



RELIGION AND AFRICAN IDENTITY IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

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Abstract

Religion has long been a cornerstone of African identity, shaping cultural practices, social norms and communal values. However, in an increasingly globalised society, the intersection of religion and African identity has become a complex and contested space. This study explores the role of religion in African societies, its potential threat to indigenous identities and its interaction with globalisation. The problem lies in the tension between preserving African cultural heritage and the influences of external religious and global forces, which often marginalise traditional African beliefs and practices. The aim of this study is to examine how religion functions in African societies, assess its impact on African identity and propose ways to reconcile these dynamics in a globalised world. Using a qualitative methodology, the study draws on literature reviews, interviews and case studies to analyse the dual role of religion as both a unifying and divisive force. Key findings reveal that religion serves as a moral and social framework but also poses a threat to African identity through the dominance of foreign religious ideologies. In a globalised context, African identity is further challenged by cultural homogenisation. However, the study identifies opportunities to reclaim African identity by integrating traditional values with modern religious and global influences. The study recommends promoting interfaith

dialogue, revitalising indigenous knowledge systems and fostering cultural education to strengthen African identity. In conclusion, while religion and globalisation present challenges, they also offer avenues for Africans to redefine their identity in a way that honors their heritage while engaging with the global community.

Keywords: Religion, African Identity, Religion and Globalisation

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Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the intersection of religion and African identity has become a critical area of exploration. Religion, as a cornerstone of cultural and social life, has historically played a significant role in shaping the values, traditions and worldviews of African societies. It serves as a unifying force, providing moral guidance, fostering community cohesion, and offering a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing world. However, the globalisation of religious ideologies, particularly through colonialism and missionary activities, has also raised questions about the preservation of Africa's unique cultural and spiritual heritage. This has led to debates about whether religion, in its current forms, poses a threat to African identity or can coexist harmoniously with it in a globalised context.

This discussion delves into the multifaceted role of religion in African societies, examining its functions as both a preserver and a disruptor of cultural identity. It also explores the tensions between indigenous African spiritual practices and foreign religious traditions, particularly in a globalised world where cultural homogenisation often overshadows local traditions. Furthermore, the discourse addressed strategies for reclaiming and redeeming African identity amidst the influences of religion and globalisation, emphasising the need for a balanced approach that respects both tradition and modernity. By engaging with these themes, this exploration seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Africans can navigate their identity in a world where religion and globalisation continue to shape their collective and individual experiences.

Conceptual Clarification: Religion, African Identity and a Globalised World

Religion, African identity and globalisation are interconnected concepts that shape and redefine each other in a rapidly changing world. Religion, as a system of beliefs and practices centered on the sacred, has historically been a cornerstone of African identity, influencing cultural, social and political life (John Samuel Mbiti, 1990, p. 1-2) African identity, in turn, is a complex construct that encompasses shared histories, cultures, languages and spiritual traditions, often rooted in communal values and oral traditions (Kwame Gyekye, 1996, p. 28). In a globalised world, these elements are increasingly influenced by external forces, leading to both the preservation and transformation of African religious and cultural practices. Globalisation, characterised by the intensification of worldwide social relations and the compression of time and space (Anthony Giddens 1990, p. 64-65), has created a dynamic interplay between local and global religious practices. For instance, African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have interacted with Christianity and Islam, resulting in syncretic practices that reflect both indigenous and global influences (Jacob K. Olupona, 2014, p. 72-75). This hybridisation challenges the notion of a static African identity, suggesting instead that identity is fluid and adaptive to global currents (Kwame Anthony Appiah's, 2006, p. 97-113). In Tiv land of Benue State, Nigeria, Benjamin Ityavkase Shii (2011, p. 411) lamented that the Christian missionaries contributed greatly to destroying group alliance in Tiv land: "The church taught that salvation was a personal matter and that one stood finally before a personal God to give a personal account. Many Christians could not participate in some of the practices of the community, and the Christians are the catalyst for the breakup of the ancient Tiv ties. The church now offers a new and important community to the Tiv. The church is also a place to identify with a group, a new focus of loyalty; the church serves as a substitute for the lost

oligarchy of the compound. According to (Akpenpuun Dzurgba, 2011, p. 50), European-African relationship was principally motivated by economic interest of nations. In this context, natural resources, production and distribution of goods and services, trade, commerce, commercial routs, political power, literary education, technological knowledge and skills, as well as strong armed forces, were all together utilised to achieve economic development. At this time, Carthaginian Empire was the only strong empire that could challenge European Empires in the Mediterranean region. The existing kingdoms in North Africa were militarily and economically weak and there was no cooperation among them. This means that the main aim of the Europeans in Africa was to disintegrate them and plunder their resources.

However, globalisation also poses challenges to African religious and cultural systems. The dominance of Western ideologies and consumerist cultures often marginalises indigenous practices, leading to what some scholars term "cultural imperialism" (John Tomlinson, 1991, p.2-10, 19-23). In addition, another destroyer of group alliance and unity in Africa is the introduction of an individualistic society. According to individuality, "all values are human-centered. The individual is of supreme importance, and all individuals are morally equal. The individualistic culture emphasises attributes like uniqueness or individuality, personal goals, independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency and privacy. Many western countries tend to be individualistic (individualistic culture explained: pros and cons of individualism, 2023). ([www.masterclass.com](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/individualism)>article>in...). Despite this, African religious and cultural systems have demonstrated resilience, adapting to global influences while retaining core elements of their identity (Molefi Kete Asante, 2003, p. 38). For example, the rise of Pentecostalism in Africa reflects both the global spread of

charismatic Christianity and the localisation of its practices to address African spiritual and social needs (Ogbu Kalu, 2008, p.30-50)

Religion and African identity are deeply intertwined, and their interaction with globalisation reveals both opportunities and challenges. While globalisation threatens to erode traditional practices, it also provides a platform for the global recognition and revitalisation of African religious and cultural heritage. The dynamic nature of this relationship underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how African identity evolves in a globalised world.

African Identity Prior to Foreign Religions and Globalisation

African identity prior to the advent of foreign religions and globalisation was deeply rooted in the continent's diverse cultures, traditions and belief systems. The African continent, often referred to as the cradle of humanity, has a rich and complex history that predates the influence of external forces such as Christianity, Islam and Western globalisation. This section of the study seeks to explore the nature of African identity before these external influences, focusing on the cultural, spiritual, social, and political dimensions that defined African societies. By examining the pre-colonial African worldview, we can gain a deeper understanding of how African identity was constructed and maintained and how it has been impacted by subsequent external forces. Cultural foundations of African identity prior to foreign influence were largely shaped by the continent's diverse cultural practices. Africa is home to over 3,000 distinct ethnic groups, each with its own unique cultural traditions, languages, and social structures (John S. Mbiti, 1969, p.1) These cultural practices were deeply intertwined with the natural environment, as many African societies were agrarian

or pastoral, relying on the land for sustenance and spiritual fulfillment. The concept of *Ubuntu*, which emphasises the interconnectedness of all people, was a central tenet of many African societies. Ubuntu, often translated as "I am because we are," reflects the communal nature of African identity, where the individual's well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the community (Desmond Tutu, 1999, p. 35)

In addition to Ubuntu, African societies placed a strong emphasis on oral traditions as a means of preserving history, culture and identity. Griots, or traditional storytellers, played a crucial role in passing down knowledge from one generation to the next. These oral traditions included myths, legends, proverbs and folktales that conveyed moral lessons, historical events and cultural values (Isidore Okpewho, 1992, p.10-15). The oral tradition was not merely a form of entertainment, but also a vital mechanism for maintaining social cohesion and transmitting cultural identity.

Spiritual and Religious Beliefs

Prior to the introduction of foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam, African spirituality was deeply rooted in indigenous belief systems that varied widely across the continent. These belief systems were often animistic, polytheistic, or ancestor-centric, reflecting a worldview that saw the spiritual and physical realms as interconnected. The concept of a supreme being was present in many African religions, but this deity was often seen as distant and inaccessible, with more immediate spiritual concerns being addressed through intermediaries such as ancestors, spirits, and deities (Mbiti, 1969, p.30-40).

Ancestor worship was a common feature of African spirituality, as ancestors were believed to play an active role in the lives of the living. Ancestors were seen as guardians and mediators between the physical world and the spiritual realm, and rituals were often

performed to honour them and seek their guidance (Benjamin C. Ray 1976, p. 100). These rituals included offerings, libations and ceremonies that reinforced the connection between the living and the dead.

African spirituality also placed a strong emphasis on the natural world, with many societies believing in the presence of spirits in natural phenomena such as rivers, mountains and trees. This animistic worldview fostered a deep respect for the environment and a sense of harmony with nature. The spiritual practices of African societies were not separate from daily life but were integrated into all aspects of existence, from agriculture to governance.

Social and Political Structures

The social and political structures of precolonial African societies were diverse and complex, reflecting the continent's vast cultural and geographical diversity. Many African societies were organised into kingdoms, chiefdoms, or clan-based systems, with power often being decentralised and distributed among various leaders and councils (Basil Davidson, 1991, p.1). These political structures were often based on kinship ties, with leadership roles being inherited or earned through merit.

In many African societies, the concept of kingship was closely tied to spiritual authority. Kings and chiefs were often seen as intermediaries between the people and the spiritual realm, and their legitimacy was derived from their ability to maintain harmony and balance within the community (Fortes, M., & Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1940, p.1-3). The role of the king was not just political, but also spiritual, as they were responsible for performing rituals and ceremonies that ensured the well-being of the community.

Gender roles in precolonial African societies were also diverse, with some societies being matrilineal and others patrilineal. In matrilineal societies, such as the Akan of Ghana, inheritance and lineage were traced through the mother's line, and women often held significant political and social power (Ifi Amadiume, 1987, p.1). In patrilineal societies, such as the Zulu of South Africa, men typically held dominant roles in both the family and the political sphere. However, it is important to note that gender roles were not rigidly defined, and women in many African societies played important roles as leaders, healers and spiritual figures.

Economic Systems and Trade

The economic systems of pre-colonial Africa were diverse and adapted to the specific environmental and cultural contexts of each society. Agriculture was the primary economic activity for many African societies, with crops such as millet, sorghum, yams, and maize being cultivated. In addition to agriculture, many societies engaged in pastoralism, fishing, and hunting, depending on their geographical location (John Iliffe, 1995, p.12).

Trade was also a significant aspect of precolonial African economies, with long-distance trade networks connecting different regions of the continent. The trans-Saharan trade routes, for example, facilitated the exchange of goods such as gold, salt and ivory between West Africa and North Africa (Edward William Bovill 1995, p. 58-65). These trade networks not only facilitated economic exchanges, but also cultural ones, as ideas, technologies and religions were transmitted along these routes.

The economic systems of precolonial Africa were often based on communal ownership and redistribution, with wealth being measured in terms of social relationships rather than

material possessions. The concept of wealth was closely tied to the ability to support one's family and community, and generosity was highly valued (Parker Shipton 1989, p.50-70). This communal approach to economics reinforced the social cohesion and interdependence that were central to African identity.

Impact of Foreign Religions and Globalisation

The arrival of foreign religions and the forces of globalisation have had a profound impact on African identity. The introduction of Christianity and Islam, beginning in the early centuries of the Common Era, brought new religious beliefs and practices that often conflicted with indigenous African spirituality. Missionaries and Islamic scholars sought to convert Africans to their respective faiths, often denigrating indigenous beliefs as pagan or primitive (Sanneh, L.1983, p. 45). This led to a gradual erosion of traditional spiritual practices and a shift in the spiritual identity of many African societies.

Globalisation, particularly in the form of European colonialism, further disrupted African identity by imposing foreign political, economic and cultural systems on African societies. Colonial powers sought to exploit Africa's resources and labour, often through violent and coercive means. The imposition of colonial borders, the introduction of cash-crop economies and the disruption of traditional social structures, all contributed to the fragmentation of African identity (Walter Rodney.1972, p. 163).

Despite these challenges, African identity has proved to be resilient, with many Africans seeking to reclaim and revitalise their cultural heritage in the face of globalisation. The African Renaissance movement, for example, seeks to promote African cultural values and traditions as a means of fostering unity and development on the continent (Malegapuru

William Makgoba 1999, p. 15). Similarly, the rise of Afrocentric scholarship has sought to challenge Eurocentric narratives of African history and identity, emphasising the agency and creativity of African peoples ((Asante, 1987, p. 6).

African identity prior to the advent of foreign religions and globalisation was deeply rooted in the continent's diverse cultures, spiritual beliefs, social structures and economic systems. The communal nature of African societies, the integration of spirituality into daily life and the emphasis on oral traditions, all contributed to a rich and complex sense of identity that was uniquely African. While the arrival of foreign religions and the forces of globalisation have had a profound impact on African identity, the resilience and creativity of African peoples continue to shape the continent's cultural and spiritual landscape. By understanding the foundations of African identity, we can better appreciate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the continent in an increasingly globalised world.

The Inherent Nature of Religion in all Humans Beings

Religion has been a fundamental aspect of human societies throughout history, shaping cultures, moral systems and individual identities. The inherent nature of religion in humans is a topic that has been explored extensively by scholars across disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and theology. This discussion examines the universality of religion, its psychological and social functions and the arguments for its innate presence in human nature.

Universality of Religion

Religion appears to be a universal phenomenon, present in some form in every known human society. Anthropologists like Clifford Geertz (1993, p.108) have argued that religion

is a cultural system that provides meaning and order to human existence. Geertz defines religion as "a system of symbols that acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence. This universality suggests that religion fulfills a deep-seated human need, whether it is for understanding the world, coping with existential anxieties, or fostering social cohesion. (p. 91-92).

Psychological Foundations of Religion

From a psychological perspective, religion can be seen as a natural byproduct of human cognitive processes. Scholars such as Pascal Boyer (2001, p. 28–30) have argued that religious beliefs arise from the way the human mind is structured. Boyer suggests that concepts of gods, spirits, and the afterlife are "minimally counterintuitive" ideas that are easily remembered and transmitted because they align with our intuitive understanding of the world while also violating certain expectations (p. 69–74). This cognitive approach posits that religion is not merely a cultural construct but is rooted in the very way humans think and perceive reality.

Additionally, the psychologist Justin L. Barrett (2004, p.31-34) has proposed the concept of the "Hyperactive Agency Detection Device" (HADD), which suggests that humans have an evolved tendency to attribute agency to events and phenomena in the environment. This predisposition may explain why humans are inclined to believe in supernatural beings who control or influence the natural world. Such psychological mechanisms indicate that religion may be an inherent aspect of human cognition.

Social Functions of Religion

Religion also serves critical social functions, which may explain its persistence across cultures. Émile Durkheim (1995 p. 418–422)), one of the founding figures of sociology, argued that religion is fundamentally a social phenomenon (p. 210). In his seminal work, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,” Durkheim posits that religion is a reflection of society itself, serving to reinforce social cohesion and collective values. He writes that "Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices that unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (p. 44). This perspective highlights the role of religion in binding individuals together and maintaining social order.

Evolutionary Perspectives

Evolutionary theories of religion suggest that religious beliefs and practices may have conferred survival advantages to early human groups. (Wilson, D Sloan 2002, p. 17-42) in his book “Darwin's Cathedral” argues that religion functions as an adaptive mechanism that promotes group cohesion and cooperation. Wilson contends that religious groups with strong moral codes and shared rituals were more likely to survive and thrive than those without such systems. This evolutionary perspective supports the idea that religion is not merely a cultural artifact, but also is deeply embedded in human nature as a result of natural selection.

Critiques and Counterarguments

While many scholars argue for the inherent nature of religion in humans, some critics challenge this view. For instance, the New Atheist movement, represented by figures like Richard Dawkins, (2006, p. 165), argues that religion is a byproduct of cultural evolution

rather than an innate human trait. Dawkins contends that religious beliefs are "memes" that spread through cultural transmission and do not necessarily reflect an inherent aspect of human psychology. (Dawkins, 2006, p. 192). Similarly, some anthropologists caution against overgeneralising the universality of religion, noting that not all societies have clear-cut religious systems as understood in the Western context.

The inherent nature of religion in humans is a complex and multifaceted topic. While there is strong evidence to suggest that religion arises from universal cognitive processes and serves essential psychological and social functions, debates persist about whether religion is truly innate or a product of cultural evolution. Regardless of these debates, the pervasive presence of religion across time and cultures underscores its significance in the human experience.

Religion and African Identity in a Globalised Society

Religion has long been a cornerstone of African identity, shaping cultural practices, social structures and worldviews. In a globalised society, the intersection of religion and African identity has become increasingly complex, as traditional belief systems interact with global religious movements, secularism and modernity.

The Resilience of Indigenous African Religions

Indigenous African religions, often characterised by animism, ancestor worship and a deep connection to the natural world, have historically been central to African identity (Mbiti, 1991, p. 15). These religions emphasise community, oral traditions and the interconnectedness of life. Despite the spread of Christianity and Islam, indigenous beliefs persist, often syncretising with global religions to create unique hybrid practices (Jacob K.

Olupona, 2014, pp. 15–17) For example, in West Africa, the Yoruba religion has influenced diasporic traditions such as Santería and Candomblé, demonstrating the adaptability of African spirituality in a global context (Rosalind I.J.Hackett 1996, p. 212).

The Impact of Christianity and Islam

Christianity and Islam, introduced to Africa through trade, colonisation and missionary activities, have significantly shaped African identity. Christianity, in particular, has been reinterpreted to align with African cultural values, leading to the rise of African Independent Churches (AICs) that blend Christian doctrine with indigenous practices (Kalu, 2008, p. 45). Similarly, Islam in Africa has been influenced by local traditions, resulting in unique expressions of the faith, such as Sufi brotherhoods in West Africa (Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels 2000, p. 3). These adaptations highlight the agency of Africans in negotiating their religious identities within a globalised framework.

Globalisation and Its Challenges

Globalisation has introduced new dynamics to the relationship between religion and African identity. On one hand, it has facilitated the spread of global religious movements such as Pentecostalism and Salafism, which often challenge traditional African beliefs (Gifford, Paul, 1998, p. 45). On the other hand, globalisation has also led to the commodification of African spirituality, as seen in the global popularity of practices like yoga and meditation, which are often divorced from their cultural contexts (David, Chidester, 2005, p.15). This tension between preservation and transformation underscores the complexity of maintaining African religious identity in a globalised world.

In a globalised society, religion remains a vital component of African identity, serving as

both a source of continuity and a site of negotiation. Indigenous religions, Christianity and Islam, continue to shape African worldviews, even as they adapt to global influences. The challenge for Africans is to navigate these changes while preserving the core values that define their identity. As globalisation progresses, the interplay between religion and African identity will undoubtedly continue to evolve, reflecting the dynamic nature of both.

The Social Implications of Religion and African Identity in a Globalised World

Religion and African identity are deeply interwoven, shaping the cultural, social, and political landscapes of the continent. In a globalised world characterised by technological advancements, economic integration and cultural exchange, African societies face significant transformations. Globalisation influences traditional religious practices, belief systems and communal structures, often leading to conflicts between maintaining indigenous identities and adapting to modernity. This section of the study examines the social implications of religion on African identity within the context of globalisation, exploring the effects on culture, governance, social cohesion and individual identity.

Religion and African Identity: An Overview

Religion has historically played a central role in defining African identity. African traditional religions, Christianity and Islam are the predominant faiths, each contributing to the social and moral fabric of African societies (Mbiti, 1990, p.1). Traditional religions emphasise ancestral reverence, communal living and spiritual interconnectedness, shaping African worldviews. However, the advent of Christianity and Islam through colonialism and trade introduced new religious paradigms, leading to a complex interrelationship between indigenous beliefs and foreign religious influences (John David Yeadon Peel, 2000, p. 45).

Globalisation, characterised by increased cross-border interactions, has further intensified the interaction between religion and African identity. The spread of Western values, through media and economic policies, challenges traditional African religious practices, often creating tensions between modernity and cultural preservation (Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2006, p.103). The adaptation of African religious practices to contemporary contexts reflects the dynamic nature of African identity in the globalised era.

Social Implications of Religion and Globalisation on African Identity

Cultural Transformation

One of the most profound social implications of religion in a globalised world is cultural transformation. Globalisation facilitates the exchange of ideas and practices, often leading to the erosion of traditional religious customs and indigenous identity (Mazrui, Ali Al'Amin 1996, p.45). Western religious ideologies have influenced African societies through missionary activities, education and media. Consequently, some African traditional religious practices are perceived as outdated, leading to a gradual loss of indigenous cultural expressions (Oyewole, S, 2019, p.45).

However, globalisation also provides a platform for African religious practices to reach a global audience. African Pentecostal churches, for instance, have gained international recognition, with churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God expanding beyond Africa (Gifford, 1998: p.145.). This global religious expansion fosters cultural exchange, showcasing African spirituality on a global stage.

Social Cohesion and Communal Solidarity

Religion plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion in African communities.

Traditional African religions emphasise communal worship, collective responsibility and social harmony (Mbiti, 1990, p. 106). Christianity and Islam, despite their foreign origins, have also reinforced social unity through shared beliefs and values. Globalisation has introduced new religious movements and ideologies that sometimes challenge traditional social structures. The rise of religious fundamentalism, especially among Christian and Islamic sects, has led to increased sectarian conflicts in some African nations (Adogame, A. 2013, p. 145)). Additionally, the spread of secular ideologies through Western education and media has contributed to religious pluralism, creating new dynamics in African social cohesion (Ellis, Stephen and Ter Haar, Gerrie (2004, p, 45)

Political Influence and Governance

Religion has historically influenced governance in Africa. Traditional rulers often derive legitimacy from religious authority, and modern African states continue to experience the interplay between religion and politics (Falola, Toyin, and Heaton, Matthew M. 2008, p.45). Globalisation has reshaped this relationship by promoting democratic governance, human rights discourses and secular policies that sometimes conflict with religious values. Religious organisations have become key players in advocating for social justice, education and economic empowerment. The role of religious groups in political mobilisation has been evident in movements against corruption, authoritarianism, and human rights abuses (Ruth Marshall 2009, p.94). However, the politicisation of religion also presents challenges, as religious affiliations sometimes influence electoral processes and national policies, leading to sectarian divisions (Kalu 2008, p. 102)

Individual Identity and Religious Syncretism

Globalisation has significantly impacted individual identity, especially among African

youth. Exposure to global cultures through the internet, social media and international migration has led to shifts in religious expressions and personal beliefs (Asonzeh F-K. Ukah, 2020, p. 45). Many Africans now practise religious syncretism, blending traditional beliefs with Christianity or Islam.

Religious hybridization has led to new forms of spirituality, where individuals incorporate elements of multiple religious traditions into their personal faith (Afe Adogame, 2013, p.72). This phenomenon demonstrates the adaptive nature of African religiosity, ensuring its survival in a rapidly changing world. However, it also raises questions about the authenticity of religious identity and the potential loss of core African religious values.

Challenges and Opportunities in Maintaining African Identity

The globalisation of religion presents both challenges and opportunities for maintaining African identity. The primary challenge lies in the potential erosion of indigenous religious practices due to Western cultural domination. Additionally, the commercialisation of religion, seen in the rise of prosperity gospel movements, sometimes shifts focus from communal spirituality to material gain (Gifford, 2004, p.110).

Conversely, globalisation provides opportunities for African religious institutions to influence global religious discourses. The digital age has allowed African theologians and religious leaders to share their perspectives on international platforms, fostering intercultural dialogue (Ukah, 2020, p. 15). The recognition of African spirituality in global interfaith discussions enhances the visibility of African religious heritage.

The relationship between religion, African identity and globalisation is complex and

multifaceted. While globalisation challenges traditional religious practices and cultural norms, it also offers opportunities for African religious expression on a global scale. The social implications of religion in a globalised world highlight the need for a balanced approach that respects indigenous religious traditions while embracing beneficial aspects of globalisation. African societies must navigate these dynamics carefully to preserve their cultural and religious identities while engaging meaningfully with the global community.

Possible Solutions to the Problems of Religion and African Identity in a Globalised Society

Globalisation has brought about significant cultural, economic and social changes, often leading to tensions between traditional African identities and the influences of global religious and cultural systems. These tensions manifest in the erosion of indigenous practices, the dominance of foreign religions and the struggle to maintain a cohesive African identity in a rapidly changing world. This paper explores possible solutions to these challenges, focusing on the role of education, interfaith dialogue, cultural preservation and the reclamation of African agency in shaping its identity.

Education as a Tool for Cultural and Religious Reconciliation

Education is a critical tool for addressing the challenges posed by globalisation to African identity and religion. By incorporating African history, indigenous knowledge systems, and religious studies into curricula, educational institutions can foster a sense of pride and continuity in African identity. According to Thiong'O Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, p.16) *Decolonizing the Mind* is essential for Africans to reclaim their cultural and intellectual heritage. Education should emphasise the coexistence of traditional African religions with global religions like Christianity and Islam, promoting mutual respect and understanding.

For example, the integration of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) into religious studies can help dispel misconceptions and stereotypes about indigenous practices. This approach aligns with Asante's (2003, p. 2) call for Afrocentricity, which advocates the centering of African experiences and perspectives in academic discourse. By educating younger generations about the richness of African spirituality and its compatibility with global religious frameworks, societies can mitigate the erosion of African identity.

Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Pluralism

Interfaith dialogue is another viable solution to the tensions between African identity and globalised religions. Globalisation has intensified religious diversity in Africa, often leading to conflicts between adherents of different faiths. Promoting dialogue between practitioners of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions can foster tolerance and reduce sectarian violence.

According to Mbiti (1991), African religions have historically been inclusive and adaptable, making them well-suited for interfaith engagement (p.15) By creating platforms for dialogue, African societies can emphasise shared values such as community, morality and spirituality, which are common to all religious traditions. This approach not only strengthens social cohesion, but also reinforces African identity as a unifying factor in a diverse religious landscape.

Cultural Preservation and Revitalisation

The preservation and revitalisation of African cultural practices are essential for maintaining a distinct identity in a globalised world. Globalisation often marginalises indigenous cultures, leading to the loss of languages, rituals and artistic expressions.

Governments and cultural organisations must prioritise the documentation and promotion of African heritage.

For instance, initiatives like UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage programme have helped safeguard traditional practices such as oral storytelling, dance and festivals (UNESCO, 2023, p.12). Similarly, African filmmakers, writers and artists play a crucial role in preserving and reinterpreting African identity for contemporary audiences. Through oral traditions, African storytellers assert control over their cultural identity, dismantling harmful stereotypes and promoting authentic perspectives (Chinua Achebe, 2014, p. 76). This process encourages empowerment by reinterpreting historical and contemporary African stories.

.By celebrating and revitalising cultural practices, Africans can assert their identity in a globalised society.

Reclaiming African Agency in Globalisation

African societies must actively participate in shaping the processes of globalisation rather than passively accepting its influences. This requires reclaiming agency in economic, political and cultural spheres. For example, African leaders and intellectuals can advocate policies that protect local industries, promote cultural exports and resist the homogenising effects of globalisation.

(Kwame Nkrumah, 1964, p. 60) concept of "African Personality" emphasises the need for Africans to assert their unique identity and contributions to global civilisation. By leveraging globalisation as a platform for sharing African perspectives, societies can challenge dominant narratives and redefine their place in the world. This approach aligns

with Appiah's (Appiah 1992 p. 112) notion of "cosmopolitanism," which encourages individuals to embrace both local and global identities.

The challenges posed by globalisation to African identity and religion are complex but not insurmountable. Through education, interfaith dialogue, cultural preservation, and the reclamation of agency, African societies can navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity. By embracing a pluralistic and inclusive approach, Africans can maintain their unique identity while engaging constructively with global religious and cultural systems. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the solutions outlined above offer a pathway for Africans to thrive in a globalized society without losing their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Recommendations

Having investigated African identity in a globalised world, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. There is the need to recognise that religion is an intrinsic part of human identity and culture. In Africa, religion (whether indigenous, Christianity, Islam, or other faiths) is deeply intertwined with daily life, values and community structures. Encourage dialogue that respects this inherent nature while fostering mutual understanding between diverse religious traditions. Promote interfaith initiatives that highlight the shared spiritual and moral values across religions, emphasising unity rather than division.
2. In a globalised world, African indigenous religions and spiritual practices are often marginalised or overshadowed by dominant global religions. Efforts should be made to preserve and celebrate these traditions as a core part of African identity. Support cultural

festivals, academic research and media representation that showcase the richness of African indigenous religions. Encourage younger generations to learn about and take pride in these traditions.

3. Globalisation often brings external religious influences that can conflict with African cultural and religious values. It is essential to navigate these tensions by fostering a balance between global interconnectedness and local identity. Create platforms for critical discussions on how globalization impacts African religious practices. Encourage African religious leaders and scholars to engage in global conversations while advocating for the preservation of African identity.

4. In a globalised society, religious diversity can lead to conflicts or exclusion. African societies must embrace religious tolerance and inclusivity to foster social cohesion and peace; develop educational programmes that teach religious tolerance from an early age. Governments and civil society organisations should also implement policies that protect religious freedom and discourage discrimination.

5. Leveraging religion for social and economic development can be a powerful force for positive change in African societies. In a globalised world, religious institutions can play a key role in addressing social issues such as poverty education and healthcare. Encourage partnerships between religious organisations, governments and NGOs to tackle development challenges. Highlight the role of faith-based initiatives in promoting sustainable development and community empowerment.

Conclusion

Religion has traditionally been a central pillar in African societies, shaping moral values,

social organisation and cultural identity. It provided a framework for belonging and helped communities face life's challenges. The advent of globalisation has created both opportunities and tensions. While some religious influences support African values, others—especially those introduced through colonialism—have disrupted indigenous traditions and weakened African identity. Religion now functions both as a preserver of African identity and a potential agent of cultural erosion. It unites communities but can also alienate them if it promotes foreign ideologies at the expense of indigenous beliefs. Africans are called to engage critically with religion—embracing elements that resonate with their cultural values and rejecting those that conflict with their identity. This includes reviving indigenous religious practices and fostering dialogue between traditional beliefs and modern realities. In a rapidly globalising world, the relationship between religion and African identity remains both intricate and consequential. To preserve and reclaim their cultural heritage, Africans must become active agents in shaping how religion influences their lives. By promoting indigenous religious expressions, valuing traditional knowledge systems and encouraging dialogue between old and new, Africans can ensure that religion serves as a tool for empowerment rather than alienation. Through this conscious engagement, Africa can confidently assert its identity on the global stage—contributing to a world that cherishes diversity, upholds cultural dignity, and fosters genuine understanding across civilisations.

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