

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING IN THE MODERN WORLD: A CHALLENGE TO GLOBAL HUMANISM

Evaristus Emeka Isife

Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

December 2019 brought a negative turn in the global health sector. This is as it marked the emergence of an infectious pandemic known as COVID-19. Spreading from Wuhan, in Hubei province of China, this infectious virus direly affected the global health sector and became a huge challenge to global humanism. This challenge emerged as global emphasis among other remedies dwell on physical distancing among people in to order minimize infections. As such, human relationship; social and personal contact on which humanism depends was hindered. Analytically therefore, this paper examines how COVID-19 and its remedy of physical distancing have become a challenge to global humanism. This study finds that COVID-19 and present physical distancing tend to separate people from one another. Yet, both are paradoxically uniting humanity and enhancing human capability and responsibility towards a common front in addressing global challenges. As such, this paper concludes that difficulties naturally foster the growth of humanism which now thrives more than before. This growth has been visible in human ingenuity towards discovery of COVID-19 vaccines, action plans like regular washing of hands, wearing of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) that stand as reflection of humanism in the modern world.

Key words: COVID-19; Challenge; Humanism; Pandemic; Physical Distancing

Introduction

As World Health Organization (WHO) was by March 2020 declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic, the virus has already wrecked havoc on the world population. And “by the end of March 2020; more than three-quarters of a million people had been diagnosed with COVID-19 and more than 39, 000 had died” (Mesa, et al., 2020,p. 38). The last time the world suffered such health threat with dire challenges on humanism was a century ago when the influenza flu of 1918-1919 wiped out about 50 million people (Idowu, 2020). At the moment however, COVID-19 pandemic has swiftly affected all the continents of the world. As such, the age-long conventional socio-physical contact and interaction that boost humanism is becoming zilch. This is as people largely huddle behind doors or stay meters apart and unable to even get close to their neighbours in the name of physical distancing. This notwithstanding; healthcare facilities are now over-stretched, human movement is largely restricted, global trade has been shaken to its foundation, offices and places of worship are largely abandoned and humanism is in every way threatened.

Indeed, physical distancing as one of the measures of contending this virus slows down the course of humanism. At the same time, it stimulates the human instinct of self preservation and natural impulse to unite and work together in time of difficulties. Thus, humanity has once again been propelled to prove her intellectual, physical capabilities and potentialities in evolving solutions to global problems. In reflecting these qualities, COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing is today fostering exchange of ideas and interdependency of people thereby enhancing humanism. Sequel to this, the present availability of maximum support, palliatives, action plans like regular washing of hands, wearing of masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), and COVID-19 vaccines testify to the growth of humanism in the modern world. This development has however exposed the unnecessary earlier larger dependence of humanity on supernaturalism, monolithic ideologies, traditions and religious creeds. As such, global humanism now remains a compelling ideology much more than geopolitics, religion and traditions. Hence, irrespective of distance, space and time, more right thinking people are becoming part of rational and scientific propelled humanism that foster the growth of humanity, safe and fulfilled habitation of humans in the modern world.

Understanding the Concepts

The basic concepts in this treatise are; COVID-19, physical distancing and humanism. COVID-19 is a human infectious virus that emerged from Wuhan, Hubei province of China in December 2019 (De Vos, 2020; Jiang, et al., 2020; Lipistch, et al., 2020). It is a virus which name was given to the sickness it causes that is popularly known as Corona virus. As an acronym, COVID-19 stands for Corona Virus Infectious Disease 2019. It attacks the human heart, kidney, nervous system, lungs and the entire respiratory system making its victims unable to breathe properly. As such, its symptoms consist in persistent dry cough, fever, breathlessness, aches, pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat and diarrhea that takes six to fourteen days to manifest. Although COVID-19 can be asymptomatic in some patients, the virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (Idowu, 2020). In congruence with this view, Wilder-Smith and Freedman (2020) argue that COVID-19 is transmitted by respiratory droplets and requires certain proximity of people to spread. COVID-19 could also be understood as the present pandemic that is effectively contained through combined protocols of social and medical managements as well as preventive personal hygienic techniques. These combined protocols include; isolation/quarantine, physical distancing (about two meters apart), personal hygiene, use of face mask and vaccine, etc.

With COVID-19 appearing with unprecedented damages, physical distancing became a globally pronounced non clinical measure to contend its pandemic. This raises the fundamental questions: What really is physical distancing? How is it central in contending COVID-19 pandemic? How does it paradoxically hinder and foster global humanism? Physical distancing connotes measures like self-isolation, avoiding close contact with another person and staying at least two meters away from the other

person. It also connotes other global strategies like “closure of educational institutions and workplaces, cancellation of mass gatherings, isolation of suspected or confirmed cases, quarantine of persons in contact with confirmed cases, stay-at-home recommendations, and even mandatory quarantine in some cities and residential areas” (Mesa, et al., 2020, p. 38). To these, Wilder-Smith and Freedman (2020) add that the closing of shops, restaurants and bars, prohibition of public events and imposition of work-from-home as efficient measures in contending COVID-19 pandemic. Based on these, Mesa, et al (2020) explains physical distancing as spatial distancing, bodily or physical disconnectedness from people. Physical distancing is thus the minimizing of physical contacts with others in public spaces. In other words, it is the maintaining of physical separation amongst people in order to minimize transmission of Corona virus (Rubin, 2020). Physical distancing is therefore the non-pharmacological preventive practice employed by diverse governments to halt the pandemic of COVID-19 virus. This preventive measure has become important because transmission of COVID-19 goes with saliva droplets that rest on people in close proximity (within 1m). Hence, the global call for physical distance is so important today because the “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” (Isife, 2021,p. 59).

Besides, humanism is a philosophical and scientific movement premised on the viewpoint that human beings have one life and should make the most use of it without requiring supernatural sanctions, restrictions and supports. Arguably, humanism formally dates back to the philosophical epochs of the Sophists. Then, Protagoras was the first to formally establish that “man is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not” (Stumpf, 1994, p.32). With this conviction, Protagoras publicly taught that man is the standard of existence, and should be the parameter and focus of judgments and decisions in the world. This must be why many Scholars understood humanism as the study of humanities; courses and classical studies that directly revolves on man. In congruence with this understanding, Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (1937) captures humanism as a reasonable balance of life, freedom from religiosity or supernaturalism, responsiveness to all human passions and a homocentric philosophy.

Humanism is therefore a term that encapsulates the present growing consciousness that upholds human potentials and capacities to take responsibility for their actions and events around them, without recourse to supernatural, religion or ideology. This, thus, means that humanism as a “progressive life stance without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity” (Omosulu & Inja, 2019, pp.91-92). It also means that humanism stands for secular consciousness that places on human beings the responsibility of making the world a free, peaceful and better place. This way of thinking and perception today underscores wide range of human activities and approaches to unfolding realities in the ever changing world. Humanism is therefore a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art and motivated by human

compassion for each other. It is “a body of philosophies and ethical perspectives that emphasize the value of human beings, individually, collectively, and generally place more importance on rational thought than on strict faith or adherence to principle” (Onyekwere & Uche, 2013, p. 94). It has also been noted that humanism,

... affirms the dignity of humans, supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity in line with the social and planetary responsibility. It advocates human rights and social justice, and freed of supernaturalism, acknowledges the existence of humans as part of nature; thereby deriving its goals from human experience rather than theological or ideological abstractions (Omosulo & Inja, 2019, pp. 91-92).

Humanism as well “espouses reason, ethics and justice, while specifically rejecting supernatural and religious ideas as a basis of ideology and decision making” (Onyekwere & Uche, 2013, p. 94). This rejection does not however remove or negate the nature of man as a religious being. It rather emphasizes “the worth of human experiences as the benchmark for decision making” (Omosulo & Inja, 2019, p.87). Indeed, humanism is a homocentric or anthropocentric mode of thought. This is as it holds human interest at heart, and exist on the basis that humans are capable of resolving the problems of the world (Mairi, 1998). From all these, it stands that humanism reflects a secular thought, an outlook and way of life comprising of synthesis of lessons of history, philosophic thoughts, truths and scientific advancement that puts human interest, needs and values at the fore front. It also means that humanism is a way of thinking that is not exclusive to Philosophers and Scholars, but stands as the creed of average men and women who seek happy, progressive, free and useful lives. This is why Dukor (2010) describes it as a “way of life that gives meaning to human life, places man in an outstanding place within the society and universe and gear towards an open society and open mind therein” (p.71).

Emergence of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing in the Modern World

One of the most perplexing aspects of COVID-19 is its origin. Stakeholders argue on whether this origin is natural or artificial. However, many theories emerge regarding this origin. Among them is the Natural but Zoonotic theory which holds that COVID-19 likely emerged from animals like bats and pangolins. For Chinese Government and WHO, these animals are possible carriers of the type of virus that can emerge as COVID-19 in humans. Consequently, Chinese Government placed restrictions on the consumption of those animals. Another origin of corona virus emerged from Divine theory peddled by some religionists. This theory claim that COVID-19 emerged as a result of human increasing iniquities. Corona virus for them is therefore an expression of God’s wrath against humans, which can only be pacified through human repentance and atonement.

There is also the Conspiracy theory of origin of COVID-19. This theory holds that COVID-19 was developed in the laboratory by some disgruntled Chinese scientists as an intended bio-weapon of warfare against the US, who lacked the smartness to foresee that the virus will spread to other parts of the world (Operanews.com, 2020). Among the proponents of this theory is the US President Donald Trump and Larry Klayman. The latter, allegedly, filed \$20 trillion lawsuit against Chinese Government for infecting the world with COVID-19 (Madhukalya, 2020). Supporting this theory, Donald Trump has continued to refer to Corona Virus as “China Virus”.

Adding to these theories of origins is the Skeptic theory that views COVID-19 as non-existent. Peddlers of this theory are mostly the uneducated and rural dwellers in many parts of the world. For many Africans within this group, COVID-19 is a hoax by Chinese Government to keep people indoors in order to establish her 5G mobile communication network which has been envisaged to have dire radiation effects on humans. Many Nigerians in particular also believe that African leaders are collaborating with China and foreign media to promote the existence of COVID-19 in order to have access to billions of dollars meant for palliative by the United Nations for worst affected countries.

With COVID-19 however came physical distancing of up to two meters as one of the effective measures of containing its pandemic. Physical distancing differs from social distancing. For while physical distancing allows people to physically communicate, meet and exchange ideas giving each other at least two meters, social distancing would not allow people to physically meet. In this sense, social distancing largely abhors human physical gatherings but physical distancing permits such so far recommended gap that undermine physical contact is observed. Thus, social distancing abhors human public gatherings while physical distancing points at the gathering of small number of people in which the recommended least of two meters apart is feasible. Social distancing therefore points to avoidance of public gathering, remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings and maintaining distance.

Challenges of COVID-19 to Global Humanism

Humanism thrives when people freely move, rationally converge, relate and interact. For pragmatic ideas that form the contents; principle and tools of humanism causally and dialectically result from such meddling. But with COVID-19, social, economic and scientific activities as well as human movement and sedentary life style were significantly hindered. For people were afraid of getting infected. As such, the cross fertilization of ideas, ingenuity and manpower which propels humanism became significantly minimal. In restricting people’s movements, COVID-19 has other devastating effects on humanism. People who live in crowded places and conditions, sub-standard accommodations and confined spaces with limited means of survival faced starvation. Covid-19 also affected transportation system, industry, agriculture, services and safe distribution of products. Significantly, there was low production of food and other commodities leading to shortages and its consequences that weakened

humanity and humanism. Caught in the middle were the migrant workers, labourers and daily earners who faced sudden unemployment and starvation. Exacerbating this situation was the closure of fresh food markets in many parts of the world. This changed the eating habits and diets of many individuals and increased poor human health. From the estimate posited by Lambert, et al (2020) COVID-19 doubled the number of poor and hungry people which was estimated to hit 265 million by the end of 2020.

With COVID-19 and its infectious nature, self/human isolation from normal social life, reductions in physical activities has been the order of the day. People's economic income also became reduced. This has led to increasing rate of human anxiety, chronic conditions, mental problems, depression, home accidents, suicide and domestic violence. Thus, coping with the increasing stresses and strains resulting from COVID-19 pandemic was a serious challenge for everyone, and humanism in general. The challenge of COVID-19 to global humanism also extends to entertainment industries. To safeguard the health of entertainers, the entire entertainment industries; sports, theatres, movies, etc., came to a halt. These are the sectors that through the years served as major social cohesion and channel through which humanism is projected to the public and inculcated in the people. Worst still, those whose emotional and psychological health depended on entertainment industries met worse conditions due to this halt.

Another sector of humanism hugely challenged by COVID-19 was the religious services. This became affected as the Churches, Mosques, Shrines, Temples, etc., were all shut down. As such, humanity was for once deprived of those humanism inclined homilies, sermons, exhortations and speeches which serve as catalysts for human emancipation and domination of the universe. Along with these, education sector which is another center of global humanism by means of its advancement of knowledge, technology, critical thinking, etc., was also subjected to greater challenge. Referring to this, "the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that 60% of the world's student population has been affected, with 1.19 billion learners out of school across 150 countries" (Lambert, et al., 2020, p.112).

Other challenges of COVID-19 to global humanism were quite visible in the health sector. This is as patients were overwhelmingly not proportionate to the overstretched, underfunded and understaffed health facilities in many places. This is too as the virus in its infectious nature placed a constraint on the health facilities and workers making it difficult for humanist (services) to adequately manifest. The virus also placed difficulties and hitches in the timely delivery of health needs; equipment, medical supplies and other services. With rumour of health facilities flooding with COVID-19 patients, other ailing patients refrained from seeking medical help in the hospitals. As such, many people perished in the quack centers or the discomfort of their homes. Globally therefore, COVID-19 poses a great challenge to humanism;

fostered more by physical distancing that serves as one of the measures of contending the pandemic of the virus.

COVID- 19, Physical Distancing and Local Humanism

The reality of COVID- 19 and physical distancing has challenged each country, each region or each continent to seek, measures for curtailing the effects of, or solutions to, the pandemic from its worldview. Each region of the world projects its humanism, which reflects its identity, as it searches for solution to COVID- 19 pandemic. Even the production of COVID- 19 vaccines has become a regional thing. A critical study of the history of the production of COVID-19 vaccines from different countries in the world shows that none of the countries in Africa has made any serious attempt neither to produce any vaccine nor to articulate a plan towards the curtailment of the virus. The case of Africa raises serious concern for the events of slavery and colonialism had brought the humanity of the African into question. Also, the Africa's underdevelopment, seen clearly in poor housing condition, illiteracy, lack of good medical facilities, corruption and poor leadership, makes the condition worse for Africa. It is difficult to talk about physical distancing when people are not even sure of or assured of their basic needs for food, shelter and Medicare. No wonder the world focused its gaze on Africa at the emergency of COVID- 19. The world has asked: how can Africa survive the pandemic? But Africa seems to be surviving the pandemic (counting from the two waves of the pandemic that has hit Africa so far) as compared to the expectations of many. What is the secret behind Africa's not hit badly by the pandemic like other continents that were better equipped than Africa medically? The answer can be found by exploring the African worldview.

But the main issue is, what can Africa, like other continents of the world, contribute towards advancing global humanism in the Post COVID -19 era? Put in another way, Isife(2021) maintains that "the gains of the Covid- 19 pandemic can be gleaned by what role African identity can play in the provision of solution that can be beneficial to the entire world as well as bringing fame and economic benefits to the continent"(p.61). African worldview is characterized by communalism or "ubuntu" or "umunna"- which depicts closeness to nature and unity of beings. It is not only that there is an interaction of beings in African worldview but also that there is closeness of beings to each other: humans, animals, plants; all relate and influence each other. The African "holds that created beings preserve a bond with one another, an intimate ontological relationship" which centers on man as the beauty and pinnacle of creation. (Tempels, 1959, p.58) This is why African medicine is not only systematic but also dynamic and mystical. Africans from time immemorial have been using plants' leaves, roots and herbs to cure sicknesses. Africans have survived many pandemics through the use of herbs and roots which are at the core of African traditional medicine. Some people even attributed the low fatality of COVID- 19 in Africa to the use of African traditional medicine. It is in this direction that Ufearoh(2020) argues that there is need for "intensive research in African traditional medicine. If cultural traits partly emanates from people's creative effort to solve prevalent problems in their environment using available sources within the environment, nothing prevents

the African from engaging in the research for a vaccine and a possible cure for Covid -19 using the available resources in the African environment” (p.102). Unfortunately, African leaders are more concerned about palliatives and vaccines from other regions than in seeking for solution for Covid -19 from the abundant available resources in Africa. The argument is that we cannot talk of global humanism without local humanism. Thus global humanism is a challenge to African humanism.

Physical Distancing and Global Humanism

In the time when humanism is crucial, physical distancing poses a greater challenge. It thwarted the natural human impulse to draw closer and seek safety in numbers when faced with menace. Thus, physical distancing stood against human physical/interpersonal connectedness. Consequently, it impaired human physical interaction; a dialectics that fosters humanism. Similarly, physical distancing opposed human natural reaction to impending and persistent global hazard as it broke human physical solidarity that inspires collective responses. Based on this, Deroy, et al (2020) concurs that physical distancing created a dilemma that fundamentally poses a great challenge to humanism and the growth of human societies. The challenge of physical distancing therefore contradicts the fact that human physical contacts are not an extra, which people are at liberty to refuse, but part of what we call normal in human existence. For human living are naturally a collective existence; where people necessarily live not in isolation from others but empirically and rationally in physical contact with others. Humans are therefore not completely egoists; but instinctively seek closer social contacts and physically huddle together in the face of danger. Severing people’s physical and social contacts, physical distancing direly impacts on global physical activities; entertainment, education and business. De Vos(2020) adds that people’s participation in social activities affects and changes “the number and types of out-of-home activities people perform, and how people reach these activities” (p.1). This is as physical distancing extended to closure of markets, restaurants, bars, schools, shops, Churches, Mosques, Temples, Shrines, social events and overall social life which serve as channels of projecting humanism but became commonplaces to curtail the pandemic of COVID-19.

With physical distancing still, there has been disruption in people’s welfare and means of livelihood. According to Mesa, the most affected are healthcare works, migrant works, arbitrary jobs, etc., some of which lack modern organization (Mesa, et al., 2020). Physical distancing therefore impaired concrete interaction through which some of these workers make their daily earnings. It also impaired the tangible interaction and wellbeing of vulnerable groups such as prisoners, elderly, disables, healthcare workers, indigenous people, homeless populations, migrants, etc (Mesa, et al., 2020). Because people now largely planned and performed out-of-home activities at home in order to ensure physical distancing, there had also been reduction in the number of people who participated in social activities and which negatively impaired subjective well-being (De Vos, et al., 2013; Ettema et al., 2010). More so, the realities of physical distancing combined with the uncertainties of the future had dire impact on people’s mental health and wellness. It has been noted that:

A study conducted during the epidemic in January among over 17 000 users of Weibo – one of the most popular social networks in China - found the unfortunate consequences on psychological wellbeing and differences in the expression of emotions among its users from which inferences about users' psychological states may be drawn. In a two-week period of social distancing, the number of posts talking about depression, anxiety, and indignation increased, while the expression of positive emotions decreased significantly (Li, et al., 2020, p.1)

These gave credence to the position of Mesa, et al (2020) that “preventive measures such as physical distancing are crucial but carries long term consequences” (p.38). This is more so as physical distancing results in lower levels of social interaction and self-development, and higher levels of stress, boredom and depression (De Vos, 2020; Brooks et al., 2020).

Moreover, physical “distancing seeds the spread of misinformation and can have profound consequences for psychological wellbeing in vulnerable populations” (Xiao, et al., 2020, p.3). This happens more as physical distancing disconnects people from experts, and exposes them to excess unfounded or inaccurate information from non experts, unreliable sources and commercially driven interests. Some of this information from unreliable sources deepens the state of uncertainty co-existing with COVID-19, and increases the feelings of insecurity, fear, anxiety, stress, depression and emotional tension that weaken the growth of humanism. In fact, “fear arising from the excess or unreliability of information about disease can lead to erratic behaviour, trigger the onset of psychiatric disorders, and even increase rates of suicide” (Tucci, et al., 2020, p.151).

COVID-19 and Physical Distancing: The Paradoxical Challenge to Global Humanism

The challenge of COVID-19 and physical distancing to global humanism is more of a paradox. This is in the sense that COVID-19 and physical distancing impact negatively on humanism, but at the same time stimulate humanism unto greater height. Thus, COVID-19 and physical distancing stimulate the substances of humanism; rationality, scientific capacities and potentialities towards resolving global problems. Meanwhile, the growth of humanism amidst COVID-19 and physical distancing has become more efficient through the instrumentality of Information Communication Technology (ICT). This has made the modern world an efficient global village where humanism has largely taken a virtual dimension, and solutions to human problems can now be reached virtually. In the present COVID-19 and physical distancing world therefore, the internet, social media and online channels provide an acceptable and effective alternative to physical contact. For these channels now

enable social interactions in the absence of physical contiguity. Particularly, social media now make it possible for large number of people to reach out to neighbors, relatives, friends, colleagues, co-researchers, etc., and share ideas, ingenuities and breakthroughs.

Thus, COVID-19 and physical distancing now inspire human greater cooperation and social support through the aid of ICT. With the internet and online channels, there is now a refocusing of research and action not only to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 but to build sustainable and strengthened human resilience into future recovery (Lambert, et al., 2020). Similarly, COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing is now leading to best human renovation and improvement of hospital facilities/systems as well as reorientation of health services. This innovation has been visible in human ingenuity towards discovery of COVID-19 vaccines, action plans like regular washing of hands, wearing of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), etc., that stand as reflection of humanism in the modern world. With the present condition, post COVID-19 humanism now considers what virus means for future global planning of hospital services, food supply chains, industry, trade, agriculture, education and human relationship. Besides, the reality of COVID-19 and physical distancing have induced humanity towards identification of potential responses that best address different intersecting risk scenarios and underscores human resilience in future occurrences of similar situation. Relying on the impetus provided by temporary shifts in working practices and transport patterns amidst COVID-19, global humanism now bothers on identifying transformative opportunities towards mitigating future health and economic crises as well as human personal and general wellbeing. In other words, COVID-19 furnishes the present humanism with collective glimpse of alternative possible futures and opportunities. It is on this note that Yaya, et al (2020) exclaims that COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new climate of uncertainty which is fuelling protectionism and playing into humanism narratives.

The Reality of Humanism in the COVID-19 and Physical Distancing World

From the discourse so far, it stands that humanism is characterized by human benevolence towards one another without distinction. It is therefore a solidarity that is propelled by naturalism, materialism and human desire to feel at home in this universe (Omosolu & Inja, 2019; Chinweuba, 2020). Humanism is thus deep-rooted in human mind and interest, and dwells with other human moral/altruistic acts. Based on all these understanding, humanism stands to be propelled by secularism, altruism, morality, distributive justice, rational and scientific worldview. In the contemporary COVID-19 and physical distancing world, humanism has become the sole standard as well as determinant of all standards and values. Hence, the present COVID-19 and physical distancing world have come to place much significance, value, worth and emphasis on human survival. As such, the reality of humanism in present era is visible in the promotion of human resilience, capacities, potentials in dominating and changing the course of natural and artificial conditions.

Amidst COVID-19 and physical distancing therefore, humanism is now displayed in other diverse ways. For instance, there are humanistic efforts by major sporting organizations towards reducing the pandemic of Corona virus. Along this line, FIFA has teamed up with the WHO and launched a “pass the message to kick out corona virus” campaign. This campaign grounded in humanism is led by well-known football players in 13 languages appealing to people to follow the key steps towards reducing the spread of COVID-19. Adding to this is the periodic online community discussions and sharing of Corona virus issues and challenges. These efforts have indeed triggered online dialogues that presently lead people to devise and identify innovative solutions to other global social issues. Thus, people now identify ways of responding to problems faced by vulnerable individuals and groups in low income communities affected by corona virus restrictions and physical distancing. Amidst this, global humanity has showcased her ingenuity by rapidly creating online contents tailored to different people. These contents range from free tutorials on social media, stretching, meditation, yoga to dance classes in which the whole family can participate. Coupled with these, educational institutions are now largely providing online learning resources for students to follow at home. Some people, organizations, etc., “are already offering psychological assistance via the internet or telephone, and using mobile apps to provide counseling or treatment amid the COVID-19 crisis” (Lai, et al., 2020, p.1). In the context of humanism therefore, the current pandemic crisis presents an opportunity to explore new strategies and to diversify solutions to human problems.

So, COVID-19 succeeded in creating “a conscious humanity that would be active in self dialectics (self-consciousness) and self-other dialectics (communal relation and reciprocity) that promote healthy relationship, unity and development” in the world. (Isife, 2020, p. 128). Consequently, the world is seeing many creative community-led practices like physical distancing, regular washing of hands, wearing of masks/PPE grounded in humanism, emerged in response to COVID-19 and physical distancing. The real-world examples of such practices are: individuals and organizations donating palliatives, equipments and social services in the communities, delivering shopping to the doorstep of the needy, checking on the elderly, widows and those in need of support. Other examples are visible in people with one voice applauding healthcare workers as well as online intra-community solidarity in which local neighborhoods work together to ensure that the most vulnerable in human societies are supported and cared for. This new but positive transnational humanism or solidarity is also visible in “medical diplomacy where countries have been sending doctors, paramedics, medicines and medical equipment across borders to those countries hit severely by the pandemic and that lacked certain medical expertise and supplies” (Mansouri, 2020, p.1). The examples of Cuba, China and India in Italy, Nigeria and Bangladesh respectively, are good ones in this context. This means that COVID-19 and physical distancing actually offer hope for new ways of forming and sustaining solidarity and humanism across cultural backgrounds, faith traditions, political systems and geographical borders. It also means that the pandemic and physical distancing paved way for real demonstration of more intersected, intimately hyper-connected,

irreversibly inter-dependent nature of our globalized humanized world. And now, COVID-19 humanism is set in reconfiguring deeper international relations, intercultural dialogue, equitable capacity human building, intercultural engagement and transnational solidarity in ways that will ensure that humanity is better able to deal with future crises and global threats.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that COVID-19 and physical distancing have created a long term crisis around humanism. Yet, the pandemic and physical distancing have become global catalysts propelling people towards greater ingenuity that fosters humanism and unveils deep human understanding and compassion towards the suffering humanity. This ingenuity is now visible in the discovery of COVID-19 vaccines, action plans like regular washing of hands, wearing of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), etc., that stand as reflection of humanism in the modern world. Similarly, the pandemic and physical distancing have paved greater human recourse to online interactions thereby making humanism more practical than before. On these notes, the challenge of Corona virus and physical distancing to global humanism is perceived as a paradox. For the present global condition may be excruciating; yet it propels humanity to the next positive and beneficial level in which ICT has become central. The true test of humanism therefore lies with the existence of threatening conditions. The health threatening situation in the world therefore gives credence to the philosophical fact that problems beget critical thinking and fervent solutions that constitute development. COVID-19 and physical distancing could thus be said to have emboldened humanity and set humanism towards a better elevation of the dignity of human persons, provision of beneficial human needs, confrontation of future global crisis and threats.

References

- Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., & Rubin, G. J. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *Lancet*, 395, 912-920. Retrieved from <http://scholar.google.com/scholar/lookup?title=The psychological impact of ...>
- Chinweuba, G. E. (2020). Low level corruption in Nigerian society: A critical investigation. *ORACLE OF WISDOM Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 4(1), 26-40. Retrieved from www.owijoppa.com
- Deroy, O., Frith, C., & Dezecache, G. (2020, April 24). COVID-19: The downside of social distancing. *Science Daily Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*. Retrieved from <https://sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200424132539.htm>
- De Vos, J. (2020). The effect of COVID-19 and subsequent social distancing on travel behavior. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 5, 100-121. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2020.100121> Get rights and content
- De Vos, J., Schwanen, T., Van Acker, V., & Witlox, F. (2013). Travel and subjective well-being: a focus on findings, methods and future research needs. *Transp. Rev.*, 33(4), 421-442. Retrieved from <http://scholar.google.com/scholar/lookup?title=Travel...>
- Dukor, M. (2010). *Theistic humanism of African philosophy: A great debate on substance and method of philosophy*. Berlin, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. (1937). *Humanism*. New York, USA: Macmillan.
- Ettema, D., Gärling, T., Olsson, L. E., & Friman, M. (2010). Out-of-home activities, daily travel, and subjective well-being. *Transp. Res.*, 44(9), 723-732. Retrieved from <http://scholar.google.com/scholar/lookup?title=Out-of-home...>
- Isife, E. E. (2021). A Critical analysis of the implications of covid-19 pandemic on African identity. *Sapiential Journal of Philosophy*. 14, 54-64. Retrieved from www.sapientiajournaluniuyo.com
- Isife, E.E. (2020). Dialectics of freedom in frantz fanon and its relevance in contemporary Africa. *IGWEBUIKE: An Africa Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(9), 118 – 131. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.31258.06083>
- Idowu, L. (2020, May 25). Deepening the media's coverage of COVID-19: Challenges and prospects. *Vanguard*. Retrieved from

- <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/05/depeening-the-medias-coverage-of-covid->
- Jiang, F., Deng, L., Zhang, L., Cai, Y., Cheung, C. Y., & Xia, Z. (2020). Review of the clinical characteristics of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). *J. Gen. Intern. Med.* Retrieved from 10.1007/s11606-020-05762-w
- Jones, C. Z. (2020). *Corona virus conspiracy: The entirety of the Coronavirus Genomic Sequence to assess bizarre conspiracy theories*. London, UK: UK Express.
- Lai, J., Ma, S., Wang, Y., Cai, Z., Hu, J., Wei, N., Wu, J., Du, H., Chen, T., Li, R., Tan, H., Kang, L., Yao, L., Huang, M., Wang, H., Wang, G., Liu, Z., & Hu, S. (2020). Factors associated with mental health outcomes among health care workers exposed to coronavirus disease 2019. *JAMA Netw. Open*, 3(3), 1-5. Retrieved from 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.3976
- Lambert, H., Jaideep, G., Fletcher, H., Hammond, L., Lowe, N., & Pelling, M. (2020). COVID-19 as a global challenge: Towards an inclusive and sustainable future. *Open Access Journal. The Lancet Healthy Longevity* 4(8), 312-314. DOI:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(20\)30168-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30168-6)
- Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of humanism*. New York, USA: Humanist Press.
- Li, S., Wang, Y., Xue, J., Zhao, N., & Zhu, T. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 epidemic declaration on psychological consequences: a study on active weibo users. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 17(6), 1-5. Retrieved from 10.3390/ijerph17062032
- Lipistch, M., Swerdlow, D. L., & Finelli, L. (2020). Defining the epidemiology of COVID-19 — studies needed. *N. Engl. J. Med.* Retrieved from 10.1056/NEJMp2002125
- Madhukalya, A. (2020, March 30). \$20 trillion lawsuit against China! US group says coronavirus is bioweapon. Retrieved from www.businessstoday.in.
- Mairi, R. (2020). *Chambers 21st century dictionary*. New Delhi, India: Allied Chambers.
- Mansouri, F. (2020). The socio-cultural implications of COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news/socio-cultural-implications-covid-19> 29/05/2020.

- Mesa, C., Vieira, O., Franco, C., Gómez, R., & Thomas, A. (2020). COVID-19: The forgotten priorities of the pandemic. *Elsevier Maturitas*, 36, 38-41. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2020.04.004> Get rights and content
- Omosulu, R., & Inja, T. (2019). Humanism and environmentalism: A dialogue. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, 11(2), 87-100.
- Onyekwere, C., & Uche, O. (2013). Atheism and humanism in a globalized world; The Igbo experience. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3(1), 93-100. DOI:10.4236/OJPP.2013.31A015
- Rubin, R. (2020). The challenge of preventing COVID-19 spread in correctional facilities. *JAMA*, 323(18),1760-1761. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.5427
- Stumpf, S. E. (1994). *Philosophy History & Problems*. New York, USA: McGraw Hills.
- Tempels, P.(1959). *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine).
- Tucci, V., Moukaddam, N., Meadows, J., Shah, S., Galwankar, S. C., & Kapur, G. B. (2017). The forgotten plague: psychiatric manifestations of Ebola, Zika, and emerging infectious diseases. *J. Glob. Infect. Dis.*, 9(4), 151-156. 10.4103/jgid.jgid_66_17
- Ufearoh, A.(2020). COVID- 19 Pandemic as an existential problem: An African perspective. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. 9.1.1. 97 – 112
- Wilder-Smith, A., & Freedman, D. O. (2020). Isolation, quarantine, social distancing and community containment: pivotal role for old-style public health measures in the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak. *J. Travel Med.* Retrieved from 10.1093/jtm/taaa020
- Xiao, H., Zhang, Y., Kong, D., Li, S., & Yang, N. (2020). Social capital and sleep quality in individuals who self-isolated for 14 days during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in January 2020 in China. *Med. Sci. Monit.*, 26, 1-7. Retrieved from 10.12659/MSM.923921
- Yaya, S., Otu, A., & Labonte, R. (2020).. Globalisation in the time of COVID-19: repositioning Africa to meet the immediate and remote challenges. *Globalization and health*, 16, 51. Retrieved from <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s1>

