

# Omoluabi: Re-thinking the Concept of Virtue in Yoruba Culture and Moral System

by

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## Abstract

This paper suggests that the neglect cum negative disposition of people to certain ethical notions and concepts is undeniably one of the factors responsible for moral decadence in contemporary African societies. Hence, it argues that the cause of social disorder is traceable to lack of virtuous qualities among people in the society. It focuses on how some of those virtues that make an omoluabi got gradually not emphasized. Second, the concept of omoluabi in Yoruba moral system and its significance which involves drawing contrasts and comparisons between the concept of omoluabi and the Western philosophical approaches to the notion of virtue is examined. The paper also argues that since culture, religion and education play pivotal roles in the lives of African people, they should be engaged in reviving the omoluabi virtues and qualities in people to ensure internalization. The presentation concludes that reviving and imbibing the culture of omoluabi can serve as a heuristic device to achieving a well-ordered society.

**Key words:** Omoluabi, Virtue Ethics, Culture, Morality, Social Order.

## Introduction

The questions such as; “how should I live?” and “what kind of person should I be?” are essential normative questions for the ethicists as well as social and political philosophers. One fundamental concern in ethics is the issue of the way human beings think or believe they should conduct their lives. Coming from the background that morality is irreducibly social, the question is that, are some ways of life better than others? If yes, on what basis can this be determined? If no, can everybody be correct in the choices of life style? These are questions about one’s entire life or the kind of person one ought to be in order to get it right morally all the time.

This is unlike the question such as, “What is the right action?” which is the concern of the consequentialist and the non-consequentialist theories. Scholars at different epochs have attempted to answer the question of “what kind of person should I be?” by appealing to the notion of virtue. Aristotle for instance proposed virtue as central to good living. That is, one ought to be virtuous or live a virtuous life. Lynne McFall also considers virtue (integrity), as important for the modern individual. Aristotle’s answer to these questions falls in line with the Yoruba’s beliefs about how one should or ought to live and the kind of person one should strive to be. My view is that, Aristotelian treatment of virtue is akin to Yoruba’s view that *ki eniyan gbe gege bi omoluabi*<sup>1</sup> (i.e one should live virtuously). This in Yoruba<sup>2</sup> moral system means one should be an *omoluabi* (virtuous person). Worthy of note is Aristotle’s conception of the study of ethics as a practical endeavour, aimed not at theoretical knowledge, but at improving human lives. In his view, ethics is properly conceived, not as a separate inquiry, but as part of political theory. This work argues that Aristotle’s<sup>3</sup> conception of virtue can be treated in the like manner with the Yoruba’s conception of *omoluabi* with slight modification.

The presentation is divided into four main sections. The first section presents a clarification of some ethical concepts in Yoruba moral philosophy. The second section examines the moral decadence in Africa: the trend, the magnitude, and the consequences. The third considers Aristotelian notion of virtue as well as the concept of *omoluabi* and its relation to the West. Meanwhile, the last section focuses on the place of culture and religion in reviving the *omoluabi* virtues in contemporary African societies.

## **Clarifying Some Ethical Concepts in Yoruba Moral Philosophy**

In Yoruba language, according to Bewaji, ethical behaviour and morally approved conduct is called, variously, “*iwa rere* (good character), *iwa pele/ iwa tutu*(gentleness) and *iwa irele/iteriba*(respect)”<sup>4</sup>. One terminology that captures all these various names is called *iwa omoluabi*. Also, other attributes or qualities of an *omoluabi* are: *Oro Siso* (Spoken word, the Yoruba accord great respect for intelligent and expert use of language); *Inu Rere* (Goodwill, Having a good mind towards others); *Otito* (Truth); *Iwa* (Character/behaviour); *Akinkanju* (Bravery); *Ise* (Hardwork); *Opolo Pipe* (Intelligence); and *Iwa Rere* (Good character/behaviour).

Meanwhile, unethical behaviours and morally disapproved conducts are *iwa buburu*, *aidaa* (evil or lawlessness), and *iwa ibaje* (bad characters) *Imele/ole* (laziness), *ole jija* (act of stealing), *iro* (lies), *ainiteriba* (disrespectful attitude) and *ojukokoro* (covetousness). Arguably, some of the qualities mentioned above could be categorised as either personal virtues or social virtues or both depending on the manner of appraisal.

## The Concept of “*Omoluabi*”: What is it?

Yoruba people of Western-Nigeria have a long tradition and a cherished culture that must not be allowed to pass into oblivion. Yoruba consider the issue of ethics or morality as one of the most essential issues of life for any human being on this planet earth. One moral concept that is highly valued is the concept of *omoluabi*. Conceptually, the concept *Omoluabi* is a derivative noun which has the words – “*Omo + ti + Olu-iwa + bi*” as its morphological components. Literally translated and separately, *omo* means 'child', *ti* means 'that or which', *Olu-iwa* means the chief or master of *Iwa* (character), *bi* means 'born'. When combined, *Omoluabi* translates as "the baby begotten by the chief of *iwa*". Such a child is thought of as a paragon of excellence in character.<sup>5</sup> Who then is an *Omoluabi*? Generally, an *Omoluabi* is one who combines all virtues. For Akinyemi, the principles of Yoruba traditional education are based on the concept of *Omoluabi* translated loosely as an "ideal being".<sup>6</sup> Akanbi and Jekayinfa also held similar view. According to them,

The end of Yoruba traditional education is to make every individual 'Omoluabi'. To be 'Omoluabi' is to be of good character. That is why the goal of Yoruba traditional education has always been to foster strong character in the individual and to prepare each person to become a useful member of the community. (Jekayinfa, 2016:13)

Also for Johnson (1921:101), the concept of 'Omoluabi' is the standard which determines the morality and the immorality of an act in Yoruba society in Africa.

In Yoruba ethics, *iwa* (character/behaviour) is one thing that should not be underemphasized if we really want to have a well ordered society. Just as we have the moral concepts such as good, bad, right, and wrong in any moral setting or ethical system in the world, so we have *iwa rere* and *iwa buburu* (i.e good character and bad character) as well as *iwa toto* and *iwa tikoto* (right behaviour and wrong behaviour) in Yoruba ethics or moral system. One of the examples of *iwa rere* (good character) that was mentioned above is *iwa omoluabi* (virtuous character). Meanwhile, *Omoluabi* is a Yoruba word for a virtuous person. *Iwa omoluabi* (virtuous character) as it is referred is an aspect of behaviour that is considered valuable which is expected to be imbibed or embraced by all. In fact, as far as Abimbola is concerned (1975:401), “*iwa rere* is the most valuable thing among all other things in Yoruba value system.”

In *Philosophy and the Africa Prospect*: Fadahunsi and Oladipo (2004:23) suggest that the Yoruba term “*omoluabi*” – very inadequately translated by the English language “gentleman”- is appropriate. Furthermore, Barry Hallen also commented on this issue. Hallen opines, ...but, as often as the case, the original Yoruba term “*omoluabi*”- is much richer in meaning because it begins from what a person really is like ‘inside’ when it is associated with ‘good character’ (*iwa rere*).<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Hallen's interpretation of *omoluabi* suggests that it is an internal thing which is reflected in the outside through human character. This I consider to be an appeal to moral psychological explanation. One notable fact about the concept of *omoluabi* is that being an *omoluabi* goes beyond oneself but it also speaks volume about your family and the society that you belong to. According to Bewaji (2004:395), Africans believe that "each person is a representative of himself or herself as well as his/her family" and by extension, his/her community. The point Bewaji is making is that, by implication, an individual has to consider not only how a course of action contemplated by him will affect him personally, but also how will affect his family directly or indirectly and community at large.

### **Moral Decadence in Africa: The Trend and the Consequences**

In African society today, low level of governmental legitimacy, voracious poverty, infrastructural decay, electoral crisis, contract killing, political assassination, insecurity and generally, developmental problems are prevalent issues in the society. Even the youths who are supposed to be the bridge between the present and future generation are not exempted. We see promiscuity, fraudulent acts, examination malpractices, drunkenness and all sorts of moral pervasiveness become the order of the day in their midst. The above problems and challenges are pathological effects of moral degradation which results from deemphasizing *omoluabi* qualities among Africans today. In essence, the decline or decay in a societal moral attitude has a way of affecting every aspect of that society due to the fact that morality is essential a social phenomenon. The apparent solution to the prevalent moral decadence in Yoruba land, Nigeria and Africa by extension is a mode of value reformation and reorientation.

### **Aristotelian Notion of Virtue**

Ethics is a subject about which there has been an immense amount of different opinion, in spite of all the time and labour which have been devoted to its studies. Ethical theories and principles primarily focused on moral evaluation of human actions, inactions and behaviours based on "right" or "wrong" as well as "good" or "bad". However, Aristotelian ethics that is, virtue ethics changes the kind of question we ask about ethics. Where consequentialism and deontology concern themselves with right or wrong actions, Aristotelian ethics is concerned with the good life and what kinds of person we should be.

In the western tradition, Aristotelian ethics is primarily considered to be the beginning of virtue ethics. Nicomachean ethics is not a type of ethical theory, addressing morally good or bad acts based on deontological or teleological principles. Instead, it is about the question of moral excellence that focuses on whether moral agent is virtuous or not. Essentially, the virtue ethics makes a central use of the concept of character to prescribe how best a moral agent should live.

That is, a moral agent should live virtuously and exhibit a virtuous character. In other words, Aristotelian ethics is character –based because virtue was emphasized to play a central role in understanding morality. Further, Aristotle’s account of rational agents, choice, deliberation and action is considered as an appropriate starting point for his ethical theory.

The thesis of Aristotle in this exercise is that, the best way of living is to strive for moral excellence that produces happiness. The specific concern and focus of Aristotle in *Nicomachean* ethics is not aimed at theoretical knowledge, neither is his inquiry aimed at knowing what virtue is, but in order to become good and virtuous person that will lead a life of moral excellence.

One of the benefits of the ethical theories is that they provide a clear road-map to arrive at moral decision or judgment. Thus, the position maintained by Aristotle on ethics is that, the good and moral life that is worthy of pursuit for a rational being should be the chief good. That is, the good that is sought as an end in itself; never desirable for the sake of something else (Perry, 1986:610). Such a life Aristotle describes as a happy life. For Aristotle, Happiness is something final.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the most qualitative moral life worthy of pursuit for a moral agent is life of “Happiness”.<sup>9</sup> The term “happiness” as used in this context is akin to the Yoruba concept of *omoluabi*. This is because; part of the beliefs of the Yoruba is the view that the very essence of one’s life is good character. According to Abimbola (1975:401), Yoruba belief system enjoins one not to disengage oneself from the path of good character lest one loses the very essence and value of one’s life. In the realm of normative ethics, if the traditional ethical view that every ethical theory must be underwritten by theory of value is to be granted intelligibility in the light of the above discussion, then impliedly, in Aristotelian view, every good life or happy life (i.e highest form of moral live) must as well be underwritten by virtuous activities.

Virtue could be defined as the character traits or inner disposition that makes a man good.<sup>10</sup> Aristotelian virtue is, importantly about state of being. It is about having appropriate inner states. For example, the virtue of kindness involves right kind of emotions and inner state with respect towards others. Virtue ethics specifically makes central use of the concept of character. According to Aristotle; ...the virtue of man will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his work well.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Aristotelian theory is a theory of action since having the virtuous inner dispositions will also involve being moved to act in accordance with them. Virtue, being a form of moral excellence such as goodness, honesty, kindness and so on are said to be of two types. Aristotle argues; virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral virtue. Intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth of teaching, while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, awarding praise or blame to moral agents depends on their choice of actions and the virtue of a man will be the state of character which makes him do what he does. In Aristotle's word; A virtuous person makes a decision to do virtuous action for its own sake and takes pleasure in virtuous action.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a virtuous person does not just act out of unreflective response, but has come to recognize the value of virtue and why it is the appropriate response being a purposive disposition chosen knowingly for its own sake.

Furthermore, in respect to human actions, Aristotle's emphasis of moral virtue reveals the presence of excess, defect and the intermediate qualities attributed to human actions. Aristotle argues similarly, with regard to actions; also there is excess defect and intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success and being praised and being successful are both characteristics of virtue. Therefore, virtue is a kind of a means, as we have seen; it aims at what is intermediate.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, excess and defect in human actions are characteristics of "vice" and "mean" which the intermediate will be the quality of virtue. Aristotelian virtue is defined in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a purposive disposition, lying in a mean and being determined by the right reason. Virtue "lies in a mean" because the right response to each situation is neither too much nor too late. Also, it can as well be supported that virtue lies in a mean because it involves displaying the mean amount of emotion, where mean stands for appropriate.

However, Aristotle's description of the virtuous person seems to attribute to decision a role that is excluded by his explicit account. If we are to accept Aristotle's argument that a virtuous person makes decision to do a virtuous action, how do we then account for a virtue such as nobleness that is earned as a result of birth and good up-bringing? Knowing full well that moral agents make no decision in this case, it thus becomes difficult to justify this in the manner by which Aristotle earlier explained. Also, experience has shown that it is possible for people to exhibit virtuous characters for the sake of personal gain contrary to Aristotelian view that virtuous person makes a decision to do virtuous action for its own sake. On this note, virtuous character or action could be a means to an end.

In addition, Aristotle fails to account for how we can conceive the objective definition of the "mean". This is owing to the fact that, this middle ground is the target of all our actions: don't spend too much money, but don't spend too little money either instead, spend just the right amount of money. The problem here is this, how do we know the right amount? This seems to be confusing and obscure because the right amount may not necessarily be the modest amount. Consequently, there arises a difficulty in apportioning praise or blame to human actions for no one can adjudge precisely what the mean or the intermediate of human action should be since there is no any objective criteria to determine the mean given that what John considers to be mean may be Peter's excess.

## The Concept of *Omoluabi* and its Relation to the West

Now, bearing in mind the two earlier mentioned fundamental questions; how should I live? And what kind of person should I be? The quick answer that could be easily deduced from Aristotelian ethics and the Yoruba moral system to the first question is that; one should live a virtuous life (i.e. *ki eniyan gbe igbe aye omoluabi*). In Christopher Taylor's reflection, the fundamental question in ethics is "How should one live?" This question is not to be understood as "What is the morally best way to live?" since a possible answer to it is that one should cast off the restraints of morality in the pursuit of one's own interest. Rather, the sense of the question is "How can one achieve the best possible life?," where "best" is understood both as "best from the point of view of the agent's interest," as distinct from, e.g. "best from a standpoint of total impartiality," and "best objectively," as opposed to "best in the agent's own opinion." (Taylor, 2010:41). While to the second, one should strive to be a virtuous person (i.e., *ki eniyan gbiyanju lati je omoluabi*). Some elements of virtue found in Aristotelian ethics includes; justice, honesty, generosity and courage. Incidentally, these same elements form the core attributes of an *omoluabi* in Yoruba land. Others are; *Oro siso* (spoken word, the Yoruba accord great respect for intelligent and expert use of language), *Iteriba* (Respect), *InuRere* (Goodwill, Having a good mind towards others), (Respect), *Otito* (Truth), *Iwa* (Character), *Ise* (Hardwork), *Akinkanju* (Bravery), and *OpoloPipe* (Intelligence).

With the understanding that the above characteristics and qualities define an *omoluabi*, it should however be noted that most of these characteristics are actually missing in the society today thereby undermining the Yoruba traditional value system. The level of corruption in contemporary societies is partly due to lack of proper moral education and misconstrued idea that you can easily escape justice if you are highly connected. The value-added culture, religion and education could help in eliminating this mindset.

Aristotle's view that virtue lies in the observance of a mean has been criticized on various grounds. I argue for a more charitable interpretation of the view. It should be noted that Yoruba moral system as well emphasises the place of moderation in human character. It is part of their beliefs that *iwontun wonsi lo ye omoluabi* (moderacy should be practised by a respectable person) (Lawuyi, 1988:29). This from my point of view captures Aristotle's *theory of mean*.

For Taylor, Aristotle defines virtue of character in general as a stable state of character which is in a mean relative to us, a mean determined by the reason or reasoning by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it (1106b36–1107a2). By a state of character in a mean relative to us Aristotle means a certain stable state of responsiveness to a given motivation or motivations (e.g. courage to fear and boldness, temperance to the desires for bodily pleasures), namely the state of being neither excessively swayed by that motivation nor insufficiently responsive to it. Excessive and insufficient responsiveness is not a simple matter of intensity of a given feeling; there are many ways in which one may manifest excess or deficiency in feeling and in action, e.g. by feeling angry or acting angrily at the wrong time, with the wrong people, for the wrong reasons, etc. (1106b18–24).

A careful examination of both Aristotelian ethics and the Yoruba moral system reflects that the virtues are dispositions to obey moral rules; and the virtues have only instrumental value (as motives for obeying those rules). It may be argued that the virtues of benevolence, gratitude, and self-respect may not conform to the view presented above. Analysis of these recalcitrant virtues as treated by Aristotle offers support for the following conclusions: (a) the duty of benevolence and self-respect is best understood as requiring persons to cultivate the corresponding virtues. It is also believed among the Yoruba that an *omoluwabi* is expected to exhibit the act of benevolence. The point of disagreement may then be that, while Aristotle is of the view that the duty of benevolence requires the cultivation of corresponding virtue, the Yoruba do not see the act of benevolence as duty that must be performed, but they see it as one of the qualities that is required of an *omoluabi*; (b) persons lacking the virtue of gratitude, for example, cannot perform acts of gratitude, for the latter just are actions motivated by gratitude (and the same is true from the Yoruba's perspectives as well); and (c) the motive of duty is not always an adequate substitute for these virtues. Acts of gratitude and sympathy, for example, cannot be motivated by disposition but only by those virtues.

I discuss the virtue of courage with these remarks in mind, and argue that certain contemporary discussions of the doctrine neglect matters which Aristotle plainly wants to emphasize. The doctrine of the mean does not and is not intended to offer detailed and unambiguous guidance to deliberating agents. What a particular virtue calls for by way of act and emotion depends on many things which cannot usefully be determined and weighed in advance. The deliberating agent, like an archer aiming at a target, must be aware of and adjust for subtle changes which would cause her to miss the mark.

### **The Place of Culture in Reviving the *Omoluabi* Virtues**

It is an established fact that morality has a foundational crisis in Africa. While some scholars strongly maintain that religion is the determinant of morality in Africa, some other scholars argue otherwise. As far as they are concerned, it is the society and the traditions that determine the morality of its members but not religion. For Wiredu, morality in Africa is founded on culture. According to Gyekye (1995), morality is not determined by religion rather society itself.<sup>15</sup> My understanding of the word 'society' as used by Gyekye in this place implies culture. What is culture? Webster's Third New International Dictionary, defines culture in more than one sense. In an intellectual sense, culture is said to be the "act of developing by education, discipline, social experience; the training or refining of the moral and intellectual faculties."<sup>16</sup> In this regard, the purpose of education (formal and informal) is the entrenchment of the community's culture. According to Akanbi and Jekayinfa (2016:15), "The end of Yoruba traditional education is to make every individual 'omoluabi'. To be 'omoluabi' is to be of good character." That is why the goal of Yoruba traditional education has always been to foster strong character in the individual and to prepare each person to become a useful member of the community. In fact, in Wande Abimbola's view, the belief of the Yoruba people is that morality is the essence of man. For him,

Being moral is regarded by the Yoruba as one of the very aims of human existence. Every individual must therefore strive to be moral in order to be able to lead a good life in a belief system dominated by many supernatural powers and a social structure controlled by hierarchy of authorities (Abimbola, 1975:395).

For the Yoruba people of western Nigeria, moral values are taken to be a set of institutional ideals, which guide and direct the patterns of life. One of the main goals of human existence is to strive towards achieving moral excellence by becoming an *omoluabi* who is an embodiment of *iwa rere* i.e. good character. This is in a way similar to Aristotelian argument in Nicomachean ethics that men should strive towards achieving a virtuous way of living. Also, Yoruba enjoins one to be committed to the culture of an *omoluabi*.

As far as Gyekye is concerned, he explains that in Akan moral system (or African moral system generally), good or moral value is determined in terms of its consequences for humankind and human society. As a matter of fact, it is my submission for moral decadence in African societies, blame culture and religion. Society is what it is today because of the absence or lack of the *omoluabi*'s attributes among the majority of the people in the society. Why do we have the cases of corruption being reported on the pages of newspapers on daily basis? What about the issue of kidnapping and violence everywhere?

In traditional Yoruba society, there are verses of *odu ifa*<sup>17</sup> that place emphasis on the importance of good character as a panacea to a well ordered society. According to this particular *odu ifa*, moral principle demands you behave virtuously. Thus we were told:

*Aimowahu ni ko je ki aye gun. Ologbon ni eni ti oti ko eko ogbon mimowahu. Ogberi ni eni ti ko ko ogbon.*

It is want of knowledge of right conduct that has made the world a horrible place to live in. He is a wise man who has studied the possession of the act of good, moral conduct. He who has not done so is a novice (Makinde, 2007:306).

In the same spirit, Akinpelu also made a point. As far as he is concerned, the traditional values required of an *omoluabi* are multi-dimensional. For Akinpelu, an *omoluabi* is to be described as one who:

combines expertise in some specific economic skills; with soundness of character and skills; and wisdom in judgment equipped to handle successfully the problems of living in his immediate and extended family; well versed in the folklores and genealogies of his ancestors; that possesses practical skills to handle some minor health problems and knows where to obtain advice and help in major ones; stands well with the ancestral spirits of the family; knows how to observe their worship; and is endowed with the ability to discharge his social and political duties.

The values essential for an *Omoluabi* go on and on, but also include such pragmatic feats as wisdom and shrewdness in judgment, oratory skills, self-control especially when under provocation, dignified in sorrow and restrained in success, and most importantly, an excellent character<sup>18</sup>. Considering the social relevance of the culture of *omoluabi* in the society, *iwa rere* (good character) which is one of the qualities of a virtuous person is regarded as the most valuable thing among the Yoruba people. The end result of this *iwa rere* is to have a well ordered society. According to Abimbola (1975:401), it is believed by the Yoruba that without morality or morally good persons (that we referred to as *omoluabi*) “the world will be a very difficult place to live in” due to vices of different sorts and disorderliness.

### **How Far Can Religions Go in Reviving the *Omoluabi* Virtues?**

Many African scholars defended the position that morality in Africa is founded on religion. Scholars such as John Mbiti, M. Akin Makinde, P.A. Dopamu, J.O. Awolalu supported this view. As John Mbiti (1969:62) clearly stated, “African moral system has a religious foundation” As a matter of fact, Mbiti emphatically stressed that Africans are notoriously religious because it is believed that they live in a religious universe.

According to African people, man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. They not only originated from Him, but also bear witness to Him. Man’s understanding is strongly coloured by the universe of which man is himself of a part. Man sees in the universe not only the imprint but a reflection of God; and whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, the only image known in traditional African societies. Mbiti(1969:62).

Makinde’s reflection on the above passage is that, Mbiti’s finding is quite tenable in the light of African tradition and cultures and his own African experience. Makinde submitted that:

We can derive from it the view that religion plays a great role in the lives of African peoples. Perhaps a more general deduction from this is that since, according to John Mbiti, the Africans live in a religious universe, then, all their activities must be influenced by one kind of religion or the other. From this, it can be more specifically stated that an African system of morality, based on African cultural beliefs must have a religious foundation (Makinde, 1988:27).

Unlike Makinde and Mbiti who are more general in their approaches, Idowu was so specific in his approach. He narrowed down the focus of his research to the Yoruba communities.

According to Idowu, Morality is certainly the fruit of religion (and that) they do not make any attempt to separate the two...what have been named *tabu* took their origin from the fact that people discerned that there were certain things which were morally approved or disapproved by the deity. So the Yoruba call *tabu eewo*- 'things forbidden', things not done (Idowu, 1962:45).

From the above background, some doubt had cleared because it is so evident that religion plays a crucial role in the lives of the Yoruba and other Africans. Thus, in traditional African societies, religion defines and shapes the moral values and characters of the people. The whole essence of defining and shaping peoples' characters is to transform them to an *omoluabi*.

However, the negligence of our religious leaders in telling the truth and preaching morals in contemporary time precipitates the cold attitude of the members of the societies towards moral values. This is so evident in a place like Nigeria because it is so obvious that the more religious Nigerians are, the more immoral they seem to become. The fear of God is no longer reigning. Instead, people are now worshipping money and material things within the purview of religion. Many pastors, imams and the traditional priests are now money conscious and no longer ready to say the truth especially when the morally perverted rich followers of theirs come to them.

Now, the antidote to all these moral problems is that the religious leaders themselves should cultivate the culture of an *omoluabi*. After this, they can then pass the message across to their followers. In Nigeria and Africa as a whole, most politicians have spiritualists who may be pastors, imams or traditional priests that they do consult for spiritual assistance from time to time. The moral values held in high esteem in our religions should be spelt out and encouraged to be internalized by the politicians who should be role models.

Furthermore, many of the religious leaders are caught in the web of what Moses Oke calls 'human plastics'. 'Human plastics' are those persons of good morals rather than morally good persons; even though they are immoral in practice, they are masters at moralizing and they show great love for moral theorizing (Oke,1988:90).

## Conclusion

As we conclude, it is my opinion that the analysis of the concept of *omoluabi* noted in Yoruba moral philosophy has to be tailored towards the directions of the Yoruba cultural, religious and social history to be fully appreciated. This is imperative due to the essential roles that culture and religion play in the lives of African people. It is our submission that a well-ordered society is possible with everyone imbibing *omoluabi's* attributes. If our society is restructured in such a way that immoral attitudes with impunity is vehemently frowned at, our societies will be better for it. If there is a society where dominant social values provide for greed and graft, where mediocrity and indolence, in the name of state interest, where wealth is celebrated irrespective of its source, where commitment and probity draw opprobrium, where exceptional diligence and patience are rebuked, where excellence and perseverance are not eminently cherished, then, *omoluabi* attributes and qualities as described above are clearly missing. One of the main goals of human existence, according to the Yoruba is to strive towards achieving moral excellence by becoming an *omoluabi*. In this process of becoming an *omoluabi*, culture and religion must be engaged.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> "Omoluabi" is a Yoruba terminology for a virtuous person or a morally upright person.

<sup>2</sup> Yoruba as used in this article is one of the major groups in Nigeria that dominates the Western part of the country. They are also found in Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, in Europe and the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle is an ancient philosopher. He is one of the leading philosophers of the western tradition. He was a student of Plato who some think he surpassed his teacher.

<sup>4</sup> Bewaji, John Ayotunde, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) *Companion to African Philosophy*, London: Blackwell, 2004) p. 399

<sup>5</sup> Fayemi, Ademola Kazeem, Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University Ojo, Lagos - "*Human Personality and the Yoruba Worldview: An Ethico-Sociological Interpretation*"

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<sup>6</sup> Akinyemi, A. (2015). *Orature and Yoruba riddles*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Civic Education, Peace Building and the Nigerian Youths. Accessed on Thursday, October 2, 2014 at <http://www.thetidenewsonline.com/2017/07/22/civiceducation-peace-building-and- the-nigerian-youths-2/>.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hallen, “The Philosophical Humanism of J. Olubi Sodipo” in Akinrinade Sola, Fasina Dipo and Ogungbile David(eds.) *The Humanities, Nationalism and Democracy* (Ile-Ife: Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University publications,2006) p.361

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.620

<sup>9</sup> This “happiness” is not the same as Epicurean and Utilitarian happiness that is synonymous to pleasure. It is about highest form of moral life.

<sup>10</sup> John Perry and Michael Bratman (eds.) *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986) p. 627

<sup>11</sup>John Perry and Michael Bratman (eds.) *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986) p. 626

<sup>12</sup> John Perry and Michael Bratman (eds.) *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986) p. 623

<sup>13</sup> John Perry and Michael Bratman (eds.) *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986) p. 626

<sup>14</sup>John Perry and Michael Bratman (eds.) *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986) p. 630

<sup>15</sup> Gyekye, K. (1995). *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, (rev. ed.). Philadelphia: Temple University Press

<sup>16</sup> Third New International Dictionary (1982)

<sup>17</sup> Ifa Literary Corpus

<sup>18</sup> Akinpelu, J.A., *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1987) pp.178-179).

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