

**Indigenous African Religions (IARs) and the Relational Value of
Tolerance: Addressing the evil of violent conflicts in Africa**
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Abstract

This essay argues that the inherent value of Indigenous African Religions (IARs), which ensures that the belief in different gods does not eclipse the fact of common humanity might be of importance to contemporary Africa plagued by ceaseless conflicts. The IAR ideology contrasts, for example, with that of Christianity which views the Christian God as the one true God and regards those who worship a different God(s) as pagans and gentiles. It also contrasts with the ideology of Islam, which views Allah as the one true God and regards those who worship different God(s) as infidels. The essay claims that social orientation in contemporary Africa is mostly influenced by the divisive ideologies of these two foreign religions that have come to dominate. These divisive ideologies are to a large extent, indirectly responsible for some of the violent conflicts on the continent. This divisive religious orientation bifurcates humanity into in and out-groups that are extended to the social sphere where people from different religious, ethnic and linguistic groups are treated as outsiders and are made targets for attacks like in South Africa and Nigeria today. Further, if we interpret such violent conflicts as evil and consider its source in light of the perennial problem of evil, what would be our response? Using the conversational method, the essay argues that both good and evil are part of the universe, and that if we want more good, then a change from a divisive to a complementary orientation based on the relational values of the IARs is imperative.

Keywords: Tolerance, Indigenous African Religions, Africa, Christianity, Islam, Conflicts.

Introduction

Indigenous African Religions (IARs) are a cluster of traditional worship systems dedicated to different Gods associated with aspects of nature, and which usually varies from community to community in different parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The importance of these religions, when one looks at them from the lens of modernity is not located on how best they described the supernatural or the spiritual, but the social benefits that can be derived from the moral orientation they promote. Unlike Christianity and Islam that were brought into the continent, these religions do not draw divisive lines between its adherents and others, its mode of worship and those of others, and certainly do not inferiorise the Godhead of other religions, nor prohibit adherents from worshipping other Gods or associating with adherents of other religions. These religions still exist today and reflect the African outlook to existence as it is expressed in people's socio-cultural and political life-world. This outlook which prioritises humanity purveys values such as solidarity, interconnectedness, interdependence and interrelatedness that roll up into what is nowadays known as the principle of relationality.

The principle of relationality can be formulated as saying, 'realities necessarily interrelate because none is ego solus'. The importance of sustainable relationship amongst people in a given territory irrespective of creed, gender, class or race, make IARs practical religions that are inseparable from the everyday life of the people. The IARs thus served important social function of bonding and cohesion in pristine Africa and can still do so in today's world.

This social function is now under threat in parts of Africa where Christianity or Islam or both are dominant religions. Since colonial times, incidences of ethnic conflict and division have increased. Some have even reached genocidal proportions like the Hutu/Tutsi in Rwanda, House/Igbo, Boko Haram Islamic fundamentalism, as well as various Islam/Christianity conflicts in Nigeria, Northern and Southern Cameroon, The Darfur conflict in Sudan, and now, Afrophobic attacks in South Africa to name but a few. These are all deadly conflicts that have claimed lives from thousands to millions, and some of them like the Afrophobic attacks in South Africa have continued to reoccur. Some analysts have tried to trace these conflicts to political, economic, and even social causes. While not disputing any of those causes, I want to argue that most of those sources might be the immediate causes. There is, however, a need to trace the remote cause of some of these conflicts.

John Mbiti (1969) states that Africans are notoriously religious and claims that a typical African takes their religion with them wherever they go, for work or for leisure. Perhaps, the point of this claim is not necessarily about how impossible it is for an African not to be religious, we have seen several African atheists, even in this age of the two powerful foreign religions. The point of Mbiti's claim can be fully realised when we look at religion as purveying ideologies that shape and influence not only the political, economic and social life of a people but also the way they perceive and treat one another. It is in this direction that we cannot help but recount the benefits of the system of IARs that encourages tolerance and promotes cohesion amongst humans irrespective of creed, language or culture. This cannot be said of the two foreign religions: Islam that came from Arabs who used the sword to convert people in sub-Saharan, and Christianity that came from the Europeans who used gun and the force of colonialism to impose their way of life, including religion on the peoples of sub-Saharan.

One feature which these two religions share in common is their divisive ideology. Each of them promotes their Godhead as the authentic and disapproves of not just the mode of worship of other religions but discounts adherents of those religions. In Africa, where religion is not perceived simply as another aspect of the society but deeply as something that shapes the all-round orientation of adherents, it is easy to see how the divisive ideologies of Christianity and Islam could be imbibed and extended to the lines between languages, geographies and cultures.

This essay shall discuss the tractions that religious and ethnic conflicts have gained in sub-Saharan Africa since colonial times and explains violent conflicts as forms of evil. In the light of the problem of evil, the essay further argues that both good and evil are necessary part of the universe. It is within human power to reduce evil and increase good. The essay shall show the difference between the system of IARs and those of Christianity and Islam and the ways in which they could possibly influence adherents. Using the conversational method, this essay shall show how the values of IARs are relational and can reduce the evil of violent conflict by bringing about peaceful co-existence, complementarity and solidarity among different peoples in contemporary Africa. On the basis of the preceding, I will argue for an orientational change, from a divisive to a relational one based on the values of IARs.

The Religious undertone of in-group/out-group Conflicts in Africa

Political independence for many countries in sub-Saharan Africa was followed by tensions and conflicts along ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious lines. Some of these conflicts went on to evolve into full scale wars. Some good examples include Liberia, Nigeria, Angola, Sierra Leone, Congo, Burundi, Somalia, etc. The causes of some of these conflicts have been traced to all

kinds of problems in the political and economic sphere. Very little allusion has been made to the religious sphere. It is our claim here that to some extent, the divisive ideologies of foreign religions constituted part of the remote causes for some of these conflicts, except for some contexts like Nigeria where such ideologies went beyond remote to form part of the immediate causes. In the years leading up to 1960 when Nigeria gained political independence, and at least five years into her independence, Ahmadu Bello, the political and religious leader of the Islamic north, consistently incited the North against the Christian South, and specifically, the Igbo, which led to bloody attacks and pogroms against the Igbo (HEERTEN and MOSES 2014; ARO and ANI 2017). Chima Korieh traces the history of several of these pogroms against the Igbo motivated mainly by religious sentiments from 1945 to the end of the century (KORIEH 2013, 727-740).

In 1962, Ahmadu Bello as premier of northern Nigeria, a political office, founded an Islamic fundamentalist organization known as *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (J.N.I.), which means the 'Organisation for the Victory of Islam.' In 1963, he constituted 'Islamic Advisory Committee' (IBRAHIM 1991, 122-123). These were tasked with the advancement of the Islamic faith, interest and dominance in Nigeria. J.N.I. in addition engaged in aggressive social orientation to implant the idea of the superiority of Islam in adherents, the need to defend Islam and its interest against infidels in the South and the propaganda that the Islamic interest was under threat in the North where the Christian Igbo dominated in the civil service. In response, the Christians in the South founded the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in 1976 (IBRAHIM 1991, 123). It should be noted that prior to this time, education at different levels was controlled by the two rival religions in Nigeria, Islam in the north and Christianity in the South. Even after most of the schools transferred to government control and purportedly became secular, a handful remained in the hands of the religions. Religious education that are mainly indoctrinations also remain a strong feature in the curricula of the so-called secular school system in Nigeria to date. So, a Christian child in the South is brought up to see the Muslims in the north as unbelievers and vice versa. It is no surprise then that most bloody conflicts in Nigeria since colonial times that occurred along ethnic, linguistic and cultural lines had religious undertone.

The psychological impact and influence of religious ideologies cannot be overestimated. Sociologists and anthropologists like Emil Durkheim (1986) argue us that factors from the environment shape the orientation of the individual and impose certain choices they could not resist. For example, if you are taught from childhood by clergies you respect, teachers you admire, and parents you trust that people on the other side of faith are infidels or unbelievers, you have very little choice in determining how you treat those people. The choice has already been imposed on you and you have very little of your own to enable you make a different choice. This appears to be the case

in much of sub-Sahara Africa where two foreign religions with rival and divisive ideologies shape and continue to shape the social orientation of adherents. The increase in conflicts along ethnic, linguistic, cultural and even geographical lines has much to do with the internalised divisive ideologies of Christianity and Islam. Even when the conflict is between people from the same religion, the seed of us and them, in and out groups which is often the cause was already sown by the religions, and would always find contexts to manifest, whether ethnic, linguistic, cultural or geographic.

Interestingly, some researchers are of the view that the displacement of the IARs by the two foreign religions contributed to the radical change in social orientation of the people, from a mindset of mutual social cohesion as members of common humanity, to the knowledge of division, discrimination and lines of difference. According to Jibrin Ibrahim:

An essential aspect of the 'civilising mission' of the colonial authorities was the concerted effort to eradicate the practices and symbols of traditional African religions. Within a few years, countless gods, deities, totems, or 'idols', to use the official terminology, were plucked from their sacred repositories only to re-emerge in new shrines in Europe known as museums. So active was the attack on indigenous beliefs and ceremonies that in a few decades most practitioners could no longer publicly admit their adhesion to the religion of their ancestors. (IBRAHIM 1991, 116)

Thus, Ibrahim blames colonialism and Arab invasion for bringing in Christianity and Islam, two religions of middle-eastern origin, with divisive ideologies. As he put it, "Colonialism as an historical epoch set in motion various fundamental changes in Nigeria, not least the de-legitimation of traditional religions, thereafter, castigated as 'paganism', and the rapid implantation of Christianity" (IBRAHIM 1991, 116). One thing that is not regularly observed in literature is the importance of IARs in maintaining social cohesion in parts of Africa prior to their displacement by Islam and Christianity. This is the goal of this essay. And this essay's hunch is not so much about the robust theoretical structure of the IARs, but about the social value of their pacifist ideologies, which almost everywhere engendered social cohesion amongst diverse peoples. With all that gone, the post-colonial Africa has become a stage for constant clash between in-groups and out-groups in different contexts, from local to international levels. South Africans today, regularly mount violent attacks and destruction of lives and property of people from other African countries whom they regard and treat as out-group. At the background is the same orientation from foreign religions that a people can discount another people in a bid to establish difference.

One way to construe violent conflicts is in light of the perennial problem of evil. What is the source of this evil and how can it be addressed? I argue that both good and evil are necessary aspects of the universe. Our daily existential quest is to reduce evil and increase good. But how can an omnibenevolent God co-exist with evil? My answer will be teased out of the relational and complementary values of the traditional African religions. These cluster of religions, as earlier explained thrives on certain values that prescribe the necessity of mutual and complementary relationships. Honoring these values increases good and reduces evil, but dishonoring these values in human interactions increases evil and reduces good. The two Abrahamic religions appear to dishonor these values when they draw divisive lines between insiders and outsiders, which has and continues to spark several violent conflicts around the world, particularly in Africa. In the next section, I will investigate the range of the influence these two religions have in conflict hotspots.

The Influence of Religious Ideologies on inter-group Conflicts in some places in Africa

There have been several conflicts on the continent prior to and since political independence. In this section, I will discuss some examples to show how religious ideologies have sparked several conflicts on the continent.

Nigeria, a typical African country is plagued with seemingly unending conflicts. The climax of the conflicts in Nigeria is the Nigerian-Biafran war, which lasted for about three years (1967-1970). In this war, the Igbo (then Biafrans) were regarded as out-group while the rest of Nigerians saw themselves as the in-group. Since the Biafrans were regarded as out-group, the in-group were out to suppress and dominate them in Nigeria that eventually morphed into a bloody war that claimed nearly three million Igbo lives, most of which through a deliberate programme of starvation (CHIMAKONAM and NWEKE 2019). Apart from the Nigerian-Biafran war, there are other in-group and out-group conflicts that have occurred in Nigeria. Some of these conflicts include the University of Ibadan conflict of May 1984; the conflict that took place at the college of Education, Kafanchan in March 1987; the conflicts that took place in Zangon, Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna and Ikara in Kaduna State in 1992, the 2014 conflict that occurred in University of Jos, to mention only a few (JEGEDE 2019, 59-61). All these conflicts had religious undertone. They were instigated by the two major foreign religions. These religions are Christianity and Islam.

For instance, the May 1984 University of Ibadan conflict though seen as student conflicts started as a Muslim demonstration and led to the burning down of the status of the Risen Christ. Also, the March 1987 conflict, which

took place in the College of Education, Kafanchan was as a result of disagreements between Christians and Muslims in the town, which escalated in the college. This demonstrates that it was religiously motivated. It led to burning and destruction of Churches by Moslems and Mosques by Christians. Furthermore, the conflicts that took place in Zangon, Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna and Ikara in Kaduna State in 1992, although started as communal quarrel between the Kataf and Hausas resulted to a religious clash between Christians and Muslims, which escalated and spilled into other parts of Kaduna State. The religious motivation is that the natives of Kataf are majorly Christians while the Hausas are mainly Muslims. More so, the University of Jos conflict of 2014 began as a communal clash by youth groups. These youths were mainly Christians and Muslims within the same neighborhood. This conflict brought about the attack on the Mosque and Church in the university (JEGEDE 2019, 59-61). Even the aforementioned Nigerian-Biafran war somehow has religious dimension to it than political. It has religious affiliation because the Biafrans were mainly Christians and the rallying call for attack on Biafrans was from the Muslim north. Others were made to believe that they were fighting for the oneness of the political entity call Nigeria, which was hardly the case.

Rwanda is another country in Africa that has experienced ethnic conflict that is worthy of mention. Their ethnic conflict resulted in the 1994 genocide wherein there was an ethnic cleansing. The main perpetrators of this genocide were the majority Hutu, who were about eighty percent (80%) of the population, while the victims were the Tutsi, who were about fifteen percent (15%) of the population of Rwanda. The Twa are the third ethnic group, who were very minute and were both perpetrators and victims of the genocide (SPIJKER 2006). History has it that the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa had coexisted peacefully, intermarried, shared a common language and Traditional Religion as well as were under the rule of the Tutsi until the advent of colonialism. It is also noted that the German colonialists did not upset the socio-political order; they ruled Rwanda through the Tutsi minority. However, when the Belgian became their colonial masters after the Second World War, there was a gradual introduction of Hutu majority into political offices. This was engineered by the Roman Catholic Church missionaries, who accompanied the Belgian colonisers. The introduction of the Hutu to political power marked the beginning of socio-political unrest in Rwanda. This is apparent in the 1959 and 1973 riots that led to some Tutsi fleeing the country into neighbouring countries such as Uganda and DR Congo (Spijker 2006). Gerard Van't Spijker notes that it was specifically in Uganda that the Tutsi formed a Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), an agency through which they launched attack on the Hutu led Rwanda government in 1990. But the climax of this conflict was the 1994 genocide.

This 1994 genocide was political since it resulted from the assassination of the Hutu President the same year. His death resulted from the shooting down of his Airplane blamed on the Tutsi Rebels in 1993. The death

of Major General Juvenal Habyarimana (President) was followed by the killing of the Prime Minister, Agatha Uwilingimana. This paved the way for a new Hutu regime that engineered and supported the killing of Tutsi as a campaign for ethnic cleansing, which led to the loss of about 800,000 to 1,000,000 Tutsi and Hutu lives (SPIJKER 2006, 339; 341). It is germane to note that this genocide was not only ethnic and politically motivated but was also religiously instigated. The idea is that religion (more specifically Christianity) played a major role in the build-up to the 1994 genocide. According to Gerard Van't Spijker, the Roman Catholic missionaries did not only bring the Hutu into political offices, but also fueled the 1994 genocide. They did so by changing the narrative of Rwanda's past of togetherness. The missionaries taught that the Hutu were the native, while the minority ruling Tutsi were non-native. And like the division between the sons of Jacob and Ishmael in the Christian Bible, the Hutu began acquiring the orientation of the native and the chosen. This inspired them to violently takeover power from the Tutsi in 1959 (SPIJKER 2006). Consequently, the Tutsi accused the Roman Catholic Church as taking sides with the Hutu against them (SPIJKER 2006, 351). This is one side of the narrative.

Another has it that "the churches of the former Colonial times, both Catholics and Protestants, favored the Tutsis and discriminated against the Hutus, thereby laying the ground for future catastrophe" (BANYANGA and BJORKQVIST 2017, 1). The idea is that Christianity was partly behind the Rwanda genocide. This is apparent in the argument of Kate Temoney that the Hutu propagandists mobilised the civilian populace for the genocide by making allusions to some Christian Biblical myths as bases for dehumanising the Tutsi as ethnic, alien other. It is on this premise that they justified the elimination of the Tutsi as threat to their social order and therefore authorised "their extirpation as granted by the state as well as clergy and the institutional churches" (TEMONEY 2016, 5). This is in line with the idea that "religion indirectly (distally) and directly (proximately) furthers the aims of genocide by coding genocidal ideology and violence as religious" (TEMONEY 2016, 3). While politicians employed the genocide to meet their goals, church leaders also used it to enhance their ecclesiastical power and position. Timothy Longman substantiates this as follows: "struggle over power within Rwanda's Christian churches led some to accept the genocide as a means of eliminating challenges to their own authority in the churches" (LONGMAN 2001, 163). The point is that the 1994 Rwanda genocide whether seen as ethnic, political or religious has some of its influences in the divisive ideology inherent in, and taught by, Christianity.

Another form of conflict that challenges the unity of contemporary Africa is the Afrophobic conflict in South Africa, misunderstood as xenophobia – the fear, hate and mistreatment of strangers. What is experienced in South Africa is not xenophobia but Afrophobia – the fear, hate and maltreatment of Africans by fellow Africans. In this act of Afrophobia, some

South Africans express antipathy, dislike and discrimination towards fellow Africans perceived to be foreign nationals. Wahbie Long, Bonga Chiliza and Dan J. Stein argue that the cause of Afrophobia in South Africa include 1.) macrostructural and socioeconomic factors – these have to do with the colonial apartheid legacy and continual inequalities and 2.) micropolitical and psychological – these have to do with the effect of foreign national entrepreneurs on the township economies and the perpetrators of Afrophobic killing being those who have a record of antisocial behaviour (LONG, CHILIZA and STEIN 2015, 510). This essay argues that the persistent presence of poverty and socio-economic inequalities is what has resulted to anger among native South Africans. But this anger, according to Long, Bonga and Stein, is misdirected to their fellow marginalised Africans from other countries (LONG, CHILIZA and STEIN 2015, 510) who they see as foreign nationals or outsiders who need to be driven away or exterminated from South Africa. The point is that Afrophobia has its root in the divisive, racist ideology that marginalised native South Africans, but favoured the Europeans during the apartheid regime. This divisive ideology accounts for the native South Africans misdirecting their anger and frustration on their fellow Africans who share the same fate with them in contemporary South Africa. Afrophobic attacks in South Africa have led to loss of human lives and property.

In all, contemporary Africa is plagued with intergroup conflicts. These conflicts are caused by the social orientation that influences Africans interpersonal relationship. This social orientation which stems from both religious and political backgrounds and which promotes conflicts is predicated on the divisive, exclusivist and discriminatory ideology that is endemic in contemporary Africa.

The Value of Tolerance in Indigenous African Religions (IARs) and its Relational Relevance in reducing the evil of violent conflicts

Tolerance, in this context, is an attitude of accommodation, which individuals in a social group could demonstrate towards others. It harbors such values as solidarity, mutual and complementary relationships. Otherness is created on the basis of perceived difference, which could be ethnic, linguistic, ideological, class, sex, gender, and so forth. Where such orientation of difference exists, tolerance is one of the values that can help keep the peace and stability of the social structure of such a society or group. Tolerance is not necessarily the acceptance of one another's orientations, but the recognition of everyone's right to their own biological, preferred or conferred identity, orientation or ideology, and the inclination to enter and sustain mutual and complementary relationships. Thus, tolerance is a core value of the relational principle. The point of relationships is not merely to get together, but to sustain such togetherness peaceably. Religion, interestingly, is one of the orientations that have the power to engender tolerance or promote intolerance in any social setting. When and where religion promotes intolerance, conflicts

of all kinds could result. According to S. P. I. Agi, religious conflicts have “led to numerous calamities, and has been responsible for the collapse of one political order or the other throughout history in various climes” (AGI 1996, v). Explaining how religious conflicts have affected contemporary Africa, Agi quotes Herbert Macauley as saying that

As Africans we have been split into Semithereens by what we call religion in West Africa, where men and women wrangle for religion, write for it, fight for it, and perhaps even die for it,... do anything but for it. (AGI 1996, 2)

Concerning Nigeria specifically, Agi states:

It is no longer news! Religious riots have become routine events in Nigeria. Burning houses, destroying property, maiming and killing innocent people have become “normal” way of religious life. The question is no longer “if” but “when”. The fact is that religious violence has now become one of Allah’s or God’s unwritten commandments that must be obeyed, at least in Nigeria. Nigeria has joined the league of the religiously restless nations with intra-and-inter-religious conflicts. The common denominator is intolerance which, in turn, breeds violence. (AGI 1996, 2)

The evils of religious conflicts have led to internal division among Africans, such that people see their differences not only along ethnic lines, but along religious lines as well. The point is that Christianity and Islam are religions that promote intolerance through their divisive and exclusivist ideologies. With this point made, it is germane to turn to the question of the idea of tolerance in Indigenous African Religions. The guiding question is, is IARs still of any relevance to contemporary Africa?

The rate at which Africans are converting to Christianity and Islam makes one wonder if IARs are still relevant for contemporary Africa. Some scholars such as David Barrett have argued that indigenous African religion is on its natural path to extinction (BARRET 1982). This conclusion might have been influenced by two other factors namely, his being 1.) a non-African and 2.) a Christian missionary with the sole aim of converting Africans to Christianity. Or, it could be true giving the high rate of conversion to the foreign religions. Likewise, there are some scholars who hold that despite the presence of Christianity and Islam in Africa, Indigenous African Religions still thrive (MBITI 1969; IKENGA-METUH 1985). John Mbiti, one of the champions of this view explains that although Africans get converted to foreign religions, they do not drop their IARs completely. According to him, they cannot leave their IARs because it has coloured, informed and shaped their worldview (MBITI 1969, xi). This chapter agrees with Mbiti that IARs

still thrive in Africa and could be relevant in some respects even with the high conversion rate of Africans to Christianity and Islam.

If the above remark is the case, then there is an inherent factor that keeps the religion alive in the African continent. This can be gleaned from its social and psychological relevance as Africans still revert to it at critical moments in their lives. The question now is: how can IARs help resolve the problem of intergroup conflicts? This essay shall address this question by arguing that IARs can function as a viable option for resolving conflicts among groups in the society by leveraging on their value of mutual tolerance.

Employing the conversational method as a philosophical/theoretical framework, this essay will show how tolerance in IARs can be harnessed for the good of contemporary African society. This essay's position would be that IARs have tolerant values such as mutual and complementary relationships as central values that they promote and that these values have relevance for Africa today, especially in reducing the evil of violent conflicts.

IARs have always promoted religious tolerance in pristine Africa due to their inherent demand for peaceful relationships. In traditional African societies where IARs were the mode of spirituality and worship, there was no struggle for supremacy of ideas of God(s), belief systems and modes of worship. Different ideas of God(s), belief systems and modes of worship were tolerated and given equal playing ground. In this context, all belief systems, ideas of God(s) and modes of worship were regarded as equals and have equal opportunities to influence and shape the lives of their adherents. Adherents of these diverse religious systems are required to cultivate and sustain healthy relationships with others as part of their moral duties.

The value of tolerance which manifests in IARs can be explained using the principle of *mmeke* grounded in Ezumezu logic. *Mmeke* is an Igbo word that means relationship nowadays formulated as the principle of relationality in African philosophy. The idea of religious tolerance in IARs is made possible by the complementary nature of IARs and the relational mindset which they inculcate in their adherents. In this way, it can be argued that adherents of IARs generally do not see their differences in ideas of God(s), belief systems or modes of worship as contradictories. Rather, they see these differences as sub-contraries that can lead to complementarity among their religions. It is pertinent to state here that Ezumezu logic purveys the idea of complementarity. This essay shall show how this logic could offer an explanation on the ideological structure of the IARs.

Ezumezu logic is a system of logic developed as an *organon* for philosophising and explaining realities within and beyond the African place, specifically those that concern intermediate valuation (CHIMAKONAM 2019a). This logic thrives on three supplementary laws of thoughts, in addition to the classical laws of two-valued logic. The supplementary laws include *njikoka*, *mmekoka* and *onona-etiti*. We shall here demonstrate how these laws of thought undergird and translate to relational principles for the IARs.

The first relational principle *njikoka* that emphasises relationality or integration and mutual recognition, clearly manifests in the IARs. In IARs, there are diverse belief systems, modes of worship and religious expressions connected by a common philosophy as Mbiti claims. This philosophy is similar to what K. C. Anyanwu calls the ‘philosophy of integration’ (1984, 78). There is, in IARs, the pulling together of spiritual and social experiences by adherents through various deities and shrines to bring about an effective human communion. In IARs, most Africans do not worship one God or through one method, but sometimes diverse Gods and using different approaches. The evidence of the preceding is in the numerous shrines such as individual, family and communal shrines where worships and religious rituals take place. This is also manifested in the diversity of religious beliefs, modes of worship and religious expressions. What is implied in the foregoing is that integrative belief systems, modes of worship and religious expressions had, and still have, significance for Africa/ns.

Another relational principle that characterise IARs is the principle of *mmekoka* otherwise known as the principle of contextuality. This principle recognises that each individual represents a unique context and that the relationship between individuals also occurs in specific contexts. In this context, all Gods and modes of worship, ethnic and linguistic groups found in communities in Africa can be viewed or conscientised to see one another as complementary. The preceding shows that there is no negative or antagonistic competition among IARs whether in their conceptions of God or the supernatural. They view all conceptions of God as complementary. In the same way, the orientation of accommodation of and tolerance for otherness can be inculcated in the people of sub-Sahara today, beginning with school children and youths. Using the social and news media, schools, social institutions, enlightening campaigns can be mounted to create a new orientation in which people are taught to see otherness in whatever form as complementary rather than antagonistic.

The third relational principle is called *onon-etiti* or complementarity (CHIMAKONAM 2019a). This principle, which also appears in Innocent Asouzu (2007) and Chimakonam (2019a), show that diverse or seemingly opposed variables can complement each other. This principle holds that there is a meeting point between two sub-contraries or two seemingly opposed variables. It is at this middle ground that variables co-exist aware of their differences and similarities but preferring to mutually co-exist. This co-existence is apparent in the worldview or cosmology that underlies IARs. Emmanuel Edeh terms this African worldview a ‘duality’ (EDEH 1985); Chris Ijiomah uses the idea of “Harmonious Monism” to explain it (IJIOMAH 1996; 2006; 2014); while Alexander Animalu and Jonathan Chimakonam calls it ‘complementary duality’ (ANIMALU and CHIMAKONAM 2012) —a mutual co-existence of opposites. The argument here is that this idea of mutual co-existence or tolerance inherent in the IARs can be fostered on any modern

society like those in sub-Sahara or elsewhere to address the tension between the in-group and out-group caused mainly by divisive ideologies.

From the above, the contemporary Africa and Nigeria specifically, that are plagued with seemingly unending evils of violent conflicts can draw some lessons from IARs to address the problem. For us, the conversational method can function as a viable theoretical framework for teasing out the importance of IARs and deploying their relational values. Conversational method holds that discourse can grow through critical and creative engagement on any existential issue confronting humankind (CHIMAKONAM 2015a; 2015b; 2017a; 2017b; 2018). Here, a philosopher/scholar (*nwansa* - proponent) might argue for an idea/position on the issue at hand, while another philosopher/scholar (*nwanju* - opponent) comes up to deconstruct and reconstruct this idea, in this way generating new idea(s) on the issue. Even this new idea can still be re-engaged with and subjected to further conversation by another philosopher/scholar thus bringing forth new ideas. This involves healthy relationships in which the values of tolerance, recognition, balance, etc., are evident. This is the relational philosophical mindset that contemporary Africans should imbibe and cultivate with respect to handling the issues that divide their interests in order to avoid conflicts. In other words, difference which is a form of ontological limitation should not always be the cause of conflict. Asouzu (2007), in his rendering of the complementary mindset of the African worldview urges us to allow the limitations of our being to be the cause of our joy. Conversational thinking maintains that biological, ideological, linguistic, ethnic, sex and gender differences should not discourage objective and creative relationships. These indices rather, should constitute the basis for critical yet, creative conversation or relationship. The foremost expectation of diversity should not be relationship of war but that of reasoning. The task should be to negotiate through difference and establish identity and not to drift apart in conflict.

In the light of conversationalism, it can be argued that where there is conflict of interests on religious, ethnic, political, boundary matters, ideological, sex, gender, etc., critical and creative conversation can be employed as a tool to reach a more peaceful resolution that increase good and decreases evil. The method of conversational thinking is objective and enjoins all to approach issues with objective mindset. But besides the emphasis on objectivity, it promotes the attitude of complementarity. It does not engender a winner take all attitude. There is room for concession, tolerance and accommodation of the other as part of the features of a healthy relationship. With conversational thinking, the goal is to work together, sustain the conversation or relationship and make progress as a collective bearing in mind that interests can hardly be separated. So, through critical and creative engagements, all the parties involved are given equal opportunities to make their case and at the end come to a compromise. In this context, plurality of religions, religious beliefs, political

ideologies, social and cultural inclinations are not seen as problems that can lead to conflict. Plurality or diversity are seen as indices for complementarity and integration when reason is engaged. This idea of complementarity and integration found in IARs, marshalled by the method of conversational thinking and grounded in Ezumezu logic would not only lead to peaceful co-existence among Africans, but would enhance solidarity thereby reducing conflicts between one group and another. Humans cannot co-exist, integrate and complement each other if they are unwilling to tolerate each other. Adherents of IARs of different sects are able to bond and co-exist because of the value of tolerance that underlies their relationships. Tolerance is a value and virtue, which IARs exemplify for the world as a whole to learn, imbibe and practice.

Therefore, there is the need for adherents of Christianity and Islam in Africa to learn and imbibe the value of tolerance promoted by the IARs. There is no doubt that beneath the increasing inter-group conflicts in Africa is a demand for a change in attitude. One of the sources for such inspiration would be the IARs. Modernity has yielded many good things for the continent of Africa, peaceful co-existence and accommodation of interests among diverse groups are not some of them. Africans are therefore compelled to look elsewhere for ideas, and unlike the erroneous supposition in some literature, that Africa has made no contributions to world history and civilization Western racists like Hegel (1975), Hume and Kant (POPKIN 1977-78) and others, (see CHIMAKONAM 2019b) are examples of those that wrote off the continent and denied its intellectual contributions to modern civilisation, and have nothing important to offer the modern world. This essay demonstrates with the IARs relational values that the opposite is the case. In IARs, diversity does not stand as a challenge to human peaceful co-existence. Rather, it promotes complementarity, integration, bonding, cohesion and co-existence. Asouzu's truth and authenticity criterion, appears to capture the importance of complementary mindset succinctly. He cautions that a lopsided, polarising or dichotomising mindset is what creates irreconcilable divisions among groups. To create a system that promotes co-existence, attitudes of marginalisation and superiority must be eschewed. In his words, "never elevate any world immanent missing link as an absolute instance" (Asouzu 2007; 2011). What he means in the preceding is that every individual or group is as relevant and important as the other. Acknowledging and recognising the fact of equality of all is central to mutual tolerance and accommodation of other interests.

It is in the light of the above arguments that IARs can be said to harbour some relational values such as mutual tolerance which promote inter-group complementarity and cohesion. Thus, if this inherent idea of tolerance in IARs is properly harnessed by social institutions, government and civil societies, the problems of religious, racial, ethnic and even Afrophobic and xenophobic conflicts can be drastically reduced.

Conclusion

What has been done in this essay is to argue that the inherent relational value of tolerance in IARs has significance for contemporary Africa that is plagued by seemingly ceaseless evil of violent conflicts. This essay also notes that contemporary Africa and most Africans are nowadays guided by other religious beliefs and movements outside the IARs, which divisive ideologies have led to lack of peaceful co-existence among individuals, communities, and nation-states within Africa. Using the relational principles of IARs teased out of the conversational method that is grounded in Ezumezu logic, this chapter demonstrated how attitudes of complementarity and integration that depict tolerance, can foster unity and peaceful co-existence in contexts where there are inter-group interests like Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa.

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