

Assessing Nigeria's Post-Civil War Idea of "No Victor No Vanquish" Agenda in the Southeast Geopolitical Zone: A Panacea for National Unity

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Abstract

On 15 January 1970, at the end of the brutal Nigeria Civil War, pronounced the outcome of the war as that of "no victor, no vanquished" an important rhetorical effort to heal the wounds of the war and to give a sense of belonging to the defeated 'Biafrans' into the Nigerian State. The General Gowon administration made it clear that the aim of the Federal Government was the reunification and reintegration of the former citizens of the rebel Republic of Biafra into the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, 53 years after the famous speech, the southeast geopolitical zone which constituted the majority of the former Biafra Republic is still struggling for political inclusion, social equity, and economic emancipation and development from the Nigerian state. The effect has been the reinforcement of the bitterness of the civil war which has in recent times resurrected the agitation for the independence of Biafra as evident in the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) with a severe threat to the unity of the country. The study therefore recommended the need for restructuring of the country, the creation of more states for the southeast, and inclusive politics among others for the restoration of peace and harmony in the country. The study relied primarily on secondary data and content analysis for its research methodology.

Keywords: National Integration, Civil War, Social Cohesion, Social Inequity, Political Exclusion, and Marginalization.

Introduction

On 15 January 1970, at the end of the brutal Nigerian Civil War, Major General Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria pronounced the outcome of the war as that of "no victor no vanquished" an important rhetorical effort to heal the wounds of the war and give a sense of belonging to the defeated Biafrans back into Nigeria. General Gowon made it clear that the aim of the federal government was the unification and reintegration of the former citizens of the republic into Nigeria as part of the federation (Kobo, 2020). This was followed by the policy of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reintegration otherwise known as the 3Rs policy. The 3Rs policy was aimed at erasing the memories of the war, reintegrating the people and rebuilding the war-torn Eastern region where the war took place as well as improving the existing infrastructure in the region.

The Speech became famous and attracted accolades and commendations across the international community and also averted what would have later become a huge disaster for the Nigerian state and the entire Western African region. However, 53 years later, the southeast (Igbos) is still struggling with the inequities and inequalities that laid the foundation for the brutal war. The experience for the average Igbo man has been tormenting because of the social inequality, economic marginalization, political exclusion, discrimination in appointments and deprivation in terms of

infrastructural development thereby making the region the most affected in terms of federal developmental presence. This reinforced the bitterness of the long-forgotten brutal civil among the south-eastern Nigeria people who are mostly Igbos, which has found expression in the revocation of the Biafra agitations, seeking the sovereign and independent state of Biafra, from the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) to the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB). Currently, IPOB is the rallying point for secessionists in South-eastern Nigeria with dire consequences. Against this backdrop, the study reappraises the post-Civil War declaration of “no victor, no vanquished” alongside the injustices meted at the southeast by the federal government as well as the emergence of IPOB. The aim is to draw out the implications of the injustices on the people of south-eastern Nigeria to Nigeria’s unity so as to remind the Federal government, policymakers and opinion leaders of the consequences of such actions to Nigeria’s unity and to make actionable recommendations on the way forward to addressing the challenges. Tell us the parts of which your paper will cover.

Methodology

The study relied largely on secondary sources of information and content analysis of the phenomenon under study due to its evolving nature. These include extant literature on the subject matter and the use of documentary evidence and reports, news reports from print and electronics, as well as social media reports from confirmed sources. This is supported by internet search engines which proved quite useful to the study in searching for information.

The Concept of National Unity

Ideally, national unity depicts the ability to accept other people from different ethnic groups as one, irrespective of religion, status, culture and geographical location. It encourages people to share ideas, values and emotional bonds and brings a feeling of unity within diversity. Just like other social science concepts, national unity has been defined by many scholars from different perspectives, incidentally, all the definitions seem to have common related basic concepts. This is the reason why it tends to include national cohesion, national integration, nation-building and social solidarity in its description (Bandyopadhyay & Greene, 2009). Although their evolution is intertwined, each of the concepts is different. The Concept of National Unity is used commonly to describe the process of uniting people of various races or ethnic groups with different cultures under one form of national identity (Ismail, 2003). The Malaysian National Unity Advisory Panel (1992) conceptualizes it as “a state in which all citizens from various groups (ethnic, religion, regions) live in peace as one united nation, giving full commitment to national identity based upon the Federal Constitution and the National Ideology”. This contention is suggestive of a social situation wherein the citizens consisting of diverse ethnic nationalities, religious beliefs and regions co-exist peacefully as one united nation in accordance with national ideology and Federal constitution.

However, most scholarly definitions of national unity have used the term simultaneously with the term national integration which covers a vast extent of human relationships as well as attitudes ranging from the development of the sense of national identity to the integration of diverse and discrete cultural traditions which include beliefs, values, religion, culture, language, race, gender and many others (Chang, Azizan, & Amran, 2013:175). According to Amri and Etnik (2007), integration is a process that creates a national identity among a separate group in terms of cultural, social and political position, while Unity can be defined as processes that unite the whole community and country to create a sharing value and identity of oneness in order to love and be proud of the country. Morrison et al (1972) in Ojo (2009) argue that national unity is a process by which members of a social system (the citizens) develop linkages and locations so that the boundaries of the system persist over time and the numbers of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact,

cooperation, consensus and community. This view is upheld by Ojo (2009), who asserts that national unity is the process of unifying a country which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. Jacob and Tenure (2009) see it as a relationship of community among people within the same political entity ... a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive, to act together, and to be committed to mutual programmes.

Tee Abdullah (2010) put the words "integration and unity" together and defined it as a process to unite a community under one national identity. He further states that cooperation and unity can be promoted via the integration of the federal, economic, cultural, social, educational and political. It is based on this understanding that the Nigerian government has emphasised national integration as an integral part of national unity and national cohesion since the end of the civil war in 1970. However, the principles of such national unity and integration as articulated by the Nigerian constitution have been implemented in breach by successive governments to date. Thereby creating social disharmony, disunity and issues of social cohesion among the divergent groups in Nigeria. The emergence of IPOB and its associated security challenges in the southeast is a consequence of the poor implementation of the principles of national unity and integration as enshrined in the constitution.

The Tansi-International College Awka (2020) highlighted the principles of National Unity to include a common goal, mutual understanding, love, cooperation and trust among the divergent groups that make up a country, and insists that to ensure that these principles are achieved there must be tolerance, unity and faith in their fatherland. The College further highlighted the measures adopted by the Nigerian Government to promote National Unity such as Wazobia; an effort to bring the languages of three major ethnic groups into one national language. Programmes on radio and television were broadcast in the three major languages. WA-Yoruba, Zo-Hausa, Bia-Igbo. Three languages were introduced in the post-primary education curriculum (still in practice to date); the National Youth Service (NYSC) Scheme; the Unity Schools system, the Federal Character Principle; Sports and Cultural Festivals, and the Nigerian Defence Academy. Sadly, these lofty policies and programmes of the government have been defectively implemented to favour a particular region at the detriment of other regions. The most affected is the southeast geopolitical zone which over the past 53 years since the end of the civil war has been unjustly and unfairly treated in a union where it comprises one of the major three ethnic groups that make up the country. This has elicited several calls from scholars, opinion leaders as well as ethno-regional and religious groupings in Nigeria for national dialogue or the full implementation of the previous national dialogues or conferences such as the 2014 National Conference that addresses divisive politics, inequity and inequalities among divergent groups in Nigeria to strengthen national unity. However, it appears to have fallen on deaf ears as Buhari's administration ended up reinforcing the division rather than closing the gaps, which have plunged the country on the path to perdition and disunity.

Understanding the Southeast Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria and the Problematic

The Southeast geopolitical zone which constitutes one of the six geopolitical zones that presently, make up Nigeria is nothing but a chip of the Old Eastern Region which comprises what presently is regarded as the southeast and south-south zones without the Edo-speaking region. The journey of its creation started on 27 May 1967 in the midst of the clamour for self-determination prior to the declaration of the independent state of Biafra in July 1967. The region was fragmented by the then military government of Lt General Yakubu Gowon as part of his twelve states' creation to weaken the Eastern Region. The fragmentation culminated in the creation of three regions namely, the East Central State with capital in Enugu, the Southeast State with capital in Calabar, and River State with Port Harcourt as its capital (Eke, 1997), which resulted in the 12 states structure of the Federal Government.

The aim was to balkanize the formerly strong Eastern region into smaller and smaller space to single the Igbo ethnic group out into a land-locked region to weaken its economic base to serve as a check against the rise of Biafra. It also weakened its political strength, as the newly created regions clamoured for recognition thereby creating identity problems amongst the different ethnic nationalities in the former Eastern region. The aim was achieved and the region was pushed into a cul-de-sac. However, a few years after the war, the region which later became known as the East Central State with its Capital in Enugu bounced back to become one of the hottest commercial hubs in Nigeria with locations in Onitsha and Aba.

In a continuous effort to weaken the region, successive military administrations further diced the country from a 12-state federation in 1967, 19 states in 1976, 21 states in 1987, to 30 states in 1991 and finally 36 states and the FCT in 1996. And later the categorization and adoption of the states into six geopolitical zones: Northcentral, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, South-south, and southwest geopolitical zones by the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha in line with the earlier recommendation of the 1994 National Constitutional Conference (NCC) (Gbenga, 2010).

The six geopolitical zones automatically became the basis for sharing the country's economic, political, and educational resources. With only five states in the southeast geopolitical zone, which includes Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states as against other geopolitical zones with six states each and the Northwest with seven states, the Southeast automatically gets the least of the resources due to the disadvantageous position it found itself among others, economically and politically. Moreover, the region has the least number of local government councils, and the value of allocations is determined by the number of LGs. This means that it gets the least allocation from the federation accounts as against the huge bonuses of other geopolitical zones. Equally, the region has the least federal government assets and infrastructure sites in the country.

In terms of population, the southeast zone has an estimated population of 21,955,414 (21.9 million) approximately the size of Sri Lanka (NBS, 2017). The region's population is predominantly Christians and members of the Igbo ethnic group who make up approximately 18% of the national population, estimated at a total population of 223,804,632 people (Worldometer, 2023). Demographically, youth make up a moderate to high share of the overall population in the southeast. Three states among the five states are significant producers of crude oil and natural gas (Imo, Abia and Anambra states), and also share similarities of a petroleum industry political economy (Vanguard, 10 April 2018). Across the range of industrialization, the Southeast has the most minor numbers of publicly quoted companies in Nigeria (NWGAV, 2014). Cumulatively, the southeast economy is more informal and employs fewer graduates than other regions (NWGAV, 2014).

At the end of the 30 months (1967-1970) brutal Nigerian Civil War on 12 January and officially on 15 January 1970 with the acceptance of the instrument of surrender from Col. Phillip Effiong who then headed the Biafra in the absence of its leader, Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, who had earlier slipped out of his territory in search of international support, the Head of State, Gen. Gowon, rather than basked in the euphoria of perceived victory chose to face the most challenging task of achieving reconciliation and reintegration of the defunct Biafra territory and its people within the shortest possible time. This was expressed through the famous speech "No Victor, No Vanquished" aimed at healing the wounds of the war and charting a new progressive front for the entire country.

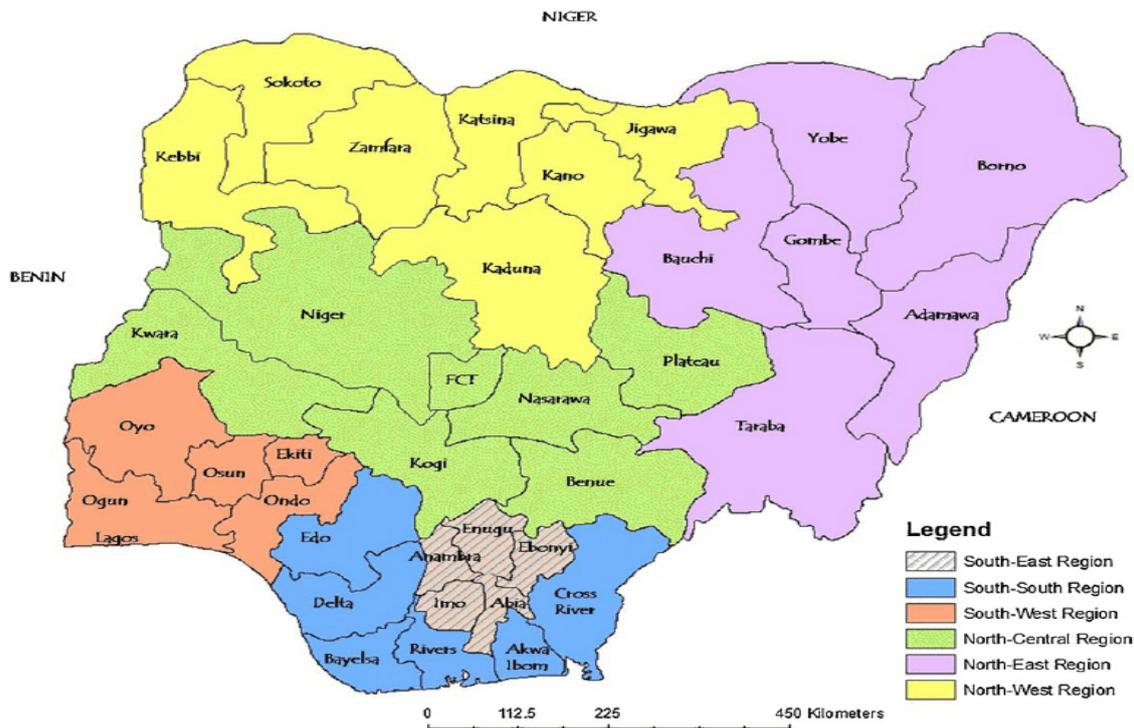


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria Showing the Southeast Geopolitical zone and the other five Geopolitical Zones

Source: Uploaded by Pius Ekong.

The speech was followed by the Federal Government policy of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Reintegration (3Rs), to erase the scars of the war in the war-torn region. The 3Rs Policy did not just try to rapidly address issues of immediate socio-economic and infrastructural concerns but vividly underpinned Gowon’s vision of the future; a vision of a greater, united Nigeria in which anyone, from the East, West, North and South could aspire success in any field of human endeavour (Gowon, 2015). To further strengthen the commitment to national unity and integration, a one-year compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme was initiated by Gowon in 1973. The *raison d’être* for the founding of the NYSC is multifarious but the most crucial objective was the cultural integration of the youths, young graduates who were posted to communities outside their home states to know their country, understand other ethnic groups, and to serve and help (Gowon, 2015). This was further supported by the Federal Government’s establishment of Unity Schools across the 12 states of the federation. The schools brought about cultural and religious integration on one hand and academic excellence on the other (The Guardian, 14 June 2021). Unfortunately, apart from the NYSC being able to achieve its purposes to a great degree, the 3Rs policy was implemented in a breach and therefore could not achieve the desired results. Thus created the room for disenchantment and animosity that continued to cast aspersions on the federal government policies in the region. The disenchantment and disharmony led the Murtala/ Obasanjo regime to come up with the Federal Character Principle in the 1979 Constitution, to curb discrimination and underrepresentation that characterized the era and to give a sense of belonging to the Igbos in the administration of the country. However, the inability of successive administrations to drive these policies for national unity and integration has been poor and inadequate. Thus, reinforcing the inequities and inequalities of the pre-Civil War era that laid the foundation for the war. We shall therefore address these policies independently to draw out the challenges that have reinforced agitations in the southeast in recent times.

Creation of States

In May 1967 while the Igbos were being massacred across the northern and western regions after the counter-coup of July 1966, the federal government of Nigeria under the leadership of Lt Col Yakubu Gowon fragmented the existing four regions (Northern, Western, Eastern and Mid-Western regions) into 12 federating states. This move led to the splitting of the Old Eastern Region into three more regions; East Central State with capital in Enugu, the Southeast State with capital in Calabar, and Rivers State with Port Harcourt as its capital. The aim was to weaken the strength of the region to form a formidable front politically and economically to confront the federal government. David J. Murray identified this plan when he said:

“The Federal Nigerian Government will have to achieve new drive and dynamism if it is effectively to reintegrate the whole Ibo people.... This author notes that to those in power in the Eastern Region, the decree of May 1967, creating the 12 states was a device for removing from their control land, oil under that land, and thus wealth. The creation of the East Central, Southeast and Rivers States out of the former Eastern Region became the immediate cause of the attempted secession of Eastern Nigeria and the creation of Biafra.” (Murray, 1970:135)

Incidentally, the aim was achieved as the federal government was able to Balkanize the region into smaller pieces to the extent that the Igbos were pushed into a land-locked situation. It created an identity and survivalist problem within the region as the newly created region became antagonistic to the Igbos in the quest to get closer to the federal government for political and economic support. In addition, the fragmentation continued to the extent that the southeast in recent times has the least number of states and local government councils compared to the other geopolitical zones and therefore gets the least allocation of revenue among the six geopolitical zones of the country. This is because the local governments and states form the basis of revenue allocation and sharing from the federation accounts. Thus deepening the marginalization of the Igbos in the sharing of the commonwealth of the country. Aribisala (2015) pointed out that the consequence of the southeast being the only zone with the least states is the least amount of revenue allocation in the federation. Collaboratively, the former Governor of Anambra State, Dr Chukwuemeka Ezeife and the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Chief Olu Falae, have argued that the creation of more states and local governments in favour of the Northern states was an injustice against their zones, southeast & southwest respectively as gave the North both political and economic advantages over the other regions (Kalu, 2017). Falae further pointed out that Lagos state which is densely populated, shared a uniform number of local governments (precisely 20 LGAs) with Kano state. However, Lagos has been made to retain the same number of local government areas, while Kano has grown to 71 LGAs inclusive of Jigawa State (44+27) (Kalu, 2017). Recall that Jigawa state was carved out of Kano. It is not only the lopsided revenue allocations being channelled to the northern region that are perceived as injustices, but the political inequities acutely manifest in addressing the national issues (Nsoedo, 2019).

Table 1 shows the distribution of local government areas in Nigeria by Geopolitical zones.

With such a structure, the voice of the region is suppressed by the overwhelming voices of the other regions, by inference affecting policies towards the zone in a negative way. The dilapidated nature of the southeast roads, the insignificant presence of federal government projects, the disadvantage in federal appointments, and the political exclusion of the southeast that has characterized the present administration are all part of the effects of a weak political structure.

Table. 1: Distribution of LGAs by Geopolitical zones

Geopolitical Zones	No of LGAs	Percentage of LGAs	Population of LGAs in Millions	Percentage in National Population
Northcentral + Abuja	120	55.5	12.5	14
Northeast	111	14.3	11.9	13.4
Northwest	186	24	22.9	25.8
Southeast	95	12.2	10.8	12.1
Southsouth	123	16	13.3	15.1
Southwest	139	18	17.4	19.6
Total	774	100	88.8	100

Source: Compiled from the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended.

The Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Reintegration (3Rs) Policy

The Federal Government’s 3Rs policy and the dictum of No Victor, No Vanquished by Gen Gowon, were meant to assure the people of the defunct Biafra territory that the war was officially over, and there was a great need to rehabilitate and reconstruct the war-torn region by attracting more presence of government, and spread of infrastructural development as well as citing national assets and critical infrastructures to complement and improve what was on the ground for effective functioning of the region (Gowon, 2015). It was also to ensure communities within the region that they have not been abandoned. However, the federal government rather than vigorously and successfully implementing the 3Rs policy, to achieve the objectives of the policy was found wanting, as the implementation was haphazardly conducted. Incidentally, successive governments after the Gowon regime have continued along the line with little or none to show for it, thereby entrenching in the discrimination of the region in terms of critical national assets and infrastructure citing across the country.

Official statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicate that: on quality and length of roads, the number of healthcare facilities and educational institutions provided by the federal government between 2003 and 2008, the North is generally higher than the South. Within the southern region, the south-south records are better and far higher than the southeast, and slightly lower than the Southwest (Udalla & Ezegwu, 2011). In addition, the entire Old Eastern region cannot boast of a functional international cargo airport and sea ports despite being the hub of the economic structure in Nigeria. For decades the Port Harcourt and Calabar ports have deliberately rendered redundant to frustrate economic activities in the southeast and emasculate the economy of the Igbos who are predominantly commercial traders.

Suffice it to know that up until the Nigeria Civil War, the Port Harcourt Port was a bustling port (Information Service, 1956 quoted in Nsoedo, 2019). It was also the second largest port in the country commissioned in 1913 as with Lagos port (NIMASA e-Library, n.d). The Calabar seaport was equally busy handling exports and imports, thus aiding commercial activities across the region. This deliberate redundancy of the seaports by the federal government frustrated Igbo businesses and led to the massive migration of their businesses to Lagos and Ogun states because of their proximity to the seaports and the resultant steady congestion of the Lagos port. A recent report based on estimates by terminal operators has it that more than 2 million twenty tons equivalent units (TEUs) of laden containers are awaiting clearance at Lagos seaports (The Pointer, 2019). The Lagos ports handle over 80 per cent of the cargo that comes into the country (The Pointer, 2019). These challenges prompted Nsoedo (2019) to ask:

“In spite of these problems and the perennial calls for the decongestion of the Lagos seaports, the federal government have remained adamant, sometimes with frivolous excuses of why it could not be done. The question is, if there is oneness in the country as it is being propagated by the federal government, why is the River Niger not dredged till now? Why are the Calabar and Warri ports still not improved, or make it friendly to use Port Harcourt port to ease the economic waste arising from the concentration of activities in the Lagos ports?” (Nsoedo, 2019:430).

There is also the issue of functional cargo international airports in the southeast geopolitical zone despite being the hub of commercial trade as well as the massive population of the Igbos scattered around the world with businesses on importation and exportation of goods and services across the world. It is highly worrisome and unacceptable that there is no single functional international flight from the zone. It is more pathetic when they could only connect direct international flights from Lagos, Abuja or Kano and not Enugu or Owerri. In 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan was able to complete the facilities at the Enugu Airport now Akanu Ibiam International Airport to commence international flights. However, there are still impediments as it is only Ethiopia Airline with a direct route from Nigeria to Addis Ababa that plies it. It is important to note that the inability of the federal government to upgrade the Enugu Airport to international status was deliberate and a ploy to emasculate the economy of the region

In addition, under the President Buhari administration, the southeast geopolitical zone was deliberately excluded from the Federal Government/EXIM China US\$22.7 billion project loan presented for approval in the Senate in 2020 is a striking example. According to the President, the loan was to ensure the prompt implementation of projects under the borrowing plan with specific emphasis on infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, water supply, growth and employment generation, poverty, reduction through social safety net programmes, governance and financial management reforms among others (The Guardian, 18 March 2020). Looking at the extent of deprivation and marginalization in the southeast, one begins to wonder why a loan meant to be invested in the improvement of infrastructure in the country excluded the most deprived of the regions, in terms of government critical national assets and infrastructure. Details of the loan, when it was made public, revealed that the southeast zone was excluded from the projects it was intended for. None of the projects captured in the loan for execution when it is eventually received falls within the southeast zone. Just as other zones will enjoy a measure of succour from it. Available details indicated that southwest will get \$200,000,000 while south-south, excluding Edo State, will get \$4,270,000,000. Northwest will get \$6,372,000,000, Northeast will get \$300,000,000, and Northcentral will get \$6,531,000,000 while \$5,853,900,000 is reserved for general expenses (The Guardian, 18 March 2020). While the southeast gets nothing. Distribution or allocation of government resources in such a manner sets the zone on a warpath with the government and also reinforces the embers of disenchantment and disunity in the country.

The Abandoned Properties in Rivers State

The term ‘Abandoned Property’ is generally used to describe the property acquired by non-indigenes in the various States in Nigeria before the Nigerian Civil War, and which property was left in the States where they were resident before returning to their states of origin. It was an official term used by the Nigerian government to describe the property of fleeing Nigerians from their States of residence to their home States and which property was taken over by the Nigerian state (Akolokwu, 2012). In Rivers State, it was used to designate premises or compounds, buildings and lands belonging to the Igbos who were resident in Port Harcourt before the Nigerian Civil War but who left to return to their states; and which properties were handed over to the Abandoned Property (Custody and Management) Authority. According to the Rivers State Edict on Abandoned Property (1969):

“Abandoned Property means any moveable or immovable belongings to a person whose hometown or place of origin is not situated in the Rivers State of Nigeria, which in the opinion of the Military Government or the Authority has been abandoned by the owner thereof as a result of the civil war in Nigeria or the disturbances in the country leading to it and is at the time of the making of this Edict not in the physical occupation or under the personal control and management of such owner” (Edict No 8, 1969).

As part of the unification and reintegration of the country after the civil war with the hope of giving a sense of belonging to the Igbos back into Nigeria and also finding a lasting solution to the disenchantment and frustration of the Igbos who lost their properties outside their territory, the Murtala/Obasanjo regime that took over power from Gowon in 1975 set up the Col. Daramola Panel on Abandoned Properties in Rivers State. The Policy marked the first serious attempt to find a solution to the problem of abandoned properties during the post-civil War era (Onoh, 2023). It was seen by many to have transcended ethnic politics. In accepting the recommendations of the Panel, the Head of State, Gen. Murtala advised in a broadcast to the nation: “At this stage, any just solution to the question of abandoned properties must involve the spirit of give-and-take on all sides” (quoted in Onoh, 2023). Afterwards, a package of N14 million naira was announced by the Murtala to enable the two states (Rivers and East Central) to pay rent arrears on all the building property. Both State governments were directed to pay adequate compensation on all acquisitions to the owners. According to Onoh (2023):

“Specifically, Adeniji enumerated in his review that the White Paper on the Panel’s report directed that 75% of the houses in Port Harcourt should be sold to indigenes of Rivers State while 10% should be sold to other Nigerians, excluding the Igbos. By mathematical deduction, 15% of the building in Port Harcourt was to be released to the Igbo owners. Those who have their buildings now belong to this category (Onoh, 2023).

Selling 85% of the houses to Rivers people and other Nigerians excluding the Igbos when the properties in question legitimately belonged to the Igbos is not in tune with the dictum of No Victor, Vanquished as declared by Gowon after the end of the war. Even the federal government implementation committee on Abandoned Properties (APIC-Abandoned Properties Implementation Committee) under Maj. David B. Mark was unfair to the Igbos and as a result increased political pressure on the government. It impacted severely the lives of many Igbos because many could not reclaim their properties and investments in their States of residence after the war having fled to their homes during the war. As a result, the properties came under the control and management of the state governments where they were situated and became subject to new conditions and laws. Some of the properties were converted to public use while others were destroyed or rebuilt resulting in loss of the character of the buildings (Akolokwu, 2012). Up to this moment, the Igbos have always shown dissatisfaction with the implementation of the API Committee. In 1990, a bill to repeal the Abandoned Properties Act Cap 1, Laws of the Federation 1990 and declare void the sale or disposition of abandoned properties conducted by the Abandoned Properties Implementation Committee and also seeks to revert and vest all rights and interests in the properties tagged ‘abandoned’ to their original owners was sponsored by Hon Tony Anyanwu (Abandoned Properties (Repeal) Bill 2000).

Unity Schools System

As part of the efforts to unify and reintegrate the country a few years after the brutal war, the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of Gen. Gowon established new Unity Schools across the 12 states of the federation. For at least two decades the schools brought about cultural and religious integration on one hand as well as academic excellence on the other hand. Till the

early 1990s, admission into the Unity Schools was very competitive, though consideration was also given to students in the catchment area of each school. Merit was the foremost consideration for admission, to ensure that each college admitted brilliant students, thus precipitating healthy academic competition, which helped the average students to up their ante (The Guardian, 14 June 2021). In addition, the ethnic, cultural, religious and social backgrounds of the students were diverse with pupils from wealthy and influential families mingling freely with those from humble homes. However, these glories have been terminated by the discrimination and lopsided behaviour of the administrators to the detriment of merit and academic excellence that was the dictum of the schools. More opportunities are given to the other regions at the detriment of the southeast zones, even when the candidates from the southeast score higher marks than others.

Quite recently, the Federal Ministry of Education in the bid to concretize the inequity and inequality in the admission policy into the 104 Unity schools has favoured states in the North over the South by granting very low cut-off marks from the North while the Southern states are denied admission through very high cut-off marks (Onyekakeyah, 2017). For instance, a situation whereby out of the maximum score of 200, candidates from Zamfara and Bayelsa states only need to score 2 and 72, respectively, while their counterparts from Anambra and Lagos must score 139 and 133, respectively, to be admitted is not only absurd but also unacceptable. This has been the situation, despite a court verdict that abolished the disparity in cut-off marks in the schools in 2014. The Federal High Court in its ruling gave a “mandatory order compelling the Minister of Education to implement a uniform cut-off mark for the 36 states of the federation” (Landmark Ruling, 07 April 2015). The Ministry has chosen to disobey the court order and nothing seems to have been done about it. Hapless pupils from the southern states, particularly are been denied admission simply on grounds of the state of origin and tribe. The table below shows the cut-off mark according to states.

Table. 2: National Common Entrance Examination Cut-off Marks by States

Geo-political zone	States	NCEE Cut-off Marks	
		Male	Female
NORTH CENTRAL	Benue	111	111
	Kogi	119	119
	Kwara	123	123
	Nasarawa	58	58
	Niger	93	93
	Plateau	97	97
NORTH EAST	Adamawa	62	62
	Bauchi	35	35
	Borno	45	45
	Gombe	58	58
	Taraba	3	11
	Yobe	2	27
NORTH WEST	Kaduna	91	91
	Kano	67	67
	Katsina	60	60
	Kebbi	9	20
	Jigawa	44	44
	Sokoto	9	13
	Zamfara	4	2

Geo-political zone	States	NCEE Cut-off Marks	
		Male	Female
SOUTH EAST	Abia	130	130
	Anambra	139	139
	Ebonyi	112	112
	Enugu	134	134
	Imo	138	138
SOUTH WEST	Ekiti	119	119
	Ogun	131	131
	Ondo	126	126
	Osun	127	127
	Oyo	127	127
	Lagos	133	133
SOUTH SOUTH	Akwa Ibom	123	123
	Bayelsa	72	72
	Cross River	97	97
	Delta	131	131
	Edo	127	127
	Rivers	118	118
FCT	FCT	90	

Source: Compiled from the full list of cut-off marks for the 36 States and the FCT, 2018 Academic Session.

This discrimination and lopsided admission that have characterized the Unity Schools is fast derailing the *raison d'être* of the schools which is foremost to entrench a sense of unity among young people where each of them related with one another in a cordial way regardless of ethnic or religious background. Equally, it is fast instigating disenchantment and disharmony among the most affected southeast region, particularly at this time when agitations and mass discontent are ragging across the country.

Federal Character Principle

Section 318(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended defines the federal character of Nigeria to mean the distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national integration and loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation. Section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution as amended also captures the federal character saying:

“The composition of Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies”
(The Constitution of Nigeria, 1999 as amended)

Based on the constitution, the purpose of the Federal Character principle was to prevent dominance by any sectional group, be it either ethnic or religious, in the country's political governance. The principle of federal character was first introduced into the Constitution of Nigeria in 1979 under Gen Olusegun Obasanjo's regime. The underlying philosophy of the Principle is to provide equality of access in the public service representation to curb dominance and reflect Nigeria's various diversities.

It marked a strong stance of the regime about Nigeria's unity, especially after the brutal civil war and in tune with the No Victor, No vanquished dictum. In 1996, the federal government established the Federal Character Commission (FCC) as a federal executive agency to implement and implement and enforce the federal character principle of fairness and equity.

Regrettably, the implementation of the Principle has been biased and does not reflect the philosophy of the Principle especially when it comes to placing a south-easterner (Igbo) in certain positions. For instance, Section 14(3) and (4) of the 1999 Constitution states that "the constitution shall provide for the equitable distribution of positions in the military, paramilitary, police, all other security institutions, public service, parastatals, and publicly owned companies" (Chapter IV, 1999 Constitution). But for decades this has not been reflected in the appointments of public officers in Nigeria for decades. Evidence has shown that portfolios given to the southeast are not accommodative enough and ineffective for the human and infrastructural development of the southeast (Ezemenaka & Prouza, 2016). This statement re-echoes Muhammed Bello's argument that although the purpose of the Federal Character Principle is laudable, its application and operation tend to disintegrate rather than integrate Nigerians (Bello, 2012). This misapplication of the federal character principle has been prevalent in Nigeria for decades since the second republic, but the Muhammadu Buhari eight-year (two terms) administration was the worst offender that had been called out for his insensitivity to the southeast when making appointments. According to Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe, "the incumbent Nigerian President, General Buhari has wilfully ensured that the southeast zone was not included in the National Defence Council" (Premium Times, 23 October 2018). The exclusion is not only in the National Defence Council but also in the entire leadership of all the three arms of government in the Buhari administration. However, this was rationalized with a bogus claim that the zone did not produce any ranking senator or member of the National Assembly on the platform of the All Progress Congress (APC) (Nwabufo, 2019). But on its part, President Buhari repeatedly without remorse made it clear that his administration considered 95 per cent of its projects to the 98 per cent that voted him to power, therefore the southeast is only considered in the 2 per cent remnant of the projects (The Cable, 26 May 2017). This is suggestive of an indication of a deliberate move to marginalize the zone by the administration, which is directly opposed to the dictum of No Victor No Vanquished.

The Buhari administration also made sure that the region did not get close to any of the principal officers of the government from the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) to principal officers of the National Assembly (Senate President and Speaker), and the Chief Justice of the Federation. Even the appointment of the heads of the services and other paramilitary institutions was denied the region. Even the second term of the government did not correct the inequity in the zoning arrangement: the President (Northwest), Vice President (Southwest), senate President (Northeast), Speaker of the House of Representatives (southwest), Deputy Senate President (South-South), and Deputy Speaker (Northcentral).

The deliberate exclusion from the political equation of power in Nigeria and the fear of appointing an Igbo man to hold sensitive strategic positions by those who have been running the federal government since the end of the Nigerian Civil War is what Ike Okonta refers to as a continuation of "war against the Igbos by other means." (Okonta, 2012: 166). It is not that appointments are not given to the southeast, but the 'non-inclusiveness' of the Igbos and other ethno-phobic behaviours in the top political circles (where deliberations concerning the country are meted out) since the civil war remains a major reason behind the call to restructure Nigeria as well as the several agitations across the country include IPOB.

The Implications to the Southeast Geopolitical Zone

According to Gen Yakubu Gowon the philosophy of the No Victor No Vanquished dictum which he pronounced at the end of the civil war in 1970 was to roll up their sleeves as they set their hands on the plough to rebuild Nigeria after they had silenced the guns. However, 53 years down the line the speech is yet to walk the talk resulting in social inequality, political exclusion, economic marginalization as well as discrimination and deprivation on the people of the region with severe implications on the region. The implications are as follows:

Emergence of Separatist Movements in the Southeast Geopolitical Zone

The poor implementation of the No Victor No Vanquished Dictum of the Federal Government and the continuous inequality and inequities meted out on the southeast by the federal government have cumulatively brought about several lamentations, disenchantments and disharmony against the federal government which have found expression in the emergence of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) with its severe implications to the unity of Nigeria. According to Professor Ebere Onwudiwe, the mismanagement of General Yakubu Gowon's Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (3Rs) policy, which the military government put in place to erase the scars of war was the major reason for the resurgence of Biafra uprisings (The Guardian, 8 June 2017). He further stated that "it was the failure of Nigeria to vigorously and successfully implement the Tree Rs policy that was partly responsible for the establishment of Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)" (The Guardian 8 June 2017). MASSOB led the way in the early period of the fourth republic precisely in 1991. Due to the loss of trust in the leader, Chief Ralph Uwazuruike, IPOB, a more vociferous and radical group was formed in 2012 by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB

By 2015 with the establishment of the "Radio Biafra" IPOB became the rallying point of the Igbos' agitation against the inequity and inequality of the federal government over the years, especially the disenfranchised youths who see Nigeria as a failed state that offers them nothing but "blood, pains and sorrows". Their belief is that the realization of the independent and sovereign state of Biafra is key to the end of social injustice, marginalization, deprivation, inequity and inequality that are being meted out to the Igbos. Unfortunately, the federal government rather than address the demands of the group, decided to coercively shut them down. Firstly, it arrested and incarcerated the leader of IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Then followed by the pronouncement and proscription of the group as a terrorist organization in 2017 by an ex parte order granted by the Federal High Court, Abuja (Daily Post, 12 October 2022). However, the proscription of IPOB has turned out to be one of the most politically divisive actions taken by the Federal government under the Buhari Government. Today, IPOB, a non-violent and unarmed group agitating for an independent state of the former Eastern region known as the blight of Biafra have been forced to wield arms against the government with severe implications for the security and unity of the country. A situation that has led to several fracas between federal government security forces against members of IPOB.

Sadly, there is the emergence of different faceless and vicious groups in the region in the name of Unknown Gun Men (UGM) unleashing all manners of violent attacks such as arson, the brutal murder of high-placed individuals and politicians in the region, kidnapping for ransom, violent attacks on police formations and barracks, prisons, market places and event centres, etc., In many instances, the UGM have threatened and attacked businesses of other ethnic groups who are either bringing their wares for sale or residence in the region from other regions in the name of fighting for the release of IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu or implementing a "sit-at-home order in the region". Statistics from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) show that 970 incidents were reported between 2019 and 6 January 2023, with an estimated 1,360 deaths reported. About 60 per cent of

these attacks were carried out by Unknown Gun Men, while the IPOB carried out 129 attacks and communal militia 101 (The Conversation, 2023). All these put together stand opposed to the unity and integration of the country which the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria envisages.

Return to Regional Politics

One of the implications of the political exclusion and economic marginalization in the southeast is the region's recoil to regional politics from mainstream politics. The experiences of the 2019, and 2023 elections have shown how the entire region has supported a particular party on the basis of capturing political power. In 2015 the PDP had the full support of the southeast because of the emergence of Peter Obi as vice presidential candidate to Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party despite the pleading of the APC chieftains to woo them to support President Buhari's second term. In the just concluded 2023 general elections, 98 per cent of the region voted for Mr Peter Obi's Labour Party to show solidarity with one of their own against the major political parties' (PDP and APC) domineering influence. An issue that has polarised the country across ethno-regional fault lines.

Hatred and Divisive Politics

One major effect of the negligence of the region resulting from the poor implementation of the No Victor, No Vanquished dictum was the reinforcement of hatred and divisive politics between the Igbos and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. In many instances, these grievances and hatred have manifested between the Igbos and those in power thereby resulting in violent attacks and reprisal attacks at the slightest provocations from other ethnic groups at the helm of power. The incidences of violent attacks on the Igbo ethnic group in Lagos during the 2023 General elections aimed at disenfranchising them are striking examples (Sahara Reporters, 20 March 2023; ThisDay, 22 March 2023; Premium Times, 15 April 2023). Such incidents also played out in the majority of the northern states during and after the 2015 and 2019 general elections that saw the emergence and return to power by President Buhari. During the lead-up to the gubernatorial elections in 2015, the Oba of Lagos stated that if Igbos did not vote for Akinwunmi Ambode would perish in the Lagoon River within seven days (Royal FM 95.1MHz, 06 April 2015).

Distrust towards the Federal Government

Trust is one of the key elements of social cohesion and largely determines the extent of a citizen's allegiance to a country. Therefore when it is lacking among citizens in a multi-ethnic and religious country like Nigeria, it sends a wrong signal to its unity. The negligence of the No Victor No Vanquished speech on the people of the southeast has brought with it a lack of trust or distrust from the citizens of the southeast geopolitical zone towards the federal government to the extent that they tend to believe the pronouncements of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and his Radio Biafra instead of the government of the day. Thus, reinforcing the proclivity towards their ethnic group over nationalism. Though this is not peculiar to the southeast, they are the worst hit. The 2021 Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey conducted by the African Polling Institute (API) revealed that there is growing citizens' distrust towards the state and fellow citizens as well as a proclivity towards ethnicity over nationalism (The Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey Report, 2021:14). It also reported that the country is more divided today at the time of the survey (2021) than it was 4 years ago. This is absolutely true, because of the high level of injustice. For instance, how can the Igbo ethnic group which is among the three major groups that make up the country not be included in the National Security Council of the country and be expected to take it hook line and sinker? It is impossible else the treatment continues. It is issues like this that are breeding the overwhelming lack of trust in the country. This is worrisome, given

that citizens' trust enhances allegiance which is essential for the country's economic growth, unity and development.

Disenchantment, Acrimony and Violence

In any given society where a particular section or section is treated socially unequally, politically excluded and economically marginalized, the implications are always disenchantment, social acrimony and violence. Violence uprising is always resorted to as a last resort for self-preservation and sustenance of the movement. This is exemplified in the several violent attacks on security forces that have become prevalent in the southeast region in recent times as well as the formation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), an armed wing of IPOB, the rise of Unknown Gun Men and other faceless criminal groups claiming to be fighting for the actualization of Biafran state and the release of the leader of IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Between January and May 2021, criminals strategically targeted government facilities, especially police stations and personnel, in the various states of Nigeria's South-eastern region, and a total of 16 police stations were attacked, buildings burnt, arms carted away, and officers killed (FES Policy Brief, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Obviously, there is no gainsaying that the emergence of separatist movements such as the MASSOB and now IPOB, the rising disenchantment and acrimony, the recoil to regional politics, the violent uprising, the hatred and divisive politics and the rising distrust in the southeast over the federal government are offshoots of the negligence of the federal government towards the implementation of the No Victor No Vanquished dictum that was pronounced at the end of the Nigeria Civil War, aimed at healing the wounds of the war by reconciling the two groups, rehabilitating the war-torn eastern region and reintegrating the people back to the Nigerian system to maintain one indivisible entity. Therefore to find a lasting solution that would assuage the people of the southeast region, douse the tension and resolve the anomalies for national peace and unity, the paper recommends the following:

- 1. Restructure:** There is a need for the Nigerian government to agree to the much talked about wholesome restructuring of the country to correct the imbalances that characterized the entire country in terms of allocation funds, state creation, political exclusion and marginalization of the southeast region.
- 2. Equity and Fairness:** There is a need for equity and fairness in the administration of policies to ensure a sense of belonging among the ethnic groups that make up the country. Fairness and equity help in managing crises of nation-building like the IPOB agitation and reducing multi-ethnic tension rather than the application of force. The issue of agitations for marginalization and deprivation in the southeast would be a thing of the past if the resources of the country were equitably distributed among the various geopolitical zones of the country.
- 3. Provision of infrastructure in the southeast:** The southeast ranks lowest among the six geopolitical zones in terms of the presence of federal government infrastructure. Across the range of industrialization, the Southeast has the least number of publicly quoted companies in Nigeria. The dilapidated road networks should be rehabilitated, and new ones constructed to ease traffic. There is also the need to revive the redundant seaports in Calabar and Port Harcourt for easy economic activities in the zone as the people are predominantly commercial traders.
- 4. More States for the Southeast:** The present structure and composition of the geopolitical zones is not favourably to the southeast, economically and politically. For the fact that the states and local government areas remain the bases of resource allocation sharing the southeast will

continue to get the least amount. For the purpose of equity and fairness, one or two more states should be carved out of the southeast and more local government areas created also.

5. **De-proscription of IPOB:** There is a need to review the proscription handed to IPOB and if possible withdraw it. The organization is neither a terrorist organization nor an armed group. The continued proscription of IPOB compared to the “patting on the back” approach of the deadly Fulani herders is counter to bringing peace in the zone. It is viewed as an orchestrated plan to maim Igbo youths rather than an approach to suppress the group. The southeast is seriously bleeding and the federal government should find a proper way of assuaging the zone rather than inflict more injuries on them.
6. **True Inclusive Politics:** True inclusive politics should be practised in Nigeria to ensure that the three major groups that formed the regional tripod in Nigeria should be well represented in the running of the affairs of the country from the presidency to the Security managers of the country. The absence of true inclusive politics steers ethno-phobic behaviours and other centrifugal pulls that bring disunity and conflict in a multi-ethnic society. This is because those who are excluded in the affairs of the country will not be comfortable maintaining the union while those with power ride on impunity. The end result is always tension and conflict as the case with the Igbos and the present government where they are treated as “third class” citizens.

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