Dynamics of
PEACE PROCESSES

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CENTRE FOR PEACE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

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The Crisis of Public Policy in a Plural Society: The Nigerian Experience

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The hallmark of the plural society, and the feature that distinguishes it from its pluralistic counterpart, is the practice of politics almost exclusively along ethnic lines (Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, 1972).

Ethnic diversity has become an albatross, profoundly disenabling the realization of equity, impeding socio-economic and political development in most nations (Andrew Eke Ojie and Christian Ewhrudjakpor, 2009).

INTRODUCTION

THIS paper is a discussion of the failure of public policies to engender the culture of peace, promote social order and meaningful development of the Nigerian state as a result of the ethnic colouration of most public policies. The truth of the matter is that many countries in Africa, for example Liberia, Sudan, Uganda and Nigeria are beset with political problems largely because of the deep divisions between the ethnic groups and the near-absence of public policies focused on the promotion of collective good.

Ethnic diversity is a serious impediment to the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies in Nigeria. Richard Joseph (1991:52) emphasises the pervasiveness of ethnicity in the conduct of public affairs in Nigeria when he writes that "most students of Nigerian politics have had to grapple not only with the phenomenon of vertically segmented groups but also with the even more daunting realisation that such identities became highly salient to political affairs and to the activities of government bodies."[1] Thus, ethnicity is pervasive to socio-political activities so much that it underlies the 'policy process' or policy circle'.

The obvious implication of this development is that public policies are formulated and executed not with a view to promoting the common good and social justice but to strengthen further the prevalent hegemonic and oppressive domination of the dominant groups over the other groups. Our argument is that in multi-ethnic societies, public policies reflect the claims, aspirations and feelings of one group (usually the dominant group) which are often met at the expense of other groups in the political community. Ralph R. Premdas (2003:2) captures this when he writes that "it is a zero-sum struggle in when the claims of one group . . . can only be met by a corresponding loss of face as well as relinquishing of space and privileges by another historic community."[2]

So, given the socio-political context within which public policies evolved in multi-ethnic societies, public policies rather than engender social order had given birth to conflict and violent crises in Nigeria. This largely culminated in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70). The 'dysfunctional outcomes' which most public policies in Nigeria produce can be said to be as a result of the nature and character of the elite class, who are essentially the custodians of the state and its institutions. It is pathetic that the Nigerian elites who are expected to generate public policies that would advance the common interest of all are themselves the champions of ethnic and sectional interests. Unfortunately, ethnicity has become an instrument in the hands of the Nigerian ruling elite in mobilising for anticipated electoral polities and evidently the means through which they gain access to state power and resources. Richard Sklar (1976) expresses this when he states that "tribalism is an instrument in the hands of political elites."[3]

Given the nature and character of the Nigerian elite, public policies must manifest the ethnic biases of the leadership. Tatalo Alamu emphasises the centrality of the nature and character of the ruling elite to character of state institutions, public policies and the larger society when he writes that "the character of a society is in the final analysis a reflection of the character of its elite . . . If Nigeria has become an unliveable hell-hole; a post-colonial inferno of disturbed denizens, it is because the elite has made it so."[4] So, for state institutions and public policies to advance collective and common interests, the ruling elite who are the custodians of the state's political institutions must be transformed. This transformation or what we call 'elite renewal' must be targeted at purging the ruling elite of the Nigerian state of 'counter-productive ethnic nationalism' and substituted with what Geertz (1994) called "civic nationalism".[5]

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Though most of the terms used in this paper are quite well known, we nevertheless proceed to provide definitions of the principal concepts in order to minimise the possibility of misunderstanding. Having said this, let us engage in the exposition of these theoretical concepts.

Public Policy

Many definitions of public policy abound in the literature on politics and public administration. But there is a consensus that public policy is the instrument through which the essence of politics is concretised. This perhaps explain why Adesina Sambo (2007) states that "public policy is the outcome of the political process of value allocation."[6] By public policy, we mean the actions of the people in authority to implement decisions targeted at addressing the problems of the society or the state. Andrew Eke Ojie and Christian Ewhrudjakpor (2009) capture this when they define public policy "as a plan of action or statement of ideals proposed or adopted by government for the attainment of sustainable good governance, peace and harmony in the society."[7] For Thomas Dye, public policy is defined as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do."[8] It is also seen as "a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of a concern."[9]

Broadly speaking, public policy is the means through which governments carry out its function, which include providing security and maintaining social order, protecting property and other rights of the citizens of the state and promoting economic efficiency, growth and social justice. This explains why public policy is generally seen as "a decision- making process targeted at affecting all segments of the society — military/political system, educational development, security, unemployment, corruption, inflation, food security."[10]

From these definitions we extrapolate the followings:

(1) Public policy is a goal-oriented action by the government;
(2) Public policy is the instrument through which government carries out her functions;
(3) Public policy, tangentially, spells out who gets what, how and when in the state or society;
(4) Public policy is the instrument through which the state realises its essence of promoting orderliness and peaceful co-existence of the diverse elements in the society.
(5) Public policy is the means through which the state allocates services, facilitates positions and ingredients of development in a polity.

Thus, in this study, public policy is considered to be an all-encompassing government action meant to achieve the realisation of the essence of the state. Having seen this, it is germane to briefly shed light on what we mean by the 'crisis of public

policy'. It is believed that this would help to remove every confusion as to what we are called to discuss. The crisis of public policy simply means the failure of public policy to promote, all things being equal, the purposes for which it was put in place and to create, in a multi-ethnic society, a common social will that is critical to the realisation of good governance and peaceful co-existence.

Plural Society

Here attempts will be made to define what plural society is all about and discuss the distinguishing features that define plural society. First and foremost, let us begin our exposition of the meaning of plural society by bringing to the fore the meaning of pluralism. According to Glickman (1995), Ottaway (1994), Martin Marger (1997) and Peter Ekeh (1974), "pluralism is a set of social processes and conditions that encourages group boundaries."[11] Put differently, pluralism depicts a social arrangement where multiple interests, viewpoints, outlooks, orientations and perspectives co-exist. It is a social condition that is characterised by existence of diverse interests, orientations, factions and groups in a polity.

Therefore according to J.S. Furnival (1948) plural society is one in which different sections (diverse groups) of "the community live side by side, but separately, within the same political unit."[12] Harry Eckstein in his own attempt emphasises the division that characterise ethnically diverse groups living together within the same political community when he posits that a plural society is a society divided by segmented cleavages. According to him, "this segmented cleavages exist where political divisions follow very closely, and especially concern lines of objectives social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in society: segmented cleavages may be of a religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial or ethnic nature."[13] Let us briefly state that this social differentiation in a political community may be a "result of diverse ethnic national or migrant minority."[14] Essentially, a plural society is one where there are diverse ethnic groups in a political community. Onigu Otite (2000) captures this when he sees ethnically diverse society (plural society) as "a sociological aggregate consisting of distinct culture-groups and institutions in society."[15] Having attempted to bring into fore the definitions of a plural society, before we highlight some of the features that define a plural society, it is good to shed a little light on two terms which, unarguably, will enhance our understanding of ethnic pluralism — the hallmark of plural society. These terms are 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group'. Our discussion of these two terms becomes imperative in view of the fact that they come up repeatedly throughout our exposition. Our clarification of the meaning of plural society cannot be said to be complete without defining 'ethnicity' and addressing the meaning of 'ethnic group'.

'Ethnicity' and 'ethnic groups,' jointly received attention when Ralph R. Premdas in his Discussion Paper titled: 'Public Policy and Ethnic Conflict' argues that "ethnicity may be defined as a collective group consciousness that imparts a sense of belonging

derived from membership in a community bound putatively by common descent and culture . . . the ethnic group is distinguished as a special sort of community, comprehensive in scope and compelling in allegiance".[16] For Okwudiba Nnoli, "ethnicity is a social phenomenon that binds a local population differentiated by wealth, age, sex, education, residence and sometimes even religion into a new political constituency seeking redress."[17] Thus, ethnicity is a social phenomenon that promotes loyalty and belongingness of individuals to one's ethnic or communal group.

Let us now examine the other term — 'ethnic group'. According to Osaghae (1992), an ethnic group is "a distinct human category whose members define themselves as different from others on the bases principally of language, myths of common origin, territory and culture."[18]

The concept of ethnicity and the idea of ethnic group is manifested in the 'we' versus 'they' dichotomy. This explains why ethnicity is largely seen as an instrument in the hands of the leadership of an ethnic group to project the interests and well-being of their group over and above those of the other groups in a multi-ethnic society.

Let us now focus on some of the features that define plural societies. They include, but not limited to the followings:

(1) In a plural society, there will always be some common political and economic systems that bind various ethnic groups together which though more often than not, is still subject to contestation among the groups;

(2) A multi-ethnic society is characterised by conflictual and hostile relationships because of intense struggles for control of state power among the various ethnic groups that constitute the political community;

(3) A plural society is characterised by communal attachments rather than the more productive national attachments as a result of "primordial loyalties which may be as a result of differences in language, religion, custom, region, race or assumed blood ties."[19]

(4) Also prevalent in a plural society is the tendency by one of the ethnic groups that constitute the political community to dominate and oppress the others.

(5) More importantly, a plural society consists of diverse ethnic groups.

ETHNICITY AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN NIGERIA

In this segment of the paper attempts shall be made to expose the pervasiveness of ethnicity in the policy process or circle in Nigeria. By policy process we mean the various stages involved in bringing a public policy to maturity. This includes agenda setting, formulation of policy, adoption of policy, implementation, evaluation and review.

Our methodology of demonstrating the effect of ethnicity on policy process in Nigeria shall be the behavioural approach in political science, which is an approach that emphasises the study of the social basis of politics, rather than the traditional

(formal legalism) which focuses on the state and its institutions. Consequently, our exposition shall attempt to reveal the 'mind-set' or the 'thinking' that informs policy processes in Nigeria. This shall be carried out by analysing the pronouncements and attitudes of both the intellectual class and political class. It is instructive to note that it is the responsibility of the elite in every society — be it plural society or homogeneous society — to design, formulate and implement public policies. The elite, in all societies, determine what goes as public policy. This perhaps explains why public policy is largely reflective of the nature and character of the ruling elite.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian ruling elite has become the moving force behind the enthronement of ethnicity as a governance principle, apparently because ethnicity is the means through which they gain access to state power and enjoy tremendous material benefits. Billy Dudley captures this when he posits that "what has been called 'tribalism' is seen to be part of the mechanism through which the political elite maintains itself in power and exercises its influence. It is therefore an attribute of elite behaviour . . . the educated elite became the chief proponents and purveyors of parochialism and particularistic values."[20]

Furthermore, Kenneth Dike, commenting on the nature and character of Nigeria's ruling elite corroborates Billy Dudley's position when he writes that "it must be said to our shame that the Nigerian intellectual, far from being an influence for national integration, is the greatest exploiter of parochial and clannish sentiments."[21] The ruling elite, rather than serving as an instrument for national cohesion and stability, is more disposed to deepening the differences between the various ethnic groups that constitute the Nigerian state for personal aggrandisement.

The ethnic parochialism and particularistic tendencies of the Nigerian ruling elite is strengthened by the fact that most Nigerians believe that unless their 'own men' are in government they may not secure those socio-economic amenities that are distributed by the government."[22] Richard Joseph expresses similar position when he states that "the non-elite member of the society goes about with the impression that the real hope of socio-economic betterment lies in the success of his relative or other "sons of the soil", in getting a lien on the public purse and trickling a few coins down to him."[23]

The obvious implication of this perception is that people see the state as *their* state when machinery of the state lies with people from a rival ethnic group and the state becomes *our* state when our own people are in control of the machinery of state. Consequently, the generality of the people are interested in making input into the policy process only when they have their *own* people in charge of state affairs.

Given the above social context, it is extremely difficult for public policies in Nigeria to promote national unity, guarantee social order and achieve the maximum social goals for which public policies are usually put in place. The crisis of public policy in the Nigerian state is aggravated by the fact that the ruling elite who are the formulators and implementers of these policies operate from what Kirk-Greene refers to "background of believed opposition, of dissent and distrust."[24] There is the suspicion

that a particular public policy is designed or is being put in place to give *others* undue advantage over *my* group. This mindset is inimical to the success of public policies in Nigeria.

Also, Nigerians hardly adjudge a public policy as good and rational except such policy emanates from their own people who are in control of state power. Consequently, the support from the people required for the success of a public policy is not given when the man in control of state power is not my *own* man. A very good example is the reforms being carried out in the banking sector by the Governor of the Central Bank. Though a measure of sanity is being restored to the sector of the Nigerian economy, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's exercise is still largely seen, especially by people who are not from Lamido Sanusi's ethnic group as a 'Northern Agenda' targeted at handing over the ownership of the banking sector to Northerners. Some people from the southern parts of Nigeria believe that Lamido's reform is a surreptitious move to 'take back' what the North 'lost' as a result of President Obasanjo's privatisation policy which was adjudged to favour southerners.

But the example cited above may not be too convincing about the pervasiveness of ethnicity in the management of public affairs in Nigeria. In view of this, a more practical one would suffice. Dudley (1968) commenting on the relationship between politics and inter-ethnic socio-economic competition in Nigeria presents a vivid account of how ethnicity underlies public policy in the management of Nigeria's public affairs when he writes:

> Also, by its control of the federal government the north ensured that in the struggle for federal resources there could be no policy which ran contrary to the interest of the leaders of that Region. Hence, it refused to allow the federal exploitation of the iron ore located in the region unless the ore using industry was sited in the North. This attitude delayed the establishment of the proposed iron and steel industry in the country for three years during which intense political negotiations were carried on in the National Economic Council. Economically, it was more lucrative to set up the industry near Port Harcourt in the east. By the time the negotiations were over Northern pressure had succeeded in forcing through a decision to build two steel plants, one in the East and the other in the North, with the probability of a third being sited in the West. Instead of building one steel plant with a capacity for the production of ¼ million tons of seed, the decision meant the setting up of two plants each with half that capacity which would be less profitable to operate.[25]

It is interesting to note that the unfortunate scenario presented above is still largely reflective of what operates in today's Nigeria. It is believed that the Railway industry that has been moribund for some time now is a deliberate 'Northern policy" to facilitate the thriving of their haulage business. Thus, the more effective and cost efficient means of transportation was destroyed for the less effective, high risk and more expensive means of transportation simply because it served the interests of the Hausa-Fulani.

The argument is that because of the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian state, public policies are based not on sound and rational principles but largely on satisfying

the interests of the dominant ethnic group. Hence, government's decisions rather than promote national cohesion, enthrone social order, promote peaceful co-existence of the diverse ethnic groups that constitute the Nigerian state are dysfunctional.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRIMACY OF ETHNICITY IN THE POLICY PROCESS IN NIGERIA

The structural make up of the Nigerian state underlies the salience of ethnicity in the management of Nigeria's public affairs. The artificiality of the Nigerian state which was largely as a result of the amalgamation of clearly distinct groups into a nation-state in 1914 without any conscious effort on the part of the colonialists to constructively engage the disparate groups for national integration has profound negative implication on the Nigerian state. Obafemi Awolowo, a key player in Nigeria's political history, captures this vividly when he writes that "Nigeria is not a nation . . . It is a mere geographical expression . . . There are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are 'Englishmen' or 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within Nigeria from those who do not."[26]

Aminu Kano, a politician and another key player in Nigeria's political history, corroborates Awolowo's position on the artificiality of the Nigerian state when he posits that "though we are all Nigerians, but everyone knows where his father comes from."[27] The obvious implication of these comments is that Nigerians still define their existence in the light of their ethnic background. For instance, a Nigerian from the western parts of Nigerian sees himself largely as a Yoruba and marginally as a Nigerian. Ditto other Nigerians from other parts of Nigeria define themselves largely in terms of their ethnic stock and marginally as Nigerians.

A corollary to this perception of an average Nigerian is the absence of a 'collective spirit' that could underlie the conduct of national affairs and facilitate civic engagement in the public sphere of the nation's life. Thus, loyalty to one's ethnic group is the alternative platform through which individuals and groups engage in the public sphere. Against this background, competitive politics — largely focused on desire to control state power for personal and group ends rather than collective national interests, is primarily conducted on the ethnic platform. Consequent to this, ethnicity is deeply entrenched in the consciousness of virtually all Nigerians.

Second, the failure of the Nigerian state to meet the aspirations and expectations of the people. This naturally led to of the abandonment of the 'civic public realm' where the state operates, for the more caring 'primordial public realm', the domain of kinship associations by Nigerians. Peter Ekeh (1992) in his profound analysis and interpretation of socio-political context in post-colonial African states captures the reason why 'citizens' abandoned the civic public realm for the primordial public realm when he writes:

In pre-colonial Africa, the state, with remarkable exceptions, rarely justified its

existence on the grounds of its capacity to meet the needs of individual in society. The colonial states of the nineteenth and twentieth centures were organizations that attempted to achieve the goals of their creators from Europe, which seldom included the security and welfare needs of the ordinary African. Post-colonial state elite have continued to assume that the state does not have to justify its existence other than on grounds of being successors to the European imperial rulers. In these circumstances of African history, the ordinary individual has sought to attain his security and welfare needs in ways and idioms different from those with which we are familiar in Western political thought. The boldest structures with which the individual has sought alliance, in preference to the state, are kinship organisations . . .[28]

Following the positive role being played by kinship associations in the satisfaction and provision of fundamental need of identity and security, ethnicity thus becomes the prism through which the individual interprets and engage in political activities. Predictably, without a compelling 'collective social vision' acceptable to all groups, it becomes extremely difficult to generate and circulate public policies that would enhance national cohesion and promote social order.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The centrality of rational and equitable public policies to the promotion of good governance and sustainable development for all stakeholders of the Nigerian state cannot be over-emphasised. It is unlikely that any meaningful progress and development can be achieved without a fundamental change in the logic that often informs the 'policy process' in Nigeria. As long as the policy process is informed by the prevalent 'we' versus 'they' mentality, especially of the Nigerian ruling elite, the purposes for which public policies, in a harmonious political community, are served will continue to elude the Nigerian state.

Andrew Eke Ojie and Christian Ewhrudjackpor (2009) stress the importance of rational and just public policies to the 'Nigerian project' when they write: "the unabated search for a just policy for the harmonious co-existence of the diverse ethnic nationalities has been the critical concern of Nigerian politicians before and since independence."[29]

This paper recommends that an important requisite for the promulgation of rational and just public policies in Nigeria is the effective transformation of the ruling elite from one that projects and promotes 'ethnic nationalism' to one that celebrates 'civic nationalism'. Michael Ignatief (1993) and Milton Esman (1994) clarify the distinction between these two types of nationalism when they write:

> Civic nationalism is when a nation is composed of all its people, regardless of race, creed, gender, language or ethnicity. Here, people possess equal political and social rights and choose to be members of a nation, along with others, regardless of ethnicity, who share broadly similar beliefs and values. Ethnic nationalism, by contrast, holds that people' allegiance is to an ethnic group or nationality into which they have been

assigned, not to a larger political entity encompassing many different ethnic groups or nationalities.[30]

The argument that is being advanced here is that public policies in Nigeria have been bedevilled by tension, crisis and failure because the ruling elite who were/are the originators of these policies embrace and promote 'ethnic nationalism, rather than the more productive civic nationalism that characteristically enables individuals to share broadly similar belief and values — virtues required for the promotion and sustenance of rational and equitable public policies in a plural society such as Nigeria. Put differently, as long as the Nigerian ruling elite continue to swim in the waters of ethnic nationalism, public policies in Nigeria will continue to generate dysfunctional outcomes.

The renewal of the mind-set of the Nigerian elite thus become imperative for the achievement of rational and equitable public policies required for the promotion of peaceful co-existence of the diverse cultural groups that constitute the Nigerian state. As a matter of fact, the centrality of the renewal of the mind-set of the Nigerian elite to the attainment of the essence of politics, which, basically is appropriation of values and resources in a polity cannot be over-emphasised. Moreso when the issue of distribution of values and resources in a polity is essentially effected through the instrument of public policies which are basically put in place by the ruling elite. To this extent, if the character of the ruling elite in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria is such that exhibits ethnic particularism and parochialism, then public policies promulgated by such elite cannot but produce dysfunctional outcomes.

How do you purge the Nigerian elite of ethnic parochialism and imbue them with nationalistic rather than the prevalent particularistic values? Or, how do we produce an elite class with nationwide vision and purpose? The question posed above is simply about the need for de-tribalised elites that have the ability to define the nation's problems, assess options, make decisions, and implement them in order to forge an avenue for achieving and promoting collective interests.

This objective can be achieved by a virile and dynamic civil society. The civil society must consciously and consistently launch intense propaganda and agitation campaigns for purposes of inculcating broadly similar beliefs and values that would turn Nigerian elites from ethnic nationalist to civic nationalists.

Another major instrument that can be employed to promote and sustain the promulgation of rational and equitable public policies in Nigeria is the complete transformation of political institutions. Political institutions in Nigeria do not have what it takes to generate public policies that would enthrone the much needed progress and development of the Nigerian state. Nigeria's political institutions do not have the elements required to concretise policy decisions in a fair rational and equitable manner. Rotimi Suberu (1999) emphasises the centrality of the character of a nation's political institutions to the political process when he submits:

> Ethnic minority tensions and passions have been inflamed by the sheer incapacity or inequity of political institutions in many heterogenous states. Indeed, unless the

political institutions of such states have been explicitly designed to encourage reciprocative or accommodative inter-ethnic behaviour and practices, the political processes of plural states have invariably degenerated into destructive, zero-sum games of ethnic political inclusion and exclusion.[31]

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