

# **Postmodernism, citizenship and the African predicament: a critical reflection**

***Idowu William***

## **Introduction**

The history of postcolonial Africa is characterised by multiple unpleasant and difficult situations. One catchy phrase that encapsulates the heart of Africa's postcolonial predicament is the 'crisis of development'. This is reflected in the social, political and economic spheres of the African cast. Significantly, apart from rare exceptions, the crisis of development is manifest from one end of Africa to the other. Be that as it may, the problems faced by Africa are daunting and my guess is that these problems are unlikely to be solved solely through reliance on the West alone.

In down-to-earth language, one of the obdurate problems of African countries today is 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, E. K. 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 (1968:560), "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."

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 its historical evidence. There are varying opinions in these attempts at objectifying and situating the historical evidence for this perennial complex. There is the strong assertion, in stentorophonic 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 peculiarity and idiosyncrasies of each of those colonial territories. Undoubtedly, the intractable problem of nation-building in Africa is partly the result of the imposition on African peoples of the boundaries drawn by the Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth century. These boundaries were such that they failed to take into account the cultures and characteristics of the different people placed within the same territorial borders.

However, in very significant and provocative senses, Africa is undergoing moments of rapid expansion and change. The rapidity of these changes and expansions are partly due to enormous cultural influences. And what is more, the introduction of cash economies, modern technology, industrialisation and the changing patterns of population arising from migration within and outside, have all contributed to the rapidity of the changes experienced in the African continent. The challenge before the continent, in spite of these changes and expansions, is making an attempt to transcend the bewildering complexities and the confining nature that characterise the African formation. The attempts to transcend these barriers have been rather episodic.

One of the dramatic changes and expansions that the African continent has continued to witness especially in the light of contact with the West and with a profound influence on the texture of its political and socio-economic landscape is the idea of postmodernism. The aim of the paper is not really to break new grounds in the area of citizenship philosophy. Its aim is modest but not unimportant. It is entirely a reflective interpretation of postmodernist philosophy in the light of the African predicament viewed from the perspective of citizenship and nation-building. In it, an attempt is made to understand the enigmatic place of postmodernism on citizenship notions in Africa.

The paper argues that the African predicament offers an excellent and current critique of postmodern conception of citizenship. In fact, the uncertain nature of Africa's post-colonial political and social formations and the lingering crisis of identity are telling arguments on the irrelevance of postmodernism both as a conceptual and practical framework or blueprint for the African continent. The discussion shall bear the following character: citizenship theorisation, postmodern conception of citizenship and the application of postmodernism to the African predicament.

## **Citizenship theories and theorisation**

It is no misnomer to contend that even though philosophical terms derive or begin from everyday usage, evidently, it does not arise from them. In philosophical usage, citizenship transcends the idea of mere belongingness to a country by legal definition. It refers to the substantive, normative ideal of membership and participation in a political community. In other words, it reflects the idea of equality of political members of that society. It is, in the philosophical sense, a democratic ideal. However, just what the ideals of democracy, equality and participation are makes the idea of citizenship as contestable as the terms consulted in aiding its definition.

According to Gallie (1968), “‘Citizenship’ is an essentially contested concept, with its meanings having always emerged in disputed and recursive use”. In preliminary understanding, citizenship is taken to be the meaning of membership in a political community. Just what “membership” means in a political society can be troubling. Again, even though “membership” may be formally or procedurally specified, the idea of a “community” has all the vagueness of both its popular and social scientific usage. It too is recursive, being a “birth-to-presence of a form of being which pre-exists” the conditions of its re-inventions (Rose 1999:177). This line of thinking elicits the endless debate between libertarians and communitarians over the most important category of social reality and existence.

Aristotle, the greatest thinker of antiquity, attempted bailing the modern world out of this fuzziness in meaning. But then, his analysis and conception entailed some obfuscation. According to Aristotle, “What effectively distinguishes the citizen proper from all others is his participation in giving judgement and in holding office” (1997:1275a 22). To understand citizenship, in the Aristotelian sense, is to understand what participation means. But then, there are many political and moral, ethical dimensions to participation which makes an analysis of citizenship quite complex. To this end, citizenship thus becomes entrapped in bewildering conceptual complexities. In fact, according to White and Donoghue (2002:3), as long as the meaning of citizenship is entrapped in a form of dependence on words and terms such as ‘membership’, ‘participation’ ‘community’ etc, what it means and what it is meant to be must remain uncertain, and possibly too, unsettled.

Liberalism and civic republicanism represents two great historical traditions in the conceptualisation of citizenship. Respectively, citizenship is seen to involve rights and political obligation. Liberalism places the individual on a higher pedestal above the community while republicanism exalts the ideals of the community above the interests of the individual. This accounts for the distinction, according to Oldfield (1990), between citizenship as a status and as a practice.

For Soysal (1994:2), 'Citizenship defines bounded populations, with a specific set of rights and duties, excluding "others" on the grounds of nationality'. Furthermore, Soysal states that 'citizenship assumes a single status; all citizens are entitled to the same rights and privileges' (1994:141). Elsewhere, Soysal writes that citizenship 'denotes participatory practices and contestations in the public sphere' (1997:501). Citizenship, according to Jacobson (1996:9), fulfils two important tasks: it determines the criteria of membership and 'the "conversation" between the individual and the state'.

In line with Jacobson, Crompton (1993:139) opines that citizenship denotes "full and participating membership of a nation-state, that is, it does not necessarily incorporate all persons resident within a given territory." In a related sense, Hill argued that the concept of citizenship embraces a range of positions. Traditionally, Hill contends, citizenship as a status, denotes rights and duties constitutionally guaranteed to all members of society. He further argues, 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). In a sense, citizenship can be seen as an important locus of the struggle for Inclusion.

With respect to power, different attitudes to citizenship notions lie beneath the problem of integration in the political sociology of developing nations. According to Bryan Turner (1990:89), "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." As rightly observed by Bryan Turner, the question of citizenship is central to the process of integration. In unequivocal terms, however, the notion of integration in the light of citizenship presupposes the idea of equal rights. The end point of citizenship as a means of integration is equality of rights of the population.

## **Postmodernism and citizenship**

One of the most influential doctrines in the history of the conceptualisation of citizenship, apart from the Marshallian model, is the idea of postmodernism. In general, postmodernism is a Western invention. In the primary sense, it is a reactive theory. As a reactive theory, it cuts across various disciplines such as jurisprudence, epistemology, ethics, political and social philosophy, literature and critical theory etc. In the last half of the twenty-first century, postmodernism, apart from feminism, appears to have dramatic influence in practical and conceptual responses to the problems of our modern world. In fact, in the important sense, feminism owes some bit of conceptual and theoretical gratitude to postmodernism. Significantly, in relation to citizenship, postmodernism represents a novel perspective and alternative to the dramatic failures and defects of orientalism and synoecism that are thought primeval to Western notions of citizenship. It is, in the larger sense, a rejection of the grounding of citizenship notions in universalistic premises. A basic treatment and analysis of these two strands of Western notions of citizenship will help us understand better postmodern notions of citizenship.

Orientalism, in citizenship notions, divides the world to that of the irrational and the rational. Oriental cultures lack the idea of citizenship. This is because it is, for most of the time, irrational, religious and traditional. The other divide of orientalism sees citizenship as a phenomenon that is uniquely occidental. It is this modern version and dimension of orientalism that perceives the idea of the citizen in terms of rationality and virtue, making an average citizen as one without any attachment with kinship ties. But this can only be understood if only we understand that orientalism divides the world into two civilisations: the pre-modern and the modern.

The pre-modern is largely irrational, religious and traditional while the modern is rationalised, secularised and of course, expectedly, modernised. The pre-modern bloc has no true and valid image of true citizenship; the notion of citizenship is inherently lacking in such oriental cultures. It is the modern that approximates the idea of citizenship in terms of rationality and virtue, qualities and characteristics which pave the way for detachment and dissociation from kinship and tribal characteristics. This contribution to citizenship is an entirely occidental affair.

The second perspective is synoecism. According to this perspective, citizenship connotes and embodies a sense of spatial and political unification. Synoecism constructs images of citizenship as fraternity, equality, liberty, expressing a unified and harmonious polity, and of the citizen as a secular and universal being without tribal loyalties. In very crude language, synoecism is an aspect of modernism that conceives the world in terms of the ideas of universality and abstract totalisation.

As a project within modernism, synoecism sponsors the idea of universal citizenship in which the barriers of ethnicism, racism, etc. are not object of contention but transcended by recourse to an idea of citizenship that is not local or contingent. Contingent factors are inherent frailties besetting the idea of a universal citizenship. Citizenship status should be cast in very unifying and universal terms. In other words, synoecism rejects spatial limitations in citizenship considerations. The claim of synoecists is not that those spatial limitations and barriers are non-existent, rather the claims of synoecism is the view that citizenship, as a status of the modern man, in any given nation-state, is imbued with much of rational and intellectual energy that surpasses the claims and attractions of tribalism, ethnicism and what have you.

In solid terms, what this turns out to mean is the view that synoecism imbues the idea of citizenship with the qualities of rationality and virtue, ideas that are germane in any serious intellectual definition of modern citizenship. In any case, it is clear from this that what synoecism sponsors and projects, in a quite fundamental way, is the ideals of modernism that commenced with the philosophy of Rene Descartes.

Descartes had invented a new formula for a vigorous pursuit of truth in the history of Western philosophy. This formula, according to Anthony Flew (1971) consisted in what can be called the era of intellectual autonomy i.e. our ability to think and reason ourselves. As a favourable item of modernism, intellectual autonomy resides and reflects, quite significantly, in our ability to transcend undue attachment to existing authorities, and by extension, identities – the church, the state and primordial attachments. Intellectual autonomy starts with a rejection of common sensism i.e. the reports of our senses. According to Descartes, common sense “is of everything in the world the best distributed, for everyone believes that he is so well provided with it that even those who are the most difficult to satisfy in every other respect do not usually demand more of this than they have” (Flew 1971:277).

In consequence, Descartes search was for what was certain and distinct that was incorrigible and free from error. Descartes charming approach was found in the power of human reason. Thus elevated, reason combined with science in dethroning religious dogma and an excessive attachment to authorities. It celebrated the existence of a new faith, faith in the power of reason. This new found faith in the power of reason became the cynosure of what is called the Enlightenment period in Western philosophy.

The Enlightenment philosophers opened up a new trust in the veracity of human nature, which is, the ability of the human subject to reason, to experience things themselves and to adopt an attitude of intellectual autonomy. It was a rejection of anything rooted in authority. Synoecism, in citizenship notions, is one of the several manifestations of the Enlightenment philosophy. Imbued with a heavy dose of Enlightenment, synoecism advocates for cosmopolitanism in citizenship i.e. ignoring national or tribal boundaries, rejecting sectarian affiliation or primordial attachment. Its ringing tone and motto was contentment with being citizens of the world alone.

The heartbeat and pulse of increasing interests in the Western notion of citizenship, according to Engin Isin (2002), is the need to avoid returning to orientalism and synoecism while at the same time inventing a new conception of Western citizenship. The critical task, therefore, for Western scholarship and Western notion of citizenship is to transcend the parochialism and myopism of orientalism and synoecism. A favourable Western agenda in the bid to transcend the boundaries of orientalism and synoecism is postmodernism. But then, what is postmodernism?

There have been many ways in which postmodernism as a project has been cast. In its essential form, however, postmodernism is conceived to represent a ragbag of objections, accusations, parodies, and satires of traditional philosophical concerns and pretensions. According to Solomon and Higgins (1996:300), postmodernism is a largely negative project. In their words, "postmodernism is, perhaps, the most unimaginative of names, suggesting only that it is "after", no longer "beyond", not even "here"(...)it is largely negative, rarely positive, the celebration of an ending but not clearly the marking of anything new. It rejects the old philosophical confidence and assertiveness." In its conceptual form, postmodernism is the rejection of the project of modernism that began with the Cartesian quest and search for a single absolute truth. The

obvious target in this whole panorama of intellectual outburst is Philosophy. For postmodernists such as Jean Francois Lyotard (1984), there no longer exists Philosophy with a capital P. There are only philosophies. There is no longer Truth, only discourses. There is no centre, only rapidly expanding margins (see Solomon and Higgins, 1996:300).

According to Lyotard, postmodernism designates a general condition of contemporary Western civilisation. It sees as non-existent in Western civilisation “grand narratives of legitimation” i.e. some set of overarching philosophies of history such as the Enlightenment story of the gradual but steady progress of reason and freedom, Hegel’s dialectic of Spirit coming to know itself, and famously, Marx’s idea of a progressive march towards a utopia through a class revolution. What is repulsive for Lyotard and other postmodernists is the fact that these explanations of the universe are merely meta-narratives giving credence to modernism in the interpretation of the problem of legitimation.

In fact, the evil of modernism, for postmodernists, as represented in the Enlightenment story, the Hegelian dialectics and the Marxist idea of the evolution of a classless society is the fact that first-order situations are legitimated and grounded within a broader totalising meta-discourse. Such meta-discourses are not to be seen as absolute in themselves but as an instance of one discourse out of a possible many. According to postmodernists, borrowing the phrase of Friedrich Nietzsche, there are only interpretations out of many different interpretations. In fact, no discourse is privileged to capture once and for all the truth of every first-order discourse.

The implication of this is the view that for postmodernist, legitimation, whether epistemic, moral or political, no longer resides in philosophical meta-narratives rendered in universalistic and absolute terms. Rather, for postmodernists, legitimation of first-order situations is to be grounded in plural, local and immanent conditions. Hence, there no longer exists universal notions of justice democracy, citizenship, etc. but multiplicities of justice, democracy and citizenship. According to Fraser and Nicholson (1997:135), Lyotard’s project can be seen as “the offering of a normative vision in which the good society consists in a decentralised plurality of democratic, self-managing groups and institutions whose members problematise the norms of their practice and take responsibility for modifying them as situations require.”



In consequence, postmodernism sponsors and celebrates the project of fragmentation in the world. This means a fragmentation of cultures, of meaning, of politics and political concepts, of ethics and moral truths, of the idea of justice, and most importantly, a rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* which defines the self in relation to what the human mind does and not in relation to a cosmic order. The fiction of the *cogito* "I think, therefore I am" should disappear from narratives and interpretations about the world (Solomon 1996:301).

### **Postmodernism, citizenship and the African predicament**

Viewed from this perspective, postmodernism not only poses grave challenges on orientalism and synoecism leading theories and conceptions on Western notions of citizenship, but also has serious implications for the idea of citizenship and nation-building in African countries in particular. Embedded in the innovative foundations and grounding of every given theory and postulations about the world are concomitant excesses and the possibilities of extremes. The excesses inherent in the postmodernist critique of existing notions of citizenship can be painted.

As a matter of fact, the implications of postmodernism on citizenship and nation-building particularly for African countries can be seen in a number of ways. In the first instance, since the notion of a unified citizenship has been demystified, then it presents the notion of fragmentation in the understanding and conception of citizenship. To this end, it transcends the idea of national citizenship that presents citizenship in a politically unified and wholistic sense.

Roughly, it posits the existence of a local, plural and immanent conception of citizenship. Again, it de-emphasises the idea of abstract universality in the definition of citizenship. The implication of this definition of citizenship is that groups that had hitherto been excluded in the definition of citizenship, now have an access not only to the status of citizenship but also in being accorded the privileges of citizenship. In a somewhat curious way, post-modern conception of citizenship is an inclusive thesis. Postmodernism, therefore, celebrates a *recognitive* or *inclusive* conception of citizenship. And this is so in as much as it is a challenge on one of the veritable premises of modernism, the idea of universalism or universalisation. According to Engin Isin (2002),

The struggles of recognition as claims to exercise citizenship rights, challenged one of the most venerable premises of modernisation—universalization—by exposing its limits. These struggles demonstrated that being a universal subject (Weber's pure citizen) did not necessarily guarantee rights let alone articulate duties. It also forced rethinking of fundamental categories of political discourse by critiquing totality, universality, unity and homogeneity that have been attributed to politics. New valorisations of multiplicity, diversity, heterogeneity, hybridity and syncretism in social and political discourse were neither consequences nor causes of 'deeper' changes or transformations but were themselves such changes or transvaluation of values.

In the second instance, the effect of postmodernism on citizenship can be seen in the fact that it accounts for the war and conflict inherent in the demonstration of ethno-nationalistic feelings and movements. In relevant terms, the African political and social spheres have been the theatre of unending and unbending conflicts that centres on the quest for self-determination. The history of inter-communal conflict and ethno-national struggles in Africa may not be traceable to postmodernism as a matter of primary influence but then it is one of the powerful forces giving energetic existence to the bid for self-determination in the world today.

In the main, therefore, one demonstrative fallout of postmodernism consists in the view that the idea of "difference" is very significant in explaining social reality and to this end, a dominant strategy in moving the world forward. Ironically, however, rather than ensuring progress, it has succeeded in pitting one group against another in what can be called the war of survival or the quest for self-determination. The issue then becomes that of the struggle for identity and recognition. In this sense, postmodernist politics elicits and accommodates the idea of splintered citizenship and identity. In concrete terms, pluralism becomes a fresh, innovative agenda and thesis of postmodern politics.

A very familiar phenomenon facilitated by this kind of quest and pluralism is the erosion of territorial integrity and juridical statehood of nation-states. When applied to groups within given nation-states, such as in African states, postmodern politics of pluralism facilitates the transformation of attempts by different groups for the recognition of their ethnic identities into a quest for

national self-determination. The grand effect of this postmodern trend on citizenship notions was succinctly put in a recent study. According to the observation of this study:

While the creation of some new states may be necessary or inevitable, the fragmentation of international society into hundreds of independent territorial entities is a recipe for an even more dangerous and anarchic world (Gottlieb, 1993:2).

On one hand, therefore, postmodern philosophy and politics is positive and also negative. It tries to give renewed vigour to the recognition of rights of groups to a stake in citizenship claims and status. In general, it has succeeded in projecting and developing a new paradigm in the understanding of citizenship. It takes the notion of citizenship away from its foundationalist structures built on the idea of universality to its contingent, partial and plurally situated character thereby making room available for what was conceived hitherto in an exclusionary manner. The gain, therefore, is the exposure of groups to a sense of meaning and belonging.

However, on the other hand, it is negative since it fosters the idea of a splintered citizenship. This is where postmodernist conception of citizenship is unhelpful to the African terrain. Trenchantly, even though the imperatives of postmodern political practice have saved Western notion of citizenship from one set of difficulties – the problem of universalism as invented in modernism – they have tended at times to incline it to another fresh set of difficulties. These difficulties, interpreted in the light of the African condition, make the notion of citizenship quite problematic and the whole process of nation-building quite enigmatic.

In fact, the major problem inherent in the implementation of the postmodern critique of Western notions of citizenship for most post-colonial African States, for instance, consists in the fact that the concept of citizenship owes its empirical validity to the existence and successful functioning of what can be called a heightened political culture which ensures the ability to manage pluralism in a multicultural, multiethnic societies. This, however, has been the bane of African countries.

The positive dimension of postmodernist notion of citizenship elicits the idea of the evolution of national citizenship and culture. In other words, the recognitive

thesis it endorses for hitherto excluded groups paves way for the sharing of a sense of participation. It is evolving what Gyekye (1997:107) calls a participatory national culture. Descriptively, in his words, it is:

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

It means the demonstration of the willingness to simultaneously meet the needs of the large majority of the populations.

However, the main challenge facing African notions of citizenship in the face of postmodernist conception of citizenship is how to accommodate and empower the multiplicity of identities, evolve a post-national image of citizenship and enhance the project of nation-building. This involves transcending the struggle of recognition and difference and evolving the culture of peaceful co-existence. It is regulating the wrenching of the many-sided identities prevalent in African countries. It also involves adopting a sovereignty that is not only shared by all but also that empowers all groups without compromising the ideal of national collective citizenship.

It is in this regard that postmodernist notion of citizenship is objected to in the light of the African predicament. In African countries, for instance, the idea of citizenship has been bedevilled in a number of ways. As a round up, I shall buttress these analyses drawing from some events and recent happenings in some African countries. Unfortunately, these conceptions of citizenship have ended up tantalising the democratic process in most of these African states. While the philosophical approach is a significant eye-opener to the wide panorama of options available for conceptualisation, the enterprise of scholarship in Africa loses direction if it stops at the level of abstract thought. These conceptions of citizenship accounts, in part, for the problematic nature of the nation-building project.

These conceptions of citizenship, in my view, manifest the following:

- Of importance to the field of political sociology is the analysis of Peter Ekeh (1978:317-20) on the nature of citizenship in Nigeria and the whole of Africa. According to Ekeh, three principal contradictory notions of citizenship, in terms of rights and duties, are manifest in Nigeria. These are:
  - Identification of citizenship with rights, and not with duties;
  - Dissociation of rights and duties in the conception of citizenship;
  - The development of two publics, in respect of the conception of citizenship, in political life: an amoral civic public from which rights are expected, duties are not owed; a moral primordial public defined in terms of one's ethnic group, to which one's duties are paid, but we never expect any right.
- The definition and ascription of citizenship notions and sentiments in the light of one's primordial base and ethnic origin. This has been one of the problems of citizenship and nation-building in Africa. Rather than lead to the survival of the nation-state, the definition and recognition of citizenship sentiments only at the level of primordial base has tended to weaken the idea of national citizenship. Reflecting on the Kenyan experience, Tom Mboya contended the following: "That we are born of different tribes we cannot change, but I refuse to believe that, because our tribes have different backgrounds and culture and customs, we cannot create an African community or a nation" (1993:70). Truly, the commitment to the goal of national citizenship has ended up hardening the boundaries of citizenship to the end that those on the right side of things are privileged while those on the wrong side are marginalised and denigrated. Interestingly, it is this kind of commitment that postmodernist critique of citizenship has been concerned with. But then, questioning the goal of national citizenship cannot solve the problem of exclusion of groups. In fact, one of the enduring tensions in the definition of citizenship in Africa and with an unspeakable effect on nation-building consists in the unwillingness to realign the framework of citizenship away from the ethnic and tribal cast to one of a national scope. One way of addressing the problem of exclusion of groups is the adoption of open policy with respect to

political power and the gains and benefits of public policies and resources. It is not restricting the ideals of national citizenship.

- The second skewed conception of citizenship in African countries is the emergence of the view that not all citizens are equal with respect to citizenship claims, stakes, rewards and responsibilities going by official practices, ideologies. In other words, there are first class citizens and second class citizens. The principal instrument in this pantomime of political intemperance is the domination of groups by another group. The translative effect is the view that not all can enjoy the fruit of citizenship. This was very pronounced in the case of the Rwandan civil war of 1994 between the Tutsis and the Hutus. The central problem in the Rwandan genocide consists in the issue of who is dominating who and what the effects of domination is. This problematic definition of citizenship also accounted for the struggle for self-determination witnessed in the Nigerian-Biafran civil war. The immediate cause of the civil war can be branded as a “crisis of confidence”. This crisis of confidence was rooted in the conflagration of pertinent issues that underpin the occurrence of two military coups within a period of six months. From all indications, it appears that the occurrence of the two coups, in particular the July 29<sup>th</sup> coup, bore in them some inherent contradiction and the manifestations of what Nunasu Amosu calls the “overestimation of the things that unite us, and worse still, in the underestimation of potential disruptive factors” (1966:117) that have the tendency and the inherent capacity to lull us into a state of complacency. Again, it can be branded as a culmination of both fundamental and immediate development of the centrifugal forces in Nigerian geo-political history. In all, a careful reading of the Biafran claim suggests the emergence of a crisis in the basis of national unity in this newly independent post-colonial structure. Stated succinctly, at the heart of these series of events is the emergence of conflicting interpretations and understanding of what constitute the basis and confidence of Nigerian citizenship.
- The wide gap between paper truth and empirical, practical and political reality in the definition and status of citizenship identity in the socio-political space. The Sudanese war of identity between the north and south brings to the fore the salience of this point. What is the normative definition of citizenship and identity in Sudanese constitutional policies

and practice? Obviously, there is no reconciliation between government policies or constitutional guarantee and official political practices. In Francis Deng's eloquent description (1995:4), the war in Sudan is that of the war of vision and the conflict of identities. In the final analysis, the attempt to defend one's identity in the whole lies beneath the war of identity in Sudan. The north had always conceived itself to be the custodian of the true Sudanese identity. This identity has always been construed by the North, in terms of Arabic and Islamic identities. This accounts for the reason why the north of Sudan often thinks it is a misnomer to think of Sudan as belonging to Black Africa, for instance. To this end, since the North had always been in charge of political power, it had used that power not only to define Sudanese citizenship and national identity in terms of Northern image and identity but also attempted assimilating other sections of the country into accepting this curious definition of Sudanese citizenship and identity through the process of Arabisation and Islamisation policies, and to turn it into a distorted image of its own. This is nothing other than exclusion and marginalisation. This image of Sudanese citizenship and identity has not gone down well with the southern Sudanese. The South, on the other hand, perceiving this scheme as a kind of cultural cloning, has always resisted it.

The quest for a stake in the whole national life has often resulted in what Deng described as the war of vision in Sudan. The quest for self-determination on the part of the Southern part of Sudan accounts for the perennial civil war and conflict witnessed in that country. It all boils down to the disparate attitudes on the part of the north and south of Sudan to what constitute the pragmatic constituents of constitutional citizenship in Sudan. Obviously, there is a wide difference between what the constitution states and its translation into practical political reality.

- The reduction of citizenship to mere formal and passive membership of the relevant political community rather than to a concrete form of substantive participation with respect to political power, competition. The imbroglio over the annulment of the 1993 presidential election in Nigeria is a case in point. The annulment saga raises fundamental questions with respect to the status of Nigerian citizenship.

These trends in the definition of citizenship often engender feelings of domination, marginalisation and alienation within the respective ethnic groups and communities. The resultant effect has been the outbreak of the war of self- or ethnic determination on the part of excluded groups in the realisation of their collective rights or stake in such political community. Thus, while postmodernism endorses the recognition of rights of groups in the definition of citizenship rights, this recognitive thesis or grounds have often provided the intellectual and practical stimulus for the war of identity in most African countries. In the bid to enforce their rights, groups have ended up engaging in the war of survival or ethnic self-determination.

## **Conclusion**

About all that has been said on the varying patterns on the notions of Western citizenship, this is the sum: citizenship is an essentially contested and contestable concept. The flaw and shortcoming of postmodernism in the face of the political economy of Africa is the failure to endorse and accommodate unity in the light of plurality that it advocates for. Therefore, the application of postmodern notion of citizenship to the African situation has the likelihood of portending a negative development for Africa's political economy. This negative development is cast in the language of the possibility of threat to the idea of national citizenship in the light of the plurality of interests.

## **Notes**

1. In some Western countries, such as Germany, France, Italy, the relation between citizenship and integration is not too clear because the concept of integration is somewhat interwoven with the concepts of assimilation and insertion.
2. Jean Francois Lyotard (1984). See also Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism" in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, edited by Diana Meyers, New York: Routledge, p. 134.
3. See Charles R. Nixon in Toyin Falola et al (eds.) (1994); Nnoli, O. (1995); Dirk-Greene, A. H. M. (1971.)

## **References**

- Amosu, N. 1966. *West Africa*. January 29, p. 117.  
Aristotle, (1997). *The Politics*. T. A. Sinclair and Trevor J. Saunders (eds trans) London: Penguin.



- Crompton, R. 1993. *Class and Stratification-an Introduction to Current Debates*. Oxford: Polity Press and Blackwell Publishers.
- Deng, M. F. 1995. *War of Vision, Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*. Washington, D.C.: The Bookings Institution.
- Dirk-Greene, A. H. M. 1971. *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Source Book 1966-1970, Vol. I*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ekeh, P. 1978. Colonialism and the Development of Citizenship in Africa: A Study in Ideologies of Legitimation. In O. Otite (ed), *Themes in African Social and Political Thought*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, pp. 302-334.
- Falola, T. et al (eds.) 1994. *The Military Factor in Nigeria 1966-1985*. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Flew, A. 1971. *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Francis, E. K. 1968. The Ethnic Factor in Nation Building. *Social Forces*, 46:338-46.
- Fraser, N. and Nicholson, L. 1997. Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism. In Diana Meyers (ed), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*. New York: Routledge; pp.132-146.
- Gallie, W. B. 1968. *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, (Second edition). New York: Schocken.
- Gottlieb, G. 1993. *Nation Against State: A New Approach to Ethnic Conflicts and the Decline of Sovereignty*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press.
- Gyekye, K.1997. *Tradition and Modernity- Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hill, D.M. 1994. *Citizens and Cities-Urban Policy in the 1990's*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Isin, E.F. 2002. Citizenship after Orientalism. In E.F. and B. Turner (eds) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. London: Sage
- Jacobson, D. 1996. *Rights Across Borders: Immigration and the Decline of Citizenship*. London: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Lyotard, J. F. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mboya, T. 1993. *Freedom and After*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Nettle, J. P. 1968. The State as a Conceptual Variable. *World Politics*. 20(4): 559-92.

- Nixon, C. R. 1972. Self-Determination: The Nigeria-Biafra Case. *World Politics*. 24(4):473-497.
- Nnoli, O. 1995. *Ethnicity and National Development in Nigeria*. Aldershot: Avebury Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Oldfield, A. 1990. *Citizenship and Community: Civic Republicanism and the Modern World*. London, Routledge.
- Solomon, R. and Higgins, K. M. 1996. *A Short History of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, N. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Soysal, Y. 1997. Changing parameters of citizenship and claims-making: organised Islam in European public spheres. *Theory and Society*. 26(4):509-27
- Soysal, Y. 1994. *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, B. S. 1990. Outline of a Theory of Citizenship. *Sociology* 24(2):189-217.
- White, R. and Donoghue, J. 2002. Marshall, Mannheim and Modern Citizenship. Refereed paper presented to the Jubilee conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association Australian National University, Canberra.

*Department of Philosophy*  
*Obafemi Awolowo University*  
*Ile-Ife*  
*Nigeria*  
*idwilly@yahoo.com*