

**THE DISTORTED IMAGES OF AFRICAN CONTINENT: A
HEIDEGGERIAN INTERPRETATION**

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BENIN CITY.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research entitled: THE DISTORTED IMAGES OF AFRICAN CONTINENT: A HEIDEGGERIAN INTERPRETATION was carried out by OGODO OGHAE SOPHIA with MATRICULATION NUMBER: ART1701674 in the Department of Philosophy, University of Benin, Benin City.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, to whom I owe my life, my existence and everything. For His provision, protection, grace and favour throughout my stay in this great institution of learning.

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First and foremost, all praise and adulation goes to God Almighty. Without God, I wouldn't be alive today. Thank you Lord for seeing me through every moment in this great institution.

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out on the distorted images of African continent: a Heideggerian interpretation. To achieve this significant research objective were formulated, which is to showcase and bring to “more” conscious awareness the varied distorted images with which Africans are labeled. The study covered the whole of African continent, especially the black Africans, bearing in mind that some Africans like Egyptians are white in complexion. The history of African is relevant to the history of Black people throughout the world, and partly because of the general derogatory image “Africans” and Black people everywhere have inherited from Western history. The study adopted the expository, analytical and hermeneutical design. Hence the study analyzed the Martin Heidegger: The Question Of “Being”, the fundamental ontology: Dasein analytic, his methodology, and Heidegger’s concept of phenomenology and interpretation. The study in the chapter four analyzed African Distorted Images, the causes of African predicament which include; Geographico, Historico, and Colonialism. Additionally, phenomenological interpretations of African distorted images was also part of the study. In conclusion, the study indicated that the distorted images about Africa, in the light of Heideggerian interpretations, are born out of prejudice, and cannot withstand the sledgehammer of logical criticisms.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

What do you expect would come to the minds of many, assuming you stand on Mountain Everest and shout the word “Africa” to the hearing of all mankind? Arguably, many (especially Westerners) would immediately succumb to the idea that Africa is a place of tribal slaughters, massacres, urban slums, skeletal children, people infected with AIDS; a place where the earth is dry and cracked, a place of endless stream of refugees without a place to call home, without clothing, medicine, food or water, plus other images of savagery, inferiority complex and hunger. According to Ezine Newsletter:

Those are the only images we see in C.N.N during the nightly news, during times of crisis and then there is nothing until the next war, skirmish or famine. Limited, selective images that make a continent look like it is always in upheaval.¹

But these images about Africa are not only associated with the C.N.N. nightly news, they have permeated for hundreds of years in the West's perception of Africa. Lending weight to this, the same Ezine Newsletter (African insight) on African images, opines:

For hundreds of years, Africa was a blank spot on Western maps, a place that did not exist and then during the Middle Ages it became a dark spot. It was referred to as the "dark continent", where primitive people without history and civilization dwelled. Where chaos was the norm, even the capacity for an African to love was questioned since a savage being was not capable of love or Christian charity ².

Concretely, Africans, having been besmirched with these subhuman statuses, it was as easy as rolling off a log to take this Dark continent filled with savages and ship them to ends of the earth as slaves. This explains the 16th Century African Slave trade, when Bartoleme de Las Casas (Bishop of Chiapas) threw off Christian anthropology aboard and made a clarion call for African slaves, who would replace the emaciated Indians in Hispaniola, Spain, 1517. It was also easy to plunder the riches of Africa, its people and

resources, and to colonize them under the guise of bringing civilization and Christianity. No wonder, Jomo Kenyatta opined in his book, ‘Facing Mount Kenya’:

The missionaries came with the Bible in their hand and we had the land. They taught us to pray with our eyes closed, and then when we opened them we had the Bible in our hand, and they had the land. ³

But a critical mind would ask, why was it Europe, rather than Africa that conquered and plundered? This, I shall briefly explain in chapter three of this project, while focusing on the main point of my project.

Today, we could see the same tune played and danced according to the old methods. We could see veiled distorted images of African continent and “neo-asphyxiating colonialism” ⁴ in the relations of Africa with the West. These we see in most actions of U.N, G-8 club, C.N.N news and other Western means.

Thus, in chapter one of this project, I will expose the views or distorted images about Africans starting from the Ancient to the Contemporary period. Chapter two of this project will navigate on Martin Heidegger’s task in his

“Being and Time”, his idea of the fundamental ontology and his concept of phenomenology, which I will use to interpret these African experiences. Chapter three will dwell on African distorted images vis-à-vis the causes of African predicament. Later, I will use Martin Heidegger’s concept of phenomenology to interpret these distorted images. Chapter four will be on critical evaluation and conclusion.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Africa has suffered from various distortions; from calling us a bridge between man and ape, to claiming that we are incapable of civilization, to calling our continent dark and further enslaving us for over two centuries. Africa was referred to as the “dark continent”, where primitive people without history and civilization dwelled. It will help many Africans to turn from the path of waste and destruction and make significant contributions to the society. Thereby, some of the endemic African problems will be addressed and this will facilitate the actualization of the greatness of Africa. It will also help a greater number of people to develop self-esteem, provide a more conducive environment for Africans to live, move Africa forward and

facilitate the greatness of the continent. At this time when Africa seems to be at the crossroad and beset with so many challenges, especially the challenge of relevance in the world, Heidegger's authentic life offers a great help to Africans in the way forward. That is to say, it is my considered view that if more African leaders and people live authentically, the great potentials of Africa would be realized and Africa's rating in the world would improve significantly.

In this project, we discuss Heidegger's interpretation of Africa and how he arrived at them

1.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

My purpose of this project is to showcase and bring to "more" conscious awareness the varied distorted images with which Africans are labeled. These distorted images, though as old as the continent itself, have continued to form ominous clouds of hatred in the mental skies of most Westerners. The notion that Africans, especially Black Africans, are inferior has implicitly continued to petrify in the African relationship with the West. For instance, "eighty five years after the witch hunt against the African soldiers

in Liverpool, Anthony Walker, a promising young black student from Liverpool was viciously murdered with an axe on 29 June, 2005 by white youths who were angered by the fact that Walker had a white girlfriend”.⁵ Imagine this.

To hedge West’s sheer and implicit distortion of Africans as inferior, Africans themselves have unconsciously submerged themselves to this status-quo. Very soon, they will become “untouchables”.

As a result of the above, this project is not only aimed at show-casing, but is also geared towards salvaging the tainted images of the Africans. It is aimed at confronting Euro centric superiority by asserting the fact that “we are all humans, irrespective of color, skin and race. Again, my intent is that there is more to complexification (coming together) than there is to particularization. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin hit the truth when he remarked:

It is precisely this state of isolation that will end if we begin to discover in each other not merely the elements of one and the same thing but of a single spirit in search of itself.⁶

Again, like every other project on African experience, this project is an attempt to unmask the “un-freedom” of Africans hobbled by many “positive” and “negative” elements (slavery, colonialism et cetera) as a result of the sub-human status created for them.

I shall interpret these images about African continent, using Martin Heidegger’s concept of phenomenology in his “Being and Time”. Remember, I am not using this concept as benchmark to African situation; instead, I am only interpreting his concept of phenomenology and situating it to African situation. Again, I shall not relegate to the limbo his question of the meaning of being by which he arrived at the fundamental ontology: “Dasein”-man. Thus “Dasein” is the gateway to other ontologies. It is because of the centrality of Dasein with its existence that this project focuses on the distortions of African “Being ness”.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are numerous distorted views of Africa from famous European writers and philosophers that have shaped world’s relation with Africa. Those views seem perpetual as they have persisted from the fifteenth century till this date.

This study helps to alienate some of the myths written by European writers about Africa, it's also serves as a means to shed more light on Afrocentrism. The study highlights one of them—Heiddegger's view of Africa and illustrate how wrong he was. It's a cautionary tale for those, especially Westerners, who want to opine about Africa.

1.5 THE SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of this project covers the whole of African continent, especially the black Africans, bearing in mind that some Africans like Egyptians are white in complexion. It covers the whole of African continent, because the word "Africa" already connotes negative undertones for most Western minds. Hear what was written on "milestones", December 26, 2005 'Time magazine', vol 166 no.25, captioned "The persons of the year", with reports by Illa Garger, about Africa 13 years ago:

Africa has become the basket case of the planet, the "third world of the third world", a vast continent in free fall.... Africa has a genius for extremes, for the beginning and the end. It seems simultaneously connected to some memory of Eden and to some foretaste of apocalypse. Nowhere is day more

vivid or night darker. Nowhere are forests more luxuriant. Nowhere is there a continent more miserable. Africa-sub-Saharan Africa, at least – has begun to look like an immense illustration of chaos theory, although some hope is forming on the margins. Much of the continent has turned into a battleground of contending doom.

Even though, the reporter might have some reservations (Egypt or some nations of North Africa), he painted the whole continent black. Therefore the scope of this project is the African continent. But distinctions will be made when necessary.

1.6. METHODOLOGY

The method of this project is expository, analytical and hermeneutical. By expository and analytical method, I will carefully expose the varied distorted images of Africans, starting from the ancient period to the contemporary period, with analysis when necessary. And by the method of hermeneutics, I will interpretatively unmask these distorted images of Africans using Martin Heidegger's concept of "phenomenology" in order to see what lies behind them.

1.7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.7.1 DISTORTED IMAGES

These are mythical, untrue stories told and written about Africa by the westerners that aided slavery and colonialism. These images have further affected our relations with the westerners such that we in the global south have been alienated. These images include fables like blacks are monkeys; that we are savages and incapable of rational thoughts and civilizations and incapable of living in a well organized society. These images are the bane of racism and the maltreatment of the African/global southerners anywhere in the world. The westerners looked at the black man, at the black continent and dismantled our identity, our personhood to that of animals in the zoo. They have persisted from the 15th century and have developed and mutated into one of the most inhumane prejudices in history.

1.7.2 AFRICAN CONTINENT

The African continent amongst every other continent in the world is located in the global south. Being the second-largest continent, it is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean.

It is divided in half almost equally by the Equator. The continent includes the islands of Cape Verde, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Comoros. Africa contains an enormous wealth of mineral resources, including some of the world's largest reserves of fossil fuels, metallic ores, and gems and precious metals. This richness is matched by a great diversity of biological resources that includes the intensely lush equatorial rainforests of Central Africa and the world-famous populations of wildlife of the eastern and southern portions of the continent. Although agriculture (primarily subsistence) still dominates the economies of many African countries, the exploitation of these resources became the most significant economic activity in Africa in the 20th century.

Climatic and other factors have exerted considerable influence on the patterns of human settlement in Africa. While some areas appear to have been inhabited more or less continuously since the dawn of humanity, enormous regions—notably the desert areas of northern and southwestern Africa—have been largely unoccupied for prolonged periods of time. Thus, although Africa is the second largest continent, it contains only about 10 percent of the world's population and can be said to be underpopulated. The

greater part of the continent has long been inhabited by Black peoples, but in historic times there also have occurred major immigrations from both Asia and Europe. Of all foreign settlements in Africa, that of the Arabs has made the greatest impact. The Islamic religion, which the Arabs carried with them, spread from North Africa .into many areas south of the Sahara, so that many western African peoples are now largely Islamized. Africa is sometimes nicknamed the "Mother Continent" due to its being the oldest inhabited continent on Earth. Humans and human ancestors have lived in Africa for more than 5 million years. Today, Africa is home to more countries than any other continent in the world. These countries are: Morocco, Western Sahara (Morocco), Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti,

Eritrea and the island countries of Cape Verde, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Comoros.

1.7.3 HEIDEGGERIAN

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher in the 20th century who produced a large body of work that intended a profound change of direction for philosophy. Such was the depth of change that he found it necessary to introduce many neologisms, often connected to idiomatic words and phrases in the German language.

Two of his most basic neologisms, present-at-hand and ready-to-hand, are used to describe various attitudes toward things in the world. For Heidegger, such "attitudes" are prior to, i.e. more basic than, the various sciences of the individual items in the world. Science itself is an attitude, one that attempts a kind of neutral investigation. Heidegger was an existentialist. Heidegger's "existentialist" philosophy begins with a profound anti-Cartesianism, an uncompromising holism that rejects any dualism regarding mind and body, the distinction between subject and object, and the very language of

"consciousness," "experience," and "mind. Heidegger's overall analysis is quite involved, taking in a lot of the history of philosophy.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* attempts to address the fundamental question of the meaning of being. He does so through a systematic exploration of human existence and its structures. First published in 1927, *Being and Time* had a major impact on subsequent philosophy. A canonical text of both existentialism and phenomenology (although Heidegger would deny the association with the former), it had a major formative influence on the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, and Herbert Marcuse.

BLIXEN, K. in his book titled *Out of Africa*, London explores the fading years of the British colonial empire in Africa in a somber and nostalgic tone utilizing a nonlinear approach. MAUTNER .T, in his book *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* explains clearly the concepts and theories at the heart of European and American philosophy. Oguejiofor's *Philosophy and African Predicament* address the nature, causes and possible solution to the African predicament in the contemporary world. In TEMPELS. P.

LaPhilosophie Bantue, Tempels argues that the African philosophical categories can be assumed through the categories inherent to language. According to Tempels, the primary metaphysical category in the thought of Bantu-speaking societies is force. That is, reality is dynamic, and being is force.

Furthermore UDUIGWOMEN A. F's Footmarks On African Philosophy, is a book which evolves a clarification of the ontological concept within the African context. The African ontological practice hangs on Dukor's perspective which provides for a coherent alliance. Among social structure, law and belief system towards the certitude and trust making for harmonious human well-being. Social order is augmented by this African ontological practice and should, therefore, be assimilated into the public.

ENDNOTES

1. Ezine Newsletter. African Images, (November 2002-african Insights) p.1
2. *Ibid*;p.1
3. *Ibid*; p.1
4. T. Serequerberham, The Hermeneutics of African philosophy: horizon and discourse (New York: Rout ledge, 1994) p.15.
5. O. Boateng, “How Africa developed Europe, U.S.A”, New African (Oct. 2005 No.444) p.22.
6. T. Chardin, The Future of Man (London: Editions du Seuil, 1959) p.95.
7. I, Garger, Persons of the Year, Time Magazine, Dec.2005

CHAPTER TWO

VARIOUS VIEWS ABOUT AFRICA

2.1 THE AFRICAN IDENTITY

The vastness of Africa has rendered talking about and identifying who is African, difficult. This is accentuated when some African countries like Egypt, are separated because of their complexion. According to Joseph Harris in his book Africans and their history:

The history of African is relevant to the history of Black people throughout the world, and partly because of the general derogatory image “Africans” and Black people everywhere have inherited from Western history. ¹

With scientific evidences, Black inferiority and racism should have been discontinued and stopped thriving in many minds but it has persisted up till this day. This project presents an analysis of the effects of historical myths, stereotypes, views and literature about racial Africa.

2.1.1 ANCIENT VIEW ABOUT AFRICA

In examining ancient characterizations, one sees the roots of racial prejudice—how became interwoven in Western culture, which internationalized the concept of black inferiority and imperialized Africa.

Joseph Harris hinged on the last statement when he said:

The denigration of Africans can be traced back beyond the Christian era into antiquity, and in later times anyone who wished to employ degrading stereotypes about black people could easily establish reference points in classical times when outstanding scholars and writers described Africans as strange and primitive creatures. Many of those descriptions have remained with us and have contributed immeasurably to the perpetuation of disparaging myths about Africans, and black people generally.² Joseph continued:

Although the father of History, Herodotus, made significant contributions towards the evolution of history as a field of study, in attempting to describe African culture which was so different from his own, sowed seeds of racial prejudice that shaped black–white images for centuries to come. He

frequently referred to Africans as “barbarians” and characterized the people of Libya by saying “their speech resembles the shrieking of a Bat rather than the language of men”³.

He went further to say of another ancient writer:

Pliny the elder discussed of Africans who by report “have no heads but mouth and eyes both in their breast”, and others, who crawled instead of walking.⁴

An evident derogatory racial tradition stems from the biblical interpretation of Africa. Some of this went back to the biblical interpretation of Noah’s curse on Ham. We find this in Thomas F. Gossett’s book “Race: The history of an Idea in America”, where a collection of Jewish oral traditions in the Babylonian Talmud from the second to the sixth century A.D, holds that: “The descendants of Ham were cursed by being black”⁵ Robert Graves and Raphael Patai also report in their book titled ‘Hebrew Myths’:

It must be Canaan, your firstborn, whom they enslaved - - - - Canaan’s children shall be born ugly and Black! Your grand children’s hair shall be twisted into kinks - - - (their lips) shall “swell”. Men of this race are called

Negroes; their forefather Canaan commanded them to love theft and fornication, to be banded together in hatred of their masters and never to tell the truth ⁶

The itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela by Robert Hess reports:

There are a people - - - who like animals, eat of the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in the fields. They go about naked and have not the intelligence of ordinary men. They co-habit with their sisters and anyone they find ...these sons of Ham are black slaves ⁷

During the Greco-Roman era, Harris made an allusion to their distinction of colors. It is, he said in reference to Ethiopia: “to wash Ethiopia white” ⁸

Most of these descriptions were uncritical opinions about the African people. It is a puzzle how the ancient were able to distort the African image, since according to Europe’s Modern History, Black Africa was discovered in the 16th century, after the great leap of Christopher Columbus, Francis Pizzaro and other explorers?

2.1.2 MEDIEVAL VIEW ABOUT AFRICA

“The medieval Age was a humble and magnanimous age”.⁹ It was the age of fundamental principle, the universal brotherhood of all men and the fatherhood of God, was sustained. As such, there were no smears on African image. This, coupled with the facts that there was very limited knowledge of Africa, except North Africa from where St. Augustine visited and also the city of Alexandria, but not Sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless most of the medieval thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine had some views concerning slavery, which later burst out in the Missionaries treatment of Africans in the 16th century. Thus, according to J.Obi Oguejiofor in his book “Philosophy and African predicament”:

Unlike St. Augustine who sees slavery as due to the evil of the fall (original sin), Thomas Aquinas describes slavery as a positive institution. For him, it was devised by human reason, along with the convention of personal possession for the benefit of human life.¹⁰

As a consequent, the image of Africans as inferiors was reinforced further by arguments of several Christian missionaries, ministers, and others who

explained that an African was better off a slave in a Christian society than free in African savagery. One is reminded that most missionaries or other Europeans did not visit the greater part of Africa until the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century; but all the same Africa was presumed to be savage. ¹¹

The Christian missionaries also argued that the Bible spoke of slavery without condemning it. These arguments convinced enough Europeans during slave Trade. Several writers on the slave trade illustrate the trend that conversion of an African slave did not necessitate manumission and that Africans are inferior. Hear John Houston in his book “Some New and Accurate observations of the coast of Guinea”, in which he described Africans thus:

They (Africans) exactly resemble their fellow creatures and natives, the monkeys ¹².

One is reminded of the note of irony expressed by the French philosopher, Charles de Montesquieu in 1748: It is impossible for us to suppose these

creatures to be men because allowing them to be men, a suspicion will follow that we ourselves are not Christians ¹³.

2.1.3 MODERN DAY VIEW OF AFRICA

African/black inferiority as a concept peaked when it became intellectualized by philosophers of the Enlightenment Period—the Rationalists and Empiricists. In a footnote of his essay entitled “Of National Characters” which appeared in his *Treatises* (1768), the empiricist and influential Scot philosopher David Hume wrote:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes... to be naturally inferior to the white. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. ¹⁴

Hume did not realize how monumental his ignorance was. But it was doubtful that such a philosopher was not privy of contribution to the stereotypic image of black people.

Another modern ignominious pronouncement came from the German philosopher, George Hegel in his philosophy of History. After a cursory discussion of Africa, he noted:

It is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we have seen them at this day, such have they always been . . . At this point we leave Africa not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.¹⁵

This was Hegel's remark depicting the movement of the Absolute spirit in History. Many of the "myths" were formulated long before any serious relationships were established between Africans and Europeans. One can only surmise the impact of those myths" on Europeans' attitudes toward blacks, and one can imagine what the early European sailors and explorers thought when they landed Africa and saw the objects of those centuries-old stereotypes.

Below are some of the opinions of early Europeans and explorers of Africa:

Sebastine Munster in his “Cosmographia,” witnessed falsely that “the inhabitants of Gulata (the present West African country of Mauritania) live like animals, have no government, no idea of agriculture, no one has a wife”

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I.A Corveia in his “Le Sens Moral Chez Ibos du Nigeria”, admitted that ‘Igbos’ have a moral heritage, but reduces it to “lowest grade of moral consciousness”¹⁷.

Hence, according to J. Ekei, “here the notion of “hierarchy” of consciousness is introduced, analogous to Levy Bruhl who spoke of the ‘mentalite primitive prelogique’¹⁸

Other European Explorers include, Jurgen Andersen, Peter Kolb, and E. B. Taylor who called Africans “puerile minds”, Lord Averbury etc. One need not overlook the remarks of the American John C. Calhoun who helped stigmatize blacks during the era of slavery in the United States, and the counter remarks made by Kwame Nkrumah in which he cited the case of a Columbia University Zulu student’s speech, Calhoun: “If I could find a black man who could understand Greek syntax, I would consider the Black

race human”. Nkrumah: what might have kindled the Greek syntax in the mind of the famous southerner, I have so far been unable to discover, but... I could show him among black men of pure African blood those who could repeat the Koran from memory, skilled in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldaic”¹⁹.

2.1.4 CONTEMPORARY VIEW ABOUT AFRICA

The views of the thinkers and explorers of the modern period as seen above have been perpetuated in this contemporary time. These are witnessed in the C.N.N. and B.B.C news during crisis in Africa, in the actions of U.N; in the deceptive strategies of the G-8 club, plus other western means.

The Western Media outlets continuously depict Africa as the epicenter of AIDs, a place where people live and dine with wild animals without fear of being devoured. They will term Africa as strife prone, where earth is cracked and dry. Ikhenemho Okomilo reports on the back page of New Age Newspaper, Tuesday, April 5. 2005 in his article titled “Love in the climate of half-truths and damned lies”: “...the corporation’s (B.B.C) governors are suddenly announcing they will devote an entire week in July to programme

that would redress its concentration in the negative aspects of Africa. The aim according to B.B.C Television controller, Loraine Heggessey, is to prompt viewers to “see the continent in a different light”. “We will help viewers to discover the real Africa, showing there is more to it than war, famine and diseases.”

Speaking on the U.N actions in most African countries, V.Lenin depicted Africa as the “sandbox of U.N”. The film on Hutu-Tutsi ethnic cleansing of 1994 in Rwanda brings home the inhuman and malicious actions of the so-called U.N. These distorted images have continued to smolder in the way Africans are interacted with all over the world. Commenting on September 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Howard Dean who was defeated in 2004 democratic presidential primaries in U.S.A, added:

*But we must come to terms with the ugly truth that skin, color, age and economics played a deadly role in who survived and who did not.*¹²⁰

On the other hand most contemporary writings have discriminatory undertones. Consider when Karen Blixen wrote in her book “Out of Africa,” during her expeditions in Kenya:

The Somali bring much trouble upon themselves by their terrible tribal quarrels. In this matter they feel and reason differently from other people ²²¹.

But Karen Blixen forgot that ethnic conflagration cuts across the breadth and length of every continent. The Holocaust camps of tribal Nazi Germany in the 20th century flashes one’s mind at this point. The inhuman treatments meted on the Kurds in Syria since March 2004, and the ethnic conflicts in Kosovo, Yugoslavia in the last 20th century.

Keith Reichburg, an African American writer, wrote in regards to the genocide of Rwanda in his book “A Black man confronts Africa”: Fully evolved human Beings in the 20th century don’t do things like that.²²

He forgot that fully evolved Westerners killed 6 million Jews under Hitler. Stalin eliminated 20 million soviets and the Japanese imperial troops

machine-gunned, bayoneted and raped 300,000 Chinese Civilians in the Rape of Nanking.

Examples of contemporary writings on African image flow like river Nile.

The film, “Gods must be crazy” was a targeted missile on Africans’ image. Having exposed the Ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary views about Africa, I shall now go straight to Martin Heidegger’s “Being and time” in order to use his concept of “phenomenology” to interpret these views about Africa since these views hinge on the Beingness of Africans.

Nevertheless, I am not enthralled by his philosophy, which is not without flaws, but only using his concepts of “phenomenology” to interpret African situation.

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CHAPTER THREE

AFRICA AND HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATION

3.1 MARTIN HEIDEGGER: THE QUESTION OF BEING.

Martin Heidegger, born on Sept. 20, 1889 in Messkirch Baden-Württemberg, was a professor both at the universities of Marburg (1923-8) and Freiburg (1928-51) until his death on May 26, 1976 in Freiburg. He was famous for his theories of being and human nature, and for his unique interpretations of traditional metaphysics. His work “Being and Time” remains his best-known and most influential work. This “work has influenced such varied fields as theology (Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Rahner), existentialism (Jean-Paul-Sartre) contemporary hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer) and literary theory and deconstruction (Jacques Derrida)”

Despite the tortuous style of his work, Heidegger was fascinated throughout his long philosophic life by the question: “what is the meaning of Being?”

In the preface to his Being and Time he asked:

Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word “being”? Not all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of being.

He continued:

But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression “Being”? Not all. So first of all we must re-awaken an understanding for the meaning of this question.

In order to re-awaken an understanding for the meaning of this question, he first of all highlighted in a luminous synthesis, starting from the Traditional Metaphysics to Hegel, the forgetfulness of the Question of the meaning of Being. He criticized traditional metaphysics (from Plato down to Hegel) for concerning themselves with the things that are, with the natural entities, with “what is”, leaving off the fundamental question about what it means to be at all. Why is there something rather than nothing? All the philosophical works of Heidegger could be said to be an inquiry into the meaning of being (sein). Thus, Heidegger’s philosophical project is a renovating or adjustment of the previously existing ones; for theories make no great leaps.

It was Parmenides who opined in his book "The Way of Reason" that "Being is, non-being is not". Heidegger asserted that since this Parmenidean remark, the meaning of the question of "Being" has gone over many heads. This started from the researches of Plato and Aristotle, who thought of being in terms of what Dorothea Frede called "substance Ontology" (metaphysics of presence), only to subside from then and persisted through many alterations and retouchings down to the logic of Hegel.

Substance Ontology is the view that "what is ultimately real is that which underlies properties-what "stands under" (Sub-stantia) and remains continuously present throughout all change". Hence, Plato would depict the phenomenal world as a copy of the world of forms which is permanent, unchanging and immutable. This (substance ontology) is also found in Aristotle's notion of primary substances, in the medieval Christians belief of "ens creatum", in Descartes' "res extensa" and "res cogitans", in Kant's noumena, and in the physical stuff presupposed by scientific naturalism. These conceptions he referred as "forgetfulness of the question of being." He also accused them for seeing things as mere "occurrences" (vorhandenheit). Certain peculiarities of Greek language, according to

Dorothea Frede, favoured the development of Ontology or Traditional Metaphysics, which became entrenched in Western thought from Aristotle to Hegel. “The fact that there is a clear linguistic distinction between “beings” ta onta, referred to by the participle with the definite article, the verb to be “onai”, and the abstract noun “being- ousia” (nature of beings).

In all, Heidegger’s goal is to undercut the entire game by challenging the idea that reality must be thought of in terms of the idea of substance at all. His claim according Frede, “is not that mind and matter (in reference to Descartes) do not exist, but that they are derivative, regional ways of being for things, the detritus of some fairly high level theorizing that is remote from concrete lived existence”.

In view of this, Heidegger succinctly says:

Thus, if the question of being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened “tradition” must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient Ontology, until we arrive at those

“primordial experience” (Husserl’s concept of phenomenology which he adopted) in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being.

From the above, Heidegger’s task in his work “Being and Time” (though he never completed the work) is in two folds:

1. The first concerns the interpretation of the history of philosophy; the task of destroying the history of Ontology.
2. The proper search for the conception of “being” itself. The task he called “the ontological Analysis of “Dasein” as laying bare the Horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of being in general.

The second task ushers us into our next sub-topic.

3.2 THE FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY: DASEIN ANALYTIC.

In a quest to explicate the meaning of the question of Being, Martin Heidegger stated that the question of the meaning of Being must be formulated; for inherent in the formulation of any question is an answer – a seeking (suchen). Heidegger explained in the introduction to his work what

belongs to any question whatsoever, so that from this stand point the question of being can be made visible as a very special one with its own distinctive character, and the question of being if it is a fundamental question be made transparent.

First of all, any question whatsoever (bearing in mind the question of the meaning of being) presupposes a being with the cognitive powers of rationality and language. The vegetative and sentient beings (in the phyla of life) cannot ask questions, for they have no reflective and cognitive powers. They cannot know that they know.

Now, every inquiry or question has that which is asked about. Heidegger called it “Sein Gefragtes” . In addition to what is asked about, every inquiry or question has that which is interrogated. Heidegger called it “ein Befragtes” . And in every inquiry or question there lies also that which is to be found out by the asking; that which is really intended. Heidegger called it “das Erfragtes”

Thus, in reference to the question (the question of being) which we are to work out, Heidegger maintained that “what” is asked about is Being – “that

which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which (woraufhin) entities are already understood”.

What is to be found out is the meaning of being, which according to Heidegger, “demands that it be conceived in a way of its own, essentially contrasting with the concepts in which entities acquire their determinate signification”. Lastly, “in so far as being constitutes what is asked about, and “Being” means the Being of entities, Heidegger maintained, “then entities themselves turn out to be what is interrogated”

But Heidegger would ask:

In which entities is the meaning of being to be discerned? From which entities is the disclosure of being to take its departure? Is the starting–point optional, or does some particular entity have priority when we come to work out the question of Being? Which entity shall we take for our example, and in what sense does it have priority?

From the above, we will find out that if the question about Being is to be explicitly formulated and carried through in such a manner as to be completely transparent to itself, then any treatment of it in line with the

elucidations above requires us to explain how Being is to be looked at, how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped; it requires us to prepare the way for choosing the right entity for our example, and to work out the genuine way of access to it. Thus looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it - all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers are ourselves. Again, the very asking of this question is an entity's mode of being; an entity with cognitive and reflexive powers which get its essential character from what is inquired about -namely being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, Heidegger denote by the term "Dasein" –being-there. But we cannot correctly translate Heidegger's term "Dasein" literally as being-there or simply as 'man', though it has mainly to do with man. This was how Heidegger arrived at the term "Dasein, the gateway to other ontologies. Dasein becomes the fundamental Ontology.

Fundamental Ontology in the sense Heidegger employs it is the "phenomenological" analysis of Dasein in order to understand the meaning

of Being. In order to understand other ontologies or the meaning of being, we have to explore the basic structures of Dasein. In this way, the meaning of being would be disclosed and uncovered to us. This task of laying bare the constitution of Dasein is what Heidegger means by fundamental Ontology. It is the belief of Heidegger that Dasein already possess a pre-ontological understanding of being and it is precisely through an appropriation of this type of understanding that the way is opened to the meaning of being. Fundamental Ontology, therefore, is a re-structuring of the essential structures of Dasein for the understanding of other Ontologies or the meaning of Being.

But one would ask why did Heidegger choose Dasein as a fundamental Ontology, the gateway to the question of the meaning of Being? This hinges on the priority of Dasein. According to Heidegger, Dasein takes priority overall other entities in several ways:

(1) Ontical one: “Dasein is an entity whose being has the determinate character of existence”

(2) Ontological one: “Dasein is, because existence is thus determinate for it”
Existence is an issue for him. The question of existence is one of Dasein’s
Ontical affairs. Dasein is that Being whose very being comports itself
understandingly toward Being.

Having seen Dasein’s priority, Heidegger went further to de-structure the
essential structures of Dasein in part one, division one of his work. These
can be analyzed into two:

- (1) The special characteristics of Dasein
- (2) The existentials of Dasein.

The special characteristics of Dasein include:

1. Openness (Dasein is full of possibilities),
2. Mineness-“Jemeinigkeit” (Each individual’s existence is peculiar to him)
and,
3. Ability to choose (Dasein, unlike other beings, can choose to live
authentic existence or inauthentic existence)

On the other hand, the existentials of Dasein include:

(1) Being- in -the World: Heidegger laid much emphasis on this concept. This is the fundamental existential constitution of Dasein. The term ‘world’ has four meaning for Heidegger:

(a) The Ontical concept: “it signifies the totality of those entities which can be present at hand within the world”

(b) The Ontological term: “it signifies the Being of those entities, and can become a term for any realm which encompasses a multiplicity of entities”,

(c) The Ontical sense: “it signifies here the ‘wherein’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to Live” and,

(d) The “Ontologico – existential concept of World hood”.

But Heidegger used the term “world” in the concept “Being–in–the World” as the “wherein” a factual Dasein is said to live. As a “being–in”, Dasein is not merely a spatial being located in the world like we say that Agulu is in Anambra, or the T.V. is in the room. It is something like, “he is in love”. It is a “being-in” that involves the person. Dasein is not simply located in the world, but forms part and parcel of the world, and at the same time the world forms part and parcel of Dasein’s existence. As a being–in-the world, Dasein

is disclosed to itself in 3 ways: Affects or facticity which include joy, boredom, dread etc, understanding or possibility and fallenness-he is thrown into existence without his consent, such that either he asserts himself or get swallowed up in existence.

The assemble of facticity, possibility and fallenness, which constitutes Dasein as Being-in-the World is what Heidegger refers to as “care” (Besorgen). Care is the unity of Dasein’s primordial structures. No wonder, Heidegger opined:

All these ways of Being-in have concern (care) as their kind of Being - a kind of Being which we have yet to characterize in detail. Leaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest – these too are ways of concern; but these are all deficient modes, in which the possibilities of concern are kept to a “bare minimum”

(2) Existenz: This comes from Latin “ex sistere” which means to stand out, to emerge. Existence, for Heidegger as well as other existentialists, comes before essence. As a being endowed with language and the capability of discourse, Dasein can stand out, can put himself apart in order to raise

question about his own Being and about Being in general. “Dasein” is conscious of his own existence. This consciousness of his existence leads to the awareness of death which is the final fulfillment of Dasein’s existence. Dasein’s existence could either be authentic or inauthentic. Authentic existence includes also the awareness and consciousness of one’s death, while the contrary is inauthentic existence.

(3) Temporality: By temporality Heidegger means to emphasize that Dasein is time-bound (future, past and present), culture-bound and historically bound.

Heidegger’s fundamental ontology through the analysis of dasein and his three existential having been exposed, one would ask: Did Heidegger succeed in using the analysis of Dasein in the understanding of the meaning of Being?

Heidegger has practically no answer in this direction. His fundamental ontology is often said to have failed to show how the phenomenological analysis of Dasein would help us to grasp the meaning of Being. Because of this failure, his fundamental ontology is seen by many as nothing but a form

of philosophical anthropology. This is the major shortcoming of his fundamental ontology. Nevertheless, the link between his fundamental ontology and the question of the meaning of being can be sought in his philosophy of nothing. But this does not fully explain his main task on the question of being.

Again another question comes to mind – the question of method. What method did Heidegger adopt in his study of the question of being and fundamental ontology? This ushers us into our next sub-topic: His methodology.

3.3. HEIDEGGER'S METHODOLOGY.

The question of methodology occupies a prominent place in Heidegger's work, "Being and Time". "In provisionally characterizing the object which serves as the theme of our investigation (the being of entities, or the meaning of being in general), it seems that we have also delineated the method to be employed. The task of ontology is to explain being itself and to make the being of entities stand out in full relief. And the method of ontology remains questionable..." He went further to elaborate:

With the question of the meaning of being, our investigation comes up against the fundamental question of philosophy. This is one that must be treated “phenomenologically”

Thus, Heidegger chooses the concept of phenomenology in his treatment of the question of being. The concept of phenomenology as a philosophical method had its origin in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). According to Robert J. Dostal, “one common view of the history of twentieth-century continental philosophy is as follows. At the beginning of the century Edmund Husserl, disturbed by what he saw as the increasing relativism and historicism of western culture, introduced the phenomenological method as a way to ensure that philosophy would arrive at final, incontrovertible truths.”

But Husserl’s pure or transcendental phenomenology must be sharply distinguished from Heidegger’s existential phenomenology. Although Heidegger was influenced by Husserl’s phenomenological method (transcendental phenomenology), he gave it an “interpretive turn“ in his recognition of the significance of finitude, worldliness, and historicity of

our human predicament-“the recognition that our access to things is always colored and preshaped by the sense of things circulating in our historical culture”.

In a general sense, “phenomenology means the study of the forms in which something appears or manifest itself, in contrast to studies that seek to explain things, say, from their causal relations, or from evolutionary processes” . It is the description of the things presented in our experience and the description of our experience of them.

According to Robert Dostal, “the phenomenological movement was heralded by Husserl’s cry, “back to the things themselves!”.

“Because phenomenology “brackets”, or suspends belief in, all metaphysical constructs and “assertions” in order to focus solely on what shows up as it presents itself in our experience, its findings are supposed to be apodictic, beyond all possible doubt”.

3.4 HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF PHENOMENOLOGY AND INTERPRETATION

Per Magda King's claim, "Heidegger in his "Exposition of the inquiry into the meaning of Being" gives a preliminary concept of phenomenology, leaving the full concept to be elaborated in the triads of "Sein und Zeit". As long as this triad is missing from Sein und Zeit, Heidegger's discussion of phenomenology remains not only short but also incomplete". Nevertheless, Heidegger writes in the introduction of his "Sein und Zeit" (Being and time):

The expression "phenomenology" signifies primarily a methodological conception. This expression does not characterize the 'what' of the objects of philosophical research as subjects-matter, but rather the 'how' of that research. The more genuinely a methodological concept is worked out and the more comprehensively it determines the principles on which a science is to be conducted, all the more primordially is it rooted in the way we come to terms with the things themselves, and the further is it removed from what we call technical devices.

Thus, the expression “Phenomenology” is a descriptive method that allows things show themselves for what they are. Heidegger introduces his discussion of phenomenology by explaining Husserl’s well-known Maxim: ‘Zu den Sachen selbst!’, (to the things themselves!) According to Magdaling, “the ‘things’ referred to in the maxim, are not concrete, material things, but the ‘phenomena’ themselves”. The Maxim formulates the demand that “no time-honored concept or theories, however well proven they may seem must be taken over and made the starting point of some constructed evidence.”³⁵ Heidegger asserts:

It (the maxim) is opposed to all free-floating constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated; it is opposed to those pseudo-questions which parade themselves as “problems”, often for generations at a time.

Thus, only phenomena that have been originally brought to light and have been directly demonstrated as ‘self evidence’ can satisfy the phenomenological demand for truth and claim to hold a place in the investigation.

After this first, broad characterization of the method, Heidegger proceeds to examine in detail the two components of the concept of phenomenology: phenomenon and logos.

The word 'phenomenon' comes from the Greek word, "phainomenon," meaning "the manifest, the self- showing (das Offenbare, das Sichzeigende)."³⁶ Heidegger defines the basic meaning of phenomenon as "that which shows itself in itself".

For Heidegger, "phenomena" are the totality of what lies in the light of being". Phenomena is occasionally identified with what the Greeks called "ta onta", things, beings. According to Heidegger, there are many ways in which things can show themselves. Things can show themselves as they are not, but only seem to be. Seeming (scheinen) is a self- showing in which things look as if they were such and such, but are not truly so. Seeming is thus a privative modification of phenomenon, however, is to be admitted into its definition: that which shows itself in itself.

On the other hand, phenomenon in the real sense of the word and seeming as its privation must be distinguished from other ways in which things can

appear. Appearing, appearance, come from ‘ad parere’, to come forward, to show oneself i.e. originally they mean the same as phenomenon. This is why appearing and appearance (Erscheinung) are often used to define phenomenon - a practice that can lead to hopeless confusion in view of the manifold and ambiguous meanings of “appearance.” A symptom, for instance, a feverish flush on the patient’s face appears, shows itself, but in so doing it points away from itself to something else, to a disturbance in the organism. The disturbance, the illness, is often said to “appear” in the symptom and yet the illness does not in the strict sense appear at all, it merely announces itself in and through the symptom. Hence, Heidegger concludes that all signs, symptoms, indications of any kind, in which something announces itself without directly appearing, must be distinguished from phenomena in the strictly defined sense, if hopeless confusion is to be avoided.

Heidegger further contrasted phenomena as defined, from “mere appearance,” an emanation of something that itself remains essentially hidden. Without going into further complications mentioned by Heidegger, it is abundantly clear that his definition of phenomenon as that which shows

itself in itself is both necessary and right. It is, however, as Heidegger immediately points out, only a purely formal concept of phenomenon.

Coming to the concept of Logos, the word is a Greek word. According to Heidegger, “in Plato and Aristotle the concept of “logos” has many competing significations, with no basic signification positively taking the lead.” Thus, in the history of philosophy, the word “logos” has been interpreted in widely different senses, as discourse, reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground, relation. Heidegger renders the word “logos” in its basic meaning of discourse (speech) but warns that this translation can only justify itself when it has been shown what discourse itself means. Discourse, in the light of Heidegger, “is letting something be seen from itself”, that is, “it lets us see something from the very thing, which the discourse is about.” Hence, after much elaboration, Heidegger renders “logos” as “letting something (discourse) be seen from itself.” Because, logos lies in letting something be seen by pointing it out, it has the structural form of synthesis, which is, letting something be seen in its “togetherness” with something.

Furthermore, because “logos” is letting something be seen, it can therefore be true or false. But here everything depends on our steering clear of any conception of truth which is construed in the sense of “agreement”. The being - true of logos means that in speech or discourse the entities of which one is talking about must be taken out of their hiding, that is, they must be discovered. Similarly, being, false amounts to deceiving in the sense of covering up: putting something in front of something and thereby passing it off as something which it is not.

Now, the meaning of phenomenon and logos has been sufficiently elucidated for a formal definition of phenomenology. Logos says: to let something be seen from itself. Phenomenon says: that which shows itself in itself. Taking the two together, phenomenology means: “to let that which show itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”

“This is the formal meaning of that branch of research which calls itself “phenomenology,” says Heidegger. But here we are still expressing nothing else than the maxim formulated above: “to the things themselves!”
(Husserl’s influence)

Thus the term “phenomenology” is quite different from other sciences to which it bears an outward resemblance, such as theology, biology, sociology: the science of God, of life, of human community.

But what are the “things” that phenomenology let us see? What are, for it, the phenomena par excellence? They are not the real things we meet within the world, which are always directly accessible to us and do not need a difficult and intricate method to bring them to light. The phenomena of phenomenology must be such that they are usually half-hidden, disguised or forgotten, so that they in themselves demand a special approach. These phenomena are not beings but the being of beings. What phenomenology shows are always “being”, its structures and characters, its meaning, its possible modifications and derivations. Phenomenology is then the method, the way in which being, the subject matter of ontology, can be approached and brought to self-showing. Thus only as “phenomenology”, is ontology possible.

But in explaining the tasks of ontology we found it necessary that there should be a fundamental ontology taking as its theme that entity which is

ontologico-ontically distinctive, Dasein, in order to confront the cardinal problem—the question of the meaning of Being in general. Hence, the issue of interpretation or hermeneutics comes into play. This is because it is through the interpretation of Dasein that we arrive at the phenomenological conception of Being in general. Thus, Dasein is pre-phenomenological. This shows that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation. And the phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. No wonder Heidegger defined philosophy thus:

Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and it takes its departure from the hermeneutics of Dasein, which as an analytic of existence, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at this point where it arises and to which it returns .

Remember, that Heidegger's design is not philosophical anthropology.

Having sufficiently elaborated on Heidegger's task in his Being and Time, his fundamental ontology and Dasein analytic, and on his concept of phenomenology and interpretation, let us now delve into our next topic,

where we shall use his concepts of phenomenology and interpretation to interpret African distorted images. But before that, we shall briefly look at some of causes of African predicament.

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CHAPTER FOUR

In chapter two, I showcased the various distorted images about Africa, beginning from the ancient period till the contemporary period. These distorted images have continued to petrify in the West relationship with Africa. They have continued to form ominous clouds of hatred. If given the chance, the West will wipe Africans from the face of the Earth. Fairfield Osborn in this book, “Our Plundered Planet,” compelled them to reduce the world’s population so that the earth will not wither away in 2050. Osborn warned that unless mankind curbs its excess consumption of natural resources, the earth’s population will be forced to colonize two planets within 50 years (2050). In order to reduce the world’s population, they have manufactured lots of things, which only a critical mind can observe. Africa and some nations in Asia continent like, India are the targets. They backed them up against their own walls and smacked round them with bullets of many sorts. Thus “Africa has become the basket case of the planet, “the third world of the third world,” and a vast continent in free fall.”¹

Therefore, it behooves me in this chapter to interpret these distorted images about Africa in light of Martin Heidegger's concept of phenomenology and interpretation. The reason is to uncover what are hidden behind those distortions. But before I navigate, it is pertinent to examine the causation of African predicament which had catalyzed the distortions.

4.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF AFRICAN DISTORTED IMAGES

In the previous chapters, we saw the various distorted images of the African continent, and the elaboration of Martin Heidegger's question of Being, his Dasein Analytic (fundamental ontology), and his concept of phenomenology and interpretation.

But in this final chapter, I will interpret these distorted images in light of Heidegger's concept of phenomenological interpretation and utilize his views in salvaging the African image.

The Ancient views about Africa which we treated in chapter 2 had become the reference point for degrading stereotypes about black people and Africa. Thus the denigration of Africans can be traced back beyond the Christian

era into antiquity and in later times anyone who wished to employ degrading stereotypes about black people could easily establish reference points in classical times when outstanding scholars and writers described Africans as strange and primitive. Many of those descriptions have remained with us and have contributed immensely to the perpetuation of derogatory treatments on Africans. After taking a critical look at those ancient myths about Africa, one would be convinced without any scintilla of doubt, that they were founded on prejudice and wild fantasies.

Those views have continued to ferment in the western mental cloud. They have become the backbone of most westerners' ideation about Africa in the Modern period. One can surmise the impacts of those "myths" on European attitudes towards blacks, and one can also imagine what the early European sailors, explorers and anthropologists thought when they landed Africa and saw the objects of those centuries-old stereotypes. Explorers and anthropologists like Levy Bruhl described Africans as savages, black monkeys, pagans and people with lower grade of consciousness. Thus, it would be incongruous to associate philosophic thoughts with those who were adjudged sub-humans and inferior.

It was against this background (bastardizations and humiliation of Africans) that the Belgian missionary in Rwanda, Placid Tempels, wrote his controversial work called “Bantu philosophy,” in which he espoused Bantus notion of “Vital Force.” Tempel’s work, according to J. Obi Oguejiofor, was therefore like “an act of faith in the humanity of the Africans.”¹ Thus Tempels wrote:

Celui qui pretend que les homes primitifs possedent point de systeme de pensee, les rejettes d’office de la classe des hommes (He who pretends that primitive people have not system of though rejects them from belonging to the class of human being).²

Tempels allowed the “being” of Africans to show itself (interpreting Heidegger) in itself. Though Tempels efforts were acknowledged by some Africans, most African philosophers, like Paulin Hountondji and Aime Cesaire criticized his work as a “divertive maneuver”; as something that would distract the attentions of the Bantus from their plight. According to

Hountondji, the work is “Janus-faced”: It is a mere pretext for learned disquisitions among the Europeans. The Blackman remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse.³

Now, the question of being or ontology, according to Heidegger, is possible only as phenomenology. And phenomenology according to him is letting that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself, or to the things themselves. The things that phenomenology reveals to us are not beings but the being of beings, its structures and characters, its meaning, its possible modifications and derivations. These phenomena of phenomenology must be such that they are usually half-hidden, disguised or forgotten so that they in themselves demand a special approach (Interpretation and Hermeneutics).

But in explaining the tasks of ontology, Heidegger stressed that it is necessary that there should be a fundamental ontology in order to confront the cardinal problem—the question of the meaning of being. From this, he arrived at Dasein (being-there), an entity which is ontologico-ontically

distinctive. Dasein, apart from its literal meaning (being-there), could also mean man. Hence, it is through the interpretation or hermeneutics of Dasein that we could arrive at the meaning of the question of being. Dasein becomes the gateway to other ontologies. In Da chapter three, we saw the special characteristics of Dasein and its Existentials. Under Dasein existentials, we interpreted Dasein as a being-in-the-world that cares about his world or environment. Dasein is not merely a spatial being located in the world, but he is in love with his world. He cares for it. This concern and care for his world and his environment is manifested in many feats of technological, scientific and other numerous inventions and creativity. He uses whatever he finds in his environment as a tool (Heidegger called it 'Zeug'). But his care for the world is made possible because he has understanding; he can decide to choose or not to choose (fallenness), and his existence is a fact (facticity). His facticity includes dread (death) anger, Joy and boredom.

More importantly, as a being-in-the world Dasein is Time-bound (Temporality), culture-bound and historical bound.

Following Heidegger's line of arguments and his phenomenological description of ontology, which starts with Dasein analytic (interpretation), we will find out that the Ancient, Modern, Medieval and Contemporary views about Africa are borne out of prejudice. The early European writers and explorers who wrote on Africa and who visited the continent were already prejudiced before they wrote on or visited Africa. Interpretatively, they did not bracket those ancient myths and presuppositions about Africa and thus let the "being" of Africans show itself from itself. Instead, they carried those myths over in their descriptions of Africans. These became convincing rationalizations for shipping Africans as slaves and for partitioning of Africa in 1889 Berlin conference. They forgot that Dasein as a being-in-the world is both time bound (temporality) and culture bound. The same is applicable to the African man. Hence, the culture of Indians is different from the cultures of Africans, Chinese, Europeans and Americans. That Africans worshipped the sun and went about naked when the early Europeans arrived, should not ruffle any feathers and become enough reasons for the subjugation of Africans. Culture is relative.

Those Europeans failed to interpret and understand that one's environment contributes to his or her understanding and knowledge. Dasein is influenced by his geographical location. For instance, early Europeans like the Norsemen, built warm houses and made warm clothing due to their cold climate, whereas one can survive in the tropics (or in Africa) with simpler housing and no clothing. One can imagine the influence of mountains in the Nsukka area of Eastern Nigeria. No wonder, many of the indigenes answer names like "Ugwuanyi" (mountain for all) "Ugwuoke" (Big mountain) etc. That the inhabitants of Gwoza hills in Borno state of Nigeria worship stones and wood is no surprise. Because they are surrounded by stones, they see them as sacred. According to News Edition Vol 23, Sept 6, 2004, P.10, "the sacred stones represent the inhabitants departed parents".

Environment and culture has a lot to say in the understanding and hermeneutics of Dasein -man. Thus, the early Europeans, and even today's Europe, invented many things due to their climatic conditions. But it does not mean that Africans invented nothing. Their creativity and innovations could be seen in their tools, paintings, arts like the Benin masks and Ethiopian Talbot, and even in the Ancient Egyptian pyramids. Remember

that most of these works of art were carted away by those European colonizers.

On the contrary, the early Europeans who explored Africa judged the African ways of life (cultures) with their own culture. Because the African cultures did not tally with their own, they adjudged Africans as sub humans and inferior. No wonder the Scot Philosopher, David Hume opines:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes... to be naturally inferior to the white. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences.⁴

Hume probably did not realize how monumental his ignorance was, when he said there was no ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences.

Today, C.N.N has continued to view Africa as a place of tribal slaughters. They forgot that tribal wars cut across the breadth and length of the world. Dasein as a being-in-the-world is bedeviled by other circumstances of his everydayness. Such circumstances like boredom, dread, fear and even wars.

Furthermore, the early European explorers (I hinge on early European explorers because they were the first to arrive Africa and strengthened those old stereotypes myths which pervades the contemporary European consciousness about Africa) of Africa did not allow those works (artifacts) and philosophies of the Africans to speak to them from itself. Those works of art and philosophies are full of hidden meanings. There are many things hidden in those symbols, which the Europeans did not want to uncover and lay bare. Hidden in them are the characters, structures, philosophies and the being of the African man. They point to the reasonability and reflectivity of their makers; that their makers (the African man) equally care about their world and environment and as such, are bundle of possibilities. Heidegger lent weight to this position when he said:

Dasein's facticity is such that it's Being-in the world has always dispersed (zerstreut) itself or even split itself into definite ways of being -in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, giving something up and letting it go, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something,

undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining.⁵

The above quotation sharply destroys those Eurocentric assumptions that Africans are inferior and have primitive mentality. It added weight to the efforts of this sub-topic in interpreting African distorted images and the salvaging of African image.

Therefore, it is time for the Europeans to build a strong faith in the humanity of Africans. No one culture, whether European or African, is all encompassing. Truth is multi-dimensional. We (humanity) can achieve a lot in our knowledge of the world and our place in it, through Mutual understanding and cross fertilization of ideas.

4.2. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

A thorough reading of this project would convince my reader that those distorted images about Africa, in the light of Heideggerian interpretations, are born out of prejudice. Those distorted images cannot withstand the sledgehammer of logical criticisms.

The ancient views about Africa are founded on mythologies and superstitious beliefs. They had become reference points for men of letters in the medieval period and for any derogatory image on Africa. The first European explorers and anthropologists who came to Africa carried in their mind those distorted images about Africa before they arrived Africa. One can imagine what they would say when they arrived the continent and saw wild animals, thick forests and half-naked people. But they forgot that geographical and climate conditions of a place have a lot to say about the place and the people in it. They forgot that as wonder (about the world) led the first Ionian philosophers to define the ‘urstoff’ of things, it also led the primitive Africans in their religious devotions. Because mists of prejudice cloud their understanding, they could not allow those African phenomena to show themselves from themselves. Some of them like Levy Bruhl who described Africans as people with inferior minds, forgot Heidegger’s words that “Dasein facticity is such that its Being-in-the world has always dispersed (zerstreut) itself or split itself into definite ways of being. Hence David Hume’s denigration of the Africans in the modern period holds no water.

They did not discover or uncover those hidden meanings embedded in those African phenomena like artifacts, symbols of religious worship etc. These reveal the care, understanding and concern of the African Dasein in his everyday world or environment.

Again, those distorted images about African still perceptibly showcase themselves in this contemporary time through most western Medias, avenues and scholarly writings. These also reveal themselves in the way Africans are treated in the world today. They are hobbled with huge debts, exploitations and harsh treatments by the U.N and E.U.

But those images with which Africans are labeled are not only African phenomena. For instance, Keith Reichburg, an African American writer, wrote in regards of the Rwandan genocide (tribal wars):

Fully evolved human Beings in the 20th century don't do things like that.⁶

But he forgot that fully evolved Western and Asian human beings killed 6 million Jews in the 20th century under Hitler. Stalin eliminated 20 million soviets and the Japanese imperial troops, machine gunned, bayoneted and raped 300,000 Chinese civilians in the Rape of Nan king

He also forgot that ethnic conflagration cuts across the breadth and length of every continent.

Again, the primitive Africans were regarded as cannibals by the first European explorers that came to Africa. But today the Japanese even eat aborted babies. What a contradiction!

Nevertheless, it would be incongruous to relegate African plightful situations to the limbo. Really, many African nations are lavishing under the burden weight of poverty, hunger and economic bastardizations. Many African leaders also contribute to the hardships of their nation. There are reaped harvests of deaths everywhere. But most of these African predicaments are caused by colonialism, slave trade and geographical cause.

Therefore, I urge the Westerners to restore an act of faith in the humanity of Africans. We can achieve and conquer a lot through mutual understanding, love and cross fertilization of ideas. Teilhard de Chardin describes this love as that which “brings individuals together, not superficially and tangentially but centre to centre.”⁷

ENDNOTES

1. J.O Oguejiofor, *Philosophy and African Predicament* (Nigeria:Hope Publications, Ibadan, 2001)p.93
2. P.Tempels, *La Philosophie bantue* (Paris:Presence Africaine, 1948) p.15
3. A.F.Uduigomen, *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (O.O.P.Limited,1995) p.28
4. J.Harris *Op cit*, p.16
5. J.Macquarrie & E. Robinson, *Martin Heidegger: Being and Time* (Britain:Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1967) p.83.
6. Ezine Newsletter, *Op cit*, p.1
7. T.Chardin, *Op cit*, p.244

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