

Ethnicity, Ethnicism and Citizenship: A Philosophical Reflection on the African Experience

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INTRODUCTION

Every African State is a multi-cultural, multinational and multilingual state, a state that comprises several nations or ethnic-groups different in terms of size, culture, historical root etc. Across Africa, a common experience is the exposure to years of colonial rule. During and after the termination of colonial rule, the colonial powers imposed nation-states on societies with large number of ethnic groups. Clearly, each ethnic group was not sufficiently large to achieve its own state, so groups within states were subsequently ranked according to whether they were a nation, nationality, a national minority, or a tribe. Hence, the construction of the post-colonial nationality started from colonial premises. Colonial premises, however, had largely been built on the relics of pre-colonial African nationalities. Ostensibly, a preponderant feature of pre-colonial and post-colonial African states is the existence of large groups, hence the construction that resulted from the combination of these ethnic groups are often called nation-states.

The obdurate problem of African countries today has been that of nation building. The UNESCO General History of Africa defines nation building as “the progressive acceptance by members of the polity of the legitimacy of a central government as a symbol of the nation.” As a process, Francis (1968: 339) viewed nation-building as “a process of social change culminating in a historical type of politically organised society i.e. the modern nation.. moving toward an ideal goal, set and rationalised by an ideology...” Nation-building, seen from these perspectives, clearly emphasises and admits of what Nettle described and portrayed as the establishment of Stateness. Stateness involves, according to Nettle, “a balanced combination of the coercive capacity and infrastructural power of the state with a degree of identification on the part of the citizenry with the idea of the state that encompasses them territorially” (Nettle, 1968).

To this end, the problem of nation building is still explained in the light of the problem of the eclectic ethnic composition of these countries. That the process of nation building in African countries can still be described as enigmatic is not without an historical antecedence. There are varying opinions in these attempts at objectifying and situating the historical evidence for this perennial complex. There is the strong assertion, in unequivocal terms, that the origin of this predicament is indeed traceable to the heedless manner in which the European colonial overlords administered and managed the colonial territories without due regard to the cultural peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of each of those colonial territories.

In recent studies, however, scholars have emphasised the role of the post-colonial African State as the core problem in the whole process of nation building. A dimension of this opinion is what Victor Azarya described as the “state’s incapacities, its functional decline, instability and inability” (1988: 3). This inability, posits Nwabueze, consists in the fact that the African state is yet to “shed off its character as an illegitimate child of colonialism” lacking “popular acceptance for itself and its powers” (1999: 7). Uroh describes this phenomenon as regime delegitimation (1998: 94). The list of such characterisation is endless. One thing is however clear and a proposition too plain to be contested: that, unquestionably, the concept of the state evokes a significant portion of intellectual discourse and conviction on the pattern, process and possibilities of political life, attitudes and interaction in Africa. Summarily, the idea of state incapacities and the pluri-ethnic nature of African states are weighty arguments in painting Africa’s crawling situation.

However, that continents and states within them are multi-ethnic is not restricted to the continent of Africa. In fact, with the exception of some very few states, almost all states in the world are composed of multiple ethnic groups with diverse cultures and a sense of distinct identity. One of the peculiarities of the post-Cold

War era is the animation of the ethnic debate. The idea of ethnicity, considered anaesthetised by the academic world, appears the pronounced and predominant philosophy in the world, especially in the wake of the breaking away of the Baltic States in the former Soviet Union in 1989.

The concept of ethnicity has continued till this time to attract a lot of debate, controversy, and of course, intellectual analyses. Termed the resilient paradigm, ethnicity accounts for a greater percentage of the analyses by scholars on the nature, essence and pattern of the problem confronting the African continent. Problems such as that of conflict, violence, corruption and political and democratic problematic etc. are often attributed to the actuality of the dynamics of the ethnic phenomenon. In this paper, my claim is modest but not unimportant. My objective is twofold but lumped into one which is: to show that whereas the concept of ethnicity has been dubbed evil it is an innocent phenomenon. Following from this, to show the impact of the politicisation of ethnicity (which is ethnicism) on the substance and status of citizenship. In order to give the tenor of my arguments some empirical contents, I shall draw compelling instances from Nigeria and some other African countries with similar experiences.

ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC PLURALISM: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Vilfredo Pareto, the term ethnicity is one of the vaguest terms known to sociology (1963:1837). In the light of this many attempts have been made by scholars from various discipline to analyse, describe, and define, in concrete terms, the term ethnicity. In terms of definitional analysis, however, the term ethnicity points to other related terms of germane interest of which ethnic groups, nationhood and identity are prominent. Critical reflection on these terms is needed at this stage in order that obfuscating tendencies are avoided. The intellectually profiting questions at this point are: what is ethnicity? What are ethnic groups? How do we construct the idea of identity and nationhood? These are some of the questions this paper seeks to interrogate in an attempt to critically underscore the relation between the politicisation of ethnicity and the existence of a peculiar diacritic in citizenship notions.

In political circles and sociological literatures, the term ethnicity has been branded in very curious and often fallacious senses. In the opening pages of his work, Okwudiba Nnoli conceives of ethnicity “as a social phenomenon associated with some forms of interaction between the largest possible cultural-linguistic communal groups (ethnic groups) within political societies such as nation-states” (1995: 1). According to Young, ethnicity refers to “the active sense of identification with some ethnic units” (1965). In the same vein, Sanda (1978: 33) defines it as a strong “feeling of allegiance to ones ethnic group”.

Of interest also is the analysis of Edmund Leach (1954: 15) and Frederik Barth (1969: 9-38). Both scholars gave the impression that ethnicity is to be understood in terms of structural relationship. According to these scholars, boundary-maintenance and identity formation are critical factors in explaining ethnicity than cultural factors. A contrary view was that of Edward Shils (1957: 113-45) and Clifford Geertz (1963: 105-57). Their view can be referred to as the Primordialist Approach. This approach placed importance on culturally distinctive characteristics such as myths of origin, ritual, religion or genealogical descent in distinguishing one group from another. Charles Keyes (1976: 202-13) also noted that the primary defining characteristics of an ethnic group is culture. The running theme in these opposing views, in essence, is the awareness of a common identity, hence, Cynthia Enloe posit that “the basic function” of ethnicity “is to bind the individual to a group” (1973: 187).

As a preliminary to my dissenting opinion on this recurrent view of the concept of ethnicity, I am persuaded in endorsing the view of Talcott Parsons that “it seems to be generally agreed that what we call ethnicity...is an extraordinarily elusive concept and very difficult to define in any precise way” (1975: 53). For me, ordinarily stated, ethnicity refers to the fact of belonging to different ethnic groups. What, however, is an ethnic group? Essentially, an ethnic group may refer to a group of people with a close sense of primordial affinities. According to Osaghae (1992), it refers to any “distinct group which possess amongst others, language, culture, myth of origin and territory which differentiates it from other groups”. Max Weber, that great sociologist perceives an ethnic group as those

human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent (1968: 389). The trend of discussion seems to have delineated subjective features from objective ones. Perhaps, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's analysis may provide a penetrating understanding of the very diffused and elusive nature of the term ethnicity. In their words,

Ethnicity seems to be a new term. In the sense in which we use it-the character or quality of an ethnic group- it does not appear in the 1933 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary...it did, however, make the 1973 edition of the American Heritage Dictionary, where it is defined as "1. The condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group; 2. Ethnic pride." (1975: 1)

The same point is echoed by Parsons who reiterated the view that the term may refer to "the organisation of plural persons into distinctive groups..." (1975: 53) Subjectively, the critical features of ethnicity is that it is ascriptive and exclusive: its continuity is centred on the maintenance of a boundary based on values and identity. In the objective sense, it refers to one or more of six different criteria, including race, kinship, religion, language, customary mode of living, and regionalism (Carment, 1994: 557). Back home, Nnoli contended that "... ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The relevant communal factor may be culture, language or both" (1995: 1).

CONCEPTUAL THOUGHTS ON ETHNICITY

The concept of ethnicity is often discussed in a general sense as if it constitutes a single phenomenon. In the light of modern debate, especially in relation to African countries in particular and Third World countries in general, there are existing thoughts on the nature of ethnicity. In general, these thoughts are meant to introduce the reader to the political salience of ethnicity. In the first place, there are those who hold the view that ethnicity is inherently conflictual and necessarily problematic. According to Smith (1981: 15), "in modern times, even the smallest ethnic communities have adopted an aggressive, if not always expansionist, posture." In other words, it is believed that conflict in pluralistic society i.e. ethnically diverse societies is inevitable. The interesting dimension to this viewpoint is the

fact that scholars who hold this position premise their conclusion on the multi-ethnic nature of such societies. Studies that perceive a connection between ethnicity and conflict rely on the idea of what Van Den Berghe tagged ethnic competitive mistrusts. It is no wonder then that Nnoli posit in strong terms that "...hostility is an important aspect of ethnicity. Destructive competition among ethnic groups gives rise to ethnicity and produces antisocial effects such as jealousy and deprivation. It becomes possible for the in-group to accept the expression of hostility toward the out-group" (1995: 3).

There is another school of thought that posits that ethnicity is equivalent to the idea of nationalism. In this sense ethnicity is regarded as the equivalent of the modern notion of nationalism which some describes as ethno-nationalism. This view can be located in the central thesis of E.K. Francis' distinction between primary and secondary ethnicity. Principally, this ethno-national dimension or view of ethnicity is aptly demonstrated and acutely emphasised in primary ethnic groups. As explained by Riggs (1994: 592-593), primary ethnic groups "are relatively viable corporate units that tend to function as closed sub societies within a larger host society (or polity)...They epitomise ethno nationalism." According to this viewpoint on ethnicity, ethnic groups adopt the posture of nationalism because of a sense of dissatisfaction within the larger host society. In other words, the desire for autonomy or self-determination stems from an increasing sense of alienation. In this perspective, such primary ethnic groups regard themselves as potential candidate for nationhood. This opinion is prominent in the works of scholars such as Connor (1972), Geertz (1974) etc.

In recent times, the interests in the critical implication of Marxists view on the salience of class and class conflict has influenced Marxist writers to contend most strongly the view that whereas, in African countries, the idea of ethnicity has gained prominent attention, what ought to be given a serious intellectual attention and academic analysis is the idea of class. In line with this perspective, Sklar (1967) argued that ethnicity was classified as a derivative of the class struggle, and its political role as a weapon forged and wielded by classes and fractions of classes for their own interests. Such conscious manipulation was attributed to

remnants of the traditional ruling class and its successors, the petty bourgeoisie. According to proponents of this view, to ignore the impact of colonialism on African societies is to downplay class relation while elevating ethnicity to the point of academic prominence. This Marxist interpretation, summarily, considers ethnicity to be a dependent variable, a form of false consciousness in which ethnic consciousness is superimposed over the interests of the masses and thus serves to camouflage the more fundamental and objective interests of competing classes. Hence, according to this interpretation, the real motivating force is that of class formation.

A deeper reflection however shows that although ethnicity is powerful, it is neither absolute nor immutable. Ethnic consciousness and loyalties lend themselves to easy manipulation particularly because other loyalties are either weak or altogether absent (Kokole, 1996: 126). Femi Taiwo has argued that "the absence of genuine citizenship is not unconnected with the dominance of ethnic politics driven by the requirements of rootedness in physical space" (1996: 19). In fact, each of the points mentioned above can be faulted without any sense of intellectual and academic loss.

However, it should be stressed that ethnicity as a concept is politically neutral. Ethnicity is a biological term, connoting the absence of a deliberate choice. No one ever chooses where he or she is born or to be born. That we are born where we are born is not out of choice but out of selection of our parents who, in turn were born into a group they never chose. So, that one belongs to an ethnic group is simply politically neutral. It is the politicisation of our origin, root, etc., especially for the purpose of political advantage, that results in inter-ethnic opposition, hindered group interaction and political conflict. In every modern state, the implication of such group interaction and the effect altogether is the emergence of citizenship crises and problem.

Interestingly, this state of multi-ethnic formation is also termed ethnic pluralism. That African societies are pluralistic simply means that the social "units maintain at least a minimum of relations with each other" although with the existence of "pronounced cleavages between these social units" (Kuper, 1965: 113). In the face of these pronounced pluralism and multi-ethnic

setting the 'awareness of a common identity' often separate one group from the other in the interplay of political forces and in the access, control and domination of the resource-allocating elements of the state.

These 'minimum of relation' Kuper hinted at above lies, most prominently, at the heart of inter-ethnic politics. According to Nnoli, in Africa, access to state power is important for various ethnic groups because of the extensive intervention of the African state in the sphere of life of the African society ...hence... ethnic group access to state power or lack of it, is an important element in ethnic politics" (1995: 6). In the bid to control and dominate the state, what result is the 'politicisation of ethnicity'. This political dimension of ethnicity should not be considered a constant factor in every plural setting, although the potential for it may be present. What activates this potential differs from one setting to the other but, essentially, they are variables contingent upon other factors which can be distinguished one from the other.

CITIZENSHIP QUESTIONS AND THE PERPLEXITY OF POLITICS IN AFRICA

Interestingly, citizenship is emerging as an important concept in socio-political discussions and discourses. Two global phenomena seem to have accounted for this increasing interest in the concept of citizenship. These are the ideas of globalisation and the whole enterprise of democratisation. However, there seem to be an overlapping influence in this direction. Globalisation, on one hand, tend to have incorporated in its wake the interest in democratisation. It is contended that if globalisation is to succeed, then it is important that democratisation be achieved. Again, there can never be full democratisation, even in the face of globalisation, without a corresponding respect for citizenship values and ideals. Hence, to democratise is to ensure the proper entrenchment of citizenship rights. On both counts, the concept of citizenship appears prominently fused: it takes for granted the importance of the attainment of global citizenship. What then is citizenship?

Basically, as a term, citizenship denotes, opines Crompton, "full and participating membership of a nation-state, that is, it does not necessarily incorporate all persons resident within a given territory" (1993: 139). In a related

sense, Hill argued that the concept of citizenship embraces a range of positions. Traditionally, Hill contends, citizenship as a status denotes individuals with rights and duties constitutionally guaranteed to all members of society. He further argued, however, that citizenship is about power and its distribution, about the framework of public and thus collective decisions, and accountability for those decisions (1994: 4). With respect to power, different attitudes to citizenship notions lies beneath the problem of integration in the political sociology of developing nations. According to Bryan Turner, "the problem of citizenship has re-emerged as an issue which is central, not only to practical political questions concerning access to health-care systems, education institutions and the welfare state, but also to traditional theoretical debates in sociology over the conditions of social integration and social solidarity" (1990: 189).

Curiously, in every modern state, there is always a one-to-one correlation and connection between the idea of the state and the concept of citizenship. Citizenship is about a state. In other words, the hallmark of a modern nation-state is citizenship. Simply stated, therefore, citizenship refers to the idea or the fact of belonging to a state. Scant reflection is needed to see the link between the two concepts. To speak in logical terms, talk of a state implies the existence of citizenship. In other words, a state constitutes a necessary condition for the existence of citizenship rights. The concept of the state is unquestionably influential in the analysis of the political process of most African countries. Even in distant Europe, the era of the state and its relative significance in understanding the political process is not yet over. According to Miliband (1973: 1), it is for the attention of the state that men compete for as they compete and interact on daily basis. Serious academic analyses of the nature, dynamics and role of the state are varied. In all, the state is not simply an inert abstraction; it is, above all, argued Young (1993: 29), a historical actor, a collective agent of macro political process.

With respect to citizenship in every modern state, two basic ideas attract attention. These are the civil-political and the social components. The former refers to the constitutional and juridical norms that define the legal powers that are possessed by a citizen. These includes rights

to participate in the exercise of public power, in political decision-making, rights to freedom of speech, thought and association, rights to take action in the courts of law etc. This cluster of civil-political rights and their corresponding obligations, argues Scott (1994: 61) "need not involve a full system of political 'democracy'... but it does imply a certain degree of democracy among those who are accorded the status of citizenship."

According to Marshall (1949: 74), the social component of citizenship involves a person's right to "share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being." According to Marshall, the structure of citizenship in every modern state entails the recognition of rights and their guarantee, and of course, the owing of duties and the respective commitments attached to them. In the words of Marshall,

Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed (1949: 87).

The two component highlighted above correspond to the first-order and second order construct respectively. Such theoretical constructs are normally appropriated from everyday life before being given their specialised and technical meanings. Since a theory is essentially a systematic mesh of interconnected concepts which purports to characterise, describe and explain reality (Vincent, 1987: 40), these constructs might help us approach better the perennial difficulties and peculiarities inherent in the notion of citizenship and its place in the politics of the Nigerian situation. To this end, the first-order construct on the idea of citizenship is one which approximates the legal or political conception. However, the existence of this conception of citizenship is at best queasy. In fact, it is a mark of intellectual bravery to contend that the constitutional or legal conception is either in abeyance or simply non-existent in most African countries, Nigeria being a prime example. It is to this end that Taiwo (1996: 15) contended

that “beyond phrase-mongering, there are no citizens in Nigeria, only citizens of Nigeria.” The second-order construct, I believe, is so central to an intellectual understanding of the predicament of Nigerian politics. This is so in as much as it helps us to define the social conditions in which the nature of citizenship can be best defined. Scott (1994: 46) has argued that this construct on the conception of citizenship herein referred to as the sociological conception, is important because of its role in our understanding of the social conditions in some societies where the legal status, and by inference, the first-order construct is not recognised and where the idea of citizenship which are found preponderant in people’s awareness and acceptance is one that comprises a whole complex of institutions, practise, and conventions that may be embodied, in often contradictory ways, in the cultural and sub-cultural perspectives of a society and which will inform its political and ideological struggles. What then are the peculiarities inherent in the conception of citizenship in Nigeria?

Ekeh (1972: 77-99; 1975: 104-111; 1978: 317-320) has preserved for the intellectual mind a wealth of unbroken analysis and valid interpretation on the salient features of the notion of citizenship in Africa. In the remaining part of this essay an attempt is made to apply these features as valid in explaining citizenship problems and how they tantalise the political process.

According to Ekeh, three principal contradictory notion of citizenship, in terms of rights and duties, are manifest generally in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. These are:

1. Identification of citizenship with rights, and not with duties;
2. Dissociation of rights and duties in the conception of citizenship;
3. The development of two publics, in respect of the conception of citizenship, in political life: an amoral civic public from whom rights are expected, duties not owed; a moral primordial public defined in terms of one’s ethnic groups, to which one’s duties are paid, but we never expect any right (1978: 317-320).

It is a proposition too plain to be contested that the character of citizenship varies systematically between different societies. Turner (1990: 195) has argued that the emergence

and conception of citizenship is made more meaningful when considered in the light of the “very different and specific histories...” of specific societies. Marshall’s historical and theoretical analysis of citizenship presents a sense of curious and crucial relevance. Parson and Clark (1966) are of the view that Marshall’s work on citizenship was used as a framework for handling the problems of ethnic and race relations in the American society. In Britain, however, Marshall’s work, contends Titmuss, formed the basis of citizens’ agitation for state provision of national welfare (1963).

Despite recent critiques of the Marshallian concept of citizenship, his work, no doubt, has succeeded in shifting the treatment of citizenship away from the arid legalistic notions in which the term is clustered. It is impressive to note that his analyses of the concept have created a dazzling awareness in the context of nation building and historical development.

Cast in this light, it is an intellectual position to defend and pursue that citizenship in Nigeria is partial and contingent. Citizenship in the political sociology of Nigeria is now defined as exclusion, not inclusion. In fact, the emergence of citizenship sentiments in Nigeria has its profound base in the particularities of birth, ethnic considerations, emphasis on geographical location etc. It appears to me that the fact of ethnic background is often emphasised at the expense of other more important facts of national life. There is a relentless geographical logic that best defines citizenship in Nigeria: this logic places citizen’s allegiance in the form of a triangular contest of North-versus-West-versus-East. In the Nigerian setting, Citizenship is now defined and conceived at the sub-state level. Every Nigerian experiences a sense of belonging and commitment only in the context of his homeland where he can return to, be accepted and where he recognises and voluntarily accepts that he owes duties and obligations while, talk about rights is at best mute. “While a Nigerian nationality is non-existent, properly speaking, citizenship is operative at the homeland level” (Ifidon, 1996: 103). The over-politicisation of ethnicity has a boomerang effect on the stability of the Nigerian state: it erodes the substance, basis and status of a common Nigerian citizenship. Following political independence, most African states have found it increasingly difficult to establish a sustainable

democratic culture. A prominent feature of the lack of such democratic culture is the absence, on the collective sense, of a national identity. It is believed that the existence of diverse and distinct ethnic groups within a single state accounts for the slow progress that most African countries have been experiencing in the area of democratic development. For many of these countries, it is still a practical impossibility for citizens generally to transfer their loyalty from their ethnic groups to the national state. In fact, part of the problem may well be that there are no national states in the actual sense.

One of the fundament of citizenship in the modern world is the freedom to locate anywhere, enjoy the rights and privileges of a citizen in any location of that relevant polity. According to Taiwo "part of what typifies citizenship, especially in the modern state, is the de-emphasising of geography and other natural facts in its composition... the freedom to locate anywhere within the boundaries of the relevant polity is non-existent in Nigeria. That is, Nigerian citizenship is merely geographical, it is without moral-ideological content (Taiwo, 1996: 16).

The analysis above is given a well-rounded meaning when estimated in the light of the problem of statehood. One of the crucial defects in the nation-state formula of most Third World countries is not just of ethnic pluralism, but primarily the breakdown of the rational capacity of the state in regulating the status of ethnic relation amongst these competing groups. Quoting Chris Uroh, "the moral bond that tied the citizen to the state, the real basis upon which the state could justify its power over the citizen, has slacked, if not totally cut... those who have lost confidence in the state have found succour in their primordial groupings, especially their ethnic communities" (1998: 101). One obvious evidence of this phenomenon is what Young (1993: 3-35) describes in the following words "the nation has in fact become the body which legitimises the state...where the state is based on any principle other than the national one, as is by definition, the case in any imperial system, its foundations are immediately suspect in a nationalist age."

After independence, the state failed to convince its citizens, in stentorophonic terms, that there is a common goal or culture to pursue and achieve regardless of nationalist sentiments and fervour, a sentiment that Buzan

characterised as a negative group unity and a "bond of xenophobia" which disintegrated once the euphoria of independence subsided (Buzan, 1991). Prominent in the whole agenda of this disintegration is the lack of autonomy on the part of the state and the problem of political domination by the dominant ethnic group that has succeeded in holding onto power to the exclusion of other ethnic groups. Given this panorama of political domination, it is straightforwardly easy to politicise one's ethnic background in terms of access to political power, advantages and benefits. Ethnicism then becomes the order of the day. The politicisation of one's ethnic background within a nation-state erodes the substance of citizenship. In some obvious cases (such as the Nigerian experience), the origin and the contemporaneity of such politicisation of ethnic background can be traced.

Curiously, the revealing feature of Nigeria's political history and development, in relation to the struggle and the structure of the control of power is the emphasis on the geographical part of the country from which each party comes from, the identity of the candidates aspiring for power i.e. whether from the north or south and a whole lot of emphasis on the primordial order or the sub-state level where each contestants comes from, the most revered being the presidency.

But then, what accounts for this peculiar brand and recurrent diacritic of citizenship notions in Nigeria? Generally, the following serves as very important clues (some connected with history and some with logic) to understanding the origin of the problem of citizenship in a country like Nigeria, for instance.

One, after the period of decolonisation, evidences of wide ranged problems of assimilative and integrative nationhood began to emerge. Integrative nationhood has been defined by J. F. Ade Ajayi as the process by which hitherto distinctive and autonomous peoples and cultures incorporated into a multinational state can achieve higher levels of mutual trust, co-operation and interdependence, shared values, common identity and national consciousness (1984: 1). However, the colonial history of the newly independent Nigeria revealed obviously that the country was not in any sense a united country. Today, many Nigerians still refer, in the light of the problem of national integration and unity, to the entity of Nigeria as the mistake of 1914 when Lord Lugard

amalgamated the southern and northern protectorates. The nucleus of the blunder can be validated in the fact that Nigeria is a country exhibiting diversity in ethnic nationalities, language, religion, culture, topography etc.

The merging of these nationalities was carried out in the bid to achieve colonial convenience in the administration of the country. The logic of colonial convenience brought in its wake manipulative tendencies and intrigues to put the whole country in check. This manipulative proclivity has found its way into the orbit of political interaction, feeling and consciousness. It is believed that the amalgamation saga is a contributory factor in the non-existence of a united Nigeria where all can have a sense of belonging, the pride of citizenship. An appropriate example of that general belief can be deciphered in the following:

The West Coast of the African continent was not to be the same again in 1914 when the colonial Governor General, Frederick Lugard, decreed into existence Nigeria comprising the southern and Northern protectorates. What had been forced into a union so casually were over 250 hitherto independent ethnic nationalities. Lugard invented an empire but failed to create the denizens for that idealised nation. The pans are what we bear today (Odion, 1999: 5).

Two, the political leaders and the government of the newly independent country failed to convince the citizens that there was a common goal to achieve and a common culture to build. The essence of a participatory, national culture argues Kwame Gyekye is the shared sense of commitment. In his words, a common culture is:

A culture whose meanings have become homogenised and can, thus, be said to be generally shared by all the citizens of a nation, one whose basic values are cherished by the citizens and considered as constituting the social context within which the individual citizens perceives herself as an individual with goals, hopes, aspiration, and life projects (1997: 107).

However, the sentiments that accompanied independence was rather overwhelming at first but was found to be superficial, what Buzan described as a 'bond of xenophobia' and negative group unity (Buzan, 1991).

Three, the state was used and ended up as an instrument of political domination by the majority group that succeeded in controlling state power at independence. This is what

Myron Weiner tagged the development of a 'mono-ethnic tendency'. According to Weiner,

In country after country, a single ethnic group has taken control over the state and used its powers to exercise control over and used its power to exercise control over others... In retrospect there has been far less 'nation-building' than many analysts had expected or hoped, for the process of state-building has rendered many ethnic groups devoid of power or influence (Weiner, 1987).

Historically, the state in Nigeria i.e. post-colonial state was anteceded by the colonial state. Its manifest features and characteristics should then be seen as a derivative of those striking qualities possessed by the colonial state. Principally, the colonial state emerged, in Nigeria, through conquest. To this end, it was a creature of specific historical circumstances. Conquest was the means by which the British foreign power gained ascendancy over the management of the colonial territories. Thus established, the colonial state not only represented the interest of its foreign allies, it also, through the process of exploration, acquaintance, identification, acceptance and consolidation, swayed high in the control of the content and direction of policies in the colonial territory. To have been based on conquest, force, not consent, the colonial state by all stretch of the imagination introduced into Nigerian politics the problem of legitimacy.

Recognising its illegitimacy, the colonial state succeeded in "holding down a conquered people through the process of pacification that involved the use of violent and non-violent means" (Nnoli, 1995: 45). Hence, as Bayart (1986: 112) rightly observes, the colonial state, and by inference the post-colonial state, was an excrescence in that it did not, as in Europe or Asia, grow organically from and against the civil society. In fact, as Nnoli (1995: 45) contends the colonial state that emerged in Nigeria differed remarkably from its Western counterpart, which had the sole function of mediating class interests.

Its central function was the establishment, sustenance and consolidation of capitalism and capitalist tendencies in Nigeria. According to Diamond (1988: 28-30) the colonial state dwarfed all other organised elements of the economy and society with state control extended over all minerals and mineral exploitation in Nigeria. In the same vein, Nnoli (1995: 48) argued that the

“colonial state was never a neutral mediator between foreign capitalists and the Nigerian people in this construction of capitalism. It was a partisan activist. It destroyed all local substitutes for foreign imports and restricted competitive local manufacturers whose industries were highly developed.” Private enterprises were discouraged, with the state emerging as the highest employer of labour. The colonial state was the dominant economic actor. It created a currency; it levied taxes; it developed markets; it codified the uses of labour; it introduced new crops; it controlled production, internal trade and export; it brought in foreign labourers or encouraged settlers. Above all, the colonial state sought to integrate the economies of the colonies into the imperial economy and in so doing it was at once the arbiter and the main agent of economic activity.

One more feature of the colonial state, and of major importance to this study, is the coercive and principally, the centralised nature of the state. There is no gainsaying the fact that all states possess the monopoly over the weapon of force and coercion and, to this extent, may decline to the use of force to either exact obedience or resist any attempt at civil disobedience on the part of the colonial subjects. It was necessarily coercive because of the centralised structures it mounted in the management of the colonial territory. The colonial state was centralised because its legitimacy ultimately depended on its ability to control and manage the political community it created rather than on enabling representation of its constituent parts. This centralised feature of the state has great implications for citizenship status and condition as I hope to show. The tip of the matter is that it was far away from its subjects and was not accountable to them nor was it representative of their views and opinions. The colonial state was never defined in relation to its constituents or part: rather the constituent parts were defined in relation to the state (Chabal, 1994: 76). In a nutshell, the history of the state in Nigeria, as a derivative of the colonial state, is that of domination. To this end, it was indeed possible for there to emerge citizenship problems for the fact of domination has vitiated the moral bond that ought to exist between the state and its citizens.

Four, the emergent state not only was dominated by a single ethnic group, it had, in

consequence, the problem of lack of autonomy to dissociate itself from the ruling, dominant class and, hence, the inability to mediate between contending social forces. Claude Ake tagged such a state “a specific modality of class domination”(1985:1).

Five, the notion of legitimacy for the post-colonial state became suspect. The state legitimacy became defined not by the role of the state in the political community but by the successful capture of power. Moreover, the state became legitimated by the nation that has control over it. “The nation” says Young “has in fact become the body which legitimises the state”(1993: 3-35).

Lastly, the history of Nigerian federalism presents to the observing, careful analyst a world of fantastic contradictions. A very important aspect of a true federal state is the assurance that the constitutional allocation of power is consistent with the real distribution of power. Writing on the basic contradiction that led to the collapse of the First Republic, Richard Sklar opines that “the constitutional allocation of power is inconsistent with the real distribution of power in society” (1965: 201). According to Sklar, the constitution gave dominant power to numerical majority i.e. under existing conditions, to the north-but the real distribution of power is determined by technological development, in which respect the South is superior. Moreover, it is also true of a federal state that no part of the federation should be greater than the other components of that federation. A negation of this classic federal thesis has continued to exhibit a corrosive effect on citizenship sentiments. In Nigeria, the Northern elites refusal to share power is the single most important reason why tribes have been resurgent and ethno national consciousness has come to transcend and override overall Nigerian Nationalism

The theoretical analysis above can be empirically validated in the political history of Nigeria. Two periods in Nigeria’s political history appears particularly germane and significant in this journey into historical facts. Two principles have emerged and evolved within these periods and they have helped to define properly the main concern of this paper. The first principle is that of Federal Character. The second principle refers to the principle of Rotational Presidency and Power Shift. The first principle was very prominent in the wake of the Second Republic

politics while the Second principle was evoked into Nigerian politics in the wake of the Fourth Republic. Both periods and principles happen to be a watershed in Nigeria's attempt to construct and consolidate a democratic culture and future. The first period refers to the emergence of the Second Republic in Nigeria 1979-1983. The second principle was the platform on which the present Republic of democratic rule was ushered in. In this section of the paper, both principles and periods in Nigeria's political history shall be closely examined. This close examination will bring to the fore the salience and the import of the politicisation of ethnicity and its effect on the concept of citizenship in Nigeria.

THE SECOND REPUBLIC, PRINCIPLE OF FEDERAL CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP IN NIGERIA

There are many dimensions to the emergence of the Second Republic in Nigeria. One historic phenomenon in the history of Nigeria has been the rule of the military. Before the emergence of the Second Republic, the military class dominated the Nigerian political scenery. Its emergence in and sway from 1966 to 1979 was argued to be a corrective regime. Moreover, the era of the military was also believed to serve as a means of suspending, if not resolving, the contradictions between democracy and the existent socio-political reality of the Nigerian condition.

That military regime cannot perform the messianic role it assigned for itself can be suitably established and validated in the fact that under it Nigeria went through a civil war that lasted for 3 years. The war ended up intensifying one of the very ills that military regimes sought to correct: the feeling of ethnic mistrusts, insecurity, and alienation. The summary of this can be validated in Nnoli's concise but partial rendering of the war. According to Nnoli, "the overall effect of the war was twofold: the strengthening of the country's territorial integrity and the intensification of ethnicity. Inter-ethnic violence is a pernicious contributor to the growth of ethnicity ...the individual's identity and sense of exclusiveness are vividly defined as each set of violence reinforces his feeling of being different and of being able to count only on members of his group for action, security and welfare..." (1995: 141).

The principle of federal character was first introduced into Nigerian politics by the Late General Murtala Mohammed. In an address at the inauguration of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) on October 18, 1975, General Mohammed established the fact that the concept of federal character was the basis on which the Second Republican 1979 Constitution was to stand. In that maiden address, the concept was necessary to ensure (i) the existence of genuine and truly national political parties; (ii) the promotion and sustenance of an Executive Presidential System of Government in which officers are elected with clearly defined powers and are accountable to the people. These officers are to be brought into office in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of the country. Moreover, their choices are also to reflect the federal character of the country. What then is federal character?

The principle of federal character as outlined in that maiden and historical speech was defined by the Constitution Drafting Committee. According to this committee,

The principle of federal character refers to the distinctive desires of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, and harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Williams, 1976: x).

Underlying this principle is the troubled nature of the federal arrangement in Nigeria, a situation in which every ethnic group makes a demand for recognition in the affairs of the country. In one word, therefore, the principle is meant to promote national unity and loyalty in the multicultural and multiethnic Nigerian society. Moreover, it is a calculated device to curtail the problem of domination in Nigerian socio-political setting. Historically, it means balancing the North and the South. It is therefore a device to correct an existing anomaly, a negative orientation in Nigerian politics.

However, the political development and experiences of the Second Republic reveals clearly the problematic nature of the concept of federal character. In 1979 for example, political parties were formed along ethnic lines. Moreover, political alignments were also carried out in the

light of ethnic sentiments. Furthermore, the voting pattern revealed curiously the fact that Nigerian citizenship was not really intact. Thus the principle of federal character, far from leading to national unity, had engendered more inter-ethnic bitterness, rivalry and acrimony. Rather than lessening the pains of inter-ethnic rivalry, the principle ended up in blowing the problem out of proportion. In the end, what was to serve as a corrective principle ended up having a damaged effect on the idea of a Nigerian citizenship. The principle made Nigerians aware more of their communal background than the building of a common feeling of loyalty to the Nigerian federation. It made some aware of their disadvantages while increasing the awareness of ethnic superiority in some others. With this, it becomes increasingly impossible to prevent the occurrence of domination on one hand and the case of the dominated. In fact, it makes it possible for an ethnic group to define citizenship of the polity in very curious and strange terms.

In very serious terms, the principle of federal character is only an evidence of the fact of the existence of citizenship problems in Nigeria. A corrective principle is always a prime indicator of an existent problem. Principles of federal character and such other concepts only make the desired unity and progress elusive. Our connection with the race is merely natural or physical while our duties to the political nation are ethical and moral. What is needed is a rational balance of the implications of ethnicity with the requirements of democratic citizenship.

ROTATIONAL PRESIDENCY, CITIZENSHIP STAKES AND NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

In general, the most outstanding constitutional innovation and political phenomenon coming from the 1994-95 National Constitutional Conference consists in the provision for the rotation of executive power at the Federal, State, and Local Governments in the new 1999 constitution. Exhibiting political pragmatism, nothing short of that move could have assuaged the centrifugal forces that had almost torn the country into shreds as a result of years of bitter experiences of domination and alienation.

In Nigeria, domination and marginalisation have been, at the national level, seen in terms of monopoly of power by the North, and the use of

this power to secure political privileges for the people who come from there. The height of such bitter experiences of alienation and domination got to its climax in the annulment of the June 1993 presidential election. Chief Moshood Abiola, a Southern Moslem, was presumed to have won that election. Given the religious dimension to politics in Nigeria, the people from the south were miffed at what the Northern cabal who are mainly Moslems could do to a fellow Moslem who picked another Moslem as his running mate. This is part of the hard feeling which has encrusted in the south which is dominantly Christian. The feeling seems to be that if the south could even forego the issue of religion in order for a southerner to emerge as president, and that did not even satisfy Northern ruling cabal, then nothing else in the country could assuage their thirst for power. All these are the reasons for the heated debate about the issue of rotational presidency and power shift.

“Rotational presidency” simply means that the office of president shall rotate among the six geo-political zones created for that in Nigeria. These zones are the following:

North West: Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, and Kaduna.

North East: Borno, Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi, Gombe, and Yobe

North Central: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau.

South West: Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, and Oyo

South South: Edo, Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, and Rivers.

South East: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo.

The essence of the idea of rotational presidency, according to its inventors, is the correction of an historical error in the nature of groups access to political power and its fruits. In other words, rotational presidency has the added advantage of ensuring change in the location of power from the north where it has been held captive for long to the south.

Predictably, rotational presidency and power shift are ideas pointing back to the past. They tend to picture the historical error in the logical construction of the Nigerian nation-state. Besides, they present a graphic illustration of the resonating views all along that Nigeria is never a united entity. The solution they seem to proffer is that it is only by assuaging ethnic

nationalities that national integration and identity can be achieved. In this direction, the dynamic nature of society is not taken into consideration. Borrowing from the logical paradigms of Christ, ethnicism cannot be cast out by ethnicism, no matter how cloaked in rotational presidency or power shift.

Besides, apart from the fact that rotational presidency is a self-serving ideology for the political class, it has to be observed that neither it nor power shift can be equated with the collective ego of any ethnic nationality. None of them can, in itself, be a focal point of sub-national identities, not to talk of leading to the formation of a national identity. They all subsume individual rights and privileges under a false ideology. The psychological succour that they can provide for the ethnic nationalities could easily turn into a psychopathic trauma when members of ethnic nationalities feel betrayed by their own sons, as has been the case with malfunctioning governors of states and chairmen of local governments.

Again, there is no inherent logical connection between the idea of rotational presidency and power shift and national integration/identity. This follows from the fact that there is also no necessary logical implication between the absence of rotational presidency/power shift and national identity. Indeed, countries that have achieved a great sense of social cohesion and identity did not model their system of political succession on the basis of rotational presidency/power shift. China, America, Japan, Sweden, etc. are good examples. Indeed, there is nothing in the idea of rotational presidency/power shift that can in itself guarantee the emergence of national identity.

In the final analysis, rotational presidency and power shift are not products of popular collective decisions or consensus. They, in practical terms, do not reflect the commonly held view that the people are the sovereign in any given political community. In fact, they are antagonistic to popular sovereignty being one of the several ways in which the collective sovereignty of the people in a given political association are undermined. Under these circumstances, no national identity can emerge in Nigeria. In fact, the adoption of rotational presidency is an ample demonstration of citizenship stakes in the accidental collocation of atoms called Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Although Nigeria has experienced a rich and complex history of popular struggles for the expansion of citizenship rights, the culture of subordination - especially as it concerns racial, ethnic, and class configurations and differentiation - has a deep and significant historical continuity. As a result, these phenomena do not necessarily disappear with the adoption of corrective principles. Not even in the face of transition to an electoral system. They tend to linger rather than losing strength. It is, however, of interest to engage in philosophic clarification and interpretive methodologies in the analyses of these terms and concepts as they relate to the African continent.

KEYWORDS Ethnicity; ethnicism; citizenship; nation-states; philosophy

ABSTRACT The concept of ethnicity continues to attract lots of debates and intellectual analyses. Termed the resilient paradigm, ethnicity accounts for a greater percentage of the analyses by scholars on the problems confronting Africa. Problems such as conflict, violence, corruption and democratic problematic are often attributed to the resilience of ethnicity. This paper attempts to show that whereas the concept of ethnicity has been dubbed evil it is an innocent phenomenon. The paper discovers that ethnicity, as a concept, is politically neutral. Ethnicity is a biological term, connoting the absence of a deliberate choice. It is the politicisation of our origin, root, etc., especially for the purpose of political advantage that results in inter-ethnic opposition, hindered group interaction and political conflict. The paper further argued that, in the bid to control and dominate the state, what result is the 'politicisation of ethnicity'. The paper concluded that the politicisation of ethnicity should not be considered a constant factor in every plural setting, although the potential for it may be present. What activates this potential differs from one setting to the other but, essentially, they are variables contingent upon other factors that can be distinguished one from the other.

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