

Contesting Exclusion: The Dilemmas of Citizenship in Nigeria

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Citizenship *is* struggle; it *is* (struggle for) community, it *is* (struggle for) belongingness, it *is* (struggle for) participation, citizenship *is* also reciprocity. However, there are various degrees of struggle, reciprocity and community embedded in different contexts of citizenship. Citizenship in the context examined in this paper has been a tool of political mobilization (and participation) in the bid to demobilise the (Nigerian) state as presently constituted and reconstitute it. This paper argues that the constricting of citizenship rights - in their political, civil and social manifestations - in Nigeria was a consequence of the seizure of the state by an autocratic politico-military establishment, the resultant weakening of the capacity of the state to perform its duties and the consequent reliance on brute force to ensure and compel obedience. These helped to sharpen the questions of the relationship between the state and citizens and to direct attention to the need to redefine this relationship and possibly *re-codify* it. This was 'initially vague but eventually became definite and precise' in such a way that ethnicity, inversely, helped the process by sharpening the questions, not merely of the direct relationship of the individual to the state but the relationship as mediated by the *community* – ethnic group. The paper concludes by challenging the manifestations of 'communal' dimensions of citizenship while stating that without enabling social conditions, political and civil rights can be vacuous.