

# **Interrogating Peter Ekeh's model of 'Two Public Realms' and its application to Kenya**

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## **Paper Proposal**

In the literature about citizenship, ethnicity and corruption in Africa, none has interrogated the triad better than Peter Ekeh. He has in particular examined the institutional element of public revenue and how it has affected governance and development. In other words, the power to impose a tax hinges on various factors inherent among them being citizenship, accountability and political freedom. Ekeh identified two kinds of publics generated by colonialism: the private and public realms. The public realm is constituted of the primordial and civic publics. While the primordial public maintains moral linkage with the private realm; the civic public maintains amoral linkage with the private realm. Ekeh argues that most Nigerians are citizens of the two publics. On one hand, they belong to a civic public from which they gain materially but to which they give only grudgingly. Likewise, they belong to a primordial public from which they derive material benefit but to which they are expected to give generously.

This paper proposal is an attempt at both a diachronic and synchronic examination of Kenya's two public realms using Ekeh's perspective. For Ekeh, the payment of taxes has been the benchmark in defining the benefits and rights of the citizen not only as a contributor but also as a member of a political society. In Kenya, the first betrayal of the people began with colonial chiefs who misappropriated the taxes collected to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. It is a drift perfected by the post-colonial government. The state apparatus is important as far as taxation is concerned because the state as an institution wields the power in levying taxes. The state thus controls the revenue and expenditure of its citizenry. Taxation remains the major source of revenue to finance its activities and thus occupies the most important place in the fiscal and budgetary system.

Peter Ekeh's paradigm can be used to analyse Kenya's socio-economic configuration. Like all governments the world over, the state has used every manner of pretexts to introduce all manner of taxes. Indeed, taxation has been a major subject of social, economic and political resistance throughout Kenya's colonial and even the post-colonial era. In fact few other subjects inspired and still inspire so much bitterness and emotions as taxation. Consequently, complaining and even revolting about taxes is a well known historical phenomena. At independence, the ruling elite rode to power on the platform of nationalism but were later subsumed by ethnicity and relied on it in the business of governance. Ethnicity was manipulated to allocate power and resources of the state. In the process, corruption thrived leading to the failure of the state to fulfil its obligation to its citizens.