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# **RESTRUCTURING, REFERENDUM OR SECESSION: OPTIONS TO BIAFRAN SEPARATIST AGITATION IN NIGERIA (2012-2017)**

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## **Abstract**

In recent times, the issue of restructuring, referendum and secession appear to have dominated the Nigerian public space. These are being championed by the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Nigeria found herself in a civil war just within seven years of her independence and the spirit of the grievances that generated the bloodletting is still causing divisiveness. The negative impact of the civil war has undermined greatly the unity and development of the country causing tensions, separatist agitations and sometimes violence, when state security agencies engage the agitators. This paper interrogates the contending issues about restructuring as well as the legality of the IPOB's call for referendum and secession. The paper adopts qualitative research methodology and used Relative Deprivation Theory to explicate the feelings of imbalance, inequality and marginalization pointed to as the reasons for the Biafran separatist agitation. It concludes that the Nigerian state can remain united if thorough comprehensiveness is given to the restructuring process in order to accommodate the wishes of the majority of diverse ethnic groups. It further provided more options besides referendum and secession that can abate the Biafran separatist agitation.

**Keywords:** IPOB, Separatist Agitation, Restructuring, Referendum, Secession

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Nigeria appears more divided than at any other time since her independence in 1960. The situation appears worse now than even during the civil war years. There seems to be so much division among Nigerians now, and since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria's unity has been challenged in the altar of insecurity and separatist waves. Without mentioning all the terror groups and their vicious acts, the Boko-Haram terrorism that has shut down North East since 2009 cannot escape unnoticed. When it seemed as if the Boko-Haram were going on a recess, the Fulani Herdsmen decided to showcase their ruthlessness in savagery, currently intimidating the whole country. However, this insecurity like a wild typhoon whirled to the doorsteps of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South East.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist organization formed by Mr. Nnamdi Kanu in 2012. The group wants the South Eastern states of Nigeria consisting mainly of the Igbo ethnic group to break away from Nigeria and form an independent nation of Biafra. To achieve this, the group is calling for referendum to settle the issue of Biafra in a civilized and democratic manner. Their activities have largely been non-violent but the Nigerian military have unleashed their might on the group killing armless civilians as reported in various Amnesty International Reports. On 20 September, 2017, a Federal High Court in Abuja granted the Nigerian Federal Government an interim injunction proscribing the group and its activities. This decision has been challenged by the group in the Nigerian court of law.

IPOB qualifies as a separatist group but her recent classification as a terror group by the Federal Government of Nigeria remains a subject of debate. No energy will be exerted here in the debate as to whether or not IPOB is a terror group. One thing remains therefore, that IPOB is a group calling for the independence of South Eastern Nigeria under the name of Republic of Biafra whose activities have been through peaceful demonstrations, sit-at-home order, call for referendum and

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secession and other non-violent actions. The Biafra separatist agitation is not new, many groups, before now, notably Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), have at one time clamoured for the same secession. Tekena. N. Tamuno<sup>1</sup> and Adebani, Wale<sup>2</sup> in chronicling of separatist agitations in the country stated that the Biafra separatism is the longest active separatist movement in Nigeria. Biafra separatist agitation is peculiar because it provides a good insight into other separatist movements and identity-based conflicts in Nigeria. IPOB has gained currency not only in Nigeria, but at the international community that its members were seen protesting peacefully in New York during the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations in October, 2017 against the military invasion of South-East states and what they called dehumanization of the people of the zone.<sup>3</sup>

For the general population of the South East that IPOB claims to represent, there is a sharp divide of opinion on the agitation. While one group majority of which are the unemployed youth, poor artisans, farmers, petty traders and peasants believe that IPOB is truly representing their wishes and aspirations, and that the actualization of Biafra is only an option not negotiable, another group mainly consisting of the political elites, the high intellectual class and high profile business entrepreneurs hold the view that IPOB is merely representing a sectional opinion and that Nigeria should remain united albeit not without restructuring. For IPOB members, their activities are not violent, and they rely on the provisions of international law under the United Nations which ascribes the right of self-determination to homogeneous people who so aspire to achieve their life potentials as one political entity. But does the Nigerian constitution provide for referendum and secessionist procedure and how legal is IPOB call for a referendum domestically?

Certain questions become very salient at this point. What is restructuring? Does restructuring mean the same thing to the Northern region and the Southern region on the one hand and to the All Progressive Congress (APC) ruling party and the other opposition

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parties on the other? How do we restructure? What is to be restructured? Why do we need to restructure rather than secession or vice versa? What is the legal standpoint of referendum in Nigeria? What are other options beyond referendum and secession and restructure?

While this paper will attempt to answer these questions raised, it will not devote much effort to discussing the causes of the Biafran separatist agitation. Many works<sup>4</sup> have already discussed extensively the causes of the agitation which the paper agree to some of them, but very little has been written concerning the way out beyond restructuring, secession and referendum. This is the task that this paper seeks to accomplish. The paper adopts content and phenomenology qualitative analysis in expounding the issue of Biafra separatist resurgence. It relies on information collated from textbooks, media reports, journal articles, committees' reports among others for analysis. To achieve the stated objectives, the second section of the paper provides a vivid clarification of relevant concepts. The third section uses Relative Deprivation Theory to explore how feelings of marginalization have culminated into anger and frustration manifesting in Biafran secessionist agitations. The fourth and fifth sections discuss the legality of referendum under the Nigerian law and the divergent views and opinions surrounding the issues of restructuring, respectively. The sixth section provided alternative paradigms outside secession and referendum that are capable of obliterating the *raison d'être* for the Biafra agitation before the last section which is concluding remarks.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION SEPARATIST AGITATION**

There is no well-established theory of secessionism despite the increasing global wave of states experiencing internal insurrections for self-determinism. Much of the scholarship<sup>5</sup> focuses on the theoretical and legal foundations of the rights of people to secede and separate but rarely considers the reasons and determinants of secessions.

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Reasons for secessionist agitations presumably revolve around economic, cultural, social and political factors. E. Osaghae et al<sup>6</sup> noted that agitations linked to social movements often manifest from grievances and social discontent against dominant practices, behaviours and conducts in the political economy such as exclusion, marginality and inequality. These grievances are an age long product of sentiments and resentments conspired by one group against the other most often having different ethnic competing interests. Truly the Biafran separatism has more often been explained as emanating from political exclusion, economic marginality and frustration and ethnic division and competition.

D. L. Horowitz<sup>7</sup> contends that the occurrence of separatist agitation gives credence to the power of ideas in the political sphere. For him, agitations with separatist motives can be appropriately conceived as the playing out of the essence of “political self-expression”, usually on a territorial basis, as a necessary accompanying feature of group distinctiveness. Notably, the IPOB separatist agitation is professed in political self-determinism for the cultural distinctive and homogeneous Igbo ethnic group of the South Eastern Nigeria. Other factors that provide explanation for secessionist threats with special reference to Nigeria are: colonial legacy, lack of ethnic homogeneity, large landmass, elite fragmentation, unemployment and lack of infrastructure, constitutional controversies as well as lopsided federalism. This further explains why majority of the unemployed, low class citizens align with IPOB in their activities.

Unfortunately, the flame of conspiracy is raging as every ethnic group is suspecting the other of covert motives of political dominance. The emphasis in Nigeria especially from the South East is that of political marginalization and inequality in the political affairs of the country. In shedding more light K. Boyle and P. Englebert<sup>8</sup> asserted that separatism is mostly a response to political conditions, rather than the manifestation of cultural differences or the exploitation of economic opportunities. To them separatist agitation is more inclined to political deprivations and marginalization than to other factors such as

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economic and social. This is true to a very good extent with the Biafran separatism wave whose aim has political end. They often point to political reasons than economic and social injustices, for example, they review the list of appointments of President Muhammadu Buhari to show how the South East region has been obviously excluded from real political relevance.

## **RESTRUCTURING AND REFERENDUM**

Lexically, the word “restructuring” is derived from its verb form “to restructure” which in turn is a derivative of the root word “structure”. For a clear conceptual understanding of restructure or “restructuring” it will be good to first understand structure because if there is no structure there would not be nothing to restructure. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English<sup>9</sup> defined structure as “the way in which relationships between people or groups is organized in a society or in an organization” p. 1434. It also defined restructure<sup>10</sup> as “to change the way in which something such as a government, business, or system is organized” p. 1211. In disciplines like chemistry, biology, mathematics, music, logic, computer science and sociology, the term structure has different meanings. Aligning to sociological context, structure refers to factors such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, cultures, norms etc. that seem to limit the actualization of full human potentials. Therefore, restructuring entails amending, adjusting, modifying, revising, changing, correcting and improving all these factors that form social structure to abet the actualization of human potentials. The important element about restructuring is changing to improve.

Looking at restructuring as a change process, Chief Paul Unongo, stated that “we have been restructuring, we had a three regional government and we have had a parliamentary system... when people are talking about restructuring, I hope that they understand history and the sort of thing they are referring to”.<sup>11</sup>Of course, the political landscape of Nigeria is full of events of experimentations and trialing that has led to different political systems, regimes, practices, and

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behaviours. Unfortunately, more than five and half decades after independence, Nigeria has not perfected a suitable political system which has resulted in the numerous cacophonies being made about restructuring. Sadly again, restructuring has diverse meanings as they are diverse peoples that make up the country. Alhaji Bahir Uthman Tofa, presented a multiple view about restructuring thus, “the agitation for restructuring of Nigeria centred around three things: marginalization, dominance of others in their regions and resources, and opportunity in distribution’.<sup>12</sup> To many other Nigerians, it means more, depending on the person’s sentiments and biases.

Referendum is the reserved right of the people to either approve or reject an act of legislature or the right bestowed on the people by the legislature to either approve or reject a particular policy or legislation. The referendum power is created by state constitutions permitting citizens to express their opinion on proposed legislation before it becomes functional as a law. The power of referendum does not enable citizens to invalidate an existing law but to suspend or annul a law that is yet to become effective. A history of nationwide referendums provided in David Butler and Austin Ranney<sup>13</sup> shows that issues bothering on referendum are concerned on frequency of conduct, how seldom they have had close results and whether it is a constitutional or moral question. Referendums are most appealing when devolution of powers or territorial separation or fusion is involved as in the case of Scotland and Wales in 1979. Some of the reasons that can necessitate a referendum include when a government deems it expedient because it wants to consult the electorate; when they are mandated by law as the only process of changing the constitution and again when there is a constitutional provision enabling citizens to demand or call for a referendum in order to promote new legislation. Exponents of referendum like A. V Dicey argued that the use of referendum will protect a government from making constitutional changes or policies that lack popular support. But in Nigeria the use of referendum in deciding critical important issues like the acceptability of the constitution, secession question,

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and political system is dreaded. The Nigerian government often displays undemocratic tendencies without consideration of the wishes, aspirations and desires of the citizenry.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY**

The earliest social justice theories<sup>14</sup> tackled the questions of distributive fairness, especially considerations of “equity” and relative deprivation in the allocation of resources. The development of the concept of relative deprivation from Stouffer to Runciman was, therefore, towards its specification in intergroup terms culminating in a cognitive social comparison process that can induce, incite and provoke individual and group behaviour. From Stouffer’s explanation of the concept, relative deprivation can be seen as a judgement that one or one’s ingroup is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent and that this judgement invokes feelings of anger, discontentment and hatred. Thus, individuals undergoing relative deprivation are subdued to three psychological processes: first they make cognitive comparisons, secondly they undertake cognitive appraisals that they or their ingroup are disadvantaged and thirdly they hold that these disadvantages are seen as unfair and arouse angry resentment which might result violent actions. If any one of these three requirements is not met, relative deprivation is not feasibly operative.<sup>15</sup>

Relative deprivation theory ultimately postulates that absolute levels of individual deprivation much less collective levels of deprivation determine partly feelings of dissatisfaction and injustice. Imagined expectations, past experiences, social exclusion and comparisons with what others possess strongly evoke such feelings of subjective evaluations by individuals and groups. Thus, Walter Garrison Runciman<sup>16</sup> theorized a distinction between egoistic (individual) and fraternal (group) relative deprivation explaining that feelings of group relative deprivation should be associated with group-serving attitudes and behaviour such as collective action and group prejudice. This is a crucial point for relative deprivation that provides adequate insight



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into the prejudice, grievance and collective action of different groups like IPOB agitating for the secession of Biafran state. Moreover, relative deprivation as a social psychological concept postulates a subjective condition that determines and shape emotions, cognitions, attitudes and behaviours linking the individual with the interpersonal and intergroup levels of action.

The relative deprivation theory has inspired a vast cross-disciplinary application but yet the concept's initial promise to proffer explanation for a wide range of social behaviour remains unfulfilled. The theory has been challenged for failing to explain the reason why some people feel marginalized but do not take action by joining social movements. Critics point out that the theory fails to hint another unseen factor that moves individuals or groups to embark on social movement, which is "the will or their will".<sup>17</sup> It is this "will" that propels or hinders some people from either joining or refusing to join the social movement despite facing the same common problems or issues. To be sure, in political science, Ted R. Gurr<sup>18</sup> explains relative deprivation in relation to the psychological frustration-aggression theory which argues that the prime motive why men rebel and engage in violence is the mechanism inherent in frustration-aggression. He opines that frustration does not explicitly transform to violence, however, that the propensity for collective violence strongly differs with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation as perceived by the group. Gurr's explanation of relative deprivation theory is evident in the Biafran separatist agitation as a protracted grievance and frustration from perceived deprivation by the South East region of Nigeria. The primary grievance generating the struggle for Biafra includes political exclusion, unemployment, ethnicity, economic hardship, and feelings of marginalization.

## **RATIONALE BEHIND THE CHOICE OF RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY ON THE BIAFRA AGITATION**

Relative deprivation theory describes the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the "what ought to be" and the "what is" of

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collective value and resources that dispose men to violence. This gap between individual's or group's expectations and actual possessions of values and resources (material and non-material) result in collective violence. Often relative deprivation manifests in poverty, social exclusion, injustice, unequal economic opportunities, and political marginalization which combine to create deep feelings of grievance that culminate into frustration and aggregation. This theory typically explains the Biafra agitation which is a protracted grievance, anger, hatred and feeling of frustration evident from social and political exclusion of the South East region. Many of the reasons for the agitation as enumerated by the IPOB point to political, economic and social factors which is the benchmark for the call for the restructuring of Nigeria. From the precepts of the theory, the inequalities that result in deprivation is the reason why IPOB members agitation though nonviolently, and some believe restructuring will be the solution while others believe referendum that will lead to secession will be a permanent solution.

### **REFERENDUM: LEGAL OR ILLEGAL**

For the moment, the options for the solution to the Biafra separatist agitation revolve around two schools of thought. The first is what I will refer to as the extremist school, whose only option is secession and according to Ibeanu, Orji and Iwuamadi<sup>19</sup> their route to sovereignty has been from armed secession to civil disobedience and more lately, deference. The other I will refer to them as the moderate school, whose option is anchored on the mantra of restructuring. For the secessionist school, the way to resolve the agitation is by dissolution and disintegration of the country, Nigeria. They believe that this can be achieved peacefully and by means of referendum to determine the general wish and aspiration of the homogeneous people constituting South East Nigeria. While the antagonists of this school believe their call for referendum and secession is unconstitutionally unlawful, the protagonists of the school have fashioned arguments in defense of the legality of their belief and clamour. This section will

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examine the legality of the doctrine of referendum within the ambit of law in Nigeria.

In Nigeria at the present, the word referendum is almost synonymous with Biafra or better reasoned represents the IPOB motto. But referendum is far beyond the single subject matter of Biafra. It is a form of direct democracy in which the entire eligible electorates vote “for” or “against” a policy proposal. A referendum is more or less an avenue or a strategy used to resolve a dispute by majority opinion of those that the issue is affecting. Alas, in Nigeria referendum is seen in a negative light. The use of referendum in Nigeria, should not just be about Biafra, but should encompass a whole lot of issues from whence division and disaffection emanate. Considering the dented political life of Nigeria with unruly military incursion, and most importantly the fact that the present constitution is a “cake” baked by the military, it becomes germane to review these policies by means of referendum. Obviously utilizing referendum to determine critical issues especially those pertaining to the question of restructure will provide a popular opinion and general participation. But the question remains, does Nigerian constitution provide for referendum?

The antagonists of the use of referendum in decision making process have relied heavily on the Nigerian constitution to advance their debate. They very often reprimand the referendum proponents of its treasonable consequence for advocating measures not contained in the constitution. They argue that the constitution remains the supreme body of law that supersedes all other forms of rules and policies. This omission of referendum in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria despite its series of amendments has been described by Nwutara<sup>20</sup> (2016) as a “dubious error”. In defense of their stance they (protagonists of referendum) have relied on the provisions for equal rights and justice as enshrined in many charters of international organizations. Among such charters like those of the United Nations, African Union, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and largely on the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

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However, the contention here remains if international conventions override domestic laws and if Nigeria is a monist state or dualist state? The protagonists of referendum acknowledging the dualist status of the Nigerian state contend that irrespective of the status that she has obligation by other conventions and moral justification to oblige to international laws. They hold that Nigeria is notorious for signing and ratifying international treaties yet, greatly takes pleasure in the violation of rule of law. They further cite Articles 26 and 27 of the Vienna Convention which imposes compliance obligation on all states, based on the universal principles of *pacta sunt servanda* and good faith fulfilment. Particularly, Article 27 precisely prohibits states from invoking their national law as justification for failure to perform obligations imposed by a treaty they have ratified whether monist or dualist. To them, referendum and secession (they often call it self-determinism) is a legal pursuit under the provisions of international laws. By this provision they believe that their actions if not domestically legal, then it is internationally legal and that international norms supersede domestic laws. But self-determinism under international customary law is extended to territories under colonialism. On this, they argue that the same method used in Sudan that granted South Sudan independence should be employed in Nigeria.

Concluding this section, one point needs to be made that, referendum in Nigeria is so warped and twisted with secession. Every thought about referendum provokes only a single thought which is Biafra secession. Alas, there is no provision for either referendum or secession in the Nigerian constitution and the relationship between international law and national law as regards which that takes preeminence seems unclear and irreconcilable. To indoctrinate a well-defined process of referendum within the constitution is a modern democratic tenet that gets nod of international best practices. However, secession is a more delicate issue which international customary law has not specified methods for a new state to emerge. However, the use of referendum to determine decisions on the issues

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affecting Nigeria will transform her into one of the most democratic states in the world like the Great Britain, United States of America, and Netherlands and Switzerland among others.

## **CONTENDING ISSUES ABOUT RESTRUCTURING**

Restructuring in Nigeria has received a very wide discussion across all the levels of life but yet it remains one of the vaguest concepts among Nigerians. Apart from being a vague concept, it has remained the most controversial issue warranting as many opinions and ideas as they are many Nigerians. Imperatively everyone talks about restructuring, unfortunately, without concrete idea of what constitutes or does not constitute restructuring. Therefore, the issue has become the Biblical tale of the big elephant in which the blind men only described depending on the part of the elephant they touched and felt. Because of the many problems of Nigeria, the belief is that the solution is imbedded in the mantra of restructuring making every group to conceive restructuring as that which will address the problem directly affecting them. Thus, every socio-cultural group, political parties, non-governmental organizations, political interest groups, ethnic nationalities in Nigeria hold one perspective about restructuring different from the other.

It is pertinent to note here that apart from the report of the group “Restructure Nigeria Community” entitled *Memorandum on True Federalism*, which is a response to the APC Committee Call on True Federalism, no other group has come up with a well-articulated, deliberated and enunciated idea about restructuring. Every other thing remains patches of criticisms, interviews, occasion addresses and personal opinions. This section will utilize the document *Memorandum on True Federalism*, to discuss many of the very issues under contention about restructuring. However it will draw analysis from it taking cognizance of other personal or group opinions or ideas that is not captured in the report.

The opening paragraph of the report *Memorandum on True Federalism*<sup>21</sup> reads; “we federalist oriented Nigerians who believe there

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is no other time but now to come together and demand for the most important change that Nigeria truly needs and which we believe is the restructuring of Nigeria to reflect true federalism” p.3. It is immediately followed by the three objectives which are; to sensitize and educate Nigerians on the need to change the present unitary system to a true federal system; to mobilize the now enlightened Nigerians towards demanding for a restructured system based on the principles of true federalism and lastly to participate in the restructuring process. Before discussing the issues, the Memorandum draws up 20 rules that do not only highlight the basic principles of true federalism but also consider to be fundamental to a two-tier system of federal structure as suitable for Nigeria as their guide in the restructuring debate. For example, the last rule states; the federal parliament shall be structured in such a manner that a bill can only become law if and only if it receives support from a minimum of 1/3 representatives from each state and not a 2/3 of the general House. However, the issues discussed therein include; creation/merger of states, derivation principle, devolution of powers, federating units, fiscal federalism and revenue allocation, form of government, independent candidacy, land tenure system, local government autonomy, power sharing and rotation, resource control, type of legislature, the need for state constitutions, state and community policing, and lastly the need for city/town/community based government as a last tier of government.

Not concerned with the basic opinion concerning these issues as postulated in the Memorandum, an analysis reveals that the issues raised therein, constitute much of the ideas about restructuring as being strewn and circumvented within the public sphere. In fact, it does in essence represent some of the yearnings of some particular ethnic nationalities, some socio-cultural organizations and some political interest groups. For instance the South-South region and Niger Delta area’s voice remain ever loud on issues bothering on resource control, derivation principle and fiscal federalism as issues to be considered when restructuring. Recently the Niger Delta Avengers

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(NDA) threatened to renew bombing of oil facilities if the Federal Government did not make haste to address the issues of resource control and fasten restructuring.<sup>22</sup>The South East region has also leaned her voice to the same issues adding power sharing and rotation and agitation for more states. The present President-General of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*, Chief John Nnia Nwodo in his speech delivered at the Chatham House on Wednesday 27 September, 2017 entitled *Restructuring Nigeria: Decentralization for National Cohesion* noted that the present Nigerian constitution is not acceptable because it was not subjected to national referendum and that devolution of powers will help Nigeria attain greatness. For most of the minority ethnic groups restructuring is precisely meant to be devolution of powers, creation of more states and creating factors that will bring government closer to the grassroots.

But what other contending issues are not covered in this Memorandum as clamoured by other groups like the IPOB? The two most dominant interpretations of restructuring for the IPOB are clearly conveyed in two words referendum and secession. As I have earlier stated that the IPOB members representing this view belong to the extremist school who according to Ibeanu, Orji and Iwuamadi<sup>23</sup> their route to sovereignty has been from armed secession to civil disobedience and more lately, deference. It appears fraudulent for IPOB should any issue concerning restructuring be discussed without the inclusion of how referendum and secession can be legally initiated and executed. Apart from the north which seems to be the highest beneficiary of the present systems in Nigeria, other regions are kicking hard for restructuring issues to be discussed. The north seems to be divided in opinion concerning the restructuring. Some persons like Ango Abdullahi and Nasir El-Rufai believe there is nothing to restructure about Nigeria or at worst that Nigeria should return to the 1914 arrangement of northern region and southern region but never to the 1963 constitutional arrangement of northern region, south west region, south east region and mid-west region.<sup>24</sup> Some other persons like the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar favour restructuring with a call

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for more powers to be given to the federating units. However some critics, skeptics and cynics believe he does not have genuine intentions about restructuring but that he wants to use it to buy over the south to support his 2019 presidential ambition. The north remains the only region that is unyieldingly adamant and not committed to the restructuring agenda and thus, may have different issues yet to be made known.

### **IF NOT REFERENDUM OR SECESSION, WHAT ELSE?**

Briefly this section explores other options available that can be employed to bring to an end the Biafra secessionist agitation outside referendum and secession. Before highlighting the options, it is instructive that restructuring of the country is very salient and forms a good footing for these factors to thrive. The restructuring has to be comprehensive, thorough and wholesome thereby allowing for the participation and inclusion of all interest groups. Every group ought to submit and make known her position and standing about the issues of restructuring in which a compilation and harmonization of all the group's position will be outlined in a single leaflet which will be acceptable to all before deliberation. A restructured and workable Nigeria remains the first step to abating the Biafra secessionist bid and upon this workability lays the success of other factors. However, an alternative option to secession and referendum is the acquisition, control and wielding of power by the South Easterners. The power meant here is not political power but expertise and economic power.

S. Fisher, et al<sup>25</sup> advice that 'it is important to explore the different dimensions of power that are present in a situation and to maximize those aspects that are most available to you'. The importance and use of power irrespective of its kind is very essential in categorization of behaviour and relationship between individuals and groups. Igbo youths should avail themselves of opportunities to acquire technical and expertise knowledge which will empower them above and over others. Such expertise knowledge can be in the area of medicine, pharmacology, information and communication technology,



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electronics, mechatronics, geotechnics, nuclear energy skills, geostationary and space technology. Naturally they are highly intelligent, ingenious, adaptive, innovative, creative, imaginative and generally resourceful. These natural capabilities have to be fully explored and exerted in these professional fields which will empower them with unchallenged expertise skills and knowledge. Take for example, if five information and communication experts are needed in the Nigerian Presidency to occupy sensitive positions like cyber security and software development and all the five experts are from the south east, considering the expertise need of the positions, all of them will be absorbed. With this expertise skill barriers like federal character, quota system and other monsters in the Nigerian polity that hinder and discourage meritocracy will be subdued. In this way the acclaimed marginalization of the region will wane.

Notably *Ndi Igbo* are known for their commercial enterprising and resilience. This commercial enterprise centred on buying and selling though viable does not accord real economic power to the people. To acquire real economic power *Ndi Igbo* need to drastically transform their economic and commercial position from *buyer-seller* entrepreneurs to product manufacturing entrepreneurs. It is instructive that these manufacturing outfits have domiciled within the South East Region. By so doing, the Nigerian economy will fall into their hands as the economy is the super structure of the society other kinds of power viz political will in time fall under their control. A famous aphorism has it that he who blows the piper dictates the tune. Besides this, transforming the South East into a manufacturing hub will help reduce the number of unemployed youths roaring within the streets in anger who take to violence at the slightest provocation. Kingsley Emeka Ezemenaka and Jan Prouza<sup>26</sup> attributed high rate of unemployment, poverty, collapse of social infrastructure among others as the leading cause of the Biafra secessionist agitations. Social infrastructural projects such as road construction, provision of water, building of hospitals and schools, provision of electricity can be embarked upon by these manufacturing companies as a way of

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corporate social responsibility to their host communities. This will also underplay the emphasis of government marginalization of the region in project execution and in turn reduce the anger emanating from the feelings of deprivation.

Another alternative to referendum and secession lays in the renaissance of African values, norms and communality. This reawakening will deemphasize individualism and promote unity, oneness, and communalism and other shared purpose. J. A. Matunhu<sup>27</sup> opines that development and poverty reduction strategies for Africa must be informed and embroiled in the African values like ‘Ubuntu’ in South Africa, ‘Humwe’ in Zimbabwe, ‘Harambee’ in Kenya and ‘Ujamahaa’ in Tanzania. This African spirit of unity and collectivity among *Ndi Igbo* should be sought in reestablishing the values and power of the concept of ‘*Nwanneism*’. With it will come a common sense of unity and collectivity towards the progress and development of the entire community rather than the individualistic development of persons at the expense of the larger society. With this renaissance of African values, it is believed that development will be for the generality of the people which will ensure harmony, enthrone sense of brotherhood and reduce anger and frustration that come with lopsided development of individuals against collective development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The old truth is that Nigeria as a multi-ethnic country for more than five and half decades after independence has not been able to develop a common sense of nationhood and unity among its diverse peoples. She has suffered several injuries that inhibit unity and alas, while one injury is being healed another is being sustained. Plagued with a civil war just within seven years of her independence, the spirit of the grievances and acrimonies that generated the bloodletting is still hunting the country. The Biafra revolt was suppressed in 1970 but the Biafra spirit and ideology have remained so much alive. This is evident in the number of different separatist groups that have sprung up at one time or the other calling for the restoration of the Republic

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of Biafra. Presently the IPOB group has given the Biafra resurgence a lift by exporting it into the international scene. The extremist elements among the IPOB group believe that nothing less than secession will end the agitation while the moderates believe that well fine-tuned restructuring can assuage the yearning and reduce the agitation in order for Nigeria to remain as one. The call of the IPOB group for a referendum and secession has generated much controversy over its legality within the laws of Nigeria. However, many of the issues concerning the restructuring of Nigeria need to be sensitively handled in order to transform Nigeria into a true federal state. This present study believes that Nigeria can remain as indivisible entity but has enumerated other options that the Biafra agitators can undertake besides secession and referendum.

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