

## THE IDEA OF UNINTENDED ETHNOCENTRIC COMMITMENT AND SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVITY

By

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### Abstract

*This piece has studied how ethnophilosophy has impeded on scientific inquiry objectivity, it is pertinent to note that as understandable as our primitive passion for self-preservation instigates us to be exclusivist and to seek those things that make us special, we think that the legitimacy of any work that seeks to be philosophical and rational is rooted in its capacity to be articulated within the frame work of the whole. This work has been able to point out why, on account of unintended ethnocentric commitment some scholars saw African Philosophy mostly from the optics of "African thinking"; also we have pinpoints that doing philosophy with ethnocentric mindset merely succeeds. In reducing it to mere rhetoric, knowledge to myths, science to ideology and gossip. It is on this note that we hold in the same scholarly spirit with Asouzu that whenever we recourse to collective categorisations like, "African thought", "European thought" in view of doing philosophy, they are not always to the best interest of scientific objectivity.*

**Keywords:** Unintended, Ethnocentric, Commitment, Scientific Objectivity.

### Introduction

In his book 'Ibuaru' - The Heavy Burden of philosophy beyond Africa philosophy; the author, Innocent Asouzu pinpoints that;

*"The first major task of this book is to illustrate in practical terms what is implied by unintended ethnocentric commitment" (25).*

The above question in the same scholarly spirit with Asouzu will constitute the fulcrum of this our research work. In our own way, we shall philosophically

scrutinize unintended ethnocentric commitment and its influence on scientific objectivity.

The very idea of unintended ethnocentric commitment is one of the heaviest burdens or loads of philosophy, which is found in philosopher's tendencies to issues such tendencies according to Asouzu.

“Surfaces mostly in those cases where philosophy is understood as culture-relevant inquiry” (9).

The above phenomenon goes to show that most philosophical “inquiries and methodologies” often have an ethnocentric undertone that gives them “ethno philosophic character”. Such tendencies makes philosophers and scientist scamper over reality with ethnocentric mindsets. In that manner they become parochial, straight jacketed, pigeon holed and bewitched to the extent they seek to project and protect their specific cultural legacies, often at the risk of being exclusivist, though unintentionally.

On this note, we can say that there is often traces of evil of “ethnophilosophy” of the unintended ethnocentric type in most things we intend to achieve which scientific objectivity falls into. Following that the universal and comprehensive nature of philosophy and science is immediately put in to doubt.

In this work, we shall attempt to conquer such constraints via the almighty spirit of *Ibuanyindanda* or a complementary mindset. We shall do this in the “transferred sense”, because: We are committed to the insight that those ants called *danda* can lift and manage excruciating heavy loads (*Ibu*) when they complement their efforts. Here, we can even say *Ibu ary anyi danda* or no heavy burden is insurmountable for *danda*, the ant. Therefore, all matters of unintended ethnocentric commitment, as the *Ibuaru*, or heavy burden militating against philosophical investigation, have to be handled within a complementary horizon to be manageable” (9).

In line with the above assertion, we shall give a preamble or background of our subject of research, discuss unintended ethnocentric commitment and the nature of philosophical question; highlights some challenges of unintended ethnocentric commitment/intrusion and the nature of scientific objectivity; expatiate on patch work philosophical approaches, harmer on the miracle of *Ibuanyindanda* then presents an evaluation and conclusion.

## **Definitions Of Terms**

**Unintended:** unintended means not planned or not meant, not deliberate or not intentional.

**Ethnocentric:** ethnocentric could be defined as evaluating other peoples and cultures according to the standard of one's own culture.

According to Merriam Webster Online Dictionary ethnocentric is having or based on the idea that your own group on culture is better or more important than others or superior than others.

Medical Online Dictionary also defined ethnocentric as the tendency to evaluate other groups according to the values and standards of one's own ethnic group is superior to the other groups.

**Commitment:** This could be defined as the state or quality of being dedicated to cause, activity, etc. It could also be seen as an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action.

Again, it can be defined as state of being emotionally or intellectually devoted, as to a belief, a course of action, or another person.

**Scientific:** scientific could be seen as that which is based on or characterized by the methods and principles of science.

**Objectivity:** objectivity could be defined as judgement based on observable phenomena and un-influenced by emotions or personal prejudices.

According to Online Macmillian Dictionary, objectivity is a state or situation in which something is based only on facts and evidence. It can also be defined as the ability to make decisions based on facts rather than your own personal feelings or beliefs.

Objectivity (philosophy) - Wikipedia, The free encyclopaedia defines objectivity as a central philosophical concept related to reality and truth, which has been variously defined by sources. Generally, objectivity means the state or quality of being true even outside of subject's individual biases, interpretations, feelings and imagining.

## **On Unintended Ethnocentric Commitment And The Nature Of A Philosophy Question**

In page (49) of *Ibuaru - The Heavy Burden of philosophy*, the author professor Innocent Asouzu holds that it is important to dwell on the nature of philosophical question in order to provide an insight on what should be counted as philosophical question from a mere Historical, Religious or a mere journalistic description of other disciplines. The author observed that due to the inability to differentiate between philosophical from non-philosophical questions have made some writers, researchers and other scholars to make philosophy reducible to other mere inquiry or liken it to Hermeneutics of culture or mere cultural philosophy (47).

Philosophy as it is cannot be dismissed from a particular cultural heritage, as often said "A man is a product of his cultural and social milieu". Further exposition of this position could mean everything a man philosophising on is borne out of his perspective and orientation, such notion or approach of philosophising is not a misnomer, further author investigating culture and building points of departure for further reflection is allowed, but becomes a problem and un-philosophical when it stops at just projecting once culture and reducing philosophy to mean such culture. As Asouzu has it, this will invariably leads to philosophic excess that leads to rendering the philosophic subject matter obscure, if not completely imperceptible; these are some of the unfortunate and lamentable deficiencies we see in most research projects that have ethnocentric undertone.

Asouzu in *Ibuaru* quoted Amaku in his work "African philosophy" by saying when one stumble over the title of this book it looks appealing, but a glance at it expose one to a mere description a marriages, new yam festivals, initiation rites, wrestling matches, burial ceremonies, folklores and so on (Asouzu). According to Asouzu, what Amaku was describing must be extremely cases, but it is not unusual. The problem arises when we substitute description of "marriages, new yam festivals, etc for example with descriptive words, concepts and ideas. A practice that is very prevalent in what many people refer to as doing philosophy" (48).

Professor Asouzu opines that it is not enough to embark on a research on phenomena of witchcraft among *Ibibio* for instance - that is giving us a mere description or analysis of what the "Ibibio's" believe or do not believe about the

phenomenon of witchcraft, it is not enough again to recoup the original meanings of these concepts in their Pure and in adulterated form, free from foreign culture or influence (48). The author holds that following this line of investigation leads to unintended ethnocentric commitment and to avoid this, there is a need to aim at critical determination of, e.g. the epistemological truth claims of phenomenon under investigation; in doing this, the focus of research would not be geared towards mere description of the phenomenon chosen for study (48).

In attempt to further explain the place of unintended ethnocentric commitment amongst scholars is that it is something different to inquire or describe witchcraft among the 'Ibibio' with the mechanisms use whether as an insider or outsider, it is another thing to inquire about the epistemological, ethical, ideological or ontological status of what obtains in such practice. Here the philosopher is expected to take a critical and rational stand, even if this entails holding a view that is contrary to popular views and practices among his own people. He is not there to give merely official stamp of approval concerning known practices; rather the aim of philosophy is to help us understand reality clearer, separate appearances from reality and this must not be context bound even if cannot articulate outside the context free the writer sees the world with a different virus and postulation [49].

Given; there are some questions that should interest the philosopher and not all manner of question; what meaning such phenomenon 'witchcraft, marriages' make within a universal complementary cognitive ambience? At this juncture of articulation certain questions become relevant, we must entail what it takes to know to be a witch doctor, whether such assumption can be verify inter-subjectively? Are there reasons why such phenomena should be given a special stature when investigating them and who set a standard for such? What is the logical metaphysical, ethical and ontological, epistemological status of such phenomenon and what information do they which to communicate? Can claims based on such phenomenon be categorised as true or false and how do we verify them? In what ways do such statements differ from those obtainable in other areas of human cognitive experience? Do such phenomena appear in other cultural areas and what measures are devised to address them at this location? How do these measures compare to each other? Are there areas where conflict - resolution strategies overlap? If not, how do we bridge the differences? Have we made more refine ways of determining causes? etc (50).

These and many more questions can be asked within such contexts. Some of these questions are second order conceptual questions that can go beyond obtaining or supplying mere information and describing given phenomena. If analysis and description become inevitable, they must be subjected to higher philosophical principles in view of their legitimization beyond localised interests. On this note, it is pertinent to understand that fundamental to all these questions are; are there interest other than those of scientific integrity, objectivity and truth underlying our inquiry? This kind of questions, is that which can guide any human who intend to see things differently from the way this phenomena occur in a given localities.

Philosophy as the author posits, is not subjected and limited to any discipline rather, philosophy as the first science or intellectual and rational enquiry has no jurisdiction. Therefore, it should not be limited to a mere historical account, Religious believes, Anthropological and Sociological account or description, philosophy, is that science that seeks to reflect and rationalized on the nature of phenomena in other to seek for the ultimate truth.

On this ground, the main case target of philosophical enquiry is, not merely to describe, to reclaim, to inform or conserve in patriotic way, but to explore, conserve in the spirit of truth, and authenticity binding on all stakeholders in a universal framework.

Asouzu opines that what we lay most claim to as African philosophy is merely cultural patrimonies, because a deep reflection on those claim overt, the fact that they have little or no knowledge about the culture they lay claim and this has bedevil the sense of objectivity, universality and inadequate scappening for the truth. In Ibaru (54), the author said; in doing philosophy as a culture-relevant undertaking, we have cases where many have been misled into doing ethnology under the poise of philosophy: this is why we have to take particular notice of it. this is the case when we formulate our questions in this form: what does it mean to do epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, political science, etc, within the African sense of reference: even when dealing with African philosophy, the answer that are gotten can easily take a descriptive informative character. That is, this act can leads to the outlook of uncritical history of African philosophy.

In the view of Asouzu, he clearly pointed out that most philosophers in African, Western and East are guilt of this problem of unintended ethnocentric commitment, that is seen in the philosophical enterprise as the most heaviest

load that has impeded scientific objectivity, universality and the ultimate investigation of reality.

### **On Some Challenges Of Unintended Ethnocentric Intrusion – Ibaru**

According to Asouzu, the problem of ethnocentric intrusion is one of the commonest issues that have gone unnoticed over the years. Some philosophers in their inquiry and investigation have engaged in this attitude unintentionally. It is often an unintended act. The actors of this phenomenon often seek to polarize the world.

Some of the challenges in this act of unintended ethnocentric intrusion is that researchers in spite of their declared goodwill to make scientific activity objective often fall into this unintended ethnocentric commitment in their minds and thinking (Asouzu, inaugural lecture, 25). Some of those biases arise from their value commitments; most especially because of the excessive importance they attach to matters that concern us most, and matters relating to their ethnic and tribal affiliations. Also, these biases result from years of exposure to certain climates of thought or some forms of selfishness that gives inquirer false notions about him and the entire universe. Another challenge is those actions philosophers engaged to uphold and defend their ethnic and tribal identities and values. The issue of ethnocentric commitment is quite widespread also in the way African philosophy is conducted and African philosophers tend to use philosophy as an avenue for projecting their African identity and culture (Asouzu, Ibaru, 26). We can also see this act in the work of some inquirers and philosophers from other regions of the world. For example, Aristotle in his philosophy of essence polarized and dichotomizes the concept of reality. These philosophers often see something “unique” and “specific” about their own conceptual scheme (Asouzu, Ibaru, 26).

The attitude of this act is one of the things that raised up the debates surrounding the so called “the philosophy of stolen Legacy” and “copy-cat philosophy”, (Asouzu, Ibaru, 30). It also causes the contradiction in scientific inquiry and scientific progress due to its conservative, dogmatic and intolerance attitude towards searching for truth, which is the ultimate goal of philosophy.

### **On The Nature Of Scientific Objectivity**

Scientific objectivity is a characteristic of scientific claims, methods, and results. It expresses the idea that the claims methods and results of science are not or

should not be influenced by particular perspectives, value commitments, community bias or personal interests. Objectivity in science is often considered as an ideal for scientific inquiry, as a good reason for valuing scientific knowledge as the basis of the authority of science in the society.

The nature of objectivity in science is a critical evaluation on the value neutrality, the absence of prejudices and the deviant from perceived personal biases that constitutes the foundation of scientific research and investigations. Accordingly and to the crux of this paper, science is pursued from an objective stance to the extent that, personal bias are absent from scientific reasoning or that they can be eliminated in a social process. This stems from the position that, all sciences is necessarily perspectival. In this regard, scientific research should not depend certainly on researcher's personal preferences or idiosyncratic experience. Interestingly, this investigation becomes very important in the social milieu as a pathway to examining the perceived idea of unintended ethnocentric commitment and scientific objectivity, other words, the thrive of the idea of unintended ethnocentric commitment against scientific objectivity which is more against scientific progress generally due to its dogmatic type of conservatism and intolerance as Asouzu observed.

In view of the above, Asouzu held that, what is interesting about this phenomenon is that, it is often unintended. That is to say, the ethnocentric commitment which Asouzu called cultural philosophy stealing its way into scientific investigation is not allowed to thrive by the scientists intendedly. This is why Asouzu observed that, despite the goodwill which constitutes the force to do science in an unbiased objective manner, many scientists find themselves taking sides in very crucial matters in a way that betrays their folk idea logical commitment. He further opines that, such biases result mostly from long years of exposure to certain climate of thought or some forms of idiosyncrasies that can give the inquirer some false notion about him and the world generally, (25).

### **On Patchwork Philosophical Approaches And Unintended Ethnocentric Commitment**

In his book "Ibuaru", Asouzu avers that two approaches are often employed when considering the issue of unintended ethnocentric commitment. Viz: those that merely seek to describe and inform the world about the content of their worldview and those who go beyond merely describing and informing; but do

this with a critical approach. It is to the latter and their approval that Asouzu refers to as “patchwork philosophical approach” bearing in mind the dimension of critical personal insight that underscores their work (Asouzu, Ibaru, 58-59).

The articulation of philosophy in a patchwork approach still faces the challenges of unintended ethnocentric commitment due to its restrictive character which has the capacity to make us less of philosophers and more of commentators, according to Asouzu.

Patchwork philosophical approach is found in the works of such philosophers as Placid Temple, Kagame, Ogenejiafor, etc, who have merely tried to philosophise and articulate the content of their world view with an ethnocentric mindset and reasoning. Thus, when actors engage on a given commentary they regard as their worldview they are faced with the tendency of dogmatising on what has identified as original thoughts belong to their people.

When this kind of approach (patchwork philosophical approach) characterizes research in the sciences, what we will have is an uncritical and biased science, despite the attempts by Scientifics to steer the course of scientific objectivity. It is this kind of value bias and the tendency by scientists to bifurcate truth in the course of their research that has culminated in to “an artificial conflict among the subject-matter of the sciences”, according to Asouzu, (Asouzu, 50<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture, 23).

Here, a clear cut distinction is often drawn between what would count as truth by the empirical sciences, that deal with observable phenomena and facts and the metaphysical sciences that do not deal with observable phenomena.

Therefore, patchwork philosophical approach in science motivated by unintended ethnocentric commitment will culminate to reductionism where scientists may have the tendency to define or describe reality from a bifurcated perspective, regardless of the subject matter of philosophy which is a science of being qua being (being in relation to being) or beings in its mutual and complementary interrelatedness.

### **Evaluation And Conclusion**

In the method and principles of complementary reflection in and beyond African philosophy” Asouzu states that,

“The scepticism concerning the fact that some ideas or exclusive to certain individuals, groups and societies would ever remain”.

Asouzu believes that certain ideas are universally entrenched in human consciousness. With regards to complementary reasoning, the human mind cannot operate without contraries and this is owing to the ability of the mind to contrast and differentiate (96).

Complementary reflection or the miracle of Ibuanyidanda did not deny the existent of unintended ethnocentric commitment in scientific or philosophical parlance, but rather affirm that in line with this reasoning, one can say that in conceiving the whole, the parts result and vice versa. Here, “miracle Ibuanyidanda” presupposes or implies that actors are bound by series of mutual complementarity right and obligations at all level of action, existence and determination. Hence, within this complementary framework all modes of research concord or agree to each other in a relationship of mutual indebtedness and interdependence in complementarity. We have seen so far in this work how ethnophilosophy has impeded on scientific inquiry objectivity, it is pertinent to note that as understandable as our primitive passion for self-preservation instigates us to be exclusivist and to seek those things that make us special, we think that the legitimacy of any work that seeks to be philosophical and rational is rooted in its capacity to be articulated within the frame work of the whole. Finally, we have been able to point out why, on account of unintended ethnocentric commitment some scholars saw African Philosophy mostly from the optics of “African thinking”; also we have pinpoints that doing philosophy with ethnocentric mindset merely succeeds. In reducing it to mere rhetoric, knowledge to myths, science to ideology and gossip. It is on this note that we hold in the same scholarly spirit with Asouzu that whenever we recourse to collective categorisations like, “African thought”, “European thought” in view of doing philosophy, they are not always to the best interest of scientific objectivity.

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