

KANU'S IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY AND SOLIDARITY DURING THE ERA OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Igwebuike is an Igbo word which means strength in number. Solidarity, on the other hand, is a bond of unity or agreement between individuals who are united around a common goal. As the saying goes "united we stand, divided we fall". As it is today, Covid-19 is a pandemic that has traumatized people, and isolated them from their loved ones, brought untold hardship to many people, taken away the lives of many and is still killing many people today. Therefore, using the principle of Igwebuike and solidarity with oneself, family, neighbour, state, country, world, etc., we would go a long way to save the world. The analytical method is used in this work and the aim of this paper is to portray how the Igwebuike principle can go a long way to salvaging the situation at hand.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Solidarity, COVID-19 Pandemic, Principle

Introduction

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary describes pandemic as "a disease that spreads over a whole country or the whole world." It is a global outbreak of disease. It happens whenever a new virus emerges to infect people and its spread is sustained. Its long period of spread is caused by the fact that there is "little or no pre-existing immunity against the new virus."¹ This Covid-19 outbreak was "characterized as pandemic on March 11 by the WHO external icon."² It is also rapidly spreading from person to person. The National Center for Disease Control in Nigeria (NCDC) maintains that this is the first pandemic known to be caused by a new coronavirus, even though "in the past century, there have been four pandemics caused by the emergence of new influenza viruses. As a result, most research and guidance around pandemics is specific to influenza, but the

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). Coronavirus Disease 2019, (COVID-19). Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus2019-ncov/index.html>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019).

same premises can be applied to the current COVID-19 pandemic.”³ It also explains the nature of such pandemics thus,

Pandemics of respiratory disease follow a certain progression outlined in a Pandemic intervals Framework. Pandemics begin with an investigation phase, followed by recognition, initiation, and acceleration phases. The peak of illnesses occurs at the end of the acceleration phase, which is followed by a deceleration phase, during which there is a decrease in illnesses. Different countries can be in different phases of the pandemic at any point in time and different parts of the same country can also be in different phases of a pandemic.⁴

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also affirmed that this Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious one caused by a newly discovered coronavirus as mentioned above. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats and bats. It mostly spreads through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is a respiratory disease, which can affect anyone but in different ways. However, people with pre-existing health conditions or problems and older people are more at risk of developing complications, or even death, should they catch the virus. Most infected people will develop mild to moderate symptoms and recover without requiring special treatment. The most common symptoms include fever, tiredness and dry cough. While other symptoms include shortness of breath, aches and pains, sore throat, and very few people will report diarrhoea, nausea or a runny nose.⁵

Brief Analysis of Covid-19

Even though little has been said about the Coronavirus pandemic in the introduction, it is also good to elaborate more on this virus by tracing its origin and spread in order to widen our knowledge. According to Shereen, Coronaviruses belong to the *Coronaviridae* family in the Nidovirales order.⁶

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019).

⁵ World Health Organization (WHO), 2019. Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) Outbreak. Available at <http://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus/emergencies-redirect>.

⁶ Shereen, M.A., (2019). “COVID-19 infection: Origin, transmission, and characteristics of human coronaviruses” in *Journal of Advanced Research*, vol. 24, p.91.

Viruses, and the diseases they cause, are often given different names. In fact, majority of persons know the name of a disease without having the knowledge of the virus that causes the disease. For example, HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. "Viruses are named based on their genetic structure to facilitate the development of diagnostic tests, vaccines and medicines. Virologists and the wider scientific community do this work, so viruses are named by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV)."⁷

Shereen describes this Coronavirus as being in form of crown-like spikes on the outer surface; under the microscope, the viruses look like they are covered with pointed structures that surround them like a crown. Since they are named by their appearance, thus, it was named as a Coronavirus. They are minute in size, like 65–125 nm in diameter, and contain a single-stranded RNA as a nucleic material, its size ranging from 26 to 32kbs in length. There are also other types of Ccoronaviruses found to be in the family. They are alpha (α), beta (β), gamma (γ) and delta (δ) coronavirus. The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), H5N1 influenza A, H1N1 2009 and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) cause acute lung injury (ALI) and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) which leads to pulmonary failure and result in fatality. These viruses were actually thought to infect only animals, until humans witnessed a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak caused by SARS-CoV, 2002 in Guangdong, China. A decade later, another pathogenic Coronavirus emerged, known as Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). This caused an endemic in Middle Eastern countries. And now, just at the end of 2019, Wuhan, an emerging business hub of China, experienced an outbreak of a novel Coronavirus that killed more than eighteen hundred and infected over seventy thousand individuals within the first fifty days of the epidemic. This Coronavirus has been reported to be a member of the β group of Coronaviruses. This new virus was named as Wuhan Coronavirus or 2019 novel Coronavirus (2019-nCov) by the Chinese researchers. The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) named the virus as SARS-CoV-2 and the disease as COVID-19. In the history, SARS-CoV (2003) infected 8098 individuals, with mortality rate of 9%, across 26 countries in the world. On the other hand, the new Corona virus (2019) infected 3,301,219 individuals, with 233,716 deaths across 213 countries, till the date of this writing, that is, 30th of April, 2020. It shows that the transmission rate of SARS-CoV-2 is higher than SARS-CoV, and the reason could be genetic recombination event at S

⁷ World Health Organization (WHO), 2019

protein in the RBD region of SARS-CoV-2, which may have enhanced its transmission ability.⁸

Covid-19 Modes of Transmission

Coronavirus was defined by David⁹ as “illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV. The name was chosen to avoid stigmatizing the virus's origins in terms of populations, geography, or animal associations.”¹⁰ The most dangerous part of this virus is its mode of transmission, even though based on the available information through the mass media and other sources of information, one is not clear enough of the transmission routes. Although we currently understand that the respiratory transmission from human to human is the major transmission route, “other ways for transmission, such as gastrointestinal transmission or aerosol propagation, is not so clear.”¹¹ According to ‘africanews,’ which is distributed by APO¹² group on behalf of World Health Organization (WHO), the transmission from person to person is

through respiratory droplets and contact routes. Droplet transmission occurs when a person is in in close contact (within 1 m) with someone

⁸ C/f Shereen, M.A., (2019). “COVID-19 infection: Origin, transmission, and characteristics of human coronaviruses” in *Journal of Advanced Research*, vol. 24, p.91.

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¹⁰ David J. Cennimo, (2020). “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid19), Practice Essentials, Background, Route of Transmission”, Medscape. Available on [https // emedicine .medscape . com/article/2500114-overview](https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/2500114-overview). Accessed 04/05/2020.

¹¹Qian, X., Ren, R., Wang, Y. *et al.*(2020) “Fighting against the common enemy of COVID-19: a practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind/ *Infectious Disease of Poverty*” Available at <https://idpjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40249-020-00650-1>. Accessed on 05/05/2020

¹²Alpha Phi Omega-Omicron(APO) is a national co-educational service fraternity founded on December 16, 1925. It is organized to provide community service, leadership development, and social opportunities for college students. The purpose of the fraternity is to develop Leadership, to promote Friendship, and to provide Service to humanity; and to further the freedom that is our national, educational, and intellectual heritage. Alpha Phi Omega's primary focus is to provide volunteer service within four areas: service to the community, service to the campus, service to the fraternity, and service to the nation and world.C/f. <https://apo.org.uiowa.edu/about-us>.

who has respiratory symptoms (e.g. coughing or sneezing,) and is therefore at risk of having his/her mucosae (mouth and nose) or conjunctiva (eyes) exposed to potentially infective respiratory droplets (which are generally considered to be > 5-10 µm in diameter). Droplet transmission may also occur through fomites in the immediate environment around the infected person. Therefore, transmission of the COVID-19 virus can occur by direct contact with infected people and indirect contact with surfaces in the immediate environment or with objects used on the infected person (e.g. stethoscope or thermometer).¹³

Brief Explanation of *Igwebuike* and Solidarity

Igwebuike, as noted above, means “number is strength... that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force,”¹⁴ while solidarity is “a bond of unity or agreement between individuals united around a common goal or against a common enemy, such as the unifying principle that defines the labor movement; mutual support within a group”¹⁵ etc. Solidarity is that virtue which enables the human family to share fully both the treasures of material and spiritual goods.

The strength attributed to “*Igwebuike*,” that is, with number, is founded on the interdependence, mutual support and reliance on each other in difficult times, or a pursuit of a particular goal. It is this “organic” interdependence of the components parts, that is, “the number, the many” that is called solidarity¹⁶. The

¹³ APO, (2020). “Modes of transmission of virus causing COVID-19: implications for IPC precaution recommendations”. Africanews. Accessed 05/05/2020.

¹⁴ Eche, Mary Winifred G., (2019). “*Igwebuike* and the Right of Inheritance of Igbo Women” in *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 5 No 7, p. 40. ISSN: 2488-9210(Online)

¹⁵ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition (2016). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

¹⁶ Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as the hermeneutic of individuality and communality in African ontology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 162-179. Kanu, I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuike* and question of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol.3 No1. pp. 131-138. Kanu, I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuike* as a philosophical attribute of Africa in portraying the image of life. A paper presented at the 2017 Oracle of Wisdom International Conference by the Department of Philosophy, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, 27-29 April. Kanu, I. A. (2017b). *Igwebuike* as a complementary approach to the issue of

number is, therefore, seen as strength only and only if there is solidarity. In African philosophy and religion, we identify this number and support through the extended family. Africans have an extended family structure. Hence, for the traditional Africans, the family does not stop with the immediate brothers and sisters and parents (nuclear family), but also includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, etc. This accounts for why the African notion of family is extended and wider than the nuclear family.

Family within the African context is usually the major source of the basic necessities of life, health, love and tenderness, food, water, clothing, shelter and sanitation. The extended family ideally provides economic, social and psychological security to all its members. This family system defines social and moral norms and safeguards both material and spiritual customs and traditions as well as provides a variety of role models preparing the way for adulthood.¹⁷ The strength of this extended family is to support one another.

In this pandemic period, for example, the Nigerian government, in compliance with the advice of the WHO, has asked her citizens to stayathome, as a necessary precaution to stop the spread of the virus. It is almost unimaginable, but this is the case, that these people are asked to stay at home without adequate provision of palliatives or means of survival for a people who depend on their daily outdoor work and petty businesses to feed themselves. Though this situation has been very challenging for most Nigerians, the exchange and support mechanism of solidarity in extended families have been the saving grace for many. The strength and unity of the number, "Igwebuike,"¹⁸ have become the source of

girl-child education. *Nightingale International Journal of Contemporary Education and Research*. Vol. 3. No. 6. pp. 11-17.

¹⁷ Patricia M. Amos, (2013). "Parenting and Culture - Evidence from Some African Communities". Available at <http://www.intechopen.com>books>parenting-andculture-...> Accessed 05/05/2020.

¹⁸ Kanu, I. A. (2017e). Igwebuike as an Igbo-African modality of peace and conflict resolution. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars*. Vol. 1. No. 1. pp. 31-40. Kanu, I. A. (2017g). Igwebuike and the logic (Nka) of African philosophy. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 1. pp. 1-13. Kanu, I. A. (2017h). Igwebuike philosophy and human rights violation in Africa. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3. No. 7. pp. 117-136. Kanu, I. A. (2017i). Igwebuike as a hermeneutic of personal autonomy in African ontology. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 14-22. Kanu, I. A. (2018). Igwebuike as an African integrative and progressive anthropology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 151-161. Kanu, I. A. (2018). New Africanism: Igwebuike as a philosophical Attribute of Africa in portraying the Image of Life. In Mahmoud Misaeli, Sanni Yaya and Rico Sneller (Eds.). *African Perspectives on Global on Global Development* (pp. 92-103). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Kanu, I. A. (2019). Collaboration within the ecology of mission: An African cultural

relief and hope for the suffering "parts" of the family. It is in this sense, that the solidarity and unity of the number, 'Igwebuike,' ultimately become their strength. Hence, this sense of solidarity becomes the bond of love and force of victory over challenges and needs.

Solidarity is, therefore, the acceptance of our social nature and the affirmation of the bonds we share with all our brothers and sisters. Solidarity creates an environment in which mutual service is encouraged. It is also the social conditions in which human rights can be respected and nurtured. The ability to recognize and accept the whole range of corresponding duties and obligations that are embedded in our social nature can occur only in an atmosphere enlivened by solidarity.¹⁹

The Role of *Igwebuike* in the Era of Covid-19

In the midst of the hopelessness that has taken over the whole world, what can the principle of *Igwebuike* offer to the world to assist during this pandemic. Medical personnel and other experts have advised that we take basic precautions such as regular washing of hands with soap, the use of hand sanitizers, keeping of our environments clean, wearing of face masks, maintaining of social distance and most importantly staying at home, etc. We obtain such information through the mass media and social media of different types, such; as television, radio, newspapers, Internet, WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, Facebook, etc. But many Nigerians who live in the villages and some that live in the cities have no phones or televisions, or even radios to listen to news, and to have access to such information. More so, many of them are not educated (that is, they have not acquired formal education). Most of them still doubt the existence of Covid-19. Someone from the village called me and said that the sickness is made for rich men and women who travel abroad, and not for poor people like them. I began to explain to him more about the Covid-19.

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¹⁹ Rev. Robert A. S., (2010). "Solidarity: The Fundamental Social Virtue", in *Religion &Liberty*: Vol 11, No.5

This is one of the major areas where the principle of *Igwebuike* comes into play. Because of the large size of the extended family, there must be some members that are more enlightened and richer. Such members may, therefore, have access to the social media; in that case, they should not hesitate to communicate to other less-privileged family members about the dangers of Covid-19, and also encourage them to take the necessary precautions as stipulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the NCDC.

Furthermore, the solidarity principle and support mechanism also are forces that encourage the rich or fairly rich members of the family to provide food and other material needs for the less-privileged members of the family. As the case is today, when government is emphasizing that citizens should stay at home, while many Nigerians survive solely on a day-to-day hawking, they have neither savings account nor reservoir; how will they survive, if there is no one to assist them? The principle of *Igwebuike*, manifesting through love of the other, gives life to the hopeless.

Outside the members of the family, the *Igwebuike* principle advocates for universal unity, love and care. This is because, even though the word is an Igbo word, it has a universal relevance. Every language possesses the words 'unity,' 'solidarity,' 'complementarity,' 'love,' etc. Apart from family members supporting their relations, the *Igwebuike* principle invites the rich members of our communities, states and countries to support the poor by donating money, drugs, buildings for isolation centers and provision of medical personnel. Retired medical personnel should volunteer to assist with their wealth of experience, which many have done and many are expected to follow suit. This is the time to help the poor and needy. If this is not done, the poor may contract the virus and transmit it to every member of the community. So the rich need to help them so that they can stay at home. On the hand, the principle of *Igwebuike* requires the poor and needy to obey the instructions that have been given. It is very necessary and obligatory that all residents in the potential risk areas should accept to stay at home. This is an effective way to block the transmission routes.

For example, I met an electrician who went about working for people, and I observed that he had been doing his normal routine work without qualms, as if everything was normal. When I tried to tell him to stay at home, explaining the implications of refusing to stay safe at home, his response was: "Whether corolla kills me or hunger kills me, death is death." He further said that the government did not give them anything to eat and they were asking him to stay at home. I

went further to ask him: "What of if this is war, will you not run after your life? Will you be waiting for the government to provide food for you, or do you care to save your life first?" I advised him to see this Covid-19 as a war and do everything possible to save his life. Instead of making empty arguments, people should make effort to stay at home to avoid spreading this virus or to avoid contracting it.

It has been observed through some video clips that some mischievous infected persons do everything possible to make sure that many people suffer along with them, thereby trying to spit on objects, touch them, sneeze without protection etc. *Igwebuike* principle speaks against such attitudes. It encourages protection of one another in love and unity. It confirms the "universal relevance of solidarity and complementarity."²⁰ This is expressed through proverbs such as: "A person is a person because of other people." "Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken." "When spiders unite, they can tie up a lion." "Behind an able man there are always other able men." "It takes a village to raise a child." "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am."²¹

Way Forward

Based on the *Igwebuike* principle, as individuals we can reduce our chances of being infected or of spreading COVID-19, by taking simple precautions in our mode of living (e. g. washing and sanitizing of hands, social distancing, avoiding of crowded places, staying at home and going out only when necessary, etc.), aware that what affects us affects our families and the entire community. The leaders and those in authority have to do their best to discharge their duties diligently and to find ways of cushioning the effects of the restriction of movement and the economic hardship that have ensued. In disbursing palliatives, all forms of discriminations should be avoided. Also, the security personnel that are guarding our borders and road checkpoints should be honest in discharging their duties and avoid taking bribes from people who contravene the restriction of movement. Selfishness and greed on their part can lead to the

²⁰ Ikechukwu A. Kanu., (2019) "On the Origin and Principles of Igwebuike Philosophy" *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pg. 160

²¹ Ikechukwu A. Kanu., (2019) "On the Origin and Principles of Igwebuike Philosophy" pg. 176

destruction of so many lives. They are on the roads to protect lives not to eliminate.

Conclusion

The Covid 19 pandemic has unleashed destruction of lives, suffering and untold hardship upon the world. However, a number of lessons are being learnt. One of such lessons is that love is the greatest force available to us for overcoming obstacles, and indeed, it is the fundamental element that makes life meaningful. According to Einstein; "Love is Light, that enlightens those who give and receive it. Love is gravity, because it makes some people feel attracted to others. Love is power, because it multiplies the best we have, and allows humanity not to be extinguished in their blind selfishness. Love unfolds and reveals".²²

In this era of the pandemic, people have become more conscious of the fragility of human life and the relevance of family relationship, friendship and solidarity among individuals, states and nations. The need for interdependence, cooperation and solidarity among peoples and nations has become more apparent. These values are at the basis of the *Igwebuike* principle. This paper makes a clarion call to everybody living today to look around and see what help we can give to our neighbours, someone that is hungry, thirsty, naked and homeless. Let us try and extend a helping hand, no matter how little; in this way, we shall be participating in the fight against Covid 19 and other conditions that endanger human life.

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²² Einstein A., (1938). "A letter from Albert Einstein to his daughter: on The Universal Force of Love". Available at <https://monoset.com/blog/journal/a-letter-from-albert-einstein-to-his-daughter-on-the-universal-force-of-love>. Accessed on 06/05/2020

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