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The Existentialist Philosophy of Albert Camus and Africa's Liberation

Abstract

This paper examines the practical utility of Albert Camus' existentialist philosophy, especially in the context of the contemporary effort to improve the condition of human life and existence in Africa. The paper is a departure from prevailing mindset among some scholars and people of Africa that nothing good can be derived from Camus' philosophy. In particular, the paper argues that the task of socio-political and economic transformation in today's Africa has a lot to benefit from a critical and pragmatic engagement with the existentialist philosophy of Camus. The paper maintains that the practical benefit of Camus' existentialist philosophy appears most clearly in the value it assigns to revolt/resistance, and ideals of friendship, commitment, solidarity and brotherhood to solve the cumulative problems of life. The obvious lack of all this has exasperated the human condition in modern African states.

Key Words

Camus' existentialist philosophy; Africa's liberation; human condition/existence.

Albert Camus'nun Varoluşçu Felsefesi ve Afrika'nın Özgürleşmesi

Özet

Bu yazı, özellikle Afrika'daki insani yaşam ve varoluş koşullarını iyileştirme yönündeki çağdaş çaba bağlamında, Albert Camus'nun varoluşçu felsefesinin pratik yararını inceliyor. Yazı, kimi uzmanlar ve Afrika halkı arasında, Camus'nun felsefesinden iyi hiçbir şey çıkarılamayacağı yolundaki hakim kafa yapısından bir kopuştur. Yazı, özellikle, günümüz Afrikasındaki sosyo-politik ve ekonomik dönüşümün görevinin Camus'nun varoluşçu felsefesiyle eleştirel ve pragmatik bir bağlantısından çok daha fazla yararı olduğunu kanıtlar. Yazı, Camus'nun varoluşçu felsefesinin pratik yararının, en açık şekilde, başkaldırıya/direnşe ve dostluk, bağlılık, dayanışma ve kardeşlik ideallerine yaşamın biriken problemlerini çözme görevi yüklediğinde ortaya çıkacağını öne sürer. Bütün bunların apaçık yokluğu, modern Afrika devletlerindeki insanlık durumunu öfkeli kılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Camus'nun varoluşçu felsefesi, Afrika'nın özgürleşmesi, İnsanlık durumu/insani varoluş.

Introduction

The name of French writer and thinker, Albert Camus (1913-1960) is a frightening phenomenon among some scholars, especially religious fathers/philosophers and their co-travelers. The reason for the negative assessment of Camus' philosophy can be examined from two fundamental perspectives.

First is Camus' characterization of human existence, which maintains the absurdity and meaninglessness of life. Some scholars view Camus' thought on the whole question of life as suggestive of a kind of existential naivety or pessimism which substantially complicates, horrifies, devalues, alienates and trivializes the worth or meaning of human existence.

Second is Camus' view on the question of God, which denies transcendent or supernatural realities. In other words, the existence of God and all religious teachings about creation and human life or existence are patently unacceptable to Camus. He hinges the rejection of God on the presence of unwarranted suffering and evil in the world. According to Camus, God (if he exists) cannot justify His creation and the human person is left with the responsibility of accounting for him or herself. Yet, the essential relevance of religion in the human person's psychological well-being and his or her epistemological understanding of life and reality cannot be underestimated. Religion satisfies the spiritual desire of the human person, given that the human person is made up of both material and spiritual entities. Some scholars, including Leo Tolstoy, believe that religion sheds understanding on creation and how things in this earthly world came into being. In fact, they argue that religion provides life's meaning. This means that any attempt to deny the spiritual aspect of life, as in the case of Camus' philosophy, amounts to obvious trivialization of human life and existence. Implicit in this statement is a realization that the obvious strands of atheism in Camus' existentialist philosophy seek to diminish the value of his philosophy, especially among religious people.

Africa, which is one of the seven continents of the world, inhabited by about 900 million people and composed of 53 countries is notoriously religious. This is evident in what Niyi Osundare aptly described as 'the leave-it-to God disposition'¹ among the people to the extent that every dictator in Africa, no matter how murderous, is declared 'God-chosen' by self-styled "Imams" and "Bishops". It is in this context that a substantial number of people, including political leaders, scholars, philosophers, appear not to appreciate Camus' philosophy and the need for its domestication and practical application as a social theory for progress and in Africa. The consequence of this is that little or no consideration is given to the philosophy of Camus in the task to improve human condition and existence in Africa.

The thesis of this paper lies in the argument that the task of socio-political and economic transformation in today's Africa has a lot to benefit from critical engagements with the existentialist philosophy of Camus. The practical benefit of Camus' existentialist philosophy is most evident in the value it assigns to revolt/resistance, and ideals of friendship, commitment, solidarity and brotherhood to solve the cumulative problems of life. The obvious lack of all this has exasperated the human condition in modern Africa.

The paper is, therefore, a justification of Camus' philosophy in the task of Africa's liberation. And we cannot successfully establish this without a broad understanding of Camus' existentialist philosophy.

A Review of Camus' Existentialist Philosophy

Camus' existentialist philosophy sprang from a life lived in perpetual confrontation and struggle with odds that characterized human existence, namely sickness, disease, suffering, oppression, hunger, famine, earthquakes, death, injustice and other related human predicaments and tragedies. An account of his biography reveals the fact that Camus suffered from a rare ailment (tuberculosis), experienced abject poverty and series of tumult and devastating wars and the attendant deaths, sufferings and destructions they wrought on human life. It is for this reason that S.B. John argues that Camus' personal vicissitudes played a great role in the development of his philosophical ideas and "it is this that explains the reason for the extreme nihilism and pessimism of his work."²

In effect, the phenomenon of (human) suffering is a thematic undercurrent, which runs through Camus' thought. In his novel, *The Plague*,³ Camus literally demonstrated the French suffering under German occupation during the Second World War and how the human race rebels against an absurd universe. In *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*,⁴ a book that has been described as an essential or fundamental statement of his philosophy, Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs and hopes.

Far and above all thematic issues in Camus' philosophy is a surpassing concern or an attempt to rationalize the meaning or otherwise of human life and existence. In other words, the question about the worth or otherwise of life is a most pressing issue of all questions. As Henry James puts it, it is a question about how one feels about life.⁵ For Camus, therefore, the truly philosophical problem is about judging whether life is or is not worth living. Camus captures this central idea of his philosophy in a philosophical rendition when he said:

There is but one truly philosophical problem and that is Suicide. 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.⁶

This means that the desire to know the worth or otherwise of one's life is the basis of philosophy. The consequence of this is that the daily struggles and actions of individual persons are determined by the question of whether life is meaningful or not. Camus argues that while many have died because they believe that life is not worth living, some have lost their lives in the process of preserving such lives because of their belief that life is meaningful. In this regard, Camus' existentialist philosophy is a rational attempt to refute or deny the central thesis of Neo-Platonism and other similar viewpoints which seek to affirm the existence of a transcendent sphere from which

meaning and value can be derived. Indeed, what is immediately discernible in Camus' philosophical thought is undisguised secularist denial of the eternal and any ultimate explanation for either the Cosmos as a whole or for individual human beings. He insists that there is no transcendental one and as such no ultimate unity, divine or secular, which explains all. Camus says:

That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama. But the fact of that nostalgia's existence does not imply that it is to be immediately satisfied. For if bringing the gulf that separates desire from conquest, we assert with Parmenides the reality of the One (whatever it may be) we fall into the ridiculous contradiction of a mind that asserts total unity and proves by its very assertion its own difference and the diversity it claimed to resolve. This other vicious circle is enough to stifle our hopes.⁷

Herbert Hochberg provides some insight into why Camus ontologically denies the existence of a transcendental absolute. According to him, "to accept an Absolute is to relinquish the search for an explanation since one explains in terms of something that is rationally incomprehensible".⁸ On another ground, Camus denies the Absolute One because accepting it amounts to providing a cue for the affirmation of the Christian God. Yet, he rejects God, given the existence and prevalence of evil and unwarranted suffering in the world. Camus cannot see any reconciliation between the existence of God and the existence of unwarranted suffering. He insists that it cannot be rationally comprehended how an infinitely good and all-powerful God can exist in the face of monumental evil and suffering in the world.

It is against the background of a denial of the Absolute that Camus ruminates on (human) life and existence. His views about life and existence are ominously similar to the one held by nihilist and atheist scholars and philosophers, including William Shakespeare, Arthur Schopenhauer and Jean-Paul Sartre. In its straightforward meaning, existential nihilism is associated with the belief that life is meaningless. Unlike its traditional sense, which is often discussed in terms of extreme skepticism and relativism, 20th century discourse of nihilism begins with a notion that the world is without meaning or purpose. Given this circumstance, existence itself (all action, suffering and feeling) is ultimately senseless and empty. Shakespeare eloquently summarizes a nihilist perspective when in his famous passage near the end of *Macbeth* he has Macbeth pour out his disquiets for life:

Out, brief candle! Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.⁹

Following a nihilist fashion thus explained, Camus claims that life is absurd and meaningless. Camus' philosophy is grouped under the rubric of 'existential nihilism', given his attack on systematic philosophy, his denial of absolutes, rejection of abstract concepts of any kind and rationalization of life as meaningless and absurd. He illustrates

the issue of life meaning, using the myth of Sisyphus, a Greek legend that tells of a man eternally condemned to roll a stone or a heavy boulder up a hill, only to have it roll down again. Considering the plight of Sisyphus (condemned to roll a stone up a mountain, knowing that the stone will roll down yet again), Camus concludes that Sisyphus' life is absurd and without hope. In the light of Sisyphus' plight, a snap of philosophical reflection on life endeavour would reveal that human existence is no less futile, no less absurd than that of Sisyphus.

This means that Camus portrays an image of life as a Sisyphean struggle. He thus argues that given life's absurdity, the universe is devoid of purpose and meaning, including all human endeavours or struggles so long as human beings expend all energy pushing or struggling against futility or frustration. The germane question now is: what precisely makes up the futility or frustration that renders human life and existence purposeless and absurd? According to Camus, it is the depressing existential problems of man, namely anguish, suffering, sickness, disease, death, anxiety, fear, uncertainty; all of which conspire to render human existence meaningless and opaque. From his rendering, living the absurd means a total lack of hope, a permanent rejection and a conscious dissatisfaction.¹⁰

In effect, therefore, a general understanding of Camus' philosophy is that which identifies its emphasis on absurdity and meaninglessness of the universe with an advocacy of despair. Yet, Camus' rationalization in this regard is in the contrary. According to him, living the absurd is not a license for despair, neither is it a justifiable reason for suicide. In other words, to say that life is absurd and meaningless in Camus' lexicon is not an express permission to hold or conclude that life is not worth living:

Hitherto, and it has not been wasted effort, people have played on words and pretended to believe that refusing to grant a meaning to life necessarily lead to declaring that it is not worth living.¹¹

By this Camus meant to say that whether life has to have a meaning to be lived is not the basic question, but that it will be lived the better if it has no meaning.¹² The consequence is that human life or existence consists in keeping the absurd alive and to keep it alive is above all contemplating it.¹³ In fact, Camus identified and examined three possible responses or options to the predicament of the absurd, hence life's meaninglessness.

First is the choice that if one decides that a life without some essential purpose or meaning is not worth living, one can simply choose to kill him or herself. Indeed, suicide is a commonsensical and logical response to the absurd in that what is worthless and valueless ought to be dispensed with. It is for this reason that some persons have taken to the act or 'solution' of suicide upon a realization or conviction that life is no longer worth the trouble. Apart from some practical experiences of people committing suicide over their conviction that life is worthless, the history of philosophy is replete with philosophers who hold opinions that obviously support suicide. Epicurus, the Stoics and David Hume, to mention a few, are among philosophers who variously underscore in their writings that when life becomes painful and meaningless, one could

end it up by committing suicide. Camus considers suicide the fundamental issue of philosophy. He argues “there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.”¹⁴

By this Camus meant that the individual person is always confronted by a challenge in relation to what decision to take on realizing the nothingness of life. A motley of philosophers, including Cicero, Seneca, Montaigne and Copenhagen have also variously theorized on the subject matter of suicide. Unlike these philosophers, Camus is less interested in assessing the traditional motives and justification of suicide. Some traditional motives and justifications for suicide include: avoiding a long painful and debilitating illness (terminal disease) as well as a response to personal tragedy or scandal. Camus interest in the problem of suicide is to the extent that it represents one possible response to the absurd. His verdict on suicide is unequivocal. “Suicide, according to him, is not an option. He, therefore, rejects it as a solution to the absurd, construing it as cowardly. In his words, “suicide is a repudiation.”¹⁵

Given the rejection of suicide, the second possible choice has to do with religious solutions, which put a transcendent world of solace and meaning beyond the absurd. Philosophers like Gabriel Marcel, John Hick, Douglas John Hall and other Christian existentialist philosophers have actually subscribed to the religious solution to the problem of life's meaning. But Camus construes such religious solution as “philosophical suicide”¹⁶ Again, he rejects the religious option on the ground that it is transparently evasive and fraudulent. Camus argues that to adopt a supernatural solution to the problem of the absurd (for example, through some type of mysticism or leap of faith) is to annihilate reason, which is as fatal and self-destructive as physical suicide.¹⁷ Camus believes that suicide (be it physical or philosophical) is not an authentic or valid solution to the problem of the absurd or life's meaninglessness. Simply put, Camus rejected suicide because he believes it amounts to consenting to absurdity as well as to a finality, which cancels conscious revolt and silence the voice that protests against injustice and senselessness.

The third possible choice of antidote to the problem of absurd is simply to accept and embrace the absurd and live with it in continuum. To Camus, this is the real, authentic value and morally accepted solution to the problem of absurdity and life's meaninglessness. He insists that since the absurd is unavoidable and is a defining characteristic of the human condition, the proper response to it is its full, unflinching and courageous acceptance.

The idea that the absurd should be courageously embraced is the springboard of Camus' philosophy of revolt. To Camus, revolt, not suicide, is the right protest against the absurd. Camus' philosophy of revolt is substantially underlined by an argument that to overcome the feeling of emptiness in the human heart and resist the cosmic injustice of the human condition is to commit oneself to a perpetual revolt and fighting of evil in the world. It is a commitment to revolt that really confers meaning on human life or existence. Camus puts it thus:

One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as

danger provided man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it... that revolt gives life its value.¹⁸

Explicit in this is the fact that Camus' solution to the problem of life such as evil, suffering, injustice, oppression, death, disease and totalitarianism, is substantially a revolt. But what is revolt? More technically and less metaphorically, it is a spirit of opposition against any perceived unfairness, oppression or indignity in the human condition.¹⁹ But in Camus' philosophy, the idea of revolt assumes broad connotation, even though it is consistent with the above definition. It is helpful to note that in Camus' existentialism, the idea of revolt is a companion theme to that of the absurd and to which Camus devotes an entire book entitled *The Rebel*.²⁰ While not saying that revolt is not an opposition against oppression or indignity in human condition, Camus perceives revolt substantially in the Sisyphean spirit of defiance in the face of the absurd. Implicit in Camus' notion of revolt is the fact that it far out-weighs individual gesture or an act of solitary protest. In his novel, *The Rebel*, Camus argues at length to show that an act of conscientious revolt is ultimately far more than an individual gesture or an act of solitary protest. He writes that: "the Rebel holds that there is a common good more important than his own destiny and that there are rights more important than himself".²¹

This means that the term 'revolt' can only be meaningful in the context of human solidarity, given that true revolt is performed not just for the self but in solidarity with and out of compassion for others.²² Here, Camus seeks to emphasize the importance of human friendship, fraternity, coming together to fight evil as opposed to egocentric and individualist tendencies which expressly allow for unconcerned attitudes towards the plight of others in the midst of suffering and calamity.

In all, Camus' existentialist philosophy thus seeks to advocate a platform of common fate and group consciousness to fight suffering, evil and injustice in the world. In essence, therefore, his existentialism is substantially about resistance; resisting the absurd and other evils that characterize the condition of human life and existence. It is this platform of common fate and group consciousness (culture of revolt/resistance) that is germane in today's Africa.

Africa's Liberation and The Imperative of Camus' Existentialist Philosophy

This part of the paper dwells on the practical utility that can be derived from Camus' philosophy for the onerous task of Africa's liberation. In other words, it is a question about: what element of Camus' philosophy is germane to the liberation movement in Africa? It is not contentious to assert that the problem with Africa is fundamentally that of leadership. In fact, Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian world-class novelist and academic, is among scholars who argued that the problem of Nigeria, nay Africa, is nothing but the problem of leadership. Edozie Udeze in a recent review of

Shehu Sani's *Civilian Dictators of Africa*²³ lays credence to the fact that Africa's worst worries are traceable to its leaders. Leadership consists of those who are in charge of government and have the power to allocate resources authoritatively according to certain conditions. The socio-economic and political stability as well as other aspects of societal development, substantially depend on the quality of leadership available to a society, even though it may be reasonably argued that leadership (government) cannot do it all alone. Ideally, a country or state's commitment to a vision of goodness and genuine concern for the physical, moral, spiritual, economic, and political well-being of all citizens is a measure of the quality of leadership in that country or state.

The management of socio-economic and political life in most modern African states is such that does not give room for any hope. The empiricism of this statement is evident in the glaring reality of failure of leadership in most, if not all, modern African states. For example, the leadership problem in Africa is exemplified by Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, a rich country reduced to starvation, penury and fear.²⁴ In Nigeria, the intolerable upsurge in unemployment, insecurity, kidnapping, poverty and suffering within the context of staggering oil resources (forgetting the present travail of oil price in the global market) indicates inadequate leadership. There is no difference between the hopeless economic quagmire in Nigeria and the kind we experience in most African nations. In deed, there is resemblance of the statelessness in Somalia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and the kind of anarchy in Nigeria. Shehu Sani argues that owing to their (African Leaders) nauseating attitude, Africa is a hot bed of poverty, warfare, hatred, *coup d'etat*, backwardness, civil strife and all sorts of omen that do not augur well for the people.²⁵

At the behest of leadership problem in Africa is the sit-tight syndrome which has completely brought the people to their knees. Shehu Sani argues that discontentment and avarice have indeed taken the place of love and peace in places like Uganda, where Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986; Zimbabwe, where Robert Mugabe has refused to vacate office since 1980; Libya, where Muamar Ghaddafi, the new Chairman of African Union (AU), has been in power since 1969; and in Egypt, the acclaimed home of civilization, where Hosni Mubarak has been in office since 1978.²⁶ The consequences of this for the African continent are numerous, namely: unprecedented economic and financial corruption, contrived political manipulations, electoral fraud and robbery, deprivation of the electorates from voting, state or official violence and killings; all of which have combined to rubbish the credibility of the continent, thus dashing the hope for good governance and improved human condition.

Politically, for instance, there is ample evidence to support the fact that elections in most modern African states are fraudulent. Apart from the raging crisis in Zimbabwe over the last general elections, the gale of political upheavals arising from the fraud-infested 2007 presidential election in Kenya is a sad reflection of sustained electoral manipulations going on in Africa. Nigeria is notoriously known for electoral criminality as recently exemplified by the activities of the Professor Maurice Iwu-led Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Court of competent jurisdiction in Nigeria is presently overturning some of the election results announced by Prof. Iwu. Prof. Iwu's conducted election is not the only fraudulent election in Nigeria's history. It is a fact of

history that Nigeria has never enjoyed free and fair elections in its post-colonial epoch. Sinatra O. Ojo, a Nigerian Professor of Political Science says:

Nigeria has had a chequered political history since independence distinguished mainly by inability to evolve a government that is the product of free, fair and credible election. Virtually all elections since independence- 1959, 1964/65, 1979, 1983,1993 (annulled at the Presidential stage), 1999, 2003 and 2007, were hotly contested and crisis ridden... The contradictions and crisis surrounding elections in Nigeria as a means of choosing representatives and political leaders have exposed the country's democracy to credibility questions at various times.²⁷

In fact, the pitfalls and flaws in elections in most modern African states are evidently confirmed by series of international observers' reports and litigations that have trailed the results. In today's Africa, crisis of legitimacy has deepened, given the fact that Africans who ought to be the custodians of political power are not actually the givers of it. The groups or classes that profit from existing socio-political relations in Africa are working tirelessly to continue to hold the continent hostage. This is the case in Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe and other African countries. What is evident in most African states of today is the existence of a tiny but powerful cabal masquerading as political leaders and godfathers whose business it is to work tirelessly to continue to foist on their various countries a suffocating political order. The consequence, as we have underscored elsewhere,²⁸ is that after decades of post-independence efforts to transform for the better the material and social reality of African life, Africa is still dogged with repetitive famine, unequal exchange, vast debt burden, political, social and cultural repression, civil unrest and wars, steady corruption and graft and a general collapse in the morale of the masses.

Professor Niyi Osundare, a world-class Nigerian poet and academic, poses some rhetorical questions to depict a debilitating worsening condition of human existence or life in most African states or countries:

Is it the Africa which shocked the world with the pogrom of Rwanda and Burundi, producing human skulls in prodigious figures which outnumbered the teeming fishes in Lake Victoria? Is it the Africa in which the Sierra Leonean civil war turned the country's most precious export/metal into "conflict diamonds" and left a land squirming with limbless casualties? Is it the Africa in which Stone Age warlords, armed with sophisticated modern weapons had reduced Somalia into a state of anarchic statelessness while assaulting one of the most ancient, most poetic cultures in the world? Is it the continent where a reprobate army General actively supported by selfish hegemonic forces, annulled Nigeria's freest and fairest election and installed one of the most brutal despotisms in Africa's recent history? Is it Africa with its neck growing shorter and shorter under a debt burden midwived by the IMF and the World Bank and other slave makers of modern times? Is it an Africa marked by the scars and lesions of centuries of slavery and myriad spoliations and Africa still reeling in neo-colonial fever even in a period misnamed as 'post-modern' and post-colonial'?²⁹

This means that the African continent is a place where the political and national leaderships have continued to give vent to bleakness, uncertainty and non-performance.

The intolerable existential condition, which is a logical consequence of mismanagement of common wealth and public affairs in Africa, has continued to endure largely because of the obvious lack of culture of resistance among the people. African leaders persist in their ignorable leadership style of looting public funds, commandist approach, unbridled arrogance, oppressive and authoritarian character, because they have not been effectively held to account for their actions. In other words, there is a problem of robust civil society in modern African states, which ought to provide the much-needed platform for mass revolt or resistance against unmitigated suffering, absurdity and loss of hope in Africa. Ahmed Amin Yusuf underscored the problem of civil society in most African countries when he argued that the weakness of civil society in Africa has greatly helped in the flowering of authoritarianism, "for in the strength of civil society lies the survival and development of democracy".³⁰

The incontrovertible fact is that the general intolerable human condition in Africa has been exasperated by poverty of culture of resistance and revolt. For example, the Zairean people did not bring down the wall when Joseph Mobutu Sese Seku stole about 8 billion dollars from the country's common wealth. Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe just moved into a 6 million dollar Villa in Harare, at the expense of his countrymen and women who are facing famine. What happened? Nothing. Nigerian leaders, at all levels, have continued to stash away billions of dollars with little or no resistance from the people. A substantial number of the immediate past government officials in Nigeria, including Ministers, Board chairmen, state Governors, local government chairmen were arrested and taken to the Court of law for various offences bordering on fraud, theft and money laundering running into billions of naira. In finality, what happened? They are not only freed but are the ones calling the shot in the country's political space. In Nigeria, it is like it pays to steal government's money. In fact, the African scenario is exemplified by a horrible situation in Nigeria, where political or military leaders engage in looting spree and lord it over the citizens through siphoning of public funds, embezzlement, fragrant violation of human rights, oppressive laws or legislations, political repression, oppression, robbery and so on, with little or no protest or resistance.

With a rising incidence of injustice, political instability, endemic poverty, excruciating pains of civil and military misrule, uncritical embrace of (western) science and technology and undue focus and attention on the development of "whole" (state) at the expense of concrete individual personality, the African continent is ripe for a robust existentialist philosophy like that of Camus. The absence of a robust civil society and, by extension, culture of revolt or resistance in most African countries underscores the desirability of Camus' existentialist philosophy. Camus' philosophy places high value on human worth and continued survival and existence, despite a portrayal of life as that which is filled with suffering, contradictions, injustice, brutal flaws and absurdities with hardly a grain of hope. Life, he says, will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. By his philosophy, Camus can be construed as an apostle of freedom, justice, humanity, group survival and true revolt. True revolt, he says, is performed not for the self but in solidarity with and out of compassion for others. His philosophy is, therefore, antithetical to egoism, individualism and aloofness that are characteristics of modern

African states. Given that his existentialism is synonymous with justice, freedom, humanity, dignity, respect for personhood and resistance to tyranny, his kind of existentialist philosophy cannot be more timely and relevant, especially to African situations where suffering or absurdities are intense and ubiquitous.

Conclusion:

We have in the course of this paper argued for the need to domesticate the existentialist philosophy of Camus in the task of improving the value and condition of human life or existence in Africa. This paper underscores the fact that the debilitating human condition in Africa is an invitation to a radical existentialist philosophy like that of Camus. The paper is of the opinion that groups or classes that profit from existing socio-political and economic relations persist because of their class or group interests, that the existing order has no alternative. This is true under the present existential scenario in Africa. Whereas there is little or nothing to gloat about the present human condition in Africa, a tiny but powerful cabal masquerading as political leaders and godfathers are working tirelessly to continue to foist on Africa the existing suffocating human condition. We have argued that Africa has persisted in the throes of human indignity because of lack of culture of resistance or revolt, especially among the populace.

All said, the paper argued that for Africa to experience the desired human condition or existence, there is the urgent need to rescue the continent from bad leadership. Following Camus' philosophy, this challenge compels toilers, the youths, adults and all other patriots to embrace the culture of resistance and revolt. This is what Professor Omotoye Olorode rightly meant when he emphasized the need for patriotic Nigerians to return to 'the tradition of popular struggle and the politics of liberation.'³¹ The conclusion is that the future of Africa's survival squarely hangs on the extent to which Africans can embrace the spirit of resistance or revolt as exemplified by Camus' existentialist philosophy.

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Ojo, S.O.J. 2008 *Promise and Performance of Democracy in Nigeria: Of Irony and Fictiveness*, 32nd Inaugural lecture of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, Benin City: Imprint Services, pp 22-23

28. See Igbafen, M.L 2003 *Basic Issues and Theories in Philosophy of Development*, Ekpoma, Nigeria: Inno Press (republished by Luosem Publishing House Benin City, in 2005) p.50.

29. Osundare, N. *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* p. 1.

Yusuf, A.A. 1994 "Democracy in Africa: Problems and Prospects" in Omo Omoruyi, Dirk Brg-Schollosser, Adesina Sambo and Ada Okwuosa (eds) *Democratisation in Africa African Perspectives* Vol. Two. Benin City: Hima & Hima Ltd. p. 258.

The import of this statement can be understood after a thorough perusal of Olorode, O. 2006 *Nigeria: Deepening Crisis and The Imperative of Popular Resistance*. Benin City: Ambik Pre