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THE JUSTICE OF THE BEING-FOR-ITSELF AND THE NIGER DELTA PROBLEM

Ncha Gabriel BUBU Ph.D

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River, Nigeria

Thomas Micah PIMARO Jr

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

One of the problems that confronts Africans and their rulers, leaders, is the issue of injustice. Basically in Africa, the reality is that, we are still groping for and wrestling with the problem of fashioning an appropriate social system. The difficulty perhaps lies in the fact that the failed systems are products of disharmonized and crisis ridden individuals who lack justice in their internal systems. The Niger Delta problem is a fall out of this injustice, the presence of an overriding power philosophy, and the lack of an existential justice. This paper submits that this wrong philosophy can be overcome by introducing existential justice, Jean Paul Sartre existentialism, provides a framework for explaining the Niger Delta puzzle and more significantly provides a medium through which the issue can be resolved amicably and justifiably too, is the thrust of this paper

Key words: Justice, Being-for-itself, Niger Delta, Sartre's existentialism

1. INTRODUCTION

The facts of social life among other things, confront man on a daily basis. That is man has an awareness of things around him. This is possible because man lives as an individual within a given existential situation in which he uses the tool of consciousness, which relates him to the world. Consciousness is used in this case in bringing about a relationship between man and the world, between the subject and the object. To understand that there is the world of men and women, that man can see trees, animals, stones, oceans, and a lot more of other objects, is made possible through the intentionality of consciousness. This consciousness is a fundamental tool of existentialism.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement which claims that individual human beings create the meaning and essence of their lives. It is a movement or revolt against traditional philosophy in its method and concern. Simply, existentialism is a movement that believes in subjective choosing over objective reasoning, concrete experience over intellectual abstractions, individuality over mass culture, human freedom over determinism, and authentic living over in-authenticity. For Lescoe, existentialism is a type of philosophy, which endeavours to analyze the basic structures of human existence and to call individuals to an awareness of their existence (Lescoe, 1974). For Ozumba, it is a school of thought which holds that every opportunity holds grounds for far-reaching consequences (27).

It is also seen as an attitude or outlook. It was in this sense that Harold, uses it. According to him, existentialism is an attitude, which emphasizes human existence and the qualities which are distinctive in individual person rather than man in the abstract or nature and the world in general (29). Specifically, the existentialists reflect and assert that the neglect of this human condition could disrupt the peace and stability of an existing government. The civil and violent uprising in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syrian and some other countries in the Arab world which began some years ago, appears to buttress this point. Themes such as dread, boredom, alienation, death, the absurd, freedom, commitment and nothingness etc characterized existentialism. Some major existentialists include: Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau Ponty, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, and Soren Kierkegaard - the father of existentialism. There are several strands of existentialism, however, regardless of the strands one is dealing with, one idea remains thematic, namely, concern with the basic facts of human existence. It is in this connection that the popular dictum of this movement "existence precedes essence" makes sense.

It is important to mention - when discussing about existential justice, governance and the people - that the notion of existence is fundamental to any government because, existence implies consciousness and consciousness involves knowledge and responsibility. This may be why it is commonly said that a philosopher's existence forms the background of his philosophy.

Our aim in this paper is to form a connection between Sartre's version of existentialism and the Niger Delta problem, with the view to using this type of existentialism to solve this problem. Issues such as individuals' welfare, responsibility/ freedom, authenticity, decision making, choice, concrete experience, bad faith, constant appraisal of the individual existential situation, characterized Sartre's existentialism. This paper highlights the importance of Sartre's existential justice in solving the Niger Delta problem.

2. SARTRE'S EXISTENTIALISM: THEMATIC ISSUES

Jean Paul Sartre was a French existentialist, who was born in 1905 in Paris and spent a good part of his life there. Although contemporary existentialism could be traced to the footsteps of Soren Kierkegaard, Sartre is widely seen as the key apostle of existentialism. What is called Sartre's existentialism is the strand of existentialism peculiar to Sartre in which the human condition rather than human nature is supreme and forms the cornerstone of existentialism.

Lescoe (1974) says that "it is no overstatement to say, without qualification whatsoever, that the best known existentialist today is Jean Paul Sartre". It is the direction or focus of Sartre's existentialism that makes it relevant to human existence because it attempts to liberate man from the clutches of human predicament by being creative in survival techniques. Sartre's existentialism is heavily characterized by individual subjectivism. Man has no human nature, and therefore, can step out to arrange for himself anything he wishes, making himself different from a stone, chair or other objects through the possession of human dignity by the fact of his subjective life. Man, according to Sartre is a being that has the capacity to move himself towards a future and is conscious that he is doing so.

Sartre introduces two modes of existence, or modes of being, that is two antithetical modes or ways of being. These modes of being are captured in his idea of Being-for-itself (L'etre pour-soi and Being-in-itself (L'etre en-soi). It is germane to point out that if we relate this distinction to man, the implication may be that man shares both these two modes of being, one showing that his is just like a stone-ensoi, while the pour-soi indicates that he is a conscious subject which is a distinguishing feature that makes him different from a stone. Furthermore, to be a conscious subject, is to be placed constantly before a future. This means that the consequences of existence coming before essence-which is the motto of existentialism is that man not only creates himself but that the responsibility of man's existence rests heavily on him.

Again, these modes of being are associated with consciousness and unconsciousness. To this end, Being-for-itself is the Being of consciousness associated with man. Other entities outside man are identified and denoted by the Being-in-itself which is the unconscious being. The Being-for-itself as consciousness of an object, is also associated with nothingness, emptiness, and negativity. These features constitute the very foundation for man's struggle and suffering in the world. The reason being that man is always in the process of transcending this ugly situation, in order to negate this emptiness and nothingness so as to perhaps reach a fullness. Man is not a totality but is always in the process of totalization. So, we can see that the Being-for-itself becomes being simply by negating being by separating itself from it and placing itself away from it. So, the for-itself is a being of nothingness and nothingness constitute its very essence (Sartre, trans. 1953, P. 18).

Furthermore, the conscious being always experiences a gap, a vacuum, an emptiness and nothingness which the for-itself attempts to fill by negating itself. In this way, the very traits of the for-itself lie at the base of its power of negation. The incomplete nature of man brings about the seeming senselessness of his existence and strives to accomplish this project of self-fulfillment, a process of totalization which ironically cannot reach totalization because man is not and cannot be a totality. This shows that man is always in a state of becoming and potency which shows that Being is meaningful at the level of the for-itself. Again Sartre says that, this transcendence of the Being-for-itself, is made possible by the too! of human freedom with its heavy load of responsibility. Thus, the Being-for-itself cannot have a steady identity and cannot be captured in anything in any permanent manner- The entire existence and happenings of the for-itself constitute a mammoth project for it to conquer nothingness and emptiness which negates itself in a consistent way. So, the Being-for-itself is not what it is and is what it is not. The implication is that nothingness cannot be overcome since it is the very foundation of being/ and negation comes from nothingness. In this case, the reality of the individual human being is possible by a perpetual negation of being.

In contrast to the Being-for-itself, the Being-in-itself does not have nothingness and negation within its being. It cannot have anything other than itself; it is simply there and full of itself and nothing more. Following this, the Being-in-itself is incapable of becoming something else other than itself. It is itself indefinite, and exhausts itself in being. It does not lack and therefore, needs no association with the other, it is what it is and is subject to temporality Sartre, explains further.

This Sartrean idea of polarized beings could be used in explaining most actions of man, and man's struggle and conflict in life could be discerned from the totalization process of the Being-for-itself. Sartre's Being-for-itself, is man conscious of the environment. This is the basis for social consciousness, which plays a prominent role in the stability and instability in any government.

There are certain terms in Sartre's existentialism that shall be used to address the issue of participatory governance in Nigeria, these themes give us insight into the level of government commitment towards the people. We have positive and negative terms. The positive terms are the terms that must apply in a situation at any given time and show the necessity of such terms, while the negative terms are the ones that must be avoided if we must solve any crisis, problem and misunderstanding in our daily lives. The positive terms include commitment, responsibility, fundamental choice, freedom, decision, subjective understanding, constant appraisal of a situation, consciousness of self and environment, authenticity. The negative terms include: self deception, bad faith, avoidance of decision, postponement of decision, in-authenticity etc. These terms are determined by human facticity and transcendence which is the root of our freedom. I shall explained the meaning of factidity and transcendence in the course of this writing.

It is germane to mention that, the thematic issues of neglect of the environment, lack of government concern for social conditions of individuals, checks on freedom, postponement of key decisions, avoidance of the concrete realities on ground and a show of in-authentic living constitute the major causes of instability in Nigeria, particularly, the Niger Delta region of the country, where militants

challenged the government to address the issues of environmental degradation-land, water, air pollution, and a lack of care for the suffering indigenes of this area.

3. THE NIGER DELTA PROBLEM

The Niger Delta region is located in the southern part of Nigeria. It is found in the area called South-south geographical zone of Nigeria. There are a number of ethnic nationalities occupying this vast land. These ethnic nationalities include: Ijaw, Orhobo, Isoko, Ndokwa, Ogoni, Andoni, Ibibio, Ibeno, Eket, Orons, Kalabari, Etche, Ikweere, Ogba, Itsekiri, Efiks (Okoh, 206).

The Niger Delta is blessed with abundant natural resources, specifically crude oil deposits found in and off shores. Analysts say that the discovery of oil since 1956 in Oloibiri community in Ogbia local government of Bayelsa state, has been a blessing and a curse on the inhabitants. Some say it is more of a curse than blessing. This means that oil which happens to be the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, ironically has caused more harm than good to the people from whose land it is mined.

What has come to be known as the Niger Delta problem originated from this. The problem has to do with the dissatisfaction of the people with the oil exploration activities in that region, which has caused untold hardships to the people in terms of underdevelopment, unemployment, environmental degradation, palpably pervasive poverty, exclusion from mainstream political participation, till president GoodLuck Jonathan, came on board etc. The attempt by the people to resist this total disregard of the impact of ecological degradation has often landed them in serious conflict with the government who also wants to maintain its, arguably, legal authority over the resources. Thus, tension, fear, and uneasiness loom largely in the region as a consequence.

In this write up the character of Being-in-itself is applied to the Niger Delta problem with a view to bringing a solution to the problem.

4. THE JUSTICE OF BEING-FOR-ITSELF: A SOLUTION TO THE NIGER DELTA PROBLEM

Jean-Paul Sartre, identified the Being-for-itself as the being of consciousness which is associated with man. It is man through consciousness that assigns meanings to things -intentional objects - such that without consciousness, ambiguity and equivocation loom large. In this case, the world of given bareness acquires a status and meaning through the instrumentality of man's consciousness, bringing a link between man and the world, a relationship which J. Unah, says "there is therefore, this rapport, this symbiotic relationship, this indissoluble link between man and the world, between the subject and the object" (209).

This also shows that consciousness is always consciousness of something like the Hursserlians would say. Hursserl himself describes the relationship this way,

Like perception every intentional experience-and this indeed the fundamental mark of all intentionality-has its "intentional object", its objective meaning or to repeat same in other words. To have meaning, or to have something in mind, is the cardinal feature of all consciousness that on account of which it is not only experience generally but meaningfully (261).

The above explains that consciousness is always targeted at some object, making it an intentional act. The Dictionary of philosophy explains it this way "Humans are conscious of the contrast between themselves and things, of their relations with other humans of their eventual deaths, and to choose and become what they are not (103).

Similarly, even in Africa, communalism remains Africans' type of consciousness that shapes their distinctive languages, dialects, religion, myths, habits, etc which define their being as persons and people (Kidzu, 115). It is important to stress that some persons are of the view that communalism is gradually moving towards total obliteration or is at the verge of extinction.

Sartre, in his Being and nothingness explains that consciousness is usually considered being-for-itself, and he further distinguished between two types of consciousness.

These are positional consciousness and non-positional consciousness (xxvii).

Further, we can understand that non-positional consciousness is being merely conscious of one's surroundings, while positional consciousness puts consciousness into relation of one's surroundings. This gives us an explicit awareness of being conscious of one's surroundings. In Sartre's understanding, identity is constructed by this explicit awareness of consciousness. In a write up on "Citizenship Questions and Environmental crisis in the Niger Delta: A critical reflection", Wunmi William, expresses this kind of positional consciousness of Sartre, when he says that.

The host communities of the Niger Delta are of the view that since oil is mined, in their land, and they suffer from pollution and environmental degradation attendant to oil production, they have the right to adequate compensation, a clean and safe environment, and a fair share of oil rents (383)

It is obvious from this that Sartre's consciousness is consciousness of the environment, of the concrete realities of life, of the positions of individuals within a given existential setting. Sartre's being-for-itself is man conscious of the environment in the Niger Delta. This is the basis for social consciousness and social justice in the Niger Delta and shows Sartre's relevance in this matter. Our aim is to show how his philosophy can resolve the Niger Delta problem.

There are always antecedents to social consciousness. Social consciousness is usually ignited because the conditions of social life in no small way determine the contents of our consciousness. Existentialism as a revolt against traditional philosophy is a product of social consciousness in the 19th century Europe. Karl Marx, was seen as the angry man of the nineteenth century because of social consciousness and justice. He was confronted by the ugly facts of existence in which the individual was dehumanized in a most annoying manner. Thinkers of the era were only concentrating on the ideals and not looking too closely at the unpleasant facts about the new industrial order. They tended to forget that the period was not only that of a beautiful era of science, progress, justice and brotherhood, but one that spelt doom for human existence due to harsh economic conditions, Collins and Makowsky speak thus,

Black smokes was beginning to hang in the air over the industrial towns of England/France, and Germany, and on the streets behind the houses of the prospering businessmen were growing the tenements which workers crowded with their families in scenes of grime, poverty, and diseases. The mines and factories were manned by a tubercular population of men and women, children working, eleven, thirteen, or fourteen-hour days, six or seven days a week, without respite except through lay off or death (30).

The basis of reality for Marx following the above, could be seen in the harsh facts of material and economic conditions. Though social consciousness brought Marx face to face with the reality of harsh economic conditions, his solution to these problems was devoid of human dimension since his doctrine of dialectical materialism was based on nature rather than man.

So, Marxian consciousness was not existential consciousness since it was not humanized in its approach but was rather on blind force (Omoregbe 146). It is this deficiency that Sartre attempted to over come by humanizing Marxism which he respects as the dominant and living philosophy of our age.

Stumpf laments the plight of the individual in the following words of his, “the individuals had over the centuries been pushed into the background by systems of thought, historical events, and technological forces. The major systems of philosophy had rarely paid attention to the uniquely personal concerns of individuals” (449).

Also, there was increasing wave of depersonalization, dehumanization and objectification and thingification of man occasioned by events of history such as wars, unemployment, induced poverty etc, showed no respect for the individual's feelings and aspirations. "Everywhere men and women were losing their peculiarly human qualities. They were being converted from "persons" into "pronouns", from "subjects" into "objects", from an "I" into "it" (Stumpf 449). From the above, we find that social consciousness gave rise to the need to save man from the evil clutches of such antecedents of existentialism. Existential consciousness and justice arose basically to address the issues of suffering, anguish and self-condemnation which characterized this era. The rise of existentialism shows the symptoms of a specifically European crisis, and also can be explained in a broader perspective as the modern crisis of human existence (Reinhardt 14).

The modern crisis is most represented by the industrial- mining activities, going on in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. There is an existential war going on in this region which calls for Sartrean solution. Ikelegbe, describes this war this way;

Nigeria's oil belt, the Niger Delta region is embroiled in resistance against the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies. The region is generally restive, with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion. Decades of oil exploitation, environmental degradation and state neglect has created an impoverished, marginalized and exploited citizenry which after more than two decades produced a resistance of which the youth has been a Vanguard (208).

From Sartrean existentialism, this war in the Niger Delta is necessary because the individual has freedom as the primary condition of human existence. Again, Sartrean being-for-itself is associated with consciousness, and the human being is seen as the being-for-itself. This is the being of the Niger Delta.

Freedom is the being of consciousness, and consciousness is the being-for-itself. Social consciousness is associated with nothingness, negativity and is always in a totalization process. Social consciousness has created an awareness in the being -for- itself in the Niger Delta to the dehumanizing, objectification, depersonalizing and thingification of human being in the Niger Delta-occasioned by the oil activities of the multinational corporations. The being-for-itself, realizing its freedom, and its condition of nothingness and emptiness, strives to overcome and transcend this ugly situation, hence the existential vituperations around the region. For Sartre, this situation of violence is so because, the human being has freedom as an inherent property and since the being-for-itself is overwhelmed with freedom, it necessarily must exercise it in order to transcend the problem of nothingness.

In order to resolve this problem, one must, according to Sartre, use the basic tenets of existentialism, through the existential tools of facticity and transcendence. These constitute "double property" in humans, the tools of facticity and transcendence enable us to know the facts about ourselves and our interpretations of those facts. Since Man's consciousness is conscious of man's incompleteness, and awareness of the need to create a future and the various possibilities for the future, facticity reveals to us the finitude of human existence and forms the very structure of the human mind because no serious thought about human existence is possibly realistic without a consideration of the facticity of human existence. Facticity refers to Jean-Paul Sartre's term which denotes those features of our past or present that we were not free to choose and yet they seem to set limits on the course of our lives. While transcendence denotes our ability to exercise our freedom in terms of our actions, choices, our plans and dreams and the way we direct the compass or our life (Lawhead, 287).

So, the players in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government, its agents, the oil companies, the militants and citizens of the Delta region and all stakeholders must recognize their facticity of existence. That the Niger Deltans did not choose to be deltans, that the ugliness of the region

expressed in terms of the objective conditions in the region, of underdevelopment, hunger, lack of basic facilities such as good roads, hospitals, electricity, standard schools, employment opportunities, security of life and property and a lot more of other good things that make and add value to life, are features of existence that one cannot close his or her eyes from. These are the concrete realities within the region which we must subjectively embrace in order to eliminate them because the being-for-itself must be conscious of these facts and determine their meaning- Sartre, posits that facts by themselves do not have any meaning, for it is only our choices that we invest facts with meaning.

Now, having known this, it is necessary also to know that in spite of our facticity of existence, freedom prevails at the end. This is so, because, we continually decide how the facts of our situation - the Niger Delta - fit into our present self-conception and projects. We must understand with Sartre, that freedom is not what the Delta people have but what they are. So, we can move away from a trouble situation, by recognizing our freedom which can be expressed by the Sartrean tool of transcendence, the root of our freedom for the fact that we define ourselves by our possibilities and by all the ways in which each of us is continually creating our own future in terms of our choices, our plans, our dreams, and our ambitions. Through transcendence, the players involved in the Niger Delta problem can understand that what they have been or done in the past does not dictate their future. Sartre says that emotions or passions should not be forces that control us, they constitute ways that we comprehend the world and act in it. The federal government must recognize the suffering and helplessness of the people in the trouble region, and act on it by transcending it through positive changes. The militants and the indigenous people of the region must also act in like manner by recognizing the humanity in persons so as to refrain from acts capable of destroying humanity. This is the justice of the being-for- itself.

The justice of the being-for-itself, is existential justice. Existential justice is a broad concept encompassing all other types of justice. It is proactive, practical, pragmatic and truthful. It is foundational justice because, the basis of justice is the existential condition of the individual. Existential justice basically is justice of the concrete realities of life. Existential justice is one that determines the contents and purposes of legal, distributive, social, moral, commutative and environmental justice. It denotes an atmosphere in which the existential situation of man is highlighted and amplified in order to guide all actions, decisions, choices, in terms of policies, laws and rules concerning the individuals. The justice of the being-for-itself is characterized by positive change that involves reinvention, reorientation, repositioning, readjustment, renewal of all the levels in man's existential journey. It is the fundamental condition for individual progress, peace, and stability (Ncha, 189). This is where we find the relevance of the justice of the being-for-itself as a tool for conflict management in this region and all over the world.

5. CONCLUSION

So far we have been talking about the justice of the being-for-itself. We have seen that the solution to the Niger Delta problem could be taken care of if we apply the idea of Sartrean being-for-itself to this problem. Indeed the solution lies in this application of the justice of the being-for-itself, as against the idealist justice, devoid of the concreteness of the human condition. To buttress this point, Uduigwomen, cautioned that justice is not something hanging up there or identified in rules, or laws but has to do with the individual within a given situation that breeds fairness to all (40).

To this end, the being-for-itself, either in the person of the federal government or individuals involved, must understand itself, its emptiness and nothingness in terms of whatever reduces the value of humans, and must transcend this by constantly and continually creating and recreating its future by embracing the positive side of life. The lesson is that the stakeholders in the Niger Delta, must realize that as humans our facticity consists simply in the fact that we are condemned to be wholly responsible for ourselves, our actions and our future. This is where the justice of the being-for-itself serves as a solution to conflict situation.

Conclusively, one can say that the being-for-itself, is actually asserting its freedom identified as consciousness, and making effort to reinvent itself so as to chart a new course in order to define itself meaningfully towards a future that is in the making, which will negate the oil technology that has no respect for human existence.

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