The Existentialist "Inter-Subjectivity" And The Problem of "Other': A Philosophical Approach to Politics of Recognition

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ABSTRACT: *Humans are ontologically positioned to interact with one another in order to satisfy the essential conditions of humanity individually and collectively. It is the extent and the nature of the relationships among human beings that defines the civilization of each age. However, the inevitable interactions among human beings as conscious beings provide the medium for conflicts, tensions and crises among individuals and social groups within the society. The history of philosophy has been occupied with rigorous analytical and speculative exercises to unravel the foundation of the suspicious antagonisms between individuals and groups. At the same time, attempts have been made in philosophy to establish a metaphysical or spiritual justification for the reconciliation of the 'self' and other' and ultimately promote mutual respect and recognition of both. Existentialism is a philosophical orientation that has been predominant in this project. This paper, through analysis of existing discourse, attempts therefore, to critically examine the existentialist concept of intersubjectivity as a viable philosophical approach to the politics of recognition and present it as a theoretical framework for peaceful cohabitation of individuals and groups of diverse worldviews.*

KEYWORDS: existentialism, intersubjectivity, philosophy, politics, recognition,

INTRODUCTION

The 'self-other' problem is an existential expression of an ontological and epistemological problem that involves a subject (the knower or potential knower) and another subject initially perceived as object (the other mind) in the process of relating with the world. As a problem, it involves the nature of the relationship between the subject and object. It is fundamental in the social identity discourse. However, the self-other problem in social identity discourse is distinguished essentially from the traditional dichotomy between the subject and object in traditional epistemology in the sense that in the case of the problem of social identity, both the subject and object are conscious beings that are paired into 'selves' and 'others'. As a response to this problem, there have been some notable attempts to remove or deconstruct either the subject

(self) or the object (other) from this bilateral and antagonistic process by collapsing one of them into the other. But there are those thinkers who have attempted to reconcile the 'self' and the 'other' by retaining the reality of both sides of the social interaction- the 'self' and the 'other'. Hegel, Marx and some notable existentialists have critically argued against the possibility of denying either the 'self' or the 'other' as they equally constitute an ontological whole. The subsequent part of this paper constitutes an exposition, critical assessment and appraisal of the existentialist approach to the dynamics of the perceptions and actions between the 'self' and the 'other'.

The Problem of 'Other'

Every human relationship, either at the individual or group level, is an encounter between two conscious selves. As soon as these conscious selves confront each other, they simultaneously engage in some psychological and epistemological activities that pitch them against one another. Consequently, human actions and interactions are motivated by psychological and epistemological drives. Each self in the relationship is confronted with the problem of the 'other'. Thus, the problem of the 'other' involves a cluster of certain psychological and epistemological questions (Owolabi, 2003:7-8), that is, the challenge of engaging and relating with the 'other' invokes in humans the desire to know and the desire to dominate. This problem posits a fundamental epistemological problem, that of the objective validity of our knowledge of other mind. Hence, knowledge and domination constitute essential indices of a man's self-affirmation.

The problem of the 'other' occurs immediately the self is confronted with any form of difference. There are various forms of difference, some being more real than others. The problem of the 'other' refers to the anxiety that an individual experience when he or she is confronted with another person. It is the anxiety that Adam developed when he met with Eve (Davidson, 1982:435). This problem manifests itself in the history of philosophy as *the problem of other mind*. The problem of other mind is the problem of whether or not other mind exists, and if it does, how does one know its real nature when it is locked in such privacy with its operations highly preserved. Rene Descartes, a French philosopher of the modern period is very notable in the discourse of the problem of other minds. Just as *the problem of other minds* in philosophy creates epistemological and psychological problems so is the *problem of the 'other'* in social relations presenting us with both epistemological and psychological challenges.

Since human beings are ceaselessly engaging in one form of relations or the other, they are bound to cope with the problem of the 'other'. It therefore becomes evident that the problem of the 'other' entails how to manage individual or social relations. Social or individual relations manifest as the desire for dominance. When the 'self' confronts the 'other', it is anxious to dominate rather than to be dominated. It is, therefore, a form of power relation, which is generated by the self-other interaction. Nietzsche has theorized this desire for dominance when he posited that the will to power is the strongest of all human instincts. In the same manner, Jan Mohammed says that every

desire is at the base a desire to impose oneself on another. It is the intention to dominate the other that explains the crisis of group actions. Basically, all groups interact to dominate the other. Consequently, when a group comes in contact with the other group, there is the feeling of one group being suspicious of the power of the other to dominate it. But the same group that tenaciously resists the hegemonic hold of the other is scheming to dominate the other group in a perpetual politics of recognition.

Discourse and Politics of the Problem of The "Other"
The power that binds people to their identities through a process that Foucault refers to as subjectification still operates. This is a process where two meanings of the word 'subject' become socially constructed truths: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and to his or her own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. "Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and make subject to.(Foucault, 1972:212) In the light of this, Cornel West refers to the powers of modern discourse to produce and prohibit, develop and delimit forms of rationality, scientificity, and objectivity, which draw boundaries for the intelligibility, availability and legitimacy of certain ideas.(West, 1982:24) For instance, Ann Laura Stoler hints that a common historiographic assumption is that racial discourse is a discourse of those with power; racial discourses contain and coexist with a range of political agenda.

The power-knowledge nexus simply describes the power to elicit certain beliefs and behaviour from individuals and groups of people through a set of knowledge claims. Mitchel Foucault, among other postmodernists once discussed how intellectuals who control the power-knowledge have been able to construct all forms of identities through their positioning as elites within the society. Karl Marx did not mince words in asserting that the owners of the factors of production are always dominating the minds of the ordinary people and constantly dispensing ideologies that will enhance the interests of the oppressors.

Discourse is a systematically constructed body of knowledge claims. Social discourse, by implication, is a set of claims, which embodies ideas about the social reality of a people. Although social discourses pretend to convey universal truths about their object of study, however, we discover from the contents of these discourses that they are ladened with sentiments, and that they are actually constructions of certain people with definite purposes. Elites who are in charge of the power-knowledge nexus are the real initiators of social discourses. This position has severally been defended by scholars. They argue that the elites of all societies are in firm control of the society. Knowledge places them in a favourable position within the power relations, and they take fundamental decisions on issues and policies in the society. They become so powerful to the extent that they decide the thinking and the behaviour pattern of the majority. Grant Parry confirms this when he asserts that the hold of the elite on the majority is due to their power, organization, skill and other personal qualities (Parry, 1969:30). Owolabi observes that a careful analysis of the identified attributes of the elite that favour their hegemonic hold on the rest of society will confirm

that they are subsumable under the dual quality of power-knowledge that Foucault regarded as necessary for any class of people to dominate and create a kind of discourse that will construct the 'other' and (re)present him in the kind of image that favours the powerful 'self'.

Social discourses are a viable instrument that is tactically appropriated in the politics of the problem of the 'other'. In fact, there is a sense in maintaining that social discourse drives the politics of recognition at the realm of intellectual and abstract consciousness. Sometimes, in this politics, discourse is applied to put any form of difference at the margin. JanMohamed's *The Economy of Manichean Allegory*, reflects this assertion. He writes:

Colonialist literature is an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of 'civilization', a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology. That world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. (JanMohamed, 1986:22)

By a process of representation and imagination, the 'other' is disfigured and turned into a prey in the self's desire to assimilate and domesticate all forms of difference. Readings in post-colonialism elucidate on how the power-knowledge has been employed in the constructions and deconstructions of the 'other' through a powerfully orchestrated discourse. Edward Said in particular affirmed that colonialism was made possible through the two indivisible foundations of imperial authority- knowledge and power (Said, 1978:32). Mudimbe's *Invention of Africa* also demonstrates how the imperial knowledge has created the 'other' through the instrumentality of the colonial discourse.

The most formidable ally of economic and political control had long been the business of 'knowing other people's because this 'knowing' underpinned imperial dominance and became the mode by which they were increasingly persuaded to know themselves: that is, as subordinate to Europe. A consequence of this process of knowing became the export to the colonies of European language, literature and learning as part of a civilizing mission which involved the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control. (Mudimbe in Ashcroft, B. *et al*, 1995:1)

The position to the effect that social discourse drives the wheels of the politics of recognition was aptly summarized by Edward Said. According to him,Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and, perhaps, even impelled by impressive ideological formations… as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like "inferior" or "subject races", "subordinate peoples", "dependency", "expansion" and "authority" (Said, 1996:9).

Abdul JanMohamed buttresses this assertion when he stresses the importance, as does Lamming, of discourse as a site of cultural control and as a highly effective instrumentality for the determination of the 'native' by fixing him or her under the sign of the 'Other'. In this respect, Chandra Mohanty refers to the idea of 'Woman' as a cultural and ideological composite 'Other' constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.). (Mohanty in Ashcroft, B. *et al*, 1995:259) In the management of the problem of the 'other', knowledge of the other is not 'value free'. Said, analyzing Orientalism, argues that the knowledge of the Orient by the European was not a 'disinterested' knowledge. This knowledge, just like any other discourse served very real material interests, the numerous texts of Orientalism- in philology, ethnography, political science, art and literature- played a vital part in constructing an Orient that allowed for the deployment of specific forms of control over it. Hence, social discourses play a part in the great politics of difference and identity.

Meaning and Tenents of Existentialism
The attempt to define existentialism shows that it is elusive. This elusiveness arises from the fact that what was intended as a philosophical movement has been vulgarized to the level of a fad, so that the existentialist label gets applied to all sorts of people and activities that are remote from existentialist philosophy. Regarding this looseness, Jean-Paul Sartre writes, "the word [existentialism] is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all" (Sartre, 1956:289). Similarly, Paul Ricoeur asserts that it is not good to talk of existentialism but existentialisms (Stewart and Mickunas, 1943:65). The term existentialism is sometimes reserved for the work of Sartre who used it to refer to his philosophy in the 1940s. But it is more often used as a general name for a number of thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who made the concrete individual central in their thought (Routledge Encyclopedia, 1998).

Consequently, existentialism has been variously defined. Existentialism, according to William Ernest is the mining process, professing to find the emptiness of categories among the richest hidden treasure (Hocking, 1954:443). These empty categories are the real and concrete situations in which man defines and ascertains his existence. Kurt Reinhardt opines that the major theme of existentialism as the term indicates, 'existence' can only be understood when conveyed by the German word 'existenz' as an *ek-stasis*, a 'standing out' from the mere biological vitality by which all subhuman forms of existence are characterized and circumscribed (Reinhardt, 1952:15). According to Heidegger, the existent called "man" stands out from all other modes of existence in that it is not simply and statistically like plants and animals, or like inanimate tools, but has constantly and dynamically to affirm and to actualize his existence in self-knowledge and self-actualization (Ibid.). In a nutshell, it could be inferred from the above that existentialism is a human centered philosophy.

Modern existentialist doctrines are better appreciated in the works of Kierkeggard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers, Merleau-Ponty, Buber, Marcel, Dostoevsky, among others. However,

existentialism has a long history, having its ancestry in the works of the Sophists who claim that "Man is the measure of all things" and Socrates who asserted that "Man know thyself". The Sophists' inspiration on existentialism is significant because they took a relativist approach to ethics and social phenomena (Saifulin and Dixton, 1984:395).

The central thesis of existentialism is that "existence precedes essence". But the exact meaning of this statement is as diverse as the various moods and emphases of different existentialist philosophers. However, all existentialist discourses have some elementary assumptions, which unite them despite their unique concerns. Oyeshile describes the major tenets that characterize existentialism in the following remark:

Existentialism is concerned with man and his existence. It is a philosophy that takes off from the individual's standpoint and it is opposed to any objective, rationalistic and system building approach in providing solutions to the problems of the absurdities of life in which man is enmeshed. To many existentialists the individual is supposed to live an authentic life by playing the role of an actor rather than that of a spectator in the issues of life and existence. (Oyeshile, 2005:25)

While the above passage points to the nature of existentialism as a philosophical tradition that focuses on man, MacIntyre enumerates the problems that this philosophical orientation addresses. These include the individual and his systems, intentionality, being and absurdity, the nature and significance of choice, the role of extreme experiences, and nature of communication (MacIntyre, 1967:14). Existentialism deals with the problem of how man is to live in the world.

Soren Kierkegaard, father of existentialism contrasts the concept of the individual both with the concepts of the stereotype and the mass. All other existentialists reject any conceptual system that attempt to reduce all facts about man to a set of rationalist system about man (MacIntyre, 1967:147). Dostoevsky emphasizes the unpredictable character of the universe and sees the individual appearing face to face with contingency. According to him, the individual responds naturally and spontaneously to every situation as it comes contingently within space and time. Existentialists hold that truth must start from subjectivity, that reality is in being acted, and that only by acting can man confer meaning into his existence. Truth, the existentialists say, is revealed in the subjective experience of the living human person. The truth about the nature of humans and their destiny is not grasped and stated adequately in abstract concepts or in propositions. A purely rationalistic approach may deal with universal principles that absorb the person into some all-embracing unity or system.

In this wise, existentialism remains a revolt against the rationalism of the Greek or classical tradition in philosophy, especially the speculative worldviews of thinkers such as Plato and Hegel. In such systems, the existentialists insist that the individual is lost in abstract universals or in a

universal ego (Titus and Smith, 1995:326). The existentialists protest all earlier forms of thoughts, which according to them, proved to be insufficient, and which have alienated men from themselves through their rational objectification. According to them, the demonic abysses of life that have been uncovered in our time simply do not admit of a mere formal-intellectual analysis of the immediate world of sense (Von Rintelen, 1962:10). In Jaspers view, for instance, we can achieve only a 'subjective absolutes" which include no universally valid demands. Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness and primacy of existence- the inner, immediate experience of self-awareness. In existentialism, the fundamental drive is to exist and to be recognized as an individual. The most concrete and most meaningful point of reference for any individual remains his or her immediate consciousness, which cannot subsist in systems or abstractions. Abstract thinking in the existentialist view tends to be impersonal and lead away from the concrete human being and human situation. Hence, a person's inner life, with its moods, anxieties and decisions becomes the center of attention (Stumpf, 1975:483).

The denial of the principle of sufficient reason is another uniting feature among the existentialists. The existentialists insist that there is no ultimate explanation of why things are as they are and not otherwise. This leads to another problem, that of 'being and absurdity'. Men fruitlessly aspire to comprehend being. However, this hopeless aspiration to comprehend being is the ultimate mark of the being of man. Therefore, man is condemned to this unending but vain aspiration to comprehend being. Most existentialists after Husserl, particularly Heidegger and Sartre, adopted the doctrine of intentionality to answer questions relating to beliefs, emotion and the act of will. They argued that consciousness is consciousness of something, that is, consciousness has an object. For instance, in desire, something is desired.

Freedom and choice constitute central concepts in existentialism. Choice is primary to human nature. Men are constantly confronted with choice making. Decision is a practical expression of the human nature as a choice making individual. Sartre maintains that men are condemned to freedom to choose; not to choose at all is a choice to be indifferent. For the existentialists, men do not have any fixed nature that determines or restricts their choices. As a summary, MacIntyre presents the three contentions of the existentialist thesis of freedom in the following words:
The first is that choice is ubiquitous. All my actions imply choices. Even when I do not choose explicitly, as I may do in majority of cases, my action bears witness to an implicit choice. The second contention is that although in many of my actions, my choices are governed by criteria, the criteria which I employ are themselves chosen and there are no rational grounds for such choices. The third is that no causal explanation of my actions can be given. (Stumpf, 1975:149)

On a critical assessment, this set of assertions suffers an internal contradiction, in the sense that it portends that man is naturally fixed or determined to act in a particular manner (to choose), contrary to which he cannot act. If man cannot decide not to choose, therefore, there is a foundation upon which a rational system could be erected about facts of man. Moreover, it follows that the

individual is not to be conceived as appearing face to face with pure contingency, rather, he is faced with the necessity of choice, just as he cannot decide not to be free in the existentialist language.

The Notion of Intersubjectivity and The 'Self-Other' Recognition

The notion of intersubjectivity is another basic feature that characterizes the existentialist philosophy. This notion is very germane to the understanding of the existentialist perspective of the problem that this paper considers. Many scholars have attempted to use the notion of intersubjectivity entrenched in existentialist philosophy to provide a framework for addressing phenomenon of social identity and the problems that are associated with it, a problem, which Oyeshile perceived as "the I's lack of consideration for the other" (Oyeshile, 2005:30). For Unah, the existentialist notion of intersubjectivity is a viable approach to resolving ethnic conflict or crisis because "we do not speak of conflict or crisis merely in the abstract, conflict, crises and turbulence are the products of concrete human situations" (Unah, 2000:237). Unah noted further that:

Generally, conflicts do not occur in a Robinson Crusoe situation. They occur fundamentally from social relatedness. Consequently, insofar as we are human beings living in a society, conflicts cannot but occur. (Ibid.)

How does the existentialist notion of intersubjectivity fit as a philosophical framework for interpreting the politics of mutual recognition and resolving the 'self-other' problem?

Buber's work: *I and Thou* (1937) provided another impressive existentialist approach to addressing conflicts that emanate from interpersonal and inter-group relations. Buber, who was convinced of the inherent problems of individualism and collectivism, sought to provide an alternative position to individualism and collectivism. Consequently, he attempted to establish this alternative through the elements of what he called the *interhuman*. The basic thesis of Buber's *I and Thou* is that an individual is a proper human being to the extent at which the individual sees 'self' in relation with 'other' human beings. Although some existentialist theories will forcefully declare that one consciousness tries to capture the consciousness of the other and to make him an object, this kind of approach cannot rule out the reality of interhuman (Buber, 1980:351). The reason for this is that the essential thing is not that one makes the other his object, but the fact that he is not fully able to do so (Ibid,). Therefore, it is only in partnership with the other that one's being can be perceived as an existing whole.

In putting forward his thesis of interhuman, Buber distinguished between two major forms of relationship in society. These are the *"I-Thou"* and the *"I-it"* relations. According to Buber, the latter relation is inhuman and depersonalizing as it treats other individuals, apart from the self, as mere objects or means to be used in achieving one's goals. It is an instrumentalist relationship, coterminous with the Aristotelian instrumental friendship. The "*I-Thou*" relationship, on the other

hand, is a relationship that is mutually affirming. This kind of relationship upholds reciprocity and respect for others as against the "*I-it*" relationship, which aims at degradation, manipulation and exploitation (Buber, 1980:365). The "*I-Thou*" relationship affirms that a person becomes fully a person only when he considers the 'other' as equally human in all respects. In this light, you are not a real person so far as you regard others as mere things or as mere objects or implements (Oyeshile, 2005:40). For Buber, the real meeting between persons comes about only when each regards the other as an end.

How do we achieve the "*I-Thou*" relationship that Buber advocated? According to him, at the sphere of the interhuman, the actual happenings between individuals and groups must be wholly mutual or must be tending towards mutual relations. This is because the participation of both partners is in principle indispensable (Buber, 1980:365). This shows that the sphere of the interhuman is one in which the other confronts a person and its unfolding is referred to as the dialogical. Buber's thesis of interhuman conveyed an ideal that expressed the Kantian position on interpersonal relationship. Kant maintains that every human should be treated as an end and never as a means to an end. This ideal, according to Kant, is a categorical imperative, which operates on the principle of universalizability. According to Buber, the Kantian view is expressed as an 'ought' which is sustained by the idea of human dignity. Hence, the element of interhuman is close to the Kantian principle because:

Man exists anthropologically not in his isolation, but in the completeness of the relation between man and man; what humanity is can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity. (Buber, 1980:358)

Furthermore,
If genuine dialogue is to arise, everyone who takes part in it must be willing on each occasion to say what is really in his mind about the subject of conversation. (Ibid.)

We can see in Buber the need for humans, regardless of diverse identities, to break away from parochial individualism and nationalism to interpersonal fellowship and global communion which rests on mutual recognition. The element of interhuman stresses that the completeness or wholeness of man is not in the sole virtue of a relation to himself but it embodies the virtue of his relation to others. Such elements as mutuality, interpersonal fellowship, human dignity, respect for the rights of others and genuine dialogue become clear, as those elements that are lacking in the contemporary relationships between persons and groups. Fortunately, embracing these elements does not diminish one's authenticity and freedoms. On the contrary, authenticity and freedom can be achieved through genuine human relationship. Thus, Buber's element of the interhuman transcends and also transforms the parochial individualism and oppressive collectivism because the essential human reality is neither one of them (Buber, 1980:366).

According to Gabriel Marcel, for the individual to exist, he must engage along with others in a world that makes demands on him and it is imperative that the individual responds to others and undertakes responsibilities to and from them. It is in this that the individual can affirm the certainty of his or her existence. According to Marcel, man is the only being that makes promises. Through the concept of fidelity, Marcel describes the unique relationship that exists between the one who makes promise and others. In Marcel's existentialism, we see a philosophy of intersubjectivity in which man is not only related to the world but to others as well. And because man has to grapple with the mystery of existence, he has to take adequate cognizance of other beings. Thus, when Marcel talks about communion rather than just physical communication, he means that every man should make himself available to others in such a way that would foster the attainment of the goals of life and the unraveling of the mystery of being (Oyeshile, 2005:43).

Marcel's existentialism provides a viable framework for addressing the self-other problem or the politics of mutual recognition because of his commitment to the ontology of intersubjectivity.
He suggested that it is the essence of human to be recognized or capable of recognition. It could be inferred from these claims that the essence of man and every social identity is recognition. Hence, man as a political being is intrinsically involved in politics of recognition. In this wise, Marcel shares an essential inspiration with Hegel who believes that:

I am dependent upon the other for recognition. I am only a self-consciousness *for-another*. Without the other I cannot exist as an independent unified self. The other, then, is part of my essence. The self that constitutes all of reality, in short, could not exist without the other. (Kain, 1998:108)

Martin Heidegger, through his seminal work *Being and Time* provided a veritable framework through which the *Dasein*, that is, 'human being' could realize its project of authenticity by coping with the being of others. The necessity of coping with others in order to be an authentic individual constitutes part of the facticities of life for the *Dasein*. Heidegger, while establishing the authenticity of the individual, he nevertheless emphasized the role of others in the constitution of the 'authentic'. This is an attempt to bring both the 'self' and the 'other' to a unity in an authentic life. According to Unah, the *Dasein* is not only a being-in-the-world; he is also a being-with-others (Unah, 1996:60).

The inference made from the above is that man is not only constituted by his projects and his relation with the material objects which he makes use of; he is also related to others because others are also beings-in-the-world just in the same manner like himself. The implication of this for the 'self' and the 'other' relationship is that, whether as an individual or as a group with particular projects and peculiar means of achieving them, one is related to others who are also beings-in-the-world with the capacity to either promote or frustrate the projects depending on the quality of relationship and recognition.

Heidegger reiterated this point when he claimed that when a man appears on the scene of existence, he is immediately aware not only of objects, but of other human beings as well. In other words, human existence is inevitably knitted with the existence of others. To survive therefore, the individual must pursue his goals and projects such as will make possible the survival of others and the achievement of their goals. One's existence also depends on the recognition by others. The intersubjectivity of *Daseins* is strikingly expressed as follows:

The awareness of the being of others is part of the awareness of our own being, and implied in it as the teacher implies the pupil, and the taxi-car implies both the driver and the passenger. We discover ourselves as existing with other people and our being as being with others. (Ibid.)

Oyeshile further commented on this,
As *Daseins*, both at the individual and ethnic group levels, survival is only possible if and only if we recognize the importance of others not as mere objects standing in the way of achieving our goal of survival, but as ends in themselves who are not only important but also inevitable and inescapable in the realization of our goal of survival and freedom. (Oyeshile, 2005:33)

Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist conception of the individual matures through different phases, from his affirmation of individual autonomy especially in *Being and Nothingness*, *Existentialism is a Humanism* to his affirmation of group solidarity especially in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. His latter works suggest that individual autonomy and the recognition of others are mutually reinforcing, the 'self' owes its existence to 'others'. According to Sartre, even though individual's autonomy is defined through his freedom of choice, when as an individual I choose, I also choose for the rest of mankind, and when others choose, they choose for me as well. Lowen, argued that not only in the latter works of Sartre has the sense of community featured. According to him, Sartre's earlier ethics was not totally relativistic, as many people would believe. It was also not radically individualistic because right from the beginning he could not ignore the power of circumstances and the socio-political character of human existence. Sartre was obviously aware of the relation of one's freedom to 'others' and to the world- the role others play in promoting a person's self-awareness, that is, our dependence upon one another (Lowen, 2000:60)

Sartre was concerned with the different modes of existence. According to him, there are two kinds of entity in existence, being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Being-in-itself (*en-soi*) is non-conscious. It possesses essence since it exists independently of any observer. It constitutes the inanimate objects in the world. On the other hand, being-for-itself (*pour soi*) is conscious and it is its consciousness that makes it different from other things and their relations to one another (Sartre, 1958:ix). The being-for-itself is a being of relations whose activities consist in these diverse relations. Sartre established that the being-for-itself has the ability to work towards the achievement of its goal of survival primarily. However, in achieving this goal, it has to contend with the existence of others. And this shows that in human society, the existence of others creates

an atmosphere of competition and solidarity. But in all these, we are for others as they are for us. The interdependence of being-for-themselves within the society is inevitable. As conscious human beings, one cannot avoid depending on other beings for one's livelihood. This is because self-consciousness has to be anchored to something external to itself through which it realizes its project of self-transcending. This can be linked to what Heidegger and Sartre described as 'facticity of existence'.

The idea of 'other mind' was used by Sartre to give room for the individual to transcend his subjectivity, that is, to make room for intersubjectivity. It becomes necessary for the individual to transcend his or her subjectivity in order to accommodate others within the world. This existence of others is arrived at through man's subjectivity, which Sartre identifies with the notion of shame. Sartre writes:

Shame is shame of oneself before the other. These two structures are inseparable. I need the other to realize fully the structures of my being. The 'for-itself' refers to the 'for-others'. (Sartre, 1958:222)

Through the concept of shame, somebody is watching me. The person who is watching me is feeling like me as being watched by somebody else. Obviously, Sartre's subjectivism provides for the existence of other consciousness in the world. Sartre believed that the' self' must first be for the 'others' as a precondition for having consciousness of himself and others as being for him.

Although, Sartre's analysis was primarily in view of the individual and his or her relationship with other subjective individuals, it sufficiently interprets the nature of human relationships of different levels and scopes. Moreover, it provides an ethical framework for the inevitable interactions among the various groups within the society. As individuals and groups, there are different latent and manifest identities, one cannot gloss over the significance of others; and persons and groups must be prepared to accept others because this is necessary in order that they be accepted as well. In spite of the subjectivity that is inherent in Sartre's existentialism it advocates human solidarity. The man who discovers himself through the *cogito* (self) also discovers the others as the condition of his own existence. The notion of intersubjectivity is necessarily implied in Sartre's subjectivity. The existence of others indirectly establishes the existence of self and its subjectivity because the other and self are inescapably linked together in some activities. Thus:

I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts me… We find ourselves in a world of inter-subjectivity. It is in this world that man has to decide what he is and what others are. (Sartre, 1976:155)

In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre attempted to locate the individual freedom within the group. In line with his commitment to freedom, Sartre's latter works constituted a modification of the former. He was committed to the affirmation of group freedom of which the individual is an inextricable part. Thus, Lowen presented Sartre as follows:

He urged that our lives will have meaning by human beings loving and supporting each other in this world, and working together to create their common humanity by constructing societies that fulfil the needs of all. True humanism, Sartre stated, should take these needs as its starting point and never deviate from them. True humanism can be built only upon the mutual recognition by men and women of their human needs and of their right to their satisfaction. (Warnock, 1970:128)

We can infer from the above position that human solidarity through mutual recognition is a necessity for the survival of human race irrespective of the nature and extent of their differences.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty talked about the unification of the "phenomenal field" in interpersonal relationship (Low, 1996:382). He claimed that it is this phenomenal field that enables an individual to unify his experiences with that of others. The reason for this is that just like the magnetic field, there is a force of unity in the phenomenal field to which the 'self' and 'other', the world and the individuals contribute. Rational agreement is based on the relationship that exists between the body and the world, which is characterized by the ontological attachment of the former to the latter. According to Merleau-Ponty:

Rational agreement is possible for human beings because their experiences open to and intersect in a shared phenomenal field. Rationality is nothing other than this blending of lived bodily profiles, of mine within me as I actively open upon the world together. (Ibid.)

The point in Merleau-Ponty's position is that the possibility of rational agreement, which is necessary in fostering harmony between individuals and groups, rests ultimately on the structure of the human body and the simple fact about the human body is that "it is similar in all members of the human species and that these bodies open upon one sole world in a similar way" (Ibid.). In other words, Merleau-Ponty predicated the establishment of interpersonal and intergroup relationships on the notion of the body, which has the same ontologically shared experience of the world like any other body. The implication of this is that similarity of our bodies underscores the possibility of rational agreement and universality on which differences could be managed. But to what extent are human bodies similar?

This similarity tends to be more in the physiological functions of the various parts of our bodies; the digestive, reproductive, respiratory and other body systems function similarly under normal condition in all bodies. As for the physical qualities of our bodies, there are variations upon which some people have created the myth of difference. Certain groups of people have specific

complexion of which they are identified, differences in colour of the eyes; the type and texture of the hair and some other bodily qualities are profoundly different in human bodies. However, Merleau-Ponty must have noticed this when he referred to the ontological experience of the world by the different bodies as the basis of universality which he claimed. Therefore, the conflicts that inevitably emanate from the differences in individual and group orientations can be managed on the realization that the human beings constituting the various groups have the same ontological experience of the world that serves as the basis for their social engagement in a shared world.

CONCLUSION

The history of human existence is a necessary dialectical process of the 'selves' and 'others', and the reality of one necessarily implies that of the other. The co-existence of the self and the other expresses itself in the forms of the following pairs: human beings and the world, the individual and the society, the in-group and the out-group, *et cetera*. All attempts to collapse any of these pairs into the other are suspect and should be treated with disdain. In the same way, Kelvin Harris aptly comments that a denial of the world as a distinct object assumes an a-historical, a-social position which blatantly disregards the very arena in which people exist, act and acquire and produce knowledge (Harris, 1979:4). The denial of the person as subject similarly disregards the existence and actions of people who, through their actions, change and interpret the world (Ibid.). Freire remarks on both extreme positions as follows:

To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without men. This objectivist position is as ingenious as that of subjectivism, which postulates men without a world. World and men do not exist apart from each other; they exist in constant interaction. (Freire, 1972:27)

The above remark by Freire applies to dichotomy between the self and other. The 'self' does not merely exist and is not merely conscious; it exists in a real world with 'others'.

It is our position that the existentialist doctrine of intersubjectivity could be a panacea for the contemporary world that is torn apart in various antagonistic identities with mutual distrust. The present world is divided on account of ethnicity, nationality, gender and sex, religion, economic and political classes. These various identities, which struggle to claim the loyalty of the individual, have succeeded in tearing humanity apart and subsequently setting people against themselves. It is a reality that we are different in some ways; that our worldviews have been construed differently through the diversity of identities. The attendant crises that emanate from the interactions between these social identities impose on humans, the need and urgency of transforming this situation to a social order that is characterised by mutual understanding and cooperation among human beings for humanity to realize its collective aspirations.

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