelated to religion also observe some ethical rules and codes such as undertaken in *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* in this study.

The informal cultural ethics is associated with some religion and socio-cultural activities such as *Ifá* and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n*. Unlike is foreign recreational activities such as chess and *ludo* that are exclusively for relaxation and entertainment, recreation among the Yoruba encodes cultural values- virtues beyond entertainment and relaxation. That is, religious concepts are enshrines in other aspects of life. However, both formal and informal cultural ethics work towards the same goal- positive behavioral or moral code.

³ Ethnics is therefore not imported concept to Africa generally and among the Yoruba in particular.



It is pertinent to note that, African societies are being governed by the informal cultural ethical code enshrines in various oral genres such as proverbs, philosophy and aphorisms. In addition, “the foundation role of the inscription system in Ifá distinguishes it as a ‘literate’ learned means of inquiry – Ifá is commonly called *alákòwé*, the scribe or literate one... Ifá divination protocols are the closest an ‘oral’ society could devise to fulfil the requirement of genuinely divine writing and speaking” (Adeèkó, 2010, p. 288) This opinion establishes that, in orality, there is a form of learning process in form of symbols that communicate ideas and information. Orality is described as “means by which Africa made its existence, its history long before the colonial and imperial presence of the west manifested itself. In this sense, orality needs to be seen not simply as ‘the absence of literacy’ but as something self-constitutes *Sui generis*” (Gunner, 2007, p. 67). The implication of this opinion is that orality does not imply absence of literacy. African generally and Yoruba in particular have cultural or indigenous ethics – a set of moral principles or issues that govern a person’s behaviour or conduct of an activity.

Ethical code of *Ifá* is formal- learnable. It’s knowledge containing of “multiple components, including formal and informal systems. Formal systems are the tangible organizational elements pertaining to ethics that are purposefully designed and implemented (e.g., ethics programs), whereas informal systems are the unwritten policies, practices, and values that are relevant to ethics” (Casoliva-Cabana, 2019, p. 2). This opinion informs why every aspect of *Ifá’s* knowledge- philosophy, economic, social, religion, science etcetera is learnable. However, social activities such as *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* are complementary media of ensuring peaceful and sustainable environment. That is, informal cultural ethical code is as old as the African societies. Its existence predates the formal cultural ethical code that was introduced by the western nations. As a result, the study of African indigenous systems of living must be sustained and developed.

Eventhough, the general belief on *Ifá* is religious, however, it is erroneous to limit its scope to religion alone; because, *Ifá’s* knowledge in addition to religion encapsulates philosophy, medicine, science and technology, mythologies and history among others. However, the sociocultural influence of *Ifá*, as proposed in this study cannot also be an exemption; since *Ifá* is believed to be the Yoruba cultural convergent point for all cultural activities of the Yoruba. The prominence of *Ifá* is however not limited to the Yoruba nations alone, but, its nomenclature cut across nations of the world. The value of *Ifá* on human activities and life is recognized and appreciated. This prompted the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to proclaimed *Ifá* in 2005, as one of the 86 traditions of the world to be recognized as masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity. By this declaration, *Ifá* is regarded as one of human heritages requiring urgent preservation. *Ifá’s* heritage is enshrined in the “international law and policy. therefore, has a universal value in which everyone has a reasonable interest” (Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018, p. 2). The implication of this opinion is that, *Ifá* ethics have been formalized through various indigenous cultural activities.

Ayò ọlọpọ̀n is a Yoruba indigenous board game. Like *Ifá*, the international status of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is also not in doubt. Apart from its popularity among the Yorùbá people of Southwestern Nigeria, 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. The prominence of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* in socio-cultural life of the Yoruba people is demonstrated in various socio-religious activities such as festivals and the deployment by artists in drama for entertainments and propagation of some cultural values. It becomes more pertinent to re-examine the orientation of Yoruba people that *eré là á fọmọ ayò ẹ.* That is everything around *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is fun, play or entertainment.

The Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to establish the crisscrossing of ethical and moral code between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. The objectives are to; establish *ayò* ethical and moral codes as extension of *Ifá* codes and to establish the intercultural confluence between the religious and social activities of the among the Yoruba.

Materials and Methods

Ethics and Culture: A Review

There are two forms of cultural relationship: the intercultural, which has to do with the relationship of one cultural element and another and intracultural, that is, cultural relationship within culture. An intercultural cultural relationships was undertaken by İbrahimoğlu, Çiğdem and Seyhan "to better understand the impact of cultural differences in perceptions of ethical attitudes of Turkish and Arab societies" (2014, p. 1). The work establishes relationship between the two cultures. In this case, the intercultural relationship is accounted for. Likewise, such ethical relationship may exist in form of cultural diffusion- a cultural spread from higher concentration to the lower concentration within culture, such as perceived with *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* in this study. That is, the cultural spreads of the ethical code from *Ifá* to *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. Cultural activities such as ethics influence the entire cultural system since all other cultural activities and institutions are undertaken by human-beings in a society.

Ifá, as a converging point of all Yoruba cultural activities have influence on the systems of living of the Yoruba people. This is done through socialization ethical and moral codes, activated in the religious and social life of the Yoruba people. This shows that "culture is an integrated system of learned behaviour" (Roy, 2003, p. 663). Socialization happens in a way that, "when an individual born in a society, he is automatically born into a culture. Although, the individual cannot perceive the culture directly, he is exposed to the social influences that play upon his physical and mental structure. Gradually, he adapts the pattern of behaviour sanctioned by the group; culture molds him as per the expectation of the society" (Roy, 2003,



p. 663). The implication of this opinion is that there are established cultural activities (formal or informal) through which ethics codes are enshrine. *Ifá* and *ayò ọlópọ̀n* are such cultural elements wherein ethical codes are encapsulated.

Ethics and moral codes remain critical and universal components of human culture that shape or mold human behaviours positively. Meaning that, ethical and moral codes “develop out of culture. The specific culture pattern helps an individual to build some moral principles, which are transmitted through various customs, norms values, prohibitions of the society. Thus different cultures produce different moral codes and so on the prevailing behaviour in one society may seem to be strange and even repellant to the other” (Roy, 2003, p. 502). A critical look at the cultural activities unfolds some latent ethical behaviours capable of sustainable peace and development.

Ethics, is mostly associated with behaviours, which is one of the major themes in *Ifá* corpus. This informs the importance Yorùbá people attached to behaviour. Ethics applies to all aspects of conduct of individuals, groups, and organizations or societies. The “concepts of ethics refer to classification such as good-bad, beautiful- ugly, true false which the community members with in the same values to the human behaviour and relations have added. Ethics deals with human behaviour. Ethics can be thought of as also a framework covering philosophy, moral philosophy, moral problems and moral judgments” (Mehalu, 2011). In this context, ethics is a set of norms and values which have been improved to praise or criticize the behaviour of the individuals living in the same community (Jones & Kavanagh, 1996). A society is valued by the forms and influence of ethical elements available in culture.

Methods

Code, is one of the semiotic elements propounded by Peirce (1931) is adopted for this study. Other semiotic elements are symbol, icon and index. Code is adopted for this study; because “semiology has so far concerned itself with codes” (Barthes, 1964, p. 1). One of the concerns of semiotics is understanding the code with which signs are communicated. The signs and their meanings are made known by codes which is, “a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication” (Geoffery and Short, 1981, p. 124). In a cultural activity, there can be concurrent use of two codes. That is, there may be simultaneous occurrences of two or more codes in a cultural context or event. The connections of signs and their meanings are channeled by code. Codes help to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate ideas. Understanding codes requires cultural knowledge involving linking signs to the meaning.

Interpretation of codes or symbols is a major task for a semiotician because it is the main outcome of semiotics or semiosis. Interpretation of codes in a culture is important to the establishment of meanings of the codes. That is, interpretation of code is important in the understanding the meaning of a sign, symbol or text., because, a sign can create multiple

meanings, depending on the cultural context it exists. Understanding and application of the cultural element on human life largely depends on the knowledge or experience of individual in a culture.

In this study, ethical codes of *Ifá* are related to the ethical code of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* to demonstrate that the ethnical code of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* evolve from *Ifá*. This is done by establishing relationship between the two ethical cultural elements. Relating religious ethics in *Ifá* to *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* will increase the understanding that ethics go beyond religion as “religious ethics can as well be seen as comparative religious ethics which is an expression used to refer to the study of religious ethics when the study is not confined to a single religious tradition” (Nyoyoko, 2012, p. 69). Implication of this statement is that religious ethnics are validated in social ethnics. The Yorùbá adopts this consciousness of pairing two similar things that share related features, values and forms in common.

Results

Ethnical codes in religion are not only means of propagating virtues that are panacea for societal development but also encoded in social activities such as *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. Ethics is one of the cultural elements that relates both *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* together. The religious ethnics are encapsulated in Yoruba social activities such as *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. The implication of this result is that, informal ethics are media through which peace is propagated and guaranteed in Yoruba societies. Yoruba society is regulated through formal and informal cultural ethics such as encapsulated in *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. Ethical code of *Ifá* is a proto, basic or primary code, while *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is derived or secondary. That is, *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* - the sociocultural element of Yoruba culture, is dependent on the *Ifá* religion. *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* as an informal ethics is universal- not limited to a religious group. The ethical code of *ayò* establishes that, eventhough it is a sociocultural activity majorly for entertainment and relaxation its values, just like *Ifá*, is premised on sustainable development.

Discussion

Every profession, including cultural activities such as games, organization or group has ethics that guide the running and operation of different activities- in interpersonal relationship among members, rules of practice and code of conduct among others. This is also applicable to religious activities. *Ifá* as a religion, have its own ethical rules- both spiritual and physical that are codes of conduct of practice. That is, any unethical practice sometimes resorts to spiritual sanctions in addition to the *Ifá* practitioners' sanction. It is a rule that *Ifá* priest must “adhere strictly to the ethics and secrets of his profession” (Abimbólá, 1977a, p. 13). There are ethical rules, requirements and behaviours that an individual must possess before one engages in *Ifá* profession to succeed. This is why *Ifá* corpus- *Arótẹ̀-àń-sá*, prescribes that whoever will engage in the profession must be “*Babaláwo tó gbán sárására níi mofá.*” That is,



a very knowledgeable *Ifá* priest is proficient in *Ifá* divination. The corpus verse states the importance of knowledge in *Ifá* divination. This is not strange as *Ifá* is the divinity of wisdom; whoever will associate with it must be wise and knowledgeable.

To ensure that the ethical sanctity of *Ifá* profession is enforced, certain qualifications and requirements are prerequisites before initiation to *Ifá* profession cult is instituted. Prior to this, before an *Ifá* priest begins to practice, he must have been initiated into *Odù* cult: The *Ifá* code of communication. This is because *Ifá* symbols are coded in *Odù*, the knowledge of which must be understood by prospective *Ifá* practitioner. Identification, recognition, understanding and interpretation of *Odù* requires a very high intelligent quotient. That is, the prospective priest must have a high intelligent quotient (IQ). This is needful because, there are minimum numbers of *Odù* or *ẹsẹ-Ifá- Ifá* verse a trainee must be able to recite, along with the associated sacrifices.⁴ During these exercises, different codes of ethics of *Ifá* profession are thought, learned and performed by the would-be *Ifá* priest, through *Ifá* ethical codes, enshrines in various *Ifá* corpora. That is, "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 *Ọ̀rúnmiḷa's* Code of Ethics" (Akintola, 1999, p. 99).

Generally, skills acquisition has been associated with ethics, because, it focuses on "realizing good conduct, being an effective moral agent, and bringing values into one's work, all require skills in addition to a moral inclination. Studies have uncovered four skill sets that play a decisive role in the exercise of moral expertise" (Saucier, 2018, p. 2). In short, it is expected that, *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n* players possess some personal qualities that show his dexterities-skills, like *Ifá*. Eventhough in *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n*, the players are not initiated, because, while *Ifá* objects are sacred and spiritual, that of *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n*, is basically associated with social values. This is because, the game is not confines to a particular religion. It is a recreational activity that different people with different background involve in. As a result of the wide scope⁵ the game has over religion, there is no doubt the influence of socio-cultural ethics, such as coded in *ayò* can be underestimated. Imbibing and abiding by the *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n* ethical code provides a social institution through which some social vices such as selfishness and fraud among others are curtailed or checked.

To engage in *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n*, the players must be intelligent in calculating and moving seeds around the board to win. It had been established that mathematical knowledge of binary, permutation and combination, arithmetic progression, geometric progression are keenly involved in *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n*. One of the importance of *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n* is to display the competence and dexterity, that is intelligence of a player over another. Like in *Ifá* divination, in *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n*, before a player can be a master of *ayò* game, he must have acquired some informal skills over

⁴ For example, only initiated apprentices of *Ifá* are allowed into the guild to acquire the specialized knowledge associated with the training. And no one is given liberty to practice the acquired art until the final step is mastered! (Ilésanmí, 2004, p. 9). Figures 2¹⁰ (1024) and 2¹² (4096) are among "the various numbers of Odu claimed by different writers and *Ifá* priests" (McGEE, 1983, p. 111). That is, these figures mark the minimum and standard numbers of *ẹsẹ-Ifá* to be mastered by the prospective *Ifá* priest before initiation.

⁵ Different *ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n* players come from different religions.

a duration of time. Like other skills, players of *ayò* starts by watching of the game, during which he learnt a lots of the informal ethics guiding against the game.

In *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* systems, the use of human skills, intelligent and wisdom come to play. Skill acquisition in *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* requires some level of intelligence, for it is a game that rests on knowledge. Even though, skills in *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* is informal, however, "the game is not easy" (Agbalajobi, Cooper and Ọ́nuga, n. d, p. 375), which makes the skill to be associated with high level of intelligence. Such training is invariably sustained by constant practice. The 'strategies' in the manipulation of *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* seeds, determine the level of skill of a player. In fact, the success of winning *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* is predicated on the skills of the player

Due to the limited human knowledge products- outcome of *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* are unpredictable. The outcomes of *Ifá* divination through *ikin*⁶ or *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀*⁷ are only predicted after completion of the process of divination on the skills and knowledge of a diviner. However, while the training and knowledge of *Ifá* divination acquire both formal and informal rigorous training, that of *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* requires informal. However, both involve training. This is associated with perseverance "perseverance is the ability to decide on a moral plan of action and then to adapt to any barriers that arise in order to continue working toward that goal" (Clement, Vincent and Casanovas, 2012a, p. 2). That is, a competent *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* player must be a strategist as the "game requires deep thought and good strategy to move seeds with the ultimate aim to win" (Clement, Vincent and Casanovas 2012a, pp. 2-3). The application of the mental knowledge makes the process involved to be complex and as such, playing *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n*

should not however be easy, but should allow for considerable variation of expertise, which variation should be easily describable as a hierarchy of strength of performance. It is also desirable that there be many different strategies available to the player, so that the strategy adopted by the subject may be a reflection of his personality. If there are also a numbers of tactics to master, it will prove illuminating to observe how a novice subject learns to use them. The degree of outward manifestation of thought process behind a subject's performance is also an important parameter in the selection of a game. While protocols may be used to make performance more explicit, information derived from the performance itself is more reliable (Agbalajobi, Cooper and Ọ́nuga, n. d, p. 474).

Reliability of information from *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* is relative. That is, it derives this peculiarity or attribute from *Ifá*. As *Ifá* generally concerned with obtaining information on every practical problem of everyday life. The opinion above demonstrates that, eventhough, *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* in basically for recreation and entertainment, however, the game has complementary values that cannot be underestimated. The relative values of *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* to *Ifá* suggest that, both in *Ifá* and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n*, like any other profession, the success depends on the personality of the *Ifá* priest and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* players- the level of his dexterity and acquisition of necessary skills.

⁶ Sacred *Ifá* palm-nuts, usually in sixteen

⁷ *Ifá* divination chain made of eight *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀* seeds. It has two faces- concave and convex; making sixteen faces.



Generally, it has been observed that there are individual traits to ethnical understanding and "beside this individualistic conditions such as age, sex, religion, etc., also have an impact on ethical perceptions and attitudes" (Ibrahimoglu, Cigdem and Seyhan, 2014, p. 1). The individual traits are strictly guided by the ethical code so as to realize the socio-cultural and religious objectives. The more adherence to the ethical code, the more the desired results or goals are achieved. Since *Ifá* ethical code is associated with religion, the practice involves the interaction with spiritual agents, some ethical codes are not opened to the public, that is, they are cultic. This is why it is only an initiated *Ifá* priest that can interpret the language of *Ifá* oracle. This is why the training involves both formal and informal training. *Ifá* client is ignorant or novice about the outcome or results of the divination. Unlike in *Ifá* divination, however, *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* ethical code is opened. All the activities of the game are conducted openly. The audience or spectators understand all the rules- except for those that are learning the game by watching. Since *Ifá* divination ethical code involves both formal (because whoever is not an initiated *Ifá* priest will be ignorant or novice of some *Ifá* ethical code) and informal, opened and closed, the informal ethical code is complemented by the *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* ethical code.

Like in *Ifá*, performance in *ayò* revealed that, the system is regulated by scientific knowledge, especially, computer in relation to memory. It is an ethics in *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*, that, "a player may count the seeds in his own holes by picking them up, but not those of his opponent, so that a memory component is introduced into the game. This may be assimilated on the computer builds up a large number of seeds in one hole the number displayed may be set to upper limit" (Agbalajobi, Cooper and Şonuga, n. d, p. 47). The game is more anchored on memory of the players. That is, ability to know the numbers of *ayò* seeds to his advantage and the ability to block any loop holes that the opponent may explore against him. The more he is able to calculate by using different mathematical methods such as addition, subtraction and multiplication, the more his chances or probability of winning more *ayò* seeds.

In *Ifá* divination, children are excluded, as the profession is associated with maturity coupled with high intelligence and memory which demands for memorization and calculation. This is why "many people start their training at early age, usually between ten and twelve, and they remain with their master or the next ten or fifteen years before the firm part of their training is completed" (Abimbola, 1977a, p. 12). That is, the core *Ifá* training starts at the age bracket of twenty-five years and above. Before this stage, a trainee will only be sent on some errand such as buying of some things and some domestic works unrelated with divination.

In *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*, immature children rarely engage in the game. This is as a result of high memory impact and input such as calculations- addition, subtraction, division and multiplication involved in the game. Relating *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*, to Morabaraba and Macala games⁸ as one of the precolonial African recreations, it is described as the game that its knowledge covering wide areas in mathematics such as algebra, geometry, theory of numbers, topology, combinatorics, graph theory, set theory symbolic logic as well as probability theory (Gerdes,

⁸ These are related to *ayò* game

1994). It has been established that, Mathematics concepts such as Geometrical shapes, Algebra, Ratio and Proportion, Symmentary, Logical reasoning, Counting, Combinational Game theory, Search Algorithms. Logical thinking and empirical and mental calculation” are also embedded in *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* (Nleya and Ndlovu, 2020, p. 141). All these works on *ayò* evolved for problem solving using different scientific approaches. These scientific approaches remind us the basic function of *Ifá* divination- problem solving as earlier explained. *Ifá* is consulted to provide a way forward in times of trouble and proffer solutions through *Ifá* oracular order.

The attributes of human mental and cognition in *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* is here believed to be as a result of the relationship the game has with *Ifá* as explained. As many adults engage in *Ifá* divination profession, likewise many adults are involved in *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n*. There is also no age limit to both. In fact, the game is medically recommended for the aged people who are suffering from dementia and sight. That is, the game is discovered to be memory enhancer. In the opinions of Oyeleke, Ige, Emuoyibofarhe, and Aworinde “acceptability by demented people and potential sufferers will not be an issue...These attributes we believe will help African sufferers to recover faster” (2014, p. 25).

Movement in the marking of *Odù-Ifá* and sowing of *ayò* seeds on the boards is another ethical code. Movement in sowing of *ayò* seeds is in an anticlockwise direction (Climent, Caanal and Casanovas, 2012). In process of sowing of *ayò* seeds, a hole on the board must not be skipped, unless if the ‘looping’ (the hole where the accumulation of *Odù* is taken) is created. Na’Allah gives hints further on this by saying, “some traditional games like the Yorùbá *ayò* involve some writing in the form of strokes or lines” (2010, p. 4). This right to left movement is also akin to the marking, reading and interpreting *Ifá* symbols. That is, “since both the divining chain and the printed marks are read from right to left, like Arabic, the pattern of the right-hand side are considered basic and it is upon them that the 16 basic patterns of the printed marks arranged in order of seniority” (Abimbola, 1977a, p. 16).

Furthermore, time of performance is another ethical rule that must be followed in *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n*. Both *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* are rarely performed out in the night. This is because, night is traditionally devoted for other things, such as settlement of misunderstanding and domestic works. *Ifá* divination that requires information from the gods through *Odù* is usually performed during the day time, when the shadow of the divination tray will not be shown. On one hand, the *babaláwo* believe that, *Ọ̀rúnmilà* must have slept and, on the other hand, there are *Odù* that are recited along the use of blood- animals and snail-fluid and so on. It is usually difficult to get some of these items in the night. Likewise, *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* is not played in the morning or at night. It is the common belief that, “bálẹ́ bá lẹ́, à fọmọ ayò fáyò” (Kòmọláfẹ́, 1978, p. 180). That is, when it is dark, we desist from playing with *ayò* seeds. The Yorùbá discourages one from playing *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* in the morning; believing that, “Ọ̀rayè èniyàn ni ní tayò àárọ̀.” That is, it is an unintelligent that plays *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* in the morning. This is to discourage people from indolence, since the game is not a profession. *Ayò* is played in the evening period as relaxation after the day’s job. Day time is devoted to work. However, development has overtaken this belief and practice as *ayò ọ́lọ́pọ́n* is played in the



morning, organized as a competition game in some cultural, religious and in drama and films. Likewise, the intelligent players are involved in the game. In *Ifá* divination, it is practiced in the morning and day time but not night. Perhaps, both *Ifá* and *ayò* game are performed with the day-light so as to guarantee transparencies in the processes of the performances. However, this is in addition to the spiritual and cultural rules that guide against their performances.

Another area of ethical relationship between *Ifá* and *ayò* game in the performance. The process of *Ifá* divination must be open and transparent; both the *babaláwo* and the client(s) must be actively involved in the process. Whether the client is able to read and interpret the message or not, the interactions of the divination objects are open and transparent to him or her. The divination board must be laid open because, it is ethical that, *Ifá's* profession be performed with truthfulness, honesty, and transparency. *Ifá* priest is under ethical oath that: "A kii şawo ká puró" (Adéèkó, 2010, p. 287). That is, the person sworn to the divination profession must not lie. The symbol of *Òrúnmilà*- the oracle of *Ifá* symbolizes truth, honesty and transparency. In order to ensure transparency in *ayò*, it is a rule that it be played in the open during the daylight period so as that both the players and the spectators can see or view clearly to comment on the activities of the player. Any player that tries to manipulate *ayò* seeds to his advantage is shouted at by the opponent payer and audience. This attitude is regarded as *òjóóró*- fraud. Whatever fraud hidden from the opponent player is exposed by the audience. This makes the game to be free from manipulation of all forms.

It is the ethics of the game, that a player with most of the seeds supplies the opponent for the objective and enjoyment of the game to be actualized. The ethics of *ayò olópoń* is that:

if all opponent pits are empty, the player must make a move that will give his opponent a move, this is called "Golden rule". If no such move can be made, the player captures all the remaining seeds on the board, ending the game. If no move is possible the winner is the person with greater number of captured seeds (n. a, n. d, p. 15).

The opinion above, coded through *ayò* ethical practice requires that, in real life application, the rich should supply or provide the poor where and when possible to do so; revealing that, life is interesting in communal sharing of benefits or things. Any *ayò* player that monopolizes the board by harvesting almost all the seeds is regarded as *anìkàńjopń*. Likewise, *Ifá* teaches that, those who are sufficient in some necessities of life such as money and food should supply to the needy ones. *Ìwòrì Wọ́fún* corpus states that:

Ká bu ọ̀kan mu, kí á bu èjì ko àgbà/To drink a cup and give two cups to an elder

Tí àgbà bá bojú wẹ̀yìn, kí á tún bu ọ̀kan mu/If an elder appreciates, one should drink a cup again

Kí ó wá bọ sí dọgba-n-dọgba/That it becomes equal

A dífá fún Pàràkòyí/Cast divination for Pàràkòyí (Odégbọla, 2014, p. 181).

The *Ifá* corpus above teaches that one must not be a miser, stingy or selfish but should share from whatever you have with those in needs. The *Ifá* states that *iwà imọ-tara-ẹni-nikan*

kò pé (Ọdégbọla, 2014, p. 181). That is, selfishness does not profit one. The Ifá-ayò ethical code teaches that society will experience peace and development. This is why Obineche “advocates that a synergy between religion and morality in Nigeria will create a peaceful and harmonious society and make the profession of every religion in Nigeria a meaningful reality” (2021, p. 13). However, as revealed in this study, ethical code is not novel to the Yoruba society. It had been instituted in various cultural and social activities capable of development and peaceful co-existence among the people. The relationships between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlópón* ethical code demonstrate synergies between the two cultural elements.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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