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SARTREAN HUMANISM AS AN IMPERATIVE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURAL IDEALS IN AFRICA

Abstract. The existential-humanistic ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre Sartre are significant because they interpret human freedom, personal responsibility, and human dignity as supreme values. Furthermore, his view of the individual as an active subject capable of determining his or her own destiny may encourage processes of social development and spiritual awakening in African states. However, insufficient attention to the existential essence of the human being in contemporary development concepts has resulted in the persistence of social inequality, dependency, and crises within society. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to reveal the philosophical significance of Sartrean humanism in the development and social transformation of Africa.

Keywords: existentialism, humanism, freedom, responsibility, transformation, human dignity.

INTRODUCTION

Africa's predicaments are many and interrelated. While some of Africa's predicaments are generated internally, others are the result of external influences. These predicaments include: misguided policies, rapid population growth, environmental degradation, civil strife and an unfavourable international economic environment. Additionally, there are the underlying basic structural problems inherent in the state of underdevelopment. Even more worrisome is the over-dependence of the continent on Western nations for aid of all kinds. Obviously, these aids have not translated into any form of qualitative or quantitative improvement in the socio-economic life of Africans. This is because development is like ambition, and like ambition, it cannot be received by a people from other peopl [Ogundowole, 1988, p.91]. It is a manifestation of human mental and physical configuration. Thus, development is like ambition, which cannot be derived from another [Okoro, 2009, p.23]. Development is about the people, who,

through their desires, ambitions, goals and projects, transform society. Despite the many problems bedevilling Africa south of the Sahara, this research considers poverty as the most worrisome, considering the abundance of human and natural resources on the continent. Ironically, Africa has the richest natural resources, yet she is poor and stagnant in terms of growth and development. In other words, despite resources, including human and material in her possession, Africa is arguably the worlds poorest continent. The poor lack the capacity to influence social process, public policy, and resources allocation. Therefore, in a society plagued by poverty, little can be said about sustainable development, if the problem of poverty cannot be redressed. Fundamental to this work is the use of Sartres concept of human existence to address the socio-economic problems of poverty ravaging the African continent. To Sartre, human existence denotes the act of being responsible for making authentic choices. His view is anchored on the fact that humans are naturally free to remake the world as they deem fit. These possibilities of humans would possibly result in development. In our view, this is the ability to use what is materially available to continuously improve the quality of life. It suggests also that humans ability to make meaning out of their meaningless existence is the fulcrum of existential philosophy. Thus, an understanding of the idea of human existence, as propagated by Sartre, is germane to repositioning Africans in attaining socio-economic transformation. It is on the basis of this that this research examines how Sartre's idea of human existence can accelerate the development of Africa.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in philosophical and comparative analysis. The primary focus is on Sartrean existential humanism, particularly the concepts of freedom, responsibility, and human subjectivity as developed by Jean-Paul Sartre. The material base of the research consists of classical existentialist texts, African philosophical writings, and contemporary works on cultural transformation in Africa. Secondary sources include journal articles, academic commentaries, and critical interpretations of existential ethics in postcolonial contexts. The methodological approach combines textual analysis and comparative philosophy in order to evaluate how Sartrean humanism can be reinterpreted within African cultural realities. In addition, a historical-interpretive method is employed to examine the evolution of African cultural ideals before and after colonial influence. This allows the study to identify how traditional African values—such as communalism, spirituality, and moral solidarity—have been reshaped under modern socio-political conditions. Comparative analysis is used to contrast Sartre's emphasis on radical individual freedom with African communitarian ethics, highlighting both tensions and possible complementarities in cultural transformation processes [Wiredu 1996]. Furthermore, the study employs critical discourse analysis to evaluate how development narratives in Africa often marginalize existential dimensions of human identity. Many modernization theories prioritize economic indicators while neglecting cultural and

existential agency. Sartrean humanism, however, provides a framework where individuals are seen as active creators of meaning and social reality. This perspective is essential for understanding cultural transformation not merely as structural change but as a redefinition of human existence itself [Mbiti 1969]. A comparative philosophical lens is also used to analyze the transformation of cultural ideals in Africa. While traditional African societies emphasize relational identity and collective responsibility, Sartrean existentialism foregrounds individual autonomy and moral accountability. The interaction between these two frameworks reveals both conflict and synthesis: African cultural ideals are not simply replaced but reinterpreted through existential awareness. This comparative perspective demonstrates that cultural transformation in Africa is a dynamic process shaped by both indigenous values and external philosophical influences [Sartre 1946]. In conclusion, the methodological framework of this study integrates existential philosophy, African cultural theory, and comparative analysis to explore how Sartrean humanism can function as an imperative for cultural transformation in Africa. The synthesis of materials reveals that African cultural ideals are undergoing a reconfiguration where traditional communal ethics increasingly intersect with existential notions of freedom and responsibility. This hybridization suggests a new philosophical direction for African development grounded in both human dignity and cultural authenticity.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In his book Being and Time (1962), Martin Heidegger reveals the fundamental characteristics of human being. His Dasein primarily dwells on the nature of human existence. Heideggers perspective on human existence shows that man, in reality, is confronted by certain given- the facticity of life, falleness and the mode of inauthentic life. However, all is not about human helplessness, Dasein is equally characterized by existentiality, the possibility of re-making ones existence [Heidegger, 1962, p.68]. According to Heidegger, Dasein or human is already in a given situation and circumstances. To him, factual within certain defined limits. It follows that human is a limited and finite being [Heidegger, 1962, p.236; Unah, 1996, p.65a]. Their freedom is limited by other possible choices. However, humans have the native ability to transform themselves into what they want to become, the ability to reconstitute themselves or the world as they deem fit and the ability to transcend the present state of affairs and project themselves into the future [Unah, 1996, p.67]. In addition to the facts of human existence, human life is equally, an expanse of uncharted territory of possibilities which humans actualise as they pilot their everyday life [Ogbozor, cited in Unah, p.68]. In his existential ontology, Heidegger conceives development as the achievement of authentic nationhood; whereas underdevelopment is seen as the inability of a nation to overcome confidence-crisis [1962, p.114]. Authentic selfhood is the courage to own oneself and is fundamental to development. It is the hallmark of Dasein to choose and not lose itself. This means that a human being not only can in its very being choose itself, it can also lose itself and never win

itself; or only seem to do so [Heidegger, 1962, p.68]. Any nation that is incapable of building on its factical givens (limiting factors) cannot be a sovereign nation. To him, a sovereign nation is free from external control. A nation without an ideological frame of its own to guide its social action could fall prey to a windstorm of external manipulation. Such a nation is not genuine; and thus operates in the realm of they world. As such, any country that finds it difficult to act on its own will find it difficult to confront external control. The main point is that Heidegger believes that it is by demonstrating freedom in action where a person, nation or people act as a subject rather than as an object (utensil), that one can deeply arrest the issue of inauthenticity which often contributes to the collapse of empire. Heideggers contention above fairly captures the African predicament. Given that African nations do not take full control of their land and resources, Africans can rely on Heideggers idea of authenticity derived from his notion of existential freedom. Against this backdrop, it can justly be said that an exploration of the idea of freedom has fundamental implications for African developmental aspirations. Heideggers authentic mode is, without doubt, imperative to development. However, he did not outline how it can be achieved to improve the quality of life, as this study does.

In Being and Nothingness (1966), J.P. Sartre proposes that human existence is grounded in freedom. To him, freedom is not a property, but rather the ontological foundation of human existence. Sartre says, Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of human and which forces human reality to make itself instead to be....Freedom is identical with my existence...this means that no limit to my freedom can be found except freedom itself [Sartre, 1966, pp. 29,41]. Accordingly, Sartre contends that the human person is condemned to be free" [1966, p.554], and whatever they decide to do is an exercise of this freedom. He therefore, links freedom to responsibility, when he says, freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose [Sartre, 1966, p.39]. To him, to be free is ipso facto to be responsible. Sartre states that freedom is not only a gift to humans, but also a heavy burden on them and a heavy responsibility entrusted to them. The study is of the view that the awareness of humans freedom, as advanced by Sartre, can be harnessed for development purposes in Africa. Sartre, however, never intended this in his work. This study notes that the development of any nation presupposes personal responsibility of every individual.

Jim Unah, in his Heideggers Existentialism: An Essay on Applied Ontology (1996), demonstrates that traditional philosophers annihilate man's freedom by equating him with the categories of physical objects, such as quantity, quality, space, time, and so forth. This error, according to Unah, leads to the objectification of human and it will do violence to the dignity of the human person [1996, p.49]. What this means is that human is not limited by physical objects. Hence, human is more than what he is at a given moment. Human is a self-transcending being, always creating themselves and always in the process of becoming. Humans essence is in his existence [1996, p.50]. Through their freedom, Unah argues that

an individual human being decides what they will be. When the individual thus decides what he will be, it means that the individual owns themselves or that the individual knows what it means to be themselves" [Unah, 1996, pp.100-101]. Thus, humans everywhere can through their freedom, overcome their predicaments through acts that are capable of transforming their environment. In this way, lamenting on the African past whether glorious or ignoble is a mark of inauthenticity. Humans must, through their freedom, overcome their factical given. Consequently, this work is a modest contribution to complement Unahs position that the desired socio-economic transformation of the least developed states in Africa can be overcome.

In On Being: Discourse on The Ontology of Man (2002), Jim Unah again points out that humans' activities are guided and controlled by the power of finite transcendence. To Unah, the human person is metaphysically controlled by the power of finite transcendence, that is, the power of reaching beyond, the power of transcending this being, this state of affairs, to that being, that state of affairs [Unah, 2002, p.41]. The human person, through their freedom can bring about any desired state of affairs. Human being, as he posits, is endowed with transcendental power, which they use more fundamentally, radically, in organizing both the non-physical and physical dimensions of existence [Unah, 2002, p.47]. The point here is that, humans have all it takes to address the obstacles to their developmental aspirations. Unahs position offers a suitable framework for this research. This is because this study intends to show the possibility of social transformation through human's transcendence.

At the core of Sartre's humanism is the notion of existential freedom, which posits that individuals are not defined by external circumstances but by their choices and actions [Sartre, 1947]. In the African context, this principle can empower individuals to take ownership of their destinies, challenging the narratives of victimhood often perpetuated by colonial legacies and neo-colonial practices. By fostering a sense of agency, African societies can cultivate a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, essential for economic growth and development (Nkrumah, 1965).

Ubuntu ethos as the basis for african humanism. For Bantu, the term ubuntu is significant in classifying African Humanness. Further it connotes the recognition of human qualities, which foster respectful and harmonious relationships where people identify and exhibit solidarity towards one another. [Eliseu, 2010, p.121-135]. The concept of Ubuntu is traced down in the ontological conception of the universe in the thought of many Africans. Ubuntu ethos is under reconstruction, so as to become a basis for African socio-economic, political and cultural reconstruction in postmodern Africa. In the post-modern global context, African humanism becomes a critique of liberal ethics, which exaggerates individual thoughts and freedom, without considering the community and society. The Ubuntu Ethics seeks to identify the conditions for the development of the individual and people in a society. Therefore, for African humanists, such as Julius Nyerere, the society is a process of the reciprocal relatedness of the individuals

and the community. Based on the principles of respect for human rights, harmony, love, justice, peace, freedom and unity. Indeed, Ubuntu holds that no one can realise oneself as an individual all by oneself. Therefore, the individual should be conscious of Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu which means acknowledging that one becomes more fully a person through relationships with others. There is also the Chewa saying Kalikokha Nikanyama, Tuli Tuwili Nituwanthu, which translates what is one is a bruteanimal, whatever or whoever has a neighbour is a human being [Wiredu, 2004, p.324-332]. Additionally, Alexis Kagame, on the other hand, expounds the notion of Ubuntu ethos among the Bantu of Rwanda by giving classification, remarkably: Umuntu (category of human being); Ikintu (category of thing); Ahantu (category of place and time); and Ukuntu (category of mode). From the category of Ukuntu can be derived three normative principles of human life, namely: Kuba (to be); Kubaho (to be in place and time); and Kubana (to be in relation with others). These trio make up the metaphysical foundation of Rwandan ethics. [Kamanzi, 2009, p.114]. These conceptions indicate the sense of belonging depicted from African Bantu social philosophy, metaphysics and political philosophy.

Undoubtedly, these Ubuntu sayings suggest that it is like human beings to lead a communal life of one form or another. In the same vein, Ifeanyi Menkiti, who belongs to the radical communitarian tradition, contends that it is the community which defines a person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory. For Menkiti, people do not choose to belong to the community; they must belong to one. He further portends that human beings become persons only after a process of incorporation, into this or that community". Nevertheless, moderate African communitarians like Kwame Gyekye acknowledge the role and place of individuality. That is, human beings not only belong to the community, but they are also self-expressive individuals. They position themselves as individuals within a community. Hence, the nature of a person in an African setting is amphibious, expressing aspects of community and individuality. The Individuality/self Mtu of a person, I think, entails the freedom to choose to enter into a certain community and share its ideals. Therefore, these insights, as derived from traditional African language paved the way for the sense of community, which agitated for African humanism, among African nationalists and scholars. The main focus was to put the values and dignity of an African person, as a complete human being, after colonial exploitation, oppression and inferiority complexes. Hence, the main focus was to forge an African community, with unity and solidarity in addressing European hegemony.

Action is the actualization of freedom and it carries with it the capacity "to initiate something new" whenever we initiate something different and authentic, we start to see changes, and the effect of such changes results in development. We need changes that will promote good governance and enhance the socio-economic and political development of the New States. Development is not so much of what we have, but of what we do with what we have, how we do it and how well [Ogundowole, 2004, p.92].

The goal of governance is the common good which is obtained through good leadership, those that steer the ship of the state. Good governance, therefore, is that which is inclined towards the purpose of governance, namely the provision, protection, promotion of the common good [Okeregbe, 2011, p.88]. The common good is the social and cultural capital essential for success, where there is equal respect for the freedom of all. It is what makes it possible for all to' share in the life of a society in a way that actualizes their potential both as persons and as contributing members of society [Alexander, 2004, p.xii]. Good governance should manifest in improved healthcare, provision of good roads, education, food security, internal and external relations and an improved economy. Good governance cannot be wished but cultivated through conscious efforts in humanistic training proposed in this work.

Having said that much on leadership, we do not want to lose sight of the fact we need a determinate conception of citizenship for national development. This calls for mental revolution from the slavery and poverty mentality and dependence culture in most African nations. The willingness to pursue good governance and development is to fulfill their responsibility and do the best they can to vote in good leaders. Authentic action in this regard, is a necessity and the irreducible minimum. While the performance of positive actions falls on the leaders, it believes the citizens to be responsible through the casting of votes to elect authentic statesmen. According to Vernom, in the ethic of voting, care for outcomes, is a sign of responsible citizenship [Vernom, 2001, p.46]. It is the self-consciousness for development that stimulate the people's determination not to remain as spectators in the public political space.

Attainment of development is not on general assumptions, but on concrete actions, which Arendt calls strict demonstration, rather than persuasive argumentation. Action is the only legitimate form of discourse. Development, therefore, carries with it a comprehensive, principle-based initiative, beyond the present state of affairs. However, development must be a true reflection of the needs of the environment in which we live. It is the recognition of the needs of our environment that would eventually stimulate the passion to effect positive and enduring change. This shows how action becomes a sine-qua-non for development. Arendt's concept of freedom takes care of freedom to think new thoughts, freedom to dream fresh dreams and freedom to initiate positive actions as well as freedom to view the future with optimism. The relevance of the Arendtian theory of action establishes a connection between active citizenship and effective political agency.Another strength of the Arendtian proposition is that freedom is meaningful, only when directed at the transformation of the socio-economic environment. This suggests that actions in political sphere should be visible actions geared towards development. Actions such as sponsoring politicians abroad for refresher courses, sponsoring trips for holidays are not actions entirely geared towards development. Visible actions include provision of basic infrastructures and the creation of an enabling environment for personal and societal development. The above points do not suggest that the Arendtian theory

of action is without any limitations. For example, freedom by its nature is boundless, and that could be problematic for action. The effect of actions is not predictable, and it is also subject to political whims and caprices. The consequence of action at time is beyond the control of the actor. These consequences are not only social forces unleashed by action, but result from the reaction, apart from being a response, of other actors who are capable of their own actions [D. Entreves, 1994, p.118)]. Action, in this regard, is unpredictable. In politics, it is difficult to know the consequences of certain actions. Many civil rights activists have been assassinated because of their determination to make a change in government policies. A typical example is that of Ken Saro Wiwa of Ogoniland in Nigeria when he was fighting for the rights of Ogoni minority, and many others across the continent. It is obvious that those holding political powers stifle progress and development.

The Arendtian concept of action itself is elitist and would require careful and reasoned strategy for it to be actualised. The Arendtian theory brings out the best in man. For changes is the result of desire and desire is the result of the will to change. The will to change also requires passion for it to be actualized. In this respect, development is based on the passion for vision and the magic of compassion. The magic of compassion is that it opened the heart of the sufferer to the sufferings of others, whereby it established and confirmed the natural bond between men which only the rich had lost [Arendt, 1958, p.81]. There are examples like Mahatma Gandhi of India who had a vision to help the Indians transform their image. He embarked on projects that redeemed the image of the Indian nation from their British overlords. His vision and actions created personality growth and development. Jerry Rawlings of Ghana actualized his freedom when he liberated his people from abject poverty. He turned the fate of Ghanaians from that of a beggarly state to an admirable one. These leaders have done what Arendt calls action as remembrance because they have imprinted their footprints on the sands of time. Thus far, we have shown how Arendt's theory of action is in line with good governance and civic responsibility. We have argued that actions should be purposeful and goal-oriented because development is an on-going process which could only emerge from authentic action on the part of the leaders and the citizens. We need the new type of government that by force of its constructive programmes, would reduce to the bare minimum the level of poverty, civil unrest and violence. The people of the nations will support, to the utmost, those statesmen who shall seek in this spirit to avert catastrophe and build a nation with less bitterness. Corruption, treasury looting, embezzlement of public funds, contract splitting and contract inflation, abuse of power and such likes erode the wealth of the nation and the result is under-development and backwardness.

Our arguments indicate that we need a re-orientation in terms of our economic, social, cultural and political life. Having emphasized the necessity for direct dialogues with players in industry, religious and community leaders and government in order to achieve meaningful development, we draw attention to the fact that the fundamental problem of under-development started with the mind as a

picture of inauthentic life before it moves to the problem of leadership. We therefore advocate for change in the thought pattern of Africans in freeing themselves from the fears engendered by long-established-and often violent-mythologies that most of the events in human life are caused by unseen forces. This does not allow for the freedom that the Arendtian theory of action teaches. Furthermore, contemporary African leaders also need a mental revolution in order to break away from the slavery and a victim mentality. It is slavery and victim mentality that make most African leaders to want to empty the treasury for their future. Such leaders are slaves to the charms of pleasure and selfishness. And so long as they remain under that bondage, they would one day, be faced with the vehemence of the populace. There is a new sun dawning, the sum of change and so African leaders must let the plight of the masses arouse their heart.

CONCLUSION

Sartrean humanism offers a holistic interpretation of human existence that is highly relevant for rethinking development paradigms in Africa. By emphasizing human dignity, freedom, and responsibility, it shifts attention away from purely economic indicators toward a more balanced understanding of development that includes social well-being and ethical considerations. In the context of African development, this philosophical approach encourages policymakers and stakeholders to prioritize human-centered frameworks. Such an orientation supports the integration of social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic stability, ensuring that development processes respond more effectively to the real needs of individuals and communities. Furthermore, Sartrean existentialism promotes the idea of individual agency, which can significantly contribute to fostering innovation and creativity. When individuals are empowered to act as responsible agents of change, they are more likely to develop solutions to pressing socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. This re-adaptation of Sartre's humanism also supports a shift from exploitative and dependency-based systems toward more sustainable and self-determined models of growth. It encourages African societies to recognize the importance of both collective responsibility and personal initiative in shaping their developmental trajectories.

In conclusion, integrating Sartrean humanism into African cultural and development discourse provides a strong philosophical foundation for transformation. It not only addresses immediate socio-economic challenges but also contributes to building a more just, sustainable, and human-centered future for the continent. Additionally, the incorporation of Sartrean principles into African intellectual and policy frameworks can contribute to the decolonization of development thought. By challenging externally imposed models of modernization, African societies are better positioned to construct indigenous pathways of progress that reflect their cultural realities and philosophical values. Ultimately, this study underscores that the transformation of Africa requires not only structural and economic reforms but also a deep rethinking of human

existence itself. Sartrean humanism, with its emphasis on freedom and responsibility, provides a powerful philosophical foundation for this comprehensive transformation.

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SARTR GUMANIZMI AFRIKADA MADANIY IDEALLAR TRANSFORMATSIYASI UCHUN IMPERATIV SIFATIDA

Annotatsiya. Sartrning ekzistentsial insonparvarlik g'oyalari inson erkinligi, shaxsiy mas'uliyat va inson qadr-qimmatini yuksak qadriyat sifatida talqin qilishi bilan ahamiyatlidir. Shuningdek, uning insonni o'z taqdirini o'zi belgilaydigan faol sub'ekt sifatida ko'rishi Afrika davlatlarida ijtimoiy taraqqiyot va ma'naviy uyg'onish jarayonlarini rag'batlantirishi mumkin. Biroq zamonaviy taraqqiyot kontseptsiyalarida insonning ekzistentsial mohiyatiga yetarlicha e'tibor qaratilmasligi natijasida jamiyatdagi ijtimoiy tengsizlik, qaramlik va inqiroz holatlari saqlanib qolmoqda. Shu bois ushbu maqolada Sartr gumanizmining Afrika taraqqiyoti va ijtimoiy transformatsiyasidagi falsafiy ahamiyatini ochib berish asosiy maqsad qilib qo'yiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: ekzistentsializm, gumanizm, erkinlik, mas'uliyat, transformatsiya, inson qadr-qimmati.

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САРТРОВСКИЙ ГУМАНИЗМ КАК ИМПЕРАТИВ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ КУЛЬТУРНЫХ ИДЕАЛОВ В АФРИКЕ

Аннотация. Экзистенциально-гуманистические идеи Jean-Paul Sartre Сартра имеют важное значение, поскольку интерпретируют человеческую свободу, личную ответственность и достоинство личности как высшие

ценности. Кроме того, его понимание человека как активного субъекта, самостоятельно определяющего свою судьбу, может способствовать процессам социального развития и духовного возрождения в африканских государствах. Однако недостаточное внимание к экзистенциальной сущности человека в современных концепциях развития приводит к сохранению социальных неравенств, зависимости и кризисных явлений в обществе. В связи с этим основной целью данной статьи является раскрытие философского значения гуманизма Сартра в развитии Африки и её социальной трансформации.

Ключевые слова: экзистенциализм, гуманизм, свобода, ответственность, трансформация, человеческое достоинство.

