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## Beyond Illusion of Myth to Allusion of Reality: The Case of Conjectures about *Ayò ọlọpọ́n* in Relation to *Ifá* Among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Among the Yoruba, it is a general belief that people engage in *ayò ọlọpọ́n* to reduce stress, create jokes and fun. Because of its entertainment value, *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is generally played in the evening, as a relaxer after the day's work. As a result of this belief, information emanating from the *ayò* context is believed to be trivial ones. However, contrary to the beliefs on *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, this study investigated *ayò ọlọpọ́n* as a popular and reliable Yoruba cultural activity that mirrors *Ifá's* primary roles of making an enquiry. This study employed symbolism, a semiotic mode that relates to interpretation of what something or somebody stands for or another, in one or more capacity. Symbolism of *ayò ọlọpọ́n* was compared with and related to *Ifá*. It was found from the study that *ayò ọlọpọ́n* have a relative role with *Ifá*- the oracle of divination and wisdom consulted to solve problems and provide solutions out of crisis. This role is validated in *ayò ọlọpọ́n* as supplementary in addition to the general function of relaxation and entertainment that it is mostly known for. The study concludes that like any other human activity that can be imitated, adapted and adopted into play, *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is an imitation or adaptation of *Ifá*. Therefore, *Ayò ọlọpọ́n* is a telescope of *Ifá* divination.

Keywords: *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, culture, *Ifá*, philosophy, symbolism

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Different cultures of the world have indigenous games that serve as entertainment and relaxation. There are also different benefits derived from those games. Among the Yoruba there are various indigenous games which can be classified by players- children, adults and gender. People usually engage in games in the evening time after the day's job. It is believed that games are primarily for relaxation and entertainment. Those that engage in *ayò olóppón* in the morning and afternoon are described as *ònràyè ni í tayò* "the unintelligent engages in *ayò olóppón*" (Daramola and Jeje, 1967, p. 14). This belief negates what *ayò olóppón* symbolizes as it is a game of intelligence and dexterity. This is validated in the belief of the Yoruba people that:

*Eni tó bá pani láyò*

whoever defeats one in *ayò olóppón*,

*ó leè pani lógún*

can overcome one in war (Oladapo, 2010, p. 119).

This opinion shows that there are latent benefits inherent in *ayò olóppón* beyond the cultural aspersions that demean the game. That is, despite some cultural limitations against *ayò*, its potentials and benefits are good ground for research and the perceived relationship the game has with *Ifá*. *Ifá* is believed to be the foundation on which all the cultural activities of the Yoruba people are anchored. This is because, virtually all the cultural activities are encapsulated and authenticated in *Ifá*. That is, the veracity of cultural activities that are rooted or soiled in Yoruba are authenticated by *Ifá* (Abimbola, 1976). Therefore, the aim of this study was to establish the importance of *ayò olóppón* beyond entertainment as evinced and validated by *Ifá*, the encyclopedia of Yoruba culture. The objectives of the study were to relate the outcome of *ayò olóppón* performance to *Ifá*; to establish that *ayò olóppón* is validated by *Ifá* as a media of inquiry and to demonstrate that *Ifá* corpus mitigates beliefs that demean *ayò olóppón*.

There were some pertinent hypothetical questions, answered by this study such as: why did *Òrúnmìlà* and *Ogún*, *Şàngó* and *Akápò* *Òrúnmìlà* engaged in *ayò* game to validate who was right among them rather than *Ifá* divination? Why is the presumption of *Òrúnmìlà* subsists over the others by defeating them in *ayò* and why is it that at the end of the game, the projection of *Òrúnmìlà* was vindicated?

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### A Review of *Ayò Olóppón*

Like *Ifá*- the divination and wisdom, *ayò olóppón* is an indigenous Yoruba board game with international nomenclature. *Ayò olóppón* is a recreational activity of the Yoruba closely associated with the people's cultural values and heritage. Generally, it is a recreational activity that "denotes the mental excellence of

the people” of any society (Roy 2003, p. 657). Implication of this statement is that *ayò olóppón* belongs to the Yoruba recreational activity that demonstrates peoples’ intelligence.

*Ayò olóppón* 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). Furthermore, *ayò olóppón* is called *Nsa Isong* and *Dara* among the Efiks and Hausas of Nigeria. In Edo language of Nigeria, *ayò* is called *Ogirise* while the Tiv people of Benue in Nigeria calls it *Teratar dar* (Egobiambu 2021). Various realizations of *ayò olóppón* names across nations indicate that *ayò olóppón* is beyond any doubt, an international recreational activity.

Scholars such as Kòmóláfé (1978), Aromọ́laran and Mustapha (1976) and Daramọ́la and Jeje (1967) examined the principles guiding against *ayò olóppón*. Oyèlékè et al., (2014) demonstrated the functional values of *ayò olóppón* beyond the basic recreational role. In their opinions, such roles are: cure of dementia, hypertension and poor sight. Some of the principles have been related to *Ifá*, such as line tracing, cultural binary, anti-clockwise movement among others. Some of the information and utterances during the process of *Ifá* divination have been addressed by (Okewande 2017). For example, neither *Ifá* priest nor *ayò-olóppón* players can be liable to any offence committed during the process of *Ifá* divination and *ayò-olóppón*. Privileged information is freely released without any fear or molestation. The work of Abiọ́dun focuses on the language use within the context of *ayò* game. He concludes that acceptability or non-acceptability of utterances depend on the context or situation (1998, p. 43).

*Ayò olóppón* is a board game. The board is commonly made of wood (although, there is a metal form). It contains two horizontal lines of six holes each. Each hole is occupied with 4 *ayò* seeds, making a total of 48 *ayò* seeds in the 12 holes. Like *Ifá* divination process, lines or strokes are also important in *ayò* game; as “some traditional games like the Yorùbá *ayò* involve some writing in the form of strokes or lines” (Na’ Allah 2010, p. 4). That is, the process of *Ifá* divination and *ayò olóppón* involve lines or strokes engaged by *Ifá* priest and players.

*Ayò olóppón* is played by two contestants. Any of the two players can move the four *ayò* seeds, dropping each *ayò* seed inside the holes in consecutive of four. No hole must be skipped. The movement must be in an anti-clockwise direction. This is done in turn taking order between the players. When *ayò* seeds are 2 or 3 in a hole after sowing, then, such *ayò* seeds are captured by the player. Capturing can be done between 1 to 5 holes. This means that 2 (minimum) to 15 (maximum) *ayò* seeds can be harvested. The player that have more than 24 (half of the total 48) *ayò* seeds becomes the winner- *Ọ́ta*, while the defeated player is regarded as the loser- *Ọ́pè*. It is possible the game ends in draw- *Ọ́mì*. That is, no winner or loser. The two players sit on a bench in direct opposite to each other with the game board at the centre mostly in the open place as shown by the photograph below (Figure 1):



Photograph of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* players (*The Nation*, Jan. 21, 2017, p.8).

Figure 1. Photograph of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* players (*The Nation*, Jan. 21, 2017, p. 8).

Looking at the photograph above it shows that players of age brackets engage in the game in an open arena watched by spectators. This is the case in this study where, *Òrúnmìlà* and deities such as *Ògún* and *Ẹ̀sàngó* engaged in *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*, not purposely for entertainment as generally known with *ayò* but, as fact finding exercise. However, since the game was purposely for authenticating the truth between two different persons, the context did not attract or involve spectators. Today, *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is played internationally. The game has also been digitalized. It is played on social media.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Comparative method is adopted for this study, since “*comparison is the basis of all scientific knowledge* A scientific understanding of anything depends on the comparisons of it with other things” (Lenski, & Lenski 1987, p. 3). Comparisons are established in-between the outcome of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* and *Ifá* as media of inquiry. The symbolisms of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* are basically on win and lose; compared to the *Ifá* divination lots, which are restricted to two alternatives: positive “yes” and negative “no.” In the context of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*, the winning symbols is symbolized by “yes” (correct or right) while the loser is “no” (incorrect or wrong). In using

comparative method in-between or among symbols, it is established that the “basic strategy in using a symbol as a cue is to pair something with the thing that it is to cue... Such a symbolic association allows one thing to be used as a cue for the other (Comb & Freedman 1990, p. 126). Eventhough, like *Ifá*, *ayò ọ́lọ́pón* is a subtle medium of making an inquiry, however, emphasis is more placed on the differences than similarities because, “in making comparisons, the most important task for scientists is to discover differences that make a difference” (Lenski, & Lenski 1987, p. 3).

### **Data Collection**

In this study, *Ifá* corpora chanted by Ifáyẹ́mí Èlẹ́buubọ́n, a renowned *Ifá* priest based in Oṣogbo, Òsun State of Nigeria form the bulk of data in this study. This is because, the corpora contains the relevance of *ayò* in determination of controversial issues relevant to the focus of this study. However, the bulk of the corpus are still stored in the memory of many *Ifá* priests, unwritten such as *Ifá* corpora in this study. *Ifá* literature is associated with orality, eventhough, some of the corpus are undergoing written form in the contemporary Yoruba society.

### ***Ifá* corpus on *ayò ọ́lọ́pón* performance between Ọ́rúnmìlà and Ọ́gún (divinity of iron and war)**

*...inú ẹ̀sẹ-Ifá ÈjìOgbè ni mo tún fẹ́ mú wa lọ.*

I want to take us to *Ifá ÈjìOgbè* corpus.

Ọ́rúnmìlà ló di hmmmmm.

Ọ́rúnmìlà says hmmmmm

*Ifá*, emi lò ń kùn ún sí?

*Ifá*, what are you murmuring about?

Ọ́rúnmìlà ní: òun ò rí ẹ̀ni tó mọ̀wájú ọ̀rọ̀,

Ọ́rúnmìlà says: he doesn't know of anyone that knows the beginning of word.

Òun ò rẹ̀ni tó mọ̀gbẹ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀.

He doesn't know of anyone that knows the end of word.

*Níbẹ̀ ni Ọ́gún gbé wolé.*

At this point, Ọ́gún came inside.

Ọ́gún ra idà, idà náà sì tuntun.

Ọ́gún bought a new sword

Ó ń kọ bí agánrán,

Very shining

Ó ń fí mọ̀nàmọ̀nà.

That is sharpened.

*Ó wá fì han Òrúnmìlà.*

He came to show it to Òrúnmìlà

*Òrúnmìlà ni kó mú idà rẹ̀,*

Òrúnmìlà says he should put his sword,

*Ó ní kó fì sí kọ̀rọ̀ yàrá.*

in a room.

*Ògún ní: Òrúnmìlà,*

Ògún says: Òrúnmìlà,

*Òun mọ̀wájú ọ̀rọ̀,*

He knows the beginning of word

*Òun sì mèyìn ọ̀ràn.*

And the end of word

***Òrúnmìlà ní: kò burú.***

**Òrúnmìlà says there is no cause for argument**

***Ó ní kó lọ rẹ̀é fìdà rẹ̀ pamó***

**He told him to go and keep his sword somewhere**

***Kó jẹ̀ káwọ̀n tayò.***

**And to let them engage in ayò performance**

***Wọ̀n bá gbé ọ̀pọ̀n ayò síta.***

**They then brought out ayò board to play**

***Wọ̀n bá bèrẹ̀ sí tayò.***

**They then strated to be playing ayò.**

***Òrúnmìlà pa Ògún ní ayò méfà.***

**Òrúnmìlà defeated Ògún six round.**

***Ìgbà tí wọ̀n tayò tán,***

**After the game**

***Òrúnmìlà ní kí Ògún kó lọ rẹ̀é múdà rẹ̀.***

**Òrúnmìlà told Ògún to go and pick his sword.**

***Ìgbà tí Ògún débi tí idà wà***

When *Ògún* got to where his sword was kept.

*Idà àlòkù lẹ́ bá.*

He saw an obsolete sword.

*Èèkù rẹ́ ikán ti jẹ́ é.*

The handle had been destroyed by termites

*Idà tó ti ní tòn mọ̀nàmọ̀nà,*

Sword that was shining for shaping

*Enu rẹ́ ti kú*

The edges were unsharpened

*Ó wá fí han Ọ̀rúnmìlà.*

He came to show it to *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*.

*Ó ní: Báwo ló ẹ̀ jẹ́?*

He asked: Why is it like this?

*Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní: Ẹ̀bí o ló o mọ́ iwájú ọ̀rọ̀?*

*Ọ̀rúnmìlà* said: I thought you said you know the beginning of word

*Ẹ̀bí o ló o mọ̀yìn ọ̀ràn?*

Didn't you say you know the end of word

*Èyí tó o rí lẹ̀kàn, iwájú rẹ́ ni,*

The one you saw before was the front of the matter

*Bó o ẹ̀ rí i tí idà dà yìí,*

As you can see what the sword turned to be now

*Ìgbèyìn rẹ́ nùun.*

That is the end of it.

*Ó ní: O ò mọ́wájú ọ̀rọ̀,*

He says: You don't know the beginning of word.

*O ò mọ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀.*

You don't know the end of word.

***Ifá corpus on ayò ọ̀lọ́pọ̀n performance between Ọ̀rúnmìlà and Ẹ̀sàngó (divinity of lightning and thunder)***

*Ọ̀rúnmìlà ló tún di hmmmmmm.*

Once again, *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* says *hmmmmmm*

*Ifá, emi lò n kùn ún sí, Ifá?*

*Ifá*, what are you murmuring about?

*Ẓàngó náà dé,*

*Ẓàngó* also came

*Ó sèsè ra wàbì.*

He has just bought new costly cloth

*Wàbì tí wón ẹ̀ lósòò.*

The new cloth beautifully decorated

*Wón fì àrán ẹ̀oge sí i lára.*

Decorated with *arán*

*Ó wá fì han Ọ̀rúnmìlà.*

He came to show it to *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*

*Ó ní: Ọ̀rúnmìlà, emi lò n kùn ún sí?*

He said: *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*, why are you murmuring?

*Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní Ọ̀un ò rẹ̀ni tó mọ̀wájú ọ̀rọ̀ tó mẹ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀ ní.*

*Ọ̀rúnmìlà* says: he doesn't know of anyone that knows the beginning of word.

*Ọ̀un ò rẹ̀ni tó mọ̀gbẹ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀.*

He doesn't know of anyone that knows the end of word.

*Ẓàngó ní: Ọ̀un mọ̀wájú ọ̀rọ̀,*

*Ẓàngó* said: He knows the beginning of words

*Ọ̀un sì mọ̀ igbẹ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀.*

And he knows the end of the word

***Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní: kò burú,***

***Ọ̀rúnmìlà* said: it is okay,**

***kó lọ̀ rẹ̀é kó làbà rẹ̀ pamó,***

**he should go and keep his cloth (laba) somewhere**

***kó jẹ́ kí àwọ̀n tayò.***

**He should let them engage in *ayò***

***Wọ̀n bá bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí tayò.***



**They continue playing ayò ọlọpón**

*Ìgbà tó pé, Ọ̀rúnmilà ní kí Sàngó wọlé,*

**After a while, Ọ̀rúnmilà told Sàngó to come in**

*Kó lọ rẹ́é kó lábà rẹ́ jade.*

And bring his cloth

*Ìgbà tí ó yẹ lábà wò,*

When he looks at the cloth

*lábà ti dèkísà.*

Cloth had turned to rag

*Sàngó ní: È é ti rí?*

Sàngó asked: What has happened?

*Ọ̀rúnmilà ní: Šebí o lóo mọwájú ọ̀rọ̀,*

Ọ̀rúnmilà replied: Did you not say you know the beginning of word?

*Še bọ̀ọ̀ mẹ̀gbèyìn ọ̀rọ̀.*

Did you not say you know the end of word?

*Ó ní: iwájú lo rí lẹ̀èkan,*

He said: It is the beginning you earlier saw

*èyìn ni èyí tóorí nísìsìnyí.*

The end is what you are seeing now.

**Ifá corpus on ayò ọlọpón performance between Ọ̀rúnmilà and Akápò Ifá (Ifá acolyte)**

*Ọ̀rúnmilà wá mú omidan,*

Ọ̀rúnmilà then brought a Damsel

*Omọge tó rẹwà,*

A very beautiful girl

*Tó lẹdan lórùn,*

Having a neck-lace round her neck

*Tó tàdí rẹke.*

That have a good body posture

*Wón wá to ilẹ̀kẹ̀ sídìí rẹ̀.*

Her bottom was circled with beads

*Ó wá ní kí omidan ó wolé.*

He then told the lady to enter into a room.

*Ó ní kí Akápò rẹ́ ó máa bọ̀.*

He instructed the *Ifá* Acolyte to come

*Ìgbà tí yòò rí ọmọge,*

When he looked at the lady,

*Ó bá a ní ìhòhòhò rìpórìpó.*

He met her naked

*Ó wá ta kìjì*

He was shocked

*Ó ní: Bàbá Kẹ̀nyò,*

And said: Daddy *Kẹ̀nyò*

*È é ti jẹ?* Why is this so?

*È sì gbóbìnrin yín sínú ilé,*

You kept your wife inside

*Lẹ́ wá ní kí n lọ rẹ́ é bá a tó wà níhòhòhò.*

And told me to go and see her while naked

*Ó ní kó má ẹ́ agbaja,*

**He said he mustn't be troubled**

*kó jẹ́ kí àwọ̀n tayò.*

**To let them engage in *ayò***

*Ọ̀rúnmilà pa a láyò méfà.*

**Ọ̀rúnmilà defeated him six round**

*Ó ní: ọmọge tó o rí lẹ̀kẹ̀kan n nì,*

He said: The girl you earlier saw

*Tó ẹ̀ hòhòhò rìpórìpó,*

That her nakedness was pretty

*Tó lẹ́dan lórín,*

That has a neck-lace round her neck

*Tó sì ní ilẹ̀kẹ̀ nibàdí.*

And beads round her bottom

*Ó ní kó wá jẹ káwon lọ rè é yè é wò*

He said they should go and see her

*Ìgbà tí wọn ó débè,*

When they got there,

*Arúgbó ni wón bá,*

An aged person was met

*Ó ti hewú orí,*

With complete grey hairs

*O ti n tẹpá,*

Has been using walk-stick

*Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni gbogbo ara rè n gbòn.*

And all her body shaking

*Akápò ní: Baba, È é ti rí?*

*Ifá* Acolyte says: Father, why is this so?

*Omoge tó lédan lórùn tó tàdí réke ni mo rí lẹ̀ẹ̀kan,*

I once saw a very beautiful girl with a neck-lace,

*Eléwo ni tiyá arúgbó?*

Which one is a very old woman i am seeing now?

*Òrúnmilà ní: Šebí o mowájú ọ̀rọ̀,*

*Òrúnmilà* says: Did you not say you know the beginning of word?

*šebi o mẹ̀yìn ọ̀ràn.*

Don't you know the end of a matter?

*Iwájú lo rí lẹ̀ẹ̀kan*

The one you once saw was the beginning of word.

*Èyìn tún wá lo rí nígbẹ̀yìn.*

The end of the word you are now seeing

*Ìdí rè ni wí pé: gbogbo ohun tí n dán kọ ni wúrà.*

The root cause of it is that: Not all that glister are gold.

(Excerpted from audio-visual clip on Ifá theological epistle entitled: Asán nínú asán (vanity upon vanity by Ifáyemí Èlèbuùbòn)

### **Symbolism**

Semiotics approach can be associated with the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss Linguist. According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), semiology is the study of signs as part of social life. He focuses on the functions of social and cultural phenomenon within semiotic system. Saussure classifies signs into two entities: “signified and or sign-vehicle or meaning” (de Saussure 1974, p. 60), referring to the signified as forms of materials (objects, images, sounds and so on). Saussure is credited with structuralism approach which, to him, language is formed by signs that are related in multiple ways. A sign consists of two parts: one part is its form; the other part is its meaning.

Symbol is one of the semiotic modes formulated by Peirce (1931). Other modes are icons, index and codes. Peirce is of the opinion that, icon, symbol and index in addition to code should be sufficient modes to describe any form of sign within the purview of semiotics. The three modes are however interwoven such that, a sign can be described as iconic symbol, indexical symbol or symbolic icon depending on dominating features of signs in a context. The symbolic mode has to do with a situation (in the context of this study) whereby, symbolic outcome of *ayò olóppón* stands for something which is conventionally established within *Ifá* and belief of the Yoruba people.

Symbolism is considered apt for this study because it is believed that scientific knowledge as a scope in semiotics is capable of unveiling meaning relation in-between *Ifá* and *ayò olóppón* symbolism since “symbolism underlies *Ifá* divination” (Olátúnjí 2005, p. 135).

In symbol mode there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified. That is, the object or somebody as signifier and what it or S/he stands for as the signified may not be connected in similarity but rather connected as a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. Such symbol, rule and convention between the signifier and the signified must be learnt.

In the contexts of *Ifá* and *ayò* in this study, there is a convention or an agreement between the *ayò* participants: *Òrúnmilà* with *Ògún*, *ṣàngó* and *Akápò-Ifá- Ifá* acolyte. There are two symbols: ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ The agreement is based on the outcome of *ayò*. *Òrúnmilà* winning his co-contestants means ‘yes’. That is, he is right and the opponents losing to him symbolizes ‘no.’ It is based on this agreement that meaning of the symbols are interpreted. However, such meaning relations are not limited to one but multiples of meaning. The meanings may be influenced by the context of use or as a variation. Symbolism of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are information carriers that need to be interpreted in lines with cultural essence or context. Different meanings associated to a symbol makes a symbol the be learnable. The meaning invented on symbol is not

rigid or constant. That is, such a meaning from symbol may change depending on context and the users' agreement.

Importance of symbol varies with its meaning. That is, a symbol is valued because of what it symbolizes. Ability to associate different meanings to a symbol make its use appreciated. That is, we will "miss the value of a symbol, however if we think it can mean absolutely anything we wish" (Kennedy and Gioia 2007, p. 238). However, since there are only two symbols: 'yes' and 'no' alternatives, there is no multiplicity of meaning to symbols as used in this study. In a situation whereby symbolisms are restricted to two meanings, adoption of binary questions: yes, and no are two alternatives based on true and false questions. Both *ayò ọlọpọ́n* and *Ifá* are created (cultural) system: evolve out of peoples' inventions and creation. A system "refers to *an entity made up of interrelated parts*" (Lenski, & Lenski 1987, p.49). This study investigates the symbolisms of the outcome of *ayò ọlọpọ́n* and *Ifá* divination systems.

#### 4. RESULTS

The results of the *ayò* in-between *Ọ̀gún*, *ẚàngó* and *Akápò-Ifá* indicate that *Ọ̀rúnmílà* defeated each of them six times. That is, what he says is in order, right and valid. The results of the *ayò* suggest that there is spiritual involvement around the process of the game. The symbolism of the gap (of period) before the game and after indicates the periods of human existence, which is never constant, unstable and unpredictable. This is the position of *Ọ̀rúnmílà* that no condition is ever permanent. That is, *lááláá tó ròkè, ilẹ̀ ló m bọ̀* - whatever goes up must come down. The notion or Yoruba belief on time is also relative as canvassed by the *ÈjìOgbè* corpus above that *ìgbà kan ò lolé ayé gbó*. That is, no time is constant till the end. Everything depends on time, either in good or bad state. *Ìgbà kì í lọ bí òréré*. That is, no condition (time) is permanent.

The Yorubas believe that there are three major times in human existence: morning, afternoon and evening. However, evening period gains prominence than others, because *alẹ̀ làgbà*- evening is the oldest. This is the message in the *Ifá* corpus that the end of word (time) is unpredictable. The end, which is the terminal point in life. The initial appearances of a new sword turning rusted and handle eaten up by termites, cloth turning rag and a beautiful girl turning to an old woman with grey hairs validates the position of *Ọ̀rúnmílà* that no condition is constant in life. Every condition is guided by time and season.

The vindication of *Ọ̀rúnmílà* by winning *ayò* with *Ọ̀gún*, *ẚàngó* and *Akápò-Ifá* suggests that as an *Ifá* oracle spokesperson, he will always be right. He is believed to be the wisest and most intelligent as he is the *Ifá* progenitor. *Ọ̀rúnmílà* sees *ayò ọlọpọ́n* as an alternative to *Ifá* divination. *Ayò* is more accessible, available and affordable as it can be performed without sacred *Ifá* objects such as *ikin* or *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀- Ifá* divination chain, sacred tray and *ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ ọ̀sùn*- divination powder. However, both processes of *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* cannot be predicted until after the process is completed. That is, eventhough, prediction can be made (like betting)

between two or more people on a matter, no one is proven right until the results of either *ayò* or *Ifá* divination is completed. That is, no human being, except God knows the beginning and the end of word. Human-being can only have access to the beginning and the end through the art of divination. However, as being investigated in this study *ayò olópon* as well performs complementary role of divination among the Yoruba.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In the above *Ifá* corpus- *ÈjìOgbè*, it teaches about human limited knowledge that no one knows the beginning and the end of words or matters in life. The analogy of the corpus is very broadening. However, the corpus referenced above are extracted part from the whole corpus, because, it is found to be relevant, authenticating *ayò olópon*'s influence on the activities of human life.

Correlation between *Odù-Ifá* symbols and their corresponding number of harvested *ayò* seeds can be illustrated as:

<i>Ifá</i> Corpus	Symbolism in <i>Ayò olópon</i>
Èjì Ogbè	15
Ọyèkú Méjì	14
Ìwòrì Méjì	13
Òdí Méjì	12
Ìrosùn Méjì	11
Ọwónrín Méjì	10
Ọbàrà Méjì	9
Ọkànràn Méjì	8
Ọgúndá Méjì	7
Ọsá Méjì	6
Ìká Méjì	5
Òtúrúpòn Méjì	4
Òtúa Méjì	3
Ìrètẹ Méjì	2
Ọsẹ Méjì	1
Ọfún Méjì	0

### Interpretation of *Ayò* seeds in *Ifá*.

Looking at the table above, when 15 *ayò* seeds are harvested it symbolizes *Èjìogbè* in *Ifá* divination, 14 *ayò* seeds symbolizes *Ọyèkú* (Okewande 2017). However, it is not possible or against the rule to harvest one (1) *ayò* seeds. The belief is that the number symbolizes God (McGEE 1983). Likewise, it is possible that *ayò* cell is empty or that no *ayò* seed is harvested, meaning 0. It is a figure and must be represented. However, figures 0 and 1 have *Odù* (*Ọsẹ* and *Ọfún*), with *Ifá* corpora they encapsulate. The interpretation of *ayò* in *Ifá* is necessary because it makes *Ọrúnmilà*'s postulations right as *Ifá* priest. That is one of the *Odù* codes symbolized in *ayò olópon* are within winning symbols of *Ọrúnmilà* against his contestants or

opponents. It negates the general notion about *ayò* that it is associated with fun and trivial matter. The outcome of *ayò* makes *Òrúnmìlà* the winner of *Şàngó*- the divinity of thunder and lightning, *Ògún*- the divinity of Iron and war and *Akápò-Ifá- Ifá* Acolyte. He defeated them, six times each in *ayò olóṣón*. This is against the opinions of Daramola and Jeje (1967) that *ònráyè*- the unintelligent or unwise indulge in *ayò*. It is *Òrúnmìlà*, that is wiser than *Şàngó*, *Ògún* and *Akápò-Ifá* by winning them in *ayò*. This is validated by defeating his opponents. The period of *ayò* symbolizes life (morning, afternoon and the evening is the end). Unlike in *Ifá*, where the oracle's messages are exclusively accessed by a professional *Ifá* priest, in *ayò olóṣón* both the players share the number of *ayò* seeds from the board by harvesting. In *Ifá*, only *babaláwo-Ifá* priest dominates both the board and information. There is no monopoly or manipulation of the board in *ayò*, whoever attempts to do so is described as being fraudulent. However, the player with more *ayò* seeds wins the game as in the case of *Òrúnmìlà* and the trio above. Monopoly of *Ifá*'s information is characterized by the fact that the system involves the supernatural agents which makes the process to be spiritually induced unlike in the context of *ayò olóṣón* that is social in nature. However, it is found out that there are latent spiritual elements in *ayò olóṣón*, which makes the process to be spiritually.

The belief on spiritual connotation around *ayò olóṣón* is buttressed by the fact that there are communities where *ayò* seeds are used in *Ifá* divination with the same results of *odù*. For example, among the *Ìjùnú* community in Kogi State of Nigeria, *isèyó*- *ayò* seeds are used instead of *ikin*- sacred *Ifá* palm-nuts (Ọbayemi 1983). That is, *omọ ayò*- *ayò* seeds believed to be used in trivial and entertainment are never looked down upon.<sup>1</sup> In this situation, the same *odù* code is used like in *Ifá* divination. This indicates that, there is nexus in-between *Ifá* and *ayò olóṣón* in functional roles of making an enquiry or findings.

In the *Ifá* corpus above *ayò olóṣón* was performed in-between deities- *Òrúnmìlà*, *Ògún* and *şàngó* and human-beings- *Akápò- Ifá: Ifá* Acolyte. *Ayò* is always played among the players are in almost age brackets. Reliability and dependability of the results of *ayò* is buttressed by the fact that, *Òrúnmìlà* recommended to the three opponent players to engage in *ayò* to find out who was right about the argument that: no one (human) knows the beginning and the end of word, which *Ògún*, *şàngó* and *Akápò- Ifá* claimed contrary. One would have expected that, *Òrúnmìlà* being a progenitor of *Ifá* oracle would recommend *Ifá* divination, which he is going to be the diviner (as a professional priest). One can aver that, since *Ifá* divination results may be complex to interpret, the contestant will be robbed of interpreting *Ifá* symbols that manifest; unlike in *ayò olóṣón*, where the results are transparent, simple and open.

*Òrúnmìlà*, as the *Ifá* progenitor works like a candle that light to others around to see and unto himself. His proposition was vindicated and his predictions guide others aright as well. He is an intermediary between

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<sup>1</sup> The general notion about *ayò* seeds is only limited to play. It is a common saying that *eré là à fọmọ ayò şe*. we only play with *ayò* seeds.

human-beings, the divinities and the God. As a spokesperson, he has the intellect- spiritual and human to interpret the mind of God by divination. Divinities, human-beings, plants and animals have been guided by the divination- knowledge of *Ifá* in the past (Abimbola 1968, 1969 & 1976, Salami 2002 and Odegbola 2010). That is,

Without *Ifá*, the importance of other gods would diminish. If a man is being punished by the other gods he can only know that by consulting *Ifá*. If a community is to make sacrifice to one of its gods, it can only know this by consulting *Ifá*. So that in this way, *Ifá* is the only mouthpiece of Yoruba traditional religion taken as a whole. As a mouthpiece, *Ifá* serves to popularise the other gods; he serves to immortalize them.

With his great wisdom, knowledge and understanding, *Ifá* co-ordinate the work of all the gods in the Yoruba pantheon. He serves as a ‘middleman’ between the people and their ancestors, ‘He is the mouthpiece and the public relation officer of all other Yoruba gods’ (Abimbola 1976, p. 9).

The above opinion is supported by the opinion of *Òrúnmìlà*, who is the interpreter of *Ifá*'s voice to human understanding language. *Ògún*, *Şàngó* and *Akápò-Ifá* were rightly guided by his position and evinced from the *Ifá* corpus. The validation of his opinion was however authenticated by *ayò olópon* and not *Ifá* in this context.

The philosophy of the Yoruba being canvassed by the *Ifá* corpus and being supported by *Òrúnmìlà* is being coded in *ayò olópon* philosophy that *ìgbèyìn ni aláyò ó ta*. That is, the end results of *ayò* is a determinant factor to the players. The ultimate aim of the player is to determine who among the players is more dexterous, intelligent and wiser between the two players. This is alluded to, in the *Ifá* corpus as *ìgbèyìn ọ̀rò*-end of the word. That is, the beginning, morning and afternoon periods are subsidiaries of the evening- end of a matter. Meaning that, *ayò olópon* like *Ifá*, is a philosophy of life and reality far from being described as a fallacy, fun and trivial.

Human knowledge including the deities are limited to comprehend and predict the future. This is supported by *Òtúúrúpon Méjì* corpus as interpreted by the author that:

*Ọlọgbón ni ò ta kókó omi sítí aşo*

No wise man can tie the water on the edge of his cloth

*Mòrànmòràn ni o mọ iye èèpè ilẹ̀*

The most knowledgeable ones cannot count the number of grains of sand on the earth

*A rìnnà kan kan ò débi ọ̀nà gbe pẹ̀kun*

Greatest traveler cannot reach the end of the world's path

*A difa fun Ọ̀rúnmìlà tí nlọ̀ rẹ̀é gbé ọ̀pò orí wáyé*

These were *Ifá*'s messages to *Òrúnmìlà*. (Awodiran 2012, pp. 20-21).



As indicated in the above *Ifá* corpus, human knowledge is limited by not able to do some things in life. These are metaphorical and philosophical expressions that no one knows the beginning and end of matters. It is by divine wisdom which *Ifá* plays a major role in, that the impossibility can be made possible. Interpretation of the voice of *Ifá* is divine. In *Ifá* corpus *Ògúndaako* otherwise known as *Ògúnda Òbàrà*, *Òrúnmilà* reports in authors translation that:

*Tí èyàn ò bá fì ogbón inú kí òun*

If the *Ifá* devotee does not use wisdom to interpret the divine message

*Ó ní òun yóò sọ pé 'koja ifa'*

They will say he is talking rubbish (Awodiran 2012, p. 73).

The language of *Ifá* is complex to the effect that its symbolism is strange to a layman. The meaning of *Ifá's* language can only be interpreted by the *Ifá* priest. The language is expressed in a proverbial or metaphorical form.

Among the Yoruba, *Ifá* is consulted through *Òrúnmilà* in time of confusion, contention, conflict and controversies. *Ifá* is a counsellor that guides on the rightful step(s) to be taken. However, *Òrúnmilà* engaged in *ayò* to prove himself right. *Ifá* corpus *Ògbèyónú* otherwise known as *Ogbè Ògúnda*, that *Ifá* “needed to consult superior counsellor. “*eni tó mowájú ọ̀rò tó m̀yìn ọ̀rò*. The one that knows the beginning and the end of all phenomena in the universe” (Awodiran, 2012, p. 131). However, *Òrúnmilà's* options for *ayò* *ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* to validate that he, as the *Ifá* oracle can predict the beginning and end of all matters. And that, *ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* is a reliable medium to prove his case right. The implication of this is that *ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* activities complement *Ifá* divination function in some instances. That is, while *ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* basic function is entertainment, its secondary role is discernable in other cultural contexts. *Ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* can therefore be regarded as a subsidiary of *Ifá* divination.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is found out from the study that, *ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* is a game of the intelligent which can be a yardstick for measuring the wisdom of participants. It is equally found out that the wit or wisdom of the winner is supported by the divinities. Likewise, the game can be played without the spectators but the environment saturated or controlled by the spiritual agents' backing the winners in a situation whereby the game is played by betting such as in-between *Òrúnmilà* and Sango, *Ògún* and *Akápò Òrúnmilà*- Acolyte of *Òrúnmilà*. As *ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* mostly accommodates the mature participants, it is found out that the divinities were once *ayò* participants during their time on the earth. Players sometimes can engage in *ayò*, not for entertainment or fun but for resolving and solving some controversial issues such as between *Òrúnmilà* and the trio deities earlier mentioned. *Ayò ọ̀lọ̀pọ̀n* has become the ultimate accolade of *Ifá* in particular and Yoruba culture in

general. Findings show that *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is a nascent Yoruba indigenous cultural activity that have potentials for societal development.

It must be noted that, unlike other Yoruba indigenous games such as *ẹkẹ/ìjàkadi/gídígò*- wrestling or *ìdí-òré mi ni n ó fí sí* or *bíírípò*- hide and seek games that are majorly for entertainment, *ayò ọlọpọ́n*'s value spanned entertainment to making an inquiry and proffer solution to problems just like *Ifá*. The cultural aspersions about the game that *ònráyè ní tayò*- it is unintelligent that engages in *ayò* is against the benefits behind the game and cannot stand the test of time. *Ayò* is beyond fun and, far beyond trivial matters. Thus the aspersions against *ayò ọlọpọ́n*'s unalloyed benefits to Yoruba does not translate into practice because, there is congruence on *ayò ọlọpọ́n*'s results or outcome with *Ifá* predictions, as validated by this study. It can therefore, be averred from the study that like *Ifá*, the importance of *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is unabated and therefore its performance should not be abased.

This study recommends, sequel to the relevance of *ayò* to the players and the cultural relevance the game have in contemporary time, the period of the game should not be confined or restricted to the evening period alone but, should rather be engaged in at any time. The opinion that those that are idle can embark or engage in *ayò* should be discouraged. Some Yoruba cultural beliefs about the game such that *eré là á fayò ẹ-* *ayò* is only for relaxation and fun and that, it lazy, unserious and unintelligent are found of engaging in *ayò* be discouraged. Like plays or drama that mimic life or reality, *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is an imitation of *Ifá*. That is, there is reminiscence of *Ifá* divination around the context of *ayò ọlọpọ́n*. That is, *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is a metaphor of life; as "life is a story and stories imitate life and life imitate stories, life reflects stories and stories reflect life. When life is over it is celebrated by a story or stories" (Akporbaro, 2001, p. 67). *Ifá* is celebrated by the stories in the *Ifá* corpus by *ayò ọlọpọ́n*. As stories reflect and imitate life, so is play or recreation such as *ayò ọlọpọ́n*.

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