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# 11. RECREATION, SPIRITUALITY AND SEMIOTIC INVESTIGATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN IFA' AND AYO' OLÓPÓN AMONG THE YORÚBÁ OF NIGERIA

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## Abstract

In a predominantly Yorùbá society, *Ifá'* is believed to be the foundation of Yorùbá culture. Therefore, almost every aspect of Yorùbá life- religion, philosophy, science, ideology, recreation, literature- links back to *Ifá'* in one way or another. Previous works neither establish any link between *Ifá'* and *ayo' olópón*, game board nor seen *ayo' olópón* beyond recreation or relaxation. These gaps are filled by this study. The study relies substantially on Yorùbá literary texts, especially *Ifá'* literary corpus and Yorùbá oral genres and analyzed with semiotics, which is the science of signs, because, symbolism is basic to *Ifá'* divination system. The indexical symbol is established to connect *ayo' olópón* with *Ifá'*. Meaning that, *ayo' olópón*, possesses some religious connotations. This study concludes that, some African social symbols and art have inherent religious connotations as a way of demonstrating their belief in other aspects of their life.

**Key words:** *Ifá'*, *ayo' olópón*, Index, Semiotics, Spirituality.

## Introduction

This work examines the relationship between *Ifá'*, one of the major Yorùbá divinities and *ayo' olópón*, a Yorùbá traditional game board. Every society associates values on some objects than the other. Those objects or symbols can be categorized into two types: immediate and dynamic. The immediate objects are ordinary objects without any spiritual reference, while dynamic objects are objects that have spiritual or religious reference. These two forms of objects are described and determined by the cultural values the society invented on the symbols. The dynamic objects, which *Ifá'* and *ayo' olópón* belong, play vital roles in Yorùbá life.

In human society, "The objects that surround him are never mere physical realities; they are the properties of his life colored and interpreted by his



mentality" (Maciver and Page 117). For instance, *Ifá*'s objects such as *ikin*, (Ifá sacred palm nuts) *opón Ifá* (Ifá divination board) and *iróké-Ifá* (Ifá's club for tapping of *ikin*) are immediate objects among the Yorùbá in general and to *Ifá* worshippers in particular. Before now, *ayò ọlópón*'s objects, such as *isẹyọ* (ayo seeds) and *opón-ayo* (ayo board) are believed to belong to dynamic objects because, they are more associated with recreation and are therefore not objects of supernatural values or reference. Therefore, this study attempts to, demonstrate connections between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlópón* on one hand and, on the other hand, establish *ayò ọlópón* beyond a mere recreation or relaxation. This new orientation suggests that, religious and social life of the Yorùbá people cannot be separated from each other (Òkẹwándé 117-128).

The semiotic investigation of *ayò ọlópón* as established in this study will go a long way to help discover and redefine the relevance and importance of *ayò ọlópón* in the Yorùbá sociocultural and religious lives. Cultural studies that focus attention on the between *Ifá*, and *ayò ọlópón* are therefore desirable. Despite the popularity of *Ifá* and *ayò ọlópón* among the Yorùbá and in the Diasporas, no attention has been paid to the religious, socio-cultural and recreational aspects of *ayò ọlópón*, in relation to *Ifá*.

#### What *Ifá* is or meant to be

*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. However, the religious knowledge of *Ifá* is explored in this study.

Akintola (1999) sees *Ifá* as the philosophy of or wisdom divinely revealed to the Yorùbá deity of *Ifá*, *Ọrúnmilá*. Farrow describes *Ifá* to be the greatest oracle of the Yorùbá that is "consulted on all important occasions" (36). *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 (Abimbólá 14). Munoz 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" (179). Because of the wide spread of *Ifá* that cut cross the nations of the globe, *Ifá* is known to different people by different names. 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 (Odeyemi 5). In fact, *Ifá* has over 70 million followers in Africa and the America. 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 1). *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. *Ifá* religion has been a means by which Yorùbá culture (including language) is propagated at home and in the diaspora. As a result of the different roles of *Ifá* in various aspects of the Yorùbá life, *Ifá*

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 Africa 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* (Abimbólá vi).

The above opinion shows that, art works and objects are means by which the beliefs of the people, especially the Yorùbá is keenly associated, that is, they are media of communication with the supernatural or the divine.

All the cultural contents of *Ifá* have been 'codified.' The codifications are realized as *Ifá* symbols in forms of *Odù* (major and minor). *Ifá* poetry is a sacred Yorùbá genre that nobody may add or subtract from. Like Holy books of Quran and Bible to the Muslims and Christians, the same is *Ifá* epistles to the Yorùbá indigenous worshippers, because, the *Ifá* epistle is, "preserved and disseminated from ancient times. It is believed that in this way the text in the *Ifá* literary corpus have been kept free from errors. The corpus, therefore, remains till today, one of the reliable genres of the Yorùbá oral literature" (Abimbólá 20). In the opinions of other authors, like as Yemitan and Ogundele, *Ifá* "jẹ imọ ijìnlẹ lẹtọ ara rẹ, ohun tí a lẹ pẹ ní ẹka imọ sayẹnsì. Iṣeji, o jẹ oríṣii ẹsìn ibílẹ ilẹ Yorùbá kan" (ix). Meaning that, *Ifá* is knowledge of science on its own. Secondly, it is a separate Yorùbá religion. The implication of this statement is that, *Ifá*'s knowledge can be properly and

better understood by scientific analysis or theory. In short *Ifá* is basic to the understanding of all aspects of Yorùbá life. This observation makes Qbáyomí to succinctly say that, *Ifá* "is fundamental in the explanation of the components of the Yorùbá culture" (76). As a result of *Ifá*'s connections with various aspects of Yorùbá life, investigating *Ifá*'s relationship with *ayò olóppón* is necessary.

### *Ayò olóppón* as a Yorùbá Recreation

Every society has different recreational activities associated with the people. *Ayò olóppón* is one of the games associated with the Yorùbá people. The geographical spread and popularity of *ayò olóppón* is not only among the Yorùbá but, globally. As a result of this, the game is called by different names among different nations of the world. 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, *AyoEleb* in Igbo and *Kalati* in Sweden (Appiah-Agy 1-2). It is not an exaggeration to say that, *ayò olóppón* is the most popular game of the Yorùbá recreations at home and abroad.

Kòmóláfè (149 and 78) estimates Yorùbá traditional games to be over twenty. He categorized them into four: indoor games, outdoor games, children games and adult games. *Ayò olóppón* is an outdoor game played mostly by the male adults. Among all the games, *ayò olóppón* has more materials than the others. It is the only Yorùbá game that has international recognition; the game also has the most standardized rules and processes, probably because of the game associations with *Ifá*, because, *Ifá* has also been established to have more materials than any other means of divination (Mustapha and Aromóláran 14). Therefore, relating the game with *Ifá* will go a long way to better understanding of the origin of the game and its relationship with the religious life of the Yorùbá people.

Ládélé et al, Dáramólá and Jéjé, Arómóláran and Mustapha, worked on the principles governing *ayò olóppón*. However, these previous works did not attempt to relate symbols and codes in *Ifá* divination system to those symbols and codes in *ayò olóppón*. This was perhaps 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.

It is significant to examine critically the relationship of *Ifá* with the game so as to determine with a reasonable degree of accuracy, its origin in relation to Yorùbá people. This is necessary because, before now, the origin of the

game is hazy. For example, Haggerty (1) opines that, "*ayò olóppón* is the oldest board game that is still widely played in the world today. It has been in existence for the seventeen thousand years... Its exact origin has been lost to history." Therefore, a thorough investigation of the links between *ayò olóppón* and *Ifá*, the springboard of the Yorùbá culture will significantly improve our understanding and claim that, the game started or originated among the Yorùbá. Apart from establishing the origin of the *ayò olóppón*, its values are to be more appreciated as a Yorùbá cultural heritage by its perceived links with *Ifá*. For example, O' Connel observes that, "nowadays, this game board is played worldwide and many of the original values are not upheld or recognized" (3).

The wisdom of the Yorùbá in particular and Africans generally towards these art works (which *ayò olóppón* is one of such African ancient creative art works associated with the Yorùbá people) has been subject of debates by different scholars from various disciplines relating to African studies. Art works, including cultural objects cannot be dissociated from the wisdom of the people past or present,

But it is a matter of surprise that how art appeared in the dim past, hundreds of thousands years back. What inspiration acted behind those aesthetic activities? The Anthropologists, art historians, art critics, philosophers all seek answer. However, the various pursuits of creativity have been classified in a number of groups like visual art, oral literature, music dance etc. Among these, the visual art is the oldest as well as a tangible form... Although much of the evidences have perished; only a few have survived... (Roy 521).

*Opón ayò* and *opón-Ifá* are some of the Yorùbá ancient visual art materials that are closely related with the belief and culture of the Yorùbá people. Interestingly, *ayò olóppón* and *opón-Ifá* are some of the Yorùbá art works that survived till today.

Before now, there is no answer to some questions relating to *ayò*, such as why and what *ayò olóppón* was invented for? Who invented (the game board)? And of what relationship is *ayò olóppón* with *Ifá*? One of the likely answers to the last question is addressed by this study. One of "connecting elements" is realized in Index as demonstrated in this study. An attempt to link *ayò olóppón* with *Ifá* in indexical mode will suggest that, *ayò olóppón*'s input and influence on the Yorùbá cultural is beyond mere relaxation.

## Semiotics

Semiotics is adopted for this study because, *Ifá*, the central element in this work communicates in signs and symbols through the interaction of divination objects. Semiotics can be traced to the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss Linguist. Saussure observes that, 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 (60) classifies signs into two entities: "signified and or sign-vehicle or meaning." He refers to the signified, mostly in form of materials (objects, images, sounds and so on). Saussure is credited with structuralism approach. To him, language is formed by signs which are related in multiple ways. A sign or a word consists of two parts: one part is its form; the other part is its meaning. The association between form and meaning of a sign is fixed by conventions of language use. This means, links between the form and meaning are inseparable.

Peirce opines that, Semiotics is an abstract entity. Sign is something which stands to somebody or something in some respects or capacity. The relation of "standing for" is mediated by an interpretant. "A sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way the interpretant becoming in turn a sign" (Peirce 35). This means anything can be adopted as a sign. However, there must be logical and convincing of associating meaning to a sign, which most of the time, such connection must be culturally accounted for.

A sign can create multiple meanings, depending on the culture in which it exists. The application of the cultural categories depends on the individual or personal knowledge. Lobner (201) asserts that, "we are all some ways apart from commanding all cultural knowledge, as we all have little experience in many areas of everyday life." The distinction between the semantic knowledge and world knowledge is a doctrine of cultural semiotics.

Three modes of significations are regarded to be sufficient to describe any form of sign. These are icon, symbol and index. In an iconic mode, the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified in one way or the other. According to Peirce, one can perceive a direct resemblance between the signifier and the signified. In symbol mode, there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol's connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. In Yorùbá tradition, it can be realized in form of *Ároko*, as such an object or something

stands for something or somebody in real life. For instance, the Yorùbá believes that "fish" stands for negative and 'crab' for positive or to determine the 'yes' or 'no' of an interrogative statement such as 'ẹja n bakan?' (fish or crab?). It is culturally accepted that 'fish' symbolizes (stands for) no or negative and 'crab' symbolizes (stands for) yes or positive.

Some of the Yorùbá religious beliefs and writing systems are realized through the "semiotic lens." The needs to study the society's symbols has been canvassed. This is because,

All communication, whether through language or otherwise, makes use of symbols. Society could scarcely exist without them...In many primitive societies the identification of the symbol and the things symbolized a common "semantic failing" in all societies is often so complete with the symbol...The symbol is at once a definite focus of interest, a means of communication, and a common ground of understanding...This is a peculiar property of the cultural symbol...The fact helps to explain the role of symbolism in the more mystical forms of religion...Many symbols are, infact, "morale symbols" suggesting and conveying the sense of group or spirit de corpse (Maciver and Page 153-4).

The identification, description and understanding roles of symbols in the people's beliefs, thoughts and manners of life cannot be separated. The modes of these symbol codifications as they relate to the African religion have been subject of cultural scholarship.

In an indexical mode, (which is the mode employed by this study) the sign is directly connected in some ways to its objects. In this mode, the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some ways (physically or casually) to the signified. Examples include: natural signs: smoke and fire, cloud and thunder, lighting and rain, a knock on the door and phone ringing, and so on. Sometimes, there is a sense of duality, as realized in smoke/fire. In this mode of signification, the connection between the signifier and the signified may not be in direct resemblance as in the iconic symbols; but one suggests the other in the mind of an observer. Indexes are central in the signification process because the very nature of the signifier is to refer to the signified. The mode is also referred to by Peirce as 'thirdness' and 'legisign'. Hawkes proposes that when two or three forms of signs co-occur in a hierarchical



order, the indexical sign dominates.

In an indexical semiotic mode, the presence of a signifier forms an input to the output of the signified; there is a form of influence. For instance, with cloud and rain; the formation of cloud is an input that suggests it is likely to rain; even though, it may not rain. This situation is supported with cultural meaning, "A ki i gbô kiku ojo, ka domi inu agbada nu." Meaning that, one should not pour away the water in a container because of mere signs of about to rain. The philosophical relevance of this statement lies in the anticipation that, the sign(s) to rain is not sacrosanct. For example, formation of cloud may suggest rain may or may not fall. The statement is to guide against disappointment.

The probability, positive or negative in this type of signs gives room for two forms of indexical modes of sign: conditional and unconditional indexical symbols. Some Yorùbá philosophical statements fall into the category of conditional indexical symbols. For instance, the statement that, "Òrukò/Itú dé oorùn dé." Meaning that, a he goat is suspected to be around by its odour. The cultural meaning of this statement is conditional, because, the signifier (odour) signaled the coming of the signified (He goat). This conforms to conditional truth rules that, wherever there is he-goat, there must be sensing odor. This form of signs can be realized in statement like, "Bí iná bá jó loko mòjàlà ni yó sòfófó." Meaning that, *mòjàlà* is the tell-tale of the bush burning (Sótundé 178). *Mòjàlà* (particles from burnt grasses or bush) is an index for bush-burning. The barking of a dog is also an index for a strange thing(s) around (visible or invisible). This is coded in Yorùbá saying that, "Bí aja kò bá rí kò ní gbó." Meaning that, if a dog doesn't see, it won't bark (155). There may also be multi-level of meanings associated with an indexical sign. For instance, a sudden stop or cessation of the monthly menstrual period of a woman may be an index of pregnancy, menopause or disease. For instance, if a woman is sixty years of age, cessation of the menstrual period is likely to be an index of menopause, else, it may be pregnancy or disease. This means that there are associations of rules to a sign. In this instance, the rule is: if A, then B, else, X or Y. That is, if there is a stop in the menstrual period of a woman, then, it is an index that, she has reached a menopause age; else, she is pregnant or has a disease. It is the meaning invented on any symbol that makes or adds value to such a symbol. In other words, a symbol has no value if it has no associated meaning.

The interrelationships among the three modes of signification above are not exclusive of one another. For example, one may account for symbolic,

iconic or indexical symbols in some Yorùbá names such as *Dúdúyemí* and *Jatò*. These names are symbolic as they represent some individuals on one hand. On the other hand, the black complexion in *Dúdúyemí* and fair in complexion in *Jatò* may be iconic symbols, as they resemble colors. Surname of an individual is an index to the family or parents. Therefore, at least, in a name of an individual there should be a symbolic name, representing an individual and index, representing the family or parents. Indexical signification underlies other modes, as it suggests to something. In a situation whereby two or three modes of signification co-exist, the context will determine the prominent mode. This is why "we can have symbolic icons, iconic symbols, etc., and the nature of signs ultimately dominant mode will depend finally on its context" (Ogundèjì 41). Therefore, a semiotic mode of signification is contextual. These modes of signification manifest in one form or the other in discussing the level of relationship between the elements of *Ifá* on one hand, and those of elements of *ayò olópon* on another hand.

Semiotic modes of descriptions will be incomplete without code, because, the link rule of signs and their meanings are made known by code. A code is "a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication" (Geoffery and Short 124). Code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. This may be realized in a multi-level coding, that is, codes are realized in different forms- behavioral, verbal, gnomonic, proraiesis, hermeneutics, epistemology, gnomonic and moral among others.

*Ifá* and *ayò olópon* materials are some of the cultural heritage of the Yorùbá people, with which their beliefs, especially religious and social beliefs are encoded. These artistic works of *opón-Ifá*, *opón-ayo*, *ikin* and *isẹyọ* deserve to be analyzed with different research tools in order to establish their social and religious influence on the beliefs of the Yorùbá people. African cultural heritage materials are "African's artistic knowledge and style as well as his developments with durable paints, but in addition, valuable data are thus provided about African's and their environment during and after the Neolithic Age" (Harris 37).

#### *Ifá* and *Ayò Olópon* Processes

Two *Ifá* divination objects are mostly used by the *Ifá* priests. These are *òpèlẹ* (divination chain with eight *òpèlẹ* seeds tied to it), and *ikin*, the *Ifá* sacred palm nuts. *Ikin* is however employed in this study. This is because, on one hand, *ikin* is an iconic symbol of *Ọrúnmilá* and on the other hand, *ikin*'s

medium of divination is also more reliable or dependable than other media of divinations.

The *Ifá* priest puts the sixteen sacred palm-nuts (*ikin*) in his palms and attempts to take the palm-nuts with the second palm, "if one palm-nut is left in his hand, he makes two marks on the yellow powder of divination, but, if two palm-nuts are left in his hand, he makes one mark. If none of the palm-nut is left, he makes no marks at all. This process is repeated until an *Odu* signature is obtained" (Abimbólá 11).

*Ayò olóppón* 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). It is played in such a way that, the players sit in direct opposite to each other with the game board at the centre on a bench or an object. The game starts after each of the twelve holes is occupied by four *ayò* seeds, making a total number of forty-eight *ayò* seeds. The game is mostly played by two matured males (of estimated fifteen years of age) in the open and watched by the spectators.

The *ayò olóppón* starts by taking any of the four *ayò* seeds on the row of the game board player, distributing it in an anticlockwise movement in the next four holes. This is known as sowing. This exercise is repeated until all the *ayò* seeds in his hand are exhausted. None of the holes must be skipped when sowing. "Harvesting" or "capturing" which is the process of winning *ayò* seeds of the opponent player is done, when the *ayò* seeds in a hole (after sowing) are two or three up to the maximum of five holes in a single movement or sowing of *ayò* seeds.

The winner is determined by the player having more number of *ayò* seeds than the opponent. That is, a player with more than twenty-four *ayò* seeds emerges as a winner, since the total number of *ayò* 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 *òmi* (draw game). The game continues until a winner emerges twice. If a loser of *ayò* game is defeated more than twice, he gives way for another *Ayò* 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 continue the game.

#### Discussion: Links between *Ifá* and *Ayò Olóppón* Indeces

Recreation is a means of measuring societal intelligence, because, some human values are associated with it. This observation shows that, recreation

"denotes the mental excellence of the people" (Roy 657). It is observed in this study that some activities in *ayò olóppón*, as one of the major Yorùbá recreational activities are connected with *Ifá*, making those activities to be perceived beyond relaxation. For example, the process of tapping of *ikin*, in *Ifá* divination is so connected with *ayò olóppón* to the extent that, the verbal code *lufá* is often heard through the *ayò* players, an example of this is demonstrated during the sowing of *ayò* seeds, it must not extend beyond five holes to harvest. Whenever the *ayò* seeds extend beyond the five holes, such seeds are referred to have insulted *Ifá*. One believes that, it is "a slap" on *Ifá*. Daramólá and Jéjé succinctly put it that, "nwón kì ígba eniyan l'aye lati jẹ, bí ayò nàa bá bọ s'orí ihò mēfēfēfā tí nḡ nī ilé alátaḡo wón, nwón a nī ayò nàa 'lu'fá'" (10 & 11). Meaning that, they don't allow a player to capture, if the sowing of seeds extends to the six holes in the opponent holes, in this case, it is believed that, "the game slaps *Ifá*." The statement, *lufá*- "slap *Ifá*" points to my assertion that suggests a cordial relationship between the process in *Ifá* divination and *ayò olóppón*. This claim about *lu Ifá* (slap *Ifá*) clearly shows a relationship of *ayò olóppón* with *Ifá*. One would note that, fraud in *ayò* is not linked to other gods; this is why one does not hear *lu Šàngó*, *lu Èṣù*, or *lu Šanpónnà* and so on; but one hears *lu Ifá*- beat *Ifá*. Another semantic interpretation associated with the statement *lufá* is insulting *Odu* in the presence of *Ifá*. The sacredness of both *Ọrúnmilá/Ifá* and *Odu* as divinities must be preserved, respected and regarded; even, in the context of recreation which *ayò olóppón* is associated with. This statement *lufá* in *ayò olóppón* is a verbal code that suggests a link of *ayò olóppón* with *Ifá*. The output of the "beating" of *ikin* and *isẹyọ* results to the production of sounds. The echo of the sound is generally believed to conjure, invoke or communicate with the spirit, in particular, *Ifá* oracle.

A similar process of observing and preserving the sacredness of *Odu*, symbolized by the *ayò* seeds is observed in the sowing of seeds by *ayò olóppón* participants/players. It is demonstrated when the counting of accumulated seeds (*Odu*) is on course. The process produces sounds by *omọ ayò* (*ayò* seeds) thereby, creating a "sonorous sound." In fact, the aesthetic value of the game is observed by this process. Roy asserts that, "some aesthetic senses are usually involved in these behaviours" (657). O' Connell further observes that, "The sound of the seeds, or whatever medium one uses for the game pieces, dropping into the depressions is said to be rhythmic" (2).

Likewise, the same exercise is equally observed with the accumulation of the harvested *ayò* seeds on the player's palm, whereby the players pour the

seeds from one palm to the other, in the process of doing this, sound is produced. The sound produced is an index to the play of *ayo* game. As a result, someone that is not too far from *ayo* arena will be signaled through the echo of the sounds by *ayo* seeds that the process of *ayo* game is ongoing nearby.

The indexical mode described above is in this study believed to be an extension of the *Ifá* divination by *ikin*- the sixteen sacred *Ifá* palm-nuts. For example, during the *Ifá* divination process, the *babaláwo* attempts to take the whole of *ikin* from one palm with the other hand. This gives the result of the symbol to be marked or written on the *Ifá* divination board (as indicated under *Ifá* divination process). The sound produced by *ikin* in an attempt to take the palm-nuts indicates an index to *Ifá* divination. One will note that, *ikin* in *Ifá* divination and *isèyó* in *ayo* game are oracular objects as a result of the sounds produced by these objects. The sound produced as a result of tapping of *ikin* with *Ifá* club-*iróké*, and the taking of *ikin* from one palm of *babaláwo* to the other and the tapping of *ayo* seeds in a hole by a player and sometimes the pouring of *ayo* seeds from one palm to the other suggest a strong link between *Ifá* and *ayo olóṣṣon*. The sounds in both *Ifá* divination and *ayo olóṣṣon* are indices to the performance of *ayo* game and *Ifá* divination. The sound is a signal to the hearer of the likely invitation, arrival, and the presence of the spirit of *Ọrúnmìlà* to the course of divinations. This link is invisible, since there is the participation of the spirits involved. The process described above is considered in this study as inordinary, but spiritual, as it brings about or invites other invisible forces or agents into the process. The sounds produced by the *Ifá* divination object- *ikin* and *ayo* seeds- *isèyó* suggest links between *Ifá* and *ayo olóṣṣon*.

Likewise, during *Ifá* divination, it is imperative for the priest to knock or tap the face of the divination board with a tapper; *Iróké* (one of *Ifá* paraphenlia); thereby, creating sound in the process. Daramóla and Jéje, Olunládé, Adékéye, assert that, the process of knocking the face of *Ifá* divination board produces sound to invite the *Ifá* oracle to the process of divination. The process is to invoke or conjure the ancestors and the spirit of the client involved in the course of divination. To initiate the ritual, the *babaláwo* places the tray in front of him and taps rhythmically on it with the pointed end of the tapper, invoking the presence of *Ọrúnmìlà*, past diviners, and other *Orìṣà*. The Yorùbá believes in the corporate existence of their divinities, to them, *awo nií gbáwo nígbòwó*. Meaning that, no divinity works in isolation and succeeds.

Duródolá says an elephant tusk could be used in place of tapper, while Pogosone and Akandé (9) described the tapper or club as, "carved wooden or ivory object used to invoke *Ifá* while performing divination." Abimbólá says the object in use could be *Iróké* or *Iróṣá*. "These are carved club-like objects used by *Ifá* priests to invoke the spirit of *Ifá* during the process of divination. The *Ifá* priest performs the invocation by knocking the ornamented tray with *Iróké* to produce a sonorous sound while he simultaneously chants the praise of *Ifá*" (12).

The sixteen palm nuts on the tray are not spared from being tapped by the *Ifá* club, *iróké* or *iróṣá*. "The diviner beats the sixteen palm nuts on his tray and taps his bell against the tray" (Salamone 2). While the tapping is in progress, statement of apology is uttered by the *Ifá* priest not to take this attitude (beating of the sacred *Ifá* divination objects) for an offense. This prompted diviner do say that, "*Ifá bí mo bá lù ọ, maṣe lù mí sán ara ẹnì làà kókó nà ká tó lù'fá*" (Adékéye 81). Meaning that, *Ifá*, if I beat you, do not retaliate, as one beats himself before beating *Ifá*. This is to appease *Ọrúnmìlà* that, the divination boards and the objects- *ikin* are revered. This is to show that, the diviner is not performing the action of "tapping" wilfully or for selfish purpose. Therefore, sounds, including the processes of sounds production are indexical symbols that link *Ifá* and *ayo olóṣṣon* together.

Another noticeable links in the *Ifá* and *ayo olóṣṣon* is in the structure of *ikin* and *isèyó*. Since the periods of use of *ikin* (These are sixteen sacred *Ifá* divination palm nuts. *Ọrúnmìlà*, the *Ifá* progenitor is believed to symbolized with these palm nuts- *ikin idáṣa*) as an object of *Ifá* divination and *isèyó* as an object of *ayo olóṣṣon*, the materials have not changed because of their immediate values and nature. The structural cult relationship between *ikin* and *ayo* seeds is also observed in their use. The practice of *Ifá* divination among the *Ijumu*, is also based upon sixteen basic *Odu* as among other Yorùbá speaking people. In addition, the *isèwó* or *isèyó* are used and not palm kernels: (*ikin*), "the counters used are *Isèwó* or *Isèyó* seeds and not palm kernels... *ayo* are employed instead of sixteen palm nuts" (Obayomi 83). One observes that, *isèyó*, which is commonly used in *ayo olóṣṣon* has a complementary religious function in *Ifá* divination among the *Ijumu* (a major tribe among the Yorùbá) because, *isèyó* performs the same purpose as *ikin*. The use of *isèyó* among tribe of Yorùbá people for *Ifá* divination suggests that, there is a strong synergy between *Ifá* divination and *ayo olóṣṣon*. This shows *ayo olóṣṣon* as an extension of *Ifá* to some extent. This further suggests a cordial links between *Ifá* divination object- *ikin* and *ayo* seed- *isèyó*.



From the historical development of *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* objects have followed the same patterns. For example, Òkẹwándé demonstrates that, both *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* make use of pebbles/cowries/palm-nuts (*ikin*) or *isẹyó* and passed through the same period of development. Both pebbles and cowries are dynamic objects, because, they are used as means (objects) to achieve divination and game objectives. However, *ikin* and *isẹyó* are immediate objects (as described earlier). For instance, whenever references are made of them, their referents (*Ifá* and *ayò*) come to mind.

The relevance of recreation involves a deep cultural value, as it torches on the behavioural or living pattern of a people considered to be a measure of the 'mental excellence' or intelligence of the people in a given culture. *Ayò ọlọpọ́n*'s objects are (as now demonstrated in this study) beyond the interplay of just ordinary 'physical objects', but, to the social, mental and religious aspects of Yorùbá life as established by Òkẹwándé. The same observation is made about *Ifá*'s objects of divination that, behavior of physical objects (*ikin*), called instruments of divination "is somehow related to the wishes and/or behavior of the gods by the diviner. Only the *Ifá* priests seem to know how this is done. In contrast, the divination system based on astrology depends on the behavior of celestial bodies. This is the most striking difference between the *Ifá* and several other divination systems" (McGEE 109). The implication of this opinion is that, the celestial bodies are symbolized (including their behaviors or characters) in *Ifá* divination.

Another major links between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is observed on the art works and sculpture such as *ọpọ́n-Ifá* and *ọpọ́n-ayò* and *ikin* and *isẹyó*, believed to be spiritually tied to the belief of the Yorùbá people. For example, talking on the carved wooden material of *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, generally referred to as *ọpọ́n-ayò*, Courlander says, "these carving form one of the most prolific categories of Yorùbá wood sculpture" (3). It will be recalled that, *Ifá* and *ayò* boards are carved wooden objects. This opinion gives room for new insights to the spirituality of some art works or objects such as *ọpọ́n-ayò* among the Yorùbá. In other words, the present semiotic orientation about *ọpọ́n-ayò* makes the values of *ayò ọlọpọ́n* to be realized beyond relaxation or recreation.

Art works in a given culture or society (such as *ọpọ́n-Ifá* or used along with it in *Ifá* divination and *ọpọ́n-ayò* in *ayò ọlọpọ́n* game) are sometimes beyond natural but, cultic objects, such as *ikin* and *isẹyó* have been established in this study to have spiritual connotations. The identification and dispensation of spirituality in *Ifá*, especially in the process of performance is extended and felt on *ayò ọlọpọ́n* game. The synergy between

Art works and spirituality is so fascinating that, the expression of opinion is debated in the national dailies. For example, *The Nation*, reports that,

the relationship between art and spirituality as well as the therapeutic effects of art on human soul from the theme of a group art exhibition, *Art and Spirituality*... Art and Spirituality was organised by the Jesuits as another platform to show the connectivity between art and spirituality... what you see around you is a pointer to what you don't see... All these works of art are pointers to the unseen supreme God. But a work of art becomes fetish when it turns God and you embrace (Ukhaheme 22).

The life of the Yorùbá people is greatly influenced by their religion. This is because, there is hardly anything associated with them that has no religious affinity. This observation has long being made by Clark when he says, "My knowledge of the Yorùbá character and an observation for several years, of their conditions and of the working of their religious rites ... and in their knowledge of many of the rude arts is to be seen in their religious systems" (276). *Ayò ọlọpọ́n* is among social activity that is established to be influenced by *Ifá*. The inclusion of *ayò* to some religious festivals also attests to its links with religion. *Ayò ọlọpọ́n* also plays some important roles in some Yorùbá festivals. For example, it was introduced to Ọṣun Ọṣogbo festival (a river goddess among the Yorùbá) some nineteen years ago.

One of the criteria for the identification of indexical symbol is the physical or invisible thing pointing or signaling the presence of something. For example, wind blow (invisible) or cloud formation may be an index for rain. These types of indices are implied in the process of *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* processes. By the physical interactions of *ikin* and *ayò* seeds, leads to the production of sounds, pointing or signaling the invitation and invocation of the spirit.

In addition, both *ọpọ́n-Ifá* and *ọpọ́n-ayò* are the Yorùbá ancient art works, on which *Ifá* divination and *ayò* game are carried out or performed. However, while *ọpọ́n-Ifá* and the associated divination materials such as *ikin* (*Ifá* sacred palm-nut) and the images around it have been established by many authors and scholars to have spiritual connotations, *ọpọ́n-ayò* and its associated *ayò* materials have never been discovered by any previous findings to have any religious links or be related with *Ifá*. It is here demonstrated and established that, some sociocultural art works, such as demonstrated with *ayò ọlọpọ́n*

have spiritual connotations. The spiritual affinities are derived from *Ifá*. It is observed in this study that, objects and symbols of *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpón* corroborates the assertion that, "objects of the cult have never lost their true character as genuine works of arts" (Nascimento 103).

An attempt is made in this study, to demonstrate the connections in the indexical symbol of *Ifá* on one hand and *ayò ọlọpón* on the other hand. This study suggests that, the social life and activities of the Yorùbá people is greatly influenced by their religion, especially *Ifá*. For instance, Clarke observes about the Yorùbá people that, "all the religious customs and institutions are so blended with their social life" (284). However, the social aspect of the Yorùbá has not been demonstrated or established (before now) with the religious life of the Yorùbá people. *Ayò ọlọpón* is one of the social activities of the Yorùbá people that relates with religion (*Ifá*) in this study.

### Conclusion

The indexical symbol of *ayò ọlọpón* has been demonstrated to be an extension of *Ifá* indexical symbol. In other words, *ayò ọlọpón* has been connected with *Ifá*, especially in indexical symbol. It is noted that there are various semiotic elements that relates *Ifá* with *ayò ọlọpón*; such as in symbols, icons, and codes. This study is a demonstration of another *Ifá* semiotic elements-indexical symbol. This study equally concludes that both *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpón* are related in indexical symbol. This opinion affords us opportunity to establish that *Ọrúnmilá* and *Odu* (*Ifá* progenitor and the wife) are the investors and first to play *ayò ọlọpón* game. The value of *ayò ọlọpón* game is seen beyond relaxation (recreation) to religion (spiritual).

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