

## **Existentialism, Kidnapping, and the Absurdity of Freedom: A Critical Consideration of the Nigerian Situation**

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### **Abstract**

Freedom is one of the core principles of existentialism. Existentialism asserts that human beings are free and so responsible for shaping their own existence. However, this freedom often leads to encounters with absurdity, the realization that life lacks inherent meaning. Sartre for instance opines that humans are absolutely free. This means that every human person is free to carry out any action, whether right or wrong. Kidnapping is a social phenomenon that poses a threat to the freedom of the other person on the one hand, and on the other hand an expression of (acting as one wills). The other person is denied of his freedom by being stripped of freedom and inherent dignity thus reducing that individual to a mere object. This paper attempts to examine the complex connection of freedom and existential absurdity in kidnapping in Nigeria. This will be achieved through the analysis of the works of key existentialists such as Soren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. The paper will adopt conceptual analysis as its methodology.

**Keywords:** Kidnapping, Existentialism, Freedom, Absurdity, Responsibility.

### **Introduction**

Kidnapping is a menace that is rapidly becoming a threat to the existential well-being of the society. In the Nigerian society, kidnapping is rapidly invading the social space and so threatening the freedom of Nigerians. The rate at which kidnapping occurs and the outrageous ransom demands, is alarming. The paper explores the link between kidnapping and existentialism.

The concept of freedom is central to existentialist philosophy, with existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus analyzing its implications for human existence. Existentialism proposes that humans are free beings who are capable of making choices. The problem, however, with this postulation is the lack of balance between human freedom and the freedom manifested through kidnapping. From an existentialist viewpoint, freedom is a central

concept, emphasizing personal choice and responsibility. However, this freedom is often accompanied by absurdity, or the lack of inherent meaning in life. Kidnappers most likely act on the basis of their freedom and by so doing infringe on the freedom of others. The act of kidnapping is a threat to human freedom based on the fact that it involves one individual stripping other people of their autonomy and freedom by force.

This paper examines kidnapping in the light of how it deprives people of their freedom and the chance to make a meaning out of their lives. It considers the kidnapper's exercise of distorted freedom, and discusses how the absurdity of freedom and how the clash of interest between the freedom of the kidnapper and kidnapped plays out. In this wise, the individual's pursuit of freedom results in another's loss of autonomy. By examining the motive behind kidnapping and the impacts it has on the society, this analysis aims to uncover the negative effects of human behaviour and the contradictions that arise in situations where freedom is constrained or restricted by force and where human beings desire and are entitled to it.

### **Existentialism and the Concept of Freedom**

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that is essentially concerned with individual existence. Elijah Akinbode defines it as a philosophical movement that seeks to study man and the nature of his existence. It is basically concerned with the existence of humans, what it means to live a meaningful life and also the relationship that exists among human beings. Existentialists inquire into the existence, nature, the purpose of life for an individual, and their relationship with others. Humans are believed to be free beings who are capable of making decisions and choices that help them actualize their essence.

Freedom is a basic theme in existentialism and it has, over time, been misconstrued. According to Webber, "existentialism is the ethical theory that we ought to treat the freedom at the core of human existence as intrinsically valuable and the foundation of all other values. It is grounded in a theory of what it is to be human that Sartre summarised in the slogan 'existence precedes essence'." Existentialism has been argued to be a philosophy that gives credence to immoral behaviour based on its emphasis on freedom. Williams McBride holds that,

...Marcel and a number of other Catholic writers and religious conservatives more generally, first in France and then in the world at large, to denounce it (existentialism) with such vehemence. They recognized the appeal it had for young people and saw it as both contributing to and reflective of their moral decline. To the use by French critics of such epithets as "diabolical," "satanic," and "luciferian" by Marcel, Jeanne Mercier (whose accusation, that existentialism had forgotten what an infant's smile is like,.

This is one of the reasons some proponents of existentialism dissociate from the appellation 'existentialist'. Young people of those times who were involved in all manner of vices often referred to themselves as existentialists who have freedom to act as they wished. Jean Paul Sartre, a major proponent of existentialism, opines that existentialism

[H]as been reproached as an invitation to people to dwell in quietism of despair. For if every way to a solution is barred, one would have to regard any action in this world as entirely ineffective, and one would arrive finally at a contemplative philosophy. Moreover, since contemplation is a luxury, this would be only another bourgeois philosophy. This is, especially, the reproach made by the Communists. From another quarter we are reproached for having underlined all that is ignominious in the human situation, for depicting what is mean, sordid or base to the neglect of certain things that possess charm and beauty and belong to the brighter side of human nature: for example, according to the Catholic critic, Mlle. Mercier, we forget how an infant smiles. Both from this side and from the other we are also reproached for leaving out of account the solidarity of mankind and considering man in isolation. And this, say the Communists, is because we base our doctrine upon pure subjectivity upon the Cartesian "I think": which is the moment in which solitary man attains to himself; a position from which it is impossible to regain solidarity with other men who exist outside of the self. The ego cannot reach them through the cogito. From the Christian side, we are reproached as people who deny the reality and seriousness of human affairs.

The concept of freedom, as a principle of existentialism, has been wrongly interpreted; hence, it is wrongly associated with immorality, vices, denial of reality and non-seriousness about life. This raises a number of questions such as: Is freedom as postulated by existentialists a license for immoral living? Is it the case that freedom gives an individual the right to behave the way they want? Is freedom a license to vices and criminal acts? It is important to discuss freedom as postulated by existentialists in order to have a clear picture of what freedom really entails.

### **Existentialism and the notion of Freedom**

Existentialism as a school of thought in philosophy has two divisions: theistic existentialism and non-theistic existentialism. The implication of this is that the concept of freedom as postulated by both divisions may be slightly different. Golan Dastagir holds that

Existentialist thinkers are primarily divided into two groups: theistic and non-theistic. Kierkegaard, as he approaches his existentialist views, is consistently claimed to have fallen in the former group, while Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) whose thought is founded on the non-existence of God as implying the non-existence of a pre-assigned value, falls within the latter.

Kierkegaard, who belongs to the theistic group, holds that human beings are free. However, their freedom is not absolute. For Kierkegaard, God is the root cause of human freedom and so the destinies of human beings have been predetermined by God. Accordingly, the decisions they make on the assumption of free choice is, simply, what God has pre-ordained. This means that human beings simply choose what God wants them to choose. This

raises the question as to whether or not they can, actually, be said to be free. Nevertheless, if the actions of human beings are already pre-ordained, one cannot meaningfully make sense of the notion of freedom in whatever they do. Kierkegaard's conception of freedom is absolutely religious because for him, god is the only guarantor of freedom. The implication of this is that human beings cannot be held responsible for their actions because whatever they do has already been predetermined by God.

Jean Paul Sartre is a major proponent of atheistic existentialism. Sartre, unlike Kierkegaard, believes that God does not exist. The implication of this is that human beings are free beings whose actions are, in the strict sense, products of their choices. Sartre defines existentialism as a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action implies both an environment and a human subjectivity. Human beings cannot lay claims to the control of their actions by external forces, because they are free beings. Akinbode explains that "for Sartre, there is no God, no objective system of values, and no essence (except for the ones we create for ourselves). Sartre believes that man exists and must create his essence and values for himself because he has freedom." Sartre believes that the world is void and meaningless, it is human beings who have the responsibility to make meaning out of life. And this is possible because they are free to make choices. Sartre, in his book, *Existentialism and Humanism*, holds that human beings are condemned to be free; this is because once thrown into the world, they are saddled with taking responsibility for everything that they do. It means that there was no essence before an individual is born, it is when he or she is born that he or she makes a meaning of his or her life. Hence the saying, existence precedes essence.

It is pertinent to note that existentialists place much emphasis on responsibility as much as they do on freedom. Sartre defines "responsibility" as "the consciousness of being the incontestable author of an event or of an object." So responsibility is that consciousness that an individual has that "he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world." Responsibility in this sense means that the individual is laden with the consequences of their freely chosen actions. Also, whatever an individual makes out of his or her existence is their responsibility; the result of the actions they took. Sartre, in explaining the principle of existentialism, states the first effect of freedom, which is that,

...man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.

Sartre explains that an individual is responsible for how he or she turns out, and not just that alone but also responsible to others. It means that before an individual carries out an act, he or she is to consider the effect of that act on others because he or she is also responsible for them. Heidegger also contends that "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities

itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting." Dasein is a word Heidegger used to describe an individual who understands his existence and working towards making a meaning out of his existence. For Kaufmann individuals are free to make choices, "to choose between this and that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen, for we are unable to choose the worse." An individual is free yet in making choices the interest of others is essential. Hence, Orji and Egberongbe hold that "complete freedom includes complete accountability for real human existence."

In spite of the responsibility attached to the freedom of individuals, Sartre's position on no moral standard seems to undermine the doctrine of principle of responsibility. Sartre was against the idea of government serving the needs of citizens due to the belief that there are no moral standards. Sartre holds that, "You are free, therefore choose that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world." This means that for Sartre, human beings are responsible for making or deciding what counts as good or bad, as there are no universal moral principles. Lawhead opines that

Nietzsche is unique among moral theorists in that he does not exhort you to accept his vision of morality. In fact this is impossible, because everyone, by virtue of their temperament, is inescapably either a master type or a slave type. The eagle cannot cease to be an eagle, and a lamb cannot aspire to be an eagle. Some are irredeemably destined to be "sheep," "little gray people," and "shallow ponds. Thus, Nietzsche's moral wisdom is not addressed to all humanity, but only to those in whom it strikes a resonate chord. He is calling forth the noble types to break through the windows of the petty morality that enclose them and to find their wings and let their spirits soar.

Individuals, by virtue of the fact that they are free, are the sole determiners of their morality. Having moral standards set by others is believed to be a threat to human freedom. How, then do we prevent the creation of moral rules that are detrimental to the society by free human beings? For instance, an individual may justify kidnapping on the basis that he is free to decide what is right and that kidnapping is right. Does it mean that anything and everything goes?

Responsibility, as one of the core themes of existentialism, can be used in controlling the excesses of human freedom. The fact that an individual will be held responsible for their actions and also the consciousness that they are responsible to others, will help curtail excesses that may arise from the expression of their freedom. This shows that existentialism is not a philosophy that encourages blaming others for how one's life turns out.

Over time, people who are involved in moral vices such as kidnapping, robbery, trafficking and so on often blame the society, government or other factors for their actions. This is common in Nigeria as there is the constant apportionment of blames to God, government, family, friends, foes, witches and wizards for lack of employment and many other existential challenges to justify the numerous vices prevalent in the country. The principle of freedom and moral responsibility as postulated by existentialists, shows that human beings should bear the consequences of their actions, as reflected in the choices they make. A person who decides to



become a kidnapper did not become one becomes they were destined or predetermined to be, but by free choice. For this reason such a person must be ready to take responsibility for his or her actions.

The individual is a member of a society who does not exist in isolation. They coexist with other individuals in the society. According to Sartre, there are two kinds of individuals in existence; beings-in-themselves and beings-for-themselves. Beings-in-themselves are nonconscious beings that is inanimate objects in the world, while Being-for-themselves are conscious beings who are also conscious of the existence of other beings. Animals and plants and inanimate objects cannot be held responsible for their actions because they do not have freedom, humans on the other hand are free beings who can be held responsible for their actions. Hence Olatunji Oyeshile holds that "We do not hold animals and machines responsible for their actions because we know that they lack the freedom to do otherwise. Animals and machines are not said to be guilty or innocent. They respond to stimuli, in the case of animals, while machines are subject to mechanical manipulations." Animals and inanimate objects lack consciousness, humans on the other hand are conscious beings who are aware of their existence and that of others too. An individual does not exist in isolation, their existence presuppose the existence of others. This will mean that a life lived in isolation or without the consideration of others is, living in bad faith as Sartre puts it. Sartre opines that individuals ought to be considerate of the freedom of others always in their interactions due to the fact that the freedom of an individual is reliant on that of another. It means that in pursuing one's freedom, one is compelled to consider that of others too. When an individual acts outside of this, they are restricting their freedom and living in bad faith.

Camus shows the complex relationship between freedom, responsibility and the interconnectedness of humans using the image of Mersault. Lui notes that for Camus,

[A] person's freedom is not simply self-expression, but rather needs to be achieved based on respect for others and social responsibility. Neglecting responsibility, although it may seem like freedom has been gained in the short term, can lead people into a non free situation in the long run. This is because onl when people take on our responsibilities can people truly establish connections with others and society, and gain true freedom.

It implies that freedom is not an isolated subject whereby an individual acts for self-gratification. Freedom is achieved through relationship with others and so when an individual decides to avoid responsibility by cutting off connection with people, they are indirectly losing true freedom. Living in isolation to avoid responsibility is not freedom, it is absurdity or bad faith. Hence, Liu contends that

it can be argued that true freedom is not achieved by avoiding responsibility, but by bravely facing responsibility and sincerely establishing connections with others. Every choice has its own freedom and limitations, and true freedom lies in how people find their place in this world, how people take on our responsibilities, and how people establish connections with others.

It means that, for Camus, true freedom is achieved when there is a relationship between individuals in the society and when all parties involved take responsibility for their actions. Sartre in like manner holds that

...in so far as I am the instrument of possibilities which are not my possibilities, whose pure presence beyond my being I cannot even glimpse, and which deny my transcendence in order to constitute me as a means to ends of which I am ignorant I am in danger. This danger is not an accident but the permanent structure of my being-for-others.

Sartre acknowledged the existence of others which must be identified at all times and this seems to limit the freedom of the individual. He went further to say, "If there is an Other, whatever or whoever he may be; whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting upon me in any way except by the pure upsurge of his being then I have an outside, I have a nature. My original fall is the existence of the Other." This shows that, for Sartre, the existence of others is important in the realisation and actualisation of the essence of an individual. It is safe to say that according to Sartre, the freedom of an individual recognises the freedom of others and so an individual is to act in such a way that they put into consideration the freedom of others.

Each one wants the other to love him but does not take into account the fact that to love is to want to be loved and that thus by wanting the other to love him, he only wants the other to want to be loved in turn. Thus love relations are a system of indefinite reference analogous to the pure 'reflection-reflected' of consciousness (...).'

Sartre in the same vein holds that

The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me. Thus, at once, we find ourselves in a world which is, let us say, that of "inter-subjectivity." It is in this world that man has to decide what he is and what others are.

The implication of this is that, the freedom of an individual does not mean that they can act as they so desire without considering others. Acting in this manner is acting behind one's self. Simone de Beauvoir rightly expresses this idea thus, "To will oneself free is also to will others free." The freedom of one, presupposes the freedom of another. It is important to note that intersubjectivity does not in any way undermine the subjectivity of humans. It is a way of ensuring that human beings actualise the meaning of their existence.

Martin Buber's usage of the "I-Thou" relationship affirms that an individual becomes a whole person only when they consider others as humans too. It means that an individual who considers others as humans as he or she is, will not rob, steal, kidnap or even murder others.

Daniel Adekeye in like manner holds that authenticity and freedom is achieved when an individual relates with others in the society and also regards them not as means to an end, but end in themselves. Oyeshile also contends that "As Daseins, both at the individual and ethnic group levels, survival is only possible if and only if we recognize the importance of others not as mere objects standing in the way of achieving our goal of survival, but as ends in themselves who are not only important but also inevitable and inescapable in the realization of our goal of survival and freedom."

### **The Phenomenon of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

Insecurity is one of the major challenges Nigeria is faced with and it includes Boko Haram Insurgence, banditry and kidnapping. Kidnapping is gradually on the increase in Nigeria. Before now, kidnapping was not a regular occurrence in Nigeria, however the narrative is rapidly changing. Ezinwa Vincent defines kidnapping as "the act of forceful abduction, enslavement and seizure of a person by a criminal or criminals to demand for the release of the person by payment of ransom from one's relation, friends, family members or government." It involves forcibly taking the freedom of another in exchange for ransom. Saminu and Shuaibu opine that kidnapping "forces citizens to avoid traveling by road while living in fear at home." The increase in the rate of kidnapping in Nigeria today determines the movement of people, places they can go to and the means to get there. This has put a lot of Nigerians in constant fear and panic. There is the need for urgent interventions to address this challenge. Kidnapping is not only a threat to the security of Nigerians, as it affects the economic development of Nigeria as well. It is "the unlawful imprisonment of a person against their will, including transporting the victim to an unknown area challenging to locate or identify." Kidnapping is scaring potential investors and foreign business partners and tourists who want to invest in the economy of Nigeria. Kelechi Ani and Eugene Nweke also define kidnapping as "act of taking a person or group of person into captivity in order to achieve a defined aim. The act places a victim on hostage for the purpose of using the abducted to attain a goal." This means that kidnapping involves two parties; the kidnapper who is the oppressor and the victim who is the prey.

In Nigeria, kidnapping is a common phenomenon. It began more in the South- south region, precisely in the Niger Delta area but has since become a country-wide phenomenon. The Niger Delta region being the oil bearing region of the country paid the first price. Militants started off by kidnapping workers and top officials of the oil companies in the region and then demand for ransom in exchange for their release. This later spread to other regions, particularly urban areas. An example of kidnapping is the abduction of over 250 school girls by the Boko Haram terrorist group in Chibok, Bornu state. Justice Ngwama reported that in December 2019, 512 cases of kidnapping was recorded by the police affairs minister, from January 2008 - June 2009, 353 were recorded. He further provides the statistics which "indicates that Abia State led the pack with a total of 110 kidnapping incidents: Imo: 58,109 arrests, 41 prosecution and one is dead, Delta recorded 44 kidnap cases, 43 releases, 27 arrests, 31 prosecuted and one death, and Akwa Ibom recorded 40 kidnap cases, 418 arrests and 11 prosecutions. The report added that between July/September 2008 and July 2009, millions of Naira was lost to kidnappers. N. Okwuwada notes that in "January 1 and July 29, 2022, the nation of Nigeria saw 2,840 episodes



of insecurity, resulting in at least 7,222 deaths and 3,823 kidnappings. The kidnapping of 250 students at a girls' secondary school in Chibok, Borno State, in 2014."

These are just a fraction of the reported cases in Nigeria. Kidnapping is of different forms: the non-violent, violent and gendered kidnapping. The violent kidnap is one in which the victim suffers all forms of physical torture, harm and sometimes death in order to get the family to pay a ransom. Non-violent, on the other hand, is one in which the victim suffers no physical harm, pain or death. Gendered kidnapping "involves those abductions where adult females and small children feature mostly. This is sometimes done to attract sympathy or easy delivery of ransom. In most cases, victims in this category are violently treated." Kidnapping poses a serious threat to the lives of Nigerians seeing that it can happen anywhere. It can occur in a school (like the case of the Chibok girls), church, mosque, roadside, house to house, in mass and so on.

One may be moved to ask why people are involved in kidnapping. Why would one seek to forcibly take away the freedom of another? Various causes have been given to be responsible for kidnapping, ranging from unemployment, poverty, political gains and so on. According to Okwuwada, "The threat of kidnapping in Nigeria are surrounded by several ideas of causation; while some others contend that it is caused by factors like unemployment, resource control agitation, and religious fanaticism, others conclude that it is political, while some point to the 'get rich quick mentality' among the youth." Aside from the aforementioned causes, loss of value is also a reason why people engage in kidnapping. The society is gradually losing its culture of respect and love for human lives and replacing it with material possession. O. Onovo contends that the increase in crimes in Nigeria is as a result of the celebration of fraudsters on the basis of their wealth. In like manner Ngwama noted that "Celebrating people of questionable character is an indictment on the societal and moral value which such rulers should represent... one of the obvious reasons which encourages kidnapping to thrive, is that people who celebrate such criminals end up encouraging them to do more." It implies that if the society goes back to upholding its values such as hard work, respect for human lives, dignity, friendliness as against the hype on material possession, there will be a decrease in crimes, especially kidnapping.

### **The Absurdity of Freedom and Kidnapping in Nigeria**

Freedom is an essential part of human beings. Without it, it becomes impossible for individual to make meaning out of life. Kidnapping strips the individual of his freedom and this imposes a contradiction to the concept of freedom as proposed by the existentialists. Sartre, for instance, holds that human beings are condemned to be free. If this is the case, why would one deprive another of his or her freedom? It means that kidnapping reveals the contradiction between the theoretical freedom existentialists propose and the stark reality of their physical constraint. The kidnapper may say that they are free and so can act as they choose, even if it is detrimental to others. It is important to note that though the concept of absolute freedom as proposed by Sartre is problematic. According to Oyeshile, "Sartre's talks about the total freedom of man. He believes that man is a being who acts unhindered by any factor. He holds that consciousness is a creation which is beyond freedom. In any given situation man is free to choose. For instance, an imprisoned person is free to shout and make attempts to escape from

his imprisonment.”

This will mean that a kidnapper has the freedom to act as he or she pleases and the victim also has the freedom to cry for help. The last case is dicey, in the sense that in crying for help, there is the possibility of the kidnapper(s) killing him or her. The point, however, is that existentialism does not advocate or justify crimes. The problem is with the postulation of absolute freedom. Human beings truly are free, but it is not the case that they possess absolute freedom. According to Awolowo, the kind of freedom proposed by Sartre is only possible theoretically and not realizable in any human society. The implication of this is that absolute freedom is an illusion.

Having established that absolute freedom is an illusion, it is pertinent to state that freedom, responsibility, and interpersonal relationships, as proposed by the existentialists, contravenes kidnapping. Sartre notes that the freedom of an individual presupposes full responsibility for his actions. It implies that freedom and responsibility are connected, asserting that human beings, in every situation, are free to make choices and must bear the full weight of the consequences. It implies that a person who decides to go into kidnapping is making deliberate decisions that align with their conception of freedom, and so cannot evade the responsibility that follows these actions. So kidnappers using the excuse of exercising their freedom must also be ready to face the moral and legal responsibility that comes with their actions.

Kidnappers represent the perverse expression of freedom where one person's freedom is exercised at the expense of another's. This is what is referred to as the absurdity of freedom. So, the action of the kidnapper can be considered as an inauthentic and negative expression of freedom. As noted earlier, freedom is connected to authenticity, in which an individual is conscious of his or her freedom and also that of others in the society. Kidnappers, in their pursuit of power or financial gain, might claim they are exercising their freedom, but this freedom lacks authenticity. Freedom allows for an individual to treat others as an end not a means to an end. Kidnappers, instead of facing their societal circumstances with integrity or seeking ethical means to improve their lives, reject moral responsibility in favour of a path that harms others and deprive others of their freedom. Their freedom, rather than being an authentic expression of self, becomes a distorted rejection of the ethical implications of true freedom.

It means that freedom as expressed by kidnappers is non-freedom according to Camus, because it is self-centered and disregards the freedom of others. Every human being is free to make choices and make meaning out of life. Kidnapping however strips the individual of their freedom and the opportunity of making meaning out of life and actualising their destiny. Every human being is free. No one is freer than the other. It means that no one has the right to seize or take away the freedom of another. In exercising one's freedom, therefore, one need to take cognizance of the freedoms of others too. Sartre contends that in choosing for oneself, one is also choosing of others. However, if the action one chooses for oneself has a negative effect for, or on others, such an action deserves to be thoroughly reconsidered and revised. The phenomenon of kidnapping, which implicates the interface or the relationship between the individual and the other, reveals the absurdity of freedom which means one thing for the kidnapper and another for the victims.

### **How Kidnapping Became a Culture in Nigeria**

It is good at this juncture to briefly examine how the practice of kidnapping became sadly an established culture in Nigeria. The causes of kidnapping in Nigeria can be classified into some simple parts: Socio-economic, ideological/Religious among others. The practice most unfortunately has not only led to international embarrassment for Nigeria, it has also brought about an air of insecurity around the country.

**Socio-Economic:** Kidnapping as earlier mentioned began in the Niger-Delta region and soon became a national phenomenon for many reasons. Being the oil-rich part of the country hosting many big oil companies, the region has had its own fair share of poverty and environmental destruction without much being done by government to address the situation. This has led to a lot of frustration of the able-bodied men of the region who are so poor and cannot farm and fish because their land has been destroyed by the oil companies. They therefore began to kidnap the foreign nationals working for the different oil companies for ransom. The truth of the matter is, if you create poverty and a misery by abandoning a people to their plight, some people must pay the price for it.

**Religious/ Ideological:** In the northern part of Nigeria, it is not surprising too that kidnapping began with the rise of the various religious sects and terrorist groups Boko Haram being one of them. They wear the toga of religion but they are full of the ideology of hatred for other religions. What they do these days has no affinity to religion as they also kidnap fellow moslems. What they do borders on pure criminality for ransom. The kind of kidnapping going on in the north today is for money making purposes and a clear demonstration of wickedness to humanity. What was seen as taking its source from the Islamic religion has permeated the entire country. There are nomads and herdsmen who are kidnapping for ransom all over the country today. The Sahel region and the crisis around it has worsened the whole kidnapping phenomenon in Nigeria.

Without any doubt, this practice has implications for the general stability of Nigeria. It is a ticking time bomb that must be attended to in league with other neighbouring countries in the sub-region otherwise it could result into an unbelievable cataclysm.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, this paper has attempted to discuss the phenomenon of kidnapping in the light of the existentialist notion of freedom. It unveils the absurdity and the ambivalence of the notion of freedom, which necessarily implicates an interface between the individual and the other and also reveals that the notion means different things to each party. It is important to note that freedom, as postulated by the existentialists, is different from that which is exhibited by kidnappers. Existentialism advocates for freedom of an individual and responsibility in relation to others in the society. While kidnappers demonstrate a distorted freedom that brings about the loss of freedom of others. The act of kidnapping therefore reflects the absurdity of human existence, where freedom can paradoxically lead to both liberation and oppression. The existential analysis of kidnapping not only exposes the dark realities of human behaviour but also forces us to confront the negative and absurd dimension of freedom. This paper therefore underlines, through the lenses of existentialism, the absurdity that lies in the phenomenon of freedom in relation to kidnapping.

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