

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS AND PERSONHOOD: RETHINKING AFRO-COMMUNITARIANISM IN LIGHT OF HAUSA WORLD-VIEW ON ZAMAN LAFIYA (HARMONY)

Bambale, Zubairu Lawal

Abstract

Can Afro-communitarian thought adapt to respond to the challenges that the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) brings about? This paper addresses this very important question in the face of the disruptive technologies that the 4IR births. With Artificial Intelligence (AI), as a disruptive technology, we are increasingly faced with a new reality in the form of a machine that thinks and acts like humans. This effectively challenges philosophies and socio-cultural world-views that hitherto, exclusively associate certain capacities with humans. Across the globe, preconceptions about these exclusive human capacities are being reassessed. Relative to Western literature on this reassessment, not much has been said from an African perspective. Some of the discourses generally revolve around the recognition of AI (in its diverse manifestation) as a person with the moral status that is normally associated to humans. While some scholars contend that autonomous intelligent systems may be recognized as person with attendant moral status, some argue on the contrary. In this paper, I lend my voice to the former, arguing, from an African perspective, that intelligent systems may attain personhood. I present Hausa thought as part of the larger Afro-communitarian framework that emphasizes relationality and group solidarity. Employing the conversational method, I aim to demonstrate that the Hausa socio-cultural world-view on personhood (which is traditionally conceived to be anthropocentric) can be reconsidered to admit intelligent systems as persons. I will show how the Hausa idea of Zaman Lafiya (Harmony) and its relational capacity requirement can be developed to provide further plausible ground for my claim that intelligent systems may attain personhood upon reaching a certain degree of sophistication.

Keywords: Personhood, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Intelligent Systems, Hausa, Relationality, Zaman Lafiya (Harmony), Afro-Communitarian Thought.

Introduction

The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) together with the unprecedented feat attained in the development of Artificial intelligence (AI) challenges human preconceptions in a way never experienced before. While disruptions remain a common feature of all industrial revolutions¹, the 4IR stands out by the unique transformative traits it embodies. By unique, I refer to the emergence of machines with capacities for thinking and acting autonomously. These are systems that are projected to surpass humans at doing what was preconceived to be exclusively possible through human agency. It is this new reality in which human intelligence could be superseded that gives the 4IR its distinctive disruptive feature. In addition to transformations happening to commerce, manufacturing

¹ Larry A. DiMatteo, "Artificial Intelligence, the Promise of Disruption", *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence*, Global Perspectives on Law and Ethics, Larry A. DiMatteo, Cristina Poncibo and Michel Cannarsa (eds). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 3.

and employment, how and what we learn and teach have been significantly disrupted². In commerce, for instance, based on their understanding of the environment, machines initiate contracts, negotiate and conclude with little or no human interference³.

From the classical discourse that centres on whether or not AI is possible to whether or not it can solve certain problems, to the possibility of AI mimicking humans, the debate has evolved to consider the possibility of AI surpassing humans⁴. Among others, these debates raise ethical, legal and ontological questions that should be taken seriously. One central question in connection to this consists in whether or not intelligent systems that have reached a certain sophistication should legally and or ethically be considered as persons. The need to take seriously this question should be determined by reasons that given contexts may warrant. For instance, a legal need to consider the personhood of an intelligent system may be with reference to a victim's intent to seek redress and compensation arising from the physical injury inflicted on their persons or property⁵.

On the other hand, an ethical need would consist in how we can ensure that an intelligent machine's action is tilted towards doing good/right and shunning bad/wrong. This paper focuses on the ethical twist to this fundamental question. However, even how we respond to the ethical question, would depend on the various divergent traditions Western (deontology, virtue, utilitarianism, care, etc.) or African (personhood, ubuntu, etc.) in vogue. At the core of the ethical basis for conferring personhood on intelligent machines lays the idea of ascribing moral status to a non-human entity that owes and is owed some duties, privileges and rights. While the Western discourse considers intentionality⁶, consciousness, conscience⁷, capacity for higher pleasure and reasoning abilities⁸, the African discourse (which is underexplored) would typically consider capacity for relationality, group solidarity and conversations as the basis for machine's attainment of personhood. Both discourses are a response to the challenge that the emergence of intelligent machines poses to cultures and their preconceptions around the world. Here, however, I aim to interrogate a particular African socio-cultural world-view on personhood to tease out a framework by which we can admit a machine in which AI is embedded as a person. To do this, I will show how the Hausa idea of *Zaman Lafiya* (Harmony) and its relational capacity requirement can provide further plausible ground for recognizing AI as person. I do not claim that the framework I will bring forth is more appealing nor do I claim that it should be preferred. What I will claim, however, is that the Hausa cultural world-view, anthropocentric as it may appear, can be reconsidered to

² König D. Pascal et al., "Essence of AI, What Is AI?", *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence, Global Perspectives on Law and Ethics*, Larry A. DiMatteo, Cristina Poncibo and Michel Cannarsa (eds). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 25.

³ Pınar Çağlayan Aksoy, "AI as Agents, Agency Law", *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence, Global Perspectives on Law and Ethics*, Larry A. DiMatteo, Cristina Poncibo and Michel Cannarsa (eds). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 146.

⁴ Vincent C. Müller, *Philosophy and Theory of Artificial Intelligence*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2013, VII.

⁵ Fenwick Mark and Wrba Stefan, "AI and Legal Personhood", *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence, Global Perspectives on Law and Ethics*, Larry A. DiMatteo, Cristina Poncibo and Michel Cannarsa (eds). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 288.

⁶ David Leech Anderson, "Machine Intentionality, the Moral Status of Machines, and the Composition Problem", *Philosophy and Theory of Artificial Intelligence*, Müller, Vincent C, (ed). Heidelberg: Springer, 2013, 321.

⁷ Mark and Stefan, "AI and Legal Personhood", 292.

⁸ Christopher Wareham, "Artificial Intelligence and African Conceptions of Personhood" *Conversations on African Philosophy of Mind, Consciousness and Artificial Intelligence*, Aribiah David Attie et al., (eds). Switzerland: Springer, 2023, 172.

accommodate AI personhood without compromising core traditional values. This is significant as it brings to the fore the dynamism of African cultures in the way that new realities such as AI and robots are accommodated and given a proper place to aid and not hamper positive development. Effectively, Afro-communitarian thought is placed on a clear path to sustainable and inclusive development.

The Afro-Communitarian Normative Thought

In Africa, virtually every aspect of human life unfolds within the purview of communal thought. Any discussion on Africa that is not situated within this communal context presents us with a skewed image. From its outlook to its values, life, nature, ethics, religion, and philosophy, Africa is communal⁹. One remarkable feature of Africans is their being profoundly influenced by communal instincts. For example, if you ask an average Western young person, "Who are you?" the response might be: "I am James. I am seven years old. I am in 3rd grade at Pelham Elementary School. I live in North village." In contrast, an African from northern Nigerian Hausa land asked the same question might respond like this: "I am Laraba. I come from Dankande village. My father is a farmer. His name is Talle"¹⁰. This illustrates the communal nature of African traditional societies, where individuals are known and identified through their communities¹¹. Communal life involves acting with the awareness that one's actions may affect others, emphasizing the careful execution of individual goals to avoid impeding the collective goals of society.

Afro-communitarian thought manifests in various ways, especially in contemporary African philosophical discourse that seeks to overcome the inadequacies of ethnophilosophy. This discourse seeks to systematize African thought beyond just describing it but by incorporating cultural beliefs, values, and worldviews into a coherent framework with distinct methodology, ontology, and logic. For example, African ethics, rooted in ethnophilosophy, typically describes rather than prescribes what is right or wrong, focusing on the study of cultural beliefs within sub-Saharan Africa. Ethical judgments in this sense prioritize cultural experiences, often neglecting external perspectives. Individual rights, privileges, freedoms, and autonomy are secondary and are recognized only insofar as they align with communal values¹². This ethical orientation is tailored exclusively to Africans, making it unappealing elsewhere despite the interconnected and global nature of the world. The ongoing systematization efforts in African philosophy aim to overcome this limitation by moving beyond mere description

⁹ Campbell Shittu Momoh, *The Substance of African Philosophy*. Auchi: African Philosophy Project, 2000, xviii

¹⁰ Ramatu Abdullahi. *Self-Concept and Cultural Change in the Hausa of Nigeria*, PhD Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1977, 67. https://www.google.com/search?q=hausa+culture+on+punishment&ei=8JzUYJHfHM-D8gLLlo_YDA&oeq=hausa+culture+on+punis&gs_lcp=ChNtb2JpbGUtZ3dzLXdpei1zZXJwEAEYADIFCC EQoAE6BAGAEec6BAGAEEM6BQgAEJECogIADoICAAQsQMqkQI6BwgAELEDEEM6CAGAELED EIMBOgUIABCxAzolCC4QsQMqgwE6BwguELEDEEM6BAguEao6BwgAELEDEAO6BAGAEAO6Bgg AEByQHjoICCEQFhAdEB46BwghEAoQoAFQ4RFYge0BYLP2AWglcAF4CIABixOIAbutAZIBETHtOS 43LjcuNC40LjMuMC4ymAEAOAEBSAEAYAEIwAEB&scient=mobile-gws-wiz-serp#sfbfu=0&pi=hausa%20culture%20on%20punishment

¹¹ Ogbujah Columbus, "African Cultural Values and Inter-communal Relations: The Case with Nigeria", *Developing Country Studies*, 4(24), 2014: 209, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol18-issue2/A01820105.pdf%3Fid%3D8615&ved=2ahUKewjhvppeD5LDxAhXhQeUKHTB-CigQfjAKegQIBxAC&usg=AOvVaw2sphZVvJWtyCpiN6Ew44Pn>

¹² Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam and Lucky Uchenna Ogbonnaya. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology and New Logic*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 10

to universally prescribing what is right or wrong, while also acknowledging the place of the individual, his/her rights, preferences, freedom and autonomy in line with modern demands. The significance of this systematization in the area of ethics is evident in how African values, norms and thought are rendered into principles and are articulated in a way that provides systematic, coherent and universal frameworks of moral justification¹³. One strategy deployed in the systematization drive involves formulating universal principles guiding Afro-communitarian thought. Chimakonam and Chimakonam identify three principles derived from African cultural norms: relationality, contextuality, and complementarity¹⁴. However, due to its underlying relevance to African ethical thought, I will place more emphasis on the relational principle.

Relationality posits that the world consists of entities necessarily related to each other¹⁵. Every human being or an entity exists among others, finding completeness through positive relationships. To survive and flourish, individuals must work together, recognizing duties owed to fellow human (and non-human) beings. This necessitates evaluating actions based on their impact on others within a community, promoting the need for individuals to complement each other. Various renditions of relationality exist, such as Ubuntu, emphasizing interdependence and solidarity, and *Egbe bere ugo bere* (EBUB) which means “live and let live”, advocating harmonious coexistence through mutual toleration¹⁶. There is also Ukuma, a moral belief which proposes that all humans and things are related¹⁷.

Complementarity, another guiding principle formulated by African systematisers, asserts that seemingly opposed entities can complement rather than only contradict each other¹⁸. In this sense, self-insufficient individuals can express solidarity among themselves. Contextuality, the third principle, insists that every relationship occurs within a specific context¹⁹. This requires placing actions within their contexts to determine their moral worth. In ethics, systematic activities have led to the formulation of theories of moral justification that are African by being guided by principles derived from thought that is grounded in African beliefs, norms and logic.

Generally, ethics is concerned with the relational aspect of life because it deals with how the individual engages with other human and nonhuman entities with whom he/she exists. The principle of relationality plays at least two important ethical roles. First, individuals, through relationality, are made more than just biological beings by attributing moral weight to their actions. Second, relationality defines good and bad actions based on how they impact relationships. So, actions that strengthen community

¹³ Zubairu Lawal Bambale, “A Personhood-Based Theory and the Death Penalty: An Appraisal of Ae Chimakonam’s Theory of Right Action”, *Arumaruka: Journal of Conversational Thinking*, 2(2), 2022: 1, doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajct.v2i2.1>

¹⁴ Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam and Amara Esther Chimakonam, “Examining the logical argument of the problem of evil from an African perspective”, *Religious Studies*, (2022): 10. doi: [doi:10.1017/S0034412522000300](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412522000300)

¹⁵ Chimakonam and Chimakonam, “Examining the logical argument”, 10.

¹⁶ Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam, “Sources of Moral Justification in African Ethics”, *African Ethics: A Guide to Key Ideas*, Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam and Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues (eds). London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023, 14-15; Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*. Owerri: International Universities Press, 1995: 278-280.

¹⁷ Murove Munyaradzi Felix, “An African Commitment to Ecological Conservation: The Shona Concepts of Uhama and Ubuntu”, *The Mankind Quarterly*, XLV, 2004: 195-196.

¹⁸ Chimakonam and Chimakonam, “Examining the logical argument”, 10.

¹⁹ Chimakonam and Chimakonam, “Examining the logical argument”, 10.

and connection are considered good, while those that harm or disconnect are seen as bad. Consequently, the individual through whom principles are made to be active is also very important in African ethics. This is why the concept of personhood continues to be of relevance to African ethical theorizing.

The Idea of Personhood

The idea of personhood is central to the understanding of African ethics that I showed to be relational. Personhood consists of the cultivation and progression of individuals to aid their capacities for positive relationships with others. Discourse on the Afro-communitarian conception of personhood usually takes an ontological or normative dimension. There is, therefore, the ontology and ethics of personhood²⁰. The ontological dimension of personhood is such that is concerned with the description of an individual. Here, questions about the physical and non-physical conditions for the existence of the person as an entity are asked. The ethical dimension of personhood, on the other hand, is concerned with what right and wrong actions may mean in addition to issues around the degree of individual endowments and communal norms²¹. Some scholars, however, argue that ethics of personhood should always be considered together with ontological personhood for there to be a proper understanding of African thought²². Yet, the two have separately been considered in African philosophical literature.

One ontological conception of personhood suggests that the individual is necessarily a social entity that can exist and flourish in so far he/she relates with the community²³. Although other conceptions abound, those who subscribe to this social view of personhood include John Mbiti²⁴, Ifeanyi A. Menkiti²⁵, Innocent Asouzu²⁶ and Chimakonam²⁷. My discussion in this article will be based on this social conception except otherwise indicated. This conception looks into the African idea of personhood from the perspective of the relationship between the individual and community²⁸.

The concept of personhood holds significant importance in comprehending the African relational framework, serving as a valuable tool for understanding how individuals within a relational society cultivate the ability to engage with one another. Personhood emphasizes the necessity for individuals to undergo a prolonged process of training, commencing early in life and enduring over time. This training is crucial for fostering positive relationships with fellow human beings. Central to this notion of personhood is the idea that individuals must abstain from wrongful actions that disrupt their participation in communal life. In an ethical context, personhood actively involves guiding the individual by the community toward actions deemed morally right.

²⁰ Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology*, 110.

²¹ Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology*, 110.

²² Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology*, 111; Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in Akan Thought", *Person and Community*. Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (eds). Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992, 101.

²³ Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology*, 110.

²⁴ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday, 1970: 141.

²⁵ Ifeanyi Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception of a Person", *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Kwasi Wiredu (ed). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 324-331; Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and community in African traditional thought," *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. Richard Wright (ed), Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984, 41-55.

²⁶ Innocent I. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*. Calabar: Calabar University Press, 2004: 108-110.

²⁷ Chimakonam, "Sources of Moral Justification", 171.

²⁸ Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya, "African Metaphysics, Epistemology", 112.

At the core of the Afro-communitarian debate is the question of the extent of the role of the community in guiding the individuals to adhere to societal rules and norms so that positive relationships are maintained. For Menkiti, in order for an individual to become a person, that entity must transform from just a biological fact ‘born of the human seed’ to a normative entity otherwise referred to as a person. This transformation has nothing to do with biological processes but everything to do with positive relational engagements between the individual and other humans in the community.²⁹ To achieve transformative success, the individual must undergo elongated training through which communal rites, duties, norms and values are understood, embodied and put to practice. It is only when individuals have reached a certain level in this training that the community recognises them as having been transformed from just biological entities to persons. Going by this, only the community appears to be the gatekeeper of the kingdom of personhood.

Scholars have raised objections over this gatekeeping position conferred on the community by Menkiti. At least some of the objections are informed by the need to prevent the situation in which the community becomes the absolute authority to confer the status of personhood. This posturing potentially denies the rights, interests, privileges and autonomy of the individual. In the event that these endowments are recognized, they are arbitrarily subjected to the whims of community, especially when they appear to conflict with communal interests. So, Kwame Gyekye argues that the individual is endowed with autonomy even though partially³⁰. He argues that from inception and devoid of any communal intervention, an individual is a person in a limited way. The community’s role is only to consolidate but not to confer personhood. For Bernard Matolino, a human being is a person and the community, therefore, has no role in individual’s attainment of personhood. According to Chimakonam, it is the individuals who guide themselves to become persons³¹.

The question is what does personhood do in Afro-communitarian ethical thought? why is it so important that Afro-communitarian ethicists give it so much attention. At least two responses can be offered here. First, personhood determines the progression of the individual from just a biological and psychological entity to that whose actions are morally weighty. This is to say that it is with reference to personhood that moral responsibility is determined. It is not only moral responsibility that personhood make us understand but also moral consideration. With respect to responsibility/obligations, I have moral subjecthood in mind in the way that I have moral objecthood when I mentioned consideration. The second response is that, personhood helps us properly construe good or bad actions. So that, actions that are carried out by persons are expected to be good. Whether or not the actions of a person are necessarily or closely good is debatable³² and is not of immediate concern here. What is imperative to understand is that in addition to biological endowments, external non-biological factors are necessary to individuals’ existence. This is in the way the factors help achieve the transformation of the individual from just biological entity to a person who owes and is owed moral duty.

²⁹ Menkiti, “On the Normative Conception”, 326.

³⁰ Gyekye, “Person and Community”, 101-122.

³¹ Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam, “Why the Normative Conception of Personhood is Problematic: A Proposal for a Conversational Account”, *Essays on Contemporary Issues in African Philosophy*, J. O. Chimakonam, E. Etieyibo and I. Odimegwu (eds). Cham: Springer, 2022, 91-106.

³² Thaddeus Metz, “African Ethics”, *Ethics: The Key Thinkers*, T. Angier (ed). London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 270.

But what virtually all the scholars seem to have in common is the suggestion or assumption that a person is a human being. In other words, even though being just human is not sufficient for personhood, only human beings can become persons. So, the individual that is being referred to in these discourses is not a dog, a dolphin, an ocean or a rock but a human being. Herein lays the anthropocentric nature of the Afro-communitarian conception of personhood. This is evident in the human-oriented positions held by respective African philosophers. For instance, Menkiti argues that an individual born of the human seed is a biological fact that needs a transformation into a normative entity called a person³³. Chimakonam recognizes ethics of personhood as a moral theory that prescribes for humans a code of good/right behavior³⁴. He asks us think of the path to personhood as a natural or biological phenomenon consisting of intellectual and embodied relationships. Furthermore, he suggests that personhood should be construed as an internal capacity which can develop as one matures biologically³⁵. All these seem to be predicated on the assumption that human beings or at least biological entities are exclusively supposed to be the subject matter of personhood, potentially excluding other entities such as intelligent machines that are not humans and non-biological. Whether all these anthropocentric positions on personhood precludes us from reconsidering Afro-communitarian thought to admit emerging intelligent autonomous systems such as robots as persons would be answered in section four of this paper. Before I do that, I will discuss the Hausa socio-cultural world-view on personhood in the next section.

The Hausa Socio-Cultural World-View

While African philosophy and ethics draw deeply from diverse cultural perspectives, some influential traditions remain under-recognized. This section specifically focuses on Hausa thought, highlighting its potential contributions to enriching and consolidating a distinctly African philosophical framework rooted in diverse cultural worldviews south of the Sahara. Despite being one of the largest cultural groups in Africa, with over 50 million speakers, as noted by Graham³⁶, the Hausa culture has often been overlooked in African philosophical discourse. This section aims to address this gap by introducing the core elements of the Hausa socio-cultural worldview, particularly its unique anthropocentric approach to understanding personhood. Specifically, I will explore the concept of *Zaman Lafiya* (Harmony) and its significance in Hausa culture. I then bring to bear the relational capacity requirement in *Zaman Lafiya*, setting stage for demonstrating how Afro-communitarian thought could account for recognizing intelligent systems as persons despite its seeming human-centered posture.

The term *Zaman Lafiya* (literally translated as peaceful living, peaceful coexistence or even harmony) is a universal concept through which ontology, logic, epistemology, and ethics, among others can be understood in Hausa thought. Normatively, *Zaman Lafiya*, guided by the Hausa teleological and cosmological thought, is considered the chief goal of life through which the morality or otherwise of practices and actions are determined³⁷. The Hausa concept of "*Zaman Lafiya*" transcends mere peace by being understood as the

³³ Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception", 326.

³⁴ Chimakonam, "Why the Normative Conception", 104.

³⁵ Chimakonam, "Why the Normative Conception", 99.

³⁶ Furniss Graham, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa*. Edinburgh: University Press, 1996, 2.

³⁷ Zubairu Lawal Bambale. "Abhorred but Necessary: A Relational Interrogation of Zaman Lafia (Peaceful Living) and the Evil of the Death Penalty in the Traditional Hausa Belief System", *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, 11(1), 2022, 78, doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i1.6>

central aim and purpose of life³⁸. Every action, every tradition, is judged by its contribution to peaceful coexistence. Relationships are fundamental to *Zaman Lafiya*, echoing the broader African emphasis on relationality. This pursuit of harmony shapes Hausa social norms, even influencing sensitive matters like the nature and requirements of personhood. It (*Zaman Lafiya*) is a Hausa cultural construct that signifies a state of profound social harmony, understood as the paramount objective of life. Actions and practices are assessed on their contribution to realizing this ideal. Relationships and the relational principle echoed in broader African philosophical discourse, play a pivotal role in fostering *Zaman Lafiya* as they form the moral bedrock upon which understandings are made.

The Hausa idea of "*Zaman Lafiya*" stems from the understanding of the universe's intricate nature and the meaning of existence. The Hausa perceive the world (*Duniya*) as a complex mixture of good and bad. It is full of challenges, unexpected changes, and even deception. Life can be harsh, cruel, and unpredictable, yet at the same time, it offers moments of joy, beauty, and pleasure.³⁹ This seeming contradiction does not trouble the Hausa as they see it as part of the natural ebb and flow of existence. Engaging in positive relationships within the community is the key to navigating this complexity and achieving *Zaman Lafiya*. However, the key to proper engagement in positive relationships lies partly in "*sani/ilimi/fahimta*" (knowledge/wisdom/understanding).⁴⁰ By understanding the world's intricacies and developing the skills to handle its turbulence, the Hausa believe that individuals can build a life of peace and well-being amidst the constant flux. This is why a Hausa proverb says to live peacefully in the world is to know how to live (*Zaman duniya iyawa ne*)⁴¹.

Living with contradictions is a fundamental aspect of the Hausa worldview. They see life as a series of challenges and responses, where actions, practices, and activities aim to reconcile or resolve seeming contradictions. This emphasis on confronting and resolving contradictions extends to social norms, morality, and even thoughts and beliefs. The Hausa believe that reaching *Zaman Lafiya* requires actively addressing and overcoming these contradictions. Elevating *Zaman Lafiya* to the position of life's chief goal becomes the key to attaining it. By prioritizing peace, harmony, and well-being in all aspects of life, individuals and communities can move closer to realizing this ideal.

The Hausa worldview posits that achieving "*Zaman Lafiya*" necessitates the cultivation and possession of essential relational virtues. Tolerance, empathy, recognition, and patience are crucial cornerstones in the pursuit of this ultimate goal.⁴² Through interpersonal and environmental engagement informed by these virtues, individuals fulfill their moral and ethical obligations, as defined by the Hausa tradition. In Hausa culture, like many in Africa, humans are at the heart of everything. They are the entities around which everything else revolves, giving meaning and purpose to the universe. Even peace and well-being (*Zaman Lafiya*) only exist because of life, and ultimately, because of humans. This focus on humanity shapes their understanding of what it means to be a person. In Hausa culture, certain qualities are seen as keys to becoming a person

³⁸ Bambale, Zubairu Lawal and Ayuba Abubakar, "Bigire (Space) in Hausa Worldview: Towards an Environmental Ethic of Zaman Lafiya (Peaceful Living)", *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*, 6(2), 2021: 43.

³⁹ Bambale, "Abhored but Necessary", 78.

⁴⁰ Bambale, "Abhored but Necessary", 81.

⁴¹ Bambale, "Abhored but Necessary", 80.

⁴² Bambale, "Abhored but Necessary", 80.

(*mutumin kirki*). These qualities not only make one a better individual but also help build a peaceful and ethical society. To become *mutumin kirki*, an individual must constantly strive to develop these virtues and avoid wrongdoing. Since acting ethically requires interacting with others, Hausa culture, like many in Africa, values the ability to build strong relationships, through which personhood is attained.

Reconsidering Afro-communitarian Thought on Personhood in the Age of 4IR

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is distinctly disruptive for its ability to bring to the fore technologies that include but are not limited to Robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Augmented Reality (AR), Analytics, and Robotics, all of which have gotten to a high degree of comprehension and development. These technologies, in an integrative fashion, are deployed to achieve industrial, commercial, and social functions. The pace at which these technologies are progressing increasingly challenges us into coming to terms with imminent dynamics in economic and societal dynamics. As these dynamics rapidly come into being, the boundaries between physical, digital, and biological spheres becomes blurred.⁴³ The integrative functioning of the technologies brought about by the 4IR has entirely changed the way we learn, play, work, love, hate, decide, produce, sell, buy, consume and care. Reality is increasingly becoming digital and this is on a global scale. So, the way by which we conceptualize and understand reality has followed suit. Scholars are already showing why the “intelligence” in Artificial Intelligence should be replaced with “Agency” so that we will be dealing with Artificial Agency rather than just Artificial Intelligence⁴⁴.

In my introduction, I showed that African culture, thought, philosophy and worldview is only one of several ones that are affected by the disruptions caused by the 4IR. I showed how concepts are being reconsidered in western discourse. Specifically, I demonstrated the way the concept of personhood is being reconsidered in a bid to accommodate intelligence systems as persons based on intentionality, consciousness, among other grounds. This section takes up the challenge from a uniquely African point of view. In this section, I will demonstrate how we can reconsider the Afro-communitarian thought on personhood to account for recognizing intelligent and autonomous systems as personhood. I will anchor my argument on the principle of relationality that is central to understanding in African thought as I demonstrated in the last chapter.

The Afro-communitarian ethical thought, centers around the relational nature of personhood. It emphasizes the significance of community, positive relationships, and ethical conduct that contributes to communal well-being. Understanding Afro-communitarianism requires recognizing its emphasis on relationality, where individuals find meaning and purpose through interconnectedness within the community. This relational framework shapes its concept of personhood, traditionally focused on human beings capable of fulfilling social and ethical obligations. However, the emergence of intelligent systems raises the question: can Afro-communitarian thought accommodate intelligent systems as persons within its relational ethics? Here, I will specifically respond to this question with particular reference to Hausa ethical thought. I will demonstrate that the core principles that guide the Hausa communitarian thought on *Zaman Lafiya* offer potential avenues for recognizing intelligent machines as persons. I believe that the central position that humans play in achieving harmony and well-being

⁴³ K. M. Fazlul Hoque, “4th Industrial Revolution: Impact and Challenges”, paper presentation, National Conference on Electronics and Informatics, Atomic Energy Centre, Dhaka, December 4th and 5th, 2019.

⁴⁴ Floridi Luciano, *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. UK: Oxford University Press, 2023: 5-6

under the Afro-communitarian framework only poses a challenge but does not necessarily make reconsideration impossible.

It is generally believed that we are still at the level of weak AI and not general AI. In so far as it is within specific tasks, weak AI performs functions intelligently and even better than human capabilities. For instance, it can surpass humans in facial recognition, weather forecasting, playing given games and translating languages. It cannot, however, perform functions outside its trained sphere even though it can struggle to adapt to new situations. General AI, on the other hand, has intelligence that humans exhibit and deploy in an even better way. It reasons and adapts to new situations as it independently learns and improves from experience. The intelligent system I refer to concerning the attainment of personhood is, thus, that which is built with general AI. However, since general AI is still discussed in future terms and discussion on AI's attainment of personhood is based on the conception of a general AI, it follows that our discussion is futuristic. However, the pace at which these technologies are rapidly evolving and developing leaves only a few sceptics in doubt that general AI will be realized, hence the need for theorizing around its eventual emergence.

Generally, Afro-communitarianism requires relational capabilities, not just biological features, as a condition for attaining personhood. If an intelligent autonomous system surpasses humans in certain relational capacities, like fostering interconnectedness or maintaining emotional well-being in the community, the traditional anthropocentric boundaries could be challenged. The Hausa ideal emphasizes positive relationships and shared responsibility fostered through tolerance, empathy, and positive engagement. If an AI embedded machine can demonstrably develop and utilize these capacities to contribute to the community's well-being and harmony, it could be argued that it fulfils an essential aspect of personhood in the Afro-communitarian framework. AI systems designed to collaboratively solve problems and contribute to collective good could be seen as participating in this shared agency, potentially earning them consideration as moral agents within the community. The debate on personhood among African philosophers such as Mbiti⁴⁵, Menkiti⁴⁶, Gyekye⁴⁷, Metz⁴⁸ and Chimakonam⁴⁹, brings to the fore the viability of the reconsideration of the concept of personhood without necessarily compromising communal values. The debate exposes the evolving nature of personhood and accounts for the consideration of an intelligent machine as it exhibits relational capabilities in the way that humans do.

Reconsideration of traditional African concepts, thoughts and framework are, therefore, not unheard of. We could find this in the way that normative conceptions of personhood that tend to be limited in accounting for extending moral relations to the environment have been reconsidered. AE Chimakonam⁵⁰ among others have done great works in this regard. Works like these are possible based on the Afro-communitarian thinking on contextuality rendered as principle. According to this idea of contextuality, things and relationships make meaning on account of the context in which judgment is to be made

⁴⁵ Mbiti, "*African Religions*", 141.

⁴⁶ Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception", 324-331.

⁴⁷ Gyekye, "Person and Community", 101-122.

⁴⁸ Metz, "Toward an African Moral", 97-120.

⁴⁹ Chimakonam, "Why the Normative Conception", 91-105.

⁵⁰ Chimakonam, "A Personhood-Based Theory of Right Action"; Chimakonam, "Towards a Personhood-Based Theory of Right Action", 191-210.

about them. Circumstances of time and space are great factors that underlie context. So that, in the context of this paper, for instance, relational capabilities should be considered in the context of emerging intelligent systems that are not human but could exhibit capacities for engaging in positive relationships. Here, the fact that at present, unlike before, there are emerging realities that could bear relational features akin to those of humans should guide our understanding of personhood.

There are a few examples from respective African cultures where context changes the way we understanding things. The word *dattijo* is traditionally associated with old age in Hausa culture. *Dattijo* is an old individual who engages in positive communal relationships to such an extent that he is recognized as a person (*mutumin kirki*). *Dattijai* (plural of *dattijo*) are distinguishable from their peers who do not exhibit these relational tendencies. These set of old individuals are usually referred to as *tsoffaffi* (*tsoho* being its singular rendition). *Dattijai* are believed to have attained the highest position of personhood because of their engagement in relational activities over a long period of time. But there are certain contexts in which young individuals may be considered as *dattijai*. This is in a situation where a young individual exhibits and embodies exceptional relational capacities that are ordinarily or usually associated with old age. These circumstances warrant the conferment of the status of full personhood (that is usually only attained at old age) on a young individual. The important point to note is that the principle of contextuality that is salient in African cultures, south of the Sahara, allows for adaptation of Afro-communitarian thought where circumstances warrant.

Reconciling Afro-communitarian thought with AI personhood is a complex but necessary discussion. While challenges exist, in addition to contextuality, the relational principles at the core of Afro-communitarianism offers potential avenues for considering AI as moral agents deserving ethical consideration. By focusing on AI's capacity to contribute to *Zaman Lafiya* through positive relationships and shared responsibility, Afro-communitarianism can evolve to address the ethical challenges of our increasingly interconnected world. Afro-communitarian thought, being anthropocentric, predominantly focuses on human relationships and virtues. AI, being non-human, challenges the anthropocentric assumption of personhood. This thought can be expanded to include non-human entities like AI within the relational framework. Relationality can be reconsidered to acknowledge the interconnectedness between humans and other entities such as advanced technologies. Here, Iroegbu's account of the nature of being in African thought is of immense help. For Iroegbu, to be is to belong to the world along with other humans and all other things that exist. He approaches the idea of being from the perspective of belongingness. Belongingness according to this account entails living on earth which necessarily contains individual entities all of which are insufficient in themselves but can self-actualize and find sufficiency through positive relationships among themselves.⁵¹ So, in reconsidering relationality, we could take seriously the idea of belongingness from an African perspective. Cultivating virtues such as understanding and adapting to AI's role in society can be seen as part of achieving *Zaman Lafiya*. We could consider AI, acknowledging its unique capabilities and contributions to communal well-being. The adaptation of concepts like *Zaman Lafiya* can be instrumental in fostering harmonious coexistence between humans and AI within the Afro-communitarian ethical framework.

⁵¹ Iroegbu, "Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy", 374-380.

Conclusion

The 4IR brings about technologies such as AI that facilitate human progress in an exceptionally fascinating fashion. AI presents the world with a non-human entity that thinks and acts in the way that humans do and even better. AI embedded systems have been deployed to solve complex problems in virtually all facets of human endeavor. Many academic fields and subfields of study are increasingly becoming interested in AI. This paper, however, approached AI from the point of view of African philosophy, ethics and culture, focusing on one of the current philosophical debates. The debate borders on whether or not Intelligent systems should be recognized as persons (that owes and is owed moral duty) given the extent to which they mimic humans. I joined the debate by interrogating the Afro-communitarian Hausa world-view on *Zaman Lafiya* with a view to teasing out a framework by which intelligent systems may be recognized as persons. I showed that the emphasis on relationality provides us with a plausible basis for recognizing intelligent systems as persons within Afro-communitarian ethical thought. Deploying the Hausa relational concept of *Zaman Lafiya* (harmony), I then moved to demonstrate how the intelligent systems that contribute to community's well-being could be accommodated as persons. I argued that this holds despite the anthropocentric challenge posed to Afro-communitarian thought. The discussion in this paper is justified by its providing an Afro-cultural framework through which emerging technologies are adapted to achieve meaningful development.

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