FUNDAMENTAL CODE OF NATURAL LAWS IN *IFÁ* DIVINATION AS AGENTS OF MORALITY FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Ifá is the natural wisdom and knowledge concerning all life activities which was divinely revealed to *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* by *Olódùmarè*, God in Yorùbá belief. It is the living foundation and custodian of the deity, moral, economic, language, religion, healing arts, tradition, culture and metaphysical orders. However, the concern of this paper is on the moral contents of the natural laws in *Ifá* corpus. Basically, there are two fundamental codes of natural laws in *Ifá* divination under which all other laws in *Ifá* exist. The first law enjoined every human being to acknowledge *Olódùmarè* as the Supreme Being and father of the universe who created all things. While the second law says "do unto others what you want them do unto you." However, it is quite unfortunate that, today, these laws that linked human relationships with the Supreme Being and the dos and don'ts of the divinities and those that hold the society together in harmonious relationships are no longer in proper use. This is evident in the lack of fear for the Creator, mismanagement of public funds, embezzlement and political killings, to mention a few. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the natural laws in *Ifá* and suggest how it can help sustain our fragile democracy as it did in the traditional society in the past for the sake of our future. The paper is premised on Matthew Flanagan's theory of divine commands which asserts that what is moral is determined by what God commands, and to be moral is to follow his commands.
Keywords: Natural laws, *Ifá* divination, morality, *Ọ̀rúnmìlà,* divine commands.

Introduction

What is *Ifá* divination? *Ifá* divination is the word of *Olódùmarè* that had been in existence since the establishment of the world.[1] It is natural wisdom and knowledge concerning all life activities given to by *Olódùmarè*. Although *Ifá* is not a philosophy, it has a lot of concepts with philosophical issues. In it is the living foundation and custodian of the deity, economic, religion healing arts, metaphysical order as well as moral and a host of other virtues. *Ifá* is infinite source of knowledge –*ìmọ̀àmọ̀nìmọ̀ntán*[2] that talks virtually about everything one can think of, including science of nature, animals, plants, incantations, divination, human and their nature with their peaceful coexistence with the aid of moral laws given by *Olódùmarè* and some more generated from this natural laws by the people.

Among the Yorùbá, *Ifá* is the potent source of having an insight into the future.[3] More importantly, it is the source of morality and ethical values of the society. Though *Ifá* is the word of *Olódùmarè,* he however, commissioned *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*to be in charge of this world for the benefit of humanity and other divinities. According to Adewale,[4] when he was sent to the earth by *Olódùmarè* on a mission to restore order and teach human beings the science of nature and the art of proper living (i.e. moral virtues), he was given the

word of *Olódùmarè* that is known and called *Ifá*. *Ọrúnmìlà* came to the world with the entourage of heavenly beings known and called *Irúnmọlẹ̀*. They were the first inhabitants of the earth and *Ọrúnmìlà* was their mouth piece. They spent a long time on earth and later ascended to heaven.[5] After *Ọrúnmìlà* had ascended to heaven, his disciples, known and called *Babaláwo* (*Ifá* priests) in Yorùbá land continued in the tradition he laid down till today.[6] However, it is quite unfortunate that western civilization has led to the neglect of *Ifá*; the word of *Olódùmarè* thereby created a vacuum against its development, particularly the moral and ethical aspect of *Ifá* as we have in other religions like Christianity and Islam. Though these foreign religions preach morals, many of the adherents seem to have little regard for ethical virtues. Do we then say that all religious truth lives within one tradition, and therefore, that anything outside such a tradition is wrong? Or can we assume that there is no truth in other sacred traditions but only a particularly one; in the case of Nigeria, in Christianity and Islam?

The nation is in disarrayed because of moral laxity due to blatant neglect of the indigenous mores derived from indigenous religion. What are in place are insecurity, *voodoo* economy, political killings, religious intolerance and many other social vices. To get out of the woods, therefore, this paper examined the natural laws in *Ifá* and offered suggestions on how it can help to sustain the fragile democracy as it was in the days of the forefathers of the nation for the sake of the future. The theoretical framework for this paper is premised on Mathew Flanagan theory of divine command that says what is moral is determined by what God commands. Therefore, to be moral is to follow the command of the creator. One may then ask what morality is, and what is the role of *Ifá* divination as agent of morality?

What Morality is all about and the Roles *Ifá* Divination as a Moral Agent

Morality is the principle concerning the distinction between what is right and what is wrong. It is about good and bad behaviour. It is conformity with self-code, doctrine or system of rules or wishes of God, or how to behave with the norms of social behaviour. Looking at this with the laws or wishes of God, we still realise that morality depends on God. According to Dostoevsky[7], if there is no God, then we won't be talking about right or wrong. As a result, everyone would go about doing whatever he/she likes. Therefore, in his view, morality depends on God.

Looking at this from the Yorùbá traditional religion's perspective, we shall realize that *Olódùmarè*, in his words *Ifá*, through *Ọrúnmìlà* prescribed some natural laws to guide our behavior and conducts toward *Olódùmarè*, divinities and fellow human beings. *Ọrúnmìlà* enjoined everyone to live at peace with God and fellow human beings in accordance with these laws. There, he teaches that we should all love one another. According to *Ọrúnmìlà*, it is through this love for fellow human beings that happiness comes when one devotes one's time to the selfless service of other members of the community or country. This implies that if one truly loves his or her fellow being, there won't be killing, cheating, seduction, embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, stealing and some other social vices.

Out of different means of articulating the divine mystery and different paths leading to it, *Ifá* divination is one and whole indivisible source of this mystery. According to Lucas, *Ifá* is the oracular deity, the most popular and most important in Yorùbáland[8] *Ifá* is turned to for guidance and for ascertaining the will of *Olódùmarè* as regards the matter of the past, present and the future. All important events in life is referred to *Ifá* for its guidance and advice. *Ifá* is consulted in marriage relationships, friendships, kingship, chieftaincy, economic, political and religious matters. According to Salami, *Ifá* is never human worship as wrongly assumed in some quarters; rather it is the divine message of *Olódùmarè* to the entire world.[9]

Although *Ifá* is in possession of several branches of knowledge as said earlier, but knowledge of this surpasses the moral and ethical teachings of *Ifá*. This evidence in most of *Ifá* is available in both major and minor *Odù's*. Hardly do we see any chapter or verse of *Odù* that does not talk about one moral instruction or the other, directly or indirectly. Most of these moral teachings are *either* taught in proverbs, wise saying, or stories.

Some of these moral teachings of *Ifá* are found in natural laws given to humanity to guide our conducts among human beings, and our relationship with the divine begins and finally with *Olódùmarè* the Supreme Being.[10] The first of such natural laws is the one that enjoined human beings to acknowledge *Olódùmarè* as the Supreme Being and father of the universe who created all things. This is evidence in many *Ifá* chapters and verses. Both divinities and mankind were advised to worship *Olódùmarè*. According to *Odù Òfún-sẹ́*[11] *Ifá* says divinities acknowledged the supremacy and headship of *Olódùmarè*. There *Ifá* says;

Origbokeke, idandageere	Origbokeke, Idandageere
Erukuyomuawo won lode orun	Erukuyomu the initiate in heaven
A dIfá fun gbogbookanlerunwoirunmole	Ifa divination was performed for all the four hundred and one divinties
Won nloreegbaisinnile Olódùmarè l'ode ọ̀run	they were going to obtain worship at Olodumare's house in heaven
Eruku – yomi a de o	Erukuyomu we've arrived
Olódùmarè mo de o	Olodumare I'm around
Mo wa yin o oo.	I came to pay homage

In the same vein, *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*, the custodian of *Ifá*, also advised all mankind to direct all its worship to *Olódùmarè*. Though one may wonder why he gives such an advice, it is because a lot of people, particularly people from different faiths, hope and belief that the Yorùbá and Africans in general worship idols. This assertion had been argued several times that Africans do not worship idols. Rather, these divinities or the so called idols are just servants, errand boys and girls of the creator, *Olódùmarè*. It is undeniable in those days that people directed their worship toward the divinities, the concept that was not peculiar to the Africans alone, rather the whole world. However, the fact remains that

mankind knows that both the divinities and the spirits were created by *Olódùmarè.*[12] They also know that they (divinities and spirits) possess some qualities and powers that mankind do not have. Thus people tend to fear and reverence them. However, with the advice of *Òrúnmìlà* through *Ifá,* mankind re-established its commitment to worship *Olódùmarè* through these divinities. *Àràbà Oláyẹmí,* an informant sited *Òṣètúrá.*[13] that attested to the above fact:

Òyèlèyẹlẹ̀	Oyeleyele
Ifá ni kámáa júbà Olórun	Ifa says we should be paying homage to God
Toripé, oyin áṣi	Because bee will depart
Oyin ä lọnikókóigi	Bee will go away from the tree
Òyèlẹ̀nyẹlẹ̀	Oyeleyele
Ifá ni ká má a júbà Olórun	Ifa says we should be paying homage to God
Óni lójókan l'àfòmóyó lọ lórùn òpẹ	He says the parasite will depart from the palm tree
Ó nilójókan lòjìjifẹ̀rẹ̀ yó relé Olódùmarè láfẹ́fé	He says one day Ojijifere will go to the house of Olodumare in a wind form.
Ó ni lójókan ni òun Òrúnmìlà yó ṣí nilé ayé.	He says he, Orunmila would one day migrate from this world,
Tí òun óròde òrun	That he would go to heaven
Óní wọn a ní baba olóore lọ	They would say a benefactor has gone
Baba tíí gbani lójóibi	the father that rescue on evil days
Óní njẹ́nigbàyi	He says then
Ẹ ẹ́ ma júbà mi pèlú Olódùmarè bí?	Would you be paying homage to me?

In *OdùÒsẹ́-Ìrẹtẹ̀, Ifá* also advised that it is important for mankind to serve, worship and venerate *Olódùmarè,* the self - existent being. In the *Odù, Ifá* says,

Ewé layé,	The world is a leaf
Gbòngbò èniyàn nbẹ́ lóde òrun	Man's root is in heaven
A dífáfún Òrúnmìlà,	Ifa divination was performed for Orunmila
Nijó tíyió mú ìbà Olódùmarè wálé ayé	On the day he will bring Olodumare's homage to the world
Ó fi nkọ́ gbogbowa,	hẹ taught every one of us
Óníkí á máṣe fi súrúpeeṣú	He says we should not misconstrue Suru for Esu
Kí a má fi sùrùpeèṣù òdàrà	We should not misconstrue suru with Esu Odara
Ó níkí a má fi ewéìrókò p'ewéoriro	He says we should not misconstrue iroko's leaf for oriro's leaf
Ká máfewé àgbágbà p'ewéàgbọn	We should not refer to plantain leaf as coconut leaf
Awá ta sílẹ̀kótó ta sẹ́nu,	It will splash on the grand before mouth
Èdùmàrè màlàgbà	Edumare[14] is supreme
Àwọn tíwọ́n fi súrúpesùrù	Those that referred to suru as suru
Èdùmàrè màlàgbà	Edumare is Supreme

Àwọn tó nfewé irókò pewé àgbọn	Those that referred to iroko's leaf as coconut's leaf
Èdùmàrè màlàgbà	Edumare is Supreme.

As a divine decree for humanity, *Òrúnmìlà* teaches mankind never to mistake truth for falsehood. This is *Olódùmarè's* law to all living beings that established the sacredness of truth. It is sad to say that truth has eluded Nigeria as a nation. Rather than truth, we celebrate falsehood, greed, unrighteousness and other social vices. Besides, the above *Odù* explained that there is no substitute for *Olódùmarè* the Supreme Being that must be worshipped and feared. But the question is, if we truly fear and respect this God and his laws, Nigeria ought not to be experiencing what she is experiencing today. *Ìwòriwòdin*[15] is also in support of the above assertion. According to the *Odù, Ifá* explained that;

A njowú Ọlọ́run ni	We only envy God
Ìbòsí Olódùmarè lawonké	We are only proclaiming Olodumare's might
Bí a ní wọn ókínni lẹ́hìn	If we ask for their support
Wọn a f'ègún sọ́wọ́	they turn deaf ears
Ẹni a ní ófẹ́nilójú	the one we rely on for assistance
F'ata sénu	Happened to be a wicked one
Òpó à bá f'èyìntì	The pillar we ought to lean on,
Ikántimúdi ẹ̀ jẹtán	Has been devoured by termites at the base
Ẹni ani áfínú hàn	The person we intend to confide in
Jáláròkìrẹ̀ni.	Is a talkative
A difá fún gbogbo ọmọ ènìyàn.	Cast divination for the all human beings
Wọn dorí kodò	They became pensive
Wọn npe Olódùmarè ní baba.	They are referring to Olodumare as the father.

The second law established that we should do unto others what you want them do unto you. This is what Adebowale[16] called the golden rule in his work. According to him, since no one likes to be killed, no one should kill another man. No one wants his property stolen; this indicates that no one should steal other person's property. No one admires a liar, therefore, we should endeavuor to tell the truth and stand by it. These and so many others are the fundamental code of natural laws that constitute the foundation of all ethics and moral laws all over the world. Somadhi[17] was elaborate in her own exploitation of these laws. She identified sixteen of these laws in *Ọdù Ìká Òfún,* which included ability to tell the truth, not to mislead people, not to deceive people, not to claim wisdom that they lacked, to be humble and never be egocentric, not to be treacherous, not to break taboos, respect the weak, the poor, the feeble and be nice to them, respect to the elderly, respect to moral laws, not to betray truths, not to disrespect and so on.

The laws of nature that says we should do unto others what we want them to do unto us enjoined us among other things to render selfless service to others. This is the reason why the Yorùbá would say or always say that "*Òfiti ẹ̀sílẹ̀gbótẹmiẹlẹ́ni, Òrìṣàòkè- Olódùmarè niíbaa gbọ́ tiẹ̀-* whoever devotes his time to help others, it is God that helps such a

person. This is evidence in one of the informants' assertion in *Ìrósùnméjì*[18] on this interpersonal relationship that;

Àkùkọ f'ogbe lẹ́bẹ́ lẹ́bẹ́ṣe 'yì	The cock decorates itself with its comb
A dÍfá fúnÒpiliki	Ifa divination was performed for Opiliki
Ti ó fi tiẹ̀silẹ̀	That abandons his work
Tí óngbọ́tẹ̀niẹlẹ́nikiri	That concentrates on other people's task
Wọ́n niẹbọniki Òpílikirú	They told him to offer sacrifice
Òpílikigbẹ́bọnbẹ̀ ósì ru	Opiliki yielded and perfomed the sacrifice
Ìgbà tórúbọnáàtán,	After he had performed the sacrifice,
Wọ́n niki ó má a lọ túntiọmọẹlòmíràǹṣe	He was told to concentrate the more on others
Jutiara rẹ̀ lọ	Than his own
Ìgbàtí tiẹ̀ ódáatán,	After fortune had smiled on him,
Ijóni Íjó,	He started to dance
Ayọ̀ni Íyọ̀.	He started to rejoice
Ó níkíni ó bámitúnwà a tèmiṣe?	He says what will assist in reshaping his character?
Èrìgìàlọ̀, Ifá ni óbámìtúnwà a tèmiṣe.	Erigialo, Ifa will assist in reshaping my character.

What *Ifá* is saying here is that, the custodian of *Ifá* (we should note that *Ifá* is used for *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*interchangeably by people because of their closeness) will intercede on behalf of the person that the divination was performed for before the creator -*Olódùmarè*. This is the primary responsibility of the divinities for mankind, and this is the reason why human beings offer them foods of all kinds and some other materials in form of *ẹbọ*-sacrifice, for them to present our petitionsvery well before the creator.

Another informant also speaks about the truth as an ethical concept which is the most important of all the virtues. According to him, *Ifá* advised us in *Odù Èjìogbè*[19] that;

Sòtítọ́,	Say the truth
Sòdodo	Be honest
Ẹnísòtítọ́	Whoever say the truth
Nimalẹ̀ngbè	Will be aided by the gods
Torípé, ṣèkéṣèké,ṣèké tití	Because the deceitful was so engrossed in deceit that
Ókúsójúiná,	He died in the public
Ṣọ̀dàlẹ̀ṣọ̀dàlẹ̀,ṣọ̀dàlẹ̀tití	The treacherous was so engrossed in treachery that
Ókú sọ́dànoòrùn	He died in the open place
Oninún ire ṣeretítí	The benevolent was so engrossed in benevolence that
Ókú, forí l'ajere idẹ	He died and rest in peace
Ókó ọwọ́méjèjì léoriọmọténté	He placed his two hands on his children
A dÍfáfún Ọ̀rúnmìlà	Ifa divination was performed for Orunmila
Ifánṣawore'fẹ̀ aṣèké	Ifa was on expedition to deceitful Ife town

Ónṣawore 'fẹ̀aṣòdàlẹ̀	Ifa was on expedition to treacherous Ife town
Ó nṣawore 'fẹ̀aṣòdodo...	Ifa was on expedition to truthful Ife town

These and many other *Odù* are what *Ifá* advised us to include into our society to edify human for everyone to leave at peace. One may wonder what all these have got to do with governance in Nigeria. However, before we answer this question, it is important to make a critical work at the Nigerian governance.

The Relevance of Natural Laws in *Ifá* as a Model for Good Governance

In the traditional religion of the Yorùbá, and Africans in general, though *Olódùmarè* is physically absent on earth, everyone must love him as the Supreme Being, acknowledge him as the father of the universe and creator of all things. *Ifá*, the word of *Olódùmarè* is the author and custodian of all things that *Olódùmarè* created. *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* in turn was given the authority to care for this world of *Olódùmarè* because of his wisdom. As earlier said, *Ifá* is recognized all over Yorùbá land, Africa and the world in general. The truth in *Ifá* cannot be over emphasized and its laws are strictly obeyed by our forefathers. Good lessons derived from *Ifá* in those days are still in place and ardent devotees still obey and make use of them till today. Though there are great changes in the ways of doing things now. Nevertheless, obeying the laws, then made all things easy and convenient for our forefathers. For instance, in those days, in Yorùbá land, our forefathers will only use stone to indicate how much they wanted to sell their goods where there was no one to stay by such goods, especially beside the road to their respective farms. Any passersby who were interested in buying the goods would count the stone and drop the amount in monetary value without taking more than the required goods or paying incomplete, inadequate money that was not in commensurate with the goods taken. This is because they were aware and knew in their hearts that where there is no man, *Olódùmarè* is there. Therefore, their belief in *Olódùmarè* was so deep that they were always afraid to do evil.[20] Besides, they also opined that whatever things they do on earth here, they are going to render account before the creator at the end of their life in the land of the living.This is the reason why *Ifá* priests always sing the song below;

Kámáṣìkàláyé[21] ,	We should not be wicked on earth
Torí à únrọ̀run,	Because we are going to heaven
Kámáṣìkàláyé o oò	We should never be wicked on earth
Torí à únrọ̀run ùn,	Because we are going to heaven
T'abáti dé bodè,	When we get to heaven's gate
Aórojọ́ o.	We shall surely give account of our deeds

Again, the second law that says do unto others what you want them do unto you that Somadhi[22] explained in elaborate manner in *Odù Ìká Òfún* as part of several *Ifá* laws that guide *Babaláwo* and*Ọ̀rúnmìlà* followers is pertinent to everyone who practicesYorùbá religion through *Ifá*. This is where these laws are relevant. It could be a model for good governance in the sense that all that they preach, all that they advocate for in their religion, love, truth, peace, accountability, prudence in spending and a host of other social vices are what our political systems lack. By emulating these *Babaláwo* and the followers

of *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*, we hope that things will change for the better in Nigeria. Although we are not saying here that there are no few bad ones among the *Babaláwo* who sometimes deviates from these laws, yet the point remains that such bad eggs, where found among them, would be seriously warned, punished and eventually be sent packing if they refused to heed warnings. All the *Babaláwo* interviewed admitted that there are a few bad eggs among them but they are not afraid because if they are not found, they take solace in after life judgment of *Olódùmarè* who is going to judge according to every deeds. Besides, *kò sẹ́ni tó maṣìkàt'ọ́lọ́run kòní dá lẹ́jọ́*-no wicked man will escape the judgment of the creator. *Ifá* explained this in *Odù Ìdín-Èrín*[23] that;

Ìdínarìnrìnmọ̀rìn	Idinarinrinmorin
Ìdínarìnrìnmọ̀rìn	Idinarinrinmorin
*Òbárìnrìn*rìn,	You could have walk so long
Kó o múgiàyinbọ̀wálé	And bring Ayin tree home
Ẹnìkankòní ọ́ óyìnbó dọ̀la	No one will praise you tomorrow
A díFá fúnorí,	Ifa divination was performed for Ori
Óṣawotíti ó fi gbadé	Who divined to the level of receiving a crown
Ọ̀rùnṣawotíti ógbèjìgbàràilẹ̀kẹ̀	The neck divined and collect expensive beads
Bèbèìdíṣawotíti,	The buttocks divined
Ó gbamósàájìaṣọ̀ba tókonáyanranyanran.	Received expensive clothes
A díFá fúnÒrúnmìlà	Ifa divination was performed for Orunmila
Óṣawotíti ógbaèbúbùiṣuwálé...	Who divined and receive half cut of yam

The four of them went to divine for *Ọlọ́fin*, where they all prescribed for *Olofin*. *Ori*- headlied by prescribing crown and lots of money as sacrifice; the neck prescribed expensive beads and lots of money as sacrifice, while the buttocks prescribed expensive clothing and lots of money. It was only *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* that did not lie in his own prescription of half cut of a tuber of yam and little money. They all went away with their prescriptions. Shortly after that, *Orí*- head, *orun*– neck and *bebeidi*- buttockswere sick. They had to offer those things they cunningly collected as sacrifice before they were okay. This is what gives good *Babaláwo*confidence that *"Ẹnibákánjúgbakọ́kọ́rọ́ọlà, ìlẹ̀kùnàbámọ̀niyíó fi ṣíkẹ́yìn"*-he who was in a hurry to get the key to riches will use the key to open the door of sorrow at the end. At least all the *Babaláwo* interviewed agreed with this assertion.

Conclusion

Ifá is the pathfinder of the Yorùbá. As confirmed by *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* himself when he was leaving the world, that whatever one desires in life, one should ask *Ifá* for guidance. It is *Ifá* that will foretell about epidemic outbreak, diseases and so on. It is also *Ifá* that tells the type of sacrifice to offer to avert calamity. For peaceful co-existence, *Ifá* plays a big role. In fact, in a thousand and one things that the Yorùbá might try to do, *Ifá* is not left

behind. In governance, installation of new king, chieftaincy taking and smooth running of government in those days in Yorùbá land, *Ifá* took preeminent position. Therefore, there is nothing wrong in tapping some wisdom from *Ifá*, the source of our ancient beginning. This does not necessarily mean we are backward or uncivilized. Islam, Christian, Judaism and Buddhism among others are traditional religions of some people. They are not superior to *Òrùnmilà's* testament that *Ifá* represents. Just as we are receiving wisdom and knowledge from these foreign religions, so also we can derive wisdom as it used to be in the past to direct our affairs in our own ways.

To maintain a political stability in the country, political office holders should be ready to obey *Olódùmarè's* laws that will help them to be truthful in their dealing with public funds and the citizen, rather than paying lip services. Through the fear of God, they would stop killing people in the name of politics. When they realize that they cannot create, then they will not kill. With all these at the back of their minds, there would be free and fair elections when they realize that the law of *Olódùmarè* is all about love and truth, then they would be accountable to the electorates, thereby minimizing to the barest minimal, if it cannot eradicate mismanagement of public funds, all these put together will bring out the good leadership in them.

Besides, it is time we took our culture seriously and made use of valuable things in it to better our social life. It is time we re-discover our nationalism and our wealth so as to liberate ourselves from the slavery, shackles and thralldom of western civilization and government that is not yielding the desired results. This would be a better world if the power of love replaces the love of power. *Ifá* divination would be of great help in this direction.

Endnotes

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