

**MAN IS NARROW BUT VAST- ETHNICISM AND ITS PRESUPPOSITIONS:
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPEAL TO THE FUNDAMENTAL
CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

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Abstract

Every human being has a spatio-cosmic origin, since he emerges from a family. Every family situates itself within an ethnic environment, since ethnicity is a mark of identification. However, when an unwarranted emphasis is laid on ethnicity for the sole purpose of subjugation, suppression, marginalization and oppression, then the disastrous tool of ethnicism will be damagingly inaugurated with all of its negative and dehumanizing allied factors and terrible consequences to the human family. Although the world of man is narrow when considered from the prism of his ethnic origin, but fundamentally, man is by his very constitution equally vast and would be terribly harmed when the vast expanse of his constitution is neglected because of ethnicism. This paper decries the evil effects of ethnicism and the societal dangers it portends to the human family and appeals for an anthropological understanding that takes into cognizance the fundamental constitution of the human person.

Keywords: Man, Self-transcendence, Narrow, Vast, Ethnicity, Ethnicism, Relationality

Introduction

In the understanding of the biological origin of man exclusive consideration must be made in respect to his birth and the locus from which he emerges into the world. Every human being in this wise has a spatio-cosmic origin; at least he or she has a mother and a father whether known or unknown, and thus, he/she emerges most supposedly from a family. To the extent that this is considered, it may not be wrong to ascribe the quality of narrowness to the constitutive build of the human person. While this 'narrow quality' assumes a definitive description of the emergence of any human being and forms as it were part and parcel of his/her immediate cosmic locality, yet this does not tell the entire story of the cosmic constitution of the human person because of the expansive scope and vastness of his/her world. From the contingency of birth, he comes from a narrow scope, his locality, but from the point of view of his relatedness to others and the tendency to engage and be engaged by the realities in the world around him, he is vast and profoundly unlimited in action. Tensions are therefore exerted on the character and identity of the human person when an explosive dominant emphasis is placed on his narrow constitution which is

encapsulated in his point of origin, to the disregard of his expansive vastness which his relationality demonstrates. To do this is to dichotomize the constitutive build of the human person and a terrible disservice to his anthropological composition. A recognition of one's origin which ethnicity expresses is important, but an unwarranted emphasis on ethnicity for the singular reason of domination and manipulation, which ethnicism demonstrates is intolerable and has bizarre consequences both on the individual members of the society as well as on the entire life of the society at large. Indeed according to Max Scheler: "Man is a being so vast, so varied, so multiform, that every definition demonstrates itself as too limited. Man's aspects are too numerous".¹ And these two aspects of his existence must be taken into consideration in the anthropological approach to the constitution of the human person. This paper addresses itself to an investigation into these issues especially as with particular reference to the Nigerian society as well as appealing for a good disposition in interpersonal relations among individuals and tribes.

Man towards a Conceptual Understanding

Man could be considered as a being that eludes precise definition. The reason according to Bautista Mondin borders on the fabulous richness, complexity and multivariate divergencies of man's expansive constitution. All of these he maintained, conspire together to make it practically impossible to define man.² Certainly, many philosophers have attempted to offer a definition of man in a two-word format like: "a rational animal" (Aristotle), 'chained Prometheus' (Sophocles), 'a fallen soul' (Plato), 'an image of the Logos' (Philo), 'an image of God' (Origen), 'a rational subsistent' (Thomas), 'a thinking reed' (Pascal), 'a mode of the Substance' (Spinoza), 'will of power' (Nietzsche), 'symbolic being' (Heidegger), 'alienated essence' (Cassirer), 'incarnated spirit' (Mounier), (Scheler), 'utopic being' (Bloch), etc." and according to Kant an 'autonomous and rational being'.

Particularly important is the fact that these definitions do not explain in its entirety the very constitution of the human person. Each of these descriptions, articulate with a peculiar but narrow lens of analysis the constitutive dimension of the human person. Man in this very constitution appears to be in possession of a "prodigy that makes him to combine in himself an apparent antithesis: 'he is a fallen, or unrealizable, divinity; an unsuccessful absolute value, or empty of absolutization; an infinite, or unreachable, possibility.'"³ Indeed according to Bautista Mondin, "it cannot be said that man is a necessary possibility: he is simply a possible possibility inasmuch as he is able to be realized in the arc of historical existence."⁴

¹Max Scheler, *La posizione dell'uomo nel cosmo* (Man's Place in Nature), trans. It., Babbri, Milan, 1970, 98.

²B. Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, Rome, Urbaniana University Press, 2016, 19.

³Ibid., 20.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

The tendency 'to be realized in the arc of historical existence' that is akin to the constitutive build of the human person brings him into contact with other realities in the world and thus expands his cosmic operational point and occupation.⁵ In this character of the human person is also found a certain tendency towards a unique fulfilment of a more realized self. The passion to conquer the earth which is engrained in the constitutive build and nature of man is seen reflected in this. At birth, man unlike other creatures is not endowed with a specialized body and instinctual powers to perform operations already determined, but rather he gradually develops the faculties to undertake unlimited functions, "thus making himself capable of performing the most disparate activities (with the hands, feet, head, etc.). Man is able to manage his body, train it, and render it capable of performing movements of admirable perfections."⁶ He therefore emerges from his originating locus of existence to encounter other existential entities both in the human world and beyond. Thus, his scope of operation may not be easily imagined, since it stretches into immense depths and horizons. It could be for this singular reason that Mondin considers it germane to define the human person as an "impossible possibility".⁷

The Terminological Nexus between Vastness and Narrowness in Relation to the Constitution of the Human Person

The Webster's New Explorer Encyclopedic Dictionary gives various meanings for the word narrow like "of slender width, of less than standard width, limited in size or scope, minutely precise", etc. and all are pointing to a particular sense of gross limitedness. This idea brings one to the sense in which this word is to be understood in this discussion. It is already noted at the beginning that from the point of view of birth, the world of man could be judged to be narrow with all of the limiting factors that could be associated with it. This idea has a lot in common with Fasiku Gbenga's explanation of a naturalist position in relation to the human formation of a society. Because according to him, "belonging to an ethnic group is beyond human control; human beings are naturally divided into ethnic groups based on some essential properties."⁸ It is to this point, that one can perceive the narrow quality of

⁵"The concept of "connections in nature" adequately captures the picture of the relatedness and interdependence of beings as found in Igbo-African eco-communitarianism," (Ufearoh, Anthony & Onebunne Jude, "Eco-Communitarianism: An Igbo-African Perspective" in: West African Journal of Philosophical Studies 19, 2020, 3) "A community according to them is defined as "an assemblage of species populations that occur together in space and time." And as a way of buttressing their point, they observed that no man is an island; so also, "No species lives in isolation." (Cf. Ufearoh Anthony and Onebunne Jude, Ibid., 1; See also, Begone, M., et al, Ecology: From Individuals to Ecosystems, Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006, 381. "The work references the Igbo worldview as a matrix that informs and shapes the cultural and ecological values of the people. The worldview is a participatory world of dependent and interdependent existence where both human and non-human realities have their pride of places. (Cf. Ufearoh, Anthony & Onebunne Jude, "Eco-Communitarianism: An Igbo-African Perspective" in: West African Journal of Philosophical Studies 19, 2020, 1)

⁶Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 232.

⁷Ibid., 20. This definition according to Modin, follows after the Leibnizian conception of God as a "necessary possibility". If in the flow of thought of Leibniz that God has a necessary existence, an existence which possibility does not include any limit or contradiction, then God must exist. And this has the singular effect of considering God as the only being that is endowed with this privilege. It is in this sense that Mondin considers man as an "impossible possibility" (Cf. Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, Ibid., 20)

⁸Fasiku Gbenga, "A Philosophical Understanding of Ethnic Grouping in Nigeria," in: The African Symposium: An Online Journal of African Educational Research Network, vol. 7, No. 2, 2007, 27-39, 30.

the human attribute. His world in this wise possesses grave limiting qualities. His birth to a family and to the immediate environment around him gives a picture of a narrow world. Fasiku's view is tacitly supported by the insistence that "the primordial roots of a nation are found in kinship – in blood relationship."⁹

Quite interestingly, the narrow quality attribute does not tell all the story about the constitutive embodiment of the human person, because as is already noted, man stretches beyond unimaginable limits and covers wide ranging horizons. In any case, it is this quality to reach out that pulls him from his localized point to the formation of a nation. Thus, analysing this view, Fasiku notes the strong connection it has with the naturalist claim "that a nation is a natural deduction from some sort of natural unions of which members have no choices or free will to decide. The implication of this is that in as much as one is a member of a family, thus a member of one of the macro groups that formed a nation, one is naturally a member of the nation, and is subject to its rules and regulations, and must assert its consciousness and interest."¹⁰

The world of man is not just limited to his biological or family constitution, it stretches beyond that and it is to be seen in this sense as one that is fundamentally vast. Vast is here considered as a quality that every human person possesses. This points to the immensity of his constitution. The vastness in discourse here can be associated with the notion of transcendence.¹¹ This is that innate quality in man that pushes him to extend beyond his immediate environment. "Today we use the term transcendence even more frequently when speaking not only of God, but of man; the expression 'self-transcendence' has become one of the foundational expressions of philosophical anthropology. This term indicates the property of man by which he constantly goes beyond himself in all that he thinks, will, and in all that he realizes."¹² This is well captured in the description made by Mondin in the following manner: "the concept of transcendence is a word that is attained by experience and in such a sphere denotes a spatial relation: the relation of surpassing, unboundedness, passing beyond, displacement, in the sense of 'being above', being beyond, outside of', etc"¹³ Man possesses this quality as a characteristic purely basic and exclusive to his constitution which creates in him the tendency to "surpass himself, all that he is, all that he wishes, and all that he has."¹⁴ "Such a self-transcendence is the most extraordinary and important fact of all life and evolution, and especially of human

⁹Ibid.; See also, Kush Satyendra, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Political Science*, Sarup and Sons, 2003.

¹⁰Fasiku, "A Philosophical Understanding of Ethnic Grouping in Nigeria," 30.

¹¹Etymologically, the word transcendence, has a Latin connotation and is derived from a Latin root 'transcendere' which means to ascend on, elevate oneself above, cross, displace pass, scale, etc. (Cf. Mondin, 196)

¹²Mondin, Ibid., 197

¹³Mondin, Ibid., 196

¹⁴Mondin, Ibid., 199

evolution.”¹⁵ This pressure to transcend that is inevitable in the human constitution is described by Edmond Barbotin as “the tendency towards a unique fulfilment of a more realized self.”¹⁶

As a note of further elucidation and in drawing out that very opening through which man connects to the world around him, Barbotin explains: “My corporeity is that by which the world manifests itself to me and that by which I project myself on the world. It is thanks to my body that things and possessions exist for me ... Because it is inseparably subjective and objective, my body mediates between my 'I' and the world of things and is the place of encounter between my consciousness and the universe of objects. Just as one must forget the body, along with Descartes, in order to reject the world, so one need only acknowledge the lived experience of the body in order to transcend the subject-object dualism and the blind alleys of idealism.”¹⁷

All of these are therefore pointers to the very fact that man is not just a being for himself, he is rather also a being for others. The societal formation is fundamentally akin to his very constitution. Even in the Spinozian concept of the monad, there is still the provision for an opening through which the monad encounters and interacts with the world outside. Man is a social animal. And it would be strange to his very constitution when he is considered otherwise. Although he has an ethnic origin, his world simply transcends it.

The Dialectics between Ethnicity and Ethnicism

In the bid to understand the constitutive meaning of ethnicity, Sian Jones has summarized and criticized the two major strands of theoretical paradigms of ethnicity: primordialists and the instrumentalist¹⁸ and offers an alternative approach that combines portions of both in “practice theory”. The alternative position she calls “practice theory”, “which attempts to address the relationship between objective conditions and subjective perceptions.”¹⁹ This distinction notwithstanding, the discussion so far has insisted that every human being embodies in his very constitution an ethnic origin. No one falls from the skies and even if that is possible, his arrival must be in and within an originating space that is

¹⁵K. Popper, *Epistemology, Freedom and Liberty*, Armando, Rome, 1972, 58.

¹⁶Barbotin, *The Humanity of Man*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y., 1975, 83-84

¹⁷Barbotin, *Ibid.*, 83-84.

¹⁸„Primordialists believe that ethnicity is a natural phenomenon with its foundations in family and kinship ties” while instrumentalist theory concerns itself “with the role of ethnicity in the mediation of social relations and the negotiation of access to resources, primarily economic and political resources.” (cf. Sian Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing identities in the Past and Present*. London and New York, Routledge Press, 1997), *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing identities in the Past and Present*. Routledge Press, London and New York, Shils, 74; See also Timothy Baumann, “Defining Ethnicism,” in *The SAA Archaeological Record*, 4(4). 1214, 13.

¹⁹Sian Jones, *Ibid.*, 88. Baumann observes that “Jones definition of practice theory is grounded in Bourdieu's theory of practice in which he developed the concept of habitus.” (Cf. Baumann, *Ibid.*, 14)

definitively ethnic, thus creating in one the needed entitlement for social identity, which is “the springboard for individuation and meaningful existence.” Constructs like qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make persons (self-identity) or groups (collective identity) are encapsulated in social identity.²⁰ This is well captured by Columbus Ogbujah who claims that “our identity situates us within families, societies and nations, and accords us psychological stability as well as physical dignity. No one emerges into the world through an inexplicable explosive mechanism. Man comes into the world relating and identifying with specific situations and peoples. In a sense, there is no humanity without identity. No wonder, when Hitler sought to exterminate the Jews, he first stripped them of identity; of belonging to the German, nay European community. And having thus, been deprived of identity – of their humanity, they became easy prey for the Nazi war machine.”²¹

Meanwhile, Timothy Baumann seeks to situate the best definition of ethnicity “within cultural anthropology”, although this is very much debated especially in the recent times.²² John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith consider the term 'ethnicity' as a relatively new concept, “first appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1953, but its English origins are connected to the term 'ethnic' which has been in use since the Middle Ages.”²³ They further noted that, “the true origins of 'ethnic' have been traced back to Greece and the term *ethnos*, which was used in reference to band, tribe, race, a people, or a swarm.”²⁴ One notices that variations to this particular term has been developed with the passage of time to include ethnic origin, ethnic identity, ethnic nationality, or even as is reflected in the broader consideration of Gerald Berreman, “as one level of social stratification or social inequality that also includes race, class, kinship, age, estate, caste, and gender.”²⁵

Baumann while analysing the description made by Hutchinson and Smith points out six main features which include:

1. a common proper name, to identify and express the 'essence' of the community;

²⁰ Cf. Cheek, J. M. “Identity Orientation and Self-interpretation,” in: *Personality Psychology: Recent Trends and Emerging Directions*. Buss, D. M. n. Cantor. (Eds.). New York: Springer, 2012. 341. See also Covington, P. “Culture and Identity.” *Success in Sociology*. Dublin: Folens

Limited, 2008, 12. See also, Columbus N. Ogbujah, „Colourism, Ethnicism and the Logic of Domination in 21st Century Nigeria in *Dialogue and Universalism* No.1/2021, 23-39, 23.

²¹ Columbus N. Ogbujah, “Colourism, Ethnicism and the Logic of Domination in 21st Century Nigeria in *Dialogue and Universalism* No 1/2021, 23-39, 23.

²² Timothy Baumann, “Defining Ethnicism,” in *The SAA Archaeological Record*, 4(4). 1214. 12.

²³ John Hutchinson, and Anthony, D. Smith, “Introduction” In *Ethnicity*, edited by J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith, 1-14, 4-5. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996

²⁴ Hutchinson and Smith, “Introduction,” 4-5.

²⁵ Gerald Berreman D., Race, Cast, and Other Individous Dinstinctions in Social Stratification, in: *Race* 13: 1972, 385-414, 1981. *Social Inequality: Across-Cultural Approach*. In *Social Inequality: Comparative and Developmental Approaches*, edited by G. Berreman, 3-40. Academic Press, New York.

2. a myth of common ancestry that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnîe a sense of fictive kinship; 3. shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration; 4. one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, and language; 5. a link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnîe, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and 6. a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnîe's population.²⁶

Ethnicity as a matter of fact establishes in very strong sense a bonding with one's kins and kits. This enables one to be psychologically equipped to chart a path for a meaningful existence. This enables members of a group to band together for survival in response to various contexts, situations and challenges but majorly for social interaction. Ethnicity embodies "an outcome of subjective perceptions, that is, personal identification based on some objective characteristics, such as physical attributes, presumed ancestry, culture or national origin. It not only includes biological inheritance, but also affiliation with a particular racial group."²⁷ In all, ethnicity does not possess any negative quality and is directly connected to the basic character of the human person. Hence, it needs to be distinguished from ethnicism.

Ethnicism or Ethnocentrism or Ethnic Nationalism might be used in this essay interchangeably since I consider them to reflect the same sense in this discussion. A unanimous definition of ethnicism is drastically elusive, since it expresses itself in multivariant forms and shapes. Different from ethnicity, ethnicism expresses an undue emphasis upon ethnic identity and or even with a certain tone of superiority and domination. It is, according to Joseph Oguejiofor Okafor a "classification of people according to common racial, national, religious, tribal, linguistic, or cultural origin or background."²⁸ Tracing its etymological history, Ratcliffe observes that "ethnicism is taken from a French word *Ethnie*, which refers to people who share a common life style and

²⁶Baumann, T., *Ibid.*, 12-13

²⁷Yang, P. Q., *Theories of Ethnicity*. Ethnic Studies Issues and Approaches, Suny Press, 2000, 39-60. This aspect of ethnicity that is multidimensional in outlook is seen reflected in the Padilla and Borsato's study about race, ethnicity and language especially from its psychological perspective. They avow that "if an individual identifies himself/herself in his/her mind, with a particular ethnic group, then he/she is willing to be perceived and treated as a member of that group" (cited in Fishman, J. A., & Garcia, O., (eds.), *Handbook of Language and Ethnic identity*, vol.1, Oxford University Press, U.S.A. 2010). Tajfel considers this social identity to be "... part of an individual's selfconcept which derives from his membership of a group or groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (cited in Baxter J., & Wallace K., *Outside in-group and out-group Identities? Constructing Male Solidarity and Female Exclusion in UK builders' talk*, *Discourse & Society*, 20 (4), 411-429, 2009; Cf. Rohmeena, Rab Nawaz Khan, Mahrukh Shakir, "Discursive Construction of Ethnicism: A Critical Stylistic Study of Londonstani" in *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology* *PJAE* 18 (10), 2021, 3592-3603, 3593.

²⁸Cf. Joseph Oguejiofor Okafor, "Ethnicism, Fragmentation, Patronage and Political Instability in Post-Colonial Uganda, 1962-2022", in *Interdisciplinary Journal of African and Asian Studies* (*IJASS*) vol. 9, no.3, 2023, 107-115, 107.

culture, but do not necessarily occupy their ancestral territory or homeland.”²⁹ However Ratcliffe's etymological history of the word explains more of ethnicity instead of ethnicism. The two ought not to be lumped together, but must be clearly distinguished from one another. The meaning of ethnicism however is better understood as “the consciousness of or emphasis on ethnic identity or culture; ethnic selfdetermination or nationalism; ethnic separation”³⁰

Nevertheless, the term means much more than the simple explanation given above, and it embodies, according to J.N. Pieterse, differentiation and or discrimination, which leads to ethnicism.³¹ Indeed any act of discrimination and or differentiation that bears on ethnic origins for the singular purpose of domination and marginalization necessarily leads to ethnicism. Rohmeena et al describes ethnicism as a concept that “grew farther from biological reality and psychological perception to a social construction, used on the one hand by oppressors as a 'legitimizing ideological tool to oppress and exploit specific social groups and to deny them access to material, cultural and political resources, to work, welfare services, housing and political rights, and on the other hand, the oppressed use it for an alternative positive self-identification, on the basis of which they fight for their political rights and independence”³²

Ethnicism is an unfortunate phenomenon noticeable in some parts of the world. One recalls at this moment the bitter divide among the Irish or the case between the Vlaams and the Wallons, or the terrible caste system of the Indians, or even the sad practices among the African tribes and ethnic groups. Although our discussion here is fundamentally general in its concern but particular emphasis might be made on the African space which embodies outrageous expressions in many visible forms concerning which Elechi Maraizu gives reasons for such occurrence. According to him, “the Western selfish motive to dominate, marginalize, and sustain economic gains, political expansion, psycho-mental control, and socio-cultural devaluations escalated racism in Nigeria. Racist ideologies were entrenched through the selfish ventures of slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism, which enforced an unprecedented unjust harvest of impugnable systemic practices. Neo-colonial forces continue to promote ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism, and the dehumanization, exploitation, oppression, and suppression of Africans.”³³ While this articulation may not be disputed, the perpetration of ethnicism in the African continent, or particularly in the

²⁹Ratcliffe, P. (1994). *Race, Ethnicity and Nation*. International Perspectives on Social Conflict, London, University College London Press.

³⁰Rohmeena et al, *Ibid.*, 3594.

³¹Pieterse, J. N. *Globalization or empire?*. Routledge Publication, 2004.

³²Rohmeena, et al., *Ibid.*, 3593; See also Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R., *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, Routledge Publication, 2005.

³³Maraizu Elechi, “Western Racist Ideologies and the Nigerian Predicament” in *Dialogue and Universalism* No. 1/2021, 87-104, 87)

Nigerian context is no longer a force from outside but now internalized. One observes that today Africans, or in this case, Nigerians, especially the political elite employ the horrible instrument of ethnicism to divide the people along ethnic lines for their own political gains.

³⁴Salawu and Hassan support this assertion with the following words:

Further identified causes of ethnic problems in Nigeria have to do with competition for employment and political exploitation. The former has been caused by the ever-increasing number of school leavers who now troop to the urban centre in search of jobs, which many a time are not found. And where such jobs are found they are given according to ethnic affiliation. The latter has to do with politicians who manipulate ethnic loyalties in order to increase their winning chance at the polls. This aspect of ethnicism in the Nigerian situation has set one ethnic group against another with immeasurable consequences.³⁵

The Limiting Character of Ethnicism

The negative quality of discrimination or differentiation that is inherent in ethnicism expresses concretely its limiting quality. It shares borderline with colourism³⁶ or even with racism³⁷ as is already observed and embodies different forms, shapes, layers and systems of discrimination.³⁸ To bond together with people of the same race or ethnic group is not at all bad, but to create an atmosphere of tension in which emphasis of importance is laid on one's ethnic group more than the other generates unhealthy rivalry that could engender unwarranted exclusive claims to propriety and favouritism. In this constitutes "the negative aspect of identity projections that lead to discrimination and criminalization of the Other."

³⁹Unfortunately, the Nigerian socio-political landscape is dominated by ethnicism in all its forms and shapes.

³⁴Bishop Godfrey Onah took time to stress this point in his homily at the episcopal ordination of Bishop Thomas Obiatuegwu on the 20th of March 2024.

³⁵B. Salawu and A. O. Hassan, "Ethnic Politics and its Implications for the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria" in: *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research* Vol. 3(2) 2011, 28-33, 31.

³⁶This explains a mode or manner by which "colours are assigned to peoples of diverse races and further ascribing them with the conventional significations of these colours." The danger here is that this gradually paves the way for negative racial profiling and eventual discrimination. (Cf. Ogbujah, 31)

³⁷Racial stratification is directly associated with ascriptions and or distinctions based on the status of birth and determined by physical and cultural characteristics by a group from the outside about a particular people. It is more extrinsic unlike ethnicism that is more intrinsic. Extrinsic in the sense that an outside group places terms and categories of definition on a group for the negative reasons of profiling, discrimination, domination and subjugation. Unfortunately, these categories are very often laced with bizarre prejudices, inaccuracies, and stereotypes. (Cf. Baumann T. Ibid., 13)

³⁸Ogbujah, Ibid., 35

³⁹Ogbujah, C. N.. "Ethics of Exclusion and Its Impacts on Nigeria's Trudge to Democracy." in *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 3 (6), (2020), 75–88. See also, Ogbujah, 29

Ethnicism in Nigeria: A Concrete Case in Focus

Making reference to his essay on “Ethics of Exclusion and Its Impacts on Nigeria's Trudge to Democracy,” Ogbujah observed that the politics of identity has taken up the entire spectrum of the Nigerian socio-political landscape. According to him, identity politics is not exclusively peculiar to the Nigerian state, although it remains dominant within the Nigerian political space and “has created an unwholesome structure wherein people are caged within the infantile familial or social constrictions, in exclusion of others.”⁴⁰ It is sad to note that ethnicism or its corollary identity politics has recurrently ignited the fireworks of tribalism, discriminations and conflicts in the Nigerian society and has never ceased to be the launch-pad for tribal profiling and discrimination.

While discussing ethnicity and ethnicism in Nigeria, D.H. Asanabi, explores five features associated with the concept of ethnicism. “Firstly, the concept of ethnicism is more pronounced in a plural state. Secondly, the feeling of cultural superiority is part of a common consciousness. Thirdly, there is a sense of competition among individuals and groups for scarce public resources. Fourthly, it is a widely used political tool to canvass for political support and emotional sympathy. Finally, it is a situational consciousness which changes in its form, role and place as the social process demands it.”⁴¹ Central to these features is the projection of selfish interest in total disregard of the sentiments of the other and the sacrificing of merit at the altar of mediocrity. Every natural resource must be scrambled and fought for with motivations that come from ethnic interests and individual greed. And in struggling for these resources much will be lost and wasted. Thus, “the Nigerian politics have presented an image of struggle among various ethnic groups for the sharing of national resources.”⁴² This unfortunately has inaugurated a situation whereby ethnic origin receives prime position of prominence for public cognition and political struggle and advancement.⁴³

Fundamentally, ethnicism has been developed to describe an unwarranted identity projection and naturalization by the singular fact of birth adopted for the oppression and subjugation of others from different ethnic nationalities. It inaugurates discrimination and alienation among people from within a national social unit and creates by so doing tensions arising from suspicions and lack of trust among supposed brothers and sisters. These have undermined the Nation's democratic journey and have continued to threaten the institutionalisation of democracy in Nigeria. Grave negative consequences have resulted from this, few of these are:

⁴⁰Ogbujah, C. N. Ibid.

⁴¹Asanebi, D. H. (2017). Ethnicity and ethnicism in Nigeria nation. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 3 (1), 22-26

⁴²Salawu B. and Hassan A. O., “Ethnic Politics and its Implications for the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria,” in *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research* Vol. 3(2), 28-33 February 2011, 29.

⁴³Cf. Salawu and Hassan, Ibid., 29; See also Nnoli O., *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1978; See also Crawford Y., *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, London, the University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestments of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relations among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another. Ethnic nationalism is equally responsible for upspring of ethnic militias across the country.⁴⁴

In addition to these, a barrage of problems arising from ethnicism or ethnic chauvinism continue to contaminate the Nigerian socio-political terrain. Few of these are: a total disregard of the common good in pursuit of personal good, the charade of nepotism and tribalism, the inauguration of Quota System and the terrible consequences emanating therefrom, the destruction of creativity and excellence, an unfortunate aversion for quality, a campaign of calumny from among persons to ethnic groups, a celebration of narrow-mindedness and lethal damage to the vastness of the human constitution. Running through all these negatives is the limiting character that sets the standard for their preference by the Nigerian political gladiators. This limiting character expresses an unfortunate fixation to that narrow constitution of every human person.

A glance at Nigeria's democratic history confronts one with explosive negative effects of ethnicism. Already between 1960 and 1965 ethnic engineered riots, arsons, killings and other acts of vandalism especially in the West became frequent occurrences in the Nigerian socio-political terrain. The formation of political parties in the second Republic⁴⁵ did not help matters since this was done with heavy ethnic sentiments with the same political gladiators as in the First Republic.⁴⁶ With the military interruptions of the democratic process in Nigeria and even to the Third Republic and beyond⁴⁷, the template of socio-political activities in Nigeria was still dominated by the overwhelming influence of ethnicism, and this has impeded the developmental strides of the nation. A commentary by Ogbujah gives one a lucid picture of the present scenario. According to him: "in Nigeria, for instance, within the latter (intracultural) category lurks perhaps, the most insidious form of discrimination in modern political history that manifests now and again in primordial linguistic and tribal leanings, religious affiliations and political/economic cleavages. At the moment, to get a job and/or political appointment; to be promoted to certain ranks in the civil service or security apparatus; and sometimes even to survive literally depends on the native language you speak, the religion you worship in, or your political party

⁴⁴B. Salawu and A. O. Hassan, "Ethnic Politics and its Implications for the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria," in *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research* Vol. 3(2), 28-33 February 2011, 32; See also Babangida, *Ethnic Nationalities and Nigeria State*. Excerpts from a Lecture delivered at NIPSS, Kuru, Jos, 2002.

⁴⁵The Second Republic lasted from 1979 - 1983

⁴⁶B. Salawu and A. O. Hassan, *Ibid.*, 32. The First Republic was from 1963 – 1966.

⁴⁷The Third Republic was very brief and lasted from 1992 till 1993.

membership.”⁴⁸ Thus, ethnicity is weaponized as a brazen instrument to strangle the political minorities in the country especially in the socio-economic sector. Precisely in his Christmas message of 2020, Matthew Hassan-Kukah criticized the Buhari's administration for sacrificing the hopes and aspirations of his electorates in his determination to stratify and institutionalize northern hegemony. According to Kukah, Buhari orchestrates this by denigrating others that do not belong to the northern oligarchy to second class status, and by so doing has turned nepotism into a state policy. Through this means Kukah insists, he alienates and dominates the non-northern Muslims. This sort of domination Kukah continues jeopardises interethnic integration, leading to mutual suspicion and national self-destruct.⁴⁹

Certainly, the events of the 1960 to 1965 and even beyond as is recounted above stretched to almost every part of the Nigerian nation as “evil” breaks barriers and expands its scope and horizon in furthering its agenda. The domination, marginalization and denigration of the then Eastern Region inaugurated the death of “meritocracy” with a fanfare celebration of mediocrity on the Nigerian nation. Chinua Achebe recounted his experience as it affected him and the Igbo in the Nigerian contraption in this manner:

In most other nations the success of an ethnic group as industrious as the Igbo would stimulate healthy competition and a renaissance of learning and achievement. In Nigeria it bred deep resentment and both subtle and overt attempts to dismantle the structures in place for meritocracy in favour of mediocrity, under the cloak of a need for “federal character” – a morally bankrupt and deeply corrupt Nigerian form of the far more successful affirmative action in the United States. The denial of merit is a form of social injustice that can hurt not only the individuals directly concerned but ultimately the entire society. The motive for the original denial may be tribal discrimination, but it may also come from sexism, from political, religious, or some other partisan consideration, or from corruption and bribery. It is unnecessary to examine these various motives separately; it is sufficient to state that whenever merit is set aside by prejudice of whatever origin, individual citizens as well as the nation itself are victimized.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ogbujah, Ibid., 36. Ogbujah sees in Buhari's administration a concrete example in this regard. Cf. Ogbujah, C. N., “Ethics of Exclusion and Its Impacts on Nigeria's Trudge to Democracy”, in: Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development, 3 (6), 2020, 75-88. See also Enumah, A. 2020. “Southern Leaders Sue Buhari over Alleged Breach of Federal Character.” THISDAY; https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/06/23/southern-leaders-sue-buhari-over-allegedbreach-of-federal-character/?utm_medium=Email&utm_source=Zenter-System&utm_campaign=%2320466+%3D%3E+MORNING+NEWS+HEADLINES&utm_content=8ca125e83dcdfc32ff36d92efd9b45d579f9f6b5, (Accessed 30 December 2020).

⁴⁹Cf. Ogbujah, p.36; See also, Kukah, M. H. 2020. “Another Christmas with Dark Clouds of Death.” the 2020 Christmas Message to Nigerians by the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto; <http://saharareporters.com/2020/12/30/full-text-bishop-kukahs-christmas-message-sparked-reactions> (Accessed 30 December 2020).

⁵⁰Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, New York, Penguin Books, 2012, 78.

The point in discourse is very simple; man stretches beyond his immediate environment and so cannot be consigned and engaged only from the point of his immediate environment. His world must be seen and understood to be in interaction with other bodies and realities, for to do otherwise bespeaks of danger and violence to his being and constitution and a terrible disservice to the human community in general. A marginalization of any section of humanity invariably affects the other sections and the discoverable gains in one section ought to be harnessed to the benefit of the other sections because man is always in relationship with other creatures and tends unceasingly to maintain and be maintained in this relationship.

The Moral Wrongness and Social Consequences of Ethnicism

The social effects of ethnicism will be approached from two aspects: the individual aspect and the communal or societal aspect. Basically, both the individual and the community experience grave damage when ethnicism enjoys profound recognition and is adopted as a norm of action in national considerations. The effects of ethnicism are multiple, arbitrary and morally wrong. Some of these consequences include: corruption, hatred, ethnic-based deprivation of benefits, poverty, miseducation, demoralization, social discrimination, moral decadence, emotional repudiation, despair and a whole lot of other ills.⁵¹

Ethnicism violates the dignity of the human person particularly when it denies an individual the opportunity to fully develop his or her potentials. Because, when an individual is judged based on his or her ethnic origins and unsolicited favours granted to him or her without any merit but solely on the strength of the individual's origin, a terrible injustice and damage would be unleashed on the individual as a person, since this would entail a denigration of the individual's uniqueness and a total disregard of his creative ability as an autonomous entity. And in this frame of mind, creativity and hardwork will be destroyed and excellence thrown overboard. And if perchance mistakes occur in the execution of duty, a terrible sense of guilt and shame will be awakened and the sense of loss will be compounded by the feeling that one was not assessed on one's own merits, but merely as a member of a group.⁵² This psychologically is emasculating, thus leaving one with no inner strength to undertake serious, laudable and courageous acts. When considered along this trajectory, then "one can infer from this that the inner unity and self-realization of the human person is indispensable for the creation of any truly human society."⁵³ Because any society that is structured along ethnic lines in all its national governmental considerations will be totally

⁵¹Garcia J. L. A. Racism in L. C. Becker, C. B. Becker (Ed). Encyclopedia of Ethics, (Second Edition), Vol. III (P-W). London: Routledge, 1436-1440, 2001. Although Garcia's concern in this work was on racism, however, one discovers that ethnicism and racism appear to share almost the same principles of operation and can be considered in this sense as of the same family and stock.

⁵²Singer, P., Is Racial Discrimination Arbitrary? In: J. Narveson (Ed.) Moral Issues, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, 308-324.

⁵³anre-Abass B., "Racism and Its Presuppositions: Towards a Pragmatic Ethics of Social Change", in: Human Affairs 20, 2010, 364-375, 368.

deficient in reconciling individuals to that independent core of human personality and will thus create in him or her a peculiar emptiness that has terrible psychological consequences. Further on, ethnicism can lead to a denial of the fundamental rights of an individual in a society. Some of these rights include housing, employment, education, freedom of association, and others. Any discrimination along these lines constitutes a threat to the fundamental right of an individual. The consequence of this is well captured by Lanre-Abass in this manner: "Since individuals possess basic human rights by virtue of being human beings, these rights should be taken into consideration when providing them with employment, education or other benefits. This should also be based on their merits as individuals and not as members of some larger racial groups. Selecting or discarding whole groups will generally result, in, at best, a crude approximation to the results that are to be achieved."⁵⁴

The social effect of ethnicism is of course tied to the damage it impacts on the individual. Nevertheless, on its wider consideration, ethnicism creates a gap on the essential constitution of the human person as belonging to a large family unit. And in this wise, it majorly "contradicts the objective purposes and values that unify humanity."⁵⁵ And just like racism, it simply "denies practically, if not in theory, that there are any objective purposes and values common to all humanity."⁵⁶ No singular individual has the prerogative of choosing his or her ethnic origin from birth or even the power to give up one's ethnic root at will. The peculiar sense of thrownness into the world is the common characteristic of every human being. Indeed, "the person who is denied advantages because of his race or ethnicity is totally unable to alter this particular circumstance of his existence and so may feel with added sharpness that his life is clouded, not merely because he is not being judged as an individual, but because of something over which he has no control at all."⁵⁷ To use ethnicity to discriminate is simply to arbitrarily adopt an irrelevant factor that is informed on bias and prejudice for the sole reason of subjugation and oppression.

Another issue is the fact of stereotyping. Often people from different ethnic roots are approached with a negatively biased stereotypes and are analyzed and judged from this prejudiced mould already formed. To recline to stereotypes in the relationships with others, is to dispose oneself to unlimited wave of biases and prejudices so much so that "these stereotypes are reinforced by a tendency to notice occurrences which conform to the stereotypes and to disregard those which conflict with it."⁵⁸ Stereotyping is morally wrong, although it appears to be inevitable at some moments, because "it is difficult to make our way in the world without generalizations about people and situations by correlating their characteristics with predictions about what we can expect to happen, nevertheless, such generalizations are always flawed. This is because they attribute particular qualities to

⁵⁴Lanre-Abass, B., *Racism and its Presuppositions: Towards a Pragmatic Ethics of Social Change*, 368.

⁵⁵Lanre-Abass, *Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.* See also, Goffart, W. *Racism in D.I.* Eggenberger (Ed.). *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12. New York: McGraw-Hill, 54-60, 1967.

⁵⁷Lanre-Abass, *Ibid.*, 369.

⁵⁸Lanre-Abass, *Ibid.*

some people who don't possess them. Hence to generalize is to overgeneralize.”⁵⁹

Generally, ethnicism is driven by fear and unfounded hatred. This unfortunately has ignited the embers of genocidal violence in some societies resulting to an unimaginable harm to the societal structure. By creating tension in its fundamental principle of alienation that shuns embrative totality, tension and aggressive resistance will be inevitably initiated thus rupturing the entire societal order. It is important to note that “a group that claims for itself extensive totality, that is to say which judges the content of all other purposes and values from the standpoint of its own purpose and fundamental scale of values destroys the basic structure of humanity as true unity in true diversity and thereby destroys its own inner falsity and worthlessness.”⁶⁰ And in this way, the society will be unfortunately divided and then the inner cohesion that enables the growth of any society will be lost.

Sadly, ethnicism runs counter to the basic sense of justice, which offers equal opportunity for every member of the society. Equality of opportunity creates a level playing ground for all the members of the society, thus giving a sense of belonging to each member of the given society. It psychologically enables the individual or group to feel integrated into the affairs of their nation and by so doing extract the best from them in their contribution to the development and growth of that particular society. It could be possible that perfection may not be achieved in the bid to maintain justice, but the members of the society could have over the years developed trust in the structure of their society that they do not feel shortchanged in the affairs of their society, but confident that the reward for merit is the operative guiding principle in the affairs of the nation. The understanding here is that “achieving equality of opportunity is about 'levelling the playing ground' or making the competition for resources fair, rather than achieving more equal outcomes. In this way, the notion of equal opportunity is tied more to liberal principles of distributive justice than to radical egalitarian ideals.”⁶¹ John Rawls for instance sets out the modalities on how to mitigate the effects of unequal circumstances and opportunities that ethnicism creates so as to arrive at principles of justice that are profoundly fair and just. This will enable any society to be solidly grounded in the distribution of resources in the quest to promote justice and fairness.⁶²

The Relationality of the Human Person: Concluding Comments

The human person is constitutively relational and this attribute of relationality manifests in many fronts. Human relationality is linked to the human character of self-transcendence, which is expressed not only on the horizontal plane, but equally on the vertical plane. In self-transcendence, the human being reaches towards limits beyond himself in every aspect of his being; thinking, willing and in the realization of himself.⁶³ To go beyond is to break the barriers of his immediate existence and to be bonded in a complex web of

⁵⁹Lanre-Abass, Ibid.

⁶⁰Lanre-Abass, Ibid., 369.

⁶¹Lanre-Abass, Ibid., 370

⁶²Rawls John, A Theory of Justice, Cambridge, MAL Harvard University Press, 1971, 83-90.

⁶³Mondin, Ibid., 197.

interconnecting relationships that is evoked by the ontological constitution of his very being. He stretches his being into getting into contact with other humans and in the process builds a society with them for it is innate in him to do so, since he is not an island.

Particularly important is the fact that “what is specifically human can be detected primarily in the qualities and causal properties of the social relations activated by people (and not by 'things') within a context of social networks, and not in isolation.”⁶⁴ The vastness of the human person is unlimited and thus, man resists any attempt at narrowing his scope and horizon because of the negative impact it will unleash on his constitutive character and identity. The uniqueness of the human person has occasioned responses by thinkers across many epochs from the ancient period to the contemporary times. Various theories have been postulated to fully grasp the unique nature of the human person. Many of these theories and ideas talk about one aspect of the human endowment or the other. Central to these ideas is the fact that the human person is a mystery that cannot be fully conceptualized because of the ontological vastness of his composition.

Some philosophers have attempted to unravel the immense constitution of the human person, but without success, thus necessitating various postulations that are both anthropomorphic in character and accentuates the prioritization of the interconnective dimension of the human person with his fellows in his communality. With the Protagorean axiom of *homo omnia mensura* (man is the measure of all things), there was a tilt towards the selfish egocentric nature of man, thus projecting an explosive demonstration of man-centredness. This idea was prevalent in the ancient period and impacted heavily on the definition of their worldview. With the development in thoughts and realization of human dependency on others, philosophers like Boethius, Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure and others in that era redefined the notion of the human person. Classifying the characteristics of the human person as having individuality, rationality and substantiality, this attempt reveals a newer understanding of the human person predicated upon the newer awareness gotten in the course of time.

Following the atrocities of the Second World War,⁶⁵ philosophers came to understand the human person in terms of relationality. They see the need for the other in human dealings. The likes of Martin Buber, Carol Wojtyla, Emmanuel Mounier and others understood the relational composition of the human person.⁶⁶ Mounier for instance in his work *Le personalisme* (Personalism) takes a stand against the empiricists, the idealists and against all those who have an individualistic tendency concerning the human person. To that effect, he avers; “I cannot think without being and be without my body: by means of my body I am exposed to myself, the world, and others, and; by means of my body I escape from the solitude of a thought which would only be the thought of my thought. Refusing to concede a

⁶⁴Donati, Pierpaolo. “Transcending the Human: Why, Where, and How?” in: *Realist Responses to Post-Human Society: Ex Machina*, Routledge, 2018, 53-81, 54.

⁶⁵The world war lasted from 1939 to 1945, this period saw the cruelty of man especially in the use of technology. It was recorded that over 15-20 million lives were lost during these years. The war ended by the first ever and only use of nuclear weapon in human warfare and the eventual formation of the United Nations in 1945.

⁶⁶Mondin, B. *Philosophical Anthropology*, Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Rome, 2016, 253.

complete transcendence to myself, the body continually projects me outside of myself, into the problematic of the world and the struggle of man.⁶⁷

Man's need of his fellow human beings is engrained in his constitutive build. The need for the other naturally opens up the deeper yearnings of encounter in a network of relationships that is fulfilling and in which the beingness of man is realized and ennobled. Strange to his constitution therefore, the negative impulse towards ethnicism can only distort, obfuscate or at best destroy the fundamental character of the human person as one unfortunately witnesses today especially in the socio-political structure of the Nigerian state. Indeed, the tendency towards ethnicism in whatever form or shape is a shift from the normal to the abnormal, from the general to the particular, from the common good to the personal/selfish good, from the proper consideration of man in his vastness and relationality to a narrow conceptual framework, from a universal understanding of the human person to the error of viewing man in terms of his place of birth and origin.

Indeed, the human character of social relation depends on the terms of the relations (human persons), but does not consist of them. It is in the interpersonal relation, with it and through it, that we can understand what is infungibly human, both in the single person and in social forms. The human, as a reality in actu, lies in the intersubjective relation because the latter has qualities and causal properties that are not replaceable by any other entity, be it artificial or belonging to the natural physical world.⁶⁸

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⁶⁷Ibid., 254.

⁶⁸Donati, Pierpaolo, "Transcending the Human: Why, Where, and How?" in: *Realist Responses to Post-Human Society: Ex Machina*, Routledge, 2018 53-81, 53-54. ¹⁶²Donati, Pierpaolo. "Transcending the Human: Why, Where, and How?" in: *Realist Responses to Post-Human Society: Ex Machina*, Routledge, 2018, 53-81, 54.

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