

Ebenezer Obadare, *Statism, Youth and Civic Imagination*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 2010 ISBN 978 – 86978 – 303 – 4, 74 pp

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Despite the avalanche of literature on the study of youth service in Nigeria and elsewhere, only few have attempted to give this area the attention that it requires. To this end, the author of this book, Ebenezer Obadare, aims at bridging this gap by putting youth service in Nigeria in proper theoretical frame. To begin with, the book was a product of field research conducted in two states in Nigeria. It covers 74 pages and spreads into eleven chapters. While chapter one, two and three lays the conceptual foundation on which the study is built, chapters 4 through 11 focus on the case study, the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria.

In the unchapterized segment titled “Introduction” the author sets the background before attempting to explore the theoretical issues. He leaves no one in doubt about the aims, rationale and justification for the study. According to him ‘*the study examines the service-citizenship nexus in Nigeria using the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme as an empirical backdrop*’. Having presented the grand motive for the study, the author is quick to present the main thesis of the study. He contends that contrary to conventional wisdom that service is an antecedent to citizenship; in a neocolony such as Nigeria, the crisis of the state vitiates such axiom. Put differently, in Nigeria, where individual egotism takes precedence over public interest, civic service cannot be an antecedent to citizenship.

Although, he admits that there are scholars who believe in the antecedence of service but contends that such scholars probably could have had other countries in mind. He sums up this point on p. 7- 9 “*Existing Studies, we argue, are therefore largely vitiated by their failure to come to terms with the political ramifications of Youth Service in Nigeria*”.

Having presented his main thesis in the introduction, the author now sets out to theoretically link the two key variables in the study – service and citizenship. Thus in Chapter one titled “The idea of Service”, the author conceptualizes the phenomenon of service from different definitional stand points. Expectedly, he explores these definitions but he is quick to state that Michael Sherraden’s (2001) definition has been the touchstone. Indeed, he quotes Sherraden’s definition on p.9 thus “*an organised period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community, recognised and valued by society with minimal monetary compensation to the participant*”.

At this juncture, he reasons that Sherraden’s formulation depicts contemporary institutionalised variant of service which according to him does not fit into the ancient Greek conception. In the latter sense, service is not just an expression of self-sacrifice but also an expression of loyalty to the state. Also, the author examines whether compensation and compulsion should be embedded in the definition of civic service. Here, he asserts that the latter issue has polarised the service school into two. He expresses his thought on p.10 thus: “*while one group of scholars avers that service that includes compensation of any kind would corrupt the process of service since that would not be pure ‘volunteerism’... in contrast to the first objection, that compensation for work that does not equal market rates does not vitiate civic service*”.

In chapter two titled “Citizenship as Civic Duty”; the author continues his definitional exploration by attempting to put the idea of citizenship in perspective. Although, he admits that there are various conceptions of citizenship but, he comes to submission that there are two broad conceptions vis: the classical republican and the liberal. The former, he opines, focuses on duty while the latter on right. However in his exploration, he delves more into the former. This he justifies on the ground that the modern conception of citizenship is hinged on the duty of the individuals to the state. As he put it on p. 16 *“the imperative of duty and participation in state and society necessarily implies a strong commitment occasioned by the right of membership”*. In essence, citizenship in modern context, according to him, is defined in terms of loyalty and allegiance of the members of the state to the state.

The author in chapter three titled “Interfacing Service and Citizenship” attempts, in an elaborate fashion, to connect the variables of service and citizenship. Here, by drawing from the works of notable authorities in the area, he infers that in most literature on service – citizenship nexus, service is often seen as the antecedent of citizenship. Empirically, he contends that in a state like Nigeria plagued by centrifugal forces, such linkage is still being romanticised .

In chapter four of the book titled “The NYSC: History and Rationale”, the author not only chronicle the history of the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria but also examines the rationale behind its establishment. To be specific, he traces the background of the scheme to the events leading to the civil war (1967 – 1970). In an attempt to unite the country after the war, contends the author, the establishment of national youth mobilisation agency became imperative (p.22). Having put the scheme in proper historical perspective (pp.21 – 23), the author uses the remaining paragraphs to examine the rationale, the goals and the reactions to the scheme. Indeed on p.23, he avers thus *“it is therefore clear from these statements (Decree No 24, 1973) that the overriding raison d’être of service here was not essentially about the intrinsic value of service but about what service could do, that is, what resulted from the process of service”*. On the reaction to the scheme at inception, the author asserts that there were initial protests, mainly from the students, against the scheme.

In chapter five of the book titled “The Development of the NYSC” the author painstakingly traces the development of the NYSC scheme. However, he states that the scheme since inception has been characterised by “up” and “down”. To be more specific, he contends that in the first and second decades of the existence of the scheme, there were high hopes and expectations but in the last third decade, due to the rumble in the political system, there were calls to either re-engineer the scheme or scrap it.

The author in chapter six of the book titled “Method of Research” the author succinctly states his research in methodology. This comprises his approach, data sources and data analysis. To be sure, the author combines three research instruments (open-ended questionnaire, FGD and in-depth interview). In addition, he justifies the choices of Lagos state (Oshodi – Isolo/ Lagos Island) and Osun state (Ife Central or Ife East) as the research sites for the administration of the instruments.

The author, in chapter seven of the book titled “The NYSC: Meaning, Perception and Interpretation, drawing from field data, attempts to establish the perceptual gulf dividing former and serving corps members. Thus from his analysis, he gives his verdict on p.43 *“During the service year, owing to programme activities, many corps members shared the foundational (official) goals of the scheme. The sheer togetherness and the sense of belonging to a social category (of educational youth), ostensibly yields a high degree of nationalistic emotion among serving corps members. Not expectedly, the meaning, perception and interpretation and the level of commitment to the ideals of the scheme marginally decrease as the service year runs out and beyond”*.

The author in chapter eight titled “The NYSC: Performance Evaluated” continues with data analysis. This time, on the perception of the performance of the scheme by the respondents (serving and former corps members). Thus using the criteria of aims and objectives; national integration; underpinning factors etc, the author submits that generational factor is so crucial in understanding the performance of NYSC corps members (serving and former). Indeed he expresses this opinion on p.47 *“the gulf between serving and former corps members illustrates the marked tendency for perceptions and opinions about the NYSC to paradoxically decrease or turn negative over time”*. In concluding the chapter, he reasons that neither group gave the scheme overwhelming rating in term of performance.

In chapter nine of the book titled “The NYSC and Citizenship Values: Any Link? the author makes an attempt to answer this question: the extent to which NYSC promotes citizenship values? Consequently, by drawing from the data collected, he states that both serving and former corps members have divergent opinions. In fact, he concludes the chapter on p.51 by submitting that *“the more time people spend on, and after, the programme, the more negative their opinion was about the programme, especially in relation to the enhancement of citizenship values and the promotion of a common, positive Nigerian identity”*.

The author in chapter ten titled “The National Youth Service Scheme: Between Continuity and Discontinuity”, gauges the opinions of the respondents with regard to continuity or discontinuity of the scheme. Thus, drawing from the data collected, the author infers that former corps members showed more predispositions towards discontinuity than the serving corps members.

In chapter eleven titled “Evaluation”, the author makes an holistic evaluation of the NYSC scheme in Nigeria. Although, he concurs that the scheme has contributed in one way or the other in spurring civic imagination especially among serving corps members. However, he contends that the socio-political realities in Nigeria have immersed the scheme. On p.60 he reasoned thus *“the objective condition of the Nigerian state are such that the raison d’être of the NYSC is vitiated”*. He goes further to establish the conditions under which schemes like NYSC could promote citizenship. Here, by drawing from the works of Perry and Katula, he argues that a sense of community is vital to effective citizenship building and in the absence of such macro variable in a divided society like Nigeria; individual and collective service will not engender citizenship in the youths. Conclusively, the author submits that prior allegiance to the community is essential for the creation and nurturing of actual citizenship and the performance of service respectively.

In the course of this review, we spot some lacunas. First, we believe that the segment dedicated for ‘Introduction’ should have constituted “chapter one” since it sets the background and the main thesis of work. Second, a book of such nature should have had a concluding chapter where remarks and recommendations are articulated. Third, since many acronyms were used in the book, a list of acronyms should have been included in the appendices.

These observations, notwithstanding, the book is recommended to scholars and policymakers particularly those working in the area of theory and practice citizenship and service.

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