

## ASOUZU AND THEORY FORMULATION IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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### **Abstract**

*This paper x-rays Asouzu's efforts in exploring the challenges therein, in formulating viable theories in African philosophy. Theory formulation is marred by ethnocentric intrusions and this is described by Asouzu as unintended ethnocentric commitment. Some of the African socio-political theories have been sampled to identify this commitment. This is basically orchestrated by over-dependence on observational experiences. Any attempt at formulating theory of universal appeal, Asouzu believes, the theoreticians have to contain the difficulties that sense-experience presents. This paper argues that a resort to Ibuanyidanda philosophy could salvage the quagmire faced by the scholars in theory formulation in African philosophy and it would help African theories to attain universal relevance.*

### **Introduction**

In most cases, for one to have a firm grasp of the philosophy of any philosopher, it is pertinent to understand the socio-political situation of that society. This is due to the fact that generally it is the socio-political situations of a place that usually present philosopher with materials for philosophizing. Contemporary African philosophy is a case in point. It is predominantly a political philosophy, due to the prevalent situations that gave birth to it. It was the socio-political situation in Africa that gave room for questions to be raised in the minds of African thinkers and this invariably was the core focus of the theory formulation in contemporary African philosophy.

The background to theory formulation in African philosophy derived its strength particularly from the scrambling and partitioning of Africa by the Europeans – Africa was divided among the European nations for the sole purpose of exploitation, subjugation and domination. The Europeans lorded it over the Africans and became masters while Africans became slaves in their own land. The French colonies even adopted the policy of “assimilation” which means Africans were forced to abandon their cultural practices and French culture was

forced on them. Anything of value in Africa was taken or rather stolen to Europe. Hence, Africa was exploited to develop Europe.

However, this situation was later to be changed with the advent of scholars who came back from oversea training and education. With this new force in place, European exploitation, subjugation and domination met its match.

The first half of twentieth century witnessed the biting wind of nationalism that blew across the African landscape. Thinkers like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Obafemi Awolowo and others having completed their studies abroad came back home and began nationalist movements that was aimed at putting a stop to the physical occupation of African nations by the Europeans – colonialism in Africa. In order for this movement to gain momentum, the African scholars began with endeavour to reclaim the original consciousness of the African identity. They packaged this idea in the formulation of various theories. Some of these theories are discussed hereunder:

### **Nkrumah and Socialism (Philosophical Consciencism) – Ideology of Decolonization**

Kwame Nkrumah was a socialist revolutionary philosopher. He was very critical of capitalism. According to Nkrumah in (Omoregbe 31) capitalism “is a refined form of feudalism, which in turn is a refined form of slavery” capitalism is therefore a developed and refined form of slavery. For Nkrumah original men lived communalistic lives, all land belonged to the community, everything was owned by the community, including all means of production, and everyone worked for the common good of the community (Kanu, 112). But gradually people began to claim ownership of property and hence, inequality, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and class struggle crept in. the bourgeois then came up with a theory to support their stand.

In reaction therefore, Nkrumah believes that the traditional African society is not capitalist in nature, but egalitarian and communal.

Nkrumah then calls on African nations to reject capitalism and then embrace socialism, which gets its strength from the egalitarian and communal living in African society. He amplified the call to reject inequality, individualism, capitalism and imperialism forcefully brought into Africa by the European imperialists by adopting socialism for the Africans to go back to their root.

Consciencism is the philosophical and ideological system of Nkrumah for the docolonization of the African continent. The basis of this philosophy is

materialism, in this sense, materialism does not preclude the existence of immaterial or spiritual realities, it only affirms the primacy of matter, and maintains that spiritual realities developed from matter through a dialectical tension inherent in matter. From this dialectical tension, new factors, such as spiritual entities emerge and radical changes take place. This process is known as “categorical conversion”. In human society, it is this process of categorical conversion that radical revolution takes place and it is in this way capitalism can give way to socialism. Nkrumah’s philosophical consciencism was seen by many as answer to the problems posed by three dominant identities – the traditional indigenous identity, the Islamic element and the Euro-Christian element. Hence, Nkrumah’s consciencism was regarded as a philosophical synthesis.

### **Senghor’s Negritude**

Leopold Senghor was a renowned poet and philosopher. His philosophy of negritude is well understood when the policy of assimilation, by the French government is in focus. Assimilation policy was aimed at assimilating Africans into French culture and citizenship. This therefore implies the rejection of African culture, African values, African identity, African personality and African attitude as worthless. Africans were expected to consider it an honour to be allowed to adopt the French culture and become French citizens at the expense of their African culture and identity. Senghor’s negritude is the rejection of this policy of Assimilation and exaltation of the African culture, values and identity (Kanu, 522). Senghor found solidarity in a common black identity. He believed that a change could be achieved through a shared black heritage. Senghor believes Africans have a distinctive outlook toward life and a distinctive cultural identity. As such, like Nkrumah he believes individualism and capitalism are foreign to traditional African society and culture. For example Senghor in (Omoregbe 34) believes “feelings and sentiments take precedence over abstraction in the African way of life. The African is deeply religious and gives prominence to the spiritual dimension in his outlook on life. He has no individualistic mentality since the society in which he lives is structured on communalism and not individualism or capitalism”.

Negritude is therefore a philosophical theory of re-discovery, re-awakening, re-direction, a philosophy of emancipation and mental decolonization in order to give the pride of place to African culture and identity. What Asouzu in the 50th inaugural lecture of the university of Calabar may view as the product of error of judgement in the maxim; “The nearer the better and safer” (30). His endeavour

was to make the Africans see their unique identity and culture as distinct from their European counterpart.

### **Nyerere's Ujamaa**

This is the philosophy of the Former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, he believes that capitalism and individualism is foreign to African and therefore his philosophy is based on the communal nature of African society. Nyerere also still believes that socialism based on class struggle, conflict and tension is just as foreign to African traditional society as capitalism, and therefore should be jettisoned (Kanu, 48).

At this point Nyerere is different from Senghor, who believes that class struggle, tension and conflict is part of universal law of progress. For Nyerere traditional African society is not based on tension and class struggle but on "familyhood", that means family relationship. Nyerere believes that is the root of authentic African socialism. For this to be applied to the whole African society in this modern times, Nyerere believes that the familyhood has to be extended beyond the extended family, beyond tribe, beyond the immediate society, beyond one African nation, it must be made to extend to reach the whole of African countries and for him African socialism has to be based on this. According to (Omeregbe 34).

Nyerere envisages a society made up of atomic family units, a country made up of Ujamaa villages, a kind of "family villages" with mutual co-operation and collaboration. Such a nation would be basically family units extended to embrace the whole society. The capitalistic spirit of acquisition, individualism, the exploitation of man by man, class struggle and conflicts will all be excluded from society. Inequality will be eliminated and everybody will be prepared to work for the good of the community in any capacity. For Nyerere, when exploitation, colonialism and inequality is removed from the society, the individual feels liberated and liberation, for him, is development.

### **Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism**

After examining different political systems such as capitalism, socialism, communism, welfarism etc. Azikiwe discovered that they all appear attractive at the level of theory, but in practical terms, there lies untold challenges (Kanu, 145). Zik therefore decided to harmonize all the positive qualities in capitalism, socialism, and welfarism. The outcome of this eclectic "harmonization of opposite" is what "Zik calls Neo-welfarism. According to (Omeregbe 43) "Zik describe his political philosophy as pragmatic and eclectic". Eclecticism is a

term used in philosophy to identify a composite system of thought which incorporates ideas selected from other systems” (43).

This eclectic method does not modify but it blends opposite views. This is not syncretism because it does not attempt to reconcile or combine irreconcilables.

Zik wonders why some people have been calling for an ideology that is specially Nigeria, thereby giving wrong impression that Nigeria has no ideology. For him, there is no people or culture without its own ideology. If our father had no ideology how were they able to govern themselves, he questions. According to Zik in (Omoregbe 44) “Politically, they were democratic in their institutions, economically, they were welfarist due to the fact that they owned and shared land in common and regarded themselves as their brother’s keepers. A neo-welfarist society, according to Zik, in Omoregbe;

The master workers in each craft are more honourable and know in a truer sense and are wiser than the manual workers, because they know the causes of the things that are done...the man of experience is thought to be wiser than the possessors of any sense perception whatever, the artist wiser than the man of experience, the master worker than the mechanical and the theoretical kinds of knowledge to be more of the nature of wisdom than the productive. (Aristotle Metaphysica Bk A)

From the above quotation, the polarizing mind-set of Aristotle is obvious, and it seems to indicate that the wise are destined to rule the unwise. When this principle is applied to society, it massages the mind into accepting and adopting some ethnocentric tendencies. This polarizing mind-set of Aristotle has made many people to veer off justice. With a mind-set impacted by Aristotle’s categorization and polarization, the mind forms a picture of interpersonal relationship where some human beings are perceived by the mind as more important than others, or a situation whereby some societies are essential while others are inconsequential. This Aristotelian ambience influenced to a larger extent how philosophy and science is done in the western world and this also extended to Africa.

### **The Effects of Ethnocentric Commitment**

According to online free encyclopedia (Wikipedia) Ethno-centric bias is “the tendency to perceive the world from your own cultural group, such as your ethnic group, national group and so on. A consequence of this is that there can also be a tendency to view your own group as superior to other groups”. While this could be considered natural to human psychology, it has however generally

developed into negative manifestations, affecting almost all areas of human existence and also contributing to the skewed nature of human intellectual output.

In his online paper, Umezurike posits; “ethnocentric bias is the tendency of the mind to cling to those nearest to it, and seeks to protect their interest, against what is perceived as the external order” when this is done, group identity is established, and it is this group identity that is always the subject of contention, the source of bifurcation and at the base of polarization. When this is imbued through education, socialization and indoctrination, it makes us consider ourselves as more important than others. This tendency makes us to seek to protect and project interest in whatever we undertake. Asouzu in his *Ibuanyidanda* – New complementary ontology encapsulate this idea when he writes;

since we tend to act under this impulse of our primitive instinct of self preservation always and often unintentionally one can say that in most multicultural and multiethnic contexts, there is often the tendency for the mind to act in an unintended ethnocentric fashion, in view of securing certain interests and privileges it defines as very important for the inner circle (130).

This clearly indicates that what causes this ethnocentric bias, is the instinct of self preservation. Asouzu believes that this instinct to act from the angle of self-preservation is one of the major conflicts in our society and it is this ambience that influences philosophy and science. Ethnocentric bias or commitment is rooted in self preservation and has a negative manifestations of exclusiveness, divisiveness and bifurcation. This attitude pervades in almost all sectors of human endeavour “ours is the best, theirs is not important”. The attitude is observed in the market, in the offices, in the church and mosques, in the state in the nation and in the world. This is what Asouzu describes as “the nearer the better, the safer” and it is the bane of development and progress in almost all sectors of human endeavour.

### **Theory Formulation in African Philosophy**

Developing theories based wholly on observation is fraught with disastrous consequences. Looking at the above theories by African nationalists and scholars, one will easily observe some traits that run across those theories for instance, we see in Nyerere’s *Uyamaa* the trait of familyhood, we see African -brother-hood

in Nkrumah's consciencism, Senghor's negritude, Azikiwe's neo-welfarism, Kenyatta's universal brotherhood etc. All these theories are founded on observational statements, that means they are synthetic in nature. At a close look, we observe that indicators such as "intimate belongingness", "togetherness", "communal intimacy" and "closeness" are what the African philosophers use to validate the claims of their theories. It should be noted that formulating a theory based only on observation or any theory that is synthetically oriented is always inadequate in terms of universal applicability. In order to remedy this situation we turn to the principle of *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy. In *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy, Asouzu tries to remedy some of the hindrances caused by the experience induced methods of doing philosophy in Africa.

### **Theory Formulation in Africa and Its Synthetic Base**

Many theoreticians in Africa get the strength of their formulation from synthetic observational statements designed to reproduce exactly the given existential conditions. This means that what is expressed in theories can be validated only by making reference to certain indicators that sustain them, they however fail in their bid to make a comprehensive inquiry or expert investigation into the raw data of their experience in order to ascertain objectively the truth value of their theory claim. This is the position of Asouzu in the journal of the philosophical association of Kenya. Asouzu was apt to point out the weakness of this position when he writes that "Iroegbu coined what he calls the principle of "belongingness". This idea of "belongingness" is for Iroegbu so constitutive that he elevates it to a principle with very high ontological significance such that, for him, to be is to belong" Asouzu complains that the problem with this type of coinage is their pure synthetic foundation, which is not always manifest to the formulators of such theories. In pointing out the weakness of this formulation (Asouzu) continues;

"For Iroegbu, "belongingness is Umunna (kindred) concretized: If belongingness is Umunna concretized, then the concept of "belongingness" does nothing other than to reproduce Umunna (kindred), a social group, as we have this in everyday experience – a matter that escape Iroegbu's attention.

As a further prove of the weakness of this position Asouzu continues with the weakness of another African thinker, Nwala. According to (Asouzu) in the same journal;

On his part, communalism is for Nwala validated due to the validated of indicators that enhance the "collective and

communal spirit, respect for the human persons, collective security owing to collective ownership and enjoyment of social wealth, social control and social wealth, social control and discipline, honesty and dedication to common cause (Nwala 257 - 258).

This means that for the communalist, formulation of theories requires empirical inferences or synthetic observational statements which explicate a given existential situation. According to (Asouzu) "in following this route, they fail to realize that all human existential situations are ambivalent - a factor that can invalidate the claims enshrined in theories" this by implication indicate that theoreticians have to understand the nature of human situation which is ambivalent and which consequently render their theories invalid. Therefore in matters of theory formulation Asouzu is of the position that, theoreticians should, apart from describing what is the case, "be able to show clear evidence of penetrating the immediate data of experience and accounting for some of the fundamental mechanisms and phenomena that have the capacity to determine the structure and dynamics of human consciousness in the process of cognition and action". This means investigating into the nature of the case in point in order to understand and access the hidden and unintended nuances therein so as to attain universal relevance.

### **Challenges of Theory Formulation in African Philosophy**

There is a common denominator in theory formulation in African philosophy and that is the forceful influence of experience - induced ambience. The major reason that can be advanced for this scenario according to Asouzu is found in the phenomena of "unintended ethnocentric commitment", a situation where a person, often quite unintentionally, seeks to reclaim, by all means, and at all cost, what he thinks is his own" (Asouzu 40 - 47) this situation is made complicated by endeavour to posit contrary theories, and in order to proffer solution or to correct the impression, many theoreticians, according to (Asouzu) "cling to what they think is their own, and go about describing the same most accurately even at the risk of sounding absurd". A good example is a situation whereby African scholars who want to advance the African communal spirit in aid of their theory formulation, project communalism over individualism as if they are contraries instead of being complementary. They also fall into the error of condemning individualism and those who practice it. In effect, they equate theory formulation with specific raw data of African experience of reality. This idea of looking at

reality by presenting them in theory form smacks of divisive and polarizing tendency.

Furthermore, another compelling force that set the mind on an exclusivist type of reasoning is the phenomenon of Tempelsian Damage" (a corruption of the minds of many African scholars due to the influence of Placid Tempels) Asouzu believes in his book *Ibuaru* that this is one of the heaviest burdens of contemporary African philosophy (Asouzu 74) a situation whereby Placid Tempels "vital force" theory influences intellectual products of the Africans in terms of theory formulation and they feel African theories have to be different. Instead of this divisive tendency that is being promoted by these scholars, Asouzu believes that theoreticians should seek for ways of reconciling conflicting interests. In his on line paper; *Ibuanyidanda* (complementary reflection), communalism and theory formulation in African philosophy. He asserts; "Here, theory formulation must concentrate on exploring ways of deriving credible principles needed to reconcile conflicting interests".

When theoreticians do not consider complementing ideas in their effort at formulating theories they end up in desperation and satisfying their over-bloated egos. In his online paper "*Ibuanyidanda* (complementary reflection) communalism and theory formulation in African philosophy".

Asouzu asserts; "when researchers approach the issue of theory formulation with an unrealistic, reclusive, defensive and non-complementary mind-set, efforts at constructing theories easily degenerate into matters of desperation and satisfaction of ideological needs, to the detriment of genuine scientific concerns".

Another big challenge that theory formulation is faced with in African philosophy is the phenomenon of enigmatic rationality as noted by Asouzu. This perception is fired up by the "vital force" of Placid Tempel. The theoreticians rest secured with the idea that the existence of these phenomena is proven when once the objectives they serve have been established. For Asouzu, it is in the realization of these objectives that "the reasonableness of these phenomena can be demonstrated beyond shades of doubt". (Asouzu 199) this means, an inquiry into extrasensory experience attain acceptance and validation immediately its functionality is ascertained. Here Asouzu avers that the African theoreticians rest content with this enigmatic rationality which is evident in their theory formulations, he argues that it is not only Africans that have this experience, but that in other cultures, other modes of rational solutions have been sought for and

used for solution to their respective cultural problems. In his *Ibuaru*, Asouzu asserts;

Here, protagonists of this view tend to forget that Africans are not alone in relating to encrypted phenomena in this fashion. The difference is that within some other cultural milieus, effective means that are workable have been put to address some of the problems these phenomena present. (199 - 120).

### ***Ibuanyidanda and Synthetic Foundations of Theories***

When the focus of our existential reality is wholly imbued with experience-imbued ambience, human consciousness is seriously skewed due to certain constraints provided by ambivalent nature of human experiences. This is why according to (Asouzu) in his on-line paper *Ibuanyidanda* "all matters of theory formulation should strive towards a method adequate to provide keen insight into the type of relationship existing between such activities of the mind as thinking (echiche), kernel of thought (uche), cognition (amamche), sense experience (ihe ahu na anya ekwe), intellectual intuition (amumauche) sensory intuition (onynyouche) etc, as these constitute the content of our consciousness." Due to the complex nature of our experience, Asouzu feels compelled that there is need for reorientation and reconceptualisation of epistemology in order to allow for a method that would explore fully the dynamic character and the integral nature of the mind. "This is why I am of the opinion that a philosophy that has the capacity to achieve this lofty objectives must not be a type whose assumptions are based on any type of overhaul worthy anthologies. It has to be a philosophy which seeks to transcend all the constraints ensuring from ethnocentric impositions. Such a philosophy has to be based on an anthology that seeks to address reality from a perspective." (Asonzu, 245) For Asousu, it means we need a method that would radically change human approach to reality and this is what *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy does.

In *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy therefore, the method is that of dispositional change that is, "the disposition to approach sensation and reality generally with a complementary comprehensive type of mind-set beyond the impositions arising from sense experience (ihe ahu na anya ekwe) (Asouzu 140-159) This is an endeavour to understand reality by grasping the subject from the depth of its completeness. In his *Ibuanyidanda : New complementary onthology*, (Asouzu 323) asserts:

Here, complementary reflection aims at grasping the subject from the depth of its completeness devoid of ambivalence and polarization. In this case, we are

delving into the question of the anthropological disposition pre-conditions for all forms of authentic rational human actions as these are captured by the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness.

*Ibuanyidanda* philosophy tries to penetrate in a complementary comprehensive manner, into the structure and dynamics of human consciousness, “and to penetrate reality generally, as to determine the nature of the mechanisms and phenomena responsible for the subject - object divide we often sense in human consciousness, and which have the capacity to impact variously on our judgments about the world. (Azouzu, 38) opines this in his *Ibuanyidanda the philosophy of essence*.

### **Ibuanyindanda and the Extension of the Scope of Synthetic Statements**

Whereas the theoreticians in African philosophy rest secured with observational statement as representing statements of fact about the world, *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy helps to dig deep and widen the scope of their applicability. In doing this *Ibuanyindanda* philosophy seeks to surmount the constraints posed by ambivalent human experience of reality. It extends the application of what is intended in the observational statement.

It is this process of extended applicability that *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy derives its metaphysical variant of its principle known as the principle of integration, which states that, according to Asouzu in his *the method and principles of complementary reflection*, “anything that exists serves a missing link of reality” (273). This principle is complemented by the principle of progressive transformation which is the practical variant of it and it states that “All human actions are geared towards the joy of being” it is by acting in this mode that “human subject can translate the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness of *Ibuanyindanda* philosophy into action” (Asouzu 323) as stated in his *Ibuanyindanda: New complementary Ontology*. It is by the same token that Asouzu arrives at the imperative of *Ibuanyindanda* philosophy and this demands that we should “allow the limitation of being to be the cause of our joy” it is on this note that theoreticians can allow for universal applicability of their position. In doing this the theoreticians are cautioned by Asouzu not to allow their position to make them to lose sight of their human insufficiency and at the same time to be conscious of the human determination to absoluteness and comprehensive in his future reference, and that is what Asouzu refers to truth and authenticity criterion. By so doing the philosophy of *Ibuanyindanda* tries to show how the essential and accidental, primary and secondary and how being in its various forms can be integrated into a comprehensive whole. His truth and

authenticity criterion states: “Never elevate a world-immanent missing link to an absolute instance” It therefore means that philosophy should be done in a complementary comprehensive manner. His philosophy directs that existential statement about the world could be validated adequately only in a complementary comprehensive way in relation to all missing links of reality. This is how Asouzu bridge the yawning gap between the universal and particular, between the necessary and the contingent, the essential and the accidental, the consequential and inconsequential, between the individual and the community etc.

### **Conclusion**

The philosophy of *Ibuanyindanda* is an alternative endeavour in understanding human reality in its entirety. It is a way of liberating the mind from the constraints posed by ambivalent – invaded mode of reasoning which has for a long time influenced the formulation of theories in African philosophy. Putting *Ibuanyindanda's* ambience in perspective theoreticians would better capture their theories and such would be meaningful beyond the shore of Africa. This means, theories in African philosophy will have a universal application.

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