



THE DISINTEGRATION OF YUGOSLAVIA: A LESSON FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract:

The prediction by some experts within the United States National Intelligence Council in a document entitled “Mapping Sub-Saharan Africa’s Future” predicting outright collapse of Nigeria as a nation state cannot be wished away. The study examined the factors that precipitated the disintegration of Yugoslavia and juxtaposed them with the past and present religious and socio-political state of Nigeria. The paper maintained that virtually all the factors that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia abound in Nigeria. These factors include deep seated inter-ethnic rivalries, religious intolerance, dearth of national integration, internal colonialism and deficiencies in Nigeria’s federal structure. The real danger is not even the possibility of the break-up of Nigeria into new states; this would not necessarily be a problem, but the collapse of Nigeria into utter chaos and manslaughter. The study recommended true fiscal federalism, constitutionalism, respect for sectionalism, national integration and the implementation of the resolutions of the 2014 National Conference as measures to checkmate the disintegration of Nigeria.

Keywords: disintegration, national integration, federalism and violence

1. Introduction

It is impossible to see any nation-state without socio-cultural diversities. Yugoslavia came into being as a result of the 1st World War. In 1914, only Serbia which was part of the present Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro were independent states; Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina belonged to the Austro – Hungary monarchy known as the land of the South (i.e Yugo). Slavs – was created at a time Croat, Slovenian and

Bosnian territories that had been part of the Austro – Hungary Empire united with the Serbian Kingdom. The country broke up under the Nazi occupation during the Second World War with the creation of Nazi – Allied independent Croat state, but was re-united at the end of the war when the communist dominated partisan force of Josip Broz Tito liberated the country. Yugoslavia broke up for a plethora of factors among them; sharp ethnic differences, religious intolerance and suppression (Itoteman, 2014).

Like Yugoslavia, Nigeria is undoubtedly a plural state. It was amalgamated in 1914 by Lord Lugard and became independent on 1st October, 1960. In the first republic, political parties took ethnic lines both in name and orientation. The NPC – Northern People Congress had the motto – One North, One People. The Action Group metamorphosed from a Yoruba cultural organization “EgbeOmoOduduwa”. It was unfortunate that even the NCNC was reduced to the party of the East. Such manipulations by politicians can and did turn what was in origin simply harmless identification with a local community into destructive conflict (Ottaway, 1995). Ishadelfamose (2009) gave an insight into ethnic distribution of party leaders in 1958, thus:

Party	Igbo	Yoruba	Hausa/Fulani
NCNC	49.3%	26.7%	2.8%
AG	4.5%	68.2%	3.0%
NPC	– %	6.8%	51.3%

Ethnic groups are not necessarily homogeneous entities even linguistically and culturally. The reason is that often, minor linguistic and cultural differences exist within the group. However, this may not be enough to dilute the very basis of oneness as a group rather it can be a basis for further delineation of sub-ethnic groups. In Nigeria, ethnicity is very closely associated with strong belief in a perceived cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. Ethnicity is a phenomenon associated with the interactions among formations. Ethnicity emphasises exclusiveness which enhances ingroup-outgroup boundaries which are always guarded jealously by various ethnic groups. In this dimension of ethnicity, acceptance and rejection on linguistic cultural grounds characterizes social relations. This is evident when it comes to job opportunities, marriages and admissions into educational institutions. These have been formed to toe ethnic lines and has deepened the dangerous issue of nepotism, jingoism and even its extreme chauvinism (Nnoli, 1980).

The inevitability of conflict in every social interaction arise and more so under conditions of inter-ethnic competition for scarce valuable resources and fear of being confined to the bottom of inter-ethnic ladder of inequality.

The dearth of national integration in a plural society like Nigeria where tribalism has eclipsed nationalism spells doom and sounds a dearth knell for the continued unity of Nigeria. Nigeria is a greatly divided country. This division is accompanied with serious suspicion, distrust, discrimination, and antagonism among its diverse people. These problems have had grave consequences for the good health, orderly growth, development, stable democratic government, unity and survival of the nation. The different measures and approaches designed and employed by successive Nigerian governments to unite, preserve and generally keep the country afloat such as the inauguration of the National Youth Service Corps and the establishment of unity schools cannot be said to have been really effective. The polity is still daily faced with increasingly monumental crises of insecurity, sectarian violence, ethnic strife, political instability and threats of disintegration (Enaruma, 2015).

With the emergence of General Muhammadu Buhari as the President of Nigeria in 2015, there has been palpable fear of the resurgence of militancy in many parts of Nigeria. The Niger Delta militants have returned to the creeks and have punctured some strategic pipelines. Boko Haram (Western education is sin) have continually unleashed mayhem, carnage and wanton destruction on residents of North East Nigeria. The menace of militant herdsman in Nigeria has left many families desolate. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have regrouped and united in their agitation for the independence of Biafra. The Niger Delta militants have equally in one occasion or the other demanded autonomy. Other groups such as the Odua People Congress, (OPC) also exist. They all see themselves fighting a just course. They all hide under the aphorism *“one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”*. The activities of these groups are strong indications that Nigeria may as well be at the brink of not only disintegrating but utter chaos and manslaughter. People agitate and tend to be violent when they have been short changed. At the background of the swell opposition and agitation against the centre is lack of true fiscal federalism. Ayoade (1998) called Nigeria *“a forced brotherhood and sisterhood that has been the subject of continued tinkering, panel beating and even attempted dissolution”*.

Yugoslavia just like the present day Nigeria was plagued by sharp ethnic lines. The SFR Yugoslavia was a conglomeration of eight federated entities, roughly divided along ethnic lines, including six republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – and the two autonomous provinces within Serbia, Vojvodina and Kosovo. Tensions between the Croats and Serbs often erupted into open conflict, with the Serb-dominated security structure exercising oppression during elections and the assassination in national parliament of Croat political leaders, including Stjepan Radic who opposed the Serbian monarch’s

absolutism. The assassination and human rights abuses were subject of concern for the Human Right League and precipitated voices of protests from intellectuals, including Albert Einstein. It was this environment of oppression that the radical insurgent group (latest fascist dictatorship), the Ustase were formed (Wikipedia; the free encyclopaedia).

2. Objectives of Study

The objectives of study include the following:

1. To examine the prevalent socio-political, ethnic and religious state of Nigeria;
2. To find out whether ethnicity and religious intolerance are capable of breaking up Nigeria;
3. To determine if the factors that led to the balkanisation of Yugoslavia abound in Nigeria;
4. To determine if Nigeria is going the way of Yugoslavia;
5. To make recommendations on how to checkmate Nigeria's disintegration.

3. Methodology

Basically, the work is a qualitative research which aimed at comparing the socio-political and historical experience of Yugoslavia with the Nigerian situation and making appropriate recommendations. It was desk/library based and did not embark on any field work. The study relied on secondary sources of data from journals, books, unpublished works, newspapers and the internet for the conduct of its analysis and conclusion.

4. Theoretical Framework

This work is hinged on the Group theory which emphasizes interest as the fulcrum of the organization of groups. A single universe of groups which combine, break, federate and form constellations of power in a flux of restless alterations is kept going and in order to explain how it can keep going in spite of the perpetual conflict among groups in which each is frantically pursuing its own narrow interest (Varma, 1999).

The proponents of the Group theory like Arthur Bentley, Daniel Truman and Robert Dahl saw a group as a mass of activity propelled by interest. Interest is a shared attitude concerning a chain of claims made by one group upon certain other groups in a social system. The continued sustenance of interest of various groups is the only assurance to keep the social system going. Yugoslavia just like Nigeria was an amalgam of many nations. What precipitated the union was interest quite unlike Nigeria's forced

federalism. According to Onyeneho (2014) a federal state is an association of states formed voluntarily for certain purpose in which the component or federating units are ideally independent but coordinate with one another. The federation of Nigeria is such an association but the demand of voluntary submission is not true of Nigeria.

In Nigeria, there has been cries and agitations premised on lopsided power equation and unprotected interests of many groups. While some are agitating for restructuring, others for autonomy, for their respective geopolitical zones. Clash of interests which is the bane of group theory was undoubtedly the underpinning factor that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. A look at the happenings in Nigeria today, also reveals a similar trend as the federating units are at loggerheads on what should form an acceptable political and economic template for sharing. At the background of most agitations in Nigeria is the issue of both inequality and lack of fiscal federalism.

5. Yugoslavia in Perspective

Yugoslavia was a conglomeration of eight federated entities, roughly divided along ethnic lines, including six republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – and two autonomous provinces within Serbia, Vojvodina and Kosovo. Yugoslavia was in its heyday a regional industrial power and an economic success. From 1960 to 1980, annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged 6.1%, medical care was free, literacy was 91% and life expectancy was 72years (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia).

However, structural problems, economic collapse, inter-ethnic rivalries and deep seated religious intolerance all combined to the balkanization of Yugoslavia. As Itotenaan, 2016:64 points out:

“In October, 1990 the United States National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) presented a dire warning to the US policy community on Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia will cease to function as a federal state within a year, and will probably dissolve within two. Economic reform will not stave off the break up a full scale inter-republic war is unlikely, but serious inter communal conflict will accompany the break up and will continue afterward. The violence will be intractable and bitter. There is little the United States and its European allies can do to preserve Yugoslavia unity.”

True to the prediction of the United States National Intelligence Estimate, Yugoslavia broke up for reasons that are akin to Nigeria. The numerous ethnic groups that made up Yugoslavia held historical animosities towards one another stretching back in some cases hundreds of years. Yet these animosities were put aside after world war two and

under Tito's grip, the nation achieved internal peace. They were not however forgotten and when nationalist politicians needed to create a power base, they had to promote nationalist symbols and myths and encouraged the discussion and exaggeration of past atrocities. For instance, tensions between Croats and Serbs often erupted *"into open conflict, with the Serbian dominated security structure exercising oppression during elections and the assassination in national parliament of Croat political leaders it was this environment of oppression that the radical insurgent group (late fascist dictatorship), the Ustase were formed"* (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia).

They were however divided in other ways. Croats and Slovenes were Roman Catholic. They used the Latin alphabet and oriented towards the Western and Central Europe. In contrast Serbs, Macedonia and Montenegrins were under the repressive autocratic control of the Ottoman Turks, Eastern Orthodox in religion and they used the Cyrillic alphabet and were less economically developed. The high handedness of Slobodon Milosevic who became President in 1989 did not equally help matters. He capitalized on the progressively weakening central government to sow seed of conflict and discord in the other republics. His government attempted to impose its authority on the rest of the country and this led Slovenia and Croatia to hurriedly declare their independence on June 25, 1991. Fighting immediately broke out with Macedonia declaring her independence in September 1991 while the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina voted for independence October the same year. There were external factors that also made significant impact. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the unification of Germany one year after and the imminent collapse of Soviet Union all served to erode Yugoslavia stability. As Eastern European states moved away from communist government towards free elections and market economies, the West's attention focused away from Yugoslavia and undermined extensive economic and financial support necessary to preserve a Yugoslavian economy that was already on the brink of collapse (Itoteman, 2015). Today, Yugoslavia has become history.

6. The Nigerian Situation

Just like Yugoslavia, the United States National Intelligence Council in 2005, in a document entitled *"Mapping Sub-Sahara Africa's future"* predicted outright collapse of Nigeria as a nation state in 2015. This prediction should not be wished away. Ambassador John Campbell one of the masterminds of that report resolutely opined *"my view has not changed about the serious challenges Nigeria faces. I think the challenges are more pronounced than they were before the Boko Haram insurrection began in the North. Political life is also unsettled by the approach of the 2015 election"* (Daily Sun, 2015). Although Nigeria had not disintegrated but there are potent

indications that it may still disintegrate. The country was welded together from multifarious nations and tribes for the administrative convenience of its colonialist. Nigeria has severally been adjudged “*a mere geographical expression*” on the strength of its fragile composition.

Boko Haram undoubtedly has terrorized Nigerians unleashing rape, carnage, abduction and anguish in its trail. Boko Haram has reportedly killed over 2000 people in various heinous attacks since the beginning of the year 2014 (Saturday Sun, 2014). In the same year 2014, Boko Haram retook Mubi in Adamawa State and renamed it “Mudinatul Islam” which means “the city of Islam”. It subsequently introduced Sharia and amputated ten people. In the same year, it abducted over two hundred Chibok girls and has since abducted more. This particular act has painted Nigeria black in the international arena. The activities of the Niger Delta Militants have equally not helped matters. Since the advent of President Muhammad Buhari’s government, there has been massive explosion of oil pipe lines which has brought Nigerian’s economy to its knees. Paramount in their demands have been restructuring of Nigeria and resource control. Quite recently there has been outrage and demonstrations by the combined forces of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) for the actualization of the independent state of Biafra.

Militant herdsmen have killed many Nigerians, burning their houses and ravaging their women. The militant herdsmen have been branded “*fourth most deadly terror organization in the world*” by the international terror index (Femi FaniKayode, 2016). In the words of Fani Kayode (2016:12):

“Our country, is like Yugoslavia unfolding before it exploded and violently broke into five separate countries. All the signs are there. Anyone that knows about the history of Yugoslavia or that is a student of world history will agree with me and appreciate what I am saying. The fact that a war is coming is a testimony to the fact that we have all failed to manage the peace that God has given us since 1970 and the cessation of hostilities after our brutal civil war. We have failed so badly that the remote and immediate causes of that civil war are back with us even though we hate to admit or acknowledge it. Consider the dangerous mix. A crumbling economy, an inept, weak, failing and paranoid government. A hungry, angry and increasingly desperate civilian population. An ignorant, obsessive, arrogant, insensitive, corrupt and self-absorbed political class who are out of touch with reality.”

7. Need for National Integration and True Federalism

National integration is a process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based on an order its members regard as equitably harmonious (Duverger, 1976). According to Eisinger (1976), integration is built on the fact of diversity, the need for mutual accommodation and the desire of the parties in the system to maintain the integrity of the competing groups. National integration is the effort to cement people of heterogeneous backgrounds to enhance development while not encroaching on their cherished values. National integration fosters unity, oneness where members of a state treat one another fairly and do resolve their differences harmoniously for the good of all.

The question is, can there be national integration in a lopsided federalism? A federal state is an association of state formed voluntarily for certain purpose in which the components or federating units are ideally independent but coordinate with one another. The federation of Nigeria is such an association but the demand of voluntary submission is not true of Nigeria (Onyeneho, 2014). The central government of a federation usually termed the federal government is most effective for common defence, greater international prestige, and control over foreign relations, foreign and international trades, armed services, currency and postal services. The authority of the central government should be constitutionally restricted within its scope. The central authority may be strong, but should not be allowed to extend beyond the limits constitutionally defined for it.

In Nigeria, however, the federalism rather than being premised on coordinate relationship is anchored on subordinate relationship. The federal government can override the decisions of state governments or suspend them as witnessed in 2005 when the federal government suspended and took over the government of Plateau State for a record six months and appointed a Sole Administrator (Onyeneho, 2014). Many reasons have been given for Nigeria's lopsided federalism. Oyovbaire (1978) posited that the entrance of the military into the politics of Nigeria tempered the federal configuration. First, there was the imposition of the command structure on the governance and secondly, there was re-orientation of the attitude towards nation building and development. Thirdly, there was a progressive pull up of powers towards the Centre which resulted in a huge concentration of power and resources in the Centre. Lastly there was a growing balkanization of the units and a consequent weakening of the component parts that made them dependent on the centre and unviable. This situation no doubt transformed Nigeria's federalism from a peripheralized federation to a centralized one. The concentration of powers and resources at the centre is such that some analysts have characterized the Nigerian situation as unitary federalism.

It is perhaps in recognition of the structural imbalance of the Nigerian federation, the quest for resource control, fiscal federalism and other agitations for equity and egalitarianism that made the Government of former President Goodluck Jonathan to set up the National Conference in 2014 to address these and other concerns in the Nigerian polity. The Conference made up of distinguished Nigerians from different strata of the federation deliberated extensively on the Nigerian situation and made far-reaching recommendations aimed at creating a basis for the mutual coexistence of the various ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian state.

8. Conclusion and Recommendation

There is no doubt that Nigeria is a plural state with a historically forced unity. Nigeria had experienced a lot of crises in the past. There was a civil war which ended in 1970 and claimed about three million lives (Achebe, 2012). It does not seem Nigerians have learnt much from the lessons of that war. Most of the crisis in the country had to do with the dearth of fiscal federalism and devolution of power to the constituent parts. The centre is too fortified thereby making constituent parts impotent and vulnerable. Corruption had sent the nation crawling and the activities of militants have consigned many to their early graves. The activities of AK 47 wielding herdsmen, religious extremists and agitations by other groups for outright independence have weakened the nation politically and economically. These should be checkmated. Also the resolutions of the 2014 National Conference should be implemented. Proponents of balkanization, insurgents, religious extremists and militants should be treated as state deviants while the secularity of Nigeria should be upheld. The implementation of the recommendations will checkmate the balkanization of Nigeria and prevent the unleashing of chaos and anarchy on the volatile Nigerian state.

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