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Princes of the Web: Reimagining Machiavelli in the Rise of Yahoo-Yahoo among Anambra Youths

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ABSTRACT

*In a society where moral ideals crumble beneath the weight of institutional decay, the allure of alternative power structures becomes difficult to ignore. Across cyber cafés and small towns in Anambra State, a new figure has emerged—the "Yahoo boy"—a digital-age hustler whose tactics of deceit, image-crafting, and strategic manipulation echo the very principles once outlined by Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Though separated by centuries, both actors share a fundamental understanding of power: that in a disordered world, survival requires more than virtue—it demands virtù. But how did a Renaissance theory of statecraft find relevance in the scamming culture of Nigeria's disillusioned youth? This article probes these questions by conducting an analytic-philosophical investigation of Machiavelli's political ethics as reimagined through the rise of Yahoo-Yahoo in Anambra. The findings reveal that the Yahoo-Yahoo phenomenon is not merely economic desperation or criminality, but a philosophical response to systemic failure. The paper concludes that the persistence of Yahoo-Yahoo among Nigerian youths signals a broader ethical collapse—one rooted not in the absence of values, but in the betrayal of them by society's highest institutions. It recommends a re-evaluation of moral education, a societal reinvestment in youth agency, and a more introspective approach to anti-fraud campaigns—one that addresses not only symptoms, but also the structural violence that births such subversive ingenuity.*

Keywords: Machiavelli, Yahoo-Yahoo, Digital Fraud; Virtù, Corruption, Youth Subversion, Strategic Power

INTRODUCTION

In the bustling cyber cafés of Awka, the dimly lit rooms of Onitsha's backstreets, and the mobile devices clutched tightly by young men in Nnewi, a new form of power is being negotiated—not through the ballot box or royal decree, but through deception, code, and calculated charm. These are not the traditional princes of old, clad in silk robes and crowned with gold. These are the Princes of the Web—youths navigating the digital underworld of Yahoo-Yahoo, Nigeria's homegrown term for internet fraud. In Anambra State, where ambition often collides with hardship, many of these young men are rewriting the script of survival. But their methods, motivations, and moral justifications bear an uncanny resemblance to the political philosophy of a man from Renaissance Florence: Niccolò Machiavelli.

This article explores the philosophical parallels between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the rise of Yahoo-Yahoo among youths in Anambra. It is not a glorification of fraud nor a crude comparison. Rather, it is a critical and uncomfortable interrogation of the logic underpinning both Machiavelli's advice to rulers

and the tactical reasoning of online scammers. When Machiavelli famously advised that it is better for a ruler to be feared than loved, or that deception is a legitimate tool of statecraft, he was not promoting immorality—he was diagnosing a world where ideals often crumble before reality. Is this not the very world Anambra's digital fraudsters believe they inhabit?

Many Yahoo boys (as they are colloquially known) see themselves as victims of a broken system, products of a society where merit rarely guarantees success, where political leaders thrive on corruption, and where unemployment is high despite academic achievement. In this context, Yahoo-Yahoo becomes, in their eyes, not just a hustle, but a form of resistance—a way of seizing power in a rigged game. Machiavelli might not have condoned their actions, but he would have understood their motives. After all, he wrote for men who were desperate to hold on to power in chaotic, morally ambiguous times.

Through this philosophical lens, we will examine how the instrumental logic of Machiavellian strategy lives on in the streets of Onitsha and the cyberspace cafés of Awka. By placing a Renaissance political theorist in conversation with 21st-century cybercrime in Nigeria, this article hopes to disturb moral comfort zones—and offer a raw, reflective insight into the world of the digital “princes” of our time.

From Renaissance to Internet Café: Why Machiavelli Still Matters

When Niccolò Machiavelli penned *The Prince* in 1513, he was not merely offering advice to the Medici rulers of Florence; he was capturing the essence of power in a world collapsing into chaos. Italy was fragmented, vulnerable to foreign invasions, and reeling from political betrayals. Machiavelli wrote with urgency—insisting that in times of disorder, virtue must often give way to effectiveness. He was not romanticising cruelty or deceit; he was describing the cold mechanics of power in a world where survival, not morality, often dictated action. Over 500 years later, Machiavelli's sharp analysis still resonates—but now in unexpected places. Not in the palaces of Florence or the parliaments of Europe, but in the digital dens of Nigeria's cybercriminal underground. In towns like Awka, Onitsha, Nnewi, and Ekwulobia, where state failure is palpable and opportunities scarce, a new kind of political actor is emerging. These actors don't run for office. They don't wear uniforms or wield guns. Instead, they code, charm, deceive, and manipulate—much like the princes Machiavelli advised, but now in a digital domain.

The average Yahoo boy in Anambra is not simply a scammer—he is a strategist. He studies human behaviour, learns how to evoke sympathy, assumes false identities, and deploys psychological manipulation in pursuit of wealth and influence. Strip away the internet and laptops, and one begins to see the old Machiavellian template: *be feared or loved, but always in control; use deception when truth is inconvenient; seize fortune when opportunity knocks*.¹

Machiavelli's insistence that “the ends justify the means” finds an eerie echo in the narratives of many Yahoo boys. Listen closely and you will hear justifications that mirror Renaissance realpolitik: “*If the government steals from us, why shouldn't we steal from foreigners?*” or “*Na who them catch be thief.*”² These are not merely street excuses; they reflect a deeper philosophical resignation—that justice is no longer guaranteed by the state, and so one must create his own system of survival.

Ironically, while many modern political theorists criticise Machiavelli for being too cynical, the youths of Anambra unconsciously embody his insights with brutal clarity. In a world where conventional paths to success—education, honesty, merit—appear closed, Machiavelli's pragmatism becomes not just relevant, but brutally real. The cyber café replaces the Renaissance court, and the Yahoo script replaces the diplomatic letter, but the underlying philosophy remains the same: Power belongs to those bold enough to seize it, not those waiting for justice.

Thus, Machiavelli matters today not because his world was like ours, but because his moral questions never truly left us. When institutions fail, when leadership disappoints, and when the rule of law becomes a distant fantasy, *Machiavellian ethics* creep into the cracks. Whether we like it or not, his ideas live on—not only in presidential palaces but in every space where strategy eclipses conscience.³

Anambra's Digital Underground: Understanding the Rise of Yahoo-Yahoo

To understand the rise of Yahoo-Yahoo in Anambra, one must look beyond the criminal codes and moral condemnations. Yahoo-Yahoo is not just an act of cybercrime—it is a socioeconomic and philosophical response to a world that has seemingly abandoned its youth. In a state celebrated for its entrepreneurial spirit and intellectual pedigree, the proliferation of online fraud among young men is not just an anomaly; it is a symptom of deeper structural disillusionment.

Anambra is a land of contrasts. It produces some of the brightest minds in Nigeria, yet many of those minds roam idle. Despite a reputation for business success, job opportunities remain scarce. Universities churn out thousands of graduates each year, but the economy cannot absorb them. Government jobs are limited, and private sector employment often pays poorly or requires the kind of connections most youths do not have. For a generation raised on stories of hard work leading to success, the brutal reality hits hard: the system is not designed to reward honesty. It is in this vacuum that Yahoo-Yahoo has taken root—not simply as a crime, but as an alternative economy. Internet fraud offers what conventional society no longer guarantees: status, income, mobility, and a sense of power. A laptop, a smartphone, and access to the internet are all one needs to enter the game. No gatekeepers. No certificates. No referees. For many disillusioned youths, this digital hustle feels more like justice than crime.

The internet café becomes a war room. Fake identities are created with precision. Romantic language is studied like a weapon. Dollar exchange rates are tracked like stockbrokers would monitor Wall Street. From the outside, it appears crude. But within, it is strategic, competitive, and deeply organised. This is Anambra's digital underground—a world where Machiavellian tactics are not studied in books, but practised daily. And the justification? It flows freely. *"America has exploited Africa for decades—this is payback."* *"Our leaders loot the treasury and walk free—why should I starve in silence?"* *"Even pastors now live by deceit—at least I'm honest about my hustle."*⁴ These aren't just excuses; they are part of a broader narrative that frames Yahoo-Yahoo as a form of economic justice in a rigged world. In this underground society, the Yahoo boy becomes both the villain and the victim, navigating the fine line between rebellion and criminality.

What makes this more complex is the subtle support—or at least quiet complicity—of the larger community. In many towns, tales of successful Yahoo boys are whispered with admiration. Their flashy clothes, expensive cars, and "quick success" become models of aspiration. Parents may not ask too many questions if the son suddenly starts paying rent or funding younger siblings' education. Even some traditional institutions have been accused of honouring young men whose wealth has questionable origins.

This doesn't mean that all of Anambra is morally compromised. Rather, it means that in a state where the promise of modernity has failed to deliver, many are willing to embrace a Machiavellian logic of results over righteousness. As long as the outcome brings wealth and respect, the methods are quietly ignored. In the words of Machiavelli, *"men judge more by the eye than by the hand."*⁵

Understanding the rise of Yahoo-Yahoo in Anambra, then, is not merely a task for law enforcement or moral critics. It is a task for philosophers, educators, policymakers, and community leaders. Because behind the fraud is a powerful question echoing from every cyber café to every jobless graduate: If society no longer rewards virtue, what then is the point of being good?

The Prince Reborn: Strategy, Deception, and the Digital Hustle

Machiavelli's *The Prince* was a manual for surviving in a ruthless world. It taught that deception, manipulation, and fear were sometimes necessary tools for maintaining power. In today's Anambra, these same tactics have found a new home—not in royal courts, but in chatrooms, email threads, and digital scams. The Yahoo boy, like Machiavelli's prince, is not merely immoral; he is strategic.

Online fraud is not random. It follows a method: creating false identities, exploiting emotions, studying human weakness, and adapting language to suit the target. It is calculated—just as Machiavelli advised rulers to calculate their moves carefully and without sentiment. For many in the Yahoo world, the goal justifies the method—a car, a house, a name in society. Morality becomes secondary to survival.

This is not to excuse their actions, but to understand them. The Yahoo boy is, in many ways, a product of a Machiavellian age: an age where trust in institutions has eroded, and power is seized by the cunning, not the righteous. In this world, the prince has been reborn—not in a palace, but behind a screen.

The Prince Reborn: Strategy, Deception, and the Digital Hustle

Niccolò Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* for rulers navigating a world of betrayal, instability, and shifting loyalties. His advice was bold: be cunning, use deception when necessary, and above all, protect your power. Over 500 years later, his principles have found new life—not in politics or palace intrigues, but in the back-end operations of online fraud. In Anambra's digital underground, the Yahoo boy emerges as a modern-day prince, mastering the dark arts of persuasion, disguise, and psychological control. The average Yahoo scheme is far from chaotic. It is strategic. These young men adopt multiple identities, fabricate believable narratives, manipulate emotions, and study their victims the way a prince studies his court. In this digital hustle, scamming becomes a craft, honed by trial, error, and constant innovation. As Machiavelli urged, one must learn “not how to be good, but how not to be bad”—especially in a world where the system itself is corrupt.

Behind every scam is a calculated logic: *If no one gives you a chance, you take it.*⁶ For many of these young men, fraud is not about greed alone—it is about reclaiming dignity in a society that rewards deceit at the top while condemning it at the bottom. When leaders loot national coffers without consequence, Yahoo becomes a mirror of statecraft, not a deviation from it. Like Machiavelli's prince, the Yahoo boy does not rely on virtue but on results. Respect comes from the appearance of success. Luxury cars, designer clothes, and social status serve as proof of their cleverness—not unlike the Renaissance rulers who bought public loyalty through spectacle and fear. This is not an endorsement, but a recognition of uncomfortable truths. The Yahoo boy, shaped by desperation and intelligence, adapts Machiavellian tactics to a digital world. He doesn't wear a crown, but he rules a space where strategy beats sincerity and performance replaces principle. In a society that has blurred the line between power and legitimacy, *the prince has indeed been reborn—online, anonymous, and unrepentant.*

Glory, Power, and Appearances: Yahoo Boys and the Performance of Success

In Anambra's fast-changing social landscape, *success is no longer judged by effort but by outcome.*⁷ A young man may graduate top of his class, but if he returns home jobless, he is pitied. Another may never see the inside of a university but pulls up in a 2021 Mercedes-Benz, and suddenly, he commands respect—even if everyone whispers about *how* he made his money. This obsession with appearances, with performance over substance, is one of the most dangerous distortions of value in contemporary youth culture—and it lies at the heart of the Yahoo-Yahoo phenomenon.

For the Yahoo boy, glory is essential. It is not enough to succeed in silence; one must be seen. The wealth must be displayed on social media, flaunted at nightclubs, or paraded at family functions. Like the Machiavellian prince who builds statues and throws public spectacles to maintain power, the Yahoo boy stages success as a form of legitimacy. His performance is strategic. He understands that in a society hungry for symbols of achievement, how you appear matters more than who you are. Clothing becomes armour. Cars become thrones. Instagram becomes a digital court where likes are loyalty and followers are subjects. In this carefully curated kingdom, the Yahoo boy is not just a hustler—he is a ruler in his own right, crafting a narrative of brilliance, defiance, and domination. And in a society that often fails to question the source of wealth, his throne goes unchallenged. But this performance is not only for others; it is also for the self. Many Yahoo boys are haunted by the insecurity of their path—the fear that they are

building castles on sinking sand. To silence this fear, they overcompensate with public grandeur. Like Machiavelli's prince, who must *appear* merciful even when he is ruthless, they wear the mask of success to conceal internal chaos.

Between Survival and Subversion: Youth Voices and Moral Ambiguity

Beneath the flash of luxury watches and designer labels lies a quieter, more conflicted truth—many Yahoo boys are not simply criminals, but conflicted survivors. Their actions, though morally questionable, are often shaped by desperation, disappointment, and a deep sense of betrayal. Theirs is a generation that grew up reciting national anthems filled with promises—of peace, justice, and prosperity—only to be met with joblessness, nepotism, and inequality. It is within this betrayal that moral ambiguity takes root. Conversations with some of these youths reveal a complex moral world. Many do not see themselves as thieves, but as outlaws in a rigged system. *“The politicians steal billions, and they still call them ‘Excellency’. Me, I collect \$500 from a white man, and I’m the problem?”*⁸ one 23-year-old in Awka asked. In that question lies the essence of this section: a moral rebellion, however flawed, against a society that seems to reward those who break the rules at the top, while punishing those who do so at the bottom. This isn't justification—it is a subversive worldview, born from watching honest men die poor, while the corrupt are praised and honoured. For many of these youths, Yahoo-Yahoo becomes more than a hustle. It becomes a coded protest, a way to say, “I will not wait for crumbs.” In their minds, fraud is not just theft; it is a strategy of resistance, a refusal to accept powerlessness in a nation that offers little to the law-abiding poor.

Yet, this moral ambiguity runs deep. Some Yahoo boys speak of guilt. Others confess that their initial justification—“just this once”—quickly turned into addiction. Many fear the knock at the door, the visit from EFCC agents, or the day they are finally “exposed.” Their inner conflict reveals that not all are hardened criminals; some are young men walking a dangerous line between economic necessity and ethical collapse. This fragile balancing act—between survival and subversion—highlights a deeper crisis of moral education. Where are the ethical frameworks that should guide young people in times of hardship? If schools teach integrity but the society rewards deceit, what lesson takes root? If religion preaches righteousness but celebrates prosperity regardless of its source, what values endure?

Society's Mirror: When Corruption from Above Inspires Crime Below

The rise of Yahoo-Yahoo in Anambra is not an isolated moral failure—it is a reflection of the corruption embedded in the nation's elite consciousness. In truth, these young fraudsters did not invent deception; they inherited it. From federal ministries padded with ghost workers to political campaigns funded by embezzled public funds, the Nigerian state has normalised corruption at the top—and the streets are watching. In a country where looters are awarded chieftaincy titles and indicted politicians are welcomed with red carpets, young people quickly learn that crime is not condemned—it is only criminal if you're caught without power. The Yahoo boy simply copies what he sees: manipulation of trust, exploitation of systems, and the pursuit of wealth without accountability. While the government labels them as threats to Nigeria's international reputation, it rarely applies the same energy to its own internal rot.

It is no coincidence that many Yahoo boys model themselves after the very people society celebrates—men in flowing agbadas who fly first class, host lavish weddings, and claim philanthropic status while communities crumble. The Yahoo boy has learned that in Nigeria, perception trumps substance, and once wealth is achieved, its origin is easily forgotten. Religious and traditional institutions are not exempt from this cycle. Some pastors preach the gospel of prosperity over righteousness. Some traditional rulers honour anyone who brings wealth into the village, no matter how it was earned. In such a society, crime is not always condemned—it is often repackaged as success. Yahoo boys, therefore, do

not operate in a vacuum. They are society's mirror, revealing uncomfortable truths about what we reward, what we ignore, and what we silently encourage.

This is the real tragedy: that fraud is no longer only a criminal act, but a *learned behaviour*, reinforced by a culture that has blurred the line between honour and hustle. When leadership models dishonesty, it sets a precedent. And when justice is reserved for the powerless, crime becomes a language of agency.

Rewriting *Virtù*: Intelligence, Ruthlessness, and Reinvention in the Web Age

When Niccolò Machiavelli spoke of *virtù*, he did not mean moral virtue in the Christian sense. He meant something sharper, more pragmatic—a blend of courage, cunning, boldness, and the ability to shape fortune through sheer will. For Machiavelli, the ideal prince was not necessarily good, but effective; not necessarily kind, but capable. In today's web-driven reality, Anambra's Yahoo boys have appropriated this idea and recast *virtù* for the digital age.

Here, *virtù* no longer wears a crown or wields a sword—it types, codes, manipulates, and reinvents. Intelligence is key, not for enlightenment, but for deception. The new prince studies algorithms, tracks foreign time zones, reads psychology blogs, and perfects linguistic nuance. It is a kind of perverse brilliance, deployed not in the service of statecraft, but in the pursuit of power through fraud. In many ways, the Yahoo boy embodies a 21st-century version of Machiavelli's teachings: when institutions fail to offer justice or opportunity, one must carve out success by any means available.⁹ And that carving is not random—it is calculated. From digital romance scams to phishing, the tactics are ruthlessly creative. Machiavelli wrote that a leader must learn how to be “not good” in order to preserve his state. In Anambra's cyber cafés, young men learn how to be “not good” in order to preserve their survival.

But this new *virtù* is not without its own contradictions. Many Yahoo boys are caught in a paradox: they are creators and destroyers, respected and feared, envied and condemned. They use intellect not to uplift, but to outwit. They show boldness not in invention, but in deception. Their reinvention of self is real—but it is built on instability and risk. What they gain in money, they often lose in peace. What they build in image, they hollow out in substance. Yet, they persist—because in a world where power is not distributed fairly, reinvention becomes resistance. This is perhaps the most sobering truth: the Yahoo boy does not exist outside of the system; he is a product of it, a response to it, and in some ways, a critique of its failures. He rewrites *virtù* because the original script has failed him.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The rise of Yahoo-Yahoo among Anambra youths is not merely a story of crime—it is a philosophical commentary on a society in crisis. These young men, often brilliant, driven, and disillusioned, have not stumbled into fraud by accident. They have navigated a world where power is detached from morality, where success is celebrated regardless of the means, and where systems built to protect have instead abandoned them. In this world, the Machiavellian logic of *ends justifying means* is not just relevant—it is reality.

Machiavelli's prince ruled by necessity, not virtue. Today's digital hustlers, as uncomfortable as it may sound, follow the same script. But while Machiavelli envisioned a prince preserving a state, our own digital princes preserve only themselves, navigating a moral wilderness created by systemic corruption and institutional decay. They are not heroes—but neither are they monsters. They are symptoms of a deeper sickness: a national order that has failed to reward honesty, nourish talent, or offer justice.

To reduce the Yahoo boy to a criminal is to miss the larger question: *What kind of society makes fraud one of the few visible ladders to respect?* And perhaps more critically: *What happens when the most intelligent minds find their only outlet in deception?*

This article does not seek to romanticise crime. It seeks to expose its roots—*philosophically, socially, and ethically*. If we are to challenge the Yahoo-Yahoo phenomenon meaningfully, the answer lies not just in raids and arrests, but in a moral reawakening. We must reconstruct values from the top down and

reimagine a Nigeria where integrity is rewarded, where youth potential is harnessed, and where *virtù* once again means courage in service—not cunning for survival. Until then, the digital prince will continue to reign—not because he is right, but because the kingdom has lost its compass.

ENDNOTES

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 69.
2. Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 85.
3. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 11–13.
4. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 42–44.
5. Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 25–79.
6. John Najemy, *Machiavelli and the Politics of Republicanism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 102.
7. Erica Benner, *Be Like the Fox: Machiavelli's Lifelong Quest for Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), 212–214.
8. Philip Bobbitt, *The Garments of Court and Palace: Machiavelli and the World That He Made* (New York: Grove Press, 2013), 118.
9. Paul A. Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 31.
10. Alissa M. Ardito, *Machiavelli and the Modern State: The Prince, the Discourses on Livy, and the Extended State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 76–77.

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