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Publishing postcolonial Africa: Nigeria and Ekeh’s two publics a generation after

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This paper interrogates Peter Ekeh’s “two publics” in Africa in the context of African studies. It argues that what Ekeh analysed was a society in transition. Thirty-eight years after Ekeh’s publication, also using a Nigerian case study, the “attacks” on the “civil public” which Ekeh theorised, are suggested to have extended to the “primordial public”: amorality is presently ubiquitous in the “two publics.” The paper identifies a combination of three elements pushing the “attack”: military rule, a civil war and enormous resource from mineral oil (oil boom). Furthermore, the paper suggests that “two publics” evolved largely because before colonialism, there was no hegemony built in any known “state” in what was Nigeria at the time to sustain any common (moral) value system that could have resisted the “civilising” ideology of colonialism. The paper underscores the fact that knowledge production in African studies has not paid sufficient attention to the gap created in nation building in Africa because of the inability of pre-colonial African states to establish hegemony which is critical in state and nation building in other civilisations. In conclusion, the paper argues that the inability to build hegemonic order before colonial rule, not only in Nigeria, but in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa largely explains why 50 years after colonial rule, there may still be debate about and delay in resolving the problem of the “two publics.”

Keywords: Africa; civic public; colonialism; Nigeria; Peter Ekeh; postcolonialism; primordial public

Introduction

In one of his early writings on African studies, Peter Ekeh made a seminal identification of what he referred to as the “two publics” in Africa; a form of dualism which underpinned the attitude of an African towards, and his relationship with, the postcolonial state on one hand and with his primordial community on the other (Ekeh 1975). According to Ekeh,

the experiences of colonialism in Africa have led to the emergence of a unique historical configuration in modern post-colonial Africa: the existence of two publics instead of one public. […] Many of Africa’s political problems are due to the dialectical relationships between the two publics. (91)

Ekeh called the two publics “civic public” and “primordial public.” The civic public refers to the armed forces, police, public service (federal and state ministries) the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government. The primordial public refers to villages/rural communities, traditional and group associations and religious

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groups. The African relates to the civic public in amoral terms and to the primordial public in moral terms. The dialectics of the African relationship with the two publics in their differing “moral” terms, to a large extent, explains the complexities in African politics.

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to raise larger questions about social change in the understanding of African studies since social change was the greater part of Ekeh’s thesis. Thirty-six years after Ekeh’s study, and 53 years after Nigeria’s political independence, to what extent is the thesis of the “two publics” still relevant as well as sufficient in explaining state, society and politics in contemporary Nigeria; to what extent do the “two publics” explain the problem of morality (“amorality” and “morality”) and corruption currently bedevilling Nigeria?

Put differently, this paper is questioning Ekeh’s thesis in terms of the dichotomous moral patterns which he identified, being cognisant of the fact of the movement of history, social change and the unfolding contests in knowledge production in African studies. The interrogation is necessitated by the special note taken of over 30 years of military rule in Africa, debilitating postcolonial wars, economic crises, and “state failures” (Zartman 1995; ACORD 2007) and other forms of social change. The article argues that what Ekeh studied in the early 1970s was a society (Nigeria) in transition – undergoing a social process through social, economic and political history, and at the same time, contending with social formations (LeVine 1966; McLeish 1969; Bascom and Herskovits 1970; Smock and Bentsi-Enchill 1976; Onuoha 1981). The emphasis is that presently the morals of both the civic and primordial publics are under attack, and are predominantly “amoral” in the relationship of individuals with each of the two publics. The paper argues that this is not unexpected in societies in transition, where social values are not yet consolidated. It is important to observe that in his thesis, Ekeh (1975) did not view the “two publics” as a shifting moral challenge or a transitional moral disposition, a point or a phase on a continuum, which might change as a result of some other forms of social history in the process of transition. His thesis took a position of finality; and this is the major part of what this paper is interrogating and rejecting.

The work has four parts to it. The first part provides a brief overview of Ekeh’s “two publics.” The second part examines postcolonial Nigeria to demonstrate the penetration of amorality into the primordial public. The third part argues that three major factors are responsible for driving the social, economic and political history which are further pushing the transition of Nigerian society: they are the intervention of the military into politics/military rule beginning 1966, the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970) and the discovery of oil and its boom almost immediately after the civil war in 1970. In the fourth and concluding part, the paper goes beyond the “two publics” to argue that the gap in socio-economic and political history – i.e. there was no hegemony built in any known “state” in what was Nigeria at the time to sustain any value system before colonialism – to a large extent provided the environment for the emergence of the two publics.

**Ekeh’s “two publics” and the dialectics**

According to Ekeh (1975), most educated Africans are citizens of two publics in the same society. On the one hand, they belong to a civic public from which they gain materially but to which they give only grudgingly. On the other hand, they belong to a primordial public from which they derive little or no material benefits but to
which they are expected to give generously and do give materially. To make matters more complicated, their relationship to the primordial public is moral, while that to the civic public is amoral. The dialectical tensions and confrontations between these two publics constitute the uniqueness of modern African politics (Ekeh 1975, 108).

The primordial public is made up of the private realm, represented by primordial groups, ties and sentiments, town unions and associations, family meetings and church associations, for example. The primordial public is moral and operates on the same moral imperative as the private realm. The civil public is made up of the public realm historically associated with the colonial administration: it is governments at all levels and their institutions (92). According to Ekeh, the civic public is amoral and lacks the generalised moral imperatives that operate in the private realm, and in the primordial public (ibid.).

Ekeh observes that an outstanding characteristic of African politics is that the same political actors simultaneously operate in the primordial and the civic public. He tries to explain how the unique political configuration emerged in Africa, as well as how the operations of the two publics have affected African politics (Ekeh 1975, 93). According to him, the two publics were created and sustained by what he called ideologies of legitimation introduced and exploited at different times and circumstances by both the colonial masters and the emergent African political actors, and both directed at the African masses (93–105). The colonial ideology emphasised the benefits of colonialism, while the African bourgeois ideology was aimed at making replacement of the white colonisers more easily acceptable, as well as to ensure that African political practitioners got the support of their people (100–102). This, according to Ekeh, clearly brought about a transfer effect from colonialism to post-colonial politics.

A good citizen of the primordial public gives out and asks for nothing in return; a lucky citizen of the civic public gains from the civic public but enjoys escaping giving anything in return whenever he can. According to Ekeh, the logic of the dialectics, its unwritten law, is that it is legitimate to rob the civic public in order to strengthen the primordial public (108).

Ekeh identified three areas of the dialectics in the two publics: tribalism, voluntary associations and corruption. He remarked that the dialectical relationships between each of these and the two publics constituted the heart of his study (108). Taking corruption, for example, while it festered in the civic public, corruption was almost absent in the primordial public. Diligence and commitment to duty was fundamental and inseparable in the primordial public but totally absent in the civic public.

Among the three dialectical relationships, corruption – the dichotomy of amorality/morality – is what concerns us most in this paper. According to Ekeh, while everywhere in the public realm there is amorality, which encourages corruption, in the primordial realm, there is preoccupation with morality. He stresses that:

corruption is completely absent in the primordial public. Strange is the Nigerian who demands bribes from individuals or who engages in embezzlement in the performance of his duties to his primordial public. […] The Africans are extremely hard working in the primordial public […] On the other hand Africans are not hard working in matters connected with the civic public. (Ekeh 1975, 110, 111)

Ekeh’s work has continued to attract interest in African studies. Intellectuals in other disciplines of African studies have long concerned themselves with the issue of dualism in African society created by colonialism (Whitaker 1970; Rathbone 1982).
Osaghae (2003), in an update on the thesis, and in spite of the long time that had lapsed since Ekeh wrote, still found the thesis of two publics fundamentally relevant today, and indeed “timeless” in understanding African society. But for Ekeh, what is critical is not that there is a dichotomy, but that the same individual relates to the two publics in different moral codes – the one amoral and the other moral:

Most educated Africans are citizens of two publics in the same society […]. To make matters more complicated, this relationship to the primordial public is moral, while that to the civic public is amoral. The dialectical tensions and confrontations between these two publics constitute the uniqueness of modern African politics. (Ekeh 1975, 108, emphasis mine)

My emphasis in this paper is on the value system – the dichotomy of amorality for the civic public and morality for the primordial public; and it is suggested that the near clear-cut distinction between the two publics no longer exists in Nigeria (Africa) for reasons to be argued in the course of the paper. In a similar observation, Joseph (1991) had this to say about Ekeh’s thesis of two publics:

Ekeh’s analysis is an important one, and it embodies insights which are essential to the study of postcolonial Africa. Yet his approach is too rigidly dichotomous, and it tends to squeeze out important aspects of the social processes he is examining: first the communal realm is not the non-economic universe he idealizes: A good citizen of the primordial public gives out and asks for nothing in return […] (but) the communal world is an arena as much characterized by the active and legitimate pursuit of material interests as is the wider civic realm […]. The amorality of the public domain in Nigeria and the destructive consequences of individual and group actions, are as dire as Ekeh outlined them before the transition to the Second Republic. (Joseph 1991, 194, 195)

With the added support from the observations of Joseph (1991), to what extent are colonial experiences sufficient in unlocking major contending socio-political issues in contemporary African studies, for example, crises and conflicts and state failures, a few of which are examined below?

Postcolonial Nigeria: two publics of a society in transition

There is a large body of literature on socio-economic and political history of postcolonial Nigeria. The central argument of the literature is that Nigeria was bedevilled with deep-seated political crises and conflicts, early in its postcolonial history. Instability may be said to have started with the Western Region crisis of 1962, which widened into the general election crises of 1964 which were marked by an intense struggle for power (Dudley 1966, 1973; Mackintosh 1966; Sklar 1966; O’Connell 1970; Panter-Brick 1970; Luckham 1971; Post and Vickers 1973; Kirk-Greene 1976; Nnoli 1978; Anifowose 1982; Oyovbaire 1985). The conflict arising from the struggle for power precipitated such a degree of instability that it led to military intervention in politics in January 1966. The military coup exposed a fractionised army, which went into a frenzy of ethnic killings, which in part triggered a 30-month gruesome civil war, from July 1967 to January 1970. The socio-political changes brought about by these conflicts were far reaching. The long years of military rule and civil war not only affected the morals of both the civic and primordial public, but reproduced what we will discuss below, i.e. a new social formation, a coalition made up of retired high-ranking military officers (Adekanye 1999), local merchant/petty bourgeois capitalists and a new rich of easy money. The new social formation which became manifest in the 1990s when the military began to prepare
to give up political power, as will be argued below, played a significant role in the changes in moral ethos of both the civic and primordial public (Onuoha 1991).

A quick observation to make from all this is that the postcolonial Nigeria analysed by Ekeh was a society in transition – a movement from the traditional setting to modern ways of life: a transitional society, embodying socio-cultural, economic and political dispositions, a flux in a value system which grips or infects people in a period of fundamental social change and which replaces their previous value system thereby generating a motion towards new attitudes and a new value system. The movement is said to be marked by dichotomous variables among which are particularism/universalism, ascription/achievement and collectivism/individualism (Parsons 1960). According to Lerner (1958, 72–84), transition hinges upon the desire among individuals to participate – it grows as more and more individuals take leave of the constrictive traditional universe and nudge their psyche towards the expansive new land of their heart’s desire. Though transition involves all aspects of society, it is essentially psychological, targeted at people’s value system, attitude and general behaviour. It is about an expansive self, newly equipped with a functioning empathy, and perceived connections between its private dilemmas and public issues (Lerner 1958, 76).

In spite of the weakness and criticism of “transition” in modernisation theory of the 1960s used in the study of social change, in particular the Eurocentric ideologies of propagation, the rubrics are not misleading. They assist in observing elements of social change. Since the 1960s, Africa has been undergoing transitions at different stages on a continuum, from old ways of life to new ways of doing things; colonialism, postcolonialism, military rule of over a generation, civil wars, democratisation and globalisation are clusters in Africa’s transition process (Onuoha 1996). It will not be entirely correct in studying elements of social change if these major factors are ignored in the way they affect norms and values, attitudes and behaviour in current discourses of African studies.

Thus, at the point Ekeh was studying the “two publics” in Nigeria, the society was in a flux, a society in transition; a point on a continuum that started diminishing by the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970. And, the end of that war introduced yet another point on the continuum. With a combination of military rule, weak and distorted democratic institutions between 1979 and 1999, the transition is still ongoing by 2014; and further changes in the value system are expected for some time to come, up to a point on the continuum when we may refer to the system as “developed.”

Postcolonial Nigeria after the “two publics”: three major contributory factors
Fundamental changes have occurred in Nigeria since Ekeh wrote in 1975, which render his study no longer adequate in an attempt to engage in critical discourse of African studies, in particular in analysing Nigerian society. The changes in Nigeria emerged from the following socio-economic, political and historical processes: military intervention in Nigerian politics, 1966–1999; the Nigerian civil war 1967–1970; and the exploitation of mineral oil in large commercial quantity (oil boom in Nigeria from 1970 to present). The combination of these three critical agents has brought about equal if not more fundamental social change in Nigeria than colonialism, in particular since the end of the civil war in 1970. Let us examine the
dynamics of these immediately below, in particular the ways they have changed or even eroded the primordial values that Ekeh described as “moral.”

The Nigerian civil war, from 1967 to 1970, brought about fundamental social change. In all history of societies, the social and moral decay consequent upon any war are as follows: mass movement, internal migration and displacements, social upheaval, anomie, moral decay, breakdown of law and order, impunity by military men, armed robbery, famine and hunger, loss of breadwinners, the creation of widows and orphans, poverty and diseases, prostitution and the challenges of de-mobilised military service men. All these erode the moral fabric of the society.

In Nigeria, many of those who went back to school after the civil war were child soldiers who had just been de-mobilised from the army. Even some who were old enough to remain as soldiers but were de-mobilised wanted to continue with their education and went back to school. It is on record that the greatest case of indiscipline in schools in Nigeria started manifesting immediately after the Nigerian civil war when ex-soldiers went back to school after the war. This period also marked the first largest known case of West African Examination Council (WAEC) examination question leakage which took place in 1970, popularly known as EXPO ’70, an account of which was narrated in Chukwuemeka Ike’s Expo 77 (Ike 1980). The episode of examination leaks marked yet another trend of an unfolding indiscipline and moral decay among the youth, the future generation. Also, cases began to be reported of students who openly fought their teachers in schools (Ukuije 2012). All these cases of indiscipline and breakdown of law and order, uncommon before 1970, penetrated the primordial public where most of the youth lived.

Nigeria was under military rule for 28 years (1966–1979 and 1984–1999). The impact of the aberration of military rule on Nigerian politics weakened the use of “two publics” for analysis especially from 1975 when General Yakubu Gowon was overthrown. This is because by 1975, the negative impacts of the military on the polity was certainly becoming manifest (Panter-Brick 1978; Adekanye 1999). The military had become characterised by impunity, corruption, waste, disregard for rule of law and even a lack of capacity to govern. The civil society had openly begun to protest continued military rule (Onuoha and Fadakinte 2002).

The negative values of the military, especially the culture of lawlessness and impunity, began to penetrate the primordial public as well, partly because of the military’s totalitarian rule. The military involved itself in traditional institutions, deposing and installing traditional rulers. It used some sections of the primordial institutions against others; forms of “divide and rule” politics (this could not have been avoided considering so many years in absolute control of political power) in the local communities in many parts of Nigeria. Furthermore, the military used financial inducement and other patronages, “dangled carrots” to favour some against others; part of these encouraged corruption and amorality in the primordial public. On the other hand, some members of traditional institutions went asking for government appointments and other favours for themselves or for members of their families or relations. These led to one form of compromise or another on the part of members of the traditional institutions. These in turn affected values of the primordial public under the custody of the traditional institutions. These forms of military control of political power unavoidably also compromised the ethos of the moral community (the primordial public).

The military banned all the tribal unions and associations in 1966 which made them lose the forms and substance by which they were known between the 1920s
and early 1960s (their autonomy and independence). When in the middle of the 1970s some of the town unions/tribal associations especially in the south-eastern part of Nigeria were to re-emerge, they no longer had the moral aura and authority they commanded before Nigeria’s political independence or before the civil war. Thereafter, they became easy prey to all sorts of moral penetration especially from those in the military and others in the civil public who controlled political power. The direct consequence of the post-civil war relationship between the two publics was that soon there was little or no difference between the moral precepts in the civil public and those in the primordial public. A drama presentation, “Langbodo” (Ogunyemi 1977), written by Wale Ogunyemi and directed by Dapo Adelugba staged during African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 1977, under military rule) in Lagos, Nigeria, by the Nigerian National Troupe, aptly narrated how corruption and moral decay, led and promoted by the military and those in control of political power, were fast penetrating both the civic and primordial publics.1

Oil boom for Nigeria immediately after the civil war in 1970 increased disproportionately the oil revenue accruing to her. Government’s inability to manage the huge resources led to unprecedented waste and corruption, and worse still to a form of “oil psychology” which influenced norms, values and attitudes, first of the rulers and second of the people. “Oil psychology” became associated with prodigality, profligacy, primitive accumulation and unprecedented corruption in all departments of government. It resulted in unusual mismanagement of government affairs, bloated government or “too much government,” which in turn led to inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and above all national poverty in the midst of huge mineral oil resources. The underlying corruption in the mismanagement of oil resources eroded values both at the civil and primordial public, and thus unleashed social and moral decay. For instance, Nigerian remained between the first and fourth most corrupt country in the corruption index of Transparency International (2013) for each year from 1996 to 2005 (no statistics for Nigeria were captured at the record’s inception in 1995).

A combination of the three socio-historical events, military in politics, Nigerian civil war and “oil boom,” transformed the Nigerian society in a manner that destroyed both the pre-colonial African social and traditional ethos, as well as the colonial imposed “civilising” values picked from colonial law and order, political obligation and other forms of civic responsibility. Thus, those three forces transformed post-civil war Nigerian society; they extended normlessness to all aspects of society – civil and primordial. The dialectics of those three reproduced what may be referred to as a Nigerian “coalition” which became manifest from the late 1980s, the beginning of General Ibrahim Babangida’s political transition programme (Onuoha 1991).

The aftermath: a Nigeria coalition

One of the direct consequences of military intervention in Nigerian politics (1966–1999), the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970), and the availability of large quantity of mineral oil, is the development of a “coalition” in a post-military Nigeria. This is an aspect of social formation in Nigeria that is intriguing and worrisome, and which this author identified and examined in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Onuoha 1991). It is an observation that the socio-political landscape of a post-military era in Nigeria which began in 1993, and later 1999, would be made up of the development of three interconnected social groups:
(1) Ex-/retired military men, of the senior officer corps (Adekanye 1999);
(2) A new rich who made their money from civil war economy, corruption and military government patronages in mineral oil exploration/allocation of mineral oil blocks, government contracts and related businesses;
(3) A new rich who made their money through outright fraud (popularly known as 419 in Nigeria, another aftermath of the civil war), drug trafficking (drug barons) and other illicit and at times criminal businesses.

My analysis in 1991, and yet valid today was that this coalition would control Nigerian politics from 1993 when it was earlier scheduled that the military would hand over power to a democratically elected government. The 1993 plan failed after the annulment of the June 1993 general elections. The military finally handed over power to elected civilian politicians in May 1999. That same coalition still took control of democratically elected government in Nigeria in 1999, and has been in charge ever since. Their boundaries are not readily perceptible and they have since 1999 coalesced to become difficult to distinguish. The coalition was the only force that had the type of big money required for success in Nigerian politics. In fact, part of the coalition made up the group called “money bags” during General Ibrahim Babangida’s political transition programme to civilian rule in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Onuoha 2002, 139).

Most other politicians who succeeded in Nigerian politics between 1989 and 1999, but did not belong to any of the three social groups, would have been sponsored by a member from one or the other of the three groups; sponsors are popularly known as political “godfathers.” The coalition, ironically and unfortunately for the country, became the role model for the youth in Nigeria even before they returned to politics in 1999. Their values and lifestyle of consumption, flamboyancy, get-rich-quick/easy wealth, questionable means of wealth effortlessly penetrated the primordial public, since they were already the role models and were admired. Such types of lifestyle did not go without elements of amorality and corruption in the society.

Thus, the Nigerian coalition destroyed whatever was left of the moral primordial public; it penetrated the primordial public with the amoral values of the civic public where it was absolutely in control; it is on the amoral civic public that the “moral” primordial public depended for its survival and subsistence; on the amoral civic public, it depended for social services including education, health and water supply which the civic public controlled, but which the coalition through poor governance was still unable to provide. Beside the damaging impact of the activities and the lifestyle of the coalition, the depraved moral ethos which was the aftermath gave impetus to other forms of decay which contaminated the moral values of the primordial public, as four cases examined below aptly demonstrate.

The ubiquity of amorality: the breakdown of moral value in the primordial public

Below are four cases that demonstrate the erosion of morality at the primordial level. The first two cases occurred in a small town in Imo State, in south-eastern Nigeria. The author is a member of the community (Mbeke) in the first case, and belongs to the Christian community involved in the second case. The author was a participant
observer in both cases. Also, the author observed and participated for three years in the third case at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, where he was an undergraduate student in the mid-1970s. The four cases took place as narrated.²

Case one: town union oil palm produce, self-help project and shifting primordial values

The end of the Nigerian civil war in January 1970 expectedly brought severe hardship as identified above. Most children could not go to school because there was no money. Agriculture and indeed most economic activities understandably were crippled by the war. For most communities, the priority was placed on education – to send their children back to school after the war. The then East Central State government declared free education which lasted for only one year, perhaps to stimulate once more interest in education and so encourage parents to send their children back to school.

Inability to pay school fees after the war led the people to revive their old practice of self-help, which assisted in the education of their children from the 1930s to the 1960s.³ In this particular instance, a community, Mbeke (in Isiala-Mbano local government of Imo state in southeastern Nigeria), revived their pre-civil war practice of using money derived from collective community harvesting and sales of oil palm nuts to subsidise the fees of their children in primary and secondary schools. In order to harvest the oil palm nuts, make sales and realise money, the town union is empowered to put a ban on individual members of the community who own oil palm trees from harvesting their nuts. This means that the town union will prohibit individuals from harvesting their oil palm nuts for some period, to enable the palm trees to bear enough nuts to be harvested by the community. The ban lasts for upward of six months to allow sufficient period for the growth and maturity of the large quantity of oil palm nuts. A period of about two weeks is set aside by the town union for the community to collectively harvest the oil palm nuts. The harvested fruits are sold to individual palm oil businessmen/traders and the money realised goes to the coffers of the town union. Aside from subsidising school fees, monies realised from sales of the palm nuts may also be used to provide water (borehole), and electricity, for example, depending on amount of money realised and the priorities of the community.

The first exercise of this after the Nigerian civil war was in 1970, a few months after the war. The money realised by the Mbeke community was mismanaged, and embezzled by the members of the executive of the town union. Three of them were identified. They denied embezzling the funds of the town union, and refused to pay back the amount missing. The community adopted “traditional” means of seeking justice by invoking their god of equity and justice for retribution. They invoked the god of the land/the community through rituals. They placed a curse through pronouncements on whoever embezzled the funds of the community. The invocation was made through the spiritual powers of the ofó (Igbo [in Nigeria] spirit of equity and justice) (Agwuna III 1972).⁴

The mysterious deaths of the three accused members of the executive under different circumstances within a few days after each other, according to the belief of the community, were indications that they were guilty and accordingly met their nemesis. According to the belief, the diseased “cheated the land” and offended the gods. But it is important to remark that embezzlement of town union funds took place. And as is revealed in the course of the paper, subsequent embezzlements and
misappropriations did not receive any “traditional” retribution or nemesis. The underlying fact is that community fund was embezzled, an action almost inconceivable in the 1960s, or before the civil war in 1967. And I hold the moral breakdown after the civil war responsible for this. The civil war involved total mobilisation of all able-bodied men and later children from the age of 12. After the war, there was total de-mobilisation of soldiers of the breakaway Biafra. With the traumas of the war, these ex-soldiers lost respect for traditional ethos, also lost the fellow-feeling of community bond and respect for its values. The war trauma and disorientation must have led to the change of attitudes and forms of misbehaviour which were certainly contrary to and conflicting with the norms and values of the towns and villages (the primordial public).

Indeed since the 1970s, town union funds have been mismanaged, misappropriated or outrightly embezzled. These are perpetrated through inflated prices of contracts for community development projects. Nevertheless, there are some town unions that have continued to manage their resources well. However, members of the union discovered to embezzle money still suffer sanctions like being ostracised from the union. But most of them are as smart as the “artful dodger” (and are rarely caught) just as in the public realm that Ekeh characterised (Ekeh 1975, 107). The issue being underlined here is that embezzlement takes place, not as an exception, and is not a taboo any longer.

Case two: a local Christian catechist and morality in the primordial public

A local Catholic Church catechist was one of those detailed for safekeeping of monies realised from the annual harvest season of the Catholic Parish, St Paul’s Parish, Osuh, again in Isiala Mbano Local Government, Imo State, Nigeria, in December 1971. While the catechist kept custody of all monies and pledges of the harvest, it was discovered that he was pocketing part of the money for private use. Certainly, this became an instant disgrace; so disgraceful that friends and well-wishers later in the days ahead paid him “condolence” visit or sympathy visit, to commiserate with him over the disgrace, just as if the catechist lost his wife, a child or a relation. But the stealing took place; it happened, so it was not something unheard of, or inconceivable. However, according to Ekeh (1975), to a large extent, this was almost inconceivable before 1975 when he wrote.

Similar cases like the one narrated above have continued to occur. There are cases of members of Christian churches who buy annual church harvest gifts on credit without making payments years after. Also, there are cases of stealing in the church by church wardens, even by women among them who traditionally are less likely to commit such crime. And in more recent times, there are reports of armed robbery in churches or against priests, including cases of rape of Reverend Sisters, which would have been a taboo in the past (Sunday Sun, September 29, 2013, 7, 12; Sunday Sun, December 22, 2013, 14). These are cases that were non-existent before the 1960s, but have been occurring since the end of the civil war in 1970 as aspects of social change. The changes are still occurring in the primordial public.

Case three: “free readers association” in a civic public

In the early 1970s at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, the newspaper vendors would leave some of their newspapers for sale on a particular spot beside a road of
their choice, centrally located within the university campus so that individuals who could afford it would buy the newspapers of their choice. The central location of the vendor’s choice served as a newspaper stand. The newspapers were left at the stand (on the ground), while the newspaper vendor would carry the rest of the stock of his newspapers for sale along the streets on campus. Individuals including students would go to the newspaper stand, and those who could afford it would buy, pick the newspaper of their choice and drop the exact price of the particular newspaper on the ground of the newspaper stand where the vendor provided for dropping the money.

Those who could not afford to buy the newspaper would pick the newspapers they wanted to read, read them and dropped back the newspapers at the stand and walked away after reading. This was the origin in the Nigeria Universities of “free readers association.” Because students, in particular, who could not afford to pay for newspapers had opportunity to read newspapers without having to buy them. And no one in the case highlighted would ever contemplate to take away (steal) any newspaper. This practice continued at the University of Ibadan for upward of 10 years, to the early 1980s. Today, or back to the 1990s, no newspaper vendor would attempt keeping/spreading his newspapers for sale at the newspaper stand without someone keeping watch over the newspapers; if he should try doing so, the newspapers would be stolen, even within the university campus. This is only a demonstration of shifting moral values; with the weakening of morality in the entire society as a result of combination of three factors raised above (military rule, civil war and oil boom); self-interest has made the individual less respectful of those morals which the primordial public taught should be cultivate for the good of society.

Case four: the honourable and moral challenges of a primordial public

One of the most accurate and visible scripts about the amoral primordial public in the recent past in Nigeria is contained in a Nollywood home video, titled Honourable. Honourable was directed by Moses Ebere and produced by Osondu Odom in 2007 in English for a Nigerian (and African) audience. In Honourable, the executive members of the lawmakers of the community collude to misappropriate community funds in their care. They violate other moral values of the community to a degree unprecedented in the history of the community.

Remarkably, Nollywood is currently playing a role in African studies as great as the role that “Onitsha market literature” played in the 1950s and 1960s (Obiechina 1973; Uzor 2012). The industry is contributing immensely towards assisting the understanding of the transformations in culture, tradition, religion; and indeed, in all aspects of society in Nigeria. Honourable provides an apt illustration of immorality in the primordial public; a demonstration of corruption and embezzlement of monies of a local community in Igboland in Nigeria (“Honourable,” irokotv.com/video/3976/honourable). The name of the community in the video is “Elu-Ama.” The chief characters/actors are “Honourable,” “Uchendu,” “Onuegbu” and “Uturu,” all members of the town union executive committee. The major character, Honourable, himself a retired public servant, who is reputed to know how to defraud the civil public without being caught, led the rest of the members of the executive in embezzling the funds belonging to the community. The style of fraud is outright embezzlement, overpricing/over-invoicing of community projects, extortion and over-taxing of community members in the pretence that they are assisting to fund community projects.
(self-help projects); Honourable incriminates or intimidates any of the committee members who refuse to co-operate with him in defrauding the community, and he had two out of the three as very ready and willing accomplices; he lies to the poor and the weak in the community, and cajoles them into submission; sleeps with widows and married women especially in the guise of assisting such women in solving their problems. Honourable colludes with other members of the committee to take over the land of widows in the name of community projects, but only with the intent of getting at the families that would have had issues with him (the “Honourable”) in the past. The home video is a simple, direct and appropriate characterisation of immorality, injustice, corruption, embezzlement in a village community (a primordial public) previously considered protected by primordial values from the amorality of a changing civic public.

In addition to the social and historical events analysed to have impacted moral value in the primordial public, no pre-colonial Nigerian “state” (e.g. Sokoto Caliphate, Oyo or Benin empire) established hegemonic order before colonial rule, and so there were no common values in Nigeria (indeed sub-Saharan Africa) before colonialism. Confirming this gap, Ekeh (1975, 100) remarked that “the colonial ideologies had a major impact on Africans […] The absence of a strong traditional ethos for instance in the form of pan-African religion made Africa easy targets of these ideologies.” This underscores the critical need of a pre-colonial hegemonic order if postcolonial Nigeria was to have escaped the development of two publics.

**Conclusion: hegemonic order and the two publics**

An appropriate locus for the study of hegemony is Gramsci (1980; Sassoon 1987). In his attempt to understand the resilience of capitalism in spite of the crises of capitalism between the 1920s and 1930s, and the difficulty of building socialism in the Soviet Union, Gramsci identified a strong hold that the dominant class and its fractions had on capitalism as an acceptable means of social reproduction. The dominant class developed an ideology of capitalism, which they sold to the working class, who accepted and sustained it in collaboration with intellectuals, schools, the bureaucracy, and the cultural groups. The role of the intellectuals is considered critical. These various groups turn round to sustain the ideology of the dominant class.

According to Gramsci, building hegemony involves those political processes through which consent to capitalist social relations are organised, enforced and maintained (Sassoon 1987, 116). It is a manifestation of class rule, which involves intellectual and moral leadership and domination, force and consent, violence and civilisation — tactics and strategy (110–115). Hegemony encompasses socio-cultural, economic and political leadership and control. It involves all aspects of life.

A definition by Gwyn Williams cited in Sassoon (232, n.1) views hegemony as a socio-political situation, a moment, in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations.
Finally Gramsci states that hegemony can only be said to have been established

[i]f the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the Leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and the ruled, leaders (dirigenti) and led, and can the shared life be realized which alone is a social force – with the creation of the ‘historical bloc.’ (Gramsci, quoted in Sassoon 1987, 124)

Drawing from the foregoing, the argument of this paper is that in African studies, no pre-colonial state in sub-Saharan Africa had the opportunity to establish this degree of socio-economic and political cohesion with all the attendant values. Accordingly, Africa did not have a strong sustaining value system to compete with the values of the European “civilising mission.” There were no strongly established dynasties or kingdoms; there was no defeat of aristocratic power followed by the emergence of a dominant bourgeois class and social groups; no strong established common religion. African studies indicate that some of the kingdoms and ideologies were in the process of being established before they were truncated by European colonisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Thus as a result of colonialism, African leaders of the eighteenth to twentieth century lost the historic opportunity to establish hegemony which could have assisted nation-building and created nation states as in places like Europe. Examples of such pre-colonial leaders are Othman Dan Fodio (Sokoto Caliphate) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Last 1971), Old Oyo Empire, also in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Smith 1989); the Buganda Kingdom, late nineteenth to early twentieth century (Reid 2002; Wrigley 2002) and Shaka Zulu, also during the nineteenth century (Omer-Cooper 1966). However, it is curious that no part of Ekeh’s thesis considered the factor of the absence of hegemony as significant in understanding why there emerged two publics with conflicting values.

In sum, the impact of colonialism on state and society in Africa is not in doubt. Scholars agree that Ekeh’s thesis provides great insight into the understanding of African studies, in particular the emergence of state and society in Africa (Joseph 1991; Osaghae 2003). But, because social change has continued after colonialism, the thesis of two publics is no longer sufficient in understanding African society as it was in 1975. This is because as changes occur, earlier impacts of colonialism begin to wane while the impact of other more recent forces on society like military rule and wars across the continent increase. This is not only in Nigeria but also in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and others in the Great Lakes region of East Africa, including the Rwandan genocide (Mamdani 2002; Prunier 2009). Even with the suggestion that these wars were the aftermath of colonialism, over time, the impacts of the wars assume a life of their own and become critical in understanding African society, history and politics. Therefore, to examine any aspect of contemporary African studies without a consideration of those socio-economic and political forces identified in this paper will weaken analysis, comprehension and interpretation, not only of Nigerian society but the rest of Africa. Thus, while the model of the “two publics” is insightful in the understanding of African society between 1960 and 1970, the more recent and fundamental changes since 1970 are contesting the pages of African history with colonial impact in reshaping Nigerian
(African) society; and are indeed fast diminishing and overshadowing the harm which colonialism inflicted in creating different moral values for the “two publics” in Nigeria (and Africa).

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Notes
1. Langbodo, the opening drama performance of FESTAC 1977, was an adaptation by Wale Ogunyemi of Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Inunmade, a Yoruba (Nigeria) work written by Fagunwa (1950). Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Inunmade is also translated in English by Wole Soyinka as The Forest of a Thousand Demons: A Hunter’s Saga (1982).
2. The author was an active youth member in the early 1970s when the incidents occurred. He has adopted these cases in his teaching in the University over the years to demonstrate shifting moral values and dispositions in a society in transition. The author also benefited from the “free readers association” at the University of Ibadan as an undergraduate in the mid-1970s. The cases narrated are among many changes in moral values in Nigeria arising from overall social change.
3. Self-help projects, that is, communities making financial contributions towards the provision of services for their communities, is a central subject of socio-economic development in rural communities in colonial Nigeria, especially in south-eastern Nigeria. See the following: Coleman (1971), Uchendu (1965), Basden (1966), Enemuo (1990), Emeh, Eluwa, and Uka (2012).
4. The “ofo” is a fundamental instrument in Igbo traditional authority and religion. It is employed in very rare, very difficult and challenging situations to the whole community when justice and equity are under threat: cases of stealing, abomination in the community, betrayal of the community and when no one owns up or admits guilt. It is usually applied by traditional priests when the occasion arises. For the role and efficacy of the ofo, see Agwuna III (1972).
5. Again, the author is a strong member of Mbeke (town) Development Union in Lagos. He is currently a patron of the Union branch in Lagos. The issue of misappropriation of funds sketched is a re-occurring challenge across town unions in Nigeria. The author has observed a few.
6. “Nollywood” is the name of the film industry or the organisation of artists under which most home videos in Nigeria are produced. Nollywood is the Nigerian equivalent of Hollywood.
7. Honourable was shot on location in, Dunukofia village in Anambra State of south-eastern Nigeria.

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