The geographies of reason - remapping the existential model across cultural boundaries

by

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Abstract:

The task of a contemporary African and African Diaspora philosopher is often defined from exogenous sources, in the sense of having to react to paradigms and hypotheses generated from colonial metropolitan thinkers. This has bred the so-called four traditions in African philosophy, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the tradition charted under the advocacy of the brilliant Caribbean philosopher, Lewis R. Gordon, through the exploration of existentialist and phenomenological philosophies from an Africana perspective.

In this discussion, I wish to subject to exploration a) the geographies of reason that constitute the founding basis of these philosophical responses, b) interrogate the theses generated through the approaches I annotate here, and c) examine African socio-cultural and existential dynamics to see if the geographies of reason derived by African philosophers and, especially by Lewis Gordon, stand up to the test of critical intellectual appraisal from a theoretical and practical application to life, literature, society and reality in Africa and its Diaspora.

This exploratory exercise is intended to generate and stimulate reflective and reflexive engagement with the reality of philosophical effort in the context of globalization and consumerism, to ensure that we maintain a clear vision of the nature of the geographies of reason(s) that define us and our existence.

A. Geographies of Reason

In recent times I have been perusing a number of critical issues in what I call the “Economics of Religion” (Bewaji 2006), the problems of leadership in Africa and its Diaspora polities (Bewaji 2002) and the questions of how best to understand the relationships between African and Diaspora art, culture and morality (Bewaji 2008). Most of these reflections have always been responses to the need to re-educate myself and/or theorize issues “far from the madding crowd”. But the more I try, the more it seems that the forces of the metropolitan academy continue to suck me into the labyrinthine conundrums of its dicta, its desiderata and its paradigms! It is because of this that I will preface my examination of Existentialism, as an explanatory model for understanding African and Diaspora realities, with a digression into some aspects of the geographies of reason that often chart our consciousness and moderate our discourses (intellectual and practical engagements) with realities.

I base this preface on an interrogation of Robin Horton (1993). This is because I believe that his ideas have not been given the full analysis they deserve, to properly unmask the errors of reasoning that he propagated, even in spite of multiculturalism, post-modernism and post-structuralism. What has been popularly discussed in his ideas will not be central to us here, for example his intellectualist thesis, his “open and closed predicaments”, and his notions of scientific and non-scientific cultures. These are beaten ground and I cannot do detailed analysis of these here, given the constraints of time and space, but starting with his work makes it possible to get a foot-hold on how using foreign cartographies and geographies may mislead, and has often misled, thought and conclusions about Africa and its Diaspora
existence by scholars from diverse backgrounds. So, I will be selective in dealing with the ideas of Horton, and those familiar with his views will immediately see that my arbitrary selection may differ from theirs if they were at liberty to consider similar issues.

Let me start with the following introduction from Robin Horton (1993) to *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*:

And comparisons between such thought-systems required a standard, universally-current medium. Both of these considerations dictated that the thought-systems of the various peoples of the world be translated into terms of a ‘world’ language. And for the time being, ‘world’ language meant Western language (p. 2).

No doubt Robin Horton has shown a level of creditable devotion to the understanding of the belief systems of some Africans peoples, especially the Kalabari people of South Eastern Nigeria. In fact, few African scholars have been as painstaking and as committed to an intellectual cause as he has been, albeit with dubious results. His contribution to the understanding of African religious beliefs and to his own understanding of what constitute traditional “philosophical” reflections of Africans is, in my judgment, not matched by most of the efforts of his critics of the same generation. It is a tribute to him also that his honesty has never been in doubt regarding the way he has forged the tools available to him and the way he has been able to ‘master’ the intellectual climate that he studied. It is in this light that his thoughts have continued to be influential in various fields of studies of the cultures of Africa and the religions that have pervaded the metaphysical domain of African peoples, even when his theoretical frameworks are suspect and his conclusions are of dubious provenance.

But we (I mean Africana philosophers and thinkers in various related disciplines) have not paid his efforts of decades the second greatest tribute one could pay to any scholar, which is to conduct a careful *tour de force* of the conundrums of the works of such a scholar, acknowledging credit where due, advancing supporting arguments of agreement where needed, providing explanatory analysis where there are unclarities and, ultimately, exposing areas of oversight, unjustified presuppositions and blatant errors where they may abound. This is a sad thing, as without such attention, many of the inconsistent conclusions to which he came, and assumptions based on slender or non-existent evidence would continue to masquerade as valid.

Horton proclaims that the “standard universally-current medium” in which comparison and understanding of the thoughts of other peoples can take place is “a world” language, which is a “Western Language”. If pressed it is clear that “standard universally-current medium”, “world” language and “Western language” all refer to “Anglo-American English language”, and only when English is not available, German, Portuguese, Spanish, minority Hungarian or other Western, Central or Eastern European language (since the imaginary Europe does not encompass the non-colonizing geographical land-mass contiguous with it, Asia, these lands which are naturally part of European continent have no languages meriting the title “world language”). What this does is to lay the foundation for the ideas of Horton’s life’s intellectual devotion. Some of the claims of Horton or inherited in the academy by
him that have shaped African Philosophical and critical intellectual discourses over
the last half century are, that

With its highly secularized world-view and its modernistic mode of thought,
the West, at first glance, stood in spectacular contrast with a spiritual and
traditionalistic Africa. (p. 3).

This has been so much so that even those African scholars who disclaim the
Eurocentricity of Western anthropologists have remained apologists of one sort or
another of Eurocentrism, as the diction of protest does not rise above the paternalism
of the prejudices enshrined in the languages of their representation, nor did they
surmise that they could challenge the illogic and material vacuity of the claims about
Africa and ascriptions abnormal religiosity and spiritualism to African peoples. This
means that, 1) at the background, the European educated African scholars, operating
within Western model, there is no way you can retain your authentic African-ness, for
you would have become Western oriented permanently and lost all traces of your
indigenous culture, 2) the reactions of resentment of people whose cultures have been
wrongly described, trampled and trammelled, is dictated and conditioned by Western
desiderata, 3) these African scholars have no opinions of their own, they say what the
West has preconditioned them to say, like the proverbial parrot, only able to
regurgitate and mime what it had learnt, and 4) once you are formally educated in
Western academic colleges or colleges that are fashioned on Western curricular, the
educational upbringing go on to determine what facts you can discover (or whether
you can discover any facts at all).

The dilemma of the so-called intellectual friends of Africa is how to treat with
paternalism and at the same time excoriate racism, colonialism and neocolonialism.
While able to locate the weaknesses of the Symbolist and Theologian explanations of
religious phenomena, experience and cultural setting, Horton betrays the weaknesses
of the underlying assumptions that cripple his very immensely erudite effort when he
says,

(U)nfortunately for the Theologian, modern Western religious discourse is
virtually unique in confining itself to the communion aspect of religious life,
whilst leaving the explanation/prediction/control aspect to the sciences. Even
in the earlier West, religious discourse dealt with both aspects. In virtually all
other religious traditions, moreover, such discourse not only always has dealt
with both aspects, but continues to do so (p. 9);

as his main goal, in my judgment, has been to show how Western religious discourse
has ceased to be religious discourse but a form of the purely utilitarian, aesthetic and
academic diversion, and in this regard, he runs afoul of what Wiredu describes as
historical ignorance or deliberate amnesia - a kind of wilful forgetfulness of the
continuing link between religion and life in the West forcefully demonstrated daily by
events, beliefs and actions of leading figures of Western society such as George
Bush’s War on Terror and its religious fundamentalist background. It is from this
background that we must appreciate when he (Horton) introduces the ‘greatest’
contribution he seems to make to the intellectual arena; that is, intellectualist thesis,
in the following manner,

Here, following the lead of the ‘Ordinary Language’ philosophers, I have
treated this whole complex of thought as inextricably bound up with the
emergence and persistence of that particular kind of socially-cooperative exploitation of the environment, mediated by language and manual technology, which is the distinguishing mark of the human. In addition, with one eye on the theory of gene-culture coevolution proposed by the sociobiologists, I have suggested that, because of its survival value in the context of this form of life, primary theory may even, through the cooperation of natural selection, have come to be supported by specific and distinctive cerebral structures. In making this suggestion, of course, I have broadened the relevant context to include, not just the technological, the economic and the socio-political, but also the biological (p. 14. Italics emphasis mine).

Horton sees religion for the Westerner in purely utilitarian, functionalist form, by contrast with African and other ‘primitives’ who, because of the “cerebral structures” of their brains, see more in religion than utility and service or benefit derivable from religion. Hence, he says, (I quote at length from Horton, so that I can allow him to speak for himself, before interrogating his ideas. The reader should forgive this indulgence, as there seems to me to be no better way of doing the interrogation)

‘I believe in God’ implies ‘I subscribe to the system of social-structural symbolism of which this belief-statement is part; and, in uttering this statement, I signify acceptance of certain social relationships and adoption of a certain social alignment’. Hence, a man’s religious belief-statements should be verifiable solely by watching to see whether he does, in fact, accept the relationships or take up the alignments allegedly referred to by such statements. The instances we have raised above, drawn from an African culture and from one nearer home, suggest that the very reverse is the case, (p. 23.)

Further he says,

Thus, whereas a (primitive) Kalabari would be as contemptuous as we (civilized persons) should of someone who talked about a table as being in two places at one time, he (the primitive Kalabari) would not be so of someone who said the same thing of a spirit (as we civilized people in our abundance of our scientific knowledge would): for instance, the dead, who are thought to exist ‘in spirit’ only, can be talked of without any sense of contradiction as both ‘in the sky with God’ and as ‘in the burial ground’ where experts may communicate with them ... Many other gods of primitive peoples could be cited as resembling the Kalabari Water-People in their thorough-going materiality (pp. 24-25; Parentheses mine for emphasis).

Horton says,

Amongst the Kalabari of the Niger Delta, for example, a great deal of religious activity takes the form of highly stereotyped prayer (very much unlike Catholic mass) and offering to the gods (probably they have no concept of the Supreme Being?); and in these stereotyped situations there is no manifestation of the gods in moment-to-moment reaction to what the human congregation is doing: ‘the gods are there but we do not see them’: (p. 28. Parenthesis mine).
Stereotyping and flexibility, then, are opposite poles of behaviours dominant in religious and non-religious contexts respectively ... In no culture is it thought very odd or unusual for one man to refuse another’s request through sheer ‘bloody-mindedness’; but there are relatively few cultures whose religious world-view admits of the possibility that a god may refuse human requests just because he chooses so (p. 29).

Later Horton says,

‘Rationalism’ in the twentieth century implies the programme of holding testable beliefs only and of acting on the assumption that connexions between events in the future will continue to resemble connexions between events observed in the past. As philosophers now acknowledge, no further justification of such a programme can be found which does not appeal to the very principles involved. It is in other words a programme which has causes deep in the roots of our nature, but one which has no rationale; and as such its status is no different from a programme which accepts faith as sufficient ground for believing in a god or gods. Where a man is faced with certain statements that are empirically testable and others that are not, there is nothing logically absurd in his applying the rationalist programme to the testable statements and the programme of faith to the untestables; (pp. 45-46)

... it seems likely that future developments in our own culture will involve not the disappearance of religion, but a greater and greater emphasis on its communion aspect. Such a development, indeed, seems to have been going on for some time in sections of the Protestant Church, which has done a good deal of reinterpretation of dogma that formerly seemed to stress the functions of the Almighty as provider in the material world (p. 46).

In the sort of pre-literate cultures that social anthropologists study, there has been little development of that ideal of objective understanding of the world which is central to the modern Western ethos (p. 54. Italics mine for emphasis).

How are all these ideas about the differences in the intellectual approaches to life and issues in Western societies and African societies related to our theme in this particular instance? And what have they to do with existentialism as an intellectual paradigm, and as a geographical map of reason inherited by Africana scholarship? It would seem not evidently that there is any connection between the issue being discussed and these quotations on the face of it, but their relevance to our topic and problems will be clear presently as we proceed.

The first point that I will make is that the geographies of reasoning, understanding and analyzing African cultures, religions, consciousness, art, education, politics, etc., indeed the spaces and the patterns of the discourses that are permissible within these spaces for Africana peoples, are all demarcated exogenously, according to the perceptions and interests of the external agencies who control the wellspring of knowledge, technology and information in the Western capitals and their spokespersons. The parameters they have set have defined responses and outputs by our (indigenous African and African Diaspora) intellects. Regardless of how much illogical, unreasonable and untenable the maps and attendant cartographies have
seemed or been, we have had to use these maps and compasses inherited from these centres to understand ourselves, our universes and others that we must interact with. Some (only some) of the elements of the maps are as follows:

a) Africans have no religions in the proper sense of it, and where they have semblances of religion, they have no real conception of a Supreme Being, a being who is creator and artificer of all, with no equal, and totally self-sufficient;

b) Africans are primitives with no understanding of the distinction between the holy and the profane, the religious and the secular, cause, effect, chance and probability theory, and are of a pre-logical mentality (as their thoughts fail to obey any rules of logic that characterize Western explanatory models and thinking processes p. 65.) in accounting for events and reality;

c) Africans never developed any science, technology, civilization or culture;

d) That traditional Africans were mainly uneducated, preliterate, with no history, no literature, no mathematics, no structured mode of thinking, no political institutions, no formal systems of education before colonization, no vocational specializations, etc;

e) That the African continent is the home to all kinds of diseases, plagues, and barbarity, about which nothing has been done, because the mental firmament of the Africans does not comprehend danger of these problems nor proceed to find solutions to them, and

f) This is why there is no success story in the form of modern political, social and economic development on the continent of Africa or among African dominated states of the Diaspora. It all has to do with the innate weakness and inferiority of the African consciousness and intellect, which make the African suitable for eternal tutelage under the ambit of other peoples of the world!

The above have bred all kinds of responses such as Senghorian Negritude, Céssaire’s hailing of the natural children of the earth, Nkrumah’s Consciencism, Nyerere’s Ujama, Hallen/Sodipo’s Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft, Oruka’s Philosophic Sagacity, Paget Henry’s Caliban’s Reason, Charles Mills’ Blackness Vissible, Lewis R. Gordon’s Existential Africana and Existence in Black, and recently Polycarp Ikuenobe’s understanding of African Metaphysical Beliefs on the one hand, and on the other, Patrick L. Goodin’s Idea of Afro-Caribbeana Philosophy.

In the face of the denial of humanity to the African, the responses have varied from one of shock, derision, self adulation, self denial as in the famous black skins, white masks of the roast breadfruit syndrome in Jamaica bred in identity crises, nostalgia, and in some instances, critical introspection, unnecessary posturing, misuse and abuse of power, position and office, ostentatious consumption patterns aimed at making up for whatever psychological deficit is felt, etc. For example, it is not uncommon for the black JJCs (Johnny Just Comes) of South Africa immediately after 1994 to be talking on two cell phones to imaginary callers in public, sweating in three piece suits in the sun. What this means is that after the denigration of the existence of the black folk by the newly arrived white powerful, it was important to find all kinds
of responses to deal with the new experience – exigencies of existence in such new world, and the expressions of the responses have been as diverse as the problems the thinkers have felt needed reaction.

Intellectually, the most potent response to Horton has been Wiredu’s “How not to Compare African thought with Western thought” (1980). But the force of this most incisive and logically telling response has been dwarfed in the drumbeat of Western dominant power of the academy, which power has contrived to drive into the background all efforts by other scholars of differing views, as merely marginal ideas to be entertained for their exoticism. In the first place, Western epistemological treatises are replete with evidence concerning the non-existence of any such ideal understanding of the world. Secondly, philosophers of science, scientists, historians of civilizations and science, critical scholars, all acknowledge the fact that there is nothing like an ideal of objective understanding of the world. Every knowledge is tentative, every theory a hypothesis, every conjecture an opinion, every certainty a transient stopping place. Thirdly, in an era of universal flux, pluralism and multiculturalism, it seems odd to suggest that any group has an ideal and objective understanding of the world. The intellectual and practical situation in medical practice and in other scientific areas, show how slippery the concept of objectivity can be when not properly handled. Fourthly, whose definition of objectivity is being used, whose perspective, whose ideal and whose universe? These are pertinent questions which obviously suggest themselves to any academic effort that aimed at laying any claim to objectivity of understanding, if there ever be such a thing, especially in a modern and post-modern intellectual environment.

On another level it will be remiss on one’s part not to find a blatant denial of the remarkable level of understanding of the cosmos, the environment, themselves and the projected understanding of even the unseen realm by the so-called primitives as objectionable. And what makes matters worse is the fact that the “primitives” of Horton’s study are not the only traditional peoples with remarkable and universally acclaimed understanding of the nature of things, science, medicine, the environment and social relations, though these peoples are modest enough to acknowledge the limitations of their understanding. Charles S. Finch (1991), discussing “The African Background of Medical Science” contends:

A study of ancient Egyptian diagnostic methods reads disconcertingly like a modern textbook on physical diagnosis. A physician summoned to examine a patient would begin with a careful appraisal of the patient's general appearance. This would be followed by a series of questions to elicit a description of the complaint. The color of the face and eyes, the quality of nasal secretions, the presence of perspiration, the stiffness of the limbs or abdomen, and the condition of the skin were carefully noted. The physician was also at pains to take cognizance of the smell of the body, sweat, breath, and wounds. The urine and feces were inspected, the pulse palpated and measured, and the abdomen, swellings, and wounds probed and palpated. The pulse taking is worth noting because it indicates that the Egyptians knew of its circulatory and hemodynamic significance (p. 141).

How it can ever be suggested that these traditional peoples have no understanding of nature is strange. Other efforts by Africans to deal with their nature, environment and the universe are documented. These include cataract removal from
eyes, Caesarean sections for delivery, mummification of the dead, surgeries of various types – orthopaedic, trephination, neurosurgery, etc. That the information is available and was not accessed by Horton does not speak well for his vaunted scholarship. That we all continue to discuss philosophy, science, development, technology and existence along the paradigms dictated by the West is even more incomprehensible, except that we have abdicated responsibility for creativity and capacity to understand our world and the inhabitants of the world in our own way.

The assertion by Horton that the “last fifteen hundred years” have witnessed the successful abdication by religion in providing explanations of worldly events to science is inaccurate rubbish (p. 57). The many persecutions of scientists in Europe and the contemporary reluctance of Christendom to accept the irrationality of the bifurcation of the areas of life into the “holy” and the “profane” have not supported this assertion at all, and it is not true that “modern Western Christianity” lacks interest in explanation of things in the “space-time world”. A whole lot of Christian theories concerning the origin of the world, the end of the world, immortality of the soul, creationism, abortion and morality (to cite a few examples) fail to bear out Horton's position, as they constantly dabble in alternative explanations of reality in competition with science and common sense. The so-called modern Western Christianity’s “lack of concern with the explanation of this-worldly events” is playing the ostrich, a hypocritical turn away from reality enjoined only after the subjugation and colonization of the greater parts of the third world (p. 58). Even now efforts are still being made in powerful quarters to continue to force humanity to see the origin of the universe in “creationist” terms – what is called “intelligent design”. To then suggest that this is a plus on the part of a religion that threatened hell and brimstone on non-believers is hypocritical and dishonest. It does not even have support in the gospels as laid down by Christ. The examples of revivalist fundamentalist Christianity (for example, in the White House for that matter with various consultations with mediums and séances), we have pointed out, is no more than a domestication of a politically virulent Christianity, and the tolerance that Africans show to other religions is a sterling example of a traditional belief that where one has no knowledge one should not claim authority, rather one should let a thousand religious flowers bloom, as no harm but good can come of this. But when Africans stand firm on what they believe, with regard to natural relations between males and females, contra Gene Robinson and the advocates of the homosexualization of humanity, the African Anglican Communion is regarded as leading the way back to primitivity!

The fifth point made concerning not regarding religion as attempting to provide explanation of the events in the mundane world we have shown with even contemporary examples, flies in the face of reason and science. The dematerialization of matter and the dementalization of the mind which Michael Polanyi (1973) celebrated in his Personal Knowledge, which Popper (1972) referred to in Objective Knowledge as evolutionary epistemology, and the advances in relativity theory and the blurring of the traditional boundaries in neurological sciences are evidences of the impossibility of the type of hard and fast view canvassed by Horton. Consider the new information being spewed out daily in space travels and explorations. We are not even sure that this is the only planet in the multiverse that is inhabited or that the earth is not the centre of the multiverse, even if we are certain that the earth is not the centre of this our own universe! Thus, it is foolhardy to make the type of pontification that Horton indulges about the “rightness of the current Western belief-system”, for this suggestion in itself is not any less patronizing than the Tylorian suggestion that the
multi-layered and multi-textured explanatory models of the “primitives” are but childlish pseudo-explanations from peoples still at the infancy of human civilization. Clinging to the idea of a superiority of one explanatory model over another, in spite of himself, and advancing arguments one would have thought fatal to such a view, probably in order not to be isolated within the community of Western anthropologists too steeped in a tradition of intellectual loyalty, is unfortunate.

The arguments of anthropologists, like Horton, have proven futile to the extent that they have attempted to find positivistic criteria of demarcating cultures into scientific and traditional. While Horton has been busy looking for the why of cultural difference, engaged in the justification of ethnocentrism and racial supremacy, the non-Western societies of the Pacific Rim have been busy transcending the imaginable boundaries of technological advancement of the West. In other words, they have shown that traditional religious beliefs are not incompatible with scientific advancement. Hence it becomes an embarrassing paradox for Hortonian type Intellectualism that Japanese intelligentsia would leave their research laboratories and enter into their religious communes to relate to the spiritual world in an unashamed way that Horton's brainwashed ignorant Nigerian Western-trained medical practitioner will find unimaginable. Speaking about the Christian Supreme Being, he writes:

Here, it is perhaps salutary to remember that the concept of natural law so central to modern Western scientific thinking had its origin in the Christian idea of a God who bound Himself to abide by cosmological laws of His own making (p. 106. Italics mine for emphasis).

That religion is that way may be a weakness, but that scientific rationality must be the only judging rationality is itself unnecessarily limiting. I do not know many religious Christian persons who would subscribe to this incoherent idea of the Christian God, hamstrung by the laws created by Himself, and which are capable of being suspended at the slightest whim by this God. Thus, according to Horton,

One such mark is that left by Christianity's own most cherished defensive tactic. Faced with challenges to the rationality of their faith, Christian thinkers have tended, very characteristically, to take refuge in aggressive obscurantism rather than in rational counter-argument, proudly vaunting the unamenability of the object of their faith to rational comprehension. They became notorious for this tactic in their early battles with Mediterranean paganisms. And they have dusted it down and brought it into action again in their more recent battles with science-inspired atheism (p. 187).

This is clearly the point about the redundancy of what Horton calls the advancements of Western religion to mere cosmetic and utilitarian sport. That the Christian fundamentalist intellectual still does what Horton describes is evidence of the slipperiness of the grounds on which his Intellectualist thesis is constricted. Thus, granting that science itself is not without rationality problems thrown up by advocates of ideology of scientism, it becomes a null point to use such a moot issue to derogate the faith of the religious. Consider, in this regard, Western medical practice that Horton uses as example in the discussion of what theory does in the lives of peoples. He suggests that it plays disparate roles in the cultures under investigation. This is not based on any clear analysis or understanding. According to Horton,
Through the length and breadth of the African continent (not Africa south of the Sahara now!), the sick or afflicted people go to consult diviners as to the causes of their troubles. Usually, the answer they receive involves a god or other spiritual agency, and the remedy they prescribed involves propitiation or calling-off of this being (p. 201).

This is not reasonable at all, using Horton’s understanding of reason and in the light of the quotation form Finch earlier! Horton knows, or should know, the degree of specialization in African traditional medical practice, and if he does not know, all he has to do is educate himself, as he lives in an African environment in which such an education is readily accessible. There are two ways this can be done: one, he could read the literature on healing in Africa, from traditional to contemporary times, or, as he is an anthropologist, he could conduct his own research to discover this fact, either by making himself a student of the system or by seeking indigenous medical assistance for whatever health condition he or his acquaintances may have. This is not too late, as he is still actively involved in research.

Now let us consider what Horton says about the points of difference between Western scientific cultures and African traditional cultures. The main one, according to him, can be formulated thus:

It is that in traditional cultures, there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets; whereas in scientifically oriented cultures, such awareness is highly accepted. It is this difference we refer to when we say that traditional cultures are `closed' and scientifically oriented cultures `open' (p. 222).

Horton asks: Why did the scientific attitude develop in Europe and not in Africa? As has been argued, it is clear that it is false to say that science did not develop in Africa. The evidence against this conclusion of Eurocentrism has been unearthed to the chagrin of Intellectualism and other ethnocentrist European scholars. But let us examine the excuses he advances and see whether they are strong enough to do the job of supporting the thesis that science did not develop in Africa:

a). Writing: Many scholars have drawn this false cause argument in support of the reason for the development of science in the West and the absence of it in Africa. Even some African philosophers have been taken in by this simplistic argument. But there are materials out there which show that writing is not alien to traditional African societies. Some of these works are by Niagoran-Bouah and Winters. They document the Mande script and Akan script in ways totally different from Egyptian hieroglyphs,

b). Development of culturally heterogeneous communities. This is not the case as history shows. Further evidence is provided by linguistic miscegenation of various cultures, and

c). Development of the trade-travel-exploration complex. Ivan Van Sertima's *The Came Before Columbus* has remarkably burst the bubble of this myth. Also his volumes on the *African presence in Early Americas, Europe and Asia* have further dispelled the notion that
Africans were not adventurous, hence why they failed to develop the scientific spirit.

B. Existentialist Themes, not persons or epochs!

Again, how is all this related to existentialism and Africa? My approach in this exploration of existentialism will be a nuanced one; it is not going to be historiographic or personalized. I will prefer, for obvious pragmatic reasons of intellectual humility, to deal with the themes in existentialist thought. In the first place, this approach can be better managed, given the kind of available space for a plenary discussion of this nature. Secondly, dealing with themes ensures that I avoid the twists and turns of who is or is not an existentialist, who first propounded existentialist thought or who influenced who. Third, my approach will ensure that I do not get embroiled in questions of when existentialist ideas first occurred in human intellectual history and where. Finally, even though I may face the challenge of determining in what order it is best to discuss existentialist themes, or which is more important, or which gets left out of discussion, it is possible for me to wriggle out of such problematic by indicating that I have no special order of choosing which theme is important and which not, as I consider all of them of equal importance, while time and space constitute the determinant of how many themes are addressed. Given this approach then, it is clear that my interest is based on how existentialist thought and theory have been related to, been used to understand, and been used to shape Africana experience, Africana existence, and Africana being. My references will be eclectic, often inadequate in my detailing of views and at times selective in attention, because this is just work in progress, deriving from some suspicion that there are gaps that need filling and notions that need amendment in our understanding of ‘Afro-existentialism’, hoping to use this as the basis of gaining some traction in my interaction with Africana scholarship and existentialism.

While we are on this trajectory, Marxism and Christianity may even be considered as tropes of and antidotes to existentialism. The only problem would relate to the difficulty that would arise from the fundamentalism of both, especially with regard to the certainties of their mutually exclusive apprehension of the essential natures of humans. But this trajectory is better left for another exploration, so that we do not get bogged down with tangent.

Concrete individual existence

It may be argued that the starting point of existentialist thought can be located in the negation of Cartesian essentialism – what has been described as non-Cartesian sum by Charles Mills (1998) – and its understanding of human natures, existence and realities. “I exist, therefore I think”, becomes the starting point of all being, all consciousness, all relatedness, all of human life. The human person is the only kind of being who defines him/herself through the act of existence and spends a lifetime making something of the self. Without life there can be no meaning, no essence, no consciousness, no thinking, no reality of, or for the self. Without life there is no capacity for self agency, which would consequently mean that there can be no realization of individuality as individuality. The compromising of the existence of the self would mean the compromising of the essence that could have derived from being.
Subjectivity as Cartesianism on its feet

Existentialist thought has stressed the importance of the inner self as an experiencing self, as a passionate individual in taking action and in deciding questions of both ‘morality and truth’. Personal experience, understanding, apprehension, projection, retrojection and acting on one's convictions are essential in arriving at ‘truth’, and in the situation of existence this cannot be properly undertaken unless as someone involved in that situation, because self-involvement is superior to that of a detached, objective observer. Because of the emphasis on personal involvement, the personal coefficient in experiencing, all a priori theorization on realities become precipitously endangered by problems of essentialism which we looked at in the contrast made between existence and essence earlier.

Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject as a subject experiencing realities and, on the other, that human beings cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is the ability of the self to locate the absolute ‘truth’ within the ontology of the self’s being. To simply say in existentialism that a person chooses him/herself, we do mean that every one of us must choose him/herself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for him/herself he chooses for all humans in all similar circumstances of existence.

Individual freedom and responsibility

One of the important tropes of existentialism is individual freedom, an absence of a restraining external force on both thought and action of the individual. This freedom has been theorized in various ways in Western scholarship, especially within phenomenology, existentialism, libertarian political, economic and legal backgrounds. Freedom is innate to human beings because of their capacity to experience, think and choose. Humans are animals that cannot but be free, and in being free come face to face with the consequences of freedom, the consequences of being endowed with an ability that is both special and loaded with awesome responsibility. This is the condition of existence of the human person as an agent in the universe.

Not taking in hand the freedom that comes with being human is bad faith (Lewis R. Gordon 1995, 1997). Bad faith is also attempting to escape from freedom, choice and responsibility. Existentialists have shown that the condition of being human imposes choices on us, even in instances where we suppose we may have none. One may find reason to question the methodological foundations of existentialism, but the validity of necessity for choice and decision-making is not in contest. We have, as persons – leaders and followers – the freedom to choose, we have determinate capacity to affect our collective destiny. Recognition of this capacity is good faith, denial of it is bad faith. Even in an interdependent world, that so-called global economy, there are acts of freedom that are inalienable, and denying responsibility or anchoring one’s fortunes on the whims of external agencies is bad faith. What is being suggested here is that there are simple acts of self-sufficiency that attracts respect and approbation – such acts are in the form of honesty, only accepting justly earned reward, and refraining from benefiting others on the grounds of vested interests. These are not too much as expectations of the people who have reposed trust in the leadership. Not doing this is a denial of self-agency and freedom, and it is bad faith.
Choice

Arising from human freedom is the innate capacity for choice. Choice making is a critical component of freedom, and it is arguably that singular factor which separate humans from animals. Choice making relates to deciding not just what course of actions to embark upon but also what life histories to design for the self as a being in the world. As humans we have no way of avoiding choice, and even when we refuse to make choices, this refusal itself is choice making. What will result in instances of abstaining from choice may be bad faith, as they mark evidence of lying to the self about the situation of the self, and in some instance lying to others! The self-delusion that constitutes bad faith is an emasculation of consciousness.

Since we cannot meaningfully abandon choice, the choosing not to choose constitutes lying to oneself about one’s condition (and one’s national, racial, cultural, economic, social predicament), about one’s and one’s fellow compatriot’s reality, about one’s and compatriot’s being-ness. It is indicating that we are making progress when in deed we are quite clear that the benchmarks of progress have been statistically lowered to accommodate disingenuous interpretations of data. It is not facing up to one’s and compatriot’s ontology, as a thing from the Western consciousness, rather than as a self, as an identity, or even as a self to the self, and as one of selves. It is not recognizing that in spite of celebrated individualism embraced by members of Western societies, there is no expropriating individuation to the point of mutual extinction, for in all critical instances, the reverberating dictum remains: I am, because we are (title of an anthology edited by Fred Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee, 1995). It is the unholy acceptance of the dictum, “Rome was not built in a day”, a call to complacency, an abdication of responsibility to build, rather than the current situation of continually pulling apart and destroying what others have laboured to build.

Dread and Anxiety

In existentialist thinking, humankind is a being that has free will. The freewill arises from the capacity to think, to choose, and to make the self whatever one wants. And life is just a continuous and endless series of choices, thereby creating the conditions for stress. For humans there are very few decisions which are without any negative consequences. Some of the events and things in the world that we experience are irrational or absurd, and without logical explanation. Even under such circumstance human beings must still make choices for which there are no clear guidance or choice-making signposts. To then make a decision and follow through with the consequences of such choices impose heavy responsibilities on the self.

In existentialist thought this is what occasions dread and anxiety in the human ‘soul’. This is where the human self must face up to the implications of his/her humanity, and not doing so will lead inexorably to bad faith. Thus, one is, literally speaking, condemned to being free. This is where the dark side of freedom is revealed, as it bodes negatively for responsibility in the midst of the uncertainties of consequences of the choices that we are compelled by our ontological situations to make. Other irrevocable attendant consequences of this situation are the feelings of aloneness, forlornness, despondence, anguish and even hopelessness.
C. Existentialism in African and Diaspora Thought and Practice

I want to say that existentialism in the contexts in which the African Diaspora thinkers have applied it to the African and Diaspora experience has appeared uniform, rather than multiform, thereby creating the impression that we are dealing with a homogenous mode of analysis. The main themes that have been examined under this discourse have been a) racism, b) oppression (or what my Rastafarian brethren and sistren will call ‘down-pression’), c) otherness, d) invisibility, e) cultural negation, f) identity negation, g) slavery and unfreedom, h) objectification, i) choicelessness, j) commodification of the self, and k) expropriation of selfhood. I will be paying attention to themes, issues and analytical tools, rather than to specific individuals and periods of analysis as indicated earlier, hence, those whose names do not appear in my discourse should not imply from that their views are not important or that they are exonerated from the call I make for the soul-searching that I enjoin here.

The major thinkers who have used existentialist analysis in comprehending and representing the black experience have supposed that this experience is uniform in the new world and in Africa during the same period, that Africans on the continent would understand their ideas as universal characterizations of the uniform black experience, and further that the traditions of explanatory methodologies offer insights which are existentialist in orientation. These are serious presuppositions which raise important issues and unavoidable problems, problems which need not only clarification but circumspection in application if we are to gain proper understanding of the difficulties that arise in continental Africans appreciating the sensitivities of Africans of the Diaspora and vice versa.

There is no doubt that an analysis of the existential conditions of humanity in any age and circumstance is always useful. There is no doubt that such analysis could yield an understanding of the nature of perception, cognition, and appropriation of realities of peoples across borders and epochs. Further, there is little doubt that the condition of the black person in the last four hundred years, or so, in the new world deserve proper understanding, if not to understand why they (the experiences and the subjects of these experiences) will not just go away, fade into the background, or stay where they are placed by the majority supremacist power brokers but to comprehend why blacks are who they are, having been born of struggle, refusing to transform themselves beyond the struggle into cohesive communities of self-supporting and self-affirming entities, unable to be victims of the divide and conquer syndrome.

But this analytical desiderata must be placed within the context of the pluriformity of the black experience, that is, historical and contemporaneous existential situations of black globally. Rather than allow a univocal analysis to lure us into complacency, it may be necessary to understand why it seems that continental Africans fail to tune into the loop of realities of new world Africans. We need to wonder whether the reason may not stem from the disparities in the numerous divergences of realities of consciousness and situations of existence of the different African peoples on the continent and the African Diaspora.

It is against this background that I undertake my reflections on existentialism as a universal tool for understanding the black experience. I am not in any way claiming that African and Diaspora scholars who expounded existentialist philosophy are wrong in their analysis, or that there is no room for existentialist
appropriation and exposition of the conditions of existence of blacks universally or regionally or even individually. In fact, I sense that the analytical tool of existentialism and phenomenology has been very ingenuously brilliant in dealing with the issue of the black experience. But I raise a caution flag, to ensure we do not misapply the tool and mistake appearance for reality.

With the above in mind, I am positive that Paget Henry’s (2000) applications of existential thoughts to African philosophy is very interesting, especially his effort to look deeply into African ontologies of being, bringing about an acoustics of clarification to issues which often defy such clarity. Starting from the premise of the ego as both located in the self and as determined by the superior forces beyond, he explains the weakness of the cogito as a function of “the ego’s ignorance of its nature and destiny” (p. 63). Instead of doing an analysis of the self in pure existentialist terms, based on the ideas posited above, we see Henry (1997) vary the content of existentialism to reflect the legitimate ambiguity of the word – both as existentialism as a philosophy and existentialism as the condition of existence.

While I am in agreement with Henry’s analysis of the self in traditional African philosophy as being a derivation of the various factors of natural, social, religious, cultural, political, economic and other factors, I do not think that the existentialist matrix can be adequately deployed to understand the lived realities of the traditional African individual without making assumptions that may detract from proper analysis. The consideration of “destiny”, “pre-destination”, the various rituals and sacrifices, the attention paid to ancestors, and various other liturgical and Para-spiritual agencies of causation, all lead to a problematic of understanding of existence in African philosophical discourse.

Because of time and space, let me state crudely my worry with the beautiful project prosecuted by Paget Henry. First, I think he has been overly sanguine with the analysis of African ontologies by many thinkers on African religiosity. This acceptance has led to the conclusion that Africans are in all things religious, and need the mediation of the super-sensible world for the negotiation of order in their lives and existence. Consequently, aspects of sceptical thinking and iconoclasm are discounted. Second, Henry seems to translate the spiritual effects of the super-sensible to a limiting factor on the abilities of the ego to realize itself, rather than take the humanistic and socio-culturally limiting factors of interpersonal relationships as the dynamics for self-understanding and for embedded self-actualisation. Third, Henry seems to overlook the possibility for the ethical dynamics of existence to be structured in such a way that the metaphysics of existence subsume its meaning within the rubrics of co-existence of individuals in society. Thus, while on face value, and to the external observer, there are various supernatural and socio-cultural forces that may moderate the existence of the ego, it is clear that a lot of the factors that enhance or retard success are self-generated and self-dependent.

Contrary to the positing of Christianity (evolutionarily) as an antidote to the individualism and egotism of the Euro-American traditions, the context of existence is well-balanced that the educational system and the socio-cultural contexts of being provide proper guides to action. What is being suggested is that while existentialism is a way of preventing the angst of the atomistic ego, its problem is the Christian a-logical suggestion that contemporary sins have been remitted by some act of some other, that is, the Christ, some couple of millennia in the past. The impotence of
existentialism in a traditional African context does not derive from the fact that there were no conditions of existence needing analysis, but such conditions were not capable of analysis in either post-Christian or in neo-Marxian terms.

This brings me to the question of the twin world-views often taken for granted as capable of providing entrepôts to understanding African existence. These are Marxism and Christianity. In the case of Marxism, its value is the liberation proposition for colonized and enslaved persons. In this regard, its resonance cannot be diminished, but the weakness of Marxian ideas has been the absence in traditional African societies of the kinds of class structures that it feeds on to be effective. While in the case of Christianity, its weakness derives from the fact that the evolution of the God that it preaches has not transcended the level of violence, superior and inferior, black and white, good and evil, Jew and Gentile mentality from which it originated. The application and usefulness of existentialist thinking within such contexts cannot but be limited to the comprehension of the lives of those ‘despicable’ humans who have inherited sin through the primordial fall of the “first” couple! Clearly, societies that do not make the assumption that human infants are “conceived in sin” or that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of the lord”, but who recognize that even the lord may not be omniscient, omnibenevolent or eternally consumed by the struggle against the forces of evil, will generate different existential consciousness needful of different existentialist stratagems. In Yoruba society traditionally a lot of effort is made to prepare for conception through various ethical, economical, social, cultural activities, both for the couple preparing to embark on the journey of family-hood and the extended and bigger community-family from which they originate. Consequently, the new infant is not just “inserted” (Henry 1997 p. 15) into an inclement, hostile and perilous natural, human or social world with no cushioning shock-absorbers to make existence meaningful or bearable. This does not minimise the numerous accidents that may befall the new, or even old, individual in the process of growth and maturation. It simply defies logic that the element of individuality is transposed on individuation to concretise individualism with little reference to the mellowing factor of socio-communal attention to insuring a good life as defined by society.

While Horton had suggested that religiosity meant that Africans fail to distinguish between the secular and the holy domains of existence, it is clearly in the introduction of Christianity that this parody of the relationship between humans and the divine was concretised. Any understanding of Yoruba religion will attest to the fact that even divinities were not immune to existential woes, as clear attention is paid to the choices made by these powers to merit attention, and as examples to the vicissitudes that humans may expect in their journeys through life and becoming. This is the weakness of both Horton and Henry, which Morrison annotated in Du Bois’s 1906 poem following the Atlanta riots (p. 42). Clear examples of disanalogies to Henry’s analysis are conceivable in various Yoruba proverbs: Aare n pe o, o lo n d’ Ifa, bi Ifa ba fo ire, b’ Aare ba fo ibi nko? meaning literally, “the chief is calling you, you claim to be divining, what if your divination elects good for you but the chief elects evil for you” and “B’ori ba yan re, b’ eniyan funrare ko ba yan ire pelu iwa, atibotan ofo “if one’s destiny is good and one’s effort and character does not select good, it is meaningless”.

If we look at the other existentialist themes that we have annotated and ask how applicable these are within the context of African realities, we would see that there is some discontinuity/dissonance in the relevance of existentialist analysis in
contemporary European society and in contemporary African realities because of
differences in cultural, social and economic ordering of existence in the two societies.
In fact, this has been part of why such analysis of income levels per capita and crime
in inner city communities does not seem to tally when comparisons are made of
Western societies and African societies. Take the idea of “concrete individual
existence” as discussed by European existentialists. It is remarkable that the time
when European thinkers were getting disillusioned with European realities and
formulating existentialist analysis of existence was about the same time when
American thinkers were formulating ideas of pragmatism. The comparison here
makes sense, because given the nature of what is known as society in the John Wayne
society, the idea of eternal, absolute, immutable truths made no sense to persons who
must survive in the here and now. While for European thinkers who were tired of the
ideas of freedom enunciated by Jean Bodin, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart
Mill, Immanuel Kant, and Karl Marx, the only realities that confronted humans was
the helplessness to which the new individual liberty and freedom from monarchical
structures of governance led, the only option was nihilism and existentialism, for the
American who has to survive in the new world and who still continue to be struggling
against not only the forces of nature but also struggling to put down the challenges of
the Amerindians, the rebellion of the black slaves and the uncertainties of the greedy
cattle rustlers and pirates, pragmatism pays no tribute to any deities except that of the
end justifying the means.

To interpret the conditions of human existence in Africa in existentialist terms
is just like conducting a rigid Marxian interpretation of social and economic relations
of African societies prior to, during and subsequent to colonialism. Because of the
fact that there was no absolute individuation, what obtained in most African societies
was structured individuality, not individualism. Since conditions for absolute egotism
were rare, it meant that individuals were parts of communities that attenuated the
conditions of existence, cushioning the vagaries and unpredictabilities of such
existence. This is the point of “I am, because we are” as a direct contradiction of the
Cartesian cogito.

This is not suggesting that existential challenges were not common, in the
form of conditions of positioning within the larger systems of life, especially in
circumstances in which there were class/caste systems as among the Ibos of South
Eastern Nigeria. Such conditions of “outcastness” may lead to subordination of self
and negation of individuality. But since such conditions were aberrations rather than
the norm, they would only yield minimal explanatory value for existentialist
philosophy. What is clear from the above is that the notion of the self cannot be
disaggregated in pure existentialist terms in African societies, because individuals are
not atoms, disconnected selves dislocated in time, space and location with no
reference to others, as even in the metropolitan urban centres the dictum “I am
because we are” makes sense as the village is translocated into the urban centres as
insulating forces against urbanization and the anonymization that follows from it.

The discontinuity that exist between the existential realities of African on the
continent and Diaspora Africans, which breeds patent inequalities on the part of the
former to fully comprehend the Diaspora realities of the latter as presented through
chattel slavery, emancipation, racism and other conditions of existence are significant
discursive forces that make uniform existential analysis problematic. It is against this
background that I am reluctant to concede the homogenization of the black experience
for intellectual mapping with the cartographic tool of existentialism, useful as it may be. This is not to be regarded as a rejection of the existentialist matrix as a useful means of dealing with the complex natures and structures of contemporary black experience.

Turning to existentialist understanding of the dual concept of individual as subjective beings with a consciousness that is private, and as subjective otherness in relation to other subjective others, the idea of subjectivity even as an inversion of Cartesianism, standing Descartes cogito on its feet, rather than on its head, still fails to account for the fact that knowledge is not simply an individual enterprise. This collective nature of knowledge is not what Horton meant by his invidious “Open and Closed predicaments”, as it is clearly applicable to all cultures that knowledge is more collective than individual (Code 1991). Buying unrestrained into European existentialist understanding of African subjectivity as interpretive modalities would dislocate not only the proper understanding of the subjectivities of African selves, but it will mask a lot of the factors that under-gird the African consciousness which translates into remittances and rootedness of Africans in their home countries even after generations of translocation in “foreign”.

Looking at the discursive effort of the existentialist philosopher through the lens of subjectivity would create a disconnection with the realities of the typical African person. And it may be difficult, as a result of the alien nature of the ways of seeing that is suggested, for an average African thinker with a first degree to relate to the existentialist analysis. While as an undergraduate I found existentialism most interesting as a means of comprehending existence, subjectivity and individuality in the European consciousness and psyche, it was with curiosity that I read more about the kind of cultures that could have bred in thinkers this kind of view of the human life and existence. While I may be regarded as probably too young then to understand the totalities of what the existentialist was trying to proffer, it clearly cannot be an explanation now for the same suspicion that I have with regard to this existentialist enterprise as a universally applicable tool for understanding black experience universally.

Considering the subject of freedom and responsibility in society, leaves us with certain suggestion that this can only be meaningful within the context of liberal democratic, Christocentric, and Western models. This suggests that individuals are atomic agents operating with no influence from external agencies, such that choices are freely made and responsibility individual. The first immediate question that arises in analysis of individual freedom and responsibility from the perspective of the person alone is the assumption that we arrive at individuality ready made, never being a child, never progressively growing up within cultural, social, religious, political, economic, psycho-doxographical contexts. This spectator theoretical analysis of freedom and individual responsibility masks the processual nature of human will and human maturation, which element, when downplayed, makes it difficult to understand many of the Western theories of human nature, human freedom, etc. The second issue that arises which the existentialist must recognize is that analytical interpretations of freedom and responsibilities without proper contextualizations run the great danger of subsuming the self within a sanitized theoretical construct which makes unrecognizable the final human product.
Within the context of many societies with proper processes of childrearing and initiation into adult life, selves are not isolated agents, with no cues as to proper moral decisions and choices. While the choice of right and wrong remain the prerogative of the individual, this freedom is not absolute, not is it compromised by considerations of the existence of others who must be taken into account in decision making. The freedom enjoyed by selves in society has never been absolute, as it is within the context of society that freedom can be enjoyed, and it only when such freedom is governed by rules, norms and boundaries of reverence for the greater communal good that it is meaningful to speak of any serious freedom. This element is what makes the question of responsibility both joint and individual – joint in the sense that individuals are agents protected from absolutisms of tyranny and oppression by others or nature, and individual in the sense that at the end of the day what makes an individual a responsible “omoluabi”; that is, good person, or the cultured person, is not simply claiming freedom while denouncing responsibility.

However with the irruptions subsequent to colonization, political and economic domination by Western powers there ensued a new and different factor of self creation which makes the old orderliness of choice, freedom, subjectivity and responsibility inapplicable as a means of comprehending existence. This new mode of existence, new mode of being, in a world in which a new religion, a new education with no sympathy for indigenous epistemologies and metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics, and cultural and political traditions makes existence so fluid that freedoms become differentiated by layers of disobedience to cultural trappings of indigenous traditions, while not understanding enough of the newly acquired statuses of Anglophonic or Francophonic gentry and damehood. Undertaking the analysis of the new existential circumstance is important to the understanding of the lives of persons and leadership of Africa with agendas that are externally determined and externally orientated.

In discourses of “dread and angst” in African and Diaspora existence, it is often against the background of the negation of personhood and individuality that this is done. This application of the two existentialist themes to the experiential situation of blacks generally cloak the variabilities in those existential circumstances, to the extent that it presents in homogenous terms the disparate natures of such existence. For the Rastafarian, for example, (Henry 1997, 157ff) dread is a phenomenon that arises within Babylon and its agents’ spurious denial and negation of the self-hood of blacks, and it is a means of understanding and responding to this situation in protest and by creating a new metaphysic.

While in orthodox existentialist analysis of the condition of the person, dread and angst are conditions that arise consequent upon the absence of road-maps to moral action in society, in regular African societies the new dread arises as a consequence of the introduction of foreign, often inclement and unsympathetic, deities into the religious horizons of discourse and relationship, as well as a consequence of the new disconnected educational system which measure success in terms of certificates rather than beneficial knowledge to society and the character of the knower. As a result, there is little or no dread or angst for actors in a world of dislocated moral terrain, which makes it possible for the appropriation of national wealth for personal use and storage in foreign bank accounts!
Given the above, an existentialist understanding of a) racism, b) oppression (or what my Rastafarian brethren and sistren will call ‘down-pression’), c) otherness, d) invisibility, e) cultural negation, f) identity negation, g) slavery and unfreedom, h) objectification, i) choicelessness, j) commodification of the self, and k) expropriation of selfhood with regard to African experience of being must be attenuated before it can be meaningful, so that the discourse generated does not fail to be informative or unnecessarily truncated. These are my worries with the road-map of existentialism as a means of understanding universally Africana experience. It has nothing to do with the worthiness of the efforts of my “brethren and sistren” who have done the most incisive interrogation of the Africana realities, it has to do with a need to be sensitive to the cleavages that exist in the experience of African and Africans of the Diaspora, which often translates into misunderstandings across the experiential spectra.

**Conclusion**

Christianity, Marxism, and Existentialism are aspects of the geographies of reason that have been used to understand and represent knowledge, metaphysic, ethics, aesthetics, culture and all the various aspects of realities of blacks. These have generated variations which often seem unrecognizable because of the idioms of discourses adopted. But they all have limitations that are easily recognizable, given the fact that each of them has the capacity to obfuscate reality, like most myths and myth-like constructs. It is against this background that I have blown here, to call for a pause, a slowing down, to re-examine our theoretical assumptions and the applications of these to the experiences we wish to understand and characterize. The imaginativeness of the discourse so far by the scholars we have attempted to engage, indicate that we can prosecute the introspective analysis that I call for, and the variations in the modalities of discourse are salutary enough to generate optimism.
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