

The Human Condition in Nigeria: An Existentialist Discourse

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Abstract

This paper is on the key ideas and perspectives of major existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir and a few others on the attitudinal dispositions and coping mechanisms for survival in a very disabling environment like Nigeria. The paper is coming on the heels of the negative narratives of hopelessness among majority of Nigerians in the instance of poor governance, consequent near statelessness, very biting economy and falling standard of living in Nigeria. The aim of the paper is to offer an alternative narrative of hope amidst hopelessness by showing Nigerians that, in the throes of the life choking-conditions as it is in the country presently, one can wade through the difficult moment following the existentialists' paradigm for survival as outlined here. The paper adopts expository method of the frustrations and hopelessness in Nigeria viz-a-viz the basic doctrines of survival of major existentialist philosophers. The major thesis put forward here is that adopting the existentialists' philosophy of human existence in the world in the context of the current existential conditions in Nigeria will offer life-enhancing insights on how to be psychologically moored for the moment.

Keywords: Existentialism, Existential, Nigeria, Survival, Attitude

Introduction:

For some decades now, almost since Nigeria as a country got her independence in 1960, or more properly since the end of the civil war in 1970, the Nigerian existential conditions – politically, economically, institutionally and otherwise have been moving from bad to worse leaving many Nigerians in a toxic abyss of fear, poverty, anger, hopelessness and shame. The indices of worsening conditions in Nigeria

include but not limited to lack of governance and apparent statelessness, corruption, lack of basic amenities and enabling institutions, unemployment and underemployment, geometric inflation in a collapsed economy, skyrocketing insecurity, loss of values, desperation and consequent emergency situation that Nigerian residents find themselves presently.

As a consequence, any interaction with an average Nigerian reveals evident hopelessness, fear and feelings of emptiness, complete confusion, feelings of magnitude of predicament; existential weakness and general depression. On the deleterious effect that depression has on people, a foremost existentialist philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard wrote that depression “robs us of the courage to command, the courage to obey, the power to act, the confidence to hope.”¹ As a consequence of the above, in the words of the famous black existentialist, Franz Fanon, which he borrowed from Aime Cesaire, contextually read “... millions of men (Nigerians) have been skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complex, trepidation, servility, despair and abasement.”²

There have been several advocacies on how Nigerians can pull through the present situation One has been resort to religion leading to an exponential growth of what an author calls miracle Christianity which is:

The brand of Christianity that departs with the assumption that Christianity provides answers to all human quests especially the earthly ones, including material prosperity, health, longevity, security from all temporal and spiritual enemies etc. In a word, it is like an attempt to co-opt the Christian faith to solve as quickly as

^{1.} Gordon Marino, *The Existentialist Survival Guide: How to live Authentically in an Inauthentic Age*. (New York: Harper One, 2018), 58.

^{2.} Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans by Charles Lam Markmann, (London: Pluto Publication, 1986), 9

possible and without the usual natural processes or means, all conceivable problems of the world.³

Another common advocacy is the positive thinking advocacy that encourages people to maintain a positive mindset as the needed attitude to surmount the challenges on ground. Some have also advocated for collective patriotism for Nigeria as the way for rebirth of a society that corresponds to the needs of man; a society that will help the citizens to continually give birth to themselves. But these advocacies have not helped matters as most Nigerians cannot yet function properly following the disabling situations and hopelessness, hence the need for an existentialist approach for survival which this paper offers.

The aim of this paper is primarily an intensive engagement with the Nigerian conditions which, can best be described, taking a cue from Eric Fromm, as an insane or hopeless society. For Fromm,

an insane society is that in which men become incapable of experiencing themselves as active, and are unable to think and take decisions because of the disabling conditions. In such society, man loses his sense of self, becomes dependent on approval, tends to conform and feels insecure, dissatisfied, bored and anxious and spends most of his energy in the attempt to compensate for or just to cover up his anxiety. His intelligence is excellent but his reason deteriorates.⁴

Secondly, against the backdrop of the above situation in Nigeria, the paper explores the existentialist options for survival for Nigerians in the current difficult situations in the country. The paper does not, however, promise a step-by-step guide for dealing with the frustrations in Nigeria

³. Joseph Oguejiofor, *African Theologians and the Challenge of Miracle Christianity*. (Enugu: Snaap Press), 19

⁴. A. Chaudhuri, *Man and Society in Eric Fromm*, (New Delhi, Ajanta Publication, 1991), 29-30

or short list of behaviours but it does generally show the way forward on how one can rediscover oneself, learn from the crushing situation, keep one's moral and spiritual bearings when it feels as though one is going under.

The paper proceeds from the meaning, background and perspectives of the ever-sprawling term existentialism and continued with how existentialists understand human existence in the world with a contextual relevance to the current existential conditions in Nigeria. This is followed by an exposition of the frustrations and hopelessness in Nigeria and why the existentialists' perspectives are important in opening the door to different, richer and more thoughtful ways of survival. What follows is an excursus on existentialism, the background of this reflection.

Existentialism: Meaning and Background

Existentialism is a philosophy of life that tries to answer in different ways the questions that men are inclined to ask about their everyday life: their experiences, challenges, fears, feelings of meaninglessness, disappointments and failures, successes, risks, in decision making, frustrations in human relationships and so on. It is about those thoughts that occupy us each time we honestly ask questions about our life or our existence in the world.⁵

Historically, the underlying theory of existentialism goes back to a brilliant Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard and his war against rational philosophy and theology and preference for passionate engagement with life. Even though during his life time and many years afterwards, his works were hardly known, but near the

⁵. Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 302.

beginning of the 20th century, his works were translated into German, French, English and other languages as the movement spread. Existentialism became very fashionable in Europe, America and the rest of the world in the 20th century following the aftermath of:

The horrible experience of the Nazi dictatorship during the Second World War, the present economic and social turmoil throughout much of the civilized world, the frightening apocalyptic aspects that emerged during the Cold War, the fear of atomic annihilation, the fear of planetary environmental disasters and the chaotic developments in various parts of the world after the Cold War, have left many people with a sense that their views and values are meaningless. The world in which they, and we ourselves, have to live no longer seems to many to be susceptible to rational examination. So, instead, they have concluded that only arbitrary beliefs seem able to give us key to live in the face of an unintelligible universe.⁶

Notable existentialists after Kierkegaard who fanned the embers of existentialism into flame in the 20th century and even before in a rough chronological order include, but not limited to the following: Frederick Nietzsche, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Miguel de Unamuno, Karl Jaspers, Fyodor, Dostoevsky, Simone de Beauvoir, Nicholas Berdyaev, Franz Fanon, Franz Kafka and so on, all of whom have critically analysed the human existential crises and proffered their own solutions as shall be seen. They generally believe that philosophy should begin and concentrate on man's existential crisis.

⁶. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy Made* 316

⁷. Gordon Marino, *Existentialist*, 7

Existential Crisis as the Focus of Existentialism

Though without a body of unifying creedal convictions yet if there was one judgement that unite existentialists, it was an antipathy towards academic philosophy.⁷ They reject a re-rehearsal of intellectual history; construction of castles of abstractions by academics that most times have no direct bearing on people's lives. Against building mere ideological systems, existentialism encourages dealing with our experiences now; with the hurly burly of real life. It encourages fierce engagement with life, creativity and personal initiative. The existentialists' position is that when it comes to the essentials in life, we may have all the knowledge but in the face of what to do, what we know and all the logic behind it tend to vanish as passion takes over. More than anything, existentialists argue that what is required is passionate relationship to our ideas and conscious dealing with our existential crisis. According to Skye C. Cleary in "How to Cope with an Existential Crisis" diagnosing existential crisis is not a rocket science. Anyone who can largely identify with what follows in the quote below is a possible victim of existential crisis:

Are you exhausted from rushing through life? Those things that use to be meaningful now seem vacuous as there is no passion for life again. If you feel that pleasures are short lived and ultimately disappointing, that your life is series of fragments punctuated with occasional ecstasies that flare up and then, like a firework, fade into darkness and despair? Perhaps you are lonely or pine for past love or you feel empty and lost in the world or nauseous and sleep-deprived. Maybe you are still looking for a reason to live or you have too many confused reasons or you have forgotten what your reasons are.... sometimes the questions 'why am I here'? and 'what's it all about' haunt you gently like a soft wingbeat with barely a whisper, but sometimes they can feel as if they are asphyxiating your entire being. Then you have an existential

crisis.⁸

No doubt, many Nigerians lives are identifiable with the above hence they are possible victims of existential crises. Many are increasingly experiencing meaninglessness, and frustration; losing faith and hope in life; find it difficult to concentrate; no longer find meaning in their normal daily engagements like going to school, doing their job and so on, being eaten up with a deep sense of ennui.

Anyone can run a personal check of existential crises with what follows below: If you cannot stay on a project or maintain a particular relationship for long without feeling like quitting and getting on a new one, if you keep feeling like changing your present location without any substantial reason; or feeling that getting a new job or new relationships will give you a fresh lease of life, if thoughts of suicide sometimes cross your mind, if you are angry against and entertain revolutionary feelings against the present crop of leadership in Nigeria, if the whole Nigerian environment irks you and a general feeling of numbness envelopes you and as a result you tend to live in state of immediacy and instant gratification, constantly overindulging in such pleasures as social media scrolling, shopping, television, busyness, alcohol, drugs, serial romancing and sometimes casual sex then you have an existentialist crisis and needs existentialist advice. Gordon Marino summarizes the human condition that existentialists are dealing with this way:

Soren Kierkegaard, Frederick Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre and other towering figures of existentialism grasped that human beings are, at heart, moody creatures, susceptible to an array of psychological setbacks, crises of faith, flights of fancy and other emotional ups and down. Rather than understanding moods – good and bad alike – afflictions to be

⁸ Skye C. Cleary, “How to Cope with an Existential Crisis” Psyche Newsletter, accessed on 11th March 2022 <https://psyche.co/guides/how>,

treated with pharmaceuticals, this swashbuckling group of thinkers known as existentialists believe that such feelings not only offer enduring lessons about living a life of integrity but also help discern an inner spark that can inspire spiritual development and personal transformation.⁹

However, to have a working grasp of the concept of existentialism, what Paul Badey and Jones Jaja in “Existentialism: A Philosophy Against Poverty Alleviation” give us may help bring the concept closer in the context of this discourse. For them:

Existentialism is the philosophy of existence. (sic). It is the philosophy of human freedom. By existence we mean the attempt of one to fulfil oneself at the highest level of development. Technically it is “possibility.” It is against all form of dehumanization of man which leads to alienation, pauperization, oppression of man that leads to poverty and denial of nobility; and seeks to re-establish “authentic values” of human existence....existentialism is also an attitude; a reflection on the existentialist experience directed towards human existence. Thus, the starting point of philosophy is the concrete situation of man in the world.¹⁰

Existentialists have so much concern for human suffering, abuse, discomfoting conditions, and all forms of dehumanization that threaten human happiness, joy and fulfilment. These are very much evident in the works – *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from Underground* and *Brothers of Kamazov* - of the Russian novelist and writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky, most of whose works focus on poverty, human difficulty and suffering.¹¹

⁹. Gordon Marino, *Existentialist Survival*, inside back cover

¹⁰. Paul Badey and Jones Jaja “Existentialism: A Philosophy Against Poverty Alleviation” Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Sustainable Development, Vol.7, No 7, July 26-29, 2011, Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

¹¹. Hassan Bin Zubair, “Analysing the Philosophical Features of Existential Nihilism and Emerging Topographies in Fyodor Dostoyevsky Fiction,” *International Research In English* accessed 23rd March, 2022, www.english.io

Existentialism also inspires faith in oneself as found in the thoughts of Frederick Nietzsche; a passionate courage to live a fulfilled life as seen in the thoughts of Kierkegaard; freedom and responsibility as in Jean Paul Sartre, proper existential dispositions as in Karl Jaspers and tries to provide answers to questions of apparent meaninglessness of life as seen in Albert Camus in his singular existentialist treatise *The Myth of Sisyphus* where he exclaims:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem....judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards.¹²

Existentialists are perennially concerned with questions about the very meaning of life, questions that tend to come to the fore when we have become unmoored from our everyday anchorage such that like “Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky and other existentialist thinkers who faced life unblinkered and were nevertheless able to lead authentic lives and keep their hearts intact,”¹³ we can find our anchor. What follows shortly is the existentialist picture of human existence in the world, its trappings in the present Nigerian situation and then a synchronization of the views of some existentialists on how to navigate through the very horrible Nigerian situation.

Existentialists' View of Human Existence in the World

For the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger, man, which he technically calls Dasein, is a 'being-in-the-world' meaning that man has an inseparable attachment with the world. Man is trapped in existence in the world. Heidegger's description of Dasein's everydayness makes clear

^{12.} www.english.jo

^{13.} www.english.jo

the totality of human existence, including our moods, our capacity for authentic individuality and our full range of involvements with the world and with others showing that we are thrown into a 'careless' world within which we have to create our own care.¹⁴ It is in the world that man can discover and realize their potentials, possibilities, socio-cultural finitudes, get educated, receive training, work and make meaning out of life. But the world (in this context Nigeria), according to Frederick Nietzsche, one of the pioneers of existentialism, which man (Nigerians) lives in is a completely meaningless or arbitrary world where there are no principles or guides that we can use for ordering or comprehending events of our lives except the ones individuals (Nigerians) create for themselves.¹⁵ And individuals (Nigerians) must create their own meaning since they cannot escape having to deal with 'existence' (having to live and survive in Nigeria) and make sense out of it all. For most existentialist, all that we can tell is that we find ourselves in this world, (Nigeria) and in this world we are confronted with utter arbitrariness. This is called facticity. Another issue with the world we find ourselves, as Kierkegaard observed is that it alienates individuals from true personal, passionate and subjective existence with its over emphasis on objectivity and results, making it difficult for them to truly exist as individuals. When we realize the unintelligibility of the world and our inability to withdraw from contact with it and our need for finding some principle of order or intelligibility we are then ready for the existentialist message.

However, man's "most advantageous advantage"¹⁶ in the world, to use the poetic expression of Fyodor Dostoyevsky is man's freedom in the world. Freedom is also at the centre of the ontology of man in the

¹⁴. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 45

¹⁵. David Allison, (ed), *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, (Cambridge, Mass MIT Press, 1985), 101

¹⁶. Bourgeois PL, "Dostoyevsky and Existentialism: An Experiment in Hermeneutics", *Journal of Thought*, 15, no. 2, 29-37. urnal.net. 2019) 9.

philosophy of the acclaimed champion of existentialism Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre's notion of freedom and its concomitant sense of personal responsibility is expressed in the following words. "In the end one is always responsible for what is made of one." Even though, against the background of the influences of the philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Husserl and Heidegger, "Sartre acknowledged the many constraints and obstacles to human freedom, yet he insisted, following Descartes, that human consciousness is free. One is never free of one's 'situation' Sartre tells us, though one is always free to deny it ("negate") that situation and try to change it. To be human, to be conscious, is to be free to imagine, free to choose, and responsible for one's lot in life."¹⁷ Suffering Nigerians are not free of the Nigerian situation, but they are free to 'negate' it. That is to change it, at least as individuals. This is also true in Simone de Beauvoirs, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, where she asserts that man is fundamentally free, a freedom that comes from 'nothingness' which is an essential aspect of his ability to be self-aware. De Beauvoir also acknowledges that "man is also a thing, a "facticity". The ambiguity is that each of us is subject and object of freedom and facticity."¹⁸ Before Sartre and other later freedom proponents, another thinker, Nicholas Berdyaev had already made freedom the metaphysical ultimate of human existence. He refers to freedom as the *Ungrund*, that is the non-being prior to being from which being arises. The *Ungrund* is not anything and our idea of it is not concept.¹⁹ The problem to solve is how Nigerians that have been trapped in an arbitrary situation like Nigeria, can through the exercise of their freedom as individuals create or recreate themselves anew and find meaning in their existence in Nigeria. We will

¹⁷. Robert Audi, (Gen. Ed), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 812

¹⁸. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans, Bernard Frechtman, (New Delhi: Citadel Press, 1948), 56

¹⁹. Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, trans R.M. French, (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 105 -111.

get closer to the way forward after a better understanding of the frustrating Nigerian situation which will reveal the existentialist touch or approach required to pull through.

The Existential Challenges of the Nigerian Society

All things considered, the average Nigerian 'world' is a good example of a meaningless frustrating existence as it is rife with many indices that and make one's self-realization difficult and trigger existential crisis: bad governance, bad economy, unemployment and under employment and consequent high level of poverty and hunger in the land, dehumanization, sense of alienation to mention but a few.

Morally or value wise Nigeria stinks. Money is the chief value and the key to everything; dignity of labour is dying, work ethics is gasping. Falsehood receives the loudest accolade and truth a deafening hiss. Guns replace votes. Fiat supplants law. Nepotism replaces merit and ultimately 'having' takes the places of 'being', to use the expression of that French Catholic thinker Gabriel Marcel. Although, to the rich and ruling class, everything may be moving fine but to the suffering residents of the country, Nigerian environment as it is now is stifling. In the words of Obiora F. Ike Nigeria Society is:

sick unto death in an “intensive hospital care unit.” Stretched out in a heap is Nigeria with a tremendous stomach, an enormous hip, two swollen shoulder, and two big tubes of drips precariously hanging over her. She was abandoned to languish and die. There wasn't a single nurse there to arrest the precariously suspended tubes fast sliding down the poles.²⁰

However, to be more direct and name the problems of Nigeria pointedly,

²⁰ Obiora Ike, “This is Nigeria” *Catholic Social Teaching en Route Africa*, (Enugu: Snaap, 2003), 47

first, politically, Nigeria has been bereft of caring and dedicated leaders to inspire hope, purpose and provide life enablers for the citizens to thrive. If according to Warren Bennis, leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality or leadership is influence as John Maxwell puts it, then we don't have leaders in Nigeria.²¹ The citizens thus are completely uninspired to deal with every aspect of real life, reasonably and responsibly. Since responsible existence are more or less the products of enabling environment the absence of those enablers tears down social fabric and breeds irresponsible citizenry all of which ultimately leads to what Bernard Lonergan calls “general bias or distortion.”²²

Secondly, consequent upon poor leadership base, Nigeria lacks strong social institutions or what macro economists call intangible wealth like stable economy, good banking system, reliable insurance policies, functional health system, pragmatic education, active security agencies, steady power supply, good infrastructure to mention but a few. In consequence of the lack of this intangible wealth that usually serve as spring board or social capital or as launching pad for citizens self-realization, most Nigerians are frustrated and dissatisfied within themselves to pursue existential aspirations and struggles.

Thirdly as the poverty capital of the world, the very bad Nigerian economy to say the least, is existentially sapping, hacks at the citizens' peace of mind and composure to engage in creative ideas. The September, 2021 release of Financial Derivatives Company which stated that Nigeria has maintained its position as the poverty capital of the world with 93.9 million persons living below poverty line²³ says it all. As

^{21.} John Maxwell, *Leadership Principles*, (New York: Haper & Row, 2015),. 88

^{22.} Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1995), 81

a consequence, there is increase in crime as citizens think more on how to manipulate the available scarce resources to their advantage. There is also anger, bitterness and rancor, loss of self-worth, decency, politeness to mention but a few.

All the above result in the fourth and the worst existentially disabling condition for a soaring existence in Nigeria namely disenchanted and unreliable human relationship as an important social value. There is loss of trust and honest interaction with others and deep loss of interpersonal sincerity. This results in a clinical character malfunction or distortion in which one lacks consciousness of existential demands for social order and the implications is a dramatic introversion and aggression in practical life, regulated by incomprehensible fantasies, split motivations and impulses. The existential consequence of this is the difficulty in “the development of one's common sense of some sort to live with others.”²⁴

This was what Robert Doran means when he explains, Lonergan's general bias as a product of malfunction of psychic censor and pathological complex:²⁵ In such a society like Nigeria. “Our psychic energy can be blocked, fixed in inflexible patterns, driven by compulsion, plagued by obsessions, weighed down by general anxiety or specific fears, resistant to insight, true judgment and responsible action.”²⁶ One shows an inattentive and unintelligent approach to life and events, creating poor impressions in the society, ignores or downplays the basic norms of living, live with repressed fears, develops a tendency

²³ Nigeria: FDC – “Nigeria Still Poverty Capital of the World”, This Day, 9th September, 2021

²⁴ Cf. G. Whelan, *Redeeming History*, 194

²⁵ John Ogonnaya “Lonergan as Therapy for Confused Cultures-An African Response,” in G. Whelan, *Lonergan's Anthropology Revisited*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 258.

²⁶ Robert Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, (New York, University Press of America, 1977), 67

to be anti-social and becomes somewhat bizarre in character. J. Ogbonnaya in this light noted that: “dramatic bias incapacitates people who are so affected at the subconscious level that they are unable to generate insights requisite for progress and development.”²⁷ M. Shute explains this further when he said that “dramatic bias constitutes a weakening of the development of common sense and, accordingly, it affects the flow of acts which could recognize and promote successfully the human cooperation which produces the good of order.”²⁸

Towards an Existentialists Paradigm for Survival in the Nigeria Society

Against the background of the above existentially frustrating situations in Nigeria, the task is chart a road map for survival in Nigeria. The first is the awareness of the situation on ground: that we are trapped in existence, in an overwhelmingly arbitrary one, in this case Nigeria. Frederick Nietzsche, says you must get the full inspiration that you live in an arbitrary world, where nothing, no value, no standard exists.²⁹ Although it may sound extremist, but one's journey to self-realization in Nigeria has not begun until it becomes clear in his mind; until he convinces himself that there is no such polity like Nigeria at least in principle. Chinua Achebe would say there was a country. What this means existentially speaking is the acknowledgement of the fact that there is no government, no governance or leadership in Nigeria. The existential consequence of such awareness is that one would be ready to become one's own government so to say: chart one's own course, provide one's own road, security and ultimately create and live in one's own world and anchor one's own ship.

²⁷. Cf. J. Ogbonnaya, *Loneragan, Social Transformation, and Sustainable Human Development*, (New York: Haper and Row, 1982), 94

²⁸. Cf. M. Shute, *The Origins of Loneragan's Notion of the Dialectic of History*, (New York: Haper and Row, 1982), 14.

²⁹. F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 65

However, to overcome the consequent disillusionment, pessimism and nihilism that usually greet such new awareness, Nietzsche recommends a re-interpretation of life and the world and a discard of unquestioned acceptance of society's patterns and traditions. He insists, individuals must create their own world and the values that guide it by their life-affirming alternatives. That way they become what he (Nietzsche) calls *Übermensch*: the individual who does not rely on anything or anyone including God for his existence and survival. He takes charge of his life and is solely responsible for his actions; what Heidegger refers to as authentic existence: a decisive, somewhat stubborn disregard of prevalent culture, tradition, environment, style in honour of one's innermost honest preferences. Such individual does not wait for anything else outside himself to dictate for him what to do or what not to do. Rather he makes use of his will to decide what is good/ best for him. Since he is the king of his will, he therefore uses it in the manner that pleases him.

After successfully discarding the illusion of Nigeria, there is one more thing, according to Nietzsche, to get yourself ready to get into the fray of existence. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche, as a prophet of reformation and reconstruction, announced the death of God, calling on humanity that God is no longer a source of meaning and hence we must get off the chains of such infant-creating mindset, the mindset of 'extra-existential' hope. The message Nietzsche wants to pass is that the 'God hypothesis' and indeed all religious and metaphysical interpretations of the world and ourselves, in the light of growing scientific knowledge, are increasingly existentially untenable. While religious and God mindedness are great sources of disciplined existence but its constant invocation of miracle soon breeds existential irresponsibility. Because of this, In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche urges us to forget the slave morality of the commoners, usually generated by God and religious

consciousness and create our own morality.³⁰

In addition, having successfully disenchanted oneself from (Nigeria), and from God so to say, the next existential attitude to adopt is the mindset that you are an individual who lives his life 'alone,' an individual who must find his own truth. In his journal Kierkegaard wrote 'what I really need is to be clear about what I am to do, not what I must know... the thing is to find a truth which is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die.' Finding this truth which is an important consciousness of being alone in the world was what Kierkegaard thought could unite our existence, overcome melancholia and help an individual to become more fulfilled.

To realize that one is alone and that no hope elsewhere, no value, no standards, no one to resort to at all is followed by the dawn of the awareness or consciousness that one must 'invent' one's life. To invent one's life is to consciously, from the scratch, with nothing to build on, choose the life you want to live and very importantly bear the responsibility for the life you have chosen. That provides the anchor. Kierkegaard frequently describes human existence as an unfinished process, in which "the individual" must take responsibility for achieving an identity as a self through free choices. Such a choice is described as a leap, to highlight Kierkegaard's view that intellectual reflection alone can never motivate action. A decision to end the process of reflection is necessary and such a decision is generated by passions of inwardness of subjectivity passing through the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious stages of existence in the journey to selfhood, which for Kierkegaard is the goal of existence.

³⁰. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (Germany, Hesperides Press, 1923),32

Now with the full awareness that the world, your world is in your hands as clay is in the hands of the porter, you must unlearn the old ways of comfortable thinking in all areas of your life, for example in your economic life. As the only porter with the clay of your economy in your hands, it is in your choices and decisions to organize your experience into an economic breakthrough. To confront squarely, the existential struggle for economic survival starring you in the face, one must keep status and hollow self-esteem aside and be ready to do anything, I mean anything, of course legal, that can put food on your table.

Such is called an existential emergency attitude, an attitude of setting aside every form of protocol in order to survive 'first'. An attitude of thinking outside the box, doing whatever that is legally allowed that can make you happy and can put food on your table, such attitude births new ideas whether immediately accepted by the society or not by manifesting authentic original indigenous self-governance.

Thirdly, aware of the dearth of enabling institutions; that Nigeria stinks, one must wake up and be one's own institutions. In practice, be one's own police, one's own educator, one's own priest, one's own Other. Be careful with 'Others' and their fake institutions. Even though Martin Buber in his philosophy of dialogue and communion recommends the I-Thou relationship,³¹ but given the evidence of increasing human unreliability on ground one must also keep an eye on the I-It kind of relationship, in the sense that one should be carefully 'present' in relationships. To relate with the World as 'thou' or 'you' is to be very present and unmediated in relationships, it is to have a connection with another person with full trust. But what stares us in the face in our 'broken world' is that I-You is today a great risk.

³¹. Buber, *I and Thou*, 178

We find ourselves *hic et nunc* in a world that is broken, so says Gabriel Marcel. Although Marcel thought the Cartesian dualism neatly defined as 'inside' and 'outside' as disturbing, yet one of his observations about life and experience is that we live in a 'broken world, a world in which 'ontological exigence' is silenced by an unconscious relativism.³² Be careful as you entrust your money to the banks, your security to the police, and your future to the politicians. Do not stay in toxic relationships just to please someone or some people's interest. At the risk of the individual self-becoming an island as Marcel warned, intimate relationships with Nigerian institutions should be handled with care.

Similarly, without prejudice to Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas like Marcel and some others who advocate a consideration of the Other in the pursuit of existential project, yet as Miguel de Unamuno would suggest, we must dominate others, not in a negative way anyway but that as we incorporate other voices and opinions in our scheme, yet we must make others accept our voice. In brief, Unamuno advocates for positive dependency on the society or on others which means to respect others otherness, without never allowing them swallow our own subjectivity. In his words:

In impressing our seal and mark upon others, in acting upon our neighbours in order to dominate them, in giving ourselves to them in order that we may eternalize ourselves so far as we can. Our greatest endeavour must be to make ourselves irreplaceable, to make the theoretical... that no one else can fill the gap that will be left when we die.³³

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the very frustrating and disabling conditions in

^{32.} Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans J.E. Crawford Flitch, (New York: Dover Publications, 1921) 298-9

^{33.} Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans, Bernard Frechtman, (New York: Citadel Press, 1948,) Part 11, "Personal Freedom and Others"

Nigeria presently, the paper, from the perspective of the existentialist, set out to explore alternative narratives of survival despite the difficulties. The core of existentialism, as was observed, is that human life is like an event stage where each person born into the world, being conscious of his potentials, develops his values which determine the meaning of his life as an individual. Existentialism thus prepares individuals to respond to any cultural, religious or social situations, like it is in Nigeria now, that tend to spell meaninglessness. Existentialists do not align with any world view as such except the one being held by the existing individual who is the measure of all things, of all values, of all morality, of things that are that they are; of things that are not, that they are not. No religion, no culture, no other external agent is the measure of values or the provider of parameters. It is against that backdrop that this paper has argued that, having seen the herculean task, it is to survive in the present frustrating Nigeria, an existentialist attitude is urgently needed to build self-courage in response to the current frustrating conditions.

It thus becomes important for existing individuals to develop the mindset of truly being an individual who lives his life 'alone,' and who must find his own truth and that way invent oneself in the Nigerian society of course with the understanding that there is no government in Nigeria to hang on; that there are no leaders or standards bearer; no objective guide whatsoever, no inspiration anywhere, no rule anywhere governing our actions, except the one they create. If this consciousness is well developed, then traditional and metaphysical ways of thinking and expecting heaven and earth from government will die a natural death. Following Nietzsche, there must be a re-interpretation of life and the world and a discard of unquestioned acceptance of society's patterns and traditions. Courageous steps should be taken to confront the frustrations in Nigeria that make authentic existence difficult. Authenticity here refers to the achievement of self-transcendence by discarding the voices

of fear in order to realize oneself For De Beauvoir, “the oppressed can fulfil his freedom as a man only in revolt.”³⁴

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