

**LITERATURE AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE EXPECTED NEW NORMAL WORLD: A REFLEXION
ON *THE REPRIEVE* OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**

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Abstract

The paper has addressed the dreadful and chaotic state of contemporary society in form of herdsmen attack, insurgency, banditry, revolutionary tendencies and war; as portrayed by Jean-Paul Sartre in *The Reprieve*. Our fundamental objectives are to unveil the horrible effects of violence and war in our society and to project the role of literature and national consciousness in national transformation of characters, nation building, emergence of peace and human freedom in the expected new normal world. We have adopted the analytic method. This method has helped us to critically examine and unfold the catastrophic effects of war in *The Reprieve*. The paper has adopted the theory of existentialism and the socio-psycho critic approach. This approach has helped us to understand and logically unveil the socio-psychological disposition of humanity in terms of war propaganda, the fear of war outbreak, death and lamentations. We have discovered that literature is the instrument that develops national consciousness and national transformation for peaceful coexistence in an ideal society. The paper reveals that in the new normal world human existence is built on ethical values of justice, equity, integrity and prevalent peace.

Key terms: Literature, National Consciousness and New Normal World

Introduction

The turbulent situation of a nation insinuates to a greater extent, the lost of conscience of the unity of purpose. The impaired conscience of the elites, proletariats, peasants and the entire teaming population of a nation breeds simultaneous youth gang sporadic attacks in form of banditry, insurgency, kidnapping and terrorism, which bastardise the peace of a nation. The existence of quagmire in human existence has made the majority of philosophers and writers alike to consider the world absurd. Albert Camus considers the conduct of man in the universe unreasonable. In view of Samuel Becket, the world is pessimistic. The 19th century Danish philosopher looks at absurd in the perspective of human faith. "The absurd is the category, the negative criterion, of the divine or of the relationship of the divine" (WEB).

In the philosophical view of Camus the world itself is a beautiful place for mankind. It is the human confrontation with the reality of the world that makes the world absurd. Camus portrays in his works the emptiness of the world due to the absurdist conduct of man. He considers man unreasonable. He says man fabricates arms for his protection; unfortunately, he uses the arms to destroy himself, his neighbor and his society. Besides, man decides to live in the community with others, but man still engages in banditry, insurgency, kidnapping, child trafficking and terrorism. It is the lost of good conscience.

In spite of unreasonability of mankind, Jean-Paul Sartre places premium on human existence. In his philosophical view, existence precedes essence. Man exists first and engages himself in diverse activities to justify his existence." Qu'est-ce qui signifie ici que l'existence précède l'essence? Ce la signifie que l'homme existe d'abord et se définit après »(487) The quest to justify human existence very often poses danger on human life. Man begins to experience clashes, conflicts emergence of wars and destruction of lives and properties. Sartre portrays this in *The Reprieve* which forms the basis of our analysis.

In the novel, *The Reprieve* Adolf Hitler expresses his exhausted patience over forceful territorial occupation and swings into war propaganda. The propaganda creates fear, social dislocation of family members and psychological turmoil in characters like Marcel, Zézette and Jeannine. A lot of people in the novel are fidgety of war and they

hate warlike situations. *The Reprieve* projects the human quest and capacity for solidarity, love, unity and selflessness. On the contradictory side of human life, *The Reprieve* projects the agony of human condition in terms of hatred, greed, brutality, rape and war.

Our preoccupation is to unveil the chaotic state of human existence in the abnormal world that is limited by injustice, sexual harassment, corruption, barbarous legislation, autocratic leadership and war. We are equally focused on characters in the novel which are the epitome of the New Normal World that is built on ethical values of justice, unity, loyalty, integrity, freedom, peace and happiness. Literature and national consciousness are looked upon as a mirror which renders the youth, the bourgeois, the proletariat, the clergy and the political leaders perspicacious of the emergence of a New Normal World.

Problem of the study: The problem of this research work is based on the dreadful and chaotic state of contemporary society in form of herdsmen attack, insurgency, banditry, revolutionary tendencies and war; as portrayed by Jean-Paul Sartre in *The Reprieve*.

Objectives of the research: Our fundamental objectives are to unveil the horrible effects of violence and war in our society and to project the role of literature and national consciousness in national transformation of characters, nation building, emergence of peace and human freedom in a new normal world.

Research methodology: We have adopted the analytic method. This method has helped us to critically examine and unfold the catastrophic effects of war in *The Reprieve*.

Theoretical framework: The paper has adopted the theory of existentialism. The existentialist theory was propounded by Jean-Paul Sartre. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, existence precedes essence. This implies that man exists before his thoughts, acts and deeds, though his acts and deeds justify his existence. This theory has prompted us to look at human actions and deeds, and as such their sociopolitical effects on human life.

Approach: We have adopted the socio-psycho critic approach. This approach has helped us to understand and logically unveil the socio-

psychological disposition of man in terms of war propaganda, the fear of war outbreak, death and lamentations.

Clarification of terms

Literature: literature encompasses all written works in both arts and sciences. It is a body of knowledge that inculcates national consciousness and develops critical thinking, philosophical thoughts and imaginative power in solving human problems. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham look at literature in the perspective of evaluative and descriptive writing.

Literature has been commonly used since the eighteenth century, equivalently with the French belles lettres (“fine letters”), to designate fictional and imaginative writings—poetry, prose fiction and drama. In an expanded use it designates also any other writings (including philosophy, history, and even scientific works addressed to general audience) that are especially distinguished in form, expression and emotional power. It is in larger sense that we call literary. ... In its application to imaginative writing, “literature” has an evaluative as well as descriptive function, so that its proper use has become a matter of contention (199).

Literature is all-inclusive. It deals with different subject matter with a view of projecting the societal values.

National consciousness: it is the affirmative sense of a people about national ideologies, aspirations and philosophy of a nation. National consciousness is the state of national awareness and a sense of belonging of a people to duties and obligations of a nation. It is characterized by patriotism, loyalty and honesty. It is a shared sense of national identity and a shared understanding that a people, group shares common ethnic and linguistic cultural background. It is a mere awareness of the many shared attitudes, and beliefs towards things, families and gender roles. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>.

The New Normal World. A New Normal World is a world that is free from insecurity, injustice, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, political

assassination, fidgety of war and other chaotic tendencies. A new Normal World is expected to be predominantly peaceful. Citizens have a strong will and determination to be loyal and patriotic to their world views of peace and security. It is indeed in this perspective that they submit their will to a responsive and responsible government. The New Normal World is a world of positivism, where national consciousness is tailored towards peaceful resolution of conflicting interest, unparalleled commitment to service for humanity, the absence of storm-tossed war and the intellectual edification of the implacable beauty of the New Normal World. Edward I. Korch on the topic “death and justice : How can capital punishment affirms life” has this to say about the confession of people aspiring for a New Normal World.

Last December a man named Robert Lee Willie, who had been convicted of raping and murdering an eighteen-year-old woman, was executed in the Louisiana state prison. In a statement issued several minutes before his death, Mr. Willie said, “killing people is wrong It makes no difference whether it’s citizens, countries, or governments. Killing is wrong.” Two weeks later in South Carolina, an admitted killer named Joseph Carl Shaw was put to death for murdering two teenagers. In an appeal to the governor for clemency, Mr. Shaw wrote: killing was wrong when I did it. Killing is wrong when you do it. I hope you have the courage and the moral strength to stop the killing” (557).

The role of literature and national consciousness in the absurd world, in *Reprieve*

Literature and national consciousness form the basis of critics and character rebranding in an abnormal society. It criticises, denounces and militates against the sociopolitical and religious vices that ravage a nation. These vices include among others: terrorism, herdsmen attack, banditry, assassination, corruption and war. Literature develops human conscience and spark off the spirit of national consciousness with a vision of bedeviling the persecution complex and sporadic attacks. It is an instrument of satire in a society where people are pessimistic, rather than optimistic about human existence. They are pessimistic because of

the unreasonableness of the governed and the ungoverned. In such an abnormal society where literature stands to correct, there are lamentations and public outcry. The majority of the people are miserable and confounded. In the view of Fabatunde Folarin “The world is currently plagued by a plethora of conflicts and crises, many of them seeming intractable” (507).

It is pertinent therefore to note that literature inspires human consciences to take a historical revolt in order to be free from the shackles of anti humanism. A historical revolt is the revolt against the destructive tendencies of man against his neighbour. Camus in *L’Homme Révolté* says: « Là où l’esclave se révolte contre le maitre, il y a un homme dressé contre un autre, sur la terre cruelle, loin du ciel des principes. Le résultat est seulement le meurtre d’un homme »(139). (In a situation where a slave revolts against his master, there is a confrontation between one another, in the crooked world, devoid of human freedom and happiness. The horrible effect is death). The human confrontation in a society where human freedom and rights have been trampled upon is a clear indication of a historical revolt. The confrontation is therefore as the result of sensitisation of human conscience that is stimulated against the splendour of autocratic leadership, barbarous legislation, exhausted patience and brutality. The literary writers take the league of this sensitisation and development of the spirit of national consciousness in the teaming population of a nation. Gabo Sani and Nelson Enefola Oyibo in their paper “poetry in a period of environmental crises: An eco-critical study of Rowland Timi Kpakiamas’s Songs From The Mangrove Swamp and Ebinyo G. Ogbwei’s Marsh Boy and Other Poems” state that,

In literary history, every epoch produces its own literature which embodies the nuances that are distinctive and specific to it. In romantic England, for instance, the creative practice of writers such as William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge reflects a high sense of environmental awareness which defines the spirit of that age (191).

This entails that literary writers educate the public about the sociopolitical, economic and religious contusions in a view on purposeful transformation.

In *Reprive*, Jean-Paul Sartre portrays partly, the heartless frivolity of freewheeling characters in the turbulent instance of war. The image of such characters: Hitler, Daniel, Daisy, Chamberlain and Daladier breed the vulgarity of war. They have a buoyant confidence in war. In the text, they are not bothered about the dreadful and horrible effects of war on human life such as psychological turmoil, family dislocation, abuse of human rights, destruction of lives and properties. Hitler says: "There is a limit beyond which it is not possible to yield, because to do so would be culpable weakness" (270). This is an expression of a buoyant confidence to use war as a resort. Gomez and Pablo exchange pleasantries over war. In a dialogue Gomez and Pablo say:

Gomez stepped quickly back, and burst out laughing. 'Kill them!' he said. 'Don't leave one alive. You've forgotten that fellow- over there'.

Pablo dashed in the direction of Gomez's outstretched arm, and streaked the air with his riffle. 'Bang, bang', he cried. 'Bang, bang, bang! No mercy.' (89).

The writer exposes the psychological disposition of people living in an abnormal society. They are fidgety of war. They are entangled by the fear of death and destruction of their properties. The novel commences with despair:

Four-thirty in the afternoon in Berlin, three-thirty in London. The hotel stood bleakly on its hill, a desolate, solemn edifice with an old gentleman inside it. At Angoulême, Marseilles, Ghent, and Dover, people thought: 'What can he be doing? It's past three o'clock, why doesn't he come out?' he was sitting in the lounge behind half-closed shutters, his thick-browed eyes staring into space, and his lips slightly parted, as though he were recalling some ancient memory. He had ceased to read; his hand-the freckled hand of an old man- still grasping some typewritten sheets, hung loosely from his knees. He turned to Horace Wilson and said: 'What is the time?' (5)

The worker is confounded because of the hovering of planes in the sky and the tensed atmosphere that is calling for war between Germany and the allied forces of France and Britain. This menace creates anxiety and boredom in thought and conduct of most people in the universe of Sartre. In the same vein, homes are engulfed by terror. Parents and children shrink back against the walls and curtains. Anna screamed to alert Milan of the appearance and the danger of the warriors.

‘There they are,’ said Anna. The voices seemed nearer: they must be marching down the main street. From a distance the jubilant shouts of a crowd sound very like shrieks of terror. ‘Is the door barricaded?’
‘Yes,’ said Milan. But they can always get through the windows or go round the garden’. ‘If they come upstairs. . . They can smash up everything; I won’t lift up a finger’ (10).

This an expression of fear and helpless condition of man in an abnormal society depicted by Sartre. The helplessness and insecurity of lives lead to the closure of schools and freedom of movement. This is a breach of fundamental human rights in a society that is considered to be absurd. Let’s look at Jägerschmitts and Milan’s reaction against Marikka, a school girl that was sent to stay with him for safety.

He eyed the empty street, and his heart turned over. Why have you come here? he asked. There is no school today.’
‘Mummy sent me’, said Marikka. ‘She was carrying a little basket, filled with apples and slices of bread spread with margarine. Your mother must be crazy: go home at once’. ‘She said you won’t send me back’. She held out a sheet of paper folded into four. He unfolded in and read: ‘Father and George are terrified. Please keep Marikka until evening’. ‘Where is your father?’ asked Milan. He’s behind the door, with George. They’ve got axes and riffles’. And she added with a touch of importance (11)

Literature gives us an insight into the agony of human condition, in the absurd world. Literature develops human conscience which makes man to be perspicacious of the horror of life. Man is conscious of his

miserable condition that is caused by sociopolitical and religious contusions which escalate, sometimes to a world conundrum. Mathieu, one of the characters in *Reprieve* is conscious of his future and his lost in the world that is considered unreasonable.

A spurious future. All the experiences of the last twenty years have been spurious. We were energetic and serious, we tried to understand, and here is the result: those lovely days led to a dark and secret future, they deceived us; today's war, the new Great War, stole them surreptitiously away. Without knowing it we were cuckolds. And now the war is there, my life is dead: that was my life: everything must be started afresh Now I have lost everything (75-76).

Sartre unveils the terrible state of human condition. In the novel, Daniel says man is born to suffer in the world that is considered to be irrational. 'Anyway he said abruptly, man was born to trouble' (1130). The affliction of human life in war makes Odette to reflect on the death of her father in war. War is a dreadful thing (25). She expresses the barbaric human sentiment of some heartless fellows about the death of her father in the war. "When her father had been killed, in 1917, people had said to her: He was a fine fellow, you must be brave; she had very soon learnt to wear her mourning veils with a sort of jaunty melancholy, and look at people with ingenuous eyes of a war-orphan (25). Similarly, her brother, Etienne came back from Morocco incapacitated and the people with naïve thinking advice her not to pity him. From the novel we have discovered that,

In 1924 her brother had been wounded in Morocco, he had come back lamed, and people used to say to Odette: 'He's a fine fellow, you must be careful not to pity him'; and Jacques had said to her, a few years afterwards: It's very odd, I thought Etienne had more strength of mind, he has never got used to his disability, he has grown embedded (25).

There is irreparable lost of implacable love and the sense of humanity. Man is conscious of the drastic effect of the abnormalities, of the world which is characterised by: banditry, insurgency, terrorism,

kidnapping, child trafficking, incessant cases of rape and war. These abnormal issues infringed injuries on human life. The follies have caused man to have some reservations and a considerable scepticism about human relationship. Many people are living in misery. They are conservative and are withdrawn from the scheme of things which originally were created beautiful. Sartre unveils the terrible state of separation and individualism in human life, in the world that is considered nonsense. Schalom thought to himself, “we have lost our sense of solidarity, and that is the true curse of God” (77). The misery of the heartless frivolity of human conduct in the world that is considered to be nonsense predestined the irreparable lost of love. “So many trains and lorries streaking across France, so much misery, so much money, such floods of tears, such vociferation on the wires all over the world, threats, and challenges in every language...men strolling round a barrack yard, or throwing coins in the dust”(375)

Literature and national consciousness in a new normal world in *the Reprieve*

Literature and national consciousness are the bedrock of a liberal society. Literature is inseparable from the society, and as such, it develops in the teaming population of a nation a sense of national unity, patriotism, honesty, justice and good governance. In a new normal world where people develop good attitude and a sense of belonging, people are the martyr of peace. There is absence of war; the society is built on ethical values such as human freedom, equity and justice, positivism and nation building. In this perspective John Cruickshank presents the view of Jean Jacques Rousseau about a normal society. He says:

It is only within a situation of stable relationships that settled claims and duties can grow, and only there that men can begin to recognise themselves as moral persons, recipients of rights and owners of obligations. Society is not an artificial construct made by far-sighted men of nature, nor is moral codes merely rules of prudence designed to reach more efficiently constant and persistent end (189).

Sartre opines that literature permits the intellectual edifice of the new normal world. People contribute ubiquitously and ceaselessly their ideas and selfless services for human development. In the *Reprieve*, Odette is

not interested in genocide, persecution and massacre which are considered to be crime against humanity. Mathieu remarks: “She disapproves of us because we are putting ourselves in a position where we risk being killed or wounded”(23). The old man has a buoyant confidence in peace rather than war. “I will say just this: I am confident that all interested parties will continue their efforts to find a peaceful solution to the problem of Czechoslovakia, because thereby hangs the peace of Europe in our time” (105). These divergent views hinge on peace in our society. The new normal world therefore revolves on peace, joy and happiness of the people. A peaceful society is a happy society. When the French society becomes free or war people express their deep satisfaction and happiness in their lives. News papers convey messages of peace. ” ‘Yes.’ No war: any aeroplanes over Paris: any bomb-shattered ceilings: life must be lived. ‘No war,’ she sobbed: no war- and you look pleased!” (377).

People are advocacy of peace and unity. The delightfulness of purposeful co-existence draws people together and inculcates in them the sense of communism. People share their set of mutually incompatible views. They are not prisoners of their own society. There are no incessant attacks of banditry, herdsmen, terrorism, kidnapping, sexual abuse and war. Mathieu expresses his freedom and peace in a society that is free from the upheaval of war. “Mathieu resumed his walk round the yard. I am free and shall remain so, he thought”(376). A lot of people are conscious of the notion of unity of purpose, in a new normal world. They are advocacy of peace and unity. Soldiers live peacefully with their civilians compatriots. Let us consider the reaction of the small soldier and Gross-Louis in the place of peace accord.

The small soldier came up to Gross-Louis waving a news paper. It’s peace! Gros-Louis set down his bucket. ‘What did you say mate?’ I said it’s peace.’ Gros-Louis eyed him dubiously. ‘Peace?- but there hasn’t been a war.’ They have signed a peace, old thing. You’ve only got to read the paper’. He handed it to Gros-Louis, who pushed it a way. Is that so?’ Said the lad sympathetically. ‘Well, look at the picture.’ Gros-Louis reluctantly took the paper, went up to the stable window and looked at the

picture. Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini, all smiles: they seemed to be good friends.... The soldier burst out laughing, and Gross Louis laughed too.(370-371).

This entails there is a large amorphous joy and delightfulness in unity. There is a common stock of ideas, communion of interests, human sympathy, tolerance and nation building.

It is evident from the novel that the New Normal World is free from corruption. People develop positive thinking and progressive ideas for the good of everybody. Nobody is interested in exploiting another. The boroughs, the towns and cities are not rotten by corruption. People are afraid of corrupt practices. This is the case in *the reprieve* where the old man cautions Philip not to bribe people for a job that is to be done legitimately.

He produced his pocket-book, and laid three notes on the table. 'Young fool!' said the old man. 'Now I shall take them, and refuse to do the job.' Philippe eyed him uneasily, and reached out a hand as though to pick them up again. The old man burst out laughing, 'I thought. . .' said Philippe. The old man was still laughing. Philippe snatched his hand away, and smiled: 'I know my fellow-men', he said. 'I know you wouldn't have done such a thing.'(147)

A lot of people with good moral conduct over shadow the insignificant few who have the tendency of being corrupt. The society is to a greater extent free from human contradictory capacity of sexual harassment. Even the teeming population of the youth is conscious of the danger of rape and as such, they implore reason and good conduct in their human relationship, with their opposite sex. Taking into consideration the case of Huber Masaryk, a member of Czechoslovakia delegation and Ivich who are careful not to indulge in rape.

A voice whispered: 'are you asleep?'

She did not answer, but she felt a mouth against her ear, and then a whole body in contact with her own.

'Ivich, 'he murmured. 'Ivich!' he murmured. 'Ivich'

She mustn't cry out, struggle. I'm not the kind of girl one rapes. She turned over on her back, and said: 'No I am not asleep. What is it?' ' I love you,' he said.(365)

This mutual understanding between partners is the image of a new normal world. There is collaboration among partners, nations and countries. In the compatible views of Shedrack Gaya Best on "The Methods of conflict resolution and transformation"

collaboration process is one in which parties work together on their own, to resolve problems through constructive dialogue or other activities like joint projects, sharing of community schools and health centres , markets, bridges, as well as other facilities, etc. Collaboration helps to build trust, confidence and mutual respect. (104-105)

It is pertinent to know that what makes up the New Normal World is the reasonableness of human attitude and conduct based on trust, confidence and mutual respect.

The government is democratic, responsible and responsive to the yearnings and aspiration of the citizens. The interest of the people is the interest of the government. Indeed, the government becomes an institution for peace and security, for the lives and properties of the people. People submit their will to the government, and the government provides happiness. No government in a New Normal World can be interested in the barbarous legislation and the splendor of autocratic leadership, that very often lead to conflict, war and misery. In the novel, Hitler, Mussolini and chamberlain do not consider war as the last resort in solving human problems, but peaceful dialogue. They are conscious of the fact that war is destructive and absurd in a New Normal World

I had announced that this evening I would make a statement to the country on the international institution, but early this afternoon I received an invitation from the German Government, to meet Chancellor Hitler, Monsieur Mussolini, and Monsieur Chamberlain tomorrow at Munich. I have accepted the invitation. You will understand that on the eve of such important

negotiations, it is my duty to postpone my promised statement. But before my departure, I wish to offer the people of France an expression of thanks for their courageous and dignified attitude (355).

The acceptance of the invitation as a response for a peaceful resolution of issues of cession of Sudeten to Germany hinders the outbreak of storm-tossed war between the two parties. Douce says:

There seems to have been a misunderstanding she explained. Hitler believed that Chamberlain and Daladier wanted to make trouble, while, at the same time, Chamberlain and Daladier thought he meant to attack. So Mussolini came along and convinced them they were mistaken: now it's fixed up tomorrow all four of them will be having lunch together (360).

The purposeful coexistence marks the end of war propaganda, the hovering of fighter-jets at the frontier and the machine guns taking over the rue Royal.

The four powers : Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, taking account of the arrangement already established in principle for the cession to Germany the territories of the Sudeten Germans, have agreed upon the dispositions and conditions regulating the said cession, and the measures thereby involved(366-367).

This maturity and mutual understanding of the two governments: France and Germany is the image of a New Normal World, where peace reigns and people have satisfaction in their leaders. Milan expresses his deep satisfaction in the reasonableness and charisma of the leaders: Milan drank and said with a laugh: 'To France! To England! To our glorious allies!' then he flung the glass against the wall: they shouted: hurrah for France! Hurrah for England! Hurray for peace! They were carrying flags and flowers (377). This is a clear indication of People who are conscious of their peaceful coexistence in a New Normal World.

Conclusion

It is imperative to say that, literature is the human laboratory that, works on human conscience, in order to give a generic man a sense of responsibility and power of reconciliation, amidst his problems. It is the mirror of the society through which, the society creates a distinction in human character and conduct. By the writer's projection, we are able to make a distinction between the absurd world and the New Normal World in terms of national consciousness. The absurd world is an irrational world. People living in the irrational world have a dead conscience and as such, they are living in the horror of war, barbarous legislation and the splendour of autocratic leadership. The New Normal World is a world of positivism, where national consciousness is tailored towards peaceful resolution of conflicting interest, unparalleled commitment to service for humanity, the absence of storm-tossed war and the intellectual edification of the implacable beauty of the New Normal World. Literature and national conscience are the platform upon which the New Normal World emerges. The work contributes to knowledge, since it is a booster of national conscience for the emergence of a liberal society.

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