Sequence of conformism and Revolt in Albert Camus’ The Plague: A psycho-analytical confrontation of religious exploitation in the contemporary society

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Abstract: The twentieth century French philosopher, Albert Camus, in his reflection on the nature of human existence asserts the legitimacy of asking if man’s life has any meaning. Even if it does, he continues, is that meaning reassuring enough for

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
This research tasks the contemporary man on the need to psychologically engage his environment on certain sensitive issues, especially existential. The Covid-19 experience is a manifestation of this literary revelation of Camus, which has opened many eyes on our existential reality, which demands rationality on the part of man, who already perceives his existence as being irrational. The rationality is established on our collective strife towards humanity. The adherence to humanity will end the current religious exploitation of man, who has fallen prey to his existence; as everything appears absurd to him. Religion has set the world on fire. Different shapes of violence have been formed through it and the contemporary man’s gullibility has watered it for long. The revolt against it will be in our collective engagement of the common enemy called blind conformism.
one to keep struggling to live? In response to these reflections, existentialism agrees that the only meaning that life can have is the meaning created by an individual himself through his choices and actions. It therefore becomes necessary that man’s choices and actions should be his and not another’s, given that the individual is a surer and a trusted source of reason than religion, government or any social institution. Above all, man is most himself when he is authentic which is to say that his actions must be solely informed by his choices. But many a time, we find conformists who are thoughtlessly playing out the role that social and religious structures have established for them without any critical attempt to articulate such a condition; such people are considered “nothing” in existential terms. Put differently, such people do not exist which presupposes the need for their revolt against conformism. Thus, Camus’ The Plague is weaved around the dialectics of conformism and revolt respectively. Against this backdrop, this study—a hasty reflection on Camusian principles on existentialism—will explore the sequence of conformism and revolt as presented in The Plague.

Subjects: Philosophy; Cultural Studies; Language & Linguistics; Language Teaching & Learning; Literature

Keywords: conformism; revolt; philosophy; existentialism; Plague

1. Introduction
As a meaning seeking being, man is constantly grappling with the deep question of existence and his place in the seeming irrational universe. The nature of human existence has, since 1930s, attracted the attention of many philosophers. Such questions of existence are best answered in existentialist philosophy. Existentialism covers a varied range of views and is chiefly associated with the writings of Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus.

Its variegated connotations notwithstanding, existentialism has anchor in the idea of what it feels like to exist as a human in this universe. Jonathan Webber’s reading of Sartre is of utmost import to us as he foregrounds Sartre’s popular phrase: “existence precedes essence” to explain that no individual is born with any innate personality. The individual arrives at the kind of person he or she is through the goals pursued and the values adopted (3). The implication is that the idea of predetermined human nature is completely banished to the effect that the real life an individual lives is what constructs his essence. This interpretation therefore places more emphasis on who an individual is as opposed to what an individual is; hence, we read in Paulinus Ejeh that man is ‘defined only in so far as he acts; and he is responsible for his actions (139). If the way one chooses to act and the effect(s) of such an act constitute strong indices of measuring one’s personality, it follows that every other thing around this individual is a variable while “choice” remains a constant. An individual who chooses to conform to a given social norm becomes a conformist and a non conformist if he chooses otherwise (Ejeh 139). In Sartre’s existential philosophy, the conformist exists as “nothing” which is to say that he does not exist. To exist therefore, one has to be responsible for one’s actions. This, literature has drawn our attention to, seeking our participation in the creative of an even world, where man fearlessly commits himself to any course that guarantees him happiness. According to Orjinta, “one could interpret a literary work within the context of race, milieu and moment. Whereas race refers to human population involved, milieu presents the socio-political setting, while moment pays attention to the epoch or era under consideration.” (p. 75) Literature, also, according to Wellek and Waren, depends on the society. (1976, p.106) This so society becomes the focus of this study.
From the foregoing, what existentialism considers ideal choice of existence is authenticity. An authentic individual in this light is an individual that has outgrown blind conformity with the established social norms. Such an individual must have engaged in a conscious quest for authentic selfhood which requires a psychological and subtle revolt from the established norms often seen as a threat to an individual’s freedom. This is part of why existentialism is not so much interested in the existence or non existence of God. It is more preoccupied with the condition and nature of human existence in the universe. Hence, its pervasive indifference to religion is not quite unmotivated. It is chiefly because religion upholds and preaches such values as faith and belief which end in conformism that in turn negates all that existentialism stands for. Camus’ existential ideas are chiefly anchored on absurdism. It is the absurd nature of life that makes revolt against conformism the only way to attain authentic life. This according to Foley, is presented thus, “exigencies of the absurd refer to the challenge posed by the absurd to the supposed rationality of our moral and political beliefs, the ‘absurd condition’ conceived as human condition” (Foley: 200). Such will form our trajectory in the study of Albert Camus’ The Plague.

2. Reflection on the Camus’ idea on conformity and Revolt

We intend to carry out a thematic approach to this work. And if that is engaged, the work presents itself as grappling with the question of the nature of human existence. Existentialism, in order in which the work presents it shares a similar theoretical template as absurdity. Hence, Camus constructs his absurdist reflection out of the popular movement of the century, existentialism. To enter into the literary world of Camus requires preeminently the realization that one is dealing with an author who is an atheist. Major characters in Camus’ fiction, therefore, can probably be expected either to disbelieve or to wrestle with the problem of belief. One’s first response then, as a reader, might profitably be a brief consideration of what might happen to a character that comes to realize that there is no God. Conceived by the existentialist philosopher, coined the term absurdity, which deals with humans, their confrontation with the conceived meaninglessness of life and the bizarre feeling emanating from this encounter. Faced with the questions of conformity, this paper envisages to diagnosing different systems of rationality: orthodox medical system, government policies and religious fundamentality vis-à-vis The Plague to show man’s helplessness in an irrational universe where the events are beyond his control. Picking religion as presented in the fictional world of Oran of Camus’ The Plague for an instance, we see the problems of assumed responsibility and unfounded attribution of causes and effects to divinity. Under such a condition, our work will be an attempt to explore through existentialism the inherent devastation of blind conformism and religious irrationality beleaguer ing the postcolonial African society as exemplified in the fictional world drawn from the Algerian quarters of French colony.

Distinctively, we will be extrapolating the reality of social influence involving a change in belief or behavior in order to fit in with a group or groups. This change is in response to real or imagined group pressure. Existentialist theory will come into play to highlight the subject of individual existence, freedom, choice and responsibility. It is the view that humans rationally define their own meaning of and try to make rational decisions which provide them with the greatest benefits and highest satisfaction despite existing in an irrational universe. By exercising our freedom and choice that implies a complete rejection of conformism, we also must take personal responsibility for our decisions.

From the twentieth century that this movement was popularized up until now, the movement appears to have raised more critical questions about the nature of human existence than it has proffered answers to the questions of human existence. In his credo still reflecting on religion, Camus sees it that man inflicts pain upon himself and other men under the watch of an all powerful and all-knowing “God” who sits and observes this inhumanity from above without making any strong intervention. Under this situation, the idea that God is present and watching leaves a rational mind with a lot of questions that will provoke curiosity and the hunger for the discovery of the true divine-man relationship in relation to the actual human identity that is often times shrouded in blind conformism to such things as divine presence that are actually beyond lay man’s cognitive domain.
Camus therefore observes that the chances are higher that ‘God does not exist. If he does, for Camus, it’s a pity, because no powerful God can sit back and smile at the level of injustice and suffering that goes on under his impotent watch as is going on in our world today. So the authentic self is the most trusted ally than God, religion or social convention. We have seen that God has been unable to put a stop to suffering and injustice. For Camus, it is either because he is not powerful enough to do so or because he enjoys watching his creatures suffer—which makes him a sadist. Therefore, Camus has shown the reason to distrust religion but what is his rationale to distrust social norms and institutions?

To the above question, Camus adds that man is caged in-between the existing man-made laws and his free moral conscience. These laws are notorious for robbing man of his psychological, social and religious freedom. Camus further examines the importance of a self-imposed posture aimed at giving the society a more sordid turn and building a superman capable of saying “no” when necessary and creatively producing resistance to the societal legal and religious hegemony meted out on man. For instance, the societal laws celebrate monotony. The daily activities of man are being repeated, man finds himself doing the same thing day-in-day-out (wake-up, eat, work and sleep). This boredom borne out of reverence to societal laws and to God is captured in the work of Camus, Myth of Sisyphus where the god of the underworld, Hades decides to nail the trickster, Sisyphus to perpetual suffering and pain; orders him to roll a rock to the peak of the mountain that leads out of Hades. This is a difficult task which requires repeating the rolling of the rock perpetually. On daily basis, Sisyphus keeps rolling the rock because he wants to leave the underworld where he has been eternally marooned. He wants to return to life and to his beloved wife; but on getting to the peak of the mountain, he will suffer fatigue and any attempt to rest will cause the rock to roll all the way down back to Hades; thus rendering futile his entire day’s hard labour. This practically defines leaving one’s existence within a vicious circle of laws made against the human freedom.

Though he is an example of a victim of human obnoxious law, Sisyphus becomes our prototype of revolt since he, at some point, rejects what the king of the underworld is doing to him. Revolt in this sense is not just the kind of insurgency being witnessed in North East part of Nigeria; it is not any physical/armed resistance against the cruel god that seems to be relishing the helpless man’s agony, albeit that may not be precluded. Revolt in this sense is just the ideological antithesis of conformism. Hades is fully aware that Sisyphus cannot move that stone out of the underworld, nobody has ever done that or can ever do that. So he expects to see Sisyphus cry, groan and bemoan his undone fate in pain and suffering. And maybe end with pleading for the merciless god to change his nature and show some mercy. Instead, Sisyphus bursts out laughing. This becomes very frustrating for the king of the underworld who finds it difficult to comprehend this man’s comfort in the midst of pain. Sisyphus’s action defines Camusian revolt par excellence because he is in charge of his actions and takes full responsibility for the said actions. Sisyphian conformism would have subsisted in his shedding of tears, crying and pleading for mercy or even hanging himself—of course Camusian revolt is diametrically opposed to suicide.

For Camus, even suicide is an act of conformism. Some people see suicide as an act of resistance; most critics of African literature have interpreted Okonkwo’s suicide in Things Fall Apart as an act of superlative resistance to the colonial masters’ onslaught. In fact Obierika, Okonkwo’s friend makes it seem so in his sensational response to the white man’s questions. But in Camusian terms, suicide is an act of surrender which is in conformity with what every average man will do under the same circumstance. Revolt lies in the individual’s ability to stand far from the madding crowd which Sisyphus actually does.

Conformism itself is a psychological attachment to an existing belief which the individual faithfully tends to protect. In giving in to this state, one is robbed of the freedom to consciously examine his decisions and actions, as he gropes in consonance with the societal policies whether it is social or religious. The society presents it in a way that some consequences await the man who drops his societal values. The society takes up a judgmental approach in engaging the man created in Camus’ work. This leaves religion as all supreme in this society, becoming an instrument
of manipulation on the weak subjects in a given population. Justice appears far away from the helpless victim, yet every religion presents its God as being a just one—what an irony.

By and Large, Camus’ frustration further increased in his discovery that the human race faces another realistic challenge whose solution remains a dramatic puzzle—the bitter end which is death after the struggle and suffering. The Camusian man, despite his already launched fate (monotony and injustice), faces yet another, an inevitable end (death) which Camus finds unfair and heartless on the side of the creator. He (Camus) therefore looks at man as a helpless element condemned to death by a destiny he has no power to change. The certainty of man’s extinction, most times untimely, suggests the uselessness of human existence. And so Camus suggests the adoption of an absurdist approach to man’s fate, and this simply creates a man viewed and judged as being a stranger to his society and its laws. This stranger has no laws to conform to, and he finds consolation in his freedom to face the reality of his existence. To enable him enjoy this freedom, he launches a revolt against any force in the forms of social and religious structures which may stand in his way. He finds happiness in his condemnation, and sees no reason to seek refuge in religion or even suicide, as any of these amounts to psychological failure and loss of dignity. This position upholds his dignity, as he fights at all cost to reclaim his freedom before a society he finds judgmental and unjust.

3. Sequence of conformity and the irrationality of the world in The Plague

Literature as we know it interprets all human experiences and is one of such places where human identity is constantly contested, hence every literary piece is preoccupied with the “fate and prospects of mankind” (Mark and Roche 1). Similarly, Albert Camus’ The Plague provides almost a good investigation field as any other society to explore these reflections. In this philosophical novel, we find various articulate responses given to the natural order, the religious and social order by various characters we find in the work. Oran, an Algerian Province under French colonial rule around the 1940s in its peak of stability, wakes up one morning and finds itself being ravaged by a deadly plague. The absurdity of the situation is in the inability of the medical experts to discover the true cause of the plague. We are not surprised that the town becomes a death zone because the narrator has initially exposed that the weather of this town is inclement: the sun is too hot and dry, and only winter brings pleasant atmosphere (Plague 3). We are not surprised when living creatures start dying because this town is not even so much of a safe haven for life: at least birds of the air are rare sights, trees and gardens are also missing. The people are bored of the town and life; they are only stolid and business minded.

However, we are surprised when we see the sequence of conformity and revolt that seems almost a discourse formative in the text. It is not every instance of willful resignation to an unpleasant phenomenon that can pass for Camusian idea of conformity neither does Camus advocate the dismantling of every power structure that affect (be it negative or positive) power relations. We only look at the foundation of the system of rationality that has informed the judgment. In the opening part of the novel, the pneumonic and bubonic plagues erupt in Oran. This first manifests in the numerous deaths of rats and other rodents. The sporadic nature of the plague makes many people interpret and account for the disease in many ways. The first of the interpreters are the uninformed members of the Oran community. Dr Rieux’s asthmatic patient, the Old Spaniard sees hunger as the cause of the death of the rats (Plague 9). This account is very thoughtless and so is disregarded as deficient in any redeeming dimension.

However, the second account for the possible death of the rats seems weightier because it comes from the medical experts represented by the agnostic, Dr Bernard Rieux, Dr Castel and Dr Richard respectively. Their position is not totally baseless because they are medical experts. However, the research in which they have based their findings is presented as unwholesome as the unfounded position of the asthmatic patient above. They advise Prefect under the French Colonial Authority that the menace can be nipped in the board by gathering the rats and cremating the carcass. It is at the cause of solving this problem that the plague goes viral because the plague transmits through contact.
The doctors are divided in their opinion about the nature of the epidemic—most of them do not want to call the plague by its rightful name, for the same reason for which the people are led to believe that the salvation to the situation lies in the hands of the three expert doctors that administer health in Oran. The existentialist view that life is irrational and that we don’t have any control over it is what is mostly expressed in the life and character of Dr Rieux, the philosophical doctor. First is his wife who falls sick to the point of being sent off to the crematorium. We cannot say for sure that Dr Rieux’s wife is suffering from the plague since the plague has not erupted exponentially before her separation. But the case that did indict the people for their thoughtless conformity in believing the doctor and his ilk unquestionably is the high fever (one of the symptoms of the plague) and death of the doctor’s concierge, the old M. Michel. The unwholesome measure recommended by the doctors to tackle the rat mortality takes its first death toll in the house of the doctor himself. Even when the authority is humbled to its knee by the incessant deaths which force them to acknowledge that the town is suffering from plague, the official notices that is disseminated for corrective measures still is couched and encapsulated in the language of frivolity that actually undermines the gravity of the plague to this community. Whether it is a psychological therapy on the part of the authority to douse the bloated impact of the plague in the minds of the people or it is some boon of administrative ineptitude on the authority’s side, we cannot certify. The interest of a Camusian reader saddled with a task as ours is to discover blind spots where conformity has orchestrated more suffering and pain for the people and then the attendant reaction of the sufferer which might be either an affirmation of the forces that has been plaguing him or a revolt against such a force.

The superlative form of irrationality is when the authority refuses to change its position concerning the doctor’s earlier postulation. The Prefect has fallen victim of Camusian reprehensible conformity, and that is the danger of it. The first position is presented by the report of the three doctors operating in Oran. And now, Dr Rieux and Dr Castel have seen a better prove to disprove the first report, yet the pedantic Dr Richard feels that a record of one death is too shallow to conclude on the nature of the fever and the authority seems to side with him. We have to note that the position of Dr Richard above, though opposed to the two other doctors’ report, does not make him a Camusian rebel. This is because while this position bring him a bit close to the label, other aspects of him ultimately negate what Camus represents, at least within the ambiance of our study.

Besides the medical position, the ecclesiastical authorities decide to tackle the plague in a religious way. They organize a week prayer. At the course of this prayer, Reverend Father Penaloux in a sermon informs the people that plague is divinely orchestrated—hence God is punishing them for their sins (Plague 89). He reminds them that plague in the scripture is unleashed either on God’s enemies (the Egyptians) or on those that harden their heart against God. The effect of the sermon is strong as the people jointly turn to God for salvation as the narrator tells us that the people move from sitting to kneeling before the end of the sermon. Even the police magistrate, M. Othon agrees with the priest’s position. Again, Camusian conformism rears its ugly head in that the people believe him. Even if there seem to be reasons to doubt the medical experts in the previous postulation, every good Christian should have no strong reason to doubt this priest at a time that the people need redemption from the incessant death. Hence anything that promises an iota of hope from their death-bound condition will thrive. The reputation of Father Penaloux grows like wide fire in the harmatan.

However, the irrationality of the world and man’s helplessness in the face of such shatters the priest’s religious system of rationality when Jaques, the little son of the magistrate, M. Othon becomes sick. The appeal is made first by the wife of the magistrate to the doctor to save the baby. When it appears as if Dr Rieux has not what it takes to save the baby, the priest steps in and prays violently for divine intervention but either doesn’t solve the problem because the baby dies after all.
The irrationality of blind conformity stares everyone in the face with the death of this baby. It makes people question the efficacy of orthodox system of medication represented by Dr Rieu. But above all, people strongly subject the life and ministry of Rev Father Penaloux to strong criticism. If the priest, in hitherto claiming that the sin of the people is the cause of the plague, is right, how can he then account for the death of the little boy Jacques who obviously has not sinned in the manner in which the priest uses the word sin? With this, the possibilities are that there may be no God after all. If at all there is a God, he may be far from the world and therefore neither all knowing nor all seeing. In any case, granted that this God knows and sees all including the painful death of this child, such a God must be impotent and powerless. If the last possibility is wrong, then evidently that God is ultimately wicked. This is what preoccupies Rieux’s mind and this, more than any other incident deals the greatest blow on Father Paneloux’s congregation. Many cease believing in him. The doctor, Rieux is unflinching about his position that he is a more trusted salvation than Father Paneloux’s God.

As the plague claims more and more lives, more desperate measures like quarantining alleged infected homes are being taken; this situation presents to us the character of M. Cottard a chief conformist. His conformism comes from his attempt at suicide in order to end his misery. He has been involved in a crime for which he will be arrested and perhaps sentenced. But the plague is so much a distraction that the police have little or no time for suspects. Since death seems to await everyone, Cottard decides that it is immaterial whether he dies by the authority’s sentence or the disease; and so he attempts hanging himself but is saved by his neighbor, Joseph Grand.

This neighbour, a municipal office clerk, has worked for twenty-two years without promotion because his education is incomplete and his abandonment of his education is for the love of a woman who later abandons him because of his stagnation. There seems to be a metaphorical plague tormenting every one of these characters even before the physical plague resurfaces. His experiences during this epidemic sparks of his creative ability as he wants to write a novel that will inoculate the scourge of the plague but he is a dull-witted chap who never writes beyond the first chapter. He is devastated when he realizes that his life holds for no meaningful purpose, no person to love and no goal to achieve.

Like M. Cottard and Joseph Grand his neighbor, Raymond Rambert the French journalist is another dynamic character who is culpable of Camusian conformity. He has come to Oran to cover the news of the plague but is trapped there with the closure of the gate of the town, isolating Oran from the entire world. In fact, no telephone conversation can be granted. Rambert gets obsessed with leaving the town and employs every means he can to leave; not even his appeal that he is a stranger will make the authority bulge in opening the gate for his exit. He goes to Dr Rieux complaining of the injustice of trapping a stranger inside a plague-ridden town. Dr Rieux admits the absurdity of the situation, yet maintains that his obsession of reuniting with his wife that he has left in Paris is based on emotion but that the restraining him from leaving is based on reason. Consider the short witty dialogue between the erudite doctor and the obsessed journalist:

“But I don’t belong here.” “Unfortunately, from now on you’ll belong here, like everybody else,” Rambert raised his voice a little. “But, damn it, Doctor, can’t you see it’s a matter of common human feeling? Or don’t you realize what this sort of separation means to people who are fond of each other?” Rieux was silent for a moment, then said he understood it perfectly. He wished nothing better than that Rambert should be allowed to return to his wife . . . Only the law was the law, plague had broken out, and he could only do what had to be done. “No,” Rambert said bitterly, “you can’t understand. You’re reusing the language of reason, not of the heart; you live in a world of abstractions.” (Plague 82)

In order to evade Rieux’s abstractions and relate with those in touch of reality, Rambert as in Nicolo Machiavelli’s teaching that if the lawful (human) means seems not to suffice for his exit, he should turn to the forceful (beasty) way. Rambert therefore pays Gonzales heavily through Cottard
to smuggle him out but he is not successful. At some point, it seems there will be light at the end of the tunnel when he gets a form from the municipal office. He feels that his exit has been granted, only to discover that the form is for record purposes in case he dies of the plague, so that the municipality can invite his family to assist in offsetting any bill accrued by his death if the municipality cannot bear the burden alone (Plague 103). This presents us with a tragic universe that interlocks the individual in a vicious and fixed environment, and the individual has no hope of escape despite his attempts to escape such a situation. It is on such a situation that tragedy becomes perspective phenomenon—while a core existentialist will cope with it and even perpetually struggle against it like Sisyphus, a non-existentialist will conform or sometimes end his life in suicide. From here, it is obvious that the individual’s response to a fixed situation such as Rambert has find himself is what defines his essence. Camus will recommend that one becomes a total stranger, undisturbed by the ugly reality. The estrangement in question constitutes Camusian revolt par excellence. Every character in the work suffers the plague but their respective reaction and response are what marks the conformist from the rebel in Camus’ appellation.

The fear of contamination launches the Oran people into alienation and isolation. Everyone becomes a stranger to his neighbor, nobody is confident of holding public gathering because everyone is afraid of contamination (Plague 103). Plates and spoons in restaurants are sterilized (Plague 104) and many businesses grind to a halt all ion the bid to quell the plague. Though this measure in itself constitutes a revolt of a sort which Camus himself will sanction, the act of estrangement notwithstanding is absurd because what the people are avoiding is not what spreads the plague. The plague has a vector in a tiny insect which can bite an individual even in isolation and yet bite a person in a group. This has shown Camus, vision of a world ruled by irrationality where man has little understanding and where his ignorance cannot excuse for his pain and suffering; and ultimately, where death is anxiously waiting to level all. In such a world, what is the justice in allowing a man suffer the pangs and even die of what he knows nothing and contributes nothing in its making? Where then is the divine mercy and benevolence that religion teaches? This dicey situation is what results in the plague claiming more lives than the Oran people imagine. Upon realization, they introduce a serum that will take care of the insects; only then did their efforts start becoming fruitful and the plague gradually dies out. The internal logic of the work still stands out that the only meaning that life will have is the one that one will create for oneself; that the only salvation that man has is the one he has create is the one he has created. This is why Dr Rieux considers it more important to do your duty than to pray. It is in doing their duty that they arrive at the solution to the plague, when Father Paneloux prays alone, the plague kills more than ever before. In this case, the Oran people seem to have shown conformism in turning all to Father Paneloux’s God for salvation when they are informed that their sin is responsible for the plague but later revolt by seeking practical and not spiritual solution to their problem. The conclusion therefore is that the solution of any problem cannot lie outside the solution, even if everyone is unable to see it or even if everyone should die for it.

4. Patterns of Revolt in The Plague

Economic revolt is the latent form of revolt in this novel made manifest in the character of M. Cottard. And Camus encourages that in the face of the absurd and irrational world, one should make oneself a total stranger. It is this estrangement which Cottard engages in: while the plague rages, people are mourning their fate, he engages in smuggling. Though it is illegal, he makes a hell deal of fortune in bringing in goods that the authority has sealed off. It is in that sense that he can be termed an existentialist prototype because he has allowed his existence to define his essence. Camus uses this character to show the foolhardiness of blind conformism and the rashness of suicide. When Cottard conforms to the authority, he is plagued by misery and depression, hence his attempt to take his life. But when he starts revolting against the authority, he becomes happier and richer and enjoys the plague in such a manner that even Tarrou has to warn him against praying for the continuation of the plague as that will be tantamount to sadism.
Besides economic revolt exhibited by Cottard above, armed revolt is another pattern of revolt that we can identify with Cottard. As the plague wanes in the last part of the novel, he finds it totally absurd that the police will come and pick him up. It is a miracle for anyone to have survived the plague; yet it is irrational for the police to arrest a survivor of such a menace. The ideal thing would have been for amnesty to be granted to people who had unaddressed criminal offences since the plague has forced a suspension of the other structures and social machinery like schools, churches and stadium that are all converted into isolation camps and hospitals. Although Camus does not advocate the use of arm in his idea of revolt, Cottard fits into whatever implication that Camus has put up. This is because, for Cottard, rather than submit to be arrested after the plague, he should revolt as he does. Though he is arrested and may be killed, he knows that either way he will die but he who dies from his position of conformity has lived for others and cannot make any impression but he who dies out of the authenticity of his personality has impacted a lot.

By and large, Father Paneloux engages in ideological revolt in trying to prove a point: that religion is still a trusted source of salvation. He experiments with his life having seen that many people have lost faith in him and his religion after he proves incompetent of praying out the M. Othon’s little boy. He engages in the volunteering service and takes no precautionary measure in distancing himself from the victims of the plague. Of course he swims in the ocean of uncertainty and doubt as to whether there is still a redeeming dimension to his belief or not. When he begins to run fever and manifest symptoms of the bubonic plague, he still refuses to be treated the orthodox way. His doubt has led him into a research and he has come up with his write up: “Is a Priest Justified to Consult a Doctor.” Though he has had this argument with Dr Rieux, he is not convinced. His only conviction will be that God is still omnipotent if he recovers. He thus orders the old lady parishioner of his who has been housing him since his church is converted to an isolation camp not to consult any doctor on his behalf. He does not survive it which appears foolish on his part but the only qualification he has to be termed a Camusian rebel is the fact that he has expressed that existential choice which is the greatest marker of the Camusian authentic man.

Rambert is another ideological rebel though his comes at the concluding part of the work. He has spent time, energy, money and so on, all in the attempt to escape the plague in Oran. In the fifth part of the work, the gate is opened around February and one expects that he will be leaping out of Oran with that kind of Eureka jubilation. He decides to stay back and continue his volunteer job of assisting the victims of the plague. Of course his wife reunites with him but he does not leave Oran town. We can place M. Othon side by side with Rambert in terms of their instinct to revolt. While the death of Tarrou towards the end of the plague inaugurates Rambert’s change of perspective towards life and reality: Jacques’ death changes M. Othom’s view about the nature of existence. The magistrate now understands fully the irrationality of the world and his helplessness in the face of such. Thus his idea of revolt takes the form of leaving the legal business and joining the government volunteer that will fight for the eradication of the plague. This comes as a shock to everyone especially to Dr Rieux who sees the decision as incongruous. But the Camusian ideal that we can associate with this decision of Othom is authenticity. He takes a decision that ensures that his life henceforth will be meaningful. It is not altogether because of Othom’s philanthropy; it is rather that the isolation camp and the act of assisting those in it bring the memory of his son alive since he dies of a similar scenario. The last memory of this child is in this camp—this and this alone can give respite to Othom’s restless dynamism. This is true when we consider the question he asks when he gets the news that his son is dead.

It should be noted that he is not in love with this camp. Though he is the camp leader when he is isolated to ascertain his health status given that his sick son may have infected him, the position is a political one. Because of his social status, he is made the camp leader but when the authority misplaces his paper record of his admittance into the camp, he finds his extension in this camp totally unbearable and supports that his wife takes protest to the prefect’s office. This also underscores the absurdity of life seeing that his wife is insulted in the Prefect’s office. It takes
the intervention of Dr Rieux and Tarrou to free M. Othom. This shows that he can be both a prey and a predator in the man-hunt of job he does in the name of state duty. This absurdism reaches its climax with the telegram that brings the news of the death of Dr Rieux’s wife.

Grand has a better reason to even commit suicide than Cottard but he revolts against that. He has been working for twenty years with no promotion. This is because the boss that employs him is late and he cannot express himself by writing a protest later. So he continues being a clerk. This in addition to the loneliness of his wife’s abandonment of him, leaves him subscribing to certain existential options.

The climax of all the absurdity in this work is not so much in the interplay of conformity or revolt as discussed so far, albeit it may be, but in the fact that the source of the narrative is not a reliable one; a historian that will pick his facts from bus conductors, Tarrou is such a man. The narrative is from the diary of Jean Tarrou whom the narrator has identified as an eccentric historian:

His notebooks comprise a sort of chronicle of those strange early days we all lived through. But an unusual type of chronicle, since the writer seems to make a point of understatement, and at first sight we might almost imagine that Tarrou had a habit of observing events and people through the wrong end of a telescope. In those chaotic times he set himself to recording the history of what the normal historian passes over. (Plague 23)

Revolt has apparently taken another sphere of human existence. This has become a global crusade, as the freedom of a particular population is being threatened. The world all over feels socially threatened by the emergence of a movement presented to be fighting for women. This is as a result of its groundbreaking awareness which has attracted a large audience and admirers. Feminism is a global menace which has given voice to so many psychologically and socially dead women all over the world. It is a menace in the sense that the tradition and status quo of existence which crown the male population have been brought under checks. The black population drowning in fear and absolute conformity to the tradition finds an appealing way of giving voice to its female population suggests womanism as a therapy for its long awaited freedom. According to the testimonies of Simone de Beauvoir in her Second Sex:

While today’s customs impose fewer constraints on her than in the past such negative have not fundamentally changed her situation, she remains a vassal, imprisoned in her condition. It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee concrete freedom. The system based on her dependence collapses as soon as she ceases to be a parasite; there is no need for a masculine mediator between her and the universe. The curse on the woman vassal is that she is not allowed to do anything; so she stubbornly pursues the impossible quest for being through narcissism, love, or religion; when she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence; she affirms herself concretely as subject in her projects; she senses her responsibility relative to the goals she pursues and to the money and rights she appropriates. (p 2109–2110)

Feminism is a social, psychological and economic revolt against a perceived sacred system which has been unfair to the female population. Certain conformists find it unsMOOTH to the inherited culture sealed on abuse.

Flora Nwapa, in her work Efuru, presents revolt through her principal character Efuru, who psychologically engages a tradition worshipped by the people as a religion. She is of the opinion that any system or practice that interferes with one’s happiness and freedom has lost mission. The woman finds it detrimental to her social freedom and has resolved to embrace revolt. Flora presents, thus:
They saw each other fairly and after a fortnight’s courting she agree to marry him. But the man had no money for dowry. He had just a few pounds for the farm and could not part with that. When the woman saw that he was unable to pay anything, she told him not to bother about the dowry. They were going to proclaim themselves married and that was that. (p. 7)

In like manner, Maria Ma’ba’s heroine in So long a letter, Ramatoulaye appears to be the opposite. She is a fanatic of the Islamic culture who can do anything for the sake of her Islamic faith. Her conformity rejects any association with freedom. When she gets emotionally betrayed by polygamy, she starts looking at her friend, Aissatou as a true conqueror of conformity, thus, realizing how crude it can be following a belief blindly. She says:

We were true sisters, destined for the same mission of emancipation. To lift us out of the bog tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilization without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values … (p. 14)

5. Conclusion
In this hasty reflection, we have seen the sequence of conformity and revolt that characterizes the work of Albert Camus The Plague. It is seen that the entire world before us is absurd because man does not determine the cause of actions in this world. Though man has no control over the cause of action in the world around him, man has the choice to conform to the social/religious established structure of control. He has another choice to rebel against such structures. In Camus’ credo, man is most himself when he revolts since that is what ensures that his authenticity. It is in this authenticity that the meaning of his existence subsists in since existentialism believes that there is not predetermined essence. And so The Plague presents a world of chaos with some characters exercising their freedom of choice to either conform or revolt. The Camusian figures in the work are not the ones that are richer or happier or the survivors. They the ones who have been able to define their life and give meaning to this life because they have thought for themselves and not allowing others do their thinking for them as the conformist characters have done.

Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Citation information
Cite this article as: Sequence of conformity and Revolt in Albert Camus’ The Plague: A psycho-analytical confrontation of religious exploitation in the contemporary society, Cindy Anene Ezeuguwu, Udeh Benneth Chukwuebuka, Onyeka E. Odoh, Chika Kate Ojukwu, Florence Onyebuchi Orabueze & Mary-Linda Vivian Onuoha, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2022), 9: 2015882.

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