

**THE AFRICAN SPIRIT AND SPIRITS: A SUCCOR IN THE NEW NORMAL WORLD IN
AFRICA AND BEYOND**

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Abstract

The resilience that characterizes African life has often been described as the “African spirit,” a worldview rooted in the belief that human existence is sustained by the influence and presence of various spirit beings. This paper examines the African spirit of perseverance and the role of spiritual agents as sources of strength, consolation, and survival in times of adversity. It argues that Africans do not exist in isolation but maintain a symbiotic relationship with the physical, social, and spiritual environment. Using the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study, the research explores how African societies responded to the crisis despite limited technical and human resources. It highlights the spirit of solidarity, communal support, and collective resilience demonstrated among African nations during the pandemic. Anchored on Socrates’ self-development or self-actualization theory, the study adopts descriptive and phenomenological methods to analyze African spiritual consciousness and coping mechanisms. The paper argues that the interaction between the African spirit and the protective role of spirit beings contributed to resilience during the pandemic. It concludes that African societies should continue to explore indigenous knowledge systems, including traditional approaches to healthcare, while engaging global influences critically.

Keywords: *African spirit; Spirit beings; Indigenous knowledge; COVID-19 resilience; African Traditional Religion*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic which ravaged the world from the end of 2019-to 2020, challenged the world to appreciate the concept of self-help and self-determination. Hitherto, actions and relationships which were taken for granted, never functioned as they were previously understood. For instance, the less developed countries took it for granted that foreign AIDS will forever continue to flow. Similarly, grants and other supports were alleged squandered with impunity. However, with the upsurge of the pandemic, different countries were put on edge as none was ordinarily in a position to give any help. Appraising the situation, Ajibulu and Onimisi (2020) avowed that it remained a reality that the pandemic in view has positioned developed and developing nations in a sober reflection, that has been characterized by a degree of progressive insights, actualized and unrealized respectively”. The implication of the above is that solace was nowhere in sight for everyone.

Without over stating the obvious, some of the prescriptions proposed as ways of reducing the spread of the pandemic infringed on the African spirit of all-for-all. For instance, such declaration as travel bans, closure of markets, community/neighborhood lockdown, social distancing, wearing of

face masques, nonetheless, negates the African culture of communalism. On the other hand, individuals and groups were equally distanced from one another. The effect is that it denigrates the African culture of being a brother's keeper.

This paper examines the African spirit of “never say die” and the role of spirit beings in Africa as a source of consolation even in the face of adversity. The research considers the incidents of the COVID-19 pandemic and how Africans coped in spite of the dearth of both technical and human resources. It x-rays the Malaga Sian hand of brotherhood and how African countries rallied round to generate support for themselves. The research adopts the descriptive and phenomenological approach in the discussion. The paper observed that the application of the African spirit with the help of the policing role of the spirit beings were responsible for curtailing the surge of the pandemic. The study concludes that Africans should not abandon the mechanism of exploring their flora and fauna in health care delivery that work for them, even in the face of pressure from the west.

Theoretical framework. Self-fulfilment, also known as self-realization or self-actualization, forms the theoretical frame of this research. This proposition is a combination of the hopes people have for their live as well as the plan they make for achieving them. Socrates, one of the foremost Greek philosophers, exposed this idea through the Socratic Tradition. He believed that everyone could discover his beliefs and values through something called self-examination. Self-examination, is simply the process of reflecting on one's own behaviors and feelings and the motivations behind them.

Without mincing words, this ideology was dominant as an essential aspect of the Greek culture and played a significant role during the Hellenic Age, otherwise known as the golden age of philosophy. During the period in question, Alexander the Great explored the prevalent Greek culture to create a vast empire. The people were not unified by traditional means, such as a political system or nationality. Instead, they were brought together by a fundamental value that was embedded in their education system, which of which focused on one simple philosophy--attaining self-fulfillment and understanding.

Invariably, this idea of self-fulfillment was found in some modern theories of psychology. For instance, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, was designed during his study on human motivation in the 1940s. Maslow focused his attention on the study of people who were successful in their chosen fields. From his observation, analyses and findings, he concluded that human motivation was rooted in discovering their potential, through personal growth. Generally, scholars of psychology like Skinner, Thurndike and Pavlov, agree that human responses are ordinarily influenced by perception, activities, experience and impact on future projection.

The concept of African spirit: Prior to the balkanization of Africa and the resultant colonization which follow, Africans lived for one another. They led a life of caring and sharing. Individually or collectively, self was de-emphasized for the general interest of the wider society. In this regard, everyone was his brother's keeper. Kanu (2015) holds that in the Igbo concept of Igwebuiké, to be is to live in solidarity and complementarity and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. He concludes that among the Igbo, to be is to be with other beings.

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In Africa, poverty and hunger is not as deadly as isolation abandonment and rejection by kinsfolk. African definition of brother is not restricted to one's biological siblings. every male in Africa is another's brother. The same goes for the females. Every woman is another's sister provided they are of the same age range. Older members of the community are a father or mother. Younger members are either sons or daughters. In this way, a hierarchy of relationship is defined. Kanu (2015) in his philosophy of (Igwebuike) submits that in Igboland, number is strength or power. He goes on When human beings come together in solidarity, and complementarily, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. Unfortunately, the era of western invasion of the African continent saw a life-style which demonstrated greed, selfishness, covetousness, vaunting ambition and the spirit of grab and heap. These were demonstrated when the various countries of Europe scrambled for the land and people of Africa. (Rodney, 2009). This spirit of selfishness gradually infiltrated Africans who interacted with them; thus, gradually and steadily, eroded the concept of live and let live which was common among the people. According to Ohia and Onyedibia (2003) it was forbidden to inflict or cause harm to another. It was a regrettable act to overlook anything that will bring pain to others.

Whether humans like it or not, life is a vicious circle. Adegba, Kachii and Yokkos (2020) argue that in human life, what goes around, comes around. In their view, people easily forget their past experience especially when they have come out of it. However, when confronted with similar circumstance, they go to the achieve to explore how similar challenge was resolved. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the African spirit of brotherhood. The dark complexion which denigrators of Africans used to write the people off, is indeed a symbol of Africanness. Whether in Africa or in the diaspora, the dark skin or perhaps dark hair, tells the genealogical trace of such an individual. This inevitably, serves as a mark of unity

In the spirit of African unity, Ikenga-Metuh (1987) notes that in Africa, a child belongs to everyone in the community. This assertion is supported by Obodoegbulam (2019 who contended that In Ogba religion, every member of the community owes it a duty to contribute his own quarter towards a good upbringing of the individual. Ikenga-Metuh (1987) holds that though, a man may give birth to a child, the child simply belongs to the entire community. Accordingly, his proper upbringing is the responsibility of the entire society. On the issue of identity, Ngbara (2018) corroborated by Ikenga-Metuh (1987) opined that a child is not identified by his parentage, rather he is asked his community.

Throughout Africa, Communal labour is an integral aspect of the African life-style. Izeogu (2018) writing on the practice of communal labor among the Ogba, holds that there is the common practice where individuals exchanged labor services among a chosen group in any community. In Ogba, this is known as 'Igba-owon' This practice is also replicated when a member of the community wants to build a house. At such instance, all members of the neighborhood, contribute building materials towards the project. This is usually repeated till all in the group have a house of their own.

The spirits in Africa: The concept of spirits in the African ontology is quite different from other aspect of life. Spirits are seen as more than the ordinary spiritual being beneath the status of divinities and above the status of men. They are the most accessible of spiritual beings. Spirit is not

clear. However, there is the African understanding that some spirits are considered to be created as a race by themselves. These are like the living creatures have continued to reproduce and add to their members. Most people however, seem to believe that the spirits are what remains of human beings when they die physically. This then becomes the ultimate statue of men, the point of change or development beyond which men cannot go apart from few national heroes who might become deified. Spirits on the other hand, are invisible but they make themselves visible to human beings. In reality, spirits sink beyond the horizon of the zamani period, so that human beings do not see them either physically or mentally.

Spirits are believed to dwell in woods, bush, forest and rivers, mountains, hills, valleys or just around the village and at road junctions with the same environment with man (Mbiti, 1969, Idowu 1973, Kanu, 2015). This means that man has to try in one way or the other to protect himself from the activities of the spirits knowing that the spirits are stronger than man. He uses various means available to him such as magical powers, sacrifices and offering to appear, control and change the course of their actions.

Man's relationship with spirits

African believed that spirits have the power to cause problem like sickness or madness to man. They also have the ability to possess an individual and chose to drive the person away making him to live in the forest. It may equally give the person information for the larger society in the case of a prophet or soothsayer (Asuevia, 2013). Again, they can be disastrous mostly those called witches and witchcraft which are considered to be very dangerous and causes havoc.

Another concept of spirits that is prevalent in Africa is that of the guardian-spirit or man's double. Idowu (1973) notes that the essence of man's personality becomes a sort of spirit entity which acts as man's spiritual counterpart or double. The African's believed that man has a guardian spirit, which if it is good, work to bring prosperity and good luck to its double but if it the guardian spirit is not in good state, it will rather bring obstacle to the ways of its double.

This spirit is known by many names among the African societies. The Yoruba tribe call it Ori, the Igbo call it Chi, while the Edo people call it Ehi. It guides one's steps leading the individual to his or her destiny. In most cases the spirit helps to ward off evil spirits that may want to devo. The individual to achieve his or her ultimate goal in life. This is why Africans may want to appease the guarding spirit whenever they want to carry out any decision.

African from the presentation above Africans are not pantheist but recognize the role spirits play in human life. They therefore, try to make all things possible in creating a harmonious relationship through veneration of the spirits which are considered as ancestors or spirit-being. The ancestors or spirits being are the departed spirit in close relation to the tribe or the family. The life of the latter has been the severed from him and because he is still one with it, his favor or disfavor has therefore, a sharply focused relation to it and is more urgently to be sought or avoided (Opoku, 1978).

The ancestors are related to the living community in a way that cannot be claimed for deity or the divinities who are definitely of a different order. They are regarded still as heads and parts of the family or families or communities to which they belong while they were living being for what happened in consequence of the phenomenon called death was only that the family life of this earth has been extended into the afterlife or super sensible world, their remains therefore, spiritually,

super-intendents of family affairs and continue to bear their titles of relationship like father or mother (Owete and Iheanacho 2009).

The ancestors as spirits being to the Africans serves as a mediator/intercessor between the living and supreme being. They keep close watch on the living as police as custodians of law and order. They punish or reward people according to the level of their conformity with the laws of the land. The living fears the departed, yet have high affection for them as well as call upon them during disaster, celebration and gathering for one purpose or the other (Obodoegbulam, 2013).

The west Africans belief on spirit of the ancestors according to Dopamu and Awolalu (1979) is that, the ancestors have a socio-juridical relationship with their Kins on one hand while the kin relates with the supernatural through the ancestors (Kwakopume, 1987). For Obodoegbulam (2013, 2019), the ancestors are believed to possess the power of shielding their living descendants from harms either physical or spiritual. They are known well in advance what evil is coming to their living descendants and well to stop it in time.

Again, spirit in African seen as ubiquitous affects also the medicine life of an inseparable aspect of religion and traditional knowledge which somehow is not within ordinary human sight. That is knowledge of traditional medicine is covered in the mystery of religion (Onunwa 1990). It involves not only herbs and roots and their likes, but it extended to magic and spiritual influence. Any power that is under control or known to be controllable and is directed towards achieving certain results is an embodiment and art of medicine. Any technique and process used to attract and control such power is making or to make medicine.

Healing is part of the complex religious attempts by Africans to bring the spiritual and physical aspect of the universe, as well as man who lives in it, into a harmonious unity and wholeness. Wholeness therefore, the underlying focus of west African medicine and healing is a cardinal religious practice (Otite and Ogionwo, 2006). To the Africans sickness is an enemy and must be fought and eradicated from the society. It is also a diminution of life, a threat posed to life, hence healing is an activity second only to that of giving life.

The concept of African sickness is that the affected person generally worldview, ethical values, self-concept and perception of neighbour and various group members are affected. It is not only a case of physical weakness, but a spiritual break-down and social pathology. This is why the rudimentary approach medicine men is to trace and tackle the cause of the ailment, with all sense of vigour, before intensive medication is administered. Every medium and intermediaries will be counted with the African spirits of nothing happens without the involvement of the spirits and with much zeal and actions. There will be victory or success. This makes the medicine men, diviners to administer all forms of herbs, plants, divination to solve problems.

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The African resilience spirit: Apart from the economic and technological development of the African, the never-say-die) has propelled Africans to cope with the present challenges facing the world. This undoubted spirit, encouraged the people to evolve some homemade ideas of the use of homemade face masks, thus solving both the economic and supply shortage problems. The Africans increasing research into locally manufacturing consumables on the continent has been a major advantage in some African countries with the African spirit. A good example of some of this success is Ghana, which is the first country in the world to use drones to collect samples, therefore, speeding up the process of testing and analysis.

With the African experience of Ebola which happened to be first pandemic that truly originated from Africa in the history of pandemic. The experience according to Korsagas (2000) Aregboshola has given the Africans the understanding, institution and instrument to effectively respond to the covid-19 pandemic at its early stage. Thus, tremendously contributing to preventing the devastating effect that was predicted and also ravaged the Europeans nations despite their technological resources. While the Europeans resort to vaccines, the Africans abroad resort to herbs and were able to curb the pandemic.

The African spirit of communalism and safety has helped use the pandemic as an opportunity to strengthen the continents 'ubuntu' spirit (humanity the belief of universal bond of sharing as exhibited among the zulu & tosa people). The African spirit has created willingness in many communities to share covid-19 related information while respecting one another space (Korsaga's 2001).

Recommendation

In view of the arguments advanced in this article, the paper makes the following recommendation:

- (i) Parents should teach their children how to care for one another including those that are not necessarily their blood relatives.
- (ii) African philosophy of live and let live should be encouraged instead of fighting inter communal wars among neighbours.
- (iii) The shrines of the various divinities in Africa should be revived as the locale of the deities which under-pin communal peace and security in Africa.

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- (iv) Those things which unites Africans should be encouraged and those others that divides should be discouraged.
- (v) Traditional medicine should not be completely abandoned in place of orthodox medicine.
- (vi) The African flora and fauna should be explored to exploit the medicinal potencies of the plants and herbs.

Conclusion

Owing to the fact that Africans draw strength in their culture of communalism, it is apparent that this practice will live with them for a long time. Africans the world over, see themselves as one no matter where they live. Without doubt, the communal spirit of the Africans encouraged inclusivism. To the people, their social and physical environment are bounded in an unbroken relationship. This include the departed, the living as well as those yet unborn. In view of this understanding, they take solace in the fact that the different deities are always there for them. This probably supports the never say die spirit in Africa.

Reflecting on the implication of the self-development or self-actualisation theory of Socrates, it is obvious that this work dwelt heavily on the principles of this theory. Africa and indeed Africans looked in word to solving the problems of the COVID-19 pandemic. In their effort, they realised that they cannot compete with the developed world hence the Malaga Sian concoction invention. At the height of the scourge, African pharmacists realised that the concoction plant was highly medicinal. Apart from the Malaga Sian plant application, other herbalists explored the African flora and fauna to reduce the effect of the scourge. To this end, there was an increase consumption of ginger and Gallic which boosted immunity. On the final note therefore, the African spirit of never say die was demonstrated without doubt in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Till the present, this is a mystery to the developed world who had earlier projected that Africa will be worse hit, owing to its under-developed science and technology.

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