

AN AFRICAN APPRAISAL OF SARTRE'S EXISTENTIALISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN EXISTENCE IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The need for better and qualitative human life cannot be underestimated in philosophical studies. This is because the basic task of philosophy is to reflect on human life and humanity. It is therefore, imperative for philosophy in Africa to make impact in that direction. Existentialism is that field of philosophy that is centered on the nature of human existence and Jean- Paul Sartre is one of the key voices in that regard. His contributions to the area of existential freedom is probably profound than that of any Western existentialists. Key issues in his existentialism are directly linked with his concept of freedom. African philosophy on the other hand is a unique philosophy with its own culture and is not bereft of ideas about human existence. African existentialism shares areas of convergence and divergence with Sartre. This is an existential view point that is concerned with the promotion and preservation of fundamental African values and culture. Consequently, the paper examines critical components of Sartre existentialism and juxtapose them with African existentialism. The thrust of this paper is the examination of the discourse of human existence from Sartre's point of view, with the hope that human existence on the continent could be improved by the maximization of the various existential virtues in African culture and philosophy. It proposes that Sartre's existentialism can be applied in achieving a good understanding of the nature of human existence and freedom in Africa. Hence, his existentialism and freedom has implications for the development of human existence in Africa.

Keywords: African, Sarte, Existentialism, Philosophy, Africa

Introduction

Sartre was a French philosopher and a leading proponent of French atheistic existentialism. He is a key figure in modern existentialism and his impact on modern thought is unprecedented and has probably influenced the West more than other thinkers

since the two world wars. He is concerned with the issues of human predicament and his philosophy laid the foundation for that doctrine. Philosophy to him must have direct relationship with practical demands of living. His theory of existentialism and freedom has cemented his place among the most influential Western philosophers of the twentieth century and beyond.

It is impossible to separate his existentialism from his freedom. Freedom to him is the value of existential thought and without freedom, there is no human existence. His 'existence precedes essence', atheism, ethics, individual transcendence, and other concepts are directly related with the need for man to be unrestrictedly free.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss crucial themes of Sartre's existentialism with the aim of subjecting them to African understanding. This will involve isolating areas of convergence and divergence. Consequently, Sartre's individualism, atheism, ethics and freedom will be given African interpretation. Hence, the paper is an interrogation of two different types of existentialism; Sartre, representing Western existentialism and African existentialism. The heart of the interrogation are the various implications drawn from the two existential viewpoints for better human existence in Africa. The work therefore, is to contribute to better human existence in Africa.

Sartre's Existentialism and Freedom

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was a French philosopher and a leading proponent of French atheistic existentialism. As a prominent part of classical theorists in existentialism, he like others also reflected on human life. He is concerned with the issue of human predicament and his philosophy laid the foundation for that doctrine. Philosophy to him must have direct relationship with practical demands of living.¹ To him, individual freedom has a direct relationship with qualitative human existence. Sartre's freedom cannot be divorced from his philosophy of human existence

His *dictum* 'existence precedes essence' and atheism are the foundation of his existentialism. By this *dictum*, he means man first exists, and then defines himself. Man cannot be said to be anything before and outside his existence. This implies that man is not a predetermined being. There is no destiny outside him that determines what an individual would be. He cannot be seen from a fatalistic point of view. He is what he makes himself. No one is born with innate personality but everyone comes to become who they are by the goals they pursue and values they adopt.

Sartre's atheism also gives credence to his notion of 'existence precedes essence.' His philosophy is in fact an attempt to form a coherent atheism. If there is no God, it means there is no design for human kind. He opines that "if God does not exist, there is at least

one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being whose existences comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it.”² The absence of God gives man the latitude to completely take hold of his destiny.

He strongly opines that the non-existence of God does not have any negative effect on human values. Without God, man can attain progress, success, honesty, dignity, and qualitative existence.³What is needed according to Sartre is for man to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself not even the valid proof of the existence of God. It then imply that man can chose and determine his essence since there is no absolute being to do that for him.

Sartre’s *dictum* and atheism provides a practical ground for him to conclude that man is free. First, if man is not predetermined and he is nothing until he becomes what he makes himself, he is then free to determine his destiny, present, future, character, goals and so many more. Since no essence can be attributed to man prior to existence, and there is no human nature that exists outside or inside being, man is free limitlessly. Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness* that “No limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or if you prefer, that we are not free to ease being free.”⁴

Second, the absence of God makes man to be limitlessly free to take hold of his destiny. The non-existence of God makes everything permissible. Since God does not exist, man becomes the only being that is limitlessly free and whose existence comes before his essence. Man without God is free to become whatever he wishes to become. What then is the scope of Sartre’s freedom?

In his concepts of liberty, Isaiah Berlin makes a distinction between two types of freedom; positive and negative freedom. Negative freedom is “the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints... positive liberty is the possibility of acting... in such a way as to take control of one’s life...”⁵ Germane to negative freedom is non-interference and to positive liberty is the ability of the individual to be his own master. Sartre’s concept of freedom is the combination of Berlin’s two types of freedom. Nothing must interfere with individual freedom and the individual must take that advantage to achieve personal goals and also transcend self.

To Sartre, freedom is fundamental and foundational to the being of man. Man came to the world to be free. Freedom is the nature of man and it cannot be in excess. He avers that “freedom in its foundation coincides with the nothingness which is the heart of man”⁶ man cannot be said to be a being or human if he is not free. Freedom to him is tantamount to existence. Roquentin, the protagonists in *Nausea*, posits that freedom is the same thing as existence. “I am free, I haven’t a single reason for living left... I am going to outlive myself.”⁷ Roquentin accepts that he is limitlessly free and decided to live in the

virtue of his freedom. To outlive himself, he is seeking to become what he is not by reaching outside of himself. Hence, he will always asserts his freedom.

Freedom is natural to the being of man. Copleston in his commentary of Sartre's concept of freedom opines that "the fact is that man cannot help being free and he cannot help acting in the world. Even if he chooses to commit suicide, he chooses so and acts. And these acts are performed with motives."⁸ The above quotation have a few implications apart from freedom being fundamental to the nature of man. First, anything is permissible in the man's use of his freedom since he can choose to commit suicide. Second, man's freedom must be translated into action. Sartre existentialism is, therefore, a theory of action. Third, individual freedom should be propelled by a motive. Hence, irrational, thoughtless and reckless use of freedom is not permitted. A significant motive can however, make an individual to commit suicide. Essentially, deliberate intention, choice and action cannot be divulge from freedom.

In addition, the freedom of man is unrestricted and there is no universal moral law that determines how he should act. No human law must restrict the freedom of the individual. No human law should determine individual character. Characters are also not determined by either genetic traits or experience of formative years or social and environmental indoctrinators. They are essentially determined by the projects the individual has freely chosen to pursue. The implication is that Sartre's ethics and existentialism is individual centered and not communal.

Since God has been eliminated in his philosophy, someone has to invent values. To invent values means life has no meaning *a priori*, life is meaningless until it is lived. It is men that gives life meaning and value is nothing more than the meaning that we give.⁹ The freedom of men is to create his own morality but since we exist in the presence of others our morality must also take others into consideration. This thesis is however, self-defeating and contradictory. He has through his argument slipped into Kant's categorical imperative which is the law of autonomous will.¹⁰ Also, his argument for individual morality is the beginning of the failure of his thesis. There will be clashes of morality if we all choose our own morality. Another serious concern is how and who is to adjudicate in the wake of conflict since everyone has his own morality.

However, Sartre is not just interested in man been free for the sake of freedom. The individual must break free of self-fastened shackles in order to attain his unlimited potentials. Freedom is, therefore, meaningless if it cannot assist man to become the best that he can be.

Man has potentiality to become what he is not. He is perpetually beyond himself. Since he is fluid and indeterminate. He must therefore, loose himself beyond himself. Hence, Sartre says men is transcendent. It must however be observed that life is not as straight forward as Sartre thought it to be. In concrete terms, there are obvious challenges to the realization of a men's life's goals. There are limitations that life itself imposes on man which limit how far he can go. These include sickness, disappointment, and incapacitation. The opportunities provided by each society also determine how far the individual can go in the realization of life goals.

But how is it possible for society to continue and community maintained despite Sartre's emphasis on individual limitless freedom? He answered this in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. "In willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim."¹¹ Hence his concept accommodates the freedom of others and responsibility in the use of freedom. Man must always make a choice he or she will be responsible for when he exercise his freedom to choose and he must choose also on behalf of others. This is also reiterated in his concept of *Anguish* which is the burden of freedom, and a reflective apprehension of the self as a free agent. It is the burden of ensuring that one uses his freedom in a responsible and not reckless manner. The recognition of others must however not be an impediment to individual freedom and desire to achieve personal life projects. The individual is, therefore, more important than the society.

Another very important concept in the discourse of Sartre's freedom is choice. Choice and freedom are Siamese twins in the work of most existentialists, and Sartre is not an exception. The usage of choice in Sartre's existentialism does not mean a spontaneous reaction to issue but that the individual has a reflective control of the deeper aspects of himself and in turn determine how things will look to him, how he will feel in response to things and the relative importance each consideration will have for him when he deliberates about what to do.

As earlier alluded, Sartre's ethics is individual centered and speaks to the freedom of man. Ethics to him is like an art work. Since nothing *a priori* determines what a painter will paint today or tomorrow, so one cannot decide what ought to be done in terms of morality. What art and morality have in common is creation and inventory. "Man makes himself, he does not come into the world fully made, he makes himself by choosing his own morality and his circumstances are such that he has no option other than to choose a morality."¹² Since God has been eliminated in Sartre's morality, someone has to invent values. Hence our actions define our values. When we choose, we express our values. The individual is free to create his own ethics. Even where the individual seeks advice on any moral decision, the final choice is still his. The freedom of man to create his own

morality has two implications. First, he must continue to exercise this freedom through the choice he makes. Second, he must at the same time acknowledge the freedom of others. Therefore, the freedom of the individual to choose his morality must necessarily put the freedom of others into consideration. And since we exist in the presence of others, our morality must also take others into consideration. This assertion suggests that the individual cannot choose his ethics in an irresponsible manner. It is impossible to behave and act anyhow.

The ultimate purpose of all we have discussed is for the individual to attain authentic existence. Authentic existence though a Martin Heidegger's philosophical classification of human beings in the world, it agrees with Sartre's concept of self-realization and individual transcendence. Sartre uses it to describe individuals that are not conformist, who have taken control of their destiny and have accepted the need to apply their limitless freedom in pursuit of alternative way of life that can make life meaningful and existence qualitative. Individuals that have exhausted all the phenomenal aspects of their being and have transcend themselves. Essentially, authentic existence has implications for freedom, choice, potentiality, action and possibilities. The opposite of it is bad faith. That is, when the individual refuses to activate his freedom, take hold of his destiny and exhaust all his phenomenal aspects. The individual must not limit himself to one option as there are many alternatives that can be considered. For example, a man must not say he can only be a professor in life. He must consider other alternatives.

Human Existence in Africa

The scope of this part of the paper is an examination of African existentialism. Undoubtedly, Africa like their Western counterpart has its unique philosophy of human existence though the larger part of what we have as existentialism today is Western existentialism. The need therefore to discuss key issues in African existentialism. It is also important to point it out that African notion of human existence cannot be separated from African worldview. This is because the worldview of the people of Africa include their perception of the world which include human existence. In fact, human existence is an essential part of African world. This is also because social cultural factors cannot be separated from human existence. This was corroborated by Otijele when he avers that "culture is a model for understanding existence, a conceptualization inclusive of all dimensions of the universe itself, one that integrates every aspect of life into an inelible whole."¹³

The beginning point of any discussion about human existence in Africa is the origin of man. Unlike the Western existentialism that pay no attention to man's origin, it is an important part of African existentialism. In Africa, man is a product of something and did

not just drop from somewhere. The Pre-existence of man has direct relationship with his practical existence. This African perspective can also not be separated from their belief in God. God to many African people is supreme, stable, reliable and dependable and the creator of man and the universe. He is the creator and the sustainer of the universe and everything therein including humanity.

African existentialism contrary to Sartre is therefore, theistic and not atheistic. Man to Africans is brought to the world by God. His existence in the world cannot be separated from his creator. In African worldview, nothing (human existence inclusive) happens without the spiritual dimension. It is believed that every aspect of life is controlled by a particular spirit. This is because of the peoples believe that the Supreme Being acts through a host of lesser gods even in the creation of man.

Apart from the Supreme Being, the divinities are also important in the pre-existence of man. The divinities or gods are like intermediaries between God and man, they are venerated and are agents in the creation of man.¹⁴ There are different versions of African legends of human creation. For example, the Yoruba legend gave *Obatala* also known as *Orunmila* the responsibility of moulding the human body (*Ara*) from sand.¹⁵ The moulded body is still lifeless as *Obatala* does not have the responsibility and power to give life to be body. This is the prerogative of the Supreme Being Himself, *Olodumare*.¹⁶

Before coming to the world, the individual will have to choose an *Ori* (essence) from among a large number of *Ori* stored in *Ajala's* warehouse.¹⁷ The individual getting to the world is oblivious of the type of essence he has chosen. So, there is agreement among scholars that man's essence is chosen before his existence. Scholars are however not united in whether the implication of the choice of *Ori* is hard or soft deterministic but this writer argued elsewhere that the concept of *Ori* in Yoruba ontology is soft deterministic.

The involvement of God in human existence contradicts Sartre's atheistic philosophy. The story of human pre-existence in African ontology also contradict Sartre's position that man has no essence before his actual existence. Man's essence in a way is predetermine in Africa worldview. It is held in many African communities that spiritual forces can determine and even alter individual essence.

The society is another important part of African worldview of human existence. Qualitative and functional human existence is not entirely dependent on the individual. The value that the African ontology places on the society is beyond mere recognition of others as found in Sartre's philosophy and some other key existentialists. Without missing word, the Africans believe no good individual existence is possible without the society. The overstretched individuality of Western existentialism is not in line with the African view of human existence.

The fact that the individual is limitlessly free in the existentialism of Sartre suggest that the larger society has little or no part in what the individual become. Though the society is recognized in his philosophy, the society must however, stay clear of the individual and not assert any form of pressure (positive or negative) on him. The society must not tamper with the freedom of the individual to transcend himself. Sartre though opines that the individual must make his decisions with the consciousness of choosing of behalf of others in the society, but this will not always be so, since the individual cannot be checked in whatever way he makes his decisions. This seeming contradiction in Sartre's view of the individual justify a consideration of the value that the African place on the society in the attainment of qualitative human existence even for the individual.

The term that best describe the value of the society in African worldview of human existence is *Ubuntu* from the South and East Africa. This concept shows how the being of an African person in not only imbedded in community, but in the universe as a whole. *Ubuntu* is used in a more philosophical sense to mean the belief in a universal bond of sharing, that which connects all humanity. With *Ubuntu*, a member of a family or a village who is in great existential difficulty will not be left alone. *Ubuntu* speaks about the interconnectedness of humanity and the fact that no man can exist in isolation.¹⁸

Ubuntu received global recognition at the Nelson Mandela's memorial service where the then president of America, Barack Obama spoke about its existential importance: "There is a word in South Africa – *Ubuntu* – a word that captures Mandela's greatest gift, his recognition that we are bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye, that there is a oneness in humanity, that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others and caring for those around us."¹⁹ The above justifies the existential importance of human interconnectedness and that no essential self or authentic existence is possible without others. Obama statement suggest that there are virtues of *Ubuntu* that are germane to good human existence. To jettison this global interconnectedness is dangerous for world peace. In addition, our individual goals and aspirations are better achieved when we cooperate with others. *Ubuntu* characteristically demands that high value be placed on human life, reject vengeance, place high premium on dignity, compassion and humanness, it also dictates a shift from confrontation to mediation, dictate good character, and favours restorative justice.

It is however important to strike a balance between Sartre's individuality and African communal life. This is because excessive individualism and an overstretched communalism is problematic to the progress of any society. The individual is not an atomic and self-sufficient being that does not need others to realize his goals. It is the community that makes available what is necessary for the realization of individual potentials and for living a worthy life. It is however counterproductive for the community

argument to be pushed to the extent of it being an obstacle to the ability of the individual to be innovative, initiate a new course of action and be autonomous.

The way forward according to Ebijuwa is to see the relationship between the individual and the community as complementary. It is possible for the individual to be connected with the society, contribute his quota to the common good and still maintain his identity. The ideal society is the one that respect individual aspiration and at the same time encourages the individual to see the common good as a fundamental goal of everyone.²⁰

Morality is another essential issue in the development of African philosophy of human existence. Morality is deeper in African discourse of human existence than in Sartre's existentialism. It is the foundation of good human existence since it regulates the social relations among people. Adherence to moral rules provides answers to complex questions of human existence. It is in fact the essence of being. Real and good human existence is discussed in Africa in relation to sound and godly moral standard. An immoral individual cannot be perceived as existing in many African societies.

Sound and excellent morality is a condition for being human in Africa. Sound morality has also helped to shape and re-shape the lives of many individuals for the attainment of self-realization. It is the belief of many African societies that individual success is difficult without discipline which is a product of morality. Even if an individual get successful in an immoral way, the same immorality will crumble the success. Morality in Africa is, therefore, important for individual attainment of self-realization and the preservation of the society. Morality in Africa has both ethical and ontological interpretation.

The ethical interpretation describes the characteristics of a morally sound individual as one who is self-disciplined, well nurtured, responsible, has integrity, possess good knowledge and wisdom, a paragon of excellent character and virtuous in nature. Hence, morality is a concept needed for individual happiness and good human condition. This is in agreement with Aristotle that virtues are qualities that are necessary for the development of man as a social being.²¹

The ontological interpretation of morality on the other hand is that, it is the essence of being. Being cannot be explained independently in many African cultures without morality. Good morality distinguishes between human being in a generic sense and human person in a specific sense.²² However, it is the society and not the individual that determines moral standard in many African countries. The spiritual dimension is also important in the determination of right and wrong. The foundation of philosophy of

existence of many African societies is, therefore predicted on sound moral standing of individual members of the society. This is why punishment for sin and wrong doing is also a significant part of African moral system.

African Morality is, therefore, a veritable basis for engendering normative principles for addressing problems and challenges in societies. The search for a functional socio-political order in the contemporary African world can be achieved by it. Human society need a synergy of morality and socio-political ideals to achieve better human existence. This is because desirable social order is predicated on moral order while sustainable development is also not possible without social order. It is the strong belief of these writers that many social- political crises that are being witnessed in many African countries will be drastically reduced if African morality can be institutionalized.

It is important at this point to juxtapose the various aspects of African philosophy of existence that have been discussed with the concept of individual freedom. We may start by asking; does these essential aspects of African philosophy of existence (human pre-existence, religious factor, society and morality) impede individual freedom? Is the individual free to transcend self, fulfil potential and realize self-ambition within African philosophy of existence? The answer is in the affirmative though a face value interpretation may suggest otherwise.

None of the essential parts of African philosophy of existence impedes individual freedom in practical terms though some extant interpretations have argued in that direction. Such conclusion is obviously a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of thorny issues surrounding the African conception of person. Beginning with religion, most religions in Africa permits and encourages individuals to take spiritual actions in making life worthwhile. This is the freedom to worship and offer sacrifices to gods either to better a good destiny or change a bad destiny to good. The emphasis many African communities places on good virtues and sound moral in private and public life is a testimonial that African culture supports freedom of the individual to take actions that will positively affect their existence. This is the freedom of the individual to nurture his or her character. There are many more illustrations that can be used in this regard. Like Sartre, African philosophy of human existence is also a theory of action. It's to a greater extent guarantees the freedom of the individual to take positive actions in the process of making existence a worthwhile experience. However, there are areas like gender discrimination that impede the freedom of the female folks to transcend self that many African culture must change.

Implications of Sartre's Existential freedom for Human Existence in Africa

Implications for Existential Issues in Africa

There is the need to emphasize that Africa also struggles with existential issues addressed by Sartre and other existentialists. Some of these issues are even reflected in African proverbs and folktales. The point of relevance of existentialism to the African context is also that Africa still struggles with existential issues of high rate of poverty, environmental degradation, corrupt leadership, terrible infrastructural facilities and social amenities just to mention but a few. These are issues that have negatively impacted on humanity in Africa.

Sartre's existentialism has implications for many existential challenges facing African countries. First, it implies that Africa must rise above the myriads of problems confronting her. African problems are surmountable because they are human problems essentially. This is more so in the light of the fact that some other parts of the world have overcome similar problems in the past. Crucial to the philosophy of Sartre are the issues of choice and responsibility. Africans must consciously choose to develop, improve leadership, commit to sincere restructuring, value democracy and honestly fight corruption in order to positively change the narrative of poor human existence. Kolawole opines that, "the more we blame our problems, mistakes, and failures on witches and wizards, or even other human agents, we shall never accept the challenge to overcome them."²³ Making productive choices and taking responsibility for our choices is crucial to the achievement of better human condition in Africa.

Implications for Authentic Human Existence in Africa

This study also raises the challenge of authentic human existence in most parts of Africa. Authentic human existence rejects the treatment of man as an object. It stresses the need for man not to be alienated from his true self as a result of mechanical and conventional life style. It has implications for the ability of the individual to make his own decision, manifest his own uniqueness and interrelate with other human beings.²⁴ In addition, authentic self has potentiality for individual action, orientation towards the future, positive outlook to life and self-actualization.²⁵

It is important for African nations to rise up against the challenge of inauthentic living, against everything that dehumanizes humanity and turns humans to objects. Kolawole asserts that "the history of the world has shown uncountable evidence of the indomitable spirit of man, and his ability to rise above tragedies and calamities. The truth is that the Lord God Almighty has given us more than enough resources to cope with the challenges of life"²⁶. Africa can surely rise above inauthentic living. Sartre's existential project therefore, challenges Africa to make intentional decisions or choices to confront the

problems that confront her and also institutionalize authentic living among her teeming population. This will mean building the capacity of Africans for optimistic life, resilience, and hope. The need for the deployment of human rational capacity in the struggle for authentic life is also very important, and since rationality is an important endowment of God to man²⁷, it is God's desire that man will meaningfully use it to promote and improve his environment and existence. This however challenges African philosophers to rise up to the responsibility of providing the platform for effective and efficient use of human rationality, the practice and use of reason in a manner that positively impacts on human existence.

Implications for comprehensive understanding and Promotion of African Culture and Philosophy

This study further makes it imperative for Africans to have a thorough and comprehensive understanding of their culture. This is because culture propels both knowledge and philosophy. A weak understanding of African culture by her people has not only led to poor knowledge of what Africa is but has also limited the gains that can come to the people through it. It is also true that no correct African philosophy can be argued without a good understanding of culture. This has not only portrayed the continent in bad light but has also limited the benefit that can be tapped from culture for the purpose of attaining good human condition. The epistemological danger of a bad understanding of a people's culture is a weak philosophy. This in turn retards development. The above argument implies that Africans must consciously promote their culture especially those that are critical to human development.

Implications for African Solutions for African Challenges

Sartre's existentialism has implication for Africa to look inward in addressing her numerous problems. She must look within for solution to her challenges. While Africa should be open to help she may get from outside, she is the one who can solve her problems. Africa must therefore, take her destiny in her hands and take practical steps to come out of her present state. Africa is surely not destined for bad human condition, but she must be willing to activate her productive choices if she must overcome her present predicaments. Africans must begin to have a new orientation and determination to change and do things differently from how they have been done before. Africa is a continent of great potentials, and she must look to the multitudinal possibilities that are available to her. The continent needs to harness her abundant human and natural resources for the benefits of her people. This is why good and competent leadership is imperative in Africa. We need leaders who will help the continent overcome her challenges and facilitate the emergence of a new Africa. There should be an end to emperialistic thinking of looking for solutions for African problems from Europe, America and also recently Asia.

Implications for Individual Needs and Development

This study also charges Africa to focus on individuals, responding to their yearnings and aspirations, meeting their needs and addressing their problems. African countries must have people-oriented policies and embark more on projects that will empower the people, improve quality of life and standard of living and deliver people from illiteracy, poverty and disease. African people must also have active engagement with life as they must resolve to live with great sense of meaning and purpose in spite of their problems and challenges.

It is important for the continent to develop greater value for human life. The life of the average African seems not to matter much. Life expectancy is relatively shorter and the African society is becoming increasingly unsafe. Many lives have been lost in Nigeria to Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen attacks, banditry and militancy. Africa must show greater concern for her people and do her utmost to preserve life and improve its quality.

Implications for Social Critique of the African Culture and Philosophy

It is crucial to add that Sartre's existentialism and African ontology have implications for a social critique of African culture and philosophy. It charges Africa to evaluate her cultural value system, retain areas that promote qualitative human existence and reject those that impede development. There are valuable aspects of Western culture and existentialism that can be imbibed. For example, African communal system needs to maintain a balance between the desire to live as a member of the society and the necessity to live a self-actualized life. We must affirm our communal living with its advantages but be willing to reassess it when it impedes optimal realization of the individual.

More importantly, Africa must make a productive use of her communal system. Kanu opines that one of the greatest virtues of the African "we philosophy" is that it facilitates sense of belongingness among African people.²⁸ This sense of belongingness must have developmental effects on the people. Belongingness without development is of no benefit to the people. It is necessary to look at the political, economic and social benefits of belongingness. The political implication is that citizens should be given a sense of belonging in the political arena through participatory democracy, free, fair and credible elections among others. Economically, people must not be robbed of their economic rights of productive employment, enabling environment for running personal business and so on.

A social critique of African concept of freedom exposes cultural limitations placed on the women folks. There are aspects of the African culture that limit the freedom and choices available to the female gender. A vivid example is the treatment meted out to widows in some parts of Africa. In widowhood, women unlike their male counterparts are subjected

to all forms of social aberrations and in-human treatments, which violate their right to dignity, personal liberty, right to freedom of thought and so on. It is, therefore, important for Africans to jettison these aspects of the culture because of its negative effects on the quality of human existence.

Implications for the Promotion of Existential Virtues in African Culture and Philosophy

This study has also brought out the need for Africa to draw from her culture and philosophy, virtues that promote human condition. Many of these virtues have been lost to Westernization. Such virtues include concepts that relate to human character like *Omoluabi*, *Iwapele*, and *Iwarere*. We also have others like hardwork, diligence, truthfulness, sincerity, responsibility, and solidarity. These virtues used to define what a respected individual is in most parts of Africa. But Westernization has substantially eroded them from our daily living. People are hardly celebrated today because of these virtues but for other things like ill-gotten wealth and political power gained through fraudulent means. Promoting these virtues will help the continent overcome moral decadence and extreme self-centeredness that have hindered considerable development in the continent.

Conclusion

The heart of the paper is that Sartre's existentialism can be a template that can be studied, critique and also contextualized in projecting a better human existence in Africa. This was done by discussing core issues in Sartre and African existentialism. Crucial implications in terms of practical lessons were drawn for better human development and existence. There is no doubt that African existentialism is apt and good but not sufficient to give man the best of the world possible. The need therefore, for a social critique evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses in order to isolate themes that can be leant from other cultures and in this regard, Western culture.

This study also points scholar's attention to the need for better philosophical analysis of African culture. There is no doubt that there are areas of African culture and philosophy that are imperative for human development. African Scholars must be willing to dig deep into them in an analytical manner in order to avoid hasty conclusions which are unprofitable and dangerous. It is without doubt that African morality, religiosity, and communality are desirable for better human condition.

Endnotes

- ¹John Gerassi, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Hated Conscience of his century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 44.
- ²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber, John Kauka (ed) (New Haven: Yale University, press, 2007), 48.
- ³*Ibid*, 23 & 33.
- ⁴Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. (London: Methuen and co., 1972), 439.
- ⁵Ian Certer, "Positive and Negative Liberty" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty.positive.negative> Accessed May 8, 2020.
- ⁶Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 440.
- ⁷Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*. (Harmond Sowerth: Penguin Modern Classics, 1965), 223.
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