

## Martin Heidegger on Inauthentic Existence: The Nigerian Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Nigeria currently faces a profound crisis of identity and sustainable development, characterized by widespread inauthenticity across its societal and individual spheres. This is more glaring in the political economy of the nation in terms of her adaptation of foreign-related, non-viable development pathways and the increasing fleeing of her citizens, especially the youths, which is popularly referred to as the Japa syndrome. The deep philosophy of Martin Heidegger supplies a moving context for understanding this complex dilemma – particularly the notion of inauthentic existence (*Das Man*), in which individuals immerse themselves in the indistinct crowd, giving up their unique identity and their ability to act authentically and autonomously. To achieve this, our objectives are twofold: first, to thoroughly delineate Heidegger's understanding of inauthenticity; and second, to critically analyze how Nigeria's unsustainable development patterns and the urgent "Japa syndrome" embody this Heideggerian mode of being. **Method:** This study adopts the textual-analytic approach blended with hermeneutic approach, philosophically and materially locating Martin Heidegger's idea of the inauthentic and examining where it may play itself out in our contemporary Nigerian scene. **Results:** The study unpacks the philosophical principles behind inauthenticity as it impacts the everyday life and experiences of Nigerians, revealing a cultural propensity to live by others' "shoulds" rather than a clear essence of what gives joy and peace. Nigeria's unsustainable development pathways and the Japa syndrome emerge as manifestations of the Heideggerian concept of "Das Man." **Novelty:** The originality of this study lies in applying Heidegger's concept of inauthentic existence (*Das Man*) as a philosophical framework for interpreting Nigeria's development crisis and the Japa phenomenon, offering a deeper existential reading of contemporary socio-political realities.

## INTRODUCTION

Martin Heidegger's philosophical discourse concerning *Dasein* (human being) centers on the fundamental question of its mode of existence and the path to genuine selfhood. Heidegger posits that existence is a possibility that exceeds mere actuality, positioning *Dasein* as a project that continually actualizes itself through action. Within this framework, human existence is fundamentally divided into two modes: authentic and inauthentic. Inauthentic existence emerges when the individual, overwhelmed by the burden of responsibility and the demand for self-determination, chooses to flee the self. This flight drives *Dasein* to seek "refuge in an undefined 'they' life-world," where the tendency is to imitate others rather than embrace one's unique being. Consequently, *Dasein* "ensnares himself in inauthenticity" by succumbing to the dictatorship of the amorphous crowd, the 'nobody,' and the 'everybody' [1]. The inauthentic self is characterized by a reliance on public validation, procrastination, the avoidance of responsibility, and the tendency to ascribe failures to external forces like destiny or supernatural beings.

This existential model offers a powerful lens through which to examine the persistent socio-political and cultural challenges facing Nigeria. Philosophical analysis suggests that inauthentic development is a conspicuous predicament and the bedrock of the country's unsustainable development trajectory [2]. That sense of inauthenticity stemmed directly from a colonial alienation of culture that made native traditional values untenable, resulting in the construction of a so-called "schizophrenic personhood." The flight from self in contemporary Nigeria is nowhere more apparent than in the infamous japa syndrome: a Yoruba word for "to flee" or "self-exportation," used to describe the large exodus of the youth of Nigeria in search of opportunities overseas [3]. This huge sense of urgency to leave and in many instances seeing migration as the only road to betterment, is a way of saying that both the political elite and ruling economic classes have collectively washed their hands of the responsibility, a running away from one's own miasmatic foul smell, like an act of bad faith or inauthentic existence, Heidegger's pallid shadow leaps out here as well. By detailing the manifestation and consequences of this societal drift into the 'they' life-world, this study aims to clarify how inauthentic existence actively obstructs self-realization and perpetuates chronic instability and corruption in the Nigerian polity.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The present study uses a qualitative textual-analytic method based on a hermeneutic approach to conduct a detailed reading of Martin Heidegger's notion of inauthentic existenz, and of the possible interpretation of its significance in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. The textual-analytic aspect consists in a careful, methodical reading of *Being and Time*, which pays close attention to Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*, of *Das Man* or the "They," and authenticity, inauthenticity, freedom, choice, and responsibility. Russell painstakingly reconstructs, explicates, and philosophically assesses the key arguments in an effort to be precise in concept, and true to the letter of Heidegger. The analytic process is then applied to a selection of secondary sources cited within the study, which facilitates an equitable interaction with previous academic readings of authenticity and development. This is complemented by the hermeneutic approach which connects Heidegger's existential ontology with the pathos of the lived experience in Nigerian culture today. By means of interpretative analysis, the study explores the ways issues like unsustainable development paths, alienation from culture, and the "Japa syndrome" can to be understood as instances of the phenomenon of Heideggerian lostness in the "they". The hermeneutic circle – from text to context and back to text – is the guiding impulse behind this inquiry, to ensure that philosophising is not done in the abstract, but rich and real and relevant to Nigeria's identity and development crisis. The methodology combines robust textual analysis with contextual exegesis, allowing for a sustained and coherent engagement with the existential aspects of Nigeria's socio-political reality and an incisive philosophically-informed advocacy for genuine self-recovery and sustainable growth.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Martin Heidegger, a pivotal figure often associated with existentialism (though he personally would not like the term), devoted his philosophical inquiry to the being he terms *Dasein*, or human being. Unlike other entities that simply *are*, *Dasein* alone exists, defined by its existence as a possibility that transcends mere actuality. Human existence, in Heidegger's analysis, is a continuous project actualizing itself through intentional and purposive action. This life is ultimately of two natures: genuine and synthetic. What lies at the heart of Heidegger's discussion on the way of being of *Dasein* is a need to reorient man toward true and authentic being, for the human condition, like all living things, is an inclination toward deterioration.

Heidegger uses the term inauthentic existence to refer to the mode of being in which *Dasein* has lost its own individuality and defaulted upon its self-choice by submitting to the suppression of individuality that the public order imposes. This idea is summated in the concept of *Das Man*, which is frequently translated as 'The They'. The bend to fakeness at the core of human need for opportunity and the curse of duty. Faced with the necessity of choosing and the need for commitment the person often flees to an undefined "they" life-world in order to escape those accompanying burdens of self-determination. This has resulted in a society where "everyone is always trying to be somebody else, and no one is ever trying to be oneself".

When *Dasein* operates in the mode of *Das Man*, it lives a life determined by the anonymous public. Inauthentic living means allowing oneself to be carried away by an undefined public – the "nobody," the "everybody," and the "they" factors. Consequently, *Dasein* "ensnares himself in inauthenticity" [2]. The 'They' life takes hold of *Dasein*'s being, causing it to live in delusion and perpetually below its genuine possibilities. The inauthentic self is continually "lost in the crowd and in the 'they' life-world and remains at a loss without the crowd". The catch is this fake self-derives its existence from the public, informed by "hear-say". Decisions are made based on other people's opinions not self determination.

The traits of the inauthentic self are deep and wide. A self that "ex-pels itself," and always places its hope in the "they." An inauthentic existence is characterized by avoiding action and decision – a fear of taking on the weight of responsibility. But the minute that one starts to make excuses about the fear of responsibility that you feel, the fear that prevents you from choosing, you are in the bad faith mode of existence and you run away from yourself. This state can be well characterized by procrastination. In addition, the inauthentic self blames its failures on external circumstances, like fate or gods, and refuses to take responsibility for its behavior, thus exhibiting what existentialists would describe as "Bad Faith." Inauthenticity at work: If the human is willing to submit to the "dictatorship of the amorphous crowd and the unanimous public". Heidegger emphasizes this loss of self, stating that *Dasein* "gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity" [1].

In existentialist thought, freedom and choice are intertwined with authentic existence. Because human beings are free, the failure to choose a course of action is, in itself, a choice. Heidegger posits that "making up for not choosing signifies choosing to make this choice" [1]. When this happens, man becomes lost in the crowd. However, the state of inauthenticity is not permanent; it is merely a "stroll away which can be reversed the moment one realizes oneself and takes a firm and resolute decision towards self-retrieval". Authenticity, in contrast, requires the self to stand on the part of what is true and dignified to the human condition, even if it means standing alone, thus requiring a life of self-affirmation. The path back to genuine selfhood occurs "When *Dasein* thus brings itself back from the 'they', the they-self is modified in all existential manner so that it becomes authentic Being-one's self" [1]. This is the existential call for self-retrieval.

### **Inauthenticity and Nigeria's Unsustainable Development**

The concept of inauthenticity, rooted in existential philosophy, provides a crucial framework for understanding the persistent failure of certain development patterns to achieve sustainability and self-realization. Existentialists, notably Heidegger, argue that authentic existence requires *Dasein* (human being) to embrace freedom, choice, and responsibility, striving to live true to oneself in both words and deeds. Inauthenticity, conversely, occurs when an individual flees the burden of responsibility, taking refuge in the generalized, undefined "they" life-world. The resulting inauthentic self is lost in the crowd, seeking public validation and failing to actualize its full possibilities [4] [5].

When this concept is applied to the societal level, particularly in post-colonial nations, inauthenticity becomes a "conspicuous predicament" and the foundation of unsustainable development. Authentic development, by nature, is sustained when it aligns with the cultural and environmental needs, cohering with the autochthonous nature and activities of the people. Inconsistency with indigenous traditional scientific and technological feats amounts to inauthentic and unsustainable development [2].

In nations like Nigeria, the current state of underdevelopment is attributed to this inauthentic course. The proximate cause was the cultural estrangement inflicted by colonial influence, which repudiated traditional values and achievements in favour of an exploitative foreign civilization. Consequently, many developments today bear deep foreign colorations that do not flow from or cohere with African values and the local worldview. This societal inauthenticity manifests as an identity crisis, creating discordance between the essence and existence of the citizenry, leading to chronological decadence across social, political, and economic institutions. The embrace of foreign models, often propagated by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), manifests in Nigeria's education policy and unchecked globalization, results in an endemic undervaluation of indigenous capabilities and a lack of faith in locally-driven development. Such foreign dependence creates a rift that destabilizes the entire system because the foundation upon which the society forcefully stands is divergent from its internal equilibrium [2].

The consequences of this inauthentic development trajectory are dire, leading to poor economic management, political instability, mass unemployment, and a weak industrial base. A clear modern manifestation of this systemic failure is the "Japa syndrome" – the mass emigration of Nigerians, especially the youth and professionals, to countries like the United Kingdom. This desperate flight, which involves citizens using the study route as a "means to an end" (relocation), is a survival strategy driven by declining economic conditions and the state's failure to guarantee basic security and services. In existentialist terms, the failure of the state to meet the needs of its people creates a fragile system that pushes citizens into emigration, regardless of whether the movement is regular or irregular [6][7].

This exodus represents a colossal capital and human-resource flight from the economically backward nation. For development to be truly sustainable, it must be built on existing traditional values, needs, productions, and materials. The philosophical call for authentic selfhood – which involves identifying with a consistent course of action and owning one's responsibility – must therefore be translated into a massive return to cultural roots and indigenous means, integrating traditional values with current aspirations to ensure development coheres with the people's personhood [2] [5].

### **The Conflict between Self-determination and External Conformity**

The existence of man is defined by a fundamental and persistent conflict between the inherent drive for self-determination – the quest for authentic existence – and the societal pressure towards external conformity, known philosophically as inauthenticity. Existentialist philosophers, who focus on concrete human existence rather than abstract speculation, center their philosophies on the condition and quality of the existing individual. The journey toward self-determination is anchored on what is often called the existential trilogy: freedom, choice, and responsibility. Man is a being who desires freedom and wishes to make conscious choices, yet he is also capable of fleeing the attendant burden of responsibility that comes with that freedom. Authentic existence requires Dasein (human being) to live true to itself in both words and deeds. The essence of man is to exist, meaning he first materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself through the choices he makes, becoming what he makes of himself [8]. The true self is one that makes a commitment and sticks with it, trying always to act in accordance with his best understanding of self – a coherent course of action. This commitment implies being different from the unanimous crowd, taking responsibility on who you are and what you decide, and stop inventing excuses [4] [5][7].

Yet external conformity is exactly that evasion of the responsibility that is required. A stage inessential existence is where the individual seeks shelter in the vague, indeterminate life-world of the other. Here, the self gets lost in the crowd, and the quest for public validation ends up taking priority over self-actualization. For the self, most of the time, just being present in the perfect social scene as a bystander to be recognized or admired is quite enough to be happy. People tend to follow others – whether it be friends, parents, teachers, the media, or trends – finding solace in feeling that conformity is more

important than being authentic. But resistance to being genuine – the honesty of taking a real look at yourself – is often more about YOU and your fear of your own embarrassment than anything else. When Dasein allows the "nobody," "everybody," or "they" factors to prevail by making no conscious choice, Dasein “ensnares himself in inauthenticity” [1].

The tension between self-determination and external conformity is also pertinent to discussions of personal autonomy, particularly in biomedical contexts. Authenticity is considered critical to a person's autonomy and decision-making capacity. Judgments of inauthenticity may be justified when a desire is found to be due to causal factors that are alien to the person and seriously deviates from the person's practical identity – the established pattern of personality developed over time [9][10][11]. Consequently, the pressure of external conformity is not a permanent state. The experience of the "they" life-world is merely a "stroll away" that can be reversed once the individual realizes oneself and takes a resolute decision toward self-retrieval, affirming the self against the dictatorship of the undifferentiated crowd.

### **The "Japa Syndrome" as a Manifestation of Inauthenticity**

The contemporary exodus of Nigerians, colloquially termed the "Japa Syndrome," where citizens flee their homeland for the perceived "golden fleece abroad", may be critically examined through the lens of existentialist philosophy, particularly Martin Heidegger's concept of inauthenticity. *Japa*, a Yoruba term meaning "to flee", characterizes a widespread societal decision that reflects a profound retreat from genuine selfhood, responsibility, and affirmation of existence in the face of daunting existential facticities [4] [6].

The core motivation behind the *Japa* syndrome mirrors this philosophical flight from self. Many Nigerians view migration as a means to relocation, often rooted in the misguided conviction that they "will never succeed in Nigeria unless they migrate". This reflects a profound sense of external dependency and a rejection of indigenous self-worth. Inauthentic selfhood is a spurious self that seeks validation from the public and listens to "hear-say" before making decisions. For the self that is lost in the crowd, life "remains at a loss without the crowd". When the human will succumb to the dictatorship of the amorphous crowd, inauthenticity is at work [4].

The drivers of the *Japa* movement – such as "migration delusion or obsession" and the pull factor of enjoying a "better life" abroad – are symptomatic of this surrender to external standards. Globalization, facilitated by social media, creates a "virtual world" where migrants impress peers, resulting in "admiration and desire" for a similar life abroad. This desire to conform to the perception of success defined by external, "civilized norms" is a classic marker of inauthenticity. Historically, this phenomenon finds parallels in Nigeria's wider issue of "inauthentic development," where societal structures lack coherence with the indigenous culture and are built on foreign colorations. When development does not flow from or cohere with the indigenous personhood, the result is inauthentic [2].

When applied to the political sphere, the choice to *Japa* can be viewed as an evasion of collective political responsibility, or "bad faith". Authentic existence requires confronting existential facticities (such as being born into a specific country and family) with courage and choice, striving to affirm oneself despite limiting conditions. The Nigerian state is currently characterized by fragility, failing to provide basic security, infrastructure, and rule of law [6]. Citizens' decision to flee, attributing failure to external factors like ethnicism or leadership failure, is an act of shirking responsibility for the collective failure to build a democracy. They are avoiding the self-affirmation required to become an "actor and not a spectator" in the political process [7]. Lastly, the *Japa* syndrome, while understood as a survival strategy against poor economic conditions and insecurity, manifests philosophically as a choice for the inauthentic mode of existence. It is a mass turning away from the arduous path of affirming one's existence and exercising freedom within a difficult context, in favor of a life defined and validated by external, often foreign, standards. The existential call remains for Dasein to retrieve itself from its "lostness in the 'they'" life-world [1] [4].

### **The Nigerian Crisis of Identity and Development**

Nigeria's protracted struggle to achieve sustainable socioeconomic and political stability is fundamentally rooted in a profound crisis of identity, manifested through what philosophical analysis terms inauthentic development. This crisis stems from a historical and persistent deviation from the nation's natural and autochthonous environmental track of development, leading to societal structures that lack coherence with the indigenous personhood and cultural values of the citizenry. The result is a weak state subject to political paralysis and unsustainable development results. This widespread inauthenticity is what existentialist philosophy can help explain. To be true to oneself, or more precisely, to have the self-be true to itself, is to act not in mere accord with the self, but as a free choice that moves from self-conviction, as well as to take upon oneself the burden of responsibility for that deed. By contrast, inauthenticity is the denial of this responsibility where the individual hides within the values and commands of the nebulous "they" world. In the survey of national life, inauthentic development means that citizens and structures are henceforth affected by this "turn from their original internals" and they "think and function from another mind other than their original mind". The lack of coherent societal vision produce a crisis of existential type, preventing sustained progress [2] [4].

This development inauthenticity has its roots in the cultural alienation brought about by colonialism. Colonial belligerent culture estranged Nigerians from their authentic cultural trajectory. Traditional values were repudiated in favor of exploitative colonial civilization, and indigenous cultural identity suffered severe blows, exemplified by the introduction of Western and Islamic education without adaptation to the people's environment. The curricula packaged from other cultures were geared toward repudiating indigenous achievements as barbaric, resulting in the abrogation of indigenous history, which is vital for transmitting traditional feats. This historical assault

left many post-colonial Nigerians with an "a priori inferiority" complex, causing them to accord superiority to the white races and believe that little is worth celebrating in their own culture. This psychological fracture creates a "schizophrenic personhood" known as the *evolue*, who is "neither African nor European" and can no longer find a stable foundation for an integral personhood [2] [12]. Perhaps, we may even add that Nigeria's democracy is not working because it is not indigenous to the Nigerian people. Nigeria's justice system is filled with corruption and pervasive injustice. This, in our view, is because it did not flow from the people. There seems to be something in the ontological make-up of a majority of Nigerian that is not well suited to Western-style liberal democracy as a government system. In Nigeria's/Africa's traditional political and judicial systems, there is fear and respect for the laws. Sometimes, the punishments for violation of these laws are grave and mystical, hence everyone feared and respected the laws. But Nigeria imported the democratic system of governance without some form of adaptation to the culture and ontology of Nigerians. This is why there is so much abuse of the democratic ethos.

Nigerian development is laden with "deep foreign colorations" that neither flow from nor cohere with the African worldview. The continuation of this trend, worsened by modern globalization which promotes exploitative hegemonic Western models as authentic, results in consistent societal collapse. Chronological decadence is observable across social, political, economic, and technological spheres. Symptoms include weak industrial bases, mass unemployment, poverty, agitation, militancy, and the failure of the state to guarantee basic security and rule of law [2] [6] [13].

Furthermore, the national crisis of identity manifests politically through widespread inauthentic existence or "bad faith". The failure to build a viable democracy is a collective responsibility, yet, the majority of Nigerians evade the exercise of their political freedom and choice, attributing failure instead to external factors like ethnicism or leadership failure. This evasion is, in existentialist terms, a negative choice to live with corrupt governance, making the citizen a spectator rather than an actor in the political process. This collective shirking of responsibility deepens the "appalling prospect for nation and society" [7][14].

For Nigeria to evolve from its current state of unsustainable development, a mental revolution leading to a massive return to the roots of Nigerian culture is required. Sustainable development can only occur when it is built from and on the existent traditional values, needs, productions, services, and materials. The philosophical call for authentic existence—the self-affirmation of the individual—provides the intellectual catalyst necessary to foster the enlightened citizenry and political commitment needed for democratization and genuine growth [15][16].

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding:** Heidegger's philosophical inquiry into Dasein's mode of being, centered on the dynamic of authenticity and inauthenticity, provides a powerful

framework for analyzing Nigeria's societal predicament. Inauthentic existence emerges when the self avoids the burden of responsibility and runs away from the freedom of choice, instead taking refuge in an undefined "they" life-world. In the Nigerian context, this is mirrored by individuals who, by allowing themselves to be carried away by the amorphous crowd and the unanimous public, ensnare themselves in inauthenticity, thereby obstructing their self-actualization. This inauthentic mode manifests socially and politically through the evasion of freedom and choice. On a national scale, this deep-rooted inauthenticity is the bedrock of Nigeria's unsustainable development. This abandonment of indigenous identity has resulted in an inferiority complex where many believe success lies only beyond Nigeria's shores. This desperation has culminated in the "Japa syndrome," the massive emigration phenomenon where Nigerians flee economic hardship, insecurity, and unemployment. **Implication:** Therefore, the existential call for Nigeria is a rigorous self-retrieval from the "they" world. Authentic selfhood requires the individual to choose consciously, accepting the full burden of freedom and responsibility for all actions. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable development, its future projects must integrate traditional values and cohere with the indigenous environment and culture. Only by fostering this trado-Nigerian systems can an enlightened citizenry through critical individualism and intentional commitment to genuine self-affirmation reverse the failing national developmental trend and maximize Nigeria's future possibilities. **Limitation:** When Nigerians become spectators rather than actors in the political process, and shirk responsibility for collective failure, they exhibit a form of self-deception or bad faith. Development fails to be sustained when it deviates from the indigenous cultural values, autochthonous nature, and traditional scientific feats of the people, instead reflecting deep foreign colorations. **Future Research:** This continuous drifting along the inauthentic way of existence, characterized by chronic poverty, corruption, and instability, validates Heidegger's warning that society continues to be fallen until humans are true to themselves in words and deeds. For many, pursuing study abroad is merely an escape route—a "means to an end" which is relocation—reflecting the choice to exit the system rather than affirm one's existence within it.

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