

## ETHICAL THOUGHTS IN BODE AKINOLA'S *OMO T'EKUN BI*

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### ABSTRACT

*Ethics is the aspect of philosophy which investigates human conducts in so far as the conduct can be said to be right or wrong. It can be define as the branch of philosophy which deals with the normality of human action. Philosophical studies of ethics seek to give general guidance concerning what to do, what to seek and how to treat others. It is an attempt to investigate human conduct in the light of our actions as human beings.*

*It is true that human beings acquire certain habits and beliefs in the course of their interactions. Such habits and beliefs when translated into actions are sometime adjudged to be comprehensible or commendable. Actions based on such habits are either approved or disapproved of. In this process, we begin to make judgment concerning our actions of which some are said to be good or bad. Consequently, the justifications for certain actions are sought especially when we are in doubt as to their rightness or wrongness. In this regard, ethics can rightly be said to deal with how we evaluate and justify those actions which arises out of relationship as human beings.*

*In this work, the ethical thoughts of Yoruba are explored in a Yoruba novel named 'Omo Tekun Bi' written by Akinola Bode to drive home the point that the Yoruba have ways of expressing their moral values and these can be investigated even in their written literature.*

**Key words:** Ethics, Philosophy, Moral Values, Written Literature, Human Action.

### INTRODUCTION

Ethics as a branch of philosophy is a reflection on human conduct. It is concerned with what things are good, what things are worthwhile. Ethics aims to analyze, evaluate and develop normative moral criteria for dealing with moral principles. In other words, ethics studies the reason why certain kinds of actions are morally right and commendable. Good and bad (right or wrong) actions are known in classical moral philosophy as "virtue and vices". Hence, the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes, defines ethics or moral philosophy as "the science of virtue and vices". The word 'ethics' is used in three different but interwoven ways to mean a general pattern or "way of life", to mean a set of rules of conduct or moral codes and thirdly to mean inquiry about ways of life and rules or conduct.

The central questions of ethics are: what do we mean by "good" and "bad"? What are the right standards for judging things to be "good" or "bad"? How do judgments of "good" and "bad" differ from judgment of value neutral facts?

With these entire questions at the back of our mind, the ethical thoughts in *OMO T'ÉKÙN BÍ* will be highlighted and discussed in this paper. The theory to be used for the work is Hermeneutics. It is the theory that digs deep into the deeper structure or meaning of a literary work. Hermeneutics came into limelight with

the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer(1976) argued that "the meaning of the text goes beyond the author and therefore the subject matter is what determines the meaning". Also Richard Palmer (1960) says of Hermeneutics that "it is the process of deciphering which goes from manifest content and meaning to intent or hidden meaning". With the function that Hermeneutics performs, one can submit that the deep structure of literary works can be exhumed to the surface level and it will facilitate a deeper understanding and interpretation.

## DISCUSSION

The Yorùbá lay great emphasis on the happenings around them. They do not just overlook the events that are going on around them. They take a critical look at Yorùbá philosophical concepts. The philosophical implication is highly notable in the novel *OMO T'ÈKUN BÍ*. The novel centres on Adéoyè who is the protagonist of the novel. In the first place, the background that surrounds the birth of Adéoyè who was formerly named Ládéjòbí indicates the kind of life that Adéoyè lived. Adéoyè had a controversial birth. His mother, Àbèbí got pregnant through Láyemí whom she worked for. Àbèbí's husband, Òkébùnmi was not around at that time. Òkébùnmi and Àbèbí were living below average before misfortune befell them that Òkébùnmi had to leave for another town. This made it possible for Àbèbí and Láyemí to meet. In Yorùbá setting, it is morally wrong for married woman to have an affair with another man. This was what Àbèbí did that brought forth Adéoyè. The ethical implication of this is that such a child that is born into such situation is always misplaced. His conducts will be different from the environment he meets himself. The traits that he will manifest will differ completely from the other people he is staying with. This is noted in the interaction that came up between Adéoyè and his real father, Láyemí. Láyemí made Adéoyè realize that it was his blood that was flowing in Adéoyè's veins. He made it known to Adéoyè that nobody in Òkébùnmi's family had ever bought a vehicle let alone a second vehicle. Therefore, Adéoyè did not belong to Okebumí's lineage. Hence, the reply that Láyemí gave to Adéoyè when he requested to know who Láyemí was.

Bí ó bá fi bẹ̀ẹ̀, a jẹ́ pé ọ̀kọ̀ tẹ̀mi yíí ni ó bí ọ̀kọ̀ tírẹ̀.  
Sé ọ̀mọ̀ akin ní yakin, ọ̀mọ̀ ọ̀pìjẹ̀ ní ya ọ̀pìjẹ̀, ọ̀mọ̀ àjànàkú kan ò  
ní yàrà láéláé. Omo T'Ekun bá bí, Ekun ní ó jọ" [oi.1].

If it is so, that means it is my car that brought forth  
your own car. A brave man begets a brave, an elephant's child  
cannot beget a bird, a lion's child surely will resemble it' parents.

The above excerpt constitutes the philosophical background of the novel. It is a reference to Yorùbá philosophical concept about the connectivity between animals and humans and their products. There is always a deep discernible relationship between an animal and its product. In the same way, there is usually a conspicuous relationship between human and their off spring, be it physical, moral or psychological. The Yorùbá believe that this relationship accounts for sameness in the character and life of Yorùbá kinship and family. This is the reason why Láyemí is claiming that Adéoyè is the member of his own family.

This is to show that blood is thicker than water. It is pertinent in Yorùbá land for a child to know his father's house. A misplaced child cannot behave the same way as the true child of a family. That is the reason why Adéoyè is distinct in Òkébùnmi's family.

{Bi ilé kan bá tòòrò, ọ̀mọ̀ ale ibẹ̀ ni kò tí ì dą̀gbà}  
{If a house/ a family, is peaceful, the bastard there is not fully grown up}.

Furthermore, killing of ducks by accident in Yorùbá land is morally wrong. Anybody who violates this rule is usually penalized. The penalty to be paid is that a coin must be put into the mouth of any duck

that is so killed. It is believed that if this is not done, it can bring calamities on the driver. This is highly philosophical in the sense that a duck is very slow in nature. In order to avoid careless killing of ducks by drivers, it is highly prohibited. It is to show that, the fact that a duck is naturally created to be slow and powerless, does not give anybody license to kill it at will. The Yorùbá believe that this is “Òhun” (Abomination). When applied to human beings, poor, powerless and insignificant beings in the community should not be cheated or carelessly killed as a result of his powerlessness. The Yorùbá believe that though, the person cheated or killed cannot fight, his creator will fight for him.

It is culturally ethical in the case with Adéoyè when he mistakenly killed a duck while on a journey to Òsogbo. The onlookers knew the implication of his careless driving, and expected him to pay the penalty, by putting money in the duck’s mouth. But Adéoyè was ignorant of the implication of his action that was why Òníòsun the owner of the duck says:

Kò sètùtù, ó wá lọ? Kó máa lọ, kì í kúkú se èmi Oniòsun ló ni  
pépéyẹ pépéyẹ Òsun ni. Bí kò bá se bó ti yẹ, òsun Òsogbo ní yóó sẹ  
tó fún un. Ádiẹ iràná kúkú ni. (0.1.4)

He did not do the atonement and he left. Let him go.  
The duck is not for me Òníòsun, it belongs to Òsun. If he doesn’t  
do the necessary thing the Òsun Òsogbo will take the vengeance.

This goes further when Şólá’s father told Adéoyè what to do. He said: “*O’ò mò pé ó yẹ kí o fi owó há a lẹnu?*”(0.1.5)

(Don’t you know you need to put money into its mouth?)

This shows that to avert any calamity for killing a duck on the road, the driver has to put money into the duck’s mouth. This money is to compensate the owner of the duck.

According to Ògúnşínà, the Yorùbá have deep love for domestic animals. They are reared not only for multiplication but they serve as economic purpose too. Thus, Yorùbá love their domestic animals and give them names that have value and meaning (See Ògúnşínà 2006). For the Yorùbá, it is morally wrong to be cruel to domestic animals. Their love for domestic animals makes them to give pet names to their pet animals which these animals promptly respond to whenever they are called. This is to show how much the Yorùbá regard life. They go to the extent of building houses for their pet animals so that they will not be beaten by rain or sun. More so, they will be well fed in their compartment.

Also, the Yorùbá frown at wasteful spending. They believe that one should not go beyond his or her limits when it comes to the issue of money. Lavishness can turn somebody to a pauper. This can be seen in the story of Òkébùnmi, the assumed father of Adéoyè. Òkébùnmi spent lavishly on the burial of his mother Şangoyoyin. He went bankrupt to the extent that he could not pay all the debts he incurred in the course of the burial. He had to run away from home because of his debts. This led to the problem that befell his family. His first wife was impregnated by another man and the second wife left his house while he was in exile. This shows that it is unethical for a man to go beyond his limit. The repercussion is always serious. It can lead to family disorder or even death. If not for Òkébùnmi’s overspending, he wouldn’t have gone on exile let alone disorganize his family.

Fóláké, Òkébùnmi’s second wife, left him when there was no more money. This confirms a Yorùbá adage that says *Qwó epo ní omọ aráyé bá ni í lá, wọn kii bá ni lá èjẹ*”. She could not bear with her husband. She only stayed when things were rosy. When problem came, she left. This shows that some women are after what they can get from their husbands, when situations change, they too will change. Àbèbí, the first wife who did not leave had an illicit friendship with another man. This sex sin brought forth a controversial

child, Adéoyè. The seed of the unlawful relationship turned to be a controversial child between Láyemí, Àbèbí and Òkébùnmi.

(Owo L'obinrin mọ)

(Women are interested in money)

The Yorùbá are highly noted for orderliness in all their dealings, therefore, they cannot tolerate any act of disorderliness in any form. They react swiftly against partiality or favouritism. It is seen as a vice in the society for somebody to be partial. The intolerance to partiality was shown at the bank scene where Adéoyè went to withdraw money. Adéoyè got to the bank and met people on the queue waiting to withdraw money. Just because he was familiar with the staff of the bank, the cashier on counter left the people on the queue and attended to Adéoyè immediately. This generated a hot argument between the cashier and the customers that were waiting. This shows that the Yorùbá see it as ethically wrong for anybody to be partial. They dislike being cheated or to be downplayed. Alhaja Ọbalówù, who was one of the customers that were delayed by the cashier, was a prominent person and a funding customer of the bank. Immediately the bank manager intervened in the argument, she accepted the apology and forgave the cashier. This shows that it is morally acceptable to tender apology and it is a good thing to accept it without any grudge. This supports the Yorùbá adage that says: “*Ọmọ àlè ní í rínú tí kò bi ọmọ àlè ní a sù bẹ tí kò nù gbà*” (It is a bastard that will not show his grievance and it is a bastard that will not accept an entreaty.)

The Yorùbá revere the place of child in their society. A bastard is always reviled. That is why it is pertinent for a child to know his father and his father's house. A misplaced child cannot behave the same way as the true child of a family. The place of the father in the life of a child cannot be overlooked. The father is the source of the child. The child carries the name and the trait of the father wherever he goes. Yorùbá believe that if a child goes astray, he will definitely trace his steps back home. This is due to the fact that people that know his background will make him realize that he is sojourning in a strange land. If such a child comes back home he will be gladly received. This was illustrated in the case of Adékúnlé the son of Adekùnbi. Adekùnbi took Adékúnlé's pregnancy to another man, Láyemí. As the Yorùbá would say: “*Bí ilé bá tòrò, ọmọ àlè ibẹ ni ko tii dagba*” {If a house/ family, is peaceful, the bastard there is not fully grown up}.

Due to the fact that Láyemí was a rich man, Adékúnbi claimed that Adékúnlé was his son. As soon as Adékúnlé was of age, Adékúnbi started to plan on how all the inheritance of Láyemí would become Adékúnlé's own. She killed Olúmide, her junior wife's son so that he would not serve as a blockage for Adékúnlé, her own son. She also poisoned Láyemí, her husband in order to claim for Adékúnlé what did not belong to him. Adékúnlé himself did not have any feeling for Láyemí, his supposed father. The reason being that the blood of Láyemí was not flowing in his veins. Even at the point of death of Láyemí, Adékúnlé did not show any concern for Láyemí.

At the time, that the inheritance of Láyemí was to be shared, there was a great problem. The case was taken to the king's palace. The king put Adékúnlé and Bólárinwá to test. It was the utterances of Adékúnlé's mother that gave him away. She said:

Kí ni o wí? Èèwò. Mo se bí o gbó ohun tí ọba wí?  
 Ká ti wá pè é, oò mò pé itijú nílá niyen. O gbódò  
 rójúforí tí nii. O ò mò pé kí nńkan bàbá oníbàbá  
 ó tó di tẹni, ojú là á rọ. Kí Ọlórún má dójú tí wá ní o.  
 Ọrọ tí di ijà ọjà, onítijú kò ní í sá, ẹni tí n  
 ná ni kò ní dẹkun níná ni. (oi – 120)

What? Abomination. Don't you hear what the king said? What will people say? It will be a thing of shame. Try and endure it. You

must struggle to claim what does not belong to you. God will not put you to shame. It has become a “do or die” affair.

This quotation shows that Adékúnlé and his mother wanted to reap from where they had not sown. They wanted to take what did not belong to them. However, due to a Yorùbá adage which says:

Àgbà ò kí wà ló jà Kí orí ọmọ tuntun ó wọ” An elder will not see things going wrong without making necessary corrections.

The king of the town used his traditional wisdom to detect the truth. The utterance of Adékúnbi gave her out that Adékúnlé was not Láyẹmí’s true son. She only wanted to inherit Láyẹmí’s riches. This also shows the place of women in a man’s life. Adékúnbi portrays they have to get what they want. Although, this did not work well for her. She knew quite well that Adékúnlé was not Láyẹmí’s son, but in order to have a part in Láyẹmí’s inheritance, she claimed that Adékúnlé was for Láyẹmí. She tried in many ways to be sure that she had her way in Láyẹmí’s life. This led to the death of Olúmide, Wẹmímọ’s son. Adékúnbi threw him from the storey building just to clear him out of her way. This would have made Kúnbi reap from where she did not sow.

The Yorùbá lays great emphasis on the importance of virginity in a female child. Any bride who had lost her virginity before marriage has no pride at all. It is a thing of shame for the bride and her family. That is the reason why Ìwàloyè did not allow Adéoyè to sleep with her before marriage. She even said it is a forbidden thing for every lass in their family to lose her virginity before marriage. This is to show that the Yorùbá see it as unethical for a lady to be jumping from one bed to the other even before marriage or after. This is to check promiscuity among women.

Furthermore, Báyo, Adéoyè’s friend acted as an example of a bad friend. This was exhibited in the action that Báyo took to make Adéoyè forget the money he lent Báyo. Adéoyè assisted Báyo to boost his business by giving him money when his business was going down. But the very day that Adéoyè reminded Báyo of the money, he took a step that shows the types of friends that one can have. Báyo went to the herbalist to cast a spell on Adéoyè so that he would not remember the money again:

Bi ilẹ̀ ojọ̀ kejì tí mọ̀, Báyo gba ọ̀nà ilé Kékeré awo lọ.  
Ó ní òun kò fẹ̀ pa ọ̀rẹ̀ òun lára rára kí se pé kí ó kú, Sùgbọ̀n bí kò  
se ní rántí bèrẹ̀ owó tí òun je é mọ̀ kí bàbá rán òun lówọ̀ sí. (0.1.51)

Very early the second day, Báyo went to Kékeré-Awo’s house. He said he did not want to harm his friend but it is only that he did not want him to remember the money he borrowed from him.

Despite the fact that Kékeré Awo warned Báyo of the aftermath of the spell that he wanted to cast on Adéoyè, Báyo still insisted that the herbalist should go ahead and cast the spell. This shows that Báyo is not a trusted friend. He did not stop at this, Báyo betrayed his friendship with Adéoyè when he took Ìwàloyè Adéoyè’s fiancée to a restaurant and began to make advances to her. This is highly unethical and it is not acceptable in Yorùbá society. Báyo can be seen as “*Òdàlẹ̀ ọ̀rẹ̀ tí n fí ọ̀bẹ̀ èyìn je egbé rẹ̀ nísu*” (A traitor friend that betrays his friend).

Adéoyè relied on Báyo as a true friend but Báyo turned to be a deceitful one. The repercussion of what Báyo did was that he lost a true friend and destroyed a long term friendship. He lost the trust that his friend had in him and he couldn’t relate freely with Adéoyè again. Adéoyè expressed this when he refused to show Ìwàloyè’s letter to Báyo:

Báyò se àkiyèsí iyàtò nínú iwà tí òrè rẹ̀ ǹ hù sí i yìí B́í ó bá se tẹ̀lẹ̀ ni, bí ó ti ka iwé yẹn tán ni ó máa gbé e fún Báyò nàà kà. Lẹ̀yìn nàà wọ̀n máa jọ jíròrò lóri ohun tó wà nínú iwé ni. Sùgbọ̀n bí Adéoyè ti kà á tán ǹ se ló fí iwé yìí bọ̀ àpò. (0.1.59)

Báyò noticed a change in his friend's behaviour. If it was before, he would give him the letter after he would have finished reading it after which they would deliberate on the content of the letter. But as soon as Adéoyè finished reading the letter, he put it into his pocket.

This action of Adéoyè shows that once the Yorùbá have any inkling about somebody, they will try to withdraw from such person. This is to avoid further destruction.

The Yorùbá frown on self-centeredness. That is why they uphold communalism. They see themselves as one and whatever happens to one of them happens to all. Whoever does anything different from this will face the repercussion all alone. Self-centeredness was illustrated by Ládépò's behaviour when he was seriously sick. Before he took ill, he was a big time farmer. He had a big cocoa plantation which was very fruitful. By the time the cocoa farm was about to ripe for harvest, the sickness had eaten deep into Ládépò. And he had lost all hope that he could survive the sickness. An evil thought came over him. He said;

Sé bí mo bá kú tán ñjẹ̀ àwọ̀n tí kò mọ̀ igbà tí mo ǹ se wàhàlà kó ni wọ̀n máa wá kó ifà oko tí mo ti dá yorí yìí bí? Àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ mí kéré igbà tí wọ̀n bá fí máa dàgbà oko á ti bọ̀ lówó èso' (0.1.12)

If I eventually die, is it not those who did not know when I was labouring that will reap the fruit? My children are still young; the farm would no more be fruitful by the time they would have grown up.

This thought prompted him to take a drastic and regrettable action. He rose up very early one morning, and went to his farm. He gathered together dried leaves at the middle of the farm, wet the farm with kerosene and set it on fire. The farm was totally destroyed by fire. Shortly after Ládépò burnt his farm, his younger brother came and took him to a hospital for treatment. Within a short period of time, he got over his illness and he recovered fully from his sickness. He went back home to meet an empty farm, eventually he became a wretched man. The Yorùbá do not behave the way Ládépò behaved. They believe that whatever belongs to you belongs to your family. The adage "Ọ̀lómú dá ọ̀mú iyá rẹ̀ gbé" does not operate in Yorùbá setting. That is why Ládépò's village head said: -

Ládépò, ẹ̀ni tí ó bá rí ọ̀ tí kò sá, sóbià ló yà dá olúwa rẹ̀. o kii se ni rere rárá. O lérò pé àisàn yẹn máa pa ọ̀, o tiná bọ̀ko Ara rẹ̀ ló yá yìí kí lo máa jẹ? Ọ̀lórùn ló mú ọ̀. Ara rẹ̀ nikan ní o fẹ̀, o ò fẹ̀nikẹ̀jì"[0.1.13]

Ládépò, whoever does not run away from you must have got a hindrance. You are a bad person. You have lost hope over your illness; you set your farm on fire. Now that you are well, what will you feed on? You only considered yourself and not others.

## CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the ethical thoughts of the Yoruba as expressed in *Omo Tekun Bi*. What can be deduced from this paper is that the Yoruba lay a great emphasis on moral values in their society. They have lay down rules that govern their ways of life in their day to day activities. They frown at anybody that goes against the lay down rules and see such person as being ill- mannered. A well behaved person in Yoruba society always attracts respect and he is held in high esteem. Such person is known as OMOLUABI. This is evident in the points highlighted in the novel *Omo Tekun Bi*.

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