Review

The challenges of ethnonationalism for the Nigerian State

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Whereas present day socio-economic realities tend to favour globalization and universalism, what is happening in Nigeria is rather a rise in ethnonationalism (Obi 2001). In fact, since the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria in 1999, ethnonationalist sentiments have become so trenchant and divisive that the country's political, social and economic bear nay future is largely threatened. Thus Ochonma plausibly observes "ethnic nationalism has become a stubborn obstacle to the socio-economic and political advancement of Nigeria and the realization of national consciousness by people. The Nigerian nation must therefore conquer it, or it will conquer the Nigerian nation" (Ochonma 2011). This paper, using the historical and analytical approaches, examines the conditions that underlie contemporary ethnonationalism in Nigeria, the different ways in which contemporary ethnonationalism manifests, and the ways in which negative ethnonationalism can be fruitfully addressed. It argues that contemporary ethnonationalism in Nigeria stems from the grievances of the different ethno-regional groups in Nigeria which grievances relate to control of or access to state power and patronage and distribution of government revenue including budgetary allocations. The surge in ethnonationalist sentiments and violence in Nigeria thus reflects the failure of federal institutions to accommodate ethnic demands as well as the failure of the elite to provide effective people-oriented governance. The paper thus seeks to demonstrate how a rise above official hypocrisy and insincerity will pave the way for checking negative ethnonationalism in Nigeria.

Key words: Ethnonationalism, democratic governance.

INTRODUCTION

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, there has been growing concern about the rise of identity politics, especially negative forms of identity politics and pressures for de-nationalization of the state (Duruji 2010). Identity politics in Nigeria manifests in the resurgence of ethnonationalism. Ethnonationalism implies "love and trust for ones ethnic group", "emotional tie to ones ethnic group", and "obligations and responsibilities" relating to membership to an ethnic group with which a person identifies (Jega, 2003: 11-23). In this sense of the term, ethnonationalism does not ordinarily connote a negative tendency; ethnonationalism is negative only when it is used to promote inter-group hatred, violence, and group closure (in the form of "us" versus "them" discrimination). Indeed, it is a positive phenomenon when it is employed in ways that benefit the entire society. In Nigeria, ethnonationalism has manifested mainly as a negative phenomenon; it generally presents a scenario where people identify with and see themselves first as a member of a particular ethnic nationality before identifying themselves with the nation.

Ethnonationalism has been an important element of

Nigerian politics since the colonial periods (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2006). Under colonialism, the earliest manifestation of ethnonationalism began as movements of resistance to British penetration and occupation as well as revolts over political and economic coercion by the colonial administration. Later, ethnonationalism became associated with "sentiments, activities, and organizational developments aimed explicitly at the self-government and independence of Nigeria" (Coleman, 1958: 169-170). Colonial policies, which emphasized ethnic, regional and religious differences in the conception and implemen-tation of social, economic and educational programmes, created ethno-regional political, economic and educa-tional imbalances that were important in the mobilization and manipulation of ethno-regional identities. Colonial policies nurtured the notion of "us" versus "them": North versus South, Hausa-Fulani versus Igbo versus Yoruba, Majority versus Minority groups etc (Agbese, 2003: 125).

At independence in 1960, Nigeria carried the burden of negative ethnonationalism developed during colonial period into the post-colonial era. This time the politics of ethnonationalism was defined by fears of ethnic and regional domination. The colonial policy that stipulated the use of population as a criterion for representation gave the Northern region (which has a greater population than the South) the opportunity to control political power nationally. This engendered strong fears of Northern political domination in the South. On the other hand, the colonial policy which handed the South an educational advantage over the North also had a subsidiary effect on the production of human capital and employment in state institutions. Consequently, the North feared that the South would capitalize on its head-start in education and manpower development to dominate the bureaucracy and other state institutions. Under this circumstance, the Northern elite mobilized a Northern identity to ensure control of political power while the Southern elite mobilized Southern identity to resist Northern domination. The mobilization of Southern identity was relatively ineffective compared to that of a Northern identity due to the existence of different competing power blocs in Eastern and Western parts of the South. The emergence of two ethno-regional power blocs in the South completed the pillars of Nigeria's tri-polar politics of the 1950s and 1960s dominated by elites from the three major ethnic groups - Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (Nnoli, 1978: 159-160).

Regionalization policy of the 1950s and 1960s intro-duced a new form of ethnonationalism – the minority ethnonationalism. At this period, minority agitations focused on redressing the domination of the regions by the major ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region, Yoruba in the Western Region, and Igbo in the Eastern Region. The strategies of the minority groups were threefold. They include: (a) the constitutional self-determination policy involving alliance with the ruling party in another region to agitate for a separate state,

hoping that such devolution of power and authority would free them from the domination of the three major groups; (b) the compromise policy of cooperation with the ruling party in the region; and (c) a non-constitutional self-determination policy with demands for separate states through riots, revolts and threats of secession (Okpu, 1977: 118). On their part, the majority groups adopted strategies which include: (1) intensive mobilization of their ethnic home base by ethnic leaders to ensure its monolithic support at the time of elections, (2) widening of each groups' political base from the ethnic home base to include the whole region by obtaining the support of smaller minority ethnic groups with whom they share certain affinities, (3) attempts to win elections in the region at all costs in order to control the regional govern-mental power and, by extension, to eliminate/ control all forms of opposition in the area, (4) encouragement and sponsorship of agitations by minority ethnic groups in regions under rival political parties, (5) attempt to control the Federal Government by winning majority seats in federal elections or, failing to do so, by soliciting coali-tions that would at least guarantee socio-economic and political rewards (Nnoli, 1978: 159-160). The struggles of ethno-regional groups created a legacy of bitter inter-ethnic rivalry in Nigeria.

Since independence, ethnonationalist struggles have induced pressures for de-nationalization of Nigerian state. These pressures culminated in the attempted secession of the Eastern Region in 1967. Federalism is an important institution created to forge "unity in diversity" – knitting the various groups in Nigeria together. However, the practice of federalism in Nigeria bedeviled by series of crises. In its detailed analysis of Nigeria's federalism, the International Crisis Group reports that:

Nigeria's federal system and politics are deeply flawed, contributing to rising violence that threatens to destabilise one of Africa's leading countries. Failing to encourage genuine power sharing, they have sparked dangerous rivalries between the centre and the 36 states over revenue from the country's oil and other natural re-sources; promoted no-holds-barred struggles between interests groups to capture the state and its attendant wealth; and facilitated the emergence of violent ethnic militias, while politicians play on and exacerbate inter-communal tensions to cover up their corruption (The International Crisis Group, 2006:I).

Although this comment exaggerates the shortcomings of Nigerian federalism, it points to some of the challenges confronting the practice of federalism in the country.

The surge in ethnonationalist sentiments and violence since 1999 reflects the failure of federal institutions to accommodate ethnic demands as well as the failure of the elite to provide effective people-oriented governance. The rest of this paper will examine the conditions that underlie contemporary ethnonationalism in Nigeria, the different ways in which contemporary ethnonationalism manifests, and how it can be addressed.

CAUSES AND MANIFESTATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ETHNONATIONALISM

Contemporary Nigeria is made up of five major ethno-regional blocs (the North, Yoruba, Igbo, Niger Delta, and Middle Belt), which developed along the ethno-regional boundaries created by the colonial and post-colonial governments (Nolutshungu, 1990: 89). Each of the ethno-regional blocs expresses ethnonationalist sentiments that emanate from the grievances the group holds towards the Nigerian state or the other ethno-regional groups. In the following analyses, we will analyze the concerns of the ethno-regional blocs in Nigeria, how these concerns stir up ethnonationalism, and the ways in which ethnonationalist sentiments are expressed by the various groups.

The North bloc

The Northern Region is dominated by the aristocracies and ruling elite of Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, and Nupe ethnic groups - the ruling elite which the British met and conquered in the areas which later became the Northern Protectorate (Madunagu, 1994: 19). The region draw their strength, resilience and cohesion especially from a common religion – Islam and a *lingua franca* – the Hausa language (Paden, 1997: 247; Falola, 2001). During the First Republic, the NPC, a party considered as an instrument of Hausa-Fulani oligarchy won both Federal and Northern regional elections. Since then, Northern elites dominated most regimes, civilian and military until 1999 when Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba was elected president. The election of Obasanjo was a concession by the North to southern pressure for a change from northern leadership. Having given its support to Obasanjo, the Northern elite expected a tradeoff. But Obasanjo adopted a hard line posture. On several occasions, he initiated policies that irritated the Northern elite. Of particular significance was the decision, soon after his inauguration in May 1999, to retire hundreds of senior officers in an attempt to rid the military of personnel who had become accustomed to the perquisites of political power. The Northern elite believed that they were disproportionately affected because of the preponderance of Northerners in top military positions who were forcibly retired (Minabere, 2000: 213). The Northern elite also felt shortchanged in the distribution of political positions in Obasanjo's cabinet.

In March 2000, Emirs, former Heads of States, and other prominent Northerners established the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) to give the Northern elite a united voice in Nigerian politics. The ACF positioned itself at the forefront of the engagement between the Northern elite on one hand, and the government and elites from other parts of Nigeria on the other hand. In many occasions, the ACF expressed the North's resentment of

Obasanjo's policies. Many observers suggest that the introduction of sharia by several northern states is also an expression of the resentment of Obasanjo administration. A pro-sharia pamphlet distributed there by a group that identified itself as "Concerned Muslims" after the Kaduna riots contained a litany of complaints against Obasanjo. The fact that many prominent Northerners took public positions against federal government's suspension of sharia suggests the political tenor of the crisis.

The Yoruba bloc

The Yoruba occupy the area known for many years as "Western Nigeria" and it is constituted by several distinct sub-groups like the Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ijebu, Ketu, and Ondo (Law, 1973: 208). In the 1940s when regionalism was introduced in Nigeria, the Yoruba regarded the Western Region as their own, thereby "merging ethnic and regional identities as one" (Falola, 2006: 29). The Yoruba had early access to Western education; this helped them to produce most of the educated elite that championed Nigerian nationalism. The Yoruba elite felt that their progress in education and social advancement would pave the way for them to lead Nigeria (Ukeje and Adebanwi, 2008: 570). However, attempts by two Yoruba elites – Obafemi Awolowo and M. K. O. Abiola at winning presidential elections during the First, Second, and Third Republics failed.

The Yoruba blame Igbo and Northern elites for frustrating the ambitions of their sons (Ibrahim, 1999: 14, Sklar, 1991). They point to the alliance between the Igbo and Northern elites after the 1959 election, which kept the Yoruba elite out of power and eventually capitalized on a split in the AG to destroy the party and to imprison Awolowo and his supporters in 1963. In particular, the annulment of the June 12 1993 election which a Yoruba, M. K. O. Abiola, was the presumed winner by a Northern military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida provoked the Yoruba elite (Abegunrin, 2006). To appease the Yoruba elite, Babangida appointed Ernest Shonekan, a respected Yoruba businessman as the head of an interim national government while departing on 27 August 1993. Many Yoruba elite opposed Shonekan's government pressing for the upholding of the June 12 election. But on 17 November 1993 another Northern general, Sani Abacha toppled the Shonekan government. Abacha appointed prominent Yoruba elites into his government to pacify the Yoruba. But this could not halt the opposition. Then Abacha adopted repressive tactics - assassination, imprisonment, and harassment of Yoruba elites opposed to his regime. In order to create a united voice and defend Yoruba interest, a group led by former Ondo State Governor, Adekunle Ajasin formed the *Egbe Afenifere*. A militant group, the *Oodua People's Congress* (OPC) was also formed by a former presidential aspirant, Fredrick

Fasehun in 1994.

Shortly after the formation of OPC, a leadership tussle broke out among the ranks of the organization. The conflict was caused by disagreements over the best strategies for pursuing collective a Yoruba agenda - that is, whether the struggle should be implemented through non-violent and/ or violent means, and whether the group should participate in the 1998-99 transition to civil rule programme (Ukeje and Adebanwi, 2008: 574). The splinter faction led by Gani Adams, which named itself the "Militant OPC", adopted violent strategy and spearheaded violent clashes with other ethnic group in major Yoruba towns and cities. The degree of violence that resulted from the activities of the OPC strained inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria in unprecedented ways. It also forced President Obasanjo to issue a shoot-on-sight order against any OPC members found fomenting trouble (Adebanwi, 2005: 340).

The Igbo bloc

The formation of Igbo identity followed the demarcation of regional administrative boundaries by the colonial government (Harneit-Sievers, 2006). In the pre-colonial era, the Igbo area suffered scarcity of land and other factors such as poor harvest due to its small landmass (Ibeanu, 2007: 23). The advent of colonialism therefore offered the many Igbo people the opportunity to move away from agriculture and to embrace western education, which offered fresh opportunities in administration (Van Den Bersselaar, 2005). Thus, Igbo identity was shaped by the group's early contact with western education, massive urban migration, and close kinship solidarity and networks that developed among the Igbos within and outside Igboland. Igbo identity was also shaped by the struggles of Igbo elite to find accommodation in Nigeria's politics of the 1940s and 1950s - a period dominated by ethnic politics (Wolpe, 1969). Lastly, the mass killing of Igbo diaspora in 1966 and the traumatic war experience that followed helped to define *Igbo-ness* (Harneit-Sievers, 2006: 121).

Since the end of the civil war in 1970, the Igbo elite have developed the concept of "Igbo problem" to des-cribe the common resentment of the Igbo by Nigerians of all other ethnic groups and marginalization of "Ndi Igbo" by the Nigerian state. In the 1990s, the *Ohaneze Ndi Igbo* – an umbrella socio-political organization took the center stage of Igbo politics. Ohaneze centered its struggles on the issue of Igbo marginalization. The activities of the organization received greatest attention in 1999 when it submitted a memorandum to the Human Rights Viola-tions Investigation Panel (the Oputa Panel) about human rights violations against the Igbo during the civil war as well as post-war Igbo marginalization. Since then, the activities of Ohaneze have been stalled by series of factional and personality disputes among its members

(Irukwu, 2007). The ineffectiveness of Ohaneze informed the emergence of a more radical group, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). MASSOB wants Igbo secession from Nigeria and has used several strategies including petition writing and organization of protest rallies to press its demands (Obianyo, 2008).

On August 26, 2004, MASSOB successfully mobilized a sit-at-home protest. Igbo people in many parts of Nigeria suspended their business activities and sat at home to remind the government of the plight of the Igbo. What is intriguing is that the sit-at-home order was widely adhered to not only in the south east but across the country where Igbo has substantial population. Most markets where Igbo ply their trade were closed. Government offices and private establishments were also affected by the directive as Igbos staged a boycott of these organizations. These were achieved in spite of the massive government campaign against MASSOB and its leaders. Adeyemo writing for *Tell Magazine* has this to say of the event,

 "…MASSOB ordered sit – at – home protest last August 26.The success of that protest was a great feat, considering how passionate an average Igbo man could be about his trade. What that means is that the message of MASSOB, for an Igbo identity and self – determination for the race is gaining ground. That apparently sent jitters down the spines of the authorities" (Adeyemo, 2004: 19).

The Niger Delta bloc

The Niger Delta bloc consists of the six states of the South-south zone, namely Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. The people of the Niger Delta are extremely heterogeneous ethnically and culturally (UNDP, 2006:48). But in spite of their ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, they share common historical experiences, which frame their collective identity. The development of the Niger Delta bloc was shaped by mobilization and resistance against the British colo-nialists, Igbo and Yoruba elites as well as the post-colonial Nigerian State. During the colonial era, the Niger Delta groups were split between the Eastern and Western Regions and brought under Igbo and Yoruba domination in the regions (Saro-Wiwa, 1989). The "servant-master" relationship that existed between the Deltans and the British during the colonial era was carried over to the post-colonial period, but this time the masters were Igbo and Yoruba elites. As a result, the initial resistance to British domination was transformed to resistance against Igbo and Yoruba domination in the regions (Naanen, 2002: 341). The fear of Igbo and Yoruba domination led to political cooperation between the Niger Delta elite and the Northern elite. One can indeed without fear of contradiction infer that the creation

of Mid West region and other states in the Niger Delta has freed the area from Igbo and Yoruba domination. Consequently, the Niger Delta elite have redirected their struggles to the issue of oil.

The recent struggle of the Niger Delta elite is shaped by the rise of oil economy in Nigeria and an "oil consciousness" directed at getting more benefits from the product (Ibrahim, 2003: 62). The growing realization of the value of oil in the global market as well as the deplorable socio-economic situation in the Niger Delta have forced the people of the area to emphasize their economic strength vis-à-vis the political dominance of the three dominant groups (Obi, 1998). Since the 1980s, the Niger Delta elite have intensified their demands for accommodation in Nigerian politics, using oil as their "bargaining chip". They have characterized their condition in Nigeria as "internal colonialism" which is carried out through control of political power and the transfer of resources from the Niger Delta to the three majority ethnic groups (Naanen, 1995: 50). Under this circumstance, the people of the Niger Delta have adopted a militant ethnonationalism involving "sabotage, seizures and lockouts; vandalization of oil wells, pipelines and other installations; hostage-taking and kidnapping of workers of multinationals…and direct confrontation with agents of the state – soldiers, police and other security agencies" (Osaghae, 2001: 14). This approach has threatened oil production and Nigeria's revenue generation capacity. Attempts by the Nigerian state to use military power to repress the struggles have triggered a backlash leading to further escalation of violence. The already volatile situation was aggravated by the Supreme Court judgment which settled the on-shore-off-shore dichotomy in favour of the central government. The crisis now has taken on some ethnic colourations. The oil producing states from the south wants a political solution to the crisis but the states from the Northern part wants the *status quo* to remain.

The Middle Belt bloc

The Middle Belt consists of a large number of minority ethnic and linguistic groups in North-central Nigeria that have historically resisted political and religious domination of the Muslim Hausa-Fulani (International IDEA, 2000: 283). The advent of colonialism in the Middle Belt introduced what has been called "Fulani sub-imperialism" (Kastfelt, 1994). After the British gained control of the Sokoto Caliphate, they used the Caliphate foot soldiers to conquer communities in the Middle Belt. Thereafter, a large amount of political power was transferred to the Fulani, whom the colonial authorities intended to rule through - under the "indirect rule" system (Kastfelt, 1994). Many of the non-Islamic ethnic groups which were independent of the Fulani in the eighteenth century found themselves subjected under the administrative control of the Fulani through the military and political intervention of

the British. The simultaneous domination of the Middle Belt by the British colonialists and Fulani sub-imperialists split the people between Islam and Christianity (Kastfelt, 1994). Christianity became an alternative religion to "a people looking desperately for something to counter the dominance of Islam", which they associated with Fulani political domination (International IDEA, 2000: 284). Also, the advent of Christianity in the Middle Belt gave the people access to western education, which was crucial in elite formation and political mobilization.

Political mobilization in the Middle Belt centers on resistance to Fulani and Islamic domination. Under the leadership of Christian politicians, various ethnic associations in the Middle Belt allied in 1955 to form the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) with the aim of pushing for the creation of a separate Middle Belt State (Harnischfeger, 2004: 440). Beginning from mid-1958, the NPC regional government exerted immense political pressure on the UMBC, leading to a split in the party between pro- and anti- NPC elements. The UMBC was further subdued following the suppression of anti-NPC revolts in the Tiv Division in 1960 (Dent, 1966; Anifowose, 1982). During the Second Republic, the Middle Belt identity faded following the split of the Middle Belt elite into three political parties. The most prominent Middle Belt politician and UMBC leader, J. S. Tarka, joined the Northern dominated NPN along with many politicians from Benue State; elites from Plateau State joined the NPP, while politicians from minority communities in Adamawa State joined the GNPP. In the 1980s, there were attempts to revive the Middle Belt identity. This effort reached its height on 22 April, 1990, when a group of mostly "Christian Middle Belt" officers led by Major Gideon Orkar announced that it had taken over the government and had decided to excise the five most northerly states from the rest of Nigeria, due to the domination of the rest of the country by the "Muslim North". The coup was crushed and the plotters rounded up, tried and executed. Since then Middle Belt ethnonationalism has taken a less militant tone including the formation of the Middle Belt Forum (MBF) in 1991 and the inauguration of a weekly magazine, The Meridein, in 1995 (Sen, 2002).

It is clear from the aforementioned that ethnonationalism is provoked by the different concerns of the various ethno-regional blocs in Nigeria. Ethno-regional blocs in Nigeria express their ethnonationalist sentiments in three distinct ways. First, the Northern discontent with Obasanjo's "Pentecostal Presidency" (Obadare, 2006) and reforms was expressed through *Islamist ethnonationalism* characterized by the introduction of Sharia legal system in many Northern states. Secondly, the grievances of the Yoruba and the Niger Delta have produced *militant ethnonationalism* in the form youth unrest targeted at the Nigerian state, the multinational corporations, (MNCs) and other ethnic groups. The OPC spearheaded violent clashes with other ethnic groups while Niger Delta militants have engaged Nigerian security agents in violent

confrontations. Finally, the feeling that the Igbo are yet to be fully integrated into the mainstream of Nigerian politics since the end of the civil war in 1970 and the Middle Belt's resistance to Hausa-Fulani domination have given rise to *self-determinist ethnonationalism*. The Igbo want an independent Biafran state while the "indigenous communities" of the Middle Belt seek to recapture political control of the area from Hausa-Fulani "settlers". In its various forms, ethnonationalist consciousness has stoked inter-group tension, and therefore needs to be addressed decisively.

HOW ETHNONATIONALISM CAN BE ADDRESSED

The challenge of ethnonationalism in Nigeria can be addressed in four major ways. First, ethnonationalist sentiments can be contained through a more credible commitment of the elite to ethno-regional power-sharing. Power-sharing offers "every significant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision-making abilities on common issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group" (Sisk, 1996:5). It provides opportunities for inter-group accommodation and containment of high-stakes inter-group political competition. Since most of the grievances of the ethno-nationalists relate to access to state power and patronage, a more credible commitment to power-sharing mechanisms such as principles of federal character, zoning and rotation of offices would address these concerns. It would resolve the problem of uncertainty and information constraints in political and institutional process.

Secondly, the challenge of ethnonationalism can be addressed by creating and utilizing opportunities for inter-ethnic dialogue. Such opportunities are abundant in democratic dispensations. One important avenue that political elites can exploit is the possibilities of con-stitutional review. The current constitution review process can be used meaningfully to ensure that aggrieved mem-bers of the Nigerian society are called upon to express their grievances. The elite also need to make serious efforts to address legitimate grievances of different groups. The legislators representing various consti-tuencies in the country can initiate dialogue which will involve the local people. In this way, the legislators can get involve in peace education and public enlightenment. Lastly, the government can engage the traditional rulers, other local elite and the local people in dialogue through the convening of summits. These summits can be organized according to age, gender, and status.

Thirdly, ethnonationalist consciousness can be con-trolled by the implementation of effective poverty reduction and economic development programmes. Poverty and economic underdevelopment is at the center of ethnonationalist consciousness and youth restiveness. According to Alabi (2010: 311 - 315) excessive lack (poverty) makes people to become pliable instruments in the hands of conflict entrepreneurs. In this context, poverty probably explains why unemployed youths are the cannon fodders of violent conflicts in different parts of Nigeria. People pay them to fight their cause. Recent figures put the rate of poverty in Nigeria at 54%, with states like Jigawa and Kebbi having figures as high as 95% (ThisDay Newspaper, 14 March 2007). The rate of unemployment is also very high, with 52 and 18% of graduates of secondary and post-secondary schools respectively, out of job (Dabalen et al., 2000: 11). Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment play key role in the production of militant youths in Nigeria (Scacco, 2007). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) needs to be restructured and retooled to its objects and focus realistically felt by the people. The government also needs to invest in basic infrastructures like electricity and roads in order to promote entrepreneurship.

Finally, ethnonationalist sentiments can be tackled through greater commitment by the elite to transparent and democratic governance, for as Kaur (2002) submits democracy as a system of government which involves the widest spectrum of participation either through elections or through the administration of the accepted/adopted policies. As such, democracy can be seen as a government that is based on the principles of rule of law which stands against arbitrariness, high handedness and autocracy. It is a system that is responsive to the people (Dahl, 1956). It thus presents an environment for constitutionalism and social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions.

It is also notable that one of the main reasons for ethnonationalist consciousness is the feeling by some ethno-regional groups that other groups are enjoying more state resources and patronage than them. This feeling can be addressed by improving transparency in government – making information about the making and implementation of government policy available to the public. This can take the form of publication and dissemination of information about items of legislation, legal provisions, public expenditure allocations, the implementation of policy and programs, and special enquiries. This can help citizens to compare the nature and number of development projects coming to their area with those of other groups. It can also help them to monitor the delivery of development resources and check the appropriation of resources by bureaucrats and local elites. Through greater transparency and accountability, the government can mobilize various constituencies and ethno-regional groups to participate fully in politics and public affairs. Knowing that their voices will be heard, the people will also be motivated to participate in the governance process.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to examine the conditions that underlie

contemporary ethnonationalism in Nigeria, the different ways in which ethnonationalism manifests, as well as the ways in which negative ethnonationalism can be handled. It argues that contemporary ethnonationalism in Nigeria stems from the grievances of the different ethno-regional groups in Nigeria. These grievances relate to control of or access to state power and patronage, political appointments, and distribution of government revenue including budgetary allocations. Most of these grievances are rooted in the history of inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria. Ethnonationalist sentiments in Nigeria manifest in three forms including Islamist ethnonationalism, self-determinist ethnonationalism and militant ethnonationalism. The various ethnonationalisms are represented by the struggles of Northern elite, Igbo/Middle Belt elite, and Yoruba/ Niger Delta elite, respectively.

What can be learnt from this analysis is that the diverse political demands of ethno-regional groups in Nigeria require to be handled through a complex approach that go beyond the institutional measures adopted by the government. Consequently, this paper suggests that the challenge of ethnonationalism can be handled through a more credible commitment of the elite to ethno-regional power-sharing, the creation and utilization opportunities for inter-ethnic dialogue, the implementation of effective poverty reduction and economic development programmes, and a greater commitment by the elite to transparent and democratic governance.

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