HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 7. NO 1. 2027
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Greeting as a Moral Practice: An Ethical Appraisal of Indigenous Yoruba Greeting Values among Students of Adeleke University, Ede

OWOLABI, Samuel Oluwafemi[1]
Department of Religious Studies
Adeleke University, Ede,
Osun State, Nigeria

AYO, Emmanuel Idowu[2]
Department of Religious Studies
Adeleke University, Ede,
Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Greeting is a central expression of respect and character in Yoruba society, yet little is known about how students in religiously diverse university settings understand it as a moral practice. This study examined the moral and religious meanings that students of Adeleke University, Ede, attach to indigenous Yoruba greeting. Drawing on African communitarian ethics, the Yoruba concept of Omolúàbí, and politeness theory, the study used a qualitative design. The study collected data through approximately 25 semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion with purposively selected Christian and Muslim Yoruba undergraduate students and analysed them thematically. The findings show that students understand greeting primarily as a moral duty that expresses respect, humility, good upbringing and recognition of elders, core markers of Omolúàbí character. Students also reported that traditional forms are declining on campus, giving way to simpler verbal greetings under the influence of peer culture, social media, cultural diversity and inconsistent reciprocal responses from elders. Where indigenous greeting and religious teaching met, particularly over kneeling or prostration, most students resolved the tension by prioritising the intention of respect over the precise gesture, affirming that both Yoruba custom and their Christian or Islamic ethics converge on humility and mutual regard. The study concludes that greeting remains a living, if contested, moral practice that continues to shape character formation among students even as its forms adapt. It recommends that the university strengthen orientation and cultural programmes that affirm respectful greeting as part of character education while fostering dialogue across religious and cultural differences.

Keywords: greeting; Yoruba culture; *Omolúàbí*; religious ethics; indigenous values; university students

[1] samuelowolabi@adelekeuniversity.edu.ng ORCID ID: 0009-0001-0970-3971
[2] emmanuel.ayo@adelekeuniversity.edu.ng

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

Introduction

Greeting is one of the most visible ways social livesare organised, and in Yoruba society, it is also a moral act. Studies of Yoruba greeting describe it as a politeness practice that serves several functions, including courtesy, respect, solidarity and the opening and closing interactions; the form a greeting takes depends on the social distance and relative power of the people involved.[3] Politeness theory explains why such forms exist: speakers use conventional expressions to protect the dignity of others and to maintain harmonious relations.[4] In the Yoruba worldview, however, greeting also carries a heavier ethical load, because it is closely tied to *Omolúàbí*, the ideal of the well-mannered person of good character.

Indigenous Yoruba greetings (*ìkíní*) are diverse linguistic and cultural expressions through which individuals communicate respect, acknowledge social relationships and maintain communal harmony. Their typology can be broadly classified according to time, social relationships, occupational activities, environmental conditions, religious or cultural events, and life circumstances. Time-based greetings include ẹ *káàárọ̀* (good morning), *ẹ káàsán* (good afternoon), *ẹ kúùrọ̀lẹ́* (good evening) and *ódàárọ̀* (good night). Greetings are also associated with activities and occupations, as demonstrated by expressions such as *ẹ kú iṣẹ́* (well done at work), *ẹ kú ìjókòó* (greetings for sitting or staying), and *ẹ kú ìsinmi* (greetings for resting). Furthermore, Yoruba greetings acknowledge environmental conditions and seasonal experiences, including *ẹ kú òjò* (greetings during the rainy season), *ẹ kú òtútù* (greetings during cold weather) and *ẹ kú ẹ̀ẹ́yẹ́* (greetings associated with the Harmattan season). These expressions demonstrate that Yoruba greetings extend beyond conventional verbal pleasantries to reflect people's daily experiences, occupations and immediate environments.[5]

Another important typology of indigenous Yoruba greetings is based on social hierarchy, gender, age, interpersonal relationships and significant life events. In traditional Yoruba society, greetings serve as instruments for expressing deference, particularly towards elders, parents, traditional rulers and individuals occupying respected social positions. Such greetings are not exclusively verbal but are accompanied by culturally prescribed bodily gestures. For instance, younger males traditionally prostrate (*dòbálẹ̀*) when greeting elders, while younger females traditionally kneel (*kúnlẹ̀*) to demonstrate respect. The language of greeting also reflects social relationships using honorific pronouns and appropriate forms of address. Beyond interpersonal interactions, there are greetings associated with festivals,

3Theophilus Adedayo Adedokun and Eugene Patrick Marais, "Greetings as a Politeness Strategy in a Yoruba Short Story Taught to High School Learners," Interdisciplinary Journal of Economics and Business Law 12, special issue (2023): 146–162, especially 146–150.

4Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 61–62, 71–76

5A. A. Olaoye, "Sociolinguistic Documentation of Endangered Ethnography of Communication in Yoruba Language," World Journal of English Language 4, no. 1 (2014): 32–40, https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v4n1p32

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

marriage, childbirth, illness, bereavement and other significant occasions. Igboin argues that Yoruba greetings possess important semiotic, ethical and cultural dimensions, through which social order, communal identity and moral expectations are communicated.[6] Consequently, the typology of Yoruba greetings reveals a cultural system in which language, bodily expressions and social values operate together to regulate interpersonal relationships and reinforce communal identity.

Azenabor presents *Omolúàbí* as an African theory of moral value. He argues that the purpose of morality is peaceful coexistence, harmonious interaction, social cohesion and character development, and that *Omolúàbí* traits can help address contemporary moral problems in Nigeria.[7] This is consistent with a wider African ethical tradition that locates moral worth in a person's relationships with the community. Mbiti is captures this with the idea that a person exists in and through the community,[8]and Gyekye defends a moderate communitarianism in which community and individual character are both important. If this is right, a greeting is not a courtesy added on top of morality. It is one of the everyday ways in which a person practises the moral life.[9]

Yet indigenous moral values do not stay fixed. Motadegbe and Ibiyemi examine how globalisation has changed the moral and cultural values associated with *Omolúàbí* in the twenty-first century, and they note that the concept has moved away from its original usage and meaning.[10] University campuses are a good place to observe this change. Students come from different ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds, and they meet one another, their lecturers and the surrounding community under conditions that differ sharply from those of traditional Yoruba society.

Adeleke University is a private university in Ede, Osun State, a town with a long Yoruba heritage. Adeleke University is a private faith-based institution located on a 520-acre campus in the historic town of Ede, Osun State, southwestern Nigeria.

It was founded in 2011 by Dr. Adedeji Adeleke through the Springtime Development Foundation (SDF), a philanthropic, non-profit NGO he established in 1996 (RC No. 8109). The SDF focuses on community development, educational services, skill development, health services, and welfare/relief for the less privileged. The university received its charter from the National

6Benson O. Igboin, "The Semiotic of Greetings in Yoruba Culture," Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology 9, no. 2 (2012): 123–42, https://doi.org/10.5840/cultura2012929
7Godwin Azenabor, "Omolúàbí: An African Conception of Moral Values," Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya 8, no. 2 (2022): 63–81.
8John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 106
9Kwame Gyekye, Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35–76.
10Adewale Oluwaseun Motadegbe and Sheriff Olasunkanmi Ibiyemi, "Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Morality: A Philosophical Study of the Yoruba Concept of Omolúàbí," Àgídìgbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities 13, no. 1 (2025): 17–27.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Universities Commission (NUC) and welcomed its first undergraduate students on 30 October 2011. Its establishment reflects SDF's view of education as the foundation for development and a means to help people from all nations, races, colours, and ethnic groups reach their full potential.

The university operates according to the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education (emphasising holistic development of the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and social aspects of the individual, the "head, heart, and hands"). It is part of the global network of more than 100 institutions following this philosophy, though it is not owned or operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church; the founder, a member of the church, directed that the university follow its educational philosophy. The institution describes itself as God-centred and stresses service to God and humanity.

The institution has a vibrant and diverse student population of over 10,000 students, comprising more than 6,000 undergraduate students and over 4,000 graduate students. The university also provides a strong residential experience, with 100% of first-year undergraduate students living on campus.The university promotes affordable quality education, scholarships, flexible fee payment, entrepreneurial skills, and a diverse academic environment that attracts students from across the world. Its motto is "Education, Excellence and Character."

Its setting makes it a useful case for asking what indigenous greeting values mean to students today and how they relate to the students' religious commitments.

Statement of the Problem

Existing scholarship describes Yoruba greeting mainly in linguistic and politeness terms,[11] while the moral literature on *Omolúàbí* is largely philosophical and conceptual.[12][13] However, a review of the existing literature reveals limited empirical attention to how Yoruba students themselves understand and practise greeting as a moral obligation within the framework of *Omolúàbí*. Existing studies tend to examine greeting from linguistic, communicative, or broader cultural perspectives, while studies on *Omolúàbí* have largely focused on its philosophical and conceptual dimensions. Consequently, insufficient attention has been given to the relationship between everyday greeting practices, moral character formation, and religious-ethical values among students. There is also a specific religious question. Some indigenous greeting practices, notably prostration, are interpreted differently within Yoruba indigenous, Christian, and Islamic moral frameworks, and this has received little systematic ethical attention in student communities. This study therefore addresses this gap by empirically examining how students

11Adedokun and Marais, "Greetings as a Politeness Strategy," 146–150
12Azenabor, "Omolúàbí," 63–81.
13Motadegbe and Ibiyemi, "Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Morality," 17–27.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

understand greeting as a moral practice and how Yoruba indigenous, Christian, and Islamic ethical perspectives shape their attitudes towards greeting and its role in the formation and expression of *Omolúàbí*.

Scope of the Study

The study is limited to Yoruba-speaking and Yoruba-indigenous undergraduate students of Adeleke University, Ede, across all faculties of the University. It focuses on students' understanding and practice of indigenous Yoruba greeting values and the religious-ethical meanings attached to such practices. Attention is given to the ways in which greeting practices, including forms such as prostration, are understood within Yoruba indigenous moral traditions and in relation to Christian and Islamic ethical perspectives. The study covers undergraduate students across the different levels of study during the period of the research. It focuses on indigenous Yoruba greeting values and their religious-ethical interpretation.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach appropriate to the Humanities, particularly the study of religion, ethics, culture and lived experience. The choice of this approach is informed by the nature of the study, which seeks to understand how Yoruba students perceive, interpret and practise indigenous greeting as a moral and religious-ethical phenomenon rather than to measure the frequency of greeting practices statistically. The study was conducted at Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, a private faith-based university situated within a predominantly Yoruba cultural environment. The University provides a useful context for examining the interaction between indigenous Yoruba moral values and contemporary religious convictions.

The population of the study comprises Yoruba-speaking and Yoruba-indigenous undergraduate students of Adeleke University across all faculties and levels of study. Approximately 25–30 students, comprising both male and female participants, were selected for the individual interviews, together with participants in one focus group discussion. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with attention given to achieving reasonable diversity in terms of gender, faculty, level of study and religious background.[14] The selection was intended to include students who possess sufficient familiarity with Yoruba cultural practices and can reflect meaningfully on the place of greeting in Yoruba moral life. The study does not seek statistical generalisation; rather, it seeks depth of understanding and interpretation of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Data were generated primarily through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The individual interviews provided participants with the opportunity to express their personal understanding of Yoruba greeting, its

14Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson, "How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability," Field Methods 18, no. 1 (2006): 59–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

relationship with *Omolúàbí*, and the influence of their religious convictions on their attitudes towards traditional greeting practices. Attention was paid to forms of greeting such as prostration and other gestures of respect, including situations in which indigenous expectations may appear to conflict with Christian or Islamic religious convictions. Focus group discussions were also employed to facilitate collective reflection and dialogue among participants and to reveal areas of agreement, disagreement and negotiation regarding the moral significance of greeting. The combination of individual interviews and focus group discussions enabled the study to consider both personal experiences and shared cultural understandings.

The interview and focus group guides were developed around the major concerns of the study, including the meaning and significance of Yoruba greeting, the relationship between greeting and *Omolúàbí*, the moral values expressed through greeting, the influence of religious beliefs on greeting practices, and changing attitudes towards traditional greeting among university students. Interviews and discussions were conducted in English and/or Yoruba, depending on the preference and linguistic comfort of participants. Where Yoruba expressions were used, particular attention was given to preserving their cultural and ethical meanings during transcription and interpretation.

The data generated from the interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically and interpretively. The researcher engaged repeatedly with the transcripts to identify recurring ideas, meanings, values and tensions emerging from participants' accounts. The analysis was guided by the study's concern with Yoruba moral philosophy, particularly the concept of *Omolúàbí*, while remaining open to themes that emerged from the participants themselves. Attention was given to themes such as respect, humility, obedience, communal harmony, dignity, age hierarchy, moral character, religious conviction and the negotiation between indigenous tradition and contemporary religious identity. Relevant statements from participants were used to illuminate the discussion, with participants identified through codes rather than their names to preserve confidentiality.

The study also employs interpretive comparison in examining how participants negotiate the relationship between indigenous Yoruba greeting practices and Christian and Islamic ethical perspectives. Rather than treating these traditions as isolated or mutually exclusive systems, the analysis considers how students encounter, interpret and negotiate these different moral frameworks in their everyday lives. This is particularly relevant to understanding practices such as prostration, which may carry meanings of respect and humility within Yoruba cultural thought but may be interpreted differently according to individual religious convictions.

To ensure the credibility of the study, information obtained through individual interviews was considered alongside the views expressed during focus group discussions. Attention was also given to the consistency and diversity of participants' accounts, while contradictory or divergent perspectives were retained as part of the interpretation rather than excluded. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were

informed of the purpose of the research and their participation was voluntary. Their identities were protected using pseudonyms or participant codes, and care was taken to ensure that discussions of cultural and religious beliefs were treated respectfully and without privileging one religious or cultural position over another.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by an integrated framework drawn from four bodies of thought: African communitarian ethics, the Yoruba concept of *Omolúàbí*, politeness theory, and the virtue-ethical idea of moral formation through habit. A fifth element, a comparative religious-ethical lens, is used to interpret how Christian and Islamic teachings interact with indigenous practice. No single theory can explain greeting as both a social act and a moral and religious one, so the framework combines them. Each strand is reviewed below, followed by an account of how they work together in this study.

African Communitarian Ethics

African communitarian thought holds that moral life is grounded in relationships rather than in the isolated individual. Mbiti expresses this in his claim that the individual exists in and through the community, so that personal identity is bound up with membership in a group.[15] Menkiti develops the idea further by arguing that personhood in African thought is not given at birth but achieved over time.[16] A human being becomes a full person by taking part in communal life and by growing in moral maturity. Gyekye accepts the importance of community but resists the stronger claim that the community wholly defines the individual. His moderate communitarianism keeps room for individual agency, choice and rights alongside communal obligation.[17]

This debate matters for the present study. If greeting is a way of practising communal membership, it becomes one of the daily means by which a young person is recognised as morally mature.[18] Yet students at a modern university also exercise personal judgement, which suggests that they may accept, adapt or question inherited greeting customs in the manner Gyekye allows.[19] The framework therefore treats students as moral agents who both inherit communal expectations and interpret them.

15John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 106.
16Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in African Philosophy: An Introduction, 3rd ed., ed. Richard A. Wright (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 171–173.
17Kwame Gyekye, Tradition and Modernity, 35–76.
18Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 172.
19Gyekye, Tradition and Modernity, 35–76.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

Omolúàbí and Yoruba Personhood

Omolúàbí represents the Yoruba conception of an ideal moral person. It suggests that human worth is not determined exclusively by wealth, social status, educational attainment or physical appearance but significantly by the quality of one's character.[20]_Omolúàbí_ gives this communitarian outlook a distinctly Yoruba form. Gbadegesin discusses the Yoruba conception of the person, in which character is central to what it means to be a good human being.[21] Azenabor presents _Omolúàbí_ as an African theory of moral value, with peaceful coexistence, harmonious interaction, social cohesion and character development as its purposes. On this view, the _Omolúàbí_ is a person whose conduct displays the traits that sustain communal life, and respectful greeting is among the most public of those traits.[22]

The concept is not static. Motadegbe and Ibiyemi argue that globalisation has altered the moral and cultural values attached to _Omolúàbí_ and that the concept has moved away from its original usage and meaning.[23] This supports the study's interest in whether, and how, greeting still functions as a mark of _Omolúàbí_ among contemporary students. _Omolúàbí_ is used in the study as the main interpretive category through which participants' accounts of respect, humility, obedience and good character are read.

Politeness Theory

Politeness theory explains the communicative side of greeting. Brown and Levinson argue that speakers protect each other's "face", that is, the public self-image people wish to maintain, by using conventional strategies of politeness.[24] The strategies a speaker chooses to depend on the social distance between speaker and hearer, the relative power of the hearer, and the weight of the imposition involved. These variables fit Yoruba greeting well, since greeting forms vary with age, status and relationship. Adedokun and Marais (2023) apply a politeness reading to Yoruba greeting and describe it as serving courtesy, respect and solidarity, and as opening and closing interaction.[25]

Politeness theory has a limit for this study. It treats greeting mainly as strategic communication, whereas the research asks about moral obligation and religious conviction. The theory is therefore used to understand how greeting works socially, while communitarian ethics and _Omolúàbí_ supply the moral content.

20Godwin Azenabor, "Omoluabi: An African Conception of Moral Values," Thought and Practice 8, no. 2 (2022): 63–81, https://doi.org/10.4314/tp.v8i2.4.
21Segun Gbadegesin, African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities (New York: Peter Lang, 1991),
22Azenabor, "Omolúàbí," 63–81.
23Motadegbe and Ibiyemi, "Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Morality," 17–27.
24Brown and Levinson, Politeness, 61–62
25Adedokun and Marais, "Greetings as a Politeness Strategy," 146–150.

Because Brown and Levinson's model claims universal application, it is used here as an interpretive aid and not as a rigid classification.[26]

Moral Formation and Virtue Ethics

Moral formation refers to the gradual process through which an individual develops moral values, virtues, attitudes, dispositions and principles that guide responsible behaviour and decision-making. It involves the cultivation of good character through education, socialisation, religious teachings, cultural practices, personal experiences and continuous engagement with moral principles.[27]Moral formation also involves the internalisation of societal and cultural values through which individuals learn to regulate their conduct, appreciate the consequences of their actions and contribute positively to the wellbeing of others.[28]To address the fourth research question, the study draws on the virtue-ethical idea that character is formed through repeated practice. In Aristotle's account, moral virtues are acquired by habituation, so that people become just, temperate or courageous by repeatedly acting in those ways.[29] This gives a philosophical basis for treating greeting as a means of moral formation. A young person who greets respectfully repeatedly is not simply following etiquette but is shaping a disposition of respect. The idea sits comfortably beside Menkiti's view of personhood as an achievement, and both suggest that everyday practices such as greeting carry moral weight.[30]

A Comparative Religious-Ethical Lens

Because students at Adeleke University hold Christian, Islamic and other commitments, the study also needs a way of reading how religious teaching meets indigenous custom. Peel compares Christianity, Islam and *Orişa* religion among the Yoruba as three traditions that have long interacted with one another, which shows that the encounter students experience has a long history.[31] The framework treats each religious tradition as an ethical system that supplies reasons for or against greeting forms.

The tension is most visible in prostration and kneeling. Within Islam, scholarly discussion of kneeling and bending as forms of greeting,[32]and the etiquette of

26Brown and Levinson, Politeness, 71–76.
27James Arthur, The Formation of Character in Education: From Aristotle to the 21st Century (London: Routledge, 2019), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429262463.
28James Arthur, The Formation of Character in Education
29Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, trans. David Ross, ed. Lesley Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), bk. 2, 1103a14–1103b25.
30Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 171–173.
31J. D. Y. Peel, Christianity, Islam, and Orisa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 1–14.
32Yusuph Dauda Gambari and Olayinka Ibrahim Oniye, "An Examination of Salafiyyah Scholars' Discourse on Kneeling and Bending as Manners of Greeting in Islam," IIUM Journal of Human Sciences 5, no. 2 (2023): 79–93.

greeting has been discussed from the viewpoint of the jurists.[33] Within Christianity, greeting is also given moral and devotional weight, as in the instruction to greet one another with a holy kiss.[34] Elsewhere in the New Testament, Peter refuses Cornelius's act of falling at his feet,[35] a passage often discussed in connection with bowing before human beings. The framework does not decide which tradition is correct. It treats these teachings as the religious-ethical resources students draw on when they decide how to greet.

Integration of the Framework

The strands combine as follows. Communitarian ethics and *Omolúàbí* explain why greeting matters morally. Politeness theory explains how it operates in social interaction. Virtue ethics explains how it forms character. The comparative religious lens explains how religious commitment shapes, supports or challenges it. The table shows how each strand informs a research question and the analysis.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion, organised thematically around the four research questions. Participants' voices are reported with names or as Anonymous where they requested anonymity. The analysis draws on the integrated theoretical framework of African communitarian ethics, Omolúàbí, politeness theory and virtue-ethical formation, while remaining attentive to the comparative religious-ethical tensions that emerged.

Moral Meanings Attached to Indigenous Yoruba Greeting

Across the interviews, students consistently associated indigenous Yoruba greeting with a cluster of moral values: respect, humility, good upbringing (or "home training"), recognition of age and experience, cultural identity, and communal harmony. These meanings align closely with the ideal of the Omolúàbí as a person of good character whose conduct sustains peaceful coexistence.[36]

Adeola Esther summarised the moral load of greeting as follows: "I associate Yoruba greetings with respect, humility and good upbringing. The way we greet elders shows the values we have learned from our families." Faith Agboola likewise emphasised hierarchy and experience: "In Yoruba culture, you are expected to greet older people properly because they have more life experience. When you greet them, it shows that you recognise their age and respect them." Khalid, a Muslim student, linked greeting to peace and recognition of position: "I

33Ali Mohd Safri, Thoarlim Abdulsoma, and Olodo Al-Shafi'i Mohammed Muneer'deen, "The Etiquette of Greeting: Opinion of Jurists," Ponte Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences & Research 72, no. 10 (2016): 89–103.
34The Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Rom. 16:16.
35The Holy Bible, New International Version, Acts 10:25–26.
36Azenabor, "Omolúàbí," 63–81.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

believe greeting shows respect, peace, and good upbringing. In Yoruba culture, the way you greet an elder is important. When a younger person greets properly, it shows that the person recognises the position and experience of the elder."

Other participants framed greeting as evidence of moral training and belonging. One Anonymous respondent stated: "To me, greeting is a sign of respect. In Yoruba culture, you are expected to greet your elders properly, even if you don't know them personally… I also believe greeting shows how well you were trained at home." Omololu added the communal dimension: "The values I associate with Yoruba greetings are respect, humility and communal harmony." These accounts treat greeting not as optional courtesy but as a public performance of moral maturity, an everyday practice through which young people demonstrate and cultivate the character expected of an Omolúàbí.

A minority of voices qualified the moral significance of the act itself. Ayomide cautioned that "greeting is a sign of respect, but I don't believe it tells you everything about a person's character. Some people greet very well but still cheat, gossip, or treat others badly." Adebimpe similarly insisted that "greeting is basic manners… but I don't think greeting alone makes somebody a good Christian. Your attitude and how you treat people also matter." Such qualifications do not deny the moral meaning of greeting; they locate it within a broader repertoire of virtues, consistent with the virtue-ethical insight that habituation in one practice contributes to, but does not exhaust, character formation.

Influence of Religious Beliefs on Greeting Practices

Students' religious commitments, predominantly Christian, with Muslim voices also present, reinforced rather than displaced the moral expectation to greet. Faith was repeatedly cited as a reason to greet sincerely, to greet everyone (including those of lower status), and to avoid pride.

Christian participants frequently linked greeting to biblical teachings on love of neighbour, humility and respect for others. One Anonymous student explained: "As a Christian, I believe the Bible teaches us to respect people and love our neighbours. So, greeting people is one way I show love and respect. My faith encourages me to greet people whether they are rich or poor." Another Anonymous respondent stated: "My Christian faith influences me a lot. Jesus taught us to love others, and I believe greeting is one small way of showing that love. I try to greet everyone, including people I have issues with, because being a Christian means I should not allow pride to control me." Faith Agboola connected Christian humility directly to the practice: "My Christian faith teaches me to respect older people and be humble. I believe greeting is one way to practise these values."

Khalid articulated an explicitly Islamic perspective that nonetheless remained open to Yoruba forms: "As a Muslim, greeting is important because Islam teaches peace and good manners. I greet people in Islamic way and use Yoruba greetings when necessary. For me, both can show respect, depending on the situation and the person I am greeting." He added that if a traditional practice

conflicted with his religious beliefs he would "rather follow my faith while still treating the person with respect."

Family upbringing and religious formation were often described as mutually reinforcing. Ifeoluwa observed: "My religious beliefs influence me, but my family upbringing also plays a major role. I was taught to greet older people, so I still do it on campus. I don't need anyone to remind me before I greet a lecturer." Several participants noted that the university environment, by removing constant parental reminders, tests whether the moral habit has been internalised, an observation that resonates with the virtue-ethical emphasis on habituation.

Convergence and Tension between Indigenous Greeting and Religious Ethics

Participants overwhelmingly reported convergence rather than conflict on the core values of respect, humility and peaceful relationship. Divergence centred on the form of greeting, especially prostration or kneeling, and on whether elders reciprocate the gesture.

On convergence, Adeola Esther stated: "They agree because both encourage respect and humility." Joshua noted that "I believe they agree in many ways, although people from different backgrounds may interpret some Yoruba customs differently." Khalid summarised the shared ground: "They converge in the areas of respect, humility, and peaceful relationships." An Anonymous Christian participant added a clarifying proviso: "I believe greetings generally agree with Christian values, provided they are expressions of respect and not worship."

Where tension appeared, it concerned compulsory traditional gestures. Feranmi (not real name) observed: "The possible conflict is about the method of greeting. Some people expect a particular traditional gesture, while others believe a verbal greeting is enough." Another Anonymous student put it: "I believe respect is important, but I also think the intention behind the action matters." Adebimpe expressed discomfort with compulsion: "The only issue is that some traditional greeting practices may feel compulsory. I think respect should come naturally, not because somebody is forcing you to do it. You can respect an elder without necessarily following every traditional practice." Khalid's stance, prioritising faith while remaining respectful, illustrates the practical negotiation many students described.

A related and frequently mentioned tension was the asymmetry of respect. Multiple participants reported that elders (including lecturers) sometimes fail to respond to greetings, which discourages further practice. Joshua remarked: "Sometimes, students greet lecturers or other elders and receive little or no response. This can discourage them from greeting again." Ifeoluwa echoed the point: "When an elder ignores a student who greets respectfully, the student may feel embarrassed and eventually lose the motivation to maintain the custom." Focus-group participants likewise stressed mutuality: "Both students and elders should make an effort to greet each other… elders should also respond warmly when students greet them." This concern for reciprocal

recognition is consistent with the moderate communitarianism of Gyekye,[37] in which communal obligation and individual dignity are held together.

Greeting, Moral Formation and Observed Change on Campus

Students generally affirmed that repeated greeting still shapes character, particularly humility, patience and the refusal of pride, yet they also documented a perceptible decline in traditional forms and, in some cases, in the practice itself.

On formative effects, Faith Agboola stated: "Greeting reminds me to be humble and not behave as if I know everything. It also helps me develop patience when interacting with older people." An Anonymous participant observed: "Greeting has shaped my character because it has taught me humility. Even when I am tired or not in a good mood, I try to greet people. It reminds me that being respectful is part of being a good person." Khalid linked greeting to ongoing self-awareness: "It helps me become more conscious of how I relate to people. Greeting encourages peaceful relationships and reminds me not to be proud."

At the same time, the focus-group discussion and individual interviews revealed several interlocking sources of change. Peer and campus culture favour informal greetings ("Hi," "Hello," or simple "Good morning, sir/ma"). One focus-group participant noted: "Because of social media and the way we communicate today, many young people prefer simple greetings like 'Hi' and 'Hello.' This does not always mean they have lost respect for elders. It may just mean that the way they greet people has changed." Another observed that "the university environment affects how students greet people. Students spend most of their time with friends and classmates, so they may become used to informal greetings." Cultural diversity on campus was frequently cited: non-Yoruba students or those raised outside strong Yoruba greeting norms may not share the same expectations, which in turn normalises simpler practices among Yoruba students as well.

Independence from parental oversight also mattered. An Anonymous student explained: "Some students become less conscious of greeting after entering the university. At home, parents may constantly remind you to greet elders. At university, nobody follows you around to remind you. So, some students stop paying attention to it." Pride and selective greeting were also mentioned: some students greet only people they know or only when they need something from a lecturer. Deborah Adeleke summarised a generational attitude: "Some young people see traditional Yoruba greetings as old-fashioned. They may think that because they are in the university, they don't need to greet every older person they meet."

Focus-group voices balanced critique with defence of cultural continuity. One participant insisted that "we may lose part of our culture if we stop practising traditional Yoruba greetings. These greetings are part of our identity." Another argued that the form may change without the value disappearing: "I don't think students are becoming less respectful. I think the way they show respect is

37Gyekye, Tradition and Modernity, 35–76.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

changing… greeting someone politely is also a way of showing respect." These observations illustrate Motadegbe and Ibiyemi's claim that Omolúàbí values are being transformed under the pressures of globalisation and contemporary social environments, while remaining recognisable to the students themselves.[38]

Discussion

The findings confirm that indigenous Yoruba greeting continues to function as a moral practice among Adeleke University students, even as its forms and intensity are renegotiated. Students' accounts map closely onto the theoretical framework. Communitarian ethics and the Omolúàbí ideal explain why greeting is experienced as a duty that displays and forms character. Politeness theory accounts for the situational variation in form (age, status, relationship). Virtue ethics illuminates the habitual dimension: students who continue to greet report the cultivation of humility and social awareness, while the absence of external reminders on campus tests whether the disposition has been internalised. The comparative religious lens shows that Christian and Islamic ethics largely reinforce the moral content of greeting while leaving room for personal judgement about specific gestures such as prostration.

The most significant points of friction are not doctrinal opposition between Yoruba custom and the major religions, but practical issues of form, reciprocity and plural campus norms. Students resolve the form question by prioritising intention and a verbal (or simple physical) acknowledgement over compulsory prostration. They insist on mutual respect: elders' failure to respond undermines the moral economy of greeting. And they recognise that a multi-ethnic, multi-religious student body cannot sustain a single traditional script. In this sense, the university becomes a laboratory for the moderate communitarianism Gyekye describes; students exercise agency in interpreting inherited obligations while still valuing the communal goods those obligations were meant to secure.[39]

Conclusion

Summary of the Study

This study set out to examine the moral and religious meanings that Yoruba undergraduate students of Adeleke University, Ede, attach to indigenous greeting practices, and to explore how those practices function as a means of moral formation in a religiously diverse campus setting. Using a qualitative design and thematic analysis.[40]Using approximately 25 semi-structured interviews and one focus-group discussion, it addressed four research questions concerning moral meaning, religious influence, points of convergence and conflict, and the continuing role of greeting in character formation.

38Motadegbe and Ibiyemi, "Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Morality," 17–27.
39Gyekye, Tradition and Modernity, 35–76.
40Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," Qualitative Research in Psychology 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

Summary of Findings

With respect to moral meaning, students consistently understood greeting as an expression of respect, humility, good upbringing and recognition of elders, values they associated with the ideal of the Omolúàbí and with proper moral training at home. Regarding religious influence, both Christian and Muslim participants reported that their faith reinforces the obligation to greet politely and sincerely, often extending the duty beyond ethnic or hierarchical boundaries. On convergence and conflict, indigenous custom and religious ethics were found to agree on the core values of respect and humility; tensions centred on the compulsory nature of traditional gestures (especially prostration or kneeling) and on the asymmetry of respect when elders fail to respond. Students typically resolved these tensions by prioritising intention over form and by calling for mutual regard. Finally, greeting was still seen as shaping moral character, particularly humility and the refusal of pride, yet participants documented a decline in traditional forms under the pressures of peer culture, social media, cultural diversity on campus, reduced parental oversight, and selective or non-reciprocal practice.

Contribution

The study contributes to religious ethics by providing an empirical, student-centred account of how young people negotiate indigenous moral claims and Christian or Islamic ethical frameworks in everyday practice. It extends the largely conceptual literature on Omolúàbí and the linguistic-politeness literature on Yoruba greeting by showing how both operate as lived moral resources, and how they are adapted, within a contemporary Nigerian university. The findings illustrate Motadegbe and Ibiyemi's observation that Omolúàbí values are transforming, while demonstrating that the underlying moral expectations of respect and humility remain recognisable and actionable for students.[41]

Recommendations

1. For the University: Orientation and character-education programmes should explicitly affirm respectful greeting as part of the institution's emphasis on character (its motto includes "Character"), while recognising cultural and religious diversity. Workshops or peer-led sessions could discuss both traditional Yoruba forms and the simpler verbal greetings that many students now prefer, reducing misunderstanding between students and staff.

2. For chaplaincy on campus: Dialogue sessions that bring Christian, Muslim and culturally traditional perspectives into conversation about respectful greeting would help students see the substantial ethical convergence and would model mutual regard across difference.

41Motadegbe and Ibiyemi, "Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Morality," 17–27.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

3. For lecturers, parents and moral educators: Reciprocity matters. Elders who consistently acknowledge students' greetings reinforce the practice; those who ignore them undermine it. Families and educators should continue to teach the moral reasons for greeting rather than only the outward forms, so that the disposition survives the transition to independent campus life.

Limitations and Further Research

The study is limited by its small, purposive sample drawn from a single private faith-based university; findings are therefore transferable rather than statistically generalisable. Future research could compare experiences at a public university with a more heterogeneous student body, include the perspectives of lecturers, parents and religious leaders, or employ a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative depth with survey data on the frequency and forms of greeting.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me