

**Festivals and Rites as Mediums of Moral Education: A Case Study of
Mobaland in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study explored how the people of Moba in Ekiti State, Nigeria, use three of their traditional festivals and rites—odun ijesu, itugbe and oku-omo-ile—for moral education. Qualitative method of research was used with unstructured interview guide utilized for data collection. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for selecting people comprising leaders and practitioners, who have deep knowledge of the three festivals as participants for the study. Interviews were conducted and the data collected were content analysed. The study found that there are moral lessons embedded in these festivals particularly in every act of the celebration. The leaders need to deliberately highlight these lessons emphasising their significance as the very essence of the festivals and rites in order for people to understand, imbibe and put them into practice.

Keywords: festivals, moral lessons, new yam festival, rites, passage

Introduction

Morality is an essential factor in determining the ethos of any society. Although, one definition may not fit all moral discussions, descriptively, it deals with certain codes of conduct acknowledged and accepted by a society that determine acceptable behaviours. (GERT 2016) Morals are the fundamental standard of behaviour that enable people to live cooperatively in a community. Some moral principles may transcend time and culture, examples include integrity, fairness and truthfulness. (McCombs School of Business, The University of Texas 2020) Morality influences the social, security, and development status of a community. It has become an issue of serious concern in many nations of the world including Nigeria and specifically in Moba Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

Moba comprises 13 towns and villages that are similar in culture, rites and practices. The people of Moba are highly industrious and value high morality. They have different ways of giving moral education to their children and of discouraging immoral behaviours in the society. Some of the ways used to achieve this include songs, stories, legends, folklore, proverbs, festivals and rites. Some of the festivals in Mobaland include Odun Ijesu (New Yam Festival), Itugbe (age group festival) and oku-omo-ile (rite of passage for the dead). This study examines how these festivals have contributed to the moral education of the people of Moba.

Festivals are part of folk heritage as the celebration of cultural, religious and/or traditional milestone or practices by a particular community of humans. (MOKUOLU 2019; ODERINDE 2018) They are important in promoting values and beliefs of people, and to give meaning to the social, political and religious life of the people involved in them. Celebration of festivals involves series of performances, entertainments, rites, and rituals. Festivals “are vital mainsprings in the traditional education.” Despite the importance of festivals, many are no longer celebrated to portray the values in them; the focus has shifted to mainly entertainment. (AKINTAN 2013, 267) They are even considered by some as occasions for promoting vices such as stealing, fighting, and immorality. (ODERINDE 2018)

While scholars have written on cultural, spiritual, social and economic values of festivals, the aspect of moral values has not been significantly considered. (FAHM 2015; MAKINDE 2011; ODERINDE 2018) This study explores how festivals can be used for moral education which is becoming increasingly essential in the 21st century human society.

Morality

The concern about morality as a concept spans through ages. The major feature of morality can be divided into formal and material. The formal features according to Kant’s moral philosophy, is that universally, what is wrong is wrong and what is right is right; moral demands are unconditional. Whereas material features hold that morality concerns what benefits and harms people; whatever does not harm is morally right and when it harms, it is morally wrong. (WONG 2019) In this study, morality is conceived of as anything that is conventionally right, anything that upholds integrity. Every human community, organization and discipline work to ensure a high morality because it is important to distinguish right conduct from wrong conduct in order to have harmonious living and to ensure human well-being (OYESHILE 2002).

Morality has been viewed from different nuances by different disciplines. Its definition has been considered from either descriptive or normative perspective. From the descriptive point of view, it is certain codes of conduct that a society puts together which is based on agreement, determines the society’s behaviour. The normative view presents morality as “a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons.” (GERT 2016)

The level of morality in a society determines the peace and safety, productivity and development of the society. The importance of morality is further established by the different disciplines—counselling, psychology, religion, politics, education, among others—that have delved into how morality is related to humanities and human societies. One of the major factors that influence morality in a society is religion. Religion and morality have been viewed as dependent on each other and cannot be separated. (ADETUNJI 2012; MCKAY 2015) Different theories have been postulated on the concept of morality some of which include, consequentialism, deontology, justice as fairness, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. (Seven Pillars Institute, 2020) The theories present a philosophical approach to understanding moral issues (MORDACCI 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Since this study is on moral education, it is necessary not to mention the ethical (moral) theories in passing. When it comes to this work, consequentialism and deontology are considered. There are two types of consequentialism which are egoistic and particularistic consequentialism. (RUDOLPH 2008) Consequentialism only takes into consideration what the effect of an action will be on oneself or a given group. In essence the moral rightness depends on the consequences of an action irrespective of the action itself. (SUIKKANEN 2009) Rudolph, in his critique of consequentialism argued that rather than determining the rightness or wrongness based on inherent value of the action, it is on the consequences. (2008) In the other way, deontology theory holds that people should act in ways constrained by moral rules or rights which are defined independently of consequences. David Cumiskey, making reference to Kant as stating that the moral worth of an action, in so far as it reflects on the agent, does not depend on the actual effects or consequences of the action. (1989, 114) This work adopts deontological theory because, though it has its own weaknesses of which according to Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, the glaring one is the seemingly irrationality of people having duties to make the world morally worse, it has its morality allowing space for agents to give special concern to their families, friends, and projects. It also gives an answer to why people have moral standing to complain and hold to account those who breach moral duties. (2020) And accountability is one of the needed ingredients for making a society conducive for living and for enhancing development.

Moral Education

Moral education is concerned with inculcating moral values, such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, and hard work, in children. (JACOBBER 2011; RYAN 2020) It is helping children acquire virtues or moral habits that will make them responsible and productive adults. This is a form of education that does not only take place in school but also outside of school, through socialization that involves deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts that cannot take place without parents and significant others in the lives of children. (JACOBBER 2011; WESTERHOFF 2000) Lanker emphasized the importance of the role of significant others by stating that, non-parental adults are a key asset during children's developmental years because "they can provide both the psychological distance . . . to separate and individuate from parents as well as the life experience to wisely and lovingly guide" children. (2010, 267)

Children and adolescents' moral development is highly dependent on parents, and significant others. Young people change when they realize that their behaviour must follow a certain acceptable standard as lived by the adults. Lawrence Kohlberg, a 20th century moral theorist stated that there is a time in the life of teens when moral development is based on respect for others rather than on personal desire. (PARROTT, 2000) The role of parents and significant others as figure of respect based on the positive life they live is important to children for their moral development; because children seek out behaviour or possessions that are readily observable.

Mentoring, which is an intentional role, is also an important factor in moral upbringing of children. (JOHNSON, 2007) Lanker viewed mentoring as essential in children development. Since children learn by imitation, the type of moral development expected from children are to be mentored by the parents and the significant others. (2010) Children are to be mentored to weave their beliefs with behaviours. (ABOLARIN 2015; GARBER 1996)

In Nigeria, specifically in Moba land, parents and significant others are involved in the moral upbringing of children. As part of the Yoruba race, the Moba people believe that all available and relevant avenues should be explored for the lofty aim of raising children to become morally upright adults. Some of the methods employed for this purpose are masterfully woven into songs, tales, proverbs as well as festival and rites. (FAGUNWA 2017; OLANIPEKUN 2017; OMOBOWALE n.b.n, 2018)

Festivals and Morality

Festivals, a vibrant part of cultures in human communities, though a celebration of victory, achievement, progress and peace, among others, have moral significance that people either directly or indirectly imbibe to make human society a better place for the well-being of the people. (THOMPSON, 2009) Festival celebration helps family members to settle differences and begin afresh. It makes community go through purification, cleaning past evils and misfortunes, and gives opportunity for a new beginning. It calls individuals to renounce every evil committed and plead for forgiveness and renewal of life. It is a time when a community is committed to the Supreme God for a new prosperous season; to pray for the king and the community. (AKANJI n.b.n 2012; AKINTAN 2013; FAHM 2015; ODERINDE 2018; WANG 2015) There are many of such festivals and rites in Yorubaland including Moba specifically, some of which are, egungun (masquerade) festival, ogun (god of iron) festival, oro (god of ancestral spirit), odun ijesu (new yam festival), itugbe (age-group rite), and oku-omo-ile (rite of passage for the dead).

The importance of unity and love among people, hard-work and diligence, and integrity are emphasised as the expectation of the gods from the people in order for the gods to bring prosperity and safety to the community. In fact, some of the festivals forbid stealing, lying, and oppression. Different aspects of the practices during the festivals depict different values upheld by the people and their commitment to the divine. (AKINTAN 2012; FAHM 2015; MAKINDE 2011; OLUSEGUN 2017) It is expected that through the practices, moral lessons would be portrayed either implicitly and/or explicitly by the practitioners as they carried out the rituals and that the lessons attached would be imbibed directly or indirectly by the children and adolescents, even the adults. Symbols are used in festivals to represent some ideal standard and situation; and the symbols are expected to pass the message across to participants. And symbols are essential to children for learning; (PARROTT 2000) they can learn moral lessons if the symbols are appropriately used, especially by authentic, sincere and well-behaved individuals.

Methodology

This study investigated the experiences of Moba people on using festivals to promote moral education in their societies, especially for the benefit of the young people. The study adopted qualitative research method, using interview as mode of data collection according to Creswell, (2007), Kothari, (2004), and Neuman, (2003). Four major towns in Moba Local Government area—Otun, Igogo, Ikosu, and Ikun—were used for the study. The leaders (kings and chiefs), elders, and some members of the four towns were purposively chosen due to their direct affiliation to the festivals as either chief, leader, organiser, or significant participant. In order to ensure anonymity, the names used in this study are not the real names of the people, but were coined from their real names or their position in the town. Unstructured interview guide was used as instrument for data collection and the collection was done by traveling to the towns. The data collected were content analysed according to the prevailing themes.

The objective of the study was to explore how festivals and rites are used to teach moral values, especially to children and adolescents. The study focused on three festivals—odun ijesu, itugbe, and oku-omo-ile—that are commonly celebrated by the communities in Moba local government area. The study answered the following questions; (1) How are those festivals celebrated? (2) What moral lessons are implied by each of the festivals? (3) How are the lessons being passed across to children? (4) How effective are the strategies? (5) Are there things to improve upon to help young people understand and imbibe the moral lessons embedded in the festivals?

Findings

Odun Ijesu (New yam festival): Odun ijesu is an annual cultural celebration of new yam in some part of Nigeria such as Igboland and Yorubaland. It is a harvest thanksgiving festival that, according to BabaOye (a prominent elder in one of the towns), Obaaro (a high chief), Obalotin (a chief) and Ogunyemi (a preist), in their conversation with the author on August 13, 2020, focuses on thanking the Supreme Being for protection over the people from planting to harvest season. According to them, new festival is the time yam is presented to the fertility and harvest deity as the first one who ought to have it because he makes yams yields and harvest possible. Failure to present new yam to the deity can lead to poor harvest and hunger. It has been established before now by scholars that eating new yam before presenting it to the deity can bring sickness and death from sore throat and cough (MANUS, 2007).

Obaaro and Omo-oba (king's son), in their interaction with the author on August 13, 2020, stated that odun ijesu marks the beginning of another year when prayer is offered to God for another plentiful and prosperous year. Each family, according to them, rejoices and thanks God for blessings received. They also ask for protection for the future. It is a period when peace is restored in the family and community. Different aspects of the celebration depict different beliefs and philosophies such as the belief that God is Supreme, and there should be accountability of every human endeavour to this God, and his ownership of all things.

In their narration of the festival, Jolaiya (a prominent participant in the festivals), Obaaro, Ogunyemi, and Omo-oba, in a personal communication with the author on August 13, 2020, stated that the chiefs converge at the king's palace to convey the people's message asking the King to give permission for them to begin to bring in new yam from the farm. The chiefs bear the message with a sense of urgency and importance telling the King that the people are already complaining of hunger. Depending on the community, this message is usually delivered three consecutive times before the king grants permission and gives a specific date from which people may begin to bring home the newly harvested tubers of yam. This traditional protocol depicts both the urgency and importance of the message, and the king's authority and sovereignty within the community.

From the day the king announces the date, Babaoye and Obalotin in their conversation with the author narrated that one of the processes that precede odun ijesu is Onisukan (one-yam man) day, when the harvest priests go to the farm and bring only one yam to be offered to God. Then the king also goes to the farm and brings in new yam on another special day. After this, the entire community goes to the farm to bring in new yam. The day of bringing yam home is a joyful day and the day is called ojo oko aye. Tubers of yam are given to widows, the poor, the old people, and anyone who could not cultivate a farmland that year due to some misfortune. It is the day lazy people are exposed and shamed, while hard-work is celebrated and rewarded. Obalotin in his conversation with the author on August 14, 2020 added that children are also fully engaged as they go with excitement on many trips of taking tubers of yam to different people and homesteads throughout the day.

Following the day yam is brought home, according to the conversation of BabaOye and Obaaro with the author on August 13, 2020, which is the actual festival day, the royal family all dressed in white, leads the community in thanking God and makes a communal presentation of the yam to him. Prayers are offered and moral and spiritual values are reiterated as people are enjoined to continue to meet the society and the Supreme Being's expectation all through the year. The people then go to their houses and begin to prepare and eat pounded yam, visiting one another, in the midst of a festive and jubilant atmosphere. On the third day, the people go to the farm to bo wo aye (cover the hand of harvest); which is another time to bring yam home to give to the needy people.

About 15th days later, according to BabaOye, Obaaro, Obalotin, Omo-oba, and Orangun (head of the women in one of the towns) in a personal conversation with the author on August 13 and 24, 2020, the entire community gathers in the king's palace for the final celebration. This is characterised by much singing, dancing, acrobatic displays and show of artistic creativity. Members of the community step out in their different groups—the king dances first then the chiefs, the warriors, the wives in the royal house, different age groups, and youths, among others. Everyone pays homage to the king as the representative of God. During the occasion, those who have not been of good character, who are sluggards and loafers are ridiculed through different songs and performances. Example of such songs as given by Bola (a participant) in her interaction with the

author on August 17, 2020, include Ole a budi bobo boo, ei loyoo see kade (a sluggard who is full of buttocks, that is all you can do around); or they compare the person through song to a local soft food called olele (grinded and cooked beans with ingredients). The person leading the song calls the name of the lazy person, and the group responds by saying, ole olele (ole = lazy or sluggard and olele is the local food made of beans). This festival according to BabaOye, Obalotin, Ogunyemi, Omo-oba, in personal conversation with the author on August, 13 and 14, 2020, is used to thank God, recognize the king as God's representative, show benevolence, honour the husbands, promote hard-work, promote unity and love in the society, It is a significant avenue for reminding the people of their duty to be honest and obedient to constituted authority, and to continue to uphold and respect the culture and tradition of the land.

Another remarkable activity associated with the new yam festival as narrated by BabaOye and Obalotin in their personal conversation with the author on August 13, 14, 2020, is called logeloge. This activity, although engaged in within a context of festivities, has a deep-seated effect of teaching young men vital hunting skills. Logeloge is a flat and round material made from the tuber of a plant called ego. One of the young men carries it while others stand in a row holding catapults and arrows shooting at the round material as it is rolled across with speed. This exercise provides a sort of hands-on lesson for young men on how to shoot at both running and stationary objects.

Itugbe (Age group rite): BabaOye and Omo-oba in personal conversation with the author on August 13 and 14, 2020, explained that this is a kind of initiation rites performed in order for someone to be accepted as belonging to a particular age group. This is generally observed beginning from puberty in many societies (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). The age of initiation varies from one society to the other but it always signifies passage from one age group to another. This is practiced in some of the towns in Mobaland, and in some other neighbouring towns.

This festival is celebrated at an interval of seven years according to BabaOye and Obalotin in a personal communication on August 14, 2020. They added that it begins in the adolescent years called igiiri, and after seven years people in that nascent cadre climb a higher ladder of age group called arilegbe (no name group), after that they move to ekoorun (the valiants). The ekoorun are the strong young men and women who labour for the development of the town. They are the warriors and defenders of the community. They served as road and bridge builders before the modern roads were constructed. After the ekoorun, there are other eleven age groups depending on how long an individual lives. The last group for the oldest people is egbe iketala (the 13th age group). On the itugbe day, members of each age group present themselves before the king in the presence of the entire community. They kneel before the king who charge them and pray for them. After all the groups are presented, each group leaves the market square with dancing and the rest of the day is for eating, drinking and all manners of felicitation. The celebration lasts for seven days in some communities.

The itugbe, still in a personal communication with BabaOye, Obaaro, Obalotin, and Orangun, on August 14, 2020, serves as a sort of primitive database through which every member of the community is accounted for, beginning from puberty. Also, through this record system, it becomes easy to identify those to be called upon for specific roles for the development of the community. If there is a need for securing the community, the king and chiefs know those to be saddled with that responsibility. While the men are engaged in the communal duties according to their age groups, women are also involved in their responsibilities to the community. One of the responsibilities of the women is to make sure that the community is kept clean.

BabaOye, Omo-oba and Orangun, in their conversation with the author on August 14, 2020 added that itugbe also allows for easy dissemination of information, and effective traditional education. It promotes morality in the society. Since no age group would want to be disgraced in the community, each group meets and inspire members to be of good behaviour in the town. As a result of the healthy inter-group competition, each group strives to excel at whatever task is assigned them by the community and by so doing no one becomes a mere bystander. Rather, everyone takes interest in whatever happens in the town, and there is a pervasive sense of joint responsibility. There are statutory meeting times when each group gathers in the king's palace for admonition, encouragement and prayer by the king. It allows each person in the community to know, meet and collaborate with his/her age group. Orangun, on August 14, 2020, declared that "These days, school system automatically puts our children in age groups."

Oku-omo-ile (rites of passage for the dead): This rites of passage for the dead according to Jolaiya, Ogunyemi and Omo-oba in a personal communication with me on August 13, 2020, also varies from town to town, but the underlying belief and goal are the same, which is opening of the path for the dead person to exit this world and move into the next world. One aspect of the rites is the giving of money, goat and kolanut to the *omo-ile* (the men and women of the compound to which the dead person belonged). This part is done by the children of the deceased; and it is so important that it goes with a common saying, *eni omo sin lo bi omo* (it is the person whose children perform the burial rites that actually have children).

The process of performing the rites according to Olaiya and Omo-oba, in a personal conversation with the author on August 13 and 14, 2020, is set in motion when the children of the deceased approach the elders to inform them of the passing of their father or mother. The elders in turn asks the children of the deceased what they want them to do. Then the children inform the elders that they will like to perform the burial rites. A suitable date for the rite will be fixed.

On the set date, Olaiya and Omo-oba narrated, the men of the part of the town where the dead person belonged sit according to their age group and the children of the deceased begin to move from one group to the other dropping money in a plate. The same is done for the women folk who also sit together in separate groups. This continues until the chief of the people sends for the children, who respond by coming together and kneeling before the chief and the

elders. The chief then charges them never to fail in their responsibility to the compound and the town at large after which he prays for the children and then makes a pronouncement that they have spent enough and have fulfilled all the requirements of the funeral rites. The sound of drums, singing and dancing immediately follows the chief's pronouncement as the children of the deceased and their relatives dance all over the town and eventually to their home. The goat given to the elders by the children is killed in the presence of the children as they dance and sing

Alagba (an aged man in one of the towns), BabaOye and Jolaiya on August 13 and 14, 2020 explained that the rites aim at encouraging people to live a good and exemplary life being industrious and committed to the care of their children so that when they die, those children will be responsible and respectable enough to give them a befitting burial. It emphasises the importance of unity among people, and it especially demonstrates to the children of the deceased that they are not alone, the entire community is with them as one big family. The occasion is also used to chastise any of the children that may not be living a dignified life.

Implications for Moral Education

This study covers three festivals, and from the data collected in the course of the study, three categories of findings with several themes under each category. The first category relates to the recognition of God as the Supreme Being, the second category is the acceptance of the king as the representative of God, and the third category deals with the influence of the festivals on the people. The focal point from the findings is that people should learn to do right because it is right. This is deontological approach to morality; consequence should not be the determinant factor of any action, but people should act because it is right to do so.

God as the Supreme Being

Three sub-themes emerged under the major theme of God as the Supreme Being. The first theme is that **God is the owner of all things**: Odun Ijesu according to Comfort, Jolaiya and Ogunyemi in a personal conversation on August 13, 2020, is to show that human beings cannot have food which is crucial for their survival if God who owns all things does not make yam to yield. Before eating new yam, it is to be given to the Supreme God who owns it; even when people going hungry, yam must first be presented to God. The people believe that without God, the owner of all things, there cannot be harvest. Death (oku-omo-ile), though painful, adequately indicates that God is the owner of all things, including lives. Obalotin in personal conversation on August 14, 2020 added that God is the one who gives strength to farmers and keeps them alive till harvest time; he gives life and takes it when he pleases. And as individuals increase in age, the age group rite is to call attention to the God who is keeping the person alive. Oku-omo-ile is to let the living know that they belong to God. BabaOye, Obaaro and Ogunyemi on August 13, 2020, clarified that the belief in God as the owner is expressed in other terms such as Oloriaye (the head of the earth), Oba to ni wa (the King who owns us), Alase ohun gbogbo (the authority over all things).

Africans, Moba people inclusive, have always perceived God as Supreme and the owner of all things (ABOLARIN 2015; MBITI 1990). This perception is to influence and mould the moral behaviour of people. If God owns all things, as stated by Comfort (a prominent woman participant), Jolaiya and Ogunyemi on August 13, 2020, every human being is accountable to him and must behave in accordance to his will because he being the Supreme, is also the Adake dajo (the silent judge). The people connected the belief in God with moral behaviour which agrees with McNamara who argued that the belief in God is identified with morality, (1984), and Garber who opined that beliefs are to be woven with behaviours. (1996)

God first: New yam festival (*odun ijesu*), according to BabaOye, Obaaro and Omo-oba on August 13, 2020, is harvest thanksgiving to God. Obaaro declared “We cannot eat new yam if it has not been presented to God who made the ground to yield the harvest.” It is important to know that the people approach this God through the deities like Orisa-oko, Oloreore, Awo as intermediaries; although the emphasis on the deities has reduced since the advent of foreign religions like Christianity and Islam. This belief in God first is demonstrated by not allowing anyone to bring new yam home from the farm or eat it before the festival. Each community has a tradition of recognising a clan as the first settler in the community, as narrated by Obaaro and Omo-oba on August 13, 2020, it is this clan that will go and bring new yam and offer it to God first before any other person does the same. Few days after this, the entire community goes to their farms and brings new yam home, usually a day before the new yam festival. God is considered to be the owner and should have the first new yam. It is believed that whenever anyone tries to eat new yam before it is offered to God in one of the communities, “such a person will eat but will not be satisfied”; in another community, “people who eat new yam before offering it to God, fell sick.” (Obaaro, in personal conversation with the author on August 13, 2020)

The *itugbe* (age group rite) as reiterated by Obalotin and Orangun, on August 14, 2020, informs people that having grown up to a level in life and entering into any of the age groups is only made possible by God and he is the only one who can keep one for another seven years. There can never be anything if *Olodumare* (Supreme God) has not sanctioned it and this is why *itugbe* is important, to acknowledge the fact that God is the beginning of every life and age.

God is pure: When these festivals are going on, according to Obalotin in a personal communication with the author on August 14, 2020, the participants have the mind of portraying the purity of God. This makes them put on white apparels covering almost every part of their bodies. This is important because God will not accept filthy offering. Those presenting the offering must also be clean to be qualified for participation. When new yam is being presented to God, the worshipers are purified after which they are to demonstrate their state of purity by wearing white apparel.

BabaOye and Obaaro on August 14, 2020, gave the narration that the procession, dressing, singing, chanting, and orderliness during the festivals serve as pedagogical method to teach both young and old that God is not man, he is the Supreme Being, the owner of all and the first in all things. In BabaOye’s words:

When we carry out the procession and the offering to God, we indirectly teach the young people that God is to be revered and taken as number one in everything in life. There is no way people will not feel the awe when the activities are going on.

The appearance of the people leading in the festivals according to Obaaro on August 14, 2020, portrays the purity of God. People put on white apparels to show that God hates sin, wickedness and anything filthy.

The King is God's Representative on Earth

The second category of finding that emerged in the study is the perception of the king as the representative of God on earth. The participants in this study agreed that people are loyal to the king because they see him as God's representative on earth. Babaoye, Jolaiya and Omo-oba on August 13, 2020, explicitly stated that the position of the king in two of the festivals and how people relate with him implies that he is regarded as God's representative on earth. Before odun ijesu can hold, the king must grant his permission and that is only obtained after the third visit of the chiefs. This further demonstrates that humans are subject to God's decision and not the other way round. After the very first yam is offered to God, the next one, before the entire community can have theirs, is for the king. He goes to the farm with all the queens to bring home the new yam. Besides, the king is the first to take new yam to the market before anyone can sell new yam. All the groups in the town appear before the king to pay homage and he pronounces blessings on them. He is the igba keji orisa (second in command to the god). Obaaro added that the king does not take part in burial rites because as God's representative, he must not see corruption.

The king is the constituted authority according to Omo-oba in conversation with the author on August 13, 2020, and the festivals teach that the subjects must be loyal and obedient to him, even when not convenient. If he does not consent to eating of new yam, no one can go ahead to do so. Ogunyemi and Omo-oba on August 13, 2020, clarified that the difference between the king and other people is even made clearer at the burial of the king. He is not buried as others are buried. A king is beyond ordinary human. They added that this is why he has the authority to summon everyone to his palace and charge them to be patriotic and cherish integrity.

Moral Lessons for the people

The third category of finding in the study is the moral lessons for the people. The participants stated that unity and love are promoted through the festivals. People settled their differences during the festivals. During oku-omo-ile, for example, as explained by Omo-oba on August 13, 2020, siblings come together, relate with one another and if there has been any contention between them, it is cleared. When they do itawo (giving of money to groups), they work together so as to avoid being disgraced. If there is any quarrel between husband and wife, during odun ijesu, it must be settled because both of them have to go to the farm to bring yam and they

will both see to how to share and to who. Comfort and Obaaro on August 13, 2020 added that the wife is expected to pound yam and present the pounded yam to the husband on the new yam festival day. This diffuses anger and animosity among people.

The three festivals promote companionship, declared BabaOye in his conversation with me on August 14, 2020. He added that Odun ijesu calls for people to work together, itugbe implies that you have age mates who you have to always consult and work with to develop yourself and the town. Obaaro and Omo-oba, on August 13, 2020, stated that there is no individual who can handle oku-omo-ile alone. Others must be involved because collaboration and consultation are the hallmark of the activities. This is part of the moral education the festivals give.

Respect for others is another moral lesson the three festivals teach, declared Ogunyemi in a personal communication with me on August 13, 2020. Comfort and Jolaiya on August 13, 2020, added that everyone is important, even the king recognises this and shows it by listening to the people, making himself available and leading by example in the celebration of the festivals. No one is looked down upon. Even children have their roles during the festivals.

Good character and discipline are promoted during the festivals, according to Comfort, Ogunyemi and Omo-oba on August 13, 2020. They added that one major way of doing this is through songs and traditional performances. Different local singers sing round the community during the festivals to praise those who do well and to disgrace those who were convicted of immoral and antisocial behaviour within the year. When people gather at the king's palace, such accused persons find it difficult to appear. Lazy people also find it difficult to join in the celebrations because it is a season in which hard-work is promoted and rewarded.

BabaOye, Obaaro, Obalotin, and Orangun on August 14, 2020, observed that selfless-living is an important moral lesson during odun ijesu. They narrated that when tubers of yam are brought home, they are shared among the poor, needy, widows and less privileged. Children are busy all day carrying tubers of yam to designated houses. By the end of the day, only few tubers are left for the family. This is repeated the third day of the new yam festival. This is a clear lesson in the virtues of benevolence and selfless-living for both children and adults.

Omo-oba, in his interaction with the author on August 13, 2020, noted that children are allowed to participate in different aspects of the festivals so as to expose them to the tradition and to give them imagery could impact moral lessons which will prepare them for the future. The children are expected to take the practices and lessons to heart and be prepared to perpetuate the culture and tradition of their people. Remembering the past is educative in itself. It is only through the knowledge of the past that one can know what to modify, change or improve upon.

Ogunyemi, in his conversation with me on August 13, 2020, stated that the festivals teach the power of unity. According to him, it takes every member of a community to build the community; “no one person alone is powerful.” The idea of “I” without considering others cannot bring progress but can lead to disaster. Alagba, Comfort, Obaaro and Omo-oba on August 13, 2020, postulated that when someone pursues his personal good instead of the good of others, there will be no peace and progress in the community. They further stated that this is demonstrated in the three festivals, from the chiefs unitedly going to the king, the king working with the chiefs and the entire community working together. It is important to point out that the festivals do not only demonstrate unity among the people, Alagba added, the people also recognise and cooperate with God. “Is there anything we can do without Olorun?” Obalotin in his own personal conversation with the author on August 14, 2020 declared,

It was Olodumare (Supreme God) who brought our ancestors from Ile-Ife and settled them where we are today. Without him there cannot be ijesu and that is why we like to hear him first at the beginning of our new year, after odun ijesu, through Ifa oracle. And the king pronounces blessings on everyone before Olodumare. This is an important thing our children need to learn, dependence on God is paramount in anything for which someone desires success

And according to Ogunyemi, on August 13, 2020, “Nowadays people don’t think about the future as long as they have the immediate satisfaction.” The oku-omo-ile teaches that an end is coming to everyone, and if it will come, each person is to live a good life that will influence other people positively. And in his own view, Omo-oba on August 13, 2020 stated as follows:

There is a chicken that is killed at the burial rites, it is called adiye irana (chicken for cleansing). We all believe that adiye irana kii se eran aje gbe (no one can eat the cleansing chicken without paying his/her own). There is no one who is above death, what will I leave, what will you leave when the time comes for us to die. This is what we must always think about as we enjoy life

Regarding moral implication of the festivals, Bolanle, Jolaiya, Obaaro, Obalotin and Omo-oba on August 13 and 14, 2020, were of the opinion that people including children go through moral education by observing and participating in everything that happens during the celebrations of the festivals. It is unusual, except on a few occasions as mentioned earlier, to find a leader verbally pointing out the lessons to be learnt from the festivals. However, learning is expected to take place through participation and observation. These lessons are to help people build their moral values. This method is adopted because *kiko ni mimo* (practice makes perfect).

Effectiveness of the moral Lessons

There is a concern about the effectiveness of the moral lessons the festivals are to pass across, especially to children and youth. The concern is that children are not patient enough anymore to learn as the average attention span of children has continued to drop with the passage of time and the preponderance of alternative attractions. Regarding children, Orangun on August 14, 2020 declared “They are only interested in quick money”. Although young people participate in the festivals, according to Comfort, Obaaro and Omo-oba, on August 13, 2020, they do not get moral lessons portrayed by them. Orangun on August 14, 2020 added that parents, unbalanced system of school education and lack of contextualization of Christianity and Islam are to be blamed for young people not getting moral education through the festivals.

In their own view, Comfort, Jolaiya, Obaaro and Omo-oba in their conversation with the author on August 13, 2020, stated that parents have failed to teach their children the importance of morality. Even when they participate in the festivals, the moral lessons of the celebrations are not projected clearly to them. There is a kind of neglect from parents concerning the proper upbringing of children.

Concerning the impact of Christianity and Islam on the effectiveness of the festivals as vehicles of moral education, the interviewees mostly disapproved of the approach of these major religions to the value of moral education in the traditional festivals and rites. According to Omo-oba on August 13, 2020:

Christianity and Islam have refused to understand the traditional festivals and practices, and because of the lack of understanding have condemned everything traditional without looking into their morals. I hate when pastors and imams make overgeneralized statement that traditional festivals are evil and demonic. It is a statement that comes from ignorance. This attitude has destroyed the fabric of morality in the society. The situation has reached an alarming level where many young people don't know what morality is again.

BabaOye and Orangun on August 14, also emphasized that Christianity too has become money making venture instead of building people up morally. Many of the people who practice Christianity and Islam do not have any moral grounds on which they can admonish others about doing right because their behaviours are morally counterproductive. The two organizations, according to them, condemn traditional ways of teaching morality, and they failed to inculcate morality to people, especially the young people.

In the aspect of school education, there is a serious gap between what teachers teach students and morality, according to BabaOye and Omo-oba in their personal communication, with me on August 13, 2020. They added that schools used to be *ile-eko* (house of knowledge), but today they are *ile-iwe* (house of books). No knowledge on how to live right is given to young people. The traditional approaches as depicted in the festivals were more effective than what is obtainable now. Aside from speaking of English, school education has failed in the teaching of moral values. Many young people do not obey anyone anymore. They do not respect elders - not even the chiefs of the town, they do not want to work but desire money, they are selfish, uncooperative, proud and devoid of good character.

Discussion and Conclusion

Traditional festivals like odun ijesu, itugbe and oku-omo-ile, especially in Mobaland of Ekiti State are replete with moral lessons communicated through practical pedagogical approaches to educate people, specifically young people, on morality and other core values of the Yoruba race. Every scene and act has moral values to inculcate into the minds of young people. From the survey carried out in the course of this study, it was observed that many of the interviewees find it difficult to identify the morals of the festivals and rites. They made allusions to the morals as they spoke generally about the activities associated with the festivals and rites, but they did not actually point at a direct connection between the moral lessons and the festivals and rites. They were aware that every action taken by anyone must be because the action is right, and this again goes with deontological theory. There is therefore a need for serious intentionality on the part of the practitioners and prominent players in the activities of the festivals to take it upon themselves to deliberately echo the moral lessons embedded in the activities which people are expected to imbibe for character formation. This will turn people's attention away from mere celebration and fanfare to which these festivals and rites have been currently reduced, and will increase the chances of having these icons of tradition as catalysts of peace, unity, development and selflessness in the various communities.

Parents also have a significant role to play in foregrounding the moral values embedded in those festivals and rites. As adults who have witnessed the festivals and rites repeatedly, they are to call their children's attention to the moral lessons in the activities they watch or participate in during the festivals and rites. Parents can be the evaluators of their children's moral behaviours using the ones portrayed by the festivals as yardstick. Having recognised the home as the first and everyday place of learning and building morals for children, with parents and significant others as teachers, the festivals and rites, along with relevant everyday activities, could come in handy as the texts for learning.

The moral decadence in Mobaland as portrayed by the respondents is not as a result of paucity of learning tools, but the lessons have not been adequately brought out and intentionally taught to the young people by those who understand and have themselves been brought up through the same traditional moral educational system. Christian leaders, Muslim leaders and school leaders need to study and understand the morals in traditional festivals and rites and inculcate them into their teachings instead of the current hasty condemnation of anything traditional.

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