

Seeking Balance in Humanity: Ethical Consideration of Ìwòntunwònsì in Yorùbá Thought System

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the concept of *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi* in Yorùbá in line with Aristotle's *golden mean* with the hope to validating how it operates in Yorùbá thoughts system. The data relied upon are verbal arts in Yorùbá which are considered the repertoires of Yorùbá cosmology. Such verbal arts include proverbs, Ifá verses, folktales and panegyric among others. The data are analysed from the Philosophical viewpoint of *golden mean* propounded by Aristotle's and binary theory of complementarity as articulated in Ilésanmí (1989) and Olúwolé (2014). The study re-affirms that *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi*, a Yorùbá concept which is translates to mean "moderation," "balance," or "equilibrium", describes a state of harmony; its principle serves as ethical framework that cautions against extremes, advocating instead for the virtues of moderation, restraint, and balance. Examining the philosophical concept of *ìwòntunwònsì* (moderation) within the verbal arts indicates that equilibrium (balance) sustains communal harmony; Without this balance, the pursuit of noble intentions may inadvertently result in societal detriment.

Keywords: Balance, Humanity, Ethical Consideration, *Ìwò.ntunwò.nsi*, *O.mo.lúàbí*, Yorùbá Thought System.

INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba concept of *ìwòntunwònsì* (measured moderation) is a foundational pillar of *ìwà* (good character) and moral upbringing *ọmo.lúàbí*. Rather than being a strictly unidirectional phenomenon leaning toward absolute positivity or negativity, *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi* represents the dynamic equilibrium required to safeguard both personal and collective well-being in the pursuit of one's aspirations. The term "*ìwòntunwònsì*" is a contraction of three Yorùbá words: *Ìwòn* (gauge/measure), *òtún* (the right/positivity), and *òsì* (the left/negativity). Therefore, a truly virtuous and ethically upright individual is one who astutely navigates and harmonies opposing forces, such as right and wrong, adaptability or dexterity or strength and weakness, thereby embodying the golden mean of moral living (Craiutus, 2023; Tabi-Agoro, 2025).

More proficiently, the pivot on which the key components of Yorùbá virtue and value called *o.mo.lúàbí* rotate are moderation and modesty, and the quest for balance is the reason why *ọmọlúàbí* encompasses true moral chastity. Individuals are expected to act in ways that promote societal harmony, reflecting moderation as a core virtue that preserves stability and prevents disruption. This aligns closely with the principle of binary complementarity, which suggests that nothing is absolutely bad in its essence. For example, while anger can be a catalyst for change, excess breeds destruction; yet, failing to express it when necessary is equally unhelpful. Similarly, ambition drives progress, but desperation is toxic; just as diligence is universally celebrated, though overworking remains detrimental to health. Modern medicine and exercise are undeniably life-saving and health-promoting. However, any health measure, no matter how beneficial, patient and clinical moderation is required to avoid fatalities and adverse side effects. For example, medication overdose can result in severe medical complications or fatality, while highly beneficial practices like physical exercise can lead to severe issues like musculoskeletal injuries, rhabdomyolysis, or cardiovascular strain if done immoderately. That is the reason why health professionals rely on personalised prescriptions and guidelines to ensure patients do not overexert themselves. (WHO, 2024; Andrew, M. et al. 2021; Theodore & Elena, 2014).

Although moderation is often overshadowed in today's culture of excess, the virtue of moderation remains essential to human flourishing and societal harmony (Harry, 2023). Aristotle's concept of the golden mean has profoundly influenced Western ethics, providing a framework for understanding key virtues like courage, justice, and prudence. Crautu, a political scientist supported the above postulation. When he frames moderation (temperance) as cardinal virtue, equating it with prudence, courage and justice. He added that, moderation is "The silken string that runs through the pearl chain of all virtues (Crautu, 2024). In other words, moral virtues are inseparably linked. Courage, prudence, and justice cannot exist in isolation; they all depend on moderation. This interconnectivity reflects the doctrine of the mean. Therefore, this paper explores the pursuit of human equilibrium by examining the ethical principle of *iwòntunwònsì* (moderation) within Yorùbá philosophy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

African moral philosophy has emerged as a significant field of inquiry within contemporary philosophy, challenging earlier Eurocentric assumptions that philosophical reflection was absent in African societies. Central to this discourse is the examination of indigenous moral systems and their contributions to global ethical thought. Among these traditions, Yorùbá ethics occupies a prominent position because of its sophisticated conception of character, personhood, responsibility, and communal well-being. This review traces the development of African moral philosophy through major scholarly contributions and situates Yorùbá ethics within broader African ethical discourse. Particular attention is paid to the concepts of personhood, communitarianism, *ìwà* (character), and *Ọmọlúàbí* as foundational categories in Yorùbá moral thought.

One of the earliest systematic philosophical discussions of African ethics emerged in the works of John Mbiti (1969). Mbiti's famous assertion that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" became an influential formulation of African communal thought. Although Mbiti was primarily concerned with African religion, his analysis provided a foundation for later ethical theories by emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals and communities.

The philosophical significance of communal personhood was further developed by Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984). Menkiti argued that African conceptions of personhood differ substantially from dominant Western notions. According to him, personhood is not automatically acquired at birth but is gradually achieved through moral participation in communal life. The community therefore serves as the normative context within which individuals develop their moral identity.

Menkiti's thesis generated considerable scholarly debate. While acknowledging the communal basis of African morality, Kwame Gyekye (1997) criticised what he considered an excessive emphasis on communal determination. Gyekye proposed a theory of "moderate communitarianism," arguing that African societies recognise both communal obligations and individual autonomy. His intervention became one of the most influential contributions to contemporary African ethical theory and helped move discussions beyond simplistic oppositions between individualism and collectivism.

Around the same period, Kwasi Wiredu (1996) emphasised the rational foundations of African moral systems. Rejecting portrayals of African ethics as merely customary, Wiredu argued that African moral values are grounded in considerations of human well-being, social harmony, and practical reason. His work contributed significantly to establishing African ethics as a legitimate philosophical enterprise rather than merely a subject of anthropological description.

According to Gbadegesin (1991), the concept of *ìwà* (character) occupies a central position in Yorùbá moral philosophy. A person's moral worth is determined not by social status, wealth, or political influence but by the quality of their character. This perspective aligns Yorùbá ethics with virtue traditions while maintaining distinctive indigenous foundations rooted in Yorùbá language, culture, and worldview. Gbadegesin further demonstrated that Yorùbá proverbs, oral traditions, and Ifá literary corpora contain sophisticated reflections on moral responsibility, justice, and human flourishing. His work established Yorùbá ethics as an important component of African philosophical discourse and inspired subsequent scholarship on indigenous African ethical systems.

Balogun (2023) argues that Yorùbá ethics should be understood within the broader framework of African virtue ethics. He maintains that while communal welfare remains important, the ultimate foundation of morality lies in the cultivation of good character. Contemporary scholars have also examined the implications of Yorùbá ethics for governance, leadership, and social development.

Lawal (2024) contends that the Ọmọlúàbí paradigm serves as a robust framework for human development because it integrates moral integrity with civic duty. In this interpretation, ethical conduct becomes a prerequisite for sustainable socio-political advancement.

Another area of contemporary interest concerns the effects of globalisation on indigenous moral systems. Motadegbe and Ibiyemi (2025) observe that globalisation, urbanisation, and technological change have transformed traditional patterns of moral socialisation. Nevertheless, they argue that the core values associated with Ọmọlúàbí remain relevant for addressing contemporary social challenges. Similarly, Oladejo and Dastile (2025) contend that the erosion of traditional moral values contributes to increasing materialism and social disintegration in many African societies. They propose a renewed engagement with Yorùbá ethical ideals as a means of promoting moral regeneration and responsible citizenship.

The development of African moral philosophy reflects a sustained effort to articulate indigenous conceptions of morality and demonstrate their philosophical significance. Beginning with foundational contributions from Mbiti, Menkiti, Wiredu, and Gyekye, African ethicists have explored themes of personhood, communal responsibility, and human flourishing. Within this broader discourse, Yorùbá ethics has emerged as one of the most extensively developed indigenous ethical traditions. The works of Gbadegesin (1991), and subsequent scholars reveal that Yorùbá ethics is fundamentally a virtue-centered moral philosophy grounded in the concepts of *iwà* and Ọmọlúàbí. By emphasising character formation, moral responsibility, and communal well-being, Yorùbá ethics contributes an important perspective to contemporary ethical theory. Moreover, ongoing scholarly engagement demonstrates that indigenous African moral traditions remain relevant for addressing modern social, political, and ethical challenges.

Theoretical Framework: Aristotle's *Golden Mean* and Theory of Binary Complementarity

Aristotle's *Golden Mean*

The *Nicomachean Ethics* is a foundational treatise on moral philosophy, written by the ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle, traditionally dedicated to his son, Nicomachus, that investigates the nature of human flourishing. It posits that the ultimate aim of human existence is *eudaimonia*, a state of well-being, which in Aristotle's word, is achieved through the cultivation of virtues and the development of excellent character. (Irwin, 1999; Easterling & Roth 2022)).

Aristotle's concept of the *golden mean* is articulated in *Nicomachean*. He asserts that, virtue is a state of character, concerned with passions and actions in which excess and defects are forms of failure and in which choice lies in a mean. In Aristotelian virtue ethics, the moral exemplar is defined by the capacity to navigate the 'Doctrine of the Mean'. Thus, courage serves as the intermediate disposition between the vices of deficiency (cowardice) and excess (rashness), while generosity acts as the mean balancing stinginess and extravagance. Cultivating the traits of an *ọmọlu. 'àbí* within these rational bounds requires both practical wisdom and deliberate self-restraint, as human nature inherently inclines toward material acquisition and power (Aristotle, 1990; Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023; Symons & VanderWeele, 2024; Tabi-Agoro, 2025; Thach & Gopal, 2025).

Just as Aristotle recognised the challenges inherent in moderation, subsequent scholars have similarly observed that maintaining a genuinely centrist position requires profound moral courage. Because ethical boundaries remain subjective, where one person's moderation is perceived as deficiency and another's ambition is viewed as excess, identifying specific virtues like modesty or vices like greed becomes a complex endeavour. Consequently, contemporary human engagements are increasingly defined by widespread extremism and excess, a deficiency of moderation from which even the world's major religious institutions are not exempt (Craiutu, 2024; Tabi-Agoro, 2025).

Theory of Binary Complementarity

The theory of binary complementarity hinges on the complementarity between the position of scientific dealing of two forces. Scientifically, positive force attracts negative force to produce a force to be reckoned with. Positivity is deemed the attraction of people because humans by nature are attracted to something that benefits them. The negative is always cast aside or totally disparaged without much consideration. The theory of binary complementarity submits that goodness embedded in negative, objects, assertions and phenomena and these need to be reconsidered in order to ensure the maximum exploration of potentials in them because nothing is totally useless and nothing is absolutely perfect. Hence, the true existence of things, situations and ideas was said to be better appreciated when they complement one another. Moreso, “the existence of everything in twos, according to Yoruba cosmology in Ifá and other oratures, is not accidental...” (Ilésanmí, 1989; Olúwolé, 2014; Ìṣòlá 2019; Ìlúpéjú, 2025).

Yoruba worldview integrates opposing binaries (e.g., joy/sadness, good/bad, light/darkness, long/short) as essential components of existence. At the core of this worldview is *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi*, which represents the moral and proportional moderation required for societal and individual harmony. Naturally humans detest negativity, however, binary complementarity scholars posit that the positivity in negativity should be appreciated. According to them, the contrast between the two forces is not apposition but oxymoronically complementary (Ilésanmí, 1989; Ajíbádé, 2009). Ajíbádé further stressed that, no matter how bad or how useless something is presented, a phenomenological look into it should be done to ascertain its total value.

The assumptions in the theory of binary complementarity are also observed in the principle of Ifá divination where the *odù* are usually binary negative versus positive (Ilésanmí, 1989; Oluwole, 2014). Similarly, the position held by the proponents of this theory is also supported by many Yorùbá axioms and proverbs. *Ibi ñ be. nínú ire, ire ñ be. nínú ibi nítorí, tibi-tire la dá ilé ayé.* (Good and evil share a symbiotic existence, stemming from the singular design of their creator). It is established from the foregoing that situations, objects, actors, ideas or phenomena that seem oppositional in nature are actually not to be seen so but as complement of one another (Ajíbádé, 2009).

Within Yorùbá philosophical frameworks, Aristotelian principle of moderation and binary complementarity interconnect as foundational principles of balance, harmony, and logic. Together, they transform binary opposites from destructive conflicts into cooperative elements of a balanced whole. Binary complementarity acts as the conceptual framework defining the two poles of a system, while moderation provides the dynamic, prudential mean that prevents collapse into the extremes.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores *Ìwòntunwònsì* (the principle of moderation) in Yorùbá verbal arts, analysing the socio-ethical consequences of violating this principle in daily interactions. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive design, the study relies on both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data were purposively sampled to include twenty-two proverbs, two folktales, a folksong, an Ifá verse, a panegyric, a quote transcript, and an Àpàlà song. These oral and textual artifacts were selected based on their explicit focus on the socio-ethical importance and implications of moderation. Secondary sources comprise relevant textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and archival resources. Data were subjected to thematic content analysis and interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of Aristotelian virtue ethics and binary complementarity theory.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section provides an ethical and philosophical examination of *Ìwòntunwònsì* (Moderation) within the Yorùbá worldview. It utilises an interdisciplinary cultural framework to analyse how this ethical principle governs human action, social equilibrium, and moral conduct.

Dialectical Tensions Between Existential Goodness (Ire) and Forces of Evil (Ibi) in Yorùbá Philosophy

Yorùbá philosophical thought believed that good and evil are real phenomena, it is the reason Yorùbá says, *ire ñ bẹ nínú ibi, nìtorí tibi-tire la dá ilé-ayé* (Good and evil share a symbiotic existence, stemming from the singular design of their creator). The concept establishes that both evil (*ibi*) and good (*ire*) naturally coexist, interconnected and complement one another, and that they are part of human existence. Often, a person's character (*ìwà*) may largely dictate whether they go through tribulation (Oyeshile, 2002; Oduwole, 2007; Ogunyomi, 2024; Olanrewaju, 2024). However, no matter how bad the situation is, if the individual concerned proffer positive or sort divine intervention, something good may come out of it, either in the immediate or in the near future. Leveraging problematic situations for advantageous results may necessitates prudent management and strategic effort. Nevertheless, moderation remains essential throughout the transformation process. This is because the Yorùbá philosophical tradition anchors *Ìwòntunwònsì* (the principle of moderation) as a cardinal virtue, which is essential to an individual's alignment with the ethical boundary. Alignment with boundaries in such situation and all that a man does is vital to preempting complications and grounding the individual within an ethical framework that mitigates possible personal liability (Ilésanmí, 1989; Oduwole, 2007; Rahman, 2018; Adeyemo, 2019; Mudashiru, 2025; Alabi, 2025). Significantly, the aforementioned argument closely mirrors the value systems in Yorùbá axiological adage: *àse. jù ni baba àṣeté..* (Extremity/overdoing is the father of regret).

The Irony of Positive Intent in Yorùbá Philosophy

In the Yoruba ontological framework, benevolence is upheld as a foundational moral virtue, intrinsically tied to the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí* (a person of good character). However, this virtue is tempered by the philosophical warning that acts of goodness can occasionally yield adverse consequences, as captured in the proverb: *oore a maá dibi, ibi a sì maá di oore* (a righteous act may yield bitter fruit, while a misstep can pave the way to unexpected grace). This dialectical view of morality necessitates that individuals exercise caution, discernment, practical wisdom and proper spiritual consultation when offering assistance to avoid unintended disaster (Olúwolé, 2007; Hallen, 2026; Àlàbí & Jékáyinfá, 2016). The Yorùbá caution against uncritical altruism, illustrating this with allegorical references. For example, rescuing a venomous snake or a predatory lion from distress does not alter their innate, predatory nature. This reality is echoed in the saying: *Kò sí bí a ṣe ṣe ebòlò tí kò nǹ rùngbẹ* (No cooking effort can stop the strong earthy aroma of fireweed).

Furthermore, the epistemological challenge of understanding human nature requires careful observation and caution to avoid punitive or dire consequences (Àlàbí & Jékáyinfá, 2016; Oyedokun-Ali, 2021). The Yorùbá maintain that it is difficult to ascertain the true intentions of others without close association with them, hence the adage: *Ìsúnmọ̀ni là á mọ̀ṣe ẹni* (It is through close proximity that one truly knows a person). Consequently, *Ọmọlúàbí* should exercise caution because *Aṣebi kì í kọ ọ́ síwájú orí* (Villains don't wear warning labels). Despite these risks and the acknowledgment that altruism may occasionally backfire, helping others remains the defining hallmark of an *Ọmọlúàbí*. This enduring philosophical commitment to communal good, regardless of the inherent unpredictability of human nature, aligns with the Yorùbá proverb that says: *Inú ire kì í pààyan, wàhálà lásán ló ń kó bá ni* (kindness does not kills, it only brings a lot of troubles), as well in a popular Yorùbá folksong which asserts that:

Oore ni n ó ṣe

N ò ní ṣẹkà

Bíre bá dibi

Ìpàdé dọ̀hún oooo!

(I will surely do good

I will never act wickedly.

But if good deeds turn sour for me.

It will be sorted in heaven!)

Nevertheless, balance matters for sustainable support, so setting firm boundaries is essential for those that desire to help others.

The Ethical Dynamics of Anger in the Yorùbá Thought System

Although Yorùbá philosophy generally views unfiltered anger (*ìbínú*) as an emotional excess that threatens communal harmony, it however recognises the validity of justifiable indignation. Within this framework, anger is permissible when deployed as a legitimate response to moral injustice; however, its application must be strictly moderated (Gbádégésin, 1991; Ògúnṣemí, 2018; Qdébùnmi, 2023). That is why Yorùbá say *O.mo. àlè èniyàn ní rínú tí kì í bí, o.mo. àlè èniyàn nì a sì n' bẹ. tí kì í gbà* (Only a bastard fails to react appropriately to provocation and only the bastard refuses to be placated). For instance, individuals who fail to express discontent when slighted or taken for granted risk further oppression and the violation of their rights. While anger can be a necessary tool in the right measure, an excess of it often leads to destruction. A perfect example is the folktale of Ìjàpá the Tortoise, who let his greed get the better of him. Caught stealing from his father-in-law's farm, the father-in-law's unchecked emotions resulted in him being tied up and humiliated until morning. Passers-by initially praised the father-in-law's actions in the morning. However, upon returning later and seeing the son-in-law still enduring the same punishment, they concluded the judgment was overly harsh. They ultimately condemned the father-in-law for his uncontrollable anger, citing it as a lack of *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi* (moderation). Contextually, the father-in-law is justified in punishing Ìjàpá for the theft, but leaving him tied up all day becomes excessive. It is the perfect embodiment of the Yorùbá proverb: *Èébú àlò nì ti ahun, tàbò nì ti ànà rẹ* (The initial rebuke is for the tortoise, but the disparaging remark on the return trip is for his in-law). This saying advocates *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi* "moderation" in meting out punishment.

In a modern context, the Yorùbá concept of *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi* (moderation and proportionality) is highly germane to criminal justice systems. Despite capital punishment existing in many countries, it has proven ineffective at deterring or stopping heinous offenses. Emerging directly from the 2001 Strasbourg Congress, the World Coalition Against Death Penalty was institutionalised in 2002. As reported by the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (2003) and the United Nations (2024). This international consortium argues that capital punishment fundamentally violates the right to life. Therefore, they advocate for a total ban on cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Consequently, October 10 was officially adopted as a focal point for the global eradication of death penalty. Advocating for the abolition of the death penalty, they maintain a position that death penalty protects no one and should be eradicated in favour of justice commensurate with the offense's severity, necessitating a retributive justice framework that scales penalties strictly to the gravity of the crime. Within this socio-cultural context, their stance does not reject punishment outright, nor do they condone systemic injustice; rather, they demand *ìwò.ntunwò.nsi*. This entails strictly limiting the use of capital punishment and implementing stringent procedural safeguards to guarantee the human rights of those facing such penalties (WCADP, 2003; UN, 2024). Fẹmi Adébáyò explores this exact ideological position in his cinematic work, *Agẹṣinkólé: King of Thieves.*, where he says:

Èyin mólè, è n' polè.

Olè tí àwọn baba-ńlá yín jà, sẹ kòju ká kóṣu lóni?

Kólékólé wá n' dájó kóhun-kóhun.

Kólùú-kólùú n' dájó kábà-kábà.

Gbómọ-gbómọ wá n' dájó ẹni gbómọ ẹran.

Aṣeburúkú wá n' fura sí ti ẹni tí tiẹ ò tó nńkan... àṣẹ mi rée.

kábíyèsí! Olè tó bá jíṣu, tó jí kòkó, tó ságèdè,

È ò sàimò pé olè àti jénìyàn kò ló n jà,

Ebi-inú ló n pa á.

Irú olè bẹ̀ẹ̀, ẹ̀ fún un ní oúnjẹ jẹ...

(*Agẹ̀sinkólé: King of Thieves*, 1: 36-1:42).

(You arrested and executing thieves.

Did your own ancestors not live on large-scale robbery?

Armed robber now judging petty thieves.

Robbers of cities judging the poor robbers of villages.

It is a grand hypocrisy:

kidnappers are condemning goat thieves.

Evil-doers are persecuting minor offenders therefore, I decree this...

Your majesty! Any person who steals a yam, cocoa, or plantain

Does not do so to amass wealth,

But to quench hunger.

Such a starving person should be fed, not killed...)

As the excerpt demonstrates, Agẹ̀sinkólé "*King of Thieves*" does not inherently oppose retribution, but rather objects to the use of capital punishment on impoverished offenders. He posits that socio-economic marginalisation requires structural empowerment rather than criminalisation, especially given systemic inequalities that favour an untouchable ruling elite. Consequently, his discourse advocates for a tempered response, warning that the criminal justice system's failure to hold corrupt elites accountable, while brutally punishing the poor, risks radicalising the populace, inadvertently breeding insurgents akin to contemporary bandits or extremists.

The Philosophy of Jealousy in the Yorùbá Thought System"

A conceptual distinction has been drawn between *owú* (jealousy) and *ìlara* (envy). While both terms appear inherently negative, *owú* is not entirely condemned in Yoruba thought; rather, it is often viewed as a natural, protective passion that drives care, whereas *ìlara* remains universally condemned as an inherently destructive and antisocial vice (Ọ̀pẹ̀fẹ̀yítímí, 1995; Fálẹ̀yẹ, 2016). It is believed that without jealousy, there cannot be progress or innovative development. The positive jealousy triggers one's quest for more. Among co-wives, Yorùbá believe that without jealousy, the husband who is positioned as the head of the family cannot enjoy his home. That is why they say; *tí obìnrin kò bá jowú ọ̀bẹ̀. kì í dùn* (without jealousy among the wives, their soup will not be tasty). This implies that without desire to outsmart or dominate others in marriage, there cannot be improvement. Therefore, while envy that leads to desperation which in turn cause bewitching one another is condemned, the Yorùbá concept of *iwò.ntunwò.nsi* demands that one needs to spice up one's product, marital life, business and transactions with others in order to surpass expectation.

The Perils of Immoderate Generosity in Yorùbá Moral Philosophy

While kindness remains a fundamental pillar of human nature, unrestrained or imprudent kindness carries inherent risks. When exercised without discretion, well-intentioned actions can precipitate adverse outcomes. This paradoxical peril is encapsulated in the Yorùbá proverb: "*bóore bá pọ̀ lápọ̀jù, ibi ní dā*" (excessive kindness

yields detrimental result). The Yorùbá proverb, “*Ṣoore níwòn, ènìyàn ṣòro, ṣoore níwòn*” (Help in moderation; human beings are complex), underscores the necessity of *ìwòntunwònsì* (moderation) in generosity to prevent exploitation. This aligns with Mudasiru’s (2026) observation that while Yorùbá culture prizes generosity, unrestrained kindness can ultimately be detrimental to the giver, recipient, and the broader community.

"The Yorùbá hold a deep-seated belief that providence invariably protects the righteous from adversity. As the proverb asserts, "*kàkà kí ọmọ olóore jìn sí kòtò, mọ̀nà mọ̀nà á tan ìmọ̀lẹ̀ fún un*" (lightning illuminates the path to spare the virtuous from a trap). This theme of miraculous vindication is central to the traditional tale of *Onibodè Lálúpon*, where a victimised *dùndún* drummer overcomes a plot engineered by detractors to receive honour and favour from the *Onibodè*. While the pursuit of generosity and societal progress is inherently noble, discerning when one's engagement shifts from balanced moderation (*ìwò.ntunwò.nsi*) to excess requires astute practical wisdom (Sanderson, 2025). For instance, while some may view politics as a corrupt endeavour, abstaining from it cedes governance to self-serving individuals, ultimately precipitating societal decay. Consequently, embracing political apathy under the guise of moderation is fundamentally detrimental. That is the reason Ayemere (2018) says “But the message is that those who are interested in governance and want authority entrusted to them must be moderate in their desire for power. Excessive desire will make them unjust in the engagement, and then malicious enough to blackmailing or eliminating their opponents”. Political engagement to combat systemic corruption is a noble necessity, navigating this activism requires strict moderation (Sanderson, 2025).

Activists must adhere to the philosophical "golden mean," as extremism ultimately distorts one's sense of justice. Similarly, although sympathising with the bereaved reflects the core *o.mo.lúàbí* disposition of goodwill, however, grieving more than the bereaved can result in emotional depletion. This phenomenon is empirically validated by *Òtùá*. (the Ifá Verse) below:

Òtùá sun sun, ó re erémi

Ọlòbàrà sun sun sun, ó re alẹ̀ odò

Ìgbà tí ẹ̀lẹ̀kún sinmi,

Emi ni alágbàsùn ò dáké ẹ̀kún sí?

A díá fún Ọlòbàrà tí ó sunkún ọ̀rẹ̀ wògbé.

(Otùá weeps and plunges beneath the water

Ọlòbàrà weeps and sinks beneath the river.

When the bereaved stops weeping

Why does the sympathizer refuse to cease?

Cast the divination for Ọlòbàrà who mourns

alongside a friend until he follows him into the forest).

While public sympathy is culturally accepted and valued, it requires moderation and should never exceed the grief of the directly bereaved. Ultimately, regardless of how well-intentioned or customary an action may be, one must always strike a balance, as the specific context and circumstances dictate the appropriateness of our actions.

The Critique of Ostentation and Flamboyance in Yorùbá Philosophy.

In Yorùbá philosophy, there is no inherent "negativism" toward dressing well; however, flaunting excessive wealth or wasteful spending (flamboyance) is frowned upon (Okunoye, 2011). The culture highly values

iwòntunwònsì (moderation) and *ewà* (beauty), but when ostentation crosses into *pompousness* or *arrogance*, it violates core moral tenets. An individual that flaunts position, wealth is regarded as *omọ àìjòbẹ̀ rí* or *oníṣe-kárími* (Status-Seeker), while individual that dresses flamboyantly but lacking good character (*iwà omọlúàbí*) is considered as *àgbá-òfífo tí ń dún woroworo* (an empty barrel that makes the loudest noise). Thompson (1973) supported this view when he analysed Yorùbá word ‘*Itutù*’ (coolness) “as the ultimate sign of moral and spiritual equilibrium.” He added that, “restraint reflects nobility of character, whereas flamboyance is often judged as vanity” among the Yorùbá people. As Hallen (2000) observes, Yorùbá thought posits an intimate relationship between morality and aesthetics. Because the purest manifestation of beauty is the cultivation of good moral character, Yorùbá cultural priorities consistently elevate virtue above material ostentation.

Within the Yorùbá worldview, coolness, modesty, simplicity, and adequacy are deeply valued across all spheres of life, including personal adornment and attire (Thompson, 1973). Individuals who maintain an unkept appearance risk facing social stigmatisation or professional devaluation. Yorùbá says, *eni tó rìn rìn iwàsà ni wo. n ń fi èkùrọ̀ lẹ̀* (Whoever slogs will be assigned discreditable task). Rather than dressing extravagantly to match the elite, individuals should maintain a balanced appearance that reflects their social status. Dressing beyond one's means to impress others often invites mockery, perfectly captured by the Yorùbá saying: *Oge àṣejù ètẹ̀ ló ń mú bá olówó è* (Overdressing leads to disgrace). On account of this, an Àpàlà music icon, Haruna Ìshòlà, in his special edition album titled: “*Nínú Èṣẹ̀ Méjì*” (Released in 1979), opined that:

Aṣọ ńlá kọ̀ lèyàn ńlá,

Dànsákì la mía kọ̀mọ̀ ọ̀ba

Tí ó bá wọ̀ bùbá pẹ̀lú sòkòtò

Bó bá ń ṣafẹ̀ lẹ̀.

Bọ̀mọ̀ olórítún bá kó sínú agbádá ẹ̀tù,

àpónlẹ̀ kòsì fún màálù béérin bá jáde síta.

(True eminence is not defined by extravagance.

A prince commands the respect of the dànsákí in simple attire.

If the son of a commoner wears the agbádá Ẹ̀tù, the garment fits.

But where the elephant walks, the cow commands no attention.)

Therefore, restraint is essential in all endeavours. Overindulgence predictably leads to frustration, reflecting the adage: *ṣebí o ti mọ̀, ẹ̀léwà Sàpọ̀n* (act within the limits of your resources).

The Ethics of Money in Yorùbá Philosophy

Money is good, financial resources are central to human pursuits and fulfill undeniable necessities. The significance of what money enables us to achieve is paramount, perfectly captured by the Yorùbá adage, *Owó ní kókó*. (Money is everything). Again, the timeless Yorùbá adage, *Owó la fi ń lògbà, owó la fi ń ṣe ohun gbogbo* (We use money to acquire pleasure and achieve all things), perfectly encapsulates the reality of human existence, almost every fundamental need requires financial backing. This is the reason Yorùbá encourage hard work, a genuine and legal source of income, the society raises eyebrow when an individual engaged in illicit activities (Motadegbe & Ibiyemi, 2025). Navigating contemporary society without capital is functionally impossible. This ubiquitous necessity for money transcends generational divides, a reality profoundly mirrored in the rich Yorùbá oral traditions and panegyrics of Owó:

Owó

Owó

Owó Àpèkánukò

Ọ̀rò owó kanpá

Owó ní sọmọ di baba

Owó ní sẹgbọn dàbúrò

Owó, òwó ò ò!

Owó la fi ń sayé

Owó la fi ń ralẹ̀

Owó la fi ń kólẹ̀

Owó la fi ń tọ́jú ilé

Owó la fi ń tọ́jú ẹbí

Owó la fi ń tọ́jú tọmọ

Owó Àpèkánukò

Ọ̀rò owó kanpá

Jẹ́ kí n ní ẹ́ lówó

Má jẹ́ kí n ní ẹ́ lórùn.

(Money

Money

Money, a lucrative financial entity called with rounded lips

Money is a serious matter

Money can turn a child into a father

Money can fast-track the youngest into the most senior roles

Money, money oh oh!

Money makes the world go round

Money is used to invest in land

We use funds to purchase real estate

We earn money to support our loved ones.

Money is used to raise and cater for children

Money, a lucrative financial entity called with rounded lips

Money is a serious matter

Money, stay in my hands

Keep me free from debt).

Although Yorùbá philosophy acknowledges the practical necessity of wealth for human well-being, it strictly condemns a desperate pursuit of material accumulation. Consequently, any unexplainable accumulation of wealth is met with societal skepticism and collective ostracisation (Igboin, 2011; Akanmu, 2024; Motadegbe & Ibiyemi, 2025; Tabi-Agoro, 2025). While money is considered essential, the unbridled love for it is viewed as the root of all evil, captured in the Yorùbá proverb: *ifẹ owó ni gbòngbò èşẹ*. Because of this, an excessive chase for material wealth violates the fundamental principle of *omolúàbí*. Those who exhibit this behaviour are heavily criticised by the society and are tagged: money monger, greedy, rapacious and materialists who lack *iwontunwonsi*. The erosion of traditional indigenous values has precipitated a severe moral crisis, creating environments vulnerable to widespread criminality. In contemporary Yorùbá society, this disconnect from foundational cultural ethos has been linked to a rise in various illicit activities, ranging from financial fraud (including money laundering and the misappropriation of public funds) and cybercrimes to violent offenses such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and ritual killings (Motadegbe & Ibiyemi, 2025; Oladunjoye, 2025).

These offenses are frequently driven by unbridled acquisitiveness and greed, corroborating the assertion that "...without greed we would still be living in caves but, left unchecked, the insatiable desire for more and better material things can be destructive (Manfred, 2016). The escalating crisis is already destabilising societies globally. Similarly, within the Yorùbá worldview, wealth acquired through illicit or desperate means incurs existential consequences that monetary compensation cannot rectify. This reality is perfectly captured by the Yorùbá proverb: *òràn tí owó máa dá, apá owó ò lè ká a*.

Tolerance Amidst Extremism in Yorùbá Thought

Extremism and immodesty manifests across various domains, including race, politics, ideology, and organisational structures. Among these, religious extremism possesses a deep historical lineage that predates many other forms. Yet, it remains a critical contemporary global challenge, with its reach and impact significantly amplified by modern technological advancements. Scholars have identified a deficit of moderation as a primary catalyst for the rise of global religious extremism. In their analysis, this extremism is characterised by the rigid adherence to extreme dogmatic interpretations and the use of violence to enforce religious compliance, which has historically resulted in devastating uprisings, brutal insurgencies, and violence (Eraliev, 2022; Akínwùmí, 2024, 2026; Ahmad et al., 2025). Recent events in Yorùbá society reveal a troubling intrusion of religious extremism, threatening the region's age-long harmony. This disruption has been driven by the intolerance and supremacist ideologies of imported Abrahamic faiths, which have actively demonised indigenous beliefs. In contrast, historical Yorùbá philosophy and religious systems remain deeply accommodating and inherently non-dogmatic (Akínwùmí, 2024, 2026).

In other words, the Yorùbá recognise many paths to the spiritual realm, this captured their philosophy *Ònà kan ò wọ ọjà* (there are many paths to the market) (Olunlade & Pius, 2025). Worshipping deities like Ifá, Ọbàtálá, Sàngó, Ọgún and Ọṣun provides a direct link to the Supreme Creator, Olódùmarè. With each divinity celebrated during its own time, these festivals brought everyone together in a spirit of harmony. This historical openness and lack of religious segregation paved the way for the smooth integration of foreign religions over time. Their legacy of religious liberalism seamlessly translates into contemporary practice, characterised by the harmonious coexistence of Muslims, Christians, and traditional worshippers who actively participate in one another's festivities.

In Yorùbá culture, religious fanaticism is viewed as a form of deep irrationality. The exact Yorùbá analogy to describe religious extremist is *ó ti gba wèrè mó èşin*. Yorùbá religious philosophy is grounded in the belief that the sky is vast enough for every bird to fly without colliding (*Ojú ọrun tó ẹyẹ é fò láìfara kanra*). This is rooted in the *Omolúàbí* philosophy of good character, deep respect, and communal harmony. It firmly rejects extremism, as true character is built on tolerance and win-win coexistence.

Therefore, institutionalising an ethic of restraint and ensuring its transmission to future generations requires intentional moral education. Equally important is dismantling the pervasive culture of unearned quick wealth mentality and its accompanying materialism. Together, these steps will effectively neutralise extreme societal vices like violence, banditry, kidnapping, ritual killings, prostitution, cybercrime and many more.

CONCLUSION

This study argues that the Yorùbá concept of moderation, *iwò.ntunwò.nsi*, resonates conceptually with Aristotle's golden mean. Unlike a simple binary division of right and wrong, *iwò.ntunwò.nsi* suggests a proportional balancing of positive and negative forces to achieve harmonious coexistence. Because human nature is inherently dynamic and imperfect, examining the native intelligence embedded in Yorùbá verbal arts, particularly proverbs, serves as a profound repository of wisdom. Consequently, the Yorùbá principle of *iwò.ntunwò.nsi* underpins the philosophical reality that *ire ñ be. nínú ibi, ibi sì ñ be. nínú ire* (the good and the bad are intertwined). To articulate this balanced worldview, this study employs the binary theory of complementarity as a foundational philosophical framework. Through this analytical framework, the research, building on the work of scholars like Sophie Olúwolé (2014) and Ilésanmí (1989), reveals that Yorùbá epistemology rejects rigid dualistic frameworks, but rather offers a more nuanced, holistic approach to ethics. Embracing these indigenous perspectives advances global conversations on morality, offering a crucial compass for the contradictions of contemporary society. Future studies should explore how this principle can be adapted to resolve contemporary socio-political conflicts and promote cross-cultural dialogue.

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