

ASOUZU'S NOTION OF UNINTENDED ETHNOCENTRIC COMMITMENT AS FURTHER CRITIQUE OF VALUE ORIENTED BIAS IN INQUIRY

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Abstract

*The danger of ethnocentrism, and value oriented bias in inquiry has given reality a different shape, and denies the sanctity of mutual relationship and interrelatedness that suppose to exist between one another in this world. This paper argues that unintended ethnocentric commitment is the genesis of value oriented bias in inquiry, which has crippled our society today. The biased and polarized mindset of Aristotle, over essence and accidents, and the mentality of other westerners, paved way for ethnocentrism and value oriented bias in inquiry, which we do experience day by day. Some of the African thinkers can be charged of this ethnocentrism, hence, in their reaction to the humiliations, experienced by the westerners, who relegated African thoughts to the background, ended up introducing another strand of ethnocentrism. They presented African thoughts, as being uniquely African, thereby, elevating the word-immanent missing link to an absolute instance. Asouzu's notion of unintended ethnocentric commitment or reduction and value oriented bias in inquiry is an eye opener, over the way we comprehend reality, and mesmerize the beauty of complementarity, that should exist among realities. Asouzu in his *Ibuanidanda Philosophy (Complementary Reflection)* formulated the principle of integration, which states that "anything that exists serves as a missing link of reality, to unmask and checkmate ethnocentric commitment and value oriented bias in inquiry that has changed our approach to life. This paper in line with the dictates of *Ibuanidanda Philosophy*, maintains that the only way we can eschew this commitment, among ethnics, and value oriented bias in inquiry is when we retrain our minds and force them to acknowledge that (*Otu osisi anaghi agba mkpa*) a tree cannot make a forest, and to be is not to be in isolation, but to be in collaboration and mutual relationship with others.*

Introduction

Asouzu's notion of unintended ethnocentric commitment has indeed exposed and critically assessed the value oriented bias in inquiry that exists as a result of man's inability to reconcile opposites. What Asouzu calls "ihe mkpuchi anya" (phenomenon of concealment) often deprive man, the opportunity of seeing other beings as missing links of reality. In other words, man operates within the

ambience of 'so that I may be alone', (*ka so mu di*) as against 'so that I may not be alone' (*ka so mu adina*). This type of mindset (*ka so mu di*), which Asouzu refers to as the negation of being was introduced by Aristotle, who differentiated between essence and accidents, metaphysics and other sciences which he calls (ancillary sciences) in a disharmonious manner. Aristotle forgot here that the meaningfulness of the essence, which he calls substance of a thing, lies on the accidents, which for him have nothing to offer. This kind of mindset can be seen in argument that science takes cognizance roots of phenomenon, and endeavour to discover its laws; art proposes to itself an end and look out for means to effect it (Root 205). According to Asouzu, the moment things are seen in this mode, initiated by Aristotle, human consciousness is misled into believing that to be is to live in an exclusivist segregationist type of relationship; a relationship that sustained by the assumption that substance and accidents are ontologically opposing categories that exist in diverse regions of being (*Otuolu Omalu: Some Unanswered Question in Contemporary African Philosophy* 43).

However, the thesis of this paper is that unintended ethnocentric commitment, which is enshrined in value oriented bias, came due to man's inability to see far, and understand that *igwue buike* (in group we stand to move mountain) (Kanu, 3). And that urine can most likely bring more foam, when it is done in group than when it is been done by one person (*agbako nwamiri onu oja uhuhu*). This paper, therefore, argues that the elevation of what we cherish and value most, at the expense of others, which for us, are nonsensical is the origin of value oriented bias in inquiry and unintended ethnocentric commitment, which often occur and reoccur each time, we are dealing with issues concerning others.

Asouzu's notion of unintended ethnocentric commitment as further critique of value oriented bias in inquiry is that unintended ethnocentric commitment is high form of value oriented bias in inquiry. Hence, it deals with ethnic matters, and can be said to be more hazardous than value oriented bias in inquiry. In the course of his argument, he stated clearly that both came as a result of *ihe mkpuch anya* (phenomenon of concealment) which often makes man to think that he can exist alone, forgetting that to be is not to be alone but to be in mutual relationship, with all the existents. In an attempt to address this bifurcation caused by unintended ethnocentric commitment, this paper recommends that we understand being not on its absolute mode but as that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality.

Aristotle's Ontology and the Rise of Ethnocentric Commitment and Value Oriented Bias in Inquiry

The Aristotle's ontology is polarized and dichotomized. His mindset about the world can be said to be the origin of ethnicity and values oriented bias in investigation of reality. In fact, the difficulties and the illusion created by the way he pursued metaphysics, contributed immensely to his false assumptions about reality. The sacrosanct natural rights, he accorded to metaphysics is the genesis of ethnocentrism and value oriented bias in inquiry that exist in the world today. He sees metaphysics as a science that supersedes other sciences, both in eminence and grandeur. For him, therefore, others are ancillary sciences that contribute little or none in the society. He captures the relationship between metaphysics and others sciences with the imagery of the relationship between the master and the mechanic, the wise and the unwise, the essential and the accidental, the leader and the led (Ezugwu, 42-43). He observes that:

The master workers in each craft are more honorable and know in a truer sense and are wiser than the manuer 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 artists wiser than the men of experience, the master worker than the mechanic and the theoretical kinds of knowledge to be more of the nature of wisdom than the productive (Aristotle *Metaphysics BKA*).

It is obvious from the point we have established here, that Aristotle holds a discriminatory kind of mindset, which makes us to think always that the wise are destined to rule the unwise, and the master to command and control the slave forever, without the reverse, being the case a times. When this type of mindset is applied to societal or ethnic relationship, the mind clings to the most desired and valued, and abandons others. This easily induces the mind to tend towards ethnocentrism. Aristotle's mindset has actually made so many persons to derail from justice. Today, things are not done the way they ought to be done, rather, they operate within the ambience of "is proposition", full of deceits and problems.

Asouzu in his book titled *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*, accuses Aristotle of being the major instigator of ethnocentric reduction. Hence Aristotle introduced a type of mindset that would determine the way most Westerners

think, and seek to achieve their desires. Following the dictates of Aristotle's approach to reality, the mind would be inclined to create a picture of human interpersonal relationship, where some human beings are perceived as essential and others merely as accidental and inconsequential (145). In addition, Asouzu captures that if a system is constituted of units, the realization of the interests of the units can hardly be achieved, where the actors act in a way that negates the fact of a necessary link joining all stakeholders. This necessary link has the character of a higher principle of integration on the basis of which equity and justice can be guaranteed for all (*Re-ethicizing the Minds: Cultural Revival in Contemporary Thought* 68).

Aristotle instigating a kind of tone concerning the nature of metaphysics in comparison to the rest of the sciences, substances and accidents, masters and the slaves, initiates the kind of mindset that has influenced the way science and philosophy is done in the West, and by extension Africa. The value oriented bias initiated by Ramose, Fanon, Padmore, Iroegbu, Garvey, Tempels, Lumumba, Ernest Gellner, Mill, Max Webber, Kagame and Nwala, could be attributed to categorization and polarization introduced by Aristotle. More so, this paper will look at the implications of ethnocentric commitment that have thwarted, the way we reason and do things nowadays.

Ethnocentric Commitment and its Implications

Ethnocentric commitment has a lot of negative implications. Asouzu holds that it is the tendency of the mind to cling to those nearest to it, and seeks to protect their interest, against what it perceived as the external order (*The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and beyond African Philosophy* 69). In other words, ethnocentric commitment arises from the mind is tendency to misunderstand or place its ethnic belongings beyond all other ethnics and their possessions. When there is consistent and dogged commitment to a philosophy of essence and the accidents are chastised and reprimanded, what Asouzu calls unintended ethnocentric commitment emerges (*Ibuanyidanda: And the Philosophy of Essence* 24).

This kind of ethnocentric commitment can be seen in the way African philosophy is done today. So many African philosophers, in reaction to the problems brought in by the colonial masters, and so many others, within and outside Africa, and their denial of the existence of African philosophy, ended up

elevating the world immanent missing link to an absolute instance. Here, Asouzu in his book titled *Ibuaru: Heavy Burden of Philosophy Beyond African Philosophy*, identifies ethnocentric commitment or bias which have befallen African philosophy and beyond as a heavy burden (10). This often emerges as a result of our instinct of self preservation, which always deceives us to see reality in a polarized and dichotomized manner, and operate within the ambience of the super maxim, the nearer the better and the safer. Ozumba and Chimakonam note that the seed of polarization and fragmentations of human society into antagonistic factions were sown by man himself. This has led to several wars, alliances, migrations, miscegenations and pockets of human societies, each seeking autonomy, identity, natural personality, and today we are talking of races, nations, countries, continents, unions, federations, republic etc (75). As a result of these, we see what belongs to us, as the best, while what belongs to others is useless and meaningless. This mentality is obtainable in the church, family, school and association. Time without number, we often regard our thing, and despise their thing, in many occasions, seeing what belongs to us, as that which will bring progress and desired result, while what belongs to others is harmful, full of bewilderment and can yield ugly result. (Ezugwu 64). Asouzu writes thus:

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 (*Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology* 130).

A lot of people have disallowed their minds to undergo what Asouzu calls noetic propaediatic. This is a process where the mind is retrained, renewed and re-educated, to acknowledge that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality, and that anything that has head, has a tail end. For Asouzu, the tendency to act from ethnic commitment can be said to be one of the major causes of conflict in our society, and one that influences greatly the way we do philosophy and science (*Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology* 130). What other people are doing is thought to be nonsense, and has little or no value to contribute to what we are doing ourselves. This gives rise to the value oriented bias in inquiry, which has engulf the interrelatedness and mutuality that suppose to exist

between one and another, essence and accidents, the rich and the poor, as well as the Westerners and the Africans.

Value Oriented Bias in Inquiry and its Implications

Value oriented bias in inquiry occurs as a result of the concealment (Ihe mkpuchi anya) that often make us to think and instinctively assume that those nearest to us are our only true friends, what is immediately projected into our consciousness are often: people from our ethnic groups, those who belong to our race and communities, people from our clan, our tribe, people from our nation, those who share like values and cultural identities with us or people who share same bond of intimacy with us (*Asouzu Ibuanyidanda: Excerpt from Online Dictionary of Intercultural Philosophy* 21). This kind of value oriented bias in inquiry can be seen in the debate between the social scientists and that of natural scientists. Lesnoff argues vehemently that the model of natural science “is inapplicable in the social sciences because the existence of social facts always implies the existence of mental states, intensions, purposes, beliefs, expectations and awareness of rulers which are not observable by empirical method (188). In line with this, Nagel observes that when purposive human action is being analyzed by social scientists, value judgment is bound to come into what was supposed to be “purely descriptive” or factual statements (406-407). Therefore, value-natural social science is impossible. Akpan on the contrary, captures that human nature and his existential situation shows that man naturally places more premium on values that can satisfy his needs and desires whether in politics, economics, religion, etcetera (140).

Furthermore, this mentality that is enshrined with the instinct of self preservation and we-them-spirit is the root of value oriented bias in inquiry that has endangered, the way we look at reality. The value oriented bias can be noticeable in the works of some African thinkers such as consciencism of Nkurumah, Bantu Ontology of Tempels, Ujama Socialism of Nyerere, Neo-welfarism of Azikiwe and the substance of African philosophy by Momoh. These aforementioned claims by the above African thinkers can be seen as thoughts that ignite value oriental bias in inquiry, which do not create way for Obi/Mmuo eziokwu, for the humanization of facts and principles of realities. Here, the need to x-ray the Asouzu’s notion of unintended ethnocentric commitment as further critique of value oriented bias in inquiry arises.

Asouzu's Notion of Unintended Ethnocentric Commitment as Further Critique of Value Oriented Bias in Inquiry

Here, it is germane to note that Asouzu considers unintended ethnocentric commitment, more dreadful and severe, than that of value oriented bias in inquiry. Hence, the former is dealing directly with the impact of clannish and ethnic mentalities on inquiry, which have the capacity to complicate coexistence of peoples in a world of globalization (*Ibuanyidanda: And the Philosophy of Essence* 24). Unintended ethnocentric commitment arises, in such a relationship where the point of reference for personal awareness is lacking, at this point, the self remains locked up in itself. The liberation of the self from the limitations imposed by self, within a human framework, becomes a methodological task that can only be accomplished and regained, genuinely too, through a methodical we-consciousness or the consciousness of the other self (Asouzu *Effective Leadership and the Ambivalence of Human Interest* 121). What Asouzu is pointing out here is that unintended ethnocentric commitment came as a result of the self centeredness in our value system of inquiry. And that we can be healed of this bias in inquiry, when we understand that to be is not to be alone, and treat others, bearing in mind, the mutual relationship that suppose to exist among realities, and remain in communion with them.

According to Asouzu, since human beings often seek to carve out riches for themselves in view of upholding privately motivated interests, they are easily also drawn, quite instinctively, to all the attractions of an exclusivist bifurcating ontology or metaphysics of essence (*Atuolu Omalu: Some Unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy* 43-44).

On this note, one enjoys safe guarding what belongs to him than what belongs to others. The implication of this is that one gets himself involved in segregation, bifurcation, and holds what he values at high esteem, and defend it, even at the expense of others, he does not value. This mindset is applicable in Tempel's philosophy that describes Africans as having vague idea of the Supreme Being. And not being able to distinguish between good and evil but the westerners can (116). Unintended ethnocentric commitment as a high form of value oriented bias in inquiry operates within the sphere of negligence and forgetfulness. Here, the value of a thing lies strongly on individual and not the group. Asouzu's notion of unintended ethnocentric commitment as further critique of value oriented bias in inquiry brings to bear, the concealment that has beclouded our mode of

operation in inquiry. His *Ibuanyidanda Philosophy* recognizes the fact that all missing links are windows of reality, and the way we manage them determine the level of truth we arrive at (94).

As a matter of fact, we cannot claim to have gotten it all, unless we allow our minds to operate in keeping with the dictates of what Asouzu calls “the transcendent categories. Here, being is grasped in its fragmentation, unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness and future reference”. It is only through these that the value oriented bias in inquiry, which has eluded our minds, in pursuit of reality, can be checked properly. At this point, the social scientists will not differentiate themselves completely from the natural scientists nor the westerners, seeing themselves, as the real people while the Africans are chaffs and artificial in nature. The essence will appreciate the existence of the accidents and vice versa. When there is harmony between these opposites, the tendency of the mind to be led astray to ethnocentric commitment, which gives rise to value oriented bias in inquiry, will be impossible. This is because, the harmonizing faculty will be in check of all forces that tends towards bifurcation and exclusiveness, and at the same time, guard against this phenomenon of concealment, which many a times, stops the mind from reasoning beyond itself. The mind often forget that the joy of being lies on its limitations, and not in absolute fragments, which discard peace, platform of comprehensiveness, universality and global mindset.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Unintended ethnocentric commitment arises due to the type of special allegiance we sense within us towards our races, ethnic groups, tribal groups and most things to which we have special feeling of intimate belongingness (Asouzu *Ibuanyidanda: Complementary Reflection and Some Basic Philosophical Problems in Africa Today* 41). The impact of Aristotle’s ontology and his bifurcative mindset, over realities, could be said to be what ushered in ethnocentrism and value oriented bias in inquiry. For him, essence can exist without the accidents but the accidents cannot exist without the essence. He equally differentiated between the masters and the slaves. The slaves will continually take order from their masters and remain subordinate to them forever. This is applicable to men and women. According to him, women will remain being servants to the men. This polarized mindset about realities is the origin of ethnocentric commitment and value oriented bias that we often find in all our endeavors today.

Moreover, Aristotle forgot that to be is not to be alone, but to be in complementarity and harmonious relationship with all the existed realities. In other words, one can be claimed to be in control or define the essence of his existence, if and only if, he exists, alongside with other existents, and appreciates the Igbo aphorism, which say that “if the eagle perches, the kite must be allowed to perch (Egbe bere ugo bere nke si ebeya ebela nkukwaya). However, it is appalling that a lot of people have failed to appreciate the dictates of Ibuanyidanda philosophy or complementary reflection that took the task of redefining, refining and reconstructing our frame of thoughts, from all ethnocentric commitments and value oriented biases. The ethnocentric commitments and value oriented biases among African thinkers have forced them to elevate the so called African philosophy above the western philosophy, in reaction to the subjugation and molestation they faced in the hands of the Western thinkers or colonial masters. For them, therefore, there is something uniquely African. This paper argues that this kind of mentality by some African thinkers is enmeshed in the web of polarization, and therefore, participated strongly in ethnic reduction.

For Asouzu, unintended ethnocentric commitment and value oriented bias in inquiry, came as a result of the inability of the mind to understand that to be is to be with others (ka so mu adina), and not to be alone (ka so mu di), which often occurs in our dealings with our fellow men. Viewing reality from the perspective of this latter, terminates the interrelatedness and harmonious order that should exist among beings, but when reality is viewed using the lens of the former, the “we-them-mentality”, which brings about ethnocentric impositions, self aggrandizements and value oriented biases in inquiry, will be eliminated.

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