

TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF MARTIN BUBER'S DIALOGICAL INTERSUBJECTIVITY FOR POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC SOCIETY

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Abstract: After experiencing and reflecting on the kind of life we are living in the contemporary society, I realised that we have changed drastically, and we have a task to return to the humane way of living. Covid-19 Pandemic is not only ending lives, it is also reminding and teaching us on how much we have contributed to the brokenness of the society we live in, the woundedness people have, and the inauthentic, meaningless lives we are leading. We are too much egocentric; everybody is busy with self, acquiring everything for self, and have no time for others; what they need and how they feel. This paper presents Martin Buber's dialogical intersubjectivity, as a proposed transformative tool in a Covid-19 Pandemic Society, where solicitude or loving care for each other can restore peace, healing and harmony, hence, man leading a dignified and authentic life.

Keywords: Dialogue, Intersubjectivity, Transformation, I-It, I-Thou, Covid-19, Pandemic, Authenticity, Human dignity.

Introduction

The overwhelming condition of Covid-19 Pandemic has been the subject of intense scientific and philosophical reflection and debate. Though scientists have tried to search for a solution right from medicine to vaccine in order to mitigate it, none seems to bear fruit by a hundred percent, since the virus keeps on changing into different variants. In this case, nobody knows how and when this disease will come to an end. The aim of this study is to analyse and discuss Buberian ethics based on his dialogical intersubjectivity as a framework that can be used to transform the society broken by Covid-19 related issues, in order to help man live a meaningful life now and in future, even in the face of suffering. Therefore, we will discuss a brief Covid-19 situation without going into its origin and spread. Subsequently, the concept of dialogue as a transformative tool in our current society, Buber's dialogical intersubjectivity in relation to Ubuntu and Western Humanism, and lastly, the relevance of Buber's ethics rooted in dialogical intersubjectivity for a dignified living in post-Covid-19 pandemic society which go hand in hand with the social teachings of the Church will be discussed.

1.0 The Prevailing Situation

The main concern of this research is based on the fact that, even when everybody is aware of the suffering humanity and is overwhelmed by the fear of contracting Corona Virus, there are injustices that still affect people, causing more physical and psychological suffering to humanity. Using the example of Kenya, while many people have lost jobs due to Covid, some of those who are still working go without pay. While funds have been raised to take care of Covid-19 patients, some government officials have squandered it forcing the poor to die without proper medical care, and those who can afford pay highly for their medical bills. While people are lacking money to pay rents, majority have been evicted and in the worst situations, the government demolishing houses leaving many homeless. While many are struggling to cater for their basic needs, prices of basic commodities like food are being hiked everyday due to increase in tax and fuel. Instead of celebrating family togetherness brought by the lockdowns, and endure suffering together, many are suffering domestic violence that is on daily rise. So, who really cares for the suffering humanity?

Indeed, we are living in a "broken world" as Gabriel Marcel puts it in one of his plays, where the reality of Covid-19 has unveiled man's evil side that affects lives and livelihoods. This refers to a human world, which used to have a

'heart' but the same heart seems to have stopped beating.¹This means, man has become a stranger to himself and to his brethren. He has neglected his duty of care for his fellow men and nature, and he has denied the existence of God who is the foundation of morality and by doing so, he has lost his moorings, his own identity, and purpose in life.²

To some extent, Covid-19 as an existential situation has given us a clear picture of the absurdity of human life, man's feeling of fear especially in contracting the virus, a feeling of anguish, his solitude and his alienation. These feelings are unavoidable in life since they give man a chance to reflect on his own authentic existence, a state of being real, genuine, or true³with self and living personal values and purpose in life. For Martin Heidegger, an authentic (person) *Dasein* chooses its own possibilities and acts on them manifesting its 'Being' alongside the 'things' with which it concerns itself, and in its solicitous 'Being-with Others,'⁴ which implies Martin Buber's "I-Thou" interpersonal relationship.

There is a feeling of fear of contracting the virus which hinders people to interact and dialogue in a desirable manner. There is also a negative feeling of loneliness, futility, desolation, emptiness, and neglect when faced with Covid-19 associated challenges.⁵ When it reaches to this point, an ethical solution is required. Martin Buber's Dialogical Intersubjectivity can be a transformative tool to humanity that has suffered from physical, psychological and social impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, moving humanity from a state and feeling of meaninglessness to a feeling of meaningfulness. There is hope that this pandemic will come to an end and life will go on. The status quo must change for the good of every person in the society.

2.0 Buberian Dialogical Intersubjectivity

The term dialogical is derived from the word dialogue which is the main theme in Buber's works: *The Life of Dialogue, I and Thou, Between Man and Man* and *Pointing the Way*. Dialogue, *Zwiesprache* in German denotes an authentic, open encounter between self and the other, where the other person is recognized as a subject rather than as an object.⁶ Dialogical refers to an approach that is used in explaining human relationships. The dialogic relationship encompasses the interrelated aspects of the therapeutic relationship, including person to person relationship, a working alliance and the transference relationship. These aspects encompass the subjective; person to person (I-Thou), and the objective; person to objects (I-It) relationships.⁷ The 'I-Thou' attitude is of course more prevalent in the interpersonal dialogue while an 'I-It' attitude is more prevalent in transference phenomena.⁸

Intersubjectivity refers to the ability to interact with other subjects in a mutual and meaningful manner.⁹ According to Edmund Husserl, intersubjectivity refers to the interchange of conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings between persons as facilitated by empathy. He held that intersubjective experience plays a fundamental role in our constitution of both ourselves as objectively existing subjects, other experiencing subjects, and the objective spatio-temporal world.¹⁰ Thus, intersubjectivity comes in when we experience empathy, which occurs in the course of

¹Katharine Rose Hanley, Trans., *Gabriel Marcel's Perspectives on The Broken World, The Broken World A Four-Act Play* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 46.

²Francis J. Lescoe, *Existentialism With or Without God* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 116.

³Olaf Dammann et al., "The Essence of Authenticity" *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol.11: Art. 629654. (2021) Accessed April 12, 2021. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.629654

⁴Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans; John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 308,

⁵Debanjan Banerjee & Mayank Rai, "Social Isolation in Covid-19: The Impact of Loneliness." *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* Vol. 66, Issue No. 6 (September 2020): 525–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020922269>.

⁶Stephen Michelman, *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 116-117.

⁷Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed. Trans., Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1958), 15. Henceforth it will be referred to as Buber, *I and Thou*.

⁸Jennifer Mackewn, "Understanding the Dialogic Relationship and Developing a Dialogue." In *Developing Gestalt Counselling: A Field Theoretical and Relational Model of Contemporary Gestalt Counselling and Psychotherapy*, Developing Counselling. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997), 80-87, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446280461.n9>.

⁹Frederick Grinnell, "The Problem of Intersubjectivity: A Comparison of Martin Buber and Alfred Schutz", *Human Science*, Vol. 6, No.2 (1983), pp.185-195. Accessed April 11, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008872>.

¹⁰Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), Sec.2 Ch.1 §29

our conscious attribution of intentional acts to other subjects, implying, putting ourselves into the other person's shoes.¹¹

Intersubjectivity cannot be without dialogue through which two or more people encounter each other in a meaningful interaction and develop a meaningful relationship. For Buber, a real living is an encounter and genuine dialogue takes place when there is an interchange of thoughts and feelings between two subjects who encounter each other.¹² The essence of Dialogue lies in the fact that each of the participants really has in mind the other in their present and particular state of being, and turns to them with the intention of establishing a lasting mutual relation between himself and them.¹³ The same dialogue exists between human beings and God, the 'Eternal Thou'; thus, Buber's dialogical understanding of religious experience is synthesized with an empirically grounded understanding of human intersubjectivity.

3.0 The Transformative Role of Dialogue

The core insight of Buber's philosophical thought is the idea of dialogue which implies, the encounter with the other. Dialogue is accomplished in ordinary acts like greeting another person, having a conversation, or simply exchanging meaningful glances and in a deeper sense, an expression of love and care. Such acts make dialogue ultimately an experience of the world's mystery and meaning through an encounter with the other.¹⁴ In this sense, the meaning of dialogue is found in their interchange of feelings and thoughts.¹⁵ In his work, *I and Thou*, Buber gives expression to the intuition that we need to withstand, the temptation of reducing human relations to the simple rational or romantic ways of relating to others. He says that we are beings that can enter into dialogic relations not just with human beings but with other animate beings, such as animals, or a tree, as well as with the Divine Thou, that is why he talks of 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' relationships.¹⁶

Talking about dialogue and friendship in society, Pope Francis says that "approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these are summed up in one word: dialogue."¹⁷ It is only in dialoguing that we are able to encounter and help one another, keep families and communities together, and do away with conflicts, thus help the world to live much better than it is now.

3.1 The Nature of Dialogue

Dialogue is intersubjective by nature. This is because it occurs between one man and his subjects in their exchange of conscious and unconscious feelings and thoughts. This implies that it is a relational aspect where man relates with nature, with men, and spiritual being; the divine being and the 'eternal Thou'.¹⁸ Different from our relationship with man where we can use speech, our relationship with nature is beneath the level of speech, and our relationship with the divine being does not use speech, yet the divine begets it for us, where we feel addressed and we respond. The life of dialogue is not individualistic in nature but communal, bearing the transformative aspect. For Buber, when the individual knows the other in himself, he breaks through his solitude in a strict and a transforming 'meeting'. Thus, the two individuals participate in one another's lives in very fact, not psychically, but ontically,¹⁹ which implies an authentic human existence. In this sense, man becomes conscious of himself as a relational being coexisting with others, and sharing with them. Buber argues that, the more humanity is mastered by individuality, the deeper does the 'I' sink into unreality. In such instances, the person in man and in humanity leads a hidden subterranean and as it were cancelled existence, till it is recalled.²⁰ The individual consciousness of who I am makes

¹¹Christian Beyer, Empathy, Intersubjectivity and Lifeworld in "Edmund Husserl", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹² Buber, *I and Thou*, 25.

¹³Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 87.

¹⁴Michelman, *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism*, 117.

¹⁵Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 85.

¹⁶Zank and Zachary, "Martin Buber", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

¹⁷Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), ch.6, sec.198. Henceforth, Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*.

¹⁸Buber, *I and Thou*, 18-19.

¹⁹Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Trans., by Ronald Gregor-Smith (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 202. Henceforth, Buber, *Between Man and Man*.

²⁰Buber, *I and Thou*, 88.

me responsible, a sense of responding to what happens to others, to what is seen, heard and felt.²¹ This is where man becomes sensitive to the needs of others, knows what he ought to do and puts upon himself a moral obligation to do it. This involves valuing of others' dignity and respect of their rights.

According to Buber, our attitude towards each other ought above all to be person to person, not Frenchman to German, not Jew to Christian, and perhaps less of man to woman.²² This is what is needed in the present-day society, a society where people value others, where every person has a fundamental and infinite responsibility for the other. Each individual responsibly responds to the needs of others regardless of where they come from, their gender, their colour, or their social status. In this sense, Karol Wojtyła says that for us to respond and act responsibly, the motivating factor should be that which we value and what is good for others.²³

On that very note, Hilary Munyaneza writing on solicitude and solidarity in the society illustrates the universality of humanity and the need for solidarity in the society that is equally affected by Covid-19 without racial, religious, gender, or social status distinctions. Putting it in a Christian perspective, he says that:

Solicitude and solidarity stem from recognising the fundamental dignity of the human person, that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. With this in mind and heart, we look beyond the differences that we establish. ... All our focus is on our common brotherhood, on unity. In various places, some people have considered others as a means to be used for their own purposes, but for a Christian, no human person can be considered as a means to an end. ... Our thoughtfulness, kindness and solidarity are offered to all without distinction. In some particular instances, however, our Christian instinct will move us to care especially for the most vulnerable, those in distress.²⁴

If this takes place, the pain of Covid-19 ceases to be because everyone feels listened to, taken care of physically, psychologically and socially through dialogue.

3.2 Conditions of Dialogue

The main condition for dialogue is authenticity or genuineness. According to Buber, authentic human existence does not just focus on the individual but on the individual in relation with others. In this sense, Wojtyła talks of solidarity and a sense of dialogue as the authentic attitudes where we live and act together for the common good in our society.²⁵ Authenticity is contained in the "I-Thou" relationship, where we value each other as subjects and not objects for exploitation, hence develop the aspects of love, trust, and responsibility. This implies having a genuine dialogue between subjects, where each of the participants really has in mind the other and seeks to establish authentic mutual relationship.²⁶ Pope Francis holds that authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. This is where a true spirit of dialogue lies; the ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, thus building togetherness.²⁷

In line with Buber, the Psychotherapist Joan E. Childs held that, relationships suffer if we are not authentic, that is, not in our essence, but flourishes when we are our authentic selves. Therefore, somewhere within each other, lies the essence of our being.²⁸ In our struggle to exist authentically, we often try to constantly balance the inner and outer aspects of ourselves in order to better fit in the society. In this sense, we are driven to find our place in society, and want to be respected for who we truly are and what we have to contribute. Many of us are propelled even further, desiring to know and live our purpose, to find meaning and fulfilment in our lives. However, we live in a society that values superficiality, strives for perfection, and defines us as per what we have; by the dollars in our bank

²¹Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 18.

²²Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr, eds, *The Letters of Martin Buber: Life of Dialogue* (New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1991), 67.

²³Karol Wojtyła (St. John Paul II), *The Acting Person*, trans., Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969), 128.

²⁴Hilary Munyameza, *Pandemic: The Christian Perspective*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), 90.

²⁵Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 284-287.

²⁶Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 22.

²⁷Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, sec., 203.

²⁸Joan E. Childs, *The Art of Authenticity: Recovering your Authentic Self and Reclaiming Relationships*, (2019).

<https://joanechilds.com.servives>. Accessed April 13, 2021.

account and not by how well we live our values. The value of what we have than who or what we truly are is what loses our authenticity.²⁹

To be authentic, one needs to have capacities for unbiased self-examination and accurate self-knowledge; reflective judgment; personal responsibility; empathy for and understanding of the other person, as well as a willingness to listen to feedback from others.³⁰ In addition to that, one needs to identify and embrace the core values, those which express your true self and inform your decisions; be our real self, be direct and speak the truth, have confidence and be happy with yourself.³¹

3.4. Types of Dialogue

The three types of dialogue that were discussed by Buber are: genuine dialogue, technical dialogue, and monologue disguised as dialogue.³²

Genuinedialoguemay be either spoken or silent,where each of the participants really has inmind the other or others and turns tothem with the intention of establishingan authentic mutual relationship.³³ In this sense, one sees or experiences the other, making the other person present as whole and one, thus making dialogue to be real in any given situation.This implies openness, respectful listening and feedback.³⁴This type of dialogue is needed to improve our relationship in the 'now' and in the post pandemic society.

Technical Dialogue isprompted by the need of objective understanding in a situation.³⁵ It is an impersonal way to communicate, but is the type of communication which is not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudices. It is basedon facts and requires an objective opinion. For Buber, this second one belongs to theinalienable sterling quality of "modern existence".³⁶ Morgan says that this type of dialogue should not be underestimated as a means of resolving conflict since it plays an important role in objective understanding of any mutual problem or situation.³⁷

Monologue Disguised as Dialogue is a kind of dialoguewhere two or more men, meeting in space, speakeach with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways andyet imagine they have escaped the tormentof being thrown backon their resources.³⁸In this case, someone who is talking appears more intent on hearing his or her own voice than on interacting or sharing information of value. Such conversations are characterized by the need neither to communicate something, nor to learn something,nor to influence someone, nor to come into connection with someone, but solely by the desire to have one's own self-relianceconfirmed by marking the impression.³⁹Though it is commonly used, it has very little impact on the social good.

3.5 Levels of Dialogue

Buberian levels of dialogue are described in three kinds of relationships: man with nature, man with fellow man, and man with the Supreme Being; God. This is where he talks of 'I-It', 'I-thou' and 'I- Eternal Thou'. In the first place we relate with nature, other people and God as 'Thou's', but man's desire to dominate, exploit, manipulate, and use

²⁹Tchiki Davis,*Develop Authenticity: 20 Ways to Be a More Authentic Person*, (2019).

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/click-here-happiness/201904>. Accessed April 13, 2021.

³⁰Ben G. Yacobi, "The Limits of Authenticity" *Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas*. Issue 92, (2012), https://philosophynow.org/issues/92/The_Limits_of_Authenticity. Accessed April 10, 2021

³¹Jacqueline Neuwirth, 5 Critical Steps to take to embrace your Authentic Self (2020). <https://www.yourtango.com/experts/jacqueline-neuwirth/how-to-be-yourself>. Accessed April 13, 2021.

³² Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 22.

³³Buber, *Between Man and Man*,22.

³⁴Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 86.

³⁵. John Morgan, "Martin Buber: Philosopher of Dialogue and of The Resolution of Conflict," *British Academy Review*, Issue 10. (2007), 11.

³⁶Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 22.

³⁷Morgan, "Martin Buber: Philosopher of Dialogue and of The Resolution of Conflict,"12.

³⁸Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 22.

³⁹Buber, *Between Man and Man*,23.

nature and man forces us to relate with them as 'It's'.⁴⁰If we relate with nature in a healthy manner, our relationship at the level of man to man will be good, hence, the level with God will be perfect.

We are told that when Buber reunited with his father at the age of fourteen, he was struck by his father's devotion to agriculture, specifically the concern he had for animals and plants. This taught him genuine human contact with nature; an active and responsible contact, something he would not have learned from any book. Friedman wrote, "in his own person, Carl Buber anticipated one of the most fundamental aspects of his son's later thoughts: that the man who practices immediacy does so in relation to nature just as much as his fellowmen, the 'I-Thou' relation to nature is a corollary of the interhuman."⁴¹ According to Buber, his father's concern extended to the solicitude of all people who depended on him; labourers, peasants, and tenants; their children's upbringing and education; the sick and aged.⁴²

In the same manner, St Francis of Assisi, born in 1182 and died in 1226, is an example of a man who respected and loved nature and man almost equally, and he always remained in union with God. He always addressed creatures like sun as brother, moon as sister, and earth as mother.⁴³ He also urged his brethren to bear with others with a compassionate heart in their weaknesses to the degree that one would wish to be sustained by the same person if he or she was in the similar situation.⁴⁴

The relationship and dialogue we have at the first level; with nature should transcend to human beings, and more to God. The problem we have in the contemporary society is that either we do not value any of the three relationships, or value one and destroy the rest. For instance, value animal (pets) and disvalue our relationship with God and human beings, or destroy trees and animals for human needs. We have to co-exist with nature but handle everything with care to avoid problems, like it is held that SARS-CoV-2 for Corona virus originated from animals. We should also treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity, showing them love even when they are sick, and this love quickens their physical and psychological healing process. It is believed by some people, especially Christians that the increased disbelief in God, and human sinful actions might have caused the Covid-19 pandemic whose source and cure is not yet found. It is therefore worth turning back to God, the source of everything for his divine intervention.

4.0 Dialogical intersubjectivity in relation to Ubuntu and Western Humanism

The current Covid-19 pandemic has showed us that we are a one human community. Its global spread does not single out an African from Westerner, white from black, and poor from rich. The philosophies of African Ubuntu and Western Humanism have a lot to offer to the world in the current situation.

In his definition of Ubuntu, Stephen Okello states that Ubuntu is a Zulu word derived from the noun Umuntu, which is translated as Human Being and this is true to all Bantus of Africa. Ubuntu therefore, is an abstract term that could be translated as Humanity or Humanness.⁴⁵ George Ndemo held that the element of true humanity or humanness from the perspective of African ontology is fully present in the African ethics of Ubuntu, where an individual embraces the virtues of patience, optimism, mutual sympathy and empathy as his way of life, and through which he embraces the life of others and their concerns.⁴⁶ Thus, Ubuntu is a relational concept, whereby the individual subject derives meaning and purpose for his existence from the community, and in turn gives greater meaning and purpose to the community, driven by compassion which goes beyond the right or wrong, and the duty.⁴⁷ This is why it is said that "I am because We are and since We are, therefore I am."⁴⁸ Our humanness as a

⁴⁰Buber, I and Thou, 18.

⁴¹Friedman, *Buber's Life and Works: Early years*, 12.

⁴²Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work: The Early Years 1878-1923* (London: Search Press, 1982), 12-13.

⁴³Regis J. Armstrong & Ignatius Brady, eds., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1982), 38-39.

⁴⁴Armstrong & Brady, eds., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Work*, 33.

⁴⁵Stephen Okello. "Western Humanism in Dialogue with African Ubuntu for the Greater Good." In *Ascolto Dell'Africa - Contesti, Attese, Potenzialita'*, (2012), 7. <https://www.academia.edu/36586935>.

⁴⁶George Ndemo Osengo, "Thematization of Inter-subjectivity in the African Context" in *The Role of Philosophy in The African Context: Traditions, Challenges and Perspective*, edited by Stephen Okello (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2019), 75.

⁴⁷Okello. "Western Humanism in Dialogue with African Ubuntu for the Greater Good" 1.

⁴⁸John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Bungay: The Chancer Press Ltd, 1969), 109.

character is learned from other human beings, that is, the way we behave, think and speak. This is why Ndemo held that intersubjectivity is thematised in African Culture.⁴⁹

Ubuntu isa humanism that is distinct from the Wester Humanism. Western humanism is defined as a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. In its ethical perspective, it affirms the dignity of each human being, supports the maximization of individual liberty and emphasises social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates for human rights and social justice, and without regarding supernaturalism, recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that religious, ethical, social, or political values have their source in human experience and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and emphasises that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.⁵⁰ Unlike Ubuntu which emphasises relation with God or gods, Western Humanism takes God completely out of scene.

Both philosophies emphasise respect for human dignity and responsibility. However, unlike western Humanism which focus on the value of a person as an individual independent of community, Ubuntu focuses on the value of a person as an individual dependent of the community. This is why Bishop Desmond Tutu said:

A self-sufficient human being is subhuman. I have gifts that you do not have, so, consequently, I am unique – you have gifts that I do not have, so you are unique. God has made us so that we will need each other. We are made for a delicate network of interdependence. We see it on a macro level. Not even the most powerful nations in the world can be self-sufficient.⁵¹

It is therefore right and just to take Ubuntu philosophy which goes hand in hand with Buberian dialogical intersubjectivity, a kind of ethics which promote 'I-thou' relationship in its three forms: man with nature, with fellow man, and with God. The words of Dr. Okello serves as a summary:

Ubuntu, therefore is not only the code for inter human relations, but also that which regulates the relationship between humans and nature. The concept of sharing the natural resources is built around the kind of respect the people have for nature which is effectively the mother of them all. They live and die at the behest of mother nature. This kind of existence has made it impossible to draw a line between the sacred and the profane. It is right here that the religious component has to be discerned. ... Our theological efforts are often an attempt to bridge the transcendence of God. To bring God closer, predictable, understandable, manageable. ... This is spirituality. This is a way of life. Ubuntu proposes a freshness that is rapidly attracting the attention of the world community. It offers an alternative to almost any life situation, as long as people are serious with life. It is not an exaggeration to see revival of humanity under the influence of UBUNTU.⁵²

Indeed, the world community needs Ubuntu to manage the Covid-19 pandemic and for the future life. This is a philosophy that will help us to value each other, and work for the good of each other, taking personal responsibility in order to give the suffering world a more human face.

5.0 Relevance of Buber's Dialogical Intersubjectivity for a Dignified Life in Post-Covid-19 Society

Buber's ethics based on his dialogical intersubjectivity has influenced so many people in various domains of life. His is a relational philosophy that will exist so long as there are relationships, and in a special way, man with man, nature, and Supreme Being. The researcher in this section will discuss how relevant Buber's thought can transform our society for a better future. Areas to be dealt with include: family relationships, health and bioethics, environmentalism, culturalism, economic issues and religion.

5.1 Family Integrity and Human Relationships

⁴⁹Ndemo Osengo, "Thematization of Inter-subjectivity in the African Context," 64.

⁵⁰*The Humanist Magazine*, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/definition-of-humanism/> Accessed May 10, 2021.

⁵¹Desmond Tutu, "God's Dream", in *Waging Peace II: Vision and Hope for the 21st Century*, edited by D. Krieger and F. Kelly, (The Noble Press 1992), 37.

⁵²Okello. "Western Humanism in Dialogue with African Ubuntu for the Greater Good, 9.

Family is known to be the foundation of all human relationships and an institution where moral values like love, truthfulness, happiness, justice, affection, tolerance and responsibility are built by being instilled in children by parents. It is the family that shapes the child's attitude towards people and society, and this entails relating with others with the "I-Thou" and not "I-It" relationships. In the current society, there are many evils like domestic violence, murder, robbery, rape, corruption and hatred in all forms. The new generations are born into this kind of society, and their minds, their world views are affected by the society where they live. Will we not perpetuate such kind of society to the next generation, a broken society, a violent society unless there is a total transformation?

During the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been cases of domestic violence and murder witnessed in various parts of the world. The United Nations has described the worldwide increase in domestic abuse as a "shadow pandemic" alongside Covid-19 where many people are trapped at home with their abusers.⁵³ Instead of family members being the source of love and consolation to each other, they have become source of threats to each other.

The nature of the commitment, the physical and emotional proximity, the frequency of interaction, and the level and nature of intimacy in family demands Buberian genuine dialogue among the couples as well as their children. According to Buber, marriage gains new life when there is the revealing by two people of the "Thou" to one another. Still in the family, experience of dialogue in parent-child relationships provide a fertile ground for relating with each other as subjects and not objects.⁵⁴ If everybody in a family setting would treat the other as a subject, there would be no domestic violence, where wives murder their husbands; husbands murder their wives; and children too murder their parents in cases of conflict and all sorts of misunderstanding.

Pope Francis emphasizes fraternity and social friendship in times of crisis, calling upon people in the entire world to acknowledge the dignity of each human person, work together and solve the common problem as a one human family, thereby affecting the to rebirth a universal aspiration to fraternity. Therefore, every person is to move beyond self in a spirit of dialogue and meet the other with that love which propagates mutual understanding, solves problems and advocates liberty, equality and fraternity. This kind of love renews the value of solidarity and promotes the rights of all peoples.⁵⁵ In this manner, he says that we can only overcome global challenges like Covid through solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst.⁵⁶ This solidarity has to go hand in hand with solicitude, that concerned care that every person needs.⁵⁷

5.2 Interpersonal Relationships in Biomedicine

Cartesian reductionism as the unspoken philosophical position has the idea that human bodies are machines and that clinicians are technicians whose job is to repair those machines. Although this kind of mentality has had undeniable success in advancing biomedical knowledge, and interventions that relieve human suffering, it is the root of many of the problems in our health care system where proper care is lacking since human beings are treated as objects: Buber's "It".⁵⁸

The definition of medicine as relation of mutual consent to effect individualized well-being by working in, with, and through the body, fits well in our topic of discussion. With this point of view the center of medicine becomes relationship, and the purpose of that relationship is healing.⁵⁹ Buber proposed "I-Thou" relationship through which we are called to be present to the other and treat the other well, and this should be so between clinicians and patients, where one does not just carry out his or her duty for the sake of duty, but a moral duty with love and responsibility, valuing life above all according to the Hippocratic oath taken by clinicians. Current research indicates that strengthening interpersonal relationships are key to any medical treatment because they help medical patients to

⁵³Megha Mohan, "Coronavirus: Domestic violence 'increases globally during lockdown,'" *BBC News*, (June 12, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-53014211>

⁵⁴Stephen T. Fife, "Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue and Implications for Qualitative Family Research", *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 7 (September 2015): 208–224, DOI:10.1111/jftr.12087. p. 219.

⁵⁵Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Sec., 198.

⁵⁶Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, with preface by Card. Michael Czerny, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), 45.

⁵⁷Hillary Munyameza, *Pandemic: The Christian Perspective*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), 90.

⁵⁸John G. Scott et. al., "Healing relationships and the existential philosophy of Martin Buber", *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*. 4.11, (2009) 1-9. DOI: 10.1186/1747-5341-4-11, 2.

⁵⁹G. Scott et. al., "Healing relationships and the existential philosophy of Martin Buber", 2.

reduce stress, heal and live longer.⁶⁰Therefore, while “I-It” relationships make the practice of medicine a business enterprise, “I-Thou”relationships give meaning to medicine and make it a fully human enterprise.⁶¹

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many patients have suffered due to inappropriate medical care, lack of money, and lack of social and mutual support from family and clinicians. This calls for a moral evaluation of every involved persons for a better future. First of all, concerned hospitals should review their policy to meet the life needs of every human person, since all have rights to receive treatment. The doctors too though this career being a source of livelihood, should be fair to the needy patients and work to save lives without charging them expensively. The governments too are required to review the policies to make health services affordable both in private and public hospitals, thus any improvements in living standards should have little effect on health, since health is a basic need, and only healthy citizens will work for economic growth.⁶²The same government should have a fair pay for health practitioners who risk their lives for others, in order for them to work proficiently.

A majority of Covid-19 fatalities were patients with underlying conditions like cancer, hypertension, diabetes, and asthma. This shows that many people are dying of psychosomatic illnesses that are caused by stress and poor eating habits. Each individual is called to work for the good of the other, by not stressing others and seeking to live in mutuality. On the same note, each individual is supposed to take care of his or her personal health by frequent exercises, healthy eating habits, and establishing good relationships with others.

5.3 Environmentalism

This refers to the concern and proper care of the environment or nature which we co-exist with. Most of Corona Virus patients have died due to insufficient Oxygen level in the body, yet hospital’s critical care that involves giving oxygen supplement is very expensive. Each day of our lives we breath in very fresh oxygen from plants around us that sustains. However, this very environment has been polluted by cutting and burning of trees, improper disposition of garbage especially polyethylene bags. Herbs have been used as medicine since time immemorial for human beings and animals, and at the moment many people are inhaling steam from boiled herbs in attempt to cure Covid. The question is, where will we get these herbs with the kind of destruction we have caused? The fact is that we have endangered our own lives and that of the future generations.

Buber says that nature is another ‘Thou’ and even if we must exploit it to obtain our needs, thus treating it as ‘It’, we should do so with love, respect and mutuality.⁶³In order to overcome global challenges, Pope Francis urges everyone to renew our commitment to love and care of our common home; the earth. This is because “we are fashioned from the earth, and a fruit of the earth sustains our life.”⁶⁴Consequently, we should overcome our selfishness and take full responsibility by being guardians and stewards of creation, ensuring that our common home does not fall into serious disrepair.⁶⁵

As in Buber’s relationships, to show that we cannot be separated from nature and God, Pope Francis says that we are not only earthly, but we bear within us the breath of life that comes from God who made heaven and earth (Gen 2:4-7, African Bible). Therefore, we are called to care and respect creatures, offer love and compassion to our brothers and sisters, as an imitation of God’s love manifested in Jesus, and love God above all, the ultimate “Thou”.⁶⁶ For our better future, we need to renew our harmonious relationships with nature, with the rest of humanity, and with God.

5.5 Transforming Man to Salvage the Economy

⁶⁰Timothy Smith and Julianne Holt-Lunstad, “Strengthening interpersonal relationships helps medical patients live longer,” *PLOS Medicine, EurekAlert/AAAS*, (May 2021) https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-05/byu-sir051821.php

⁶¹G. Scott et. al., “Healing relationships and the existential philosophy of Martin Buber”, 4.

⁶²Richard Wilkinson, *Unhealthy societies: the afflictions of inequality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

⁶³Buber, *I and Thou*, 20-21.

⁶⁴Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, with preface by Card. Michael Czerny, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), 45.

⁶⁵Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, 46.

⁶⁶Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, 45-46.

The pandemic has greatly affected the global economy and everyone is affected. However, the most affected people are those who lost their jobs and small-scale business people. Many countries and individuals have survived on loans yet the means of paying back is not promising. The greatest danger is that millions of people might fall into extreme poverty due to the pandemic, and the most affected will be the poor informal workers and smaller business men and women.⁶⁷ Pope Francis said that it is important for us to prepare ourselves for what follows, since we can already see some consequences that need to be faced: hunger, (especially for people without permanent employment; casual workers), violence, and the appearance of loan sharks (who may become the real plague of our society in the near future, inhuman criminals).⁶⁸

Buber's intersubjectivity serves as a solution to manage pandemic consequences and the life after. If every person sees himself or herself in the other, he or she will empathise and therefore will not allow or expose the other to suffering through violent acts, robbery or conmanship. The same feeling will not let my neighbour miss food, miss medical care or languish in poverty when I have. The "I-Thou" relationship will make us live as one family where each individual takes responsibility to care for others' needs, thus fostering social fraternity where love transcends all geographical, tribal, and social class barriers.

5.5 Reclaiming the Humanistic Culture

Culturalism can be understood as a viewpoint or set of beliefs; a theoretical approach which emphasizes the significance of culture, especially in determining individual behaviour and the way in which society functions.⁶⁹ Culture defines our way of life and there are different cultures in our society which vary from tribe, nationality and region. However, the Current pandemic does not know any culture, it has affected all of us, forcing us to change our lifestyles and attitudes. The new norms compel us to distance ourselves from others, with no shaking of hands or hugging or kissing, but has united us in our diversity through suffering.

United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) notes that culture, and specifically African Culture has been affected by Covid-19, whereas social norms, ethics and human rights are under threat. This comes as a consequence of the imposition of strict measures by African governments to mitigate Covid-19 that is threatening human life. The sociocultural norms and values that are at the center of African societies now face severe risk of disappearing into oblivion due to the ban on social gatherings and ceremonies like weddings and burials which enhanced interpersonal relationships. The integrated community life of solidarity where the problem of one person or family became a concern of the whole community is disintegrating slowly.⁷⁰

5.6 Religious Transformation

The lockdowns caused by the spread of Covid-19 interfered with religious gatherings and public church services. However, the option for virtual services has been of help to humanity that needed to address their creator; God. Many families too enhanced prayer in their homes thus keeping good relationship with God. In the same spirit, Christians for instance, provided for the material and financial needs of the church, its leaders and the poor people. Indeed Buber's 'I-thou' relationship has been upheld, and it should go on even into the future to promote solidarity.

6.0 Buberian Intersubjectivity and the Social Teachings of the Church

Buber emphasised that we should treat other people in a worthy manner, seeing them as human subjects with same dignity and rights as ours. The Catholic Church's social teachings aim at building a just society where humanity strives for a meaningful and authentic lives amidst the challenges of modern society affected by Covid-19 pandemic. This is discussed in the following principles.

6.1 The Life and Dignity of the Human Person

⁶⁷Nita Bhalla, "Big Firms Reap Pandemic funds, the Poor Miss Out." *The Standard Newspaper*. April 26, 2021, 8.

⁶⁸Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, 23.

⁶⁹<https://www.lexico.com/definition/culturalism>

⁷⁰United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Socio-Economic and Cultural Impacts of Covid-19 in Africa," UNESCO Responses (2020), 6. Available at https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/stand_alone_executive_summary_fin.pdf.

The human person is created in the divine image of God (Gen 1:27, African Bible), thus possessing the dignity of a human person capable of self-knowledge, of self possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons.⁷¹ Human life should be held sacred, and valuable above all things, and nobody should lose his or her dignity because of disability, poverty, age, or race. In this sense, a just society can become a reality only when it is founded on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person.⁷²

6.2 Call to Family, Community and Participation

A family is the place where an authentic community of persons develops and grows being revitalised by love.⁷³ In the same sense, “the social subjectivity of the family, both as a single unit and as associated group, is expressed as well in the demonstration of solidarity and sharing not only among families themselves but also in the various forms of participation in social and political life.”⁷⁴ As social beings, we only realize our meaningfulness in our relationships with others in a community which begins with the family. Every person has a right and responsibility to participate in society’s wellbeing by seeking the common good for all its members and being in solidarity with the suffering.

6.3 Rights and Responsibilities

The need for the common good depends on the social conditions of each historical period which are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental and inalienable rights.⁷⁵ Every person has a fundamental right to life, food, shelter, health care, education, employment, and a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. In addition to these, every person has a responsibility to respect the rights of others in the wider society and to work for the common good.

6.4 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

How we treat the most vulnerable members of the society is a basic moral test that humanity has to exercise love and Christian charity. The preferential option for the poor is very fundamental where we not only protect their rights, but take full responsibility in providing their needs.⁷⁶

6.5 The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

Aware of the economy that exists to serve people and not the other way around, everyone has a right to decent and productive work, right to just wages, right to rest, and economic initiative.⁷⁷ We believe that work is not only for livelihood but also a continuation of God’s creation. Therefore, the dignity of work is to be protected as well as respect for the rights of workers who labour each day for the common good.

6.6 Fraternal Solidarity

As one of the principles of the Church’s Social Doctrine, “Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity.”⁷⁸ Indeed we are one human family despite our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Therefore, we are called to pursue the virtue of love in a world affected and broken by hatred and conflict. Love has to go hand in hand with peace and justice for the enhancement of solidarity which is considered as an authentic moral virtue; a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.⁷⁹

⁷¹Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2012), § 108. Henceforth, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

⁷²*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §. 132.

⁷³*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §221.

⁷⁴*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 246.

⁷⁵*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §166.

⁷⁶*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §182-184.

⁷⁷*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §301-303.

⁷⁸*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §192.

⁷⁹*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §193.

6.7 Care for God's Creation

Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'* emphasized on the care of creation which he referred to as 'Our Common Home.' This title is taken from the canticle of creatures composed by St. Francis of Assisi who praised our common home for being like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us, governs us, and produces fruits that sustain our being.⁸⁰ It is therefore our responsibility to care for the environment entrusted to us by God as explained in Gen 1:28-30, to be stewards of our common heritage which extends not only to present needs but also to the needs of future generations.⁸¹ By our stewardship of creation we show our respect for the Creator.

The Social Doctrine of the Church has offered us principles that can help us lead an authentic life not only as Christians, but as a human family. These principles act as a criterion for judgement and directives for action which are the starting point for the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism. These discourage 'I-It' relationships and promote 'I-Thou' relationship that is three-dimensional: I with nature, I with other people, and I with God.

Conclusion

The researcher in this work has tried to analyse Buber's dialogical intersubjectivity, an ethical framework that can be used in transforming the current society that is wounded and broken by Covid-19 related issues like injustices, corruption, and difficult living conditions that come as a result of bad human relationships. In relation to Buber's thought, the Ubuntu thought, western humanism and social teachings of the church have been discussed to show the relevance of Buber's philosophy that was written many years back, but can be used in the current and future society for man to lead a dignified and authentic life. Man's feeling of meaninglessness which stems from fear, anguish, solitude, alienation and to some extent, desolation, emptiness and neglect can change to something positive only if the 'I-It' relationship is obliterated and 'I-Thou' relationship advocated.

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⁸⁰Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home, (Nairobi: Paulines publications Africa, 2015), Sec. 1.

⁸¹*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §467.

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