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#EndSARS and Beyond
Protests, Politics, and the Public Sphere

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR'S NOTE

2020 will be remembered as the year of #EndSARS, the series of explosive, youth-led protests against police brutality and impunity that caught the Nigerian government by surprise and eventually forced it to make some concessions to the protesters. Starting in the first week of October and continuing for the next several weeks, the protests erupted at the close of a difficult year in which an erratically implemented lockdown imposed to curtail the spread of the coronavirus had led to widespread frustration. While vexation at official mishandling of the CoVID-19 pandemic most certainly contributed to the outbreak of the protests, it is clear to any observer of the Nigerian political scene that #EndSARS was several years, if not decades, in the making.

So far as the protests were triggered by causes buried deep in the substratum of state-society relations in the country, they also revealed changes and emergent patterns in the ambiance of protests, the configuration of civil society, and the mobilization of state power. Accordingly, the four papers in this issue address the themes of youth participation in the protests, the use, power, and increasing importance of social media, and the ticklish question of the utility of violence. The edition also includes a review of a poetry collection in which leading Nigerian poets attempt to take a measure of the protests and matters arising from them.

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Social Media, Youth Participation and Activism: An Analysis of the #EndSARS Protests in Nigeria

by Akinyetun Tope Shola*

ABSTRACT The relationship between social media use and civic participation in a Nigerian context has sparked considerable commentary. The discussion has become more intense following the #Endsars protests in late 2020 by Nigerian youths against police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad – a unit of the Nigerian police accused of extrajudicial killings, intimidation and human rights abuses. This paper argues that increased social media use by Nigerian youths has also increased youth civic participation, thus necessitating activism. The paper adopts a descriptive and historical approach that draws on secondary sources of data. It concludes that youths are beginning to engage in civic activities beyond the traditional norms of voting to a more justice-oriented sphere by demanding equity and increased involvement in public life using social media.

Keywords: Social media, civic participation, #Endsars, political protest, SARS.

INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) is a veritable tool in fostering extra-parliamentary political participation, particularly among young people. It offers the opportunity to cultivate participatory skills and democratic political behaviour. This is evident in the growing use of SM to campaign, debate, formulate an opinion, evaluate a political decision and even finance political activities. It has made political activists, commentators, panellists, and political content producers of many youths. Indeed, it is indispensable to youth civic participation – the involvement of young people in political and non-political processes to improve the quality of life in a community. Youths have used social media to influence the scale of political protests in different parts of the world – including Nigeria. A recent and notable example is the #Endsars protests against police brutality in Nigeria by Nigerian youths. The Nigerian Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was accused of wanton corruption, abuse, intimidation, gross human rights violation and

brutality – among others. The calls for an 'end' to SARS culminated in a nationwide protest in October 2020. This paper assesses the interplay between SM, youth participation and activism in Nigeria, using the #Endsars protests as a unit of analysis. The core argument is that SM has led to an increase in youth civic participation which has invariably aroused youths' consciousness towards activism and political protests. The analysis is guided by the following key questions: What is the role of social media in promoting youth civic participation? How does social media influence political protests? What role did social media play in the #Endsars protests?

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This paper fills a significant gap in the literature, as previous studies have narrowly focused on the role of SM in empowering the protests through increased discussion and real-time information dissemination. Here, the focus is on how SM empowers youth civic participation on one hand and activism and political protests on the other. This assessment is of course a means to an end, as this paper ultimately fills a gap on the role of SM and youth civic participation in necessitating the #Endsars protests. Adopting a descriptive and historical approach, the paper draws on secondary sources of data.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) trace the roots of SM to the creation of 'Open Diary' by Bruce and Susan Abelson to bring online diary writers together into one community. The proliferation of internet access aided its popularity and led to the creation of social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook in 2003 and 2004 respectively. The term SM thus received popularity in 2005 when it was used to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users. Kietzmann et al (2011:241) define SM as a medium that "employ[s] mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content". According to Xenos, Vromen and Loader (2014), SM includes a multiplicity of internet-based tools that allows its users to create an individual profile, maintain such a profile and interact with other users using a network of connections.

For Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61). SM is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC). Web 2.0 refers to the novel way in which users utilize the World Wide Web (WWW); whereby contents are endless and collaboratively altered by all users. Meanwhile, (UGC) describes the totality of how people utilize SM. SM is an evolutionary phenomenon that remodels the WWW into its original purpose of facilitating information exchange between users. Trottier and Fuchs (2015) suggest three identifiers of SM: cognition, communication and cooperation. Cognition buttresses shared knowledge, communication emphasizes social relations and interactions, while cooperation directs attention to interdependent acts toward a communal goal. SM has also been classified according to its presence/richness and its presentation /disclosure (see table 1).

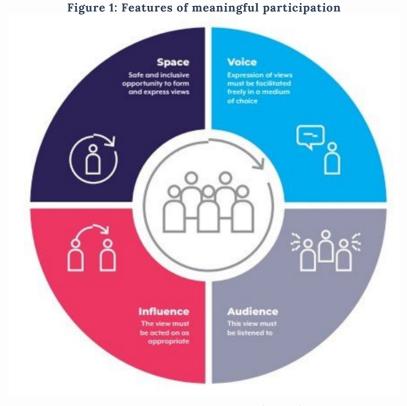|		Social Presence/Media Richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-preservation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr etc.)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life, The Sims, Active Worlds etc.)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia, Bookmarking, etc.)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare etc.)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Source: **Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)**

YOUTH CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Youth is an environment-specific concept. Akinyetun (2021a) shows that conceptions of youth by the World Bank and the United Nations differ. While the former sees youth as individuals between 12-24 years, the latter refers to youth as a person aged 15-24. This contrasts with what is obtainable in Nigeria where youth describes someone aged 18-35 years. It is a transitional age between childhood and adulthood. According to Generation Unlimited (2020), there are 1.8 billion youths worldwide – a quarter of the world's population – who are critical for innovative social change and are increasingly contributing to community development while building their skills through civic participation.

According to Mirra and Garcia (2017), the civic emphasizes the notion of a democratic community where citizens are united by a common interest, while participation is defined by Generation Unlimited (2020) as the process of partaking in and influencing decisions, actions and activities. Meanwhile, meaningful participation allows for a space (where views are expressed); voice (a medium); influence (view) and an audience (a listener) (see figure 1). Thus, civic participation refers to the process of partaking in decisions aimed at creating a democratic community that guarantees common interests. Mirra and Garcia (2017) add that civic participation is central to building a commonwealth that bridges the gap of diversity among individuals and increases their productivity rather than struggle over resources. The Washington, D.C.- based nonprofit, Innovations in Civic Participation [ICP] (2010:6) defines it as "individual or collective actions in which young people participate to improve the wellbeing of communities or society in general, and which provide an opportunity for reflection."

According to ICP (2010), youth civic participation programmes prepare youths for community life through participation in community development. It addresses fundamental issues such as civic pride, social capital, social responsibility, social cohesion

Figure 1: Features of meaningful participation

Source: *Generation Unlimited*

and sense of citizenship. Youth civic participation involves the following:

- Collaborating with others to solve a problem in the community
- Attending a political meeting, speech or rally
- Actively belonging to a group that attempts to influence the government or public policy
- Engaging in political discourse or electronically commenting on a news
- Volunteering or working for a candidate or a political party
- Maintaining correspondence with a government official (online and offline)
- Petitioning the government (on paper or online)
- Donating money to a political cause.

To be sure, youths advance participatory culture and politics by exerting influence and lending voice to public issues. They take advantage of SM to formulate, inform, circulate, lead action and create a political dialogue. This is evidenced in the increase in activism by youths especially on SM through the use of hashtags – which has been used to circulate political content and influence participatory politics. The hashtag has become pivotal to civic participation. Prominent examples are the #BlackLivesMatter, #Occupy, #Istandwithhongkong, and #Endsars.

#ENDSARS Protest

To understand the #Endsars protest, we need to consider the activities of the SARS and the necessity for a protest calling for an end to it. SARS – Special Anti-Robbery Squad – is an investigating unit of the Nigerian Police force formed in 1992 to combat the rise in armed robbery in the southern part of the country. Due to its initial success, SARS was extended to other parts of the country to arrest and prosecute armed robbers, murderers, kidnappers and violent criminals. However, the Squad soon became enmeshed in corruption, extortion, human rights violation, extrajudicial killings, and sexual abuses. It has been accused of harassing youths and adopting unlawful methods such as illegal stop and search, killings, hanging, starvation, dehumanisation,

waterboarding, mock execution, beatings, burning with cigarettes, stretching victims' body positions and near-asphyxiation with plastic bags – among others. Despite these accusations, the government failed to heed the call to reform or scrap the unit. The circulation of the footage of the SARS' unjust killings of an unidentified man and Jimoh Isiaq on October 3 and 8 2020 in Delta and Oyo states respectively on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram led to protests by Nigerian youths in 21 states of the country in October 2020. The protest, which adopted an online and offline strategy was given impetus by SM and was tagged #Endsars (Akinyetun, 2021b; Ekoh and George, 2021).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Undoubtedly, the heaviest SM users are youths and they use the various platforms to fashion new norms and habits of civic participation that remain stable across the life course. Among the factors influencing youths' civic participation through SM use are political socialization, family political activities, school experiences, peer influence, political interaction (on SM groups and offline), incidental exposure and new citizenship norms. These factors create in the youth a personalized politics of self-actualization and expressive engagement – that emphasizes volunteering, digital networking and consumer activism (Xenos, Vromen and Loader, 2014). The potential of SM transcends the elementary use for mobilization to engendering a broadened political participatory society.

Scholars disagree on the significance of SM for increased civic participation. While some emphasize the salutary effect of SM on participation and engagement (Xenos, Vromen and Loader, 2014), others point to an inconsistency in the supposed correlation between SM use and increased civic participation (Baumgartner and Morris, 2009). Baumgartner and Morris (2009) argue that the

the alleged relationship between SM and political engagement is inconsistent. They insist that although SM is used by youths to receive news and increase political participation, SM users are not more inclined to civic engagement than users of other media. Despite this mixed opinion, SM remains a potential instrument of maximizing the internet for political activities. This is because SM allows young people to take up the role of social activists and maximize their influence through their platforms.

It is now common for youths to use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp and TikTok to spread social activism. For instance, recent protests such as #BLM, #Istandwithhongkong and #Endsars were organized through SM. In addition, youth civic participation is demonstrated in their involvement in decision-making that affects their lives through various organizations. In Nigeria for example, organizations such as the Youth Adolescent Reflection and Action Center (YARAC), Young Men Christian Association, Boy and Girl Scouts, and the Network of African Youths for Development (NAYD), are avenues for increased youth civic participation.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PROTESTS
Social media has recently been used to shape political protests in various parts of the world. The preference for SM in aiding political protests can be subsumed under three broad headings viz: informational, emotional and structural factors. Concerning information, social media can be easily used to coordinate protest activities by circulating news about transportation, medical services, turnout for demonstration, legal support and police presence. Regarding its emotional advantage, SM can be used to spread motivational messages to garner support for a political cause, to spread an ideology, to expose deprivation, to advocate for social justice, moral indignation, fairness, group efficacy and social identification. Yet, the structure of social media allows for information exposure without barriers – a major determinant for the failure or success of a protest movement (Jost et al, 2018). Granillo (2020) observes that there are two major groups in social

protests; a core group and a periphery group. The core group includes street users who actively protest and spread their message while the periphery is low-level users who echo and share the message of the core group on their various SM platforms.

Social media has aided political protest in places like New York, Minneapolis, Hong Kong, Egypt and Spain. Notably, these protests are often depicted by a unique hashtag (#) which explains the objective. For example, #BlackLivesMatters emphasizes the sanctity of the life of every black person; #OWS; Occupy Wall Street, was a protest against income inequality and demand for bank reforms in the United States; #Standwithhongkong symbolizes for pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. According to Jost et al. (2018), SM is used to promote protests because of the advantages it holds. It facilitates prompt transmission of information, coordinated planning and organization of the protests. The increase in participatory politics and communications means that the people can access information rapidly and engage in public speech needed for collective action.
The role of SM in promoting and sustaining social movements cannot be understated because even if people ignore what they hear, they are unlikely to disregard the viral images circulating on SM.

As already stated, social media also played a key role in the Hong Kong protests in 2014 and 2019. Thousands of people in Hong Kong organized a protest tagged the Umbrella Movement for 79 days beginning 26 September 2014. The main reason for the protest was the request for the direct election of the leader of Hong Kong. The movement became known as the umbrella movement when the picture of an individual holding two umbrellas following an attempt by the police to disperse protesters with tear gas surfaced online. As a result, supporters of the protest began using yellow ribbons and umbrell-

as as icons on their SM profiles (Luk, 2015). According to Luk (2015), the protesters – the majority of whom are youths – used Facebook, WhatsApp and FireChat during the movement. Facebook was largely used because Hong Kong ranks third in Asia in the use of the app. FireChat helped to overcome the limitation of internet services because it connects mobile phones via WiFi or Bluetooth without an Internet connection. SM thus became a network of support through which protesters canvased for resources and support. They circulated pictures of people donating umbrellas, water, food, tents, masks etc. to attract more volunteers. The protesters also used SM to upload photos and videos. SM helped to maintain the anonymity of the influencers of the protest and created an avenue for direct exchange of unfiltered information.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE #ENDSARS PROTEST IN NIGERIA

Although Nigerians have been protesting against police brutality for a long time, the October 2020 #Endsars protest was different for two major reasons. One, the protest coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic when Nigerians were grappling with the attendant socio-economic realities of the pandemic such as unemployment and poverty. Secondly, the protest was highly circulated on SM and received wide acceptance by youths who spent more time on their phones and SM due to the lockdown occasioned by the pandemic. Akinyetun (2021b), notes that calls for an end to SARS started in 2017.

Ekoh and George (2021) observe that young people who have for a long time been denied access to governance found their voice on SM by protesting police brutality and demanding general reforms and inclusive governance. This led to the circulation of other hashtags such as #EndBadGovernanceInNigeriaNow and #NassSalaryCut. Even when the government hurriedly announced the scrapping of SARS and its replacement with the Special Weapons and Tactics unit (SWAT), the protesters rejected this using another tag #EndSWAT. Without a doubt, Instagram, Facebook and particularly, Twitter, became critical to

spreading messages about the protest. These platforms became a panel where users recounted their experiences and that of their friends on SM about the cases of police brutality, corruption and other injustices– thus stimulating physical demonstrations. SM made it possible for the protesters to articulate their grievances by providing video evidence of police brutality over time. It also provided them with real-time information which sustained the coordination of the protests.

According to Spaces for Change (2021), what started as a tweet spiralled into mass action and created new actors who demonstrated a high level of civic participation. The tweets by activists such as Aisha Yesufu, Omoyele Sowore, Deji Adeyanju, Douglas Jack Agu (Runtown) and Folarin Falana (Falz) had great impacts on participation in the protests, particularly in Alausa, Ikeja and Lekki Toll Gate. Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, notable personalities like Jeremiah Archibong, Flavor and Phyno also contributed to the campaign using their SM platforms and inducing protests in the southeast.

Just like the 2019 Hong Kong protests,#Endsars was without a known superintendent; rather the participants coordinated themselves virtually and organized music, medical, legal support meals and supplies. They also solicited crowdfunding on the internet – thus sustaining the protests for a longer period than anticipated. SM became the tool for coordinating, amplifying conversation and documenting the course of the protest. The protests were boosted by solidarity tweets from celebrities within and outside the country. Among such celebrities were Wizkid, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Beyonce, Rihanna, Anthony Joshua and John Boyega.

CONCLUSION

This paper emphasizes the role of social media in influencing youth civic participation, political protests and activism, using the #Endsars protest in Nigeria as a case study. Youths are be-

ginning to engage in civic activities beyond the traditional norms of voting to a more justice-oriented sphere by demanding equity and increased involvement in public life. SM changes youth civic participation by encouraging shared governance and flexible involvement. It is therefore fundamental to a participatory culture that allows youths to organize, socialize, and produce complex relationships.

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Digital Africa – from youth movements to government bans

by Nwachukwu Egbunike*

ABSTRACT The number of digital users in Africa has been on a steady rise and the numbers are predicted to spike even further by 2025. Young people across the continent are employing digital media in many aspects of their lives. Crucially, the movements spurred by young people offer a deep insight into social political issues, with their message spiking awareness through digital media to offline protests. The issues which these youth-mediated movements have championed have been amplified by mainstream media, leading to public debates and agenda setting in their countries. As a result, governments across the continent are embarrassed and have sought to tighten control on online freedom of expression. These African countries have resorted to switching off or throttling the internet, spying on their citizens online, and generally enacting legislations that tamper with digital rights. These tactics by officialdom are especially pronounced during tense political moments like elections, protests and pandemics. This paper argues that official high handedness is unlikely to rein in an enterprising and digitally savvy African young population

Keywords: Digital media, African youths, African governments, freedom of expression, social movements

DIGITAL AND YOUNG

There are 495 million users of mobile phones and 303 million mobile internet users in Sub Saharan Africa as at 2021. These numbers are projected to ramp up to 615 million mobile users and 474 million internet users by 2025 according to the GSMA Mobile Economy (The GSMA Mobile Economy, 2021). The time spent on social media has been on a steady rise, over the global average, in three African countries: Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. Between 2017 and 2020, the time spent daily on social media increased from 2.5-3.34 hours for Kenyans, 2.47-3.32 hours for South Africans and 3.03-3.42 hours for Nigerians. Each month, Facebook hosts more than 95 million people from Sub Saharan Africa, 97% of which access the platform from their mobile phones (Facebook, 2016). The countries with the highest Facebook access in this region are from Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. At the same time, WhatsApp is the favorite social media app in Africa – 44% in Ghana and Kenya, 41% in Nige-ria and South Africa (Global Web Index, 2020b). Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria – with 97%, 96% and 95% of their digital population respectively – being the three top global WhatsApp using countries as at the fourth quarter of 2020 (Statistia, 2021).

Evidently, digital media has risen steadily and consistently within the continent. There are many plausible reasons for this, one of which is that Africa being a youthful continent with almost 60% of Africa's population under the age of 25 (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019). According to the United Nations, 19 African countries, with a median age of 15 years, were the world's top 20 youngest countries in 2020 (Meyers, 2019).

Beyond these numbers, what has been the impact of digital Africa on social movements by young people in the continent? What has been the reaction of African governments to digital rights and free expression in the continent? We address these questions through a critical review of extant literature.

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AFRICAN MOVEMENTS GONE DIGITAL

Social movements have laboured to overturn the asymmetrical dependence on mainstream media. On the one hand, these movements need the media to gain visibility. On the other hand, traditional media often negate or spin the message of movements (Carroll & Ratner, 2010). The overemphasis of media on creating narratives that are newsworthy, most times results in framing movements by the energy or deviant behaviours of protesters at the expense of their message. Hence, the need for movements to seek alternative media that will grant them visibility but more importantly, preserve the integrity of their message (Stoddart & MacDonald, 2011; Bosch, Wasserman & Chuma, 2018).

The foregoing explains why some scholars prematurely heralded the Arab Spring protests of the early 2010s as a definitive solution to the uneven reliance of movements on mainstream media. The novelty of protests being significantly promoted by digital media (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Alhindi, 2012), resulted in their erroneous branding of the Arab Spring as Twitter or Facebook revolutions (Comninos, 2011; Passini, 2012).

Nonetheless, despite these extreme and problematic inferences about the impact of digital media on social movements, there are still exceptions. It is imperative to understand that the core contention is the power relationship that social movements have to grapple with in their interactions with the media and establishment (Castells, 2012). Since, in theory, movements are necessarily weaker than institutions they fight against, the means of communicating their grievances are vital to their success or otherwise. This explains why digital media has morphed into the communication nerve centre of movements' battle for social justice.

In addition, the majority of digital media users in Africa are young people. Hence, it is only natural that these youth have adopted their media – digital media – in the quest for a better and brighter future. From the review of extant literature, two African yo-

uth movements stand tall in this regard – South Africa's Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) and Nigeria's #EndSARS movements.

SOUTH AFRICA'S RHODES MUST FALL (#RMF)

#RMF, a youth-led national protest, rocked South Africa's University of Cape Coast in 2015. The agitation was initially directed at the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a British colonialist. However, the protests soon morphed into a movement for the 'decolonialization' of education in South Africa (Hlophe, 2015; Chaudhuri, 2016).

Mpofu (2017) focused on the movement's hashtags- #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall- to explain the disruptive impact of the protests had on the South African society. This was essential in communicating the youths' grievances as an integral part of the wider marginalization of the black community. The protesters demanded a total overhauling beyond the performative pronouncements by the post-apartheid government. Nonetheless, Nyamnjoh (2017) cautioned the movement against the danger of becoming what they were seeking to abolish. Essentially, the youth movement cannot effectively fight against alienation, while at the same time, overlooking alienating practices within it.

It is noteworthy that despite the digital divide in South Africa, the #RMF activism racked up considerable presence on Twitter (Bosch, 2017). The micro-blogging site was the backbone of youth mobilisation, setting public agenda that was picked up by mass media, shaping the narrative of counter-memory that drove public debate, within and outside South Africa.

Twitter was not the only social media platform that contributed to the awareness and execution of the #RMF youth-led movement. The movement also used Facebook to drive their message without any signs of attrition. On the contrary, mainstream media picked up news about the activism from the platform (Knudsen, & Andersen, 2019). In addition, the #RMF also generated social media memes which

were a metaphor for the refrain of protesters that Rhodes Must Fall (Frassinelli, 2018).

NIGERIA'S #ENDSARS PROTEST

The #EndSARS protests were an organic movement led by Nigerian youths against brutalities by the police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The movement gained online recognition in 2017 when abuses by SARS police operatives was widely circulated on Twitter. However, the digitally-driven offline #EndSARS protests were ignited on October 3, 2020, when the video of the dehumanization of a young Nigerian by SARS officials trended on Twitter (Akinwotu, 2020). Within a week, #EndSARS had generated over 2.4 million tweets, and was the top trending hashtag on the microblogging app in various countries (GetAfrica, 2020).

Pent-up frustration by Nigerian youths who have been victims of years of police brutality underlay the protests. Hence, youths ramping up the great potentials of digital media for airing their grievances but most importantly, to assert that the Nigerian police is a great foe (Yeku, 2020).

Nigerian youths leveraged digital media to mobilize financial resources, coordinate legal, medical and media support for the protests (Global Voices, 2020b). The fallout of this intense, systematic and coordinated digital media campaign by the #EndSARS protesters resulted in a global mainstream media gaze that amplified the message, tilting public agenda against the police. Contrariwise, the digital media mediated attention was both uncomfortable and embarrassing to the Nigerian government (Soladoye & Ojo, 2020).

AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS STRIKE BACK

While social movements have significantly benefited from digital Africa, it has been a source of disquiet for governments within the continent. Consequently, African governments have deployed Internet blackouts, throttling, banning, taxing, privacy breaches within 2019 and 2020, as a means of curtailing online freedom of expression.

In 2019, the governments of Algeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe, in a bid to control the political narrative, quash protests and consolidate their hold on the political systems of their various countries, resorted to switching off the internet and digital platforms (Global Voices, 2019). This tactic of disrupting digital media especially during elections, protests and charged political moments continued in 2020 when Algeria, Ethiopia, Guinea, Sudan, and Tanzania – switched off the internet in their various countries (Hamed & Egbunike, 2020). Digital blackouts were also tied to elections; in Guinea for instance, the internet went dead ahead of a presidential referendum, in Tanzania before the presidential elections. Digital blackouts also occurred during charged political periods like protests, as was evident in Ethiopia. Furthermore, there were state-engineered internet blackouts during examinations for high school students in Sudan.

Internet disruption is not the only means used by governments across the continent. In 2020, Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Zambia, and Zimbabwe deployed spyware technology on their citizens. The governments of seven African countries, according to a report by University of Toronto's cyber research unit Citizen Lab actively spied on their citizens, breaching their right to privacy (Marczak et al, 2020).

Legislations were actively used as well by African governments in the period under review. The southern African governments of Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, all enacted various law that were aimed at stifling freedom of expression of their citizens (Egbunike, 2020). In 2019, the Nigerian government also considered the enactment of a law that will clip the wings of citizens using social media (Ewang, 2019). The proposed law criminalizes any form of governm-

ent criticism. It will legalize internet blackouts in Nigeria and telecoms companies will lose their license if they do not obey the government's order to enforce a digital blackout.

The use of regulations or legislations to curtail online free expression in the continent was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments in Algeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe, using the pandemic as a pretext, enacted regulations that infringed on citizens' rights (Global Voices, 2020a; CIPESA, 2020). These regulations were also aimed at having a firm control on the COVID-19 narrative as statistics on fatalities and the spread of the disease were geared towards reputation management.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF DIGITAL AFRICA: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Digital media in Africa has risen considerably over the years. The bulk of users are young African 'digital natives' who are comfortable with the media that is truly their own and this explains the ramping up of this media in the continent. Unlike the older generation, young digital natives are perfectly comfortable with social media. Therefore, they have no need to adapt to it. They have also developed and sustained a digital culture that has enormous expressions in all aspects of their life. The youth have not only witnessed the rot that has characterised governance in their countries, they have also seen the impact of misgovernance on their generation and that of their parents. The import of all this is pent-up anger and frustration, even for those young people who migrate to other parts of the world. Being digital media savvy, they have expanded their networks to hold conversations through apps. These discussions have, among other things, pushed them to speak more loudly about socio-political issues concerning Africa.

It is against this backdrop of the generative capacity of digitally mediated networks that the call to action has blossomed. Capitalizing on the enthusiasm of influential young digital natives, these movements

were able to articulate a narrative that clearly defines the victims –i.e. the youth – as a group totally at odds with the political predators – the establishment. The line of battle being thus clearly established, the movements' work had been made easier. In addition, the young natives are citizens of a supposedly borderless, ubiquitous nation-state, driven and hosted on digital platforms. The direct consequence of this is that no single national government can effectively micromanage information or curtail it exclusively within its boundaries. Hence, a protest in South Africa or Nigeria, say, is not only hosted in these respective countries as their physical location.

Another aspect is the digital culture that African youth, like all young people in the world, have embraced. This is a generation that is not afraid of discussing or forcing conversations around topics that are considered taboo. While this may have its demerits, the strength lies in not being comfortable with the status quo. Young people are neither hindered by the culture of silence nor by the tradition of questioning elders, common to African traditional societies. Hence, their movements are pushed with youthful zeal.

This is the scenario that played out in South Africa, where the older generation, contented with pulling down apartheid, were impervious to colonial policies still alive in the educational sector. Their flexibility and appreciation of issues played out in the country's Rhodes Must Fall protest, which initially started as a demand against a hike in school fees, later morphing into a decolonization movement. Like the media they use, young South Africans understood the power of immediacy and took advantage of it to demand more incisive reforms. We may infer that #RMF was a forerunner of #BlackLivesMatter. But the scale of the falling of geographical boundaries of protests, particularly the ones led by youths, does not stop at a show of solidarity. They were able to raise funds using digital platforms, circumventing all official obstructions, for their

These young natives exploited the participatory nature of digital media to also mobilize for the protests and coordinate logistical support.

A key feature of Nigeria's #EndSARS protest was the horizontal leadership. This meant that there was no one single leader of the movement. Hence, the protest matured organically with many parts carrying out varying responsibilities. The nature of this movement resulted in the inability of the Nigerian authorities to clamp down on the protest. The government could not derail #EndSARS like it did during the 2012 #OccupyNigeria protests, when it convinced organized labour to back out, leaving the other protesters in the cold.

Everywhere, the relationship between state and civil society is hardly cordial. While social movements seek to promote freedom of expression, demand more transparency and accountability, governments aspire to close the civic space. Hence, it is not surprising that most governments have taken the route of proscription, banning or quelling digital spaces in the continent.

The sheer number of digital blackouts and other assaults on online free speech by African governments is evidence of deep frustration. The vibrancy of the digital space is one thing these governments will wish to bring under their direct supervision or control. Also, this is a manifestation of the reality on ground in many African countries, which claim to be democratic but are deeply autocratic. Hence, it looks like mobilization by digital young natives has made these governments very jittery. It remains to be seen how these governments will track the virtual, transnational activities of their young and digitally savvy population. The tyrant's manual implemented by most governments has become obsolete. It cannot cage a bold and courageous young generation of Africans, who do not seem to be afraid of expressing their opinions. Their rising numbers on digital platforms is a testament to this reality.

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Twitter as a veritable Public Sphere: A Habermasian Perspective on the #EndSARS Protests

by Nnaemeka Ijioma*

ABSTRACT Following widespread use of social media to raise awareness and aggregate public opinion during the EndSARS protests in Nigeria, this paper discusses the status of Twitter as the epitome of the Habermasian public sphere. The paper argues that Twitter has become a veritable public space, in the mode of the Habermasian public sphere, playing host to enlightened citizens, journalists, activists, politicians, government functionaries and agencies, the international community and the media. The conversations and discourse that trend on Twitter go on to form public opinion, set the agenda for what the traditional and other social media focus on and, consequently, influence society. As a nascent public sphere, Twitter in Nigeria has become a space for public opinion formation, agenda-setting, and mobilisation of social action, elements necessary for enhancing participatory democracy.

Keywords: Twitter, Public Opinion, Public Sphere, #EndSARS, Social Media, Participatory Democracy, Habermas.

A HISTORY OF PROTESTS

Nigeria's recent history is pockmarked by protests, among them the Occupy Nigeria demonstrations against fuel-subsidy removal in early 2012, and the Bring Back Our Girls protests of 2014. The EndSARS protest of October 2020 was initiated, organised and given prominence online, using social media in general with Twitter operating more or less as the 'operations headquarters'. Reminiscent of the Arab Spring, especially in Egypt, were middle-class and the diaspora leveraged Facebook to maintain the momentum on the streets, the EndSARS protesters first used Twitter to draw attention to the alleged atrocities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), generate a global buzz around the issue with the #EndSARS hashtag and subsequently take the agitations to the streets of Lagos, the nation and across the globe. But unlike the Arab Spring where the agitations followed the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the EndSARS mass action was started and executed from the timelines of Twitter users.

Does the success of the hashtag in shaping public opinion around police brutality and drawing Nigerians at home and in the diaspora to protest against the brutality and ultimately lead to the disbandment of the SARS unit prove that Twitter has become an actual public sphere as postulated by German Philosopher Jurgen Habermas in his theory of the public sphere?

THE HABERMASIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

The concept of the public sphere was originally articulated in the 18th century and was initially conceptualized in relation to the feudal society that was still in existence then. German sociologist Jurgen Habermas further developed the concept in the 1960s and defined it as a 'virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space' (Overland, 2018). He defined it as 'a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the pe-

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ople' (Soules, 2007). The public sphere was distinct from the marketplace because it was primarily a space for discourse and engagement with the government's policies and actions and not for economic activities.

The public sphere theory, as espoused by Habermas, holds that government's laws and policies should be steered by public opinion arrived at in the public sphere and that responsible governments are those that pay attention to the public sphere. According to Habermas (1989), the public sphere is a place where public opinion could be debated and where such opinions will be used to pressure the authorities. He also described the public sphere as a place where decisions are arrived at without recourse to violence.

Habermas's idea of a public sphere was one where participation was open to everyone and all members are considered equal and free to debate any issue. But Habermas's theory was also called the bourgeois public sphere because it originally focused on white, bourgeois male participants. Some critics faulted the exclusion of women and minorities in the original conception (Fraser, 1992). In the same spirit, some of Habermas's students propounded a 'subaltern' public sphere as a counter-public sphere theory (Negt & Kluge, 1993).

In today's information age dominated by mediated communication, the media has played a pivotal role in the public sphere theory. Habermas argued that the media was important in building a public sphere or realm and keeping it active because the public sphere needed a means of passing information and also of affecting those who receive the information. Since the mass media historically acted to facilitate discourse in a public sphere, the rise of the internet has led to scholars applying public sphere theory to internet technologies.

Habermas expressed reservations about the role of the mass media in acting as the realm where citizens could debate the political culture without any instit-utional control. He wondered whether the media can act as a site for participation of the public in debates, accountability, bringing together of expert and lay knowledge, and the delivery of 'ideal' communicative situations?

The traditional media was limited in providing this ideal that Habermas craved for but social media is showing great potential in removing all supposed restrictions and providing that ideal public sphere that will be available to both the proletariat and the bourgeoise, as well as mean and women. In other words, a realm with a wide range of participants necessary for critical public participation. Today, social media is seen as an avenue to have a virtual public sphere that is all-inclusive. But does social media have the reach and the critical adoption to create consensus, shape thoughts and ideas and stir the civil society into action to hold the government to account? Can social media, which is primarily a tool for entertainment and communication, craft public opinion, set agenda and influence society in a democracy?

In recourse to the original incarnation of the public sphere theory, many journalists seem to use Twitter as a "public square" to determine the trending topics of the day and subsequently make sure these trends get into the traditional media, further expanding the prominence given to such topics and effectively setting the agenda for public discourse. Robinson (2016), writing in Current Affairs, explains:

> Given that much of the media consists of content-for-the-sake-of-content, the introduction of Twitter came as something of a godsend to journalists. With 500 million new Tweets rolling in every day, and nearly 310 million active monthly users, Twitter offers a sprawling bank of quotable sources. Tweets from all lands are ripe for plucking and republishing. Hashtags, then, have become something of a goldmine for online publications.

Authors like Jungherr, (2014) and Ausserhofer & Maireder (2013) have argued that many media organisations now use Twitter to source for news, connect with sources, and promote their publications. An example of this trend is the number of Tweets that former United States President, Donald Trump posted during his Presidency and before his social media ban, and which media houses all over the world quoted, re-published or re-broadcast.

In Nigeria, both the President and the Vice-President have Twitter profiles that are regularly updated with all of their communications and on which they regularly engage with the citizenry. These Twitter profiles also provide a source of information to journalists, bloggers, activists etc. As the rate of internet usage increases nationwide, many newsmakers continue to adopt Twitter to directly reach the public and engage and communicate outside the prism of the mainstream media gatekeepers and try to set the agenda and influence public opinion.

However, there are arguments against Twitter being the public sphere and doubts about its capacity to act as an open and universally accessible realm. Some scholars argue that Twitter is not representative of the public, and that it is elitist and serves a privileged demographic, especially educated and young people who seem to populate the app and dictate the discourse. The example of the Brexit referendum where Twitter failed to reflect or to influence public opinion, is often cited as an illustration of the inability of college-educated Twitter users to affect public opinion (Siegel, & Tucker, 2016; Posegga & Jungherr, 2019).

As internet penetration deepens in many countries, Twitter reaches a critical mass of users who begin to have a say on public opinion. Although research by Posegga and Jungherr (2019) found that there is a weak correlation between Twitter agenda and politi-cal agenda, it also proved that there was more correlation between Twitter agenda and the newspapers and television agendas. This is a result of the growing influence of social media in interpersonal and mass communication. Unlike other major social media like WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, the Twitter algorithm makes it possible for a user to easily interact with thought leaders, politicians, journalists, influencers, government agencies and persons outside their sphere.

As mentioned earlier, many journalists, political commentators, media houses and news types inhabit Twitter so it is understandable that Twitter will become a vehicle for agenda-setting for the mass media. What is novel is that the product humbly referred to as 'a short burst of inconsequential information,' and 'chirps from birds' (David, 2009) by founder, Jack Dorsey, has grown to become consequential for individuals, public opinion, nations and the global community. In the aftermath of the 2015 general election in Nigeria where social media, and especially Twitter hosted conversations that changed the electoral landscape, the jury was out on the utility of the microblogging platform to act as the veritable public sphere. With the hashtag #EndSARS protests in 2020 came the verdict.

#ENDSARS PROTESTS

The #EndSARS campaign against police brutality started on Twitter in 2017. In December of that year, one Segun Awosanya, who tweets from the Twitter handle @segalink, started a petition after video footage of officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force allegedly brutalizing a citizen went viral online. The petition which he trended with the #EndSARS hashtag and signed by 10,195 persons before being handed over to the National Assembly sought the disbandment of the SARS unit. The force of the viral campaign including campaign including street protests led to the then Inspector-General of Police ordering the reorganisation of the unit. This sentiment was also

On Saturday, October 3, 2020, a video went viral allegedly showing a young man who was shot and pushed out of his vehicle by officers of SARS in Ughelli, Delta State, in the oil-rich Niger-Delta went viral. The video created instant rage online and mostly young Nigerians started recounting their experiences with the SARS unit using the hashtag #EndSARS. The volume of tweets expressing rage and fury led to the police authorities announcing on Sunday, October 4, 2020 the 'Ban of SARS members and other tactical squads from carrying out routine patrols...stop and search duties, checkpoints, mounting of roadblocks, traffic checks, etc with immediate effect' (Ukpe, 2020). That same day, Mr Festus Keyamo, the Minister of State for Labour released a picture via Twitter of the young man in the hospital and announced that he was injured and not dead (Ukpe, 2020). This heralded the start of a full month of month of protests under the #EndSARS hashtag.

On October 8 2020, EndSARS protesters hit the streets nationwide with the offline protesters reporting their actions online on Twitter. This action of citizen journalism by the protesters helped focus attention on major events like the shooting of a protester, Jimoh Ishiaka (Premium Times, 2020) in Oyo State, and also helped escalate what was happening in Nigeria across the globe. In Lagos, which was the epicentre of the protests by virtue of the number of Lagosians on the streets and on Twitter, celebrities like Falz, Eedris Abdulkareem, Olu Jacobs, Don Jazzy etc brought their star power to the movement. Across the globe, celebrities like Cardi B, Kanye West, Chimamanda Adichie, Lewis Hamilton, Jidenna, Odion Ighalo and Mesut Ozil and many others voiced support on Twitter. Most importantly, and cementing the place of Twitter in the protests, was the endorsement by Jack Dorsey the founder and CEO of the platform, who promoted the protests and called for Bitcoin donations while creating a unique emoji for the #EndSARS hashtag. The emoji was a tight fist in the Nigerian national colours of green, white and green.

Another symbol that was popular and symbolised the EndSARS movement was the logo of the Feminist Coalition which was at the centre of the protests managing its organisation and influencing its direction. The symbol was not too dissimilar to the Twitter emoji. It was a symbol of a black raised closed fist against a yellow background. The Feminist Coalition had been founded a few months earlier in July 2021 to advance the cause of women in Nigeria. When one of the leading members of the organisation, Feyikemi Abudu, noted that protesters were protesting round the clock by sleeping in front of the Government House in Aluasa, Lagos State, she got her organisation to help provide food, water, medicines, masks and other materials and legal aid as a means of supporting the protests and helping fellow citizens in the exercise of their constitutional rights.

The entry of the Feminist Coalition into the EndSARS protests changed its entire dynamic. Within a short time, the Feminist Coalition had become the heartbeat of the movement: raising funds, coordinating medical and legal aid, setting up an emergency call centre, an online radio station, and reaching out with its services across all the states involved in the protests. Using mostly bitcoin, the group raised more than 74 million Naira, equivalent to almost $200,000 by October 19, 2022 (Time, 2020). Feyikemi Abudu, who was initially coordinating the operations over the phone and on Twitter from a secure location, became a model for her fellow young people, especially women who for the first time since the Bring Back our Girls campaign, found themselves at the forefront of a protest movement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: TWITTER AS THE PUBLIC REALM OF THE INFORMATION AGE
When Habermas (1989) asked if the media can potentially provide a site for public participation, expert accountability, integration of expert and lay knowledge and the provision of ideal communicative situations, he was speaking of the traditional mass

media because he understood the limitations inherent in them; limitations like ownership structure, dependence on advertising, government control, accessibility, cost of production, and the like. These limitations prevented the media in its old incarnation from becoming an ideal public sphere. In the world before web 2.0 and the advent of social media and citizen journalism, the media-dominated public realm was still one controlled by the bourgeoisie and by mostly men. The proletariat, women and LGBTQ individuals were noticeable bystanders.

In a country like Nigeria where the media has historically been censored, social media has been embraced by dissidents, the opposition, women, and the LGBTQ community. But most social media applications are heavily tilted towards entertainment and or place users in a filter bubble or echo chamber. Although Twitter, like all social media, is designed to match like-minded people together thereby fostering a filter bubble effect, the app, unlike Facebook, Instagram and other new media applications, has proved a better space for discourse and debate of government's laws and policies and the steering of those laws to reflect public opinion. Twitter's structure and network abilities ensure that critical discourse is given prominence and reach, and the information flow and debate is such that the realm can influence public opinion and by extension the society.

For Hauser (1999), participatory democracy and the public sphere are studied together because the public sphere is seen to be viable when public opinion is developed to become public action. The argument in this paper is that the crystallisation of public opinion around the activities of the SARS branch of the Nigeria Police was enabled by the unique hue of Twitter - one that enables debate from all demographics of the 'enlightened' public and has the wherewithal to initiate mass action against the state, validating the perspective of scholars like

Habermas (1989) who see the public sphere as a bulwark against the authoritarianism of the state.

Habermas (1989) described the public sphere as 'a historical space between the private domain and the state, where citizens could engage as equals in critical discussion about the state and society and influence their development in the process.' In the feudal society, the Habermasian ideal of the public realm was something like a café or salon where the members could discuss anything without the influence of the media. Traditional media was limited in proving this ideal that Habermas craved, but social media has the potential to remove all supposed restrictions and provide that ideal public sphere that 'might generate the critical consensus which he considers necessary for public participation in democratic political processes' (Livingstone, & Lunt, 1994).

In the 21st century, Twitter has become the Habermasian ideal with the opportunity it provides for citizens to engage as equals and reach a critical consensus on public matters. Twitter has provided a platform for engaging in political discourse in Nigeria and across the globe. It has provided opportunities for people to present their opinions outside of the mainstream media and this alone is breaking down the hold on public opinion by traditional media. As a global public sphere, Twitter is the best avenue to have a realm that incorporates all minorities and groups. It has become a major public sphere in Nigeria, enabling all classes of people to have an online presence, communicate and participate in political dialogue. This is because access to social media, which is powered by relatively cheap mobile internet, has closed the communication gap between the elite - bourgeoisie - and the rest of the people.

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A Hashtag Revolution in Nigeria

by Ebenezer Obadare*

ABSTRACT Exploding in October 2020 and reverberating internationally, protests against police brutality under the hashtag #EndSARS exposed enduring patterns and emergent trends in Nigerian politics and society. This article examines various elements of the protests to advance hypotheses about the culture of social media, the weakening of old forms of solidarity, and the rise of a new generation of activists steeped in new rules and technologies of civic engagement. #EndSARS marks the possible ascent of an inorganic civil society with profound implications for Nigerian democracy.

Keywords: policing, Nigeria, protests, violence, civil society, democracy, social media, LGBT

The series of largely uncoordinated and at times violent street protests against police brutality that exploded across several towns and cities in Nigeria in late 2020, reverberating internationally under the social media hashtag #EndSARS, caught most people by surprise. But anyone with a finger on the Nigerian pulse could have seen it coming, for at least three reasons.

First, after a string of protests in recent years that by and large had fizzled out before gaining any sort of traction—#Occupy Nigeria (2012), #Our-MumuDonDo (2016–17), #TakeItBackMovement (2018), and #RevolutionNow (2019)—the coun- try was due for another bout of street action. All the frustrations that had motivated those previous protests were still simmering.

Second, in the same way as the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests against perceived economic inequality in the United States eventually reso- nated globally and were appropriated by social forces in Nigeria, one might have confidently pre- dicted that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that flared across the United States after the May 2020 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapo- lis would eventually ricochet on Nigerian streets. Of course, #EndSARS was not a clone of BLM; far from it.

Still, a protest against police brutality toward black people in the United States was bound to find some sympathy in Nigeria, whether on account of racial solidarity or a new transna- tional sensitivity regarding violence and the black body—aided most certainly by the explosion of images in the media. Or simply because police brutality, epitomized by the impunity of theSpecial Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), is an undeni- able fact of life in Nigeria.

Third, by the time #EndSARS protesters finally took to the streets—not to mention various social media platforms—at the beginning of October 2020, Nigeria was a society on edge. The hashtag #EndSARS had made its debut on social media sometime in 2017, as agitated Nigerians exchanged stories (and, where available, images) of police assaults and general misconduct. After "trending" for a while, it seemingly petered out as public attention was inevitably diverted by other problems. But evidence suggests that the most popular hashtags never die—they tend to continue to exist in a kind of digital limbo, waiting for their moment of resurrection, often by other hashtags with a cognate focus.

In any event, #EndSARS was reactivated and gained renewed traction in October 2020 due to a fur- ther concourse of factors.

One was the COVID-19 pandemic. Among its other deleterious social effects, the pandemic had made it impossible for many Nigerians to travel out of the country. For a cross section of the Nigerian middle class, international travel is a time-honored means of letting off steam and getting away from the dilapidated infrastructure and annoyances of everyday life in Nigeria. For the first time in recent memory, COVID-19 had, albeit tem- porarily, cut off that means of escape.

To compound matters, there was widespread despondency over the country's dire economic sit- uation—partly brought about by the maladroitness of President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, but structurally a function of Nigeria's undue reli- ance on oil exports, since the global oil market had been more or less crippled by the pandemic. Finally, the tension across the country was not eased by the fact that universities had been shut- tered since March due to a nationwide strike action (the umpteenth one) by the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities, leaving thousands of high-strung young people with plenty of time, nowhere to go, and practically nothing to do.

The upshot of all this was a social explosion, the scale and ferocity of which arguably had not been witnessed in Nigeria since the 1989 student-led "anti-SAP" riots—against the structural adjustment programs imposed by the military at the behest of the International Monetary Fund—which report- edly claimed more than 200 lives. On one level, the #EndSARS movement, inspired by a hashtag and led (to the extent it had leaders at all) by members of a new generation shrewd in the employment and manipulation of digital technol- ogy, is the protest for this era. It displays the rel- ative ease of instigating a protest (organizing one is a different matter) by leveraging the increased use and power of social media, which has driven the growing frequency of hashtag-driven movements.

At the same time, we can hardly doubt that #EndSARS was about accumulated grievances for which the hashtag served as a convenient place-holder.

To understand fully the passion that galvanized and sustained #EndSARS while it lasted, we need to look closely at its socioeconomic and polit- ical antecedents, and the dee- per issues around politics, the state, and civil society in Niger-
ia that the protests foregrounded.

A THEORY OF POLICE VIOLENCE

One notable feature of social protests in con- temporary Nigeria is that they tend to be about one thing and many things simultaneously. This is not to say that specific protests lack immediate triggers, but merely to observe that a peek under their veneer would disclose issues over which Nigerians have perennially sparred. This much is true of #EndSARS. On the face of it, the movement was about ending the reign of terror maintained by the heavily armed elite police unit—and by law enforcement in general —over hapless Nigerians. Yet beneath the surface, angst concerning the overall place of violence in Nigerian society, of which police brutality is just one aspect, could not have been more palpable.

Not even the government's agreement to disband SARS, a concession made just as the protests were beginning to spread, proved enough to halt them. Skepticism founded on experience no doubt played a role—in Nigeria, disbanded entities frequently are resurrected under new identities, and SARS itself had been dissolved at least once before. But it appears that the protesters were determined to use the opportunity to press claims that many believed were equally, if not more, important. Police brutality may have been the proximate cause of #EndSARS, but the time was also ripe for a collective release; many people just had too much pent-up anger at the system that needed to be discharged.

Accordingly, calls to "End SARS" and "End Police Brutality" quickly gave way to placards featuring broader messages like "End Bad Governance," "End Corruption," "Stop Killing Our Youth," and "End State Violence."

The question of violence in Nigeria, particularly violence involving the police, is critical. Daily, in encounters defined by gross impunity, police kill, torture, and maim scores of Nigerians. Between 2000 and 2007 alone, according to a Human Rights Watch report, police shot and killed more than 10,000 people, which averages to more than 1,400 victims annually. The average Nigerian expects any contact with the police to be uncivil, and the police rarely disappoint. Some of that daily dosage of incivility might be obviated with the right financial inducement (bribery is rampant), but the first law of survival in Nigeria is understanding that a police officer at a checkpoint is, quite literally, above the law.

Why are the police in Nigeria so prone to violence? One theory—to which a cross section of Nigerians tends to be sympathetic—is that the dearth of resources committed to law enforcement, and the ensuing degradation of policing as a profession, are such that meting out violence to hapless civilians is the only method of "policing" known to a majority of police officers. Treat the police well, the assumption goes, and they will return the favor.

That the police in Nigeria are shabbily treated is a commonplace. They often go without salaries for months (to be fair, they are not alone in this predicament), regularly shoulder the expense of purchasing their own uniforms and equipment, and endure notoriously barbarous living conditions in their barracks. For the average police constable, the checkpoint, whether legal or illegal (for all practical purposes, the distinction is academic), means survival.

It is an opportunity to leverage his uniform and firearm to extort what he feels he is owed—by society, if not by his immediate employers. The need to extort becomes more acute when, as a wealth of anecdotes confirms, "earnings" from checkpoints have to be redistributed both up and down the police hierarchy, and among an informal network of agents, often including the wives and significant others of superiors. This is the material backdrop to the emergence of the checkpoint as a space characterized by violence, which is frequently lethal.

The class dimension of this violence is noteworthy. Police brutality is often random and is by no means exclusive to checkpoints, but its average target in Nigeria nonetheless fits a familiar profile: public transport drivers and passengers, students, hair stylists, auto mechanics, tailors, traders, artisanal apprentices. Given the nature of their activities, they are more likely to be brought into direct contact with the police. Since they occupy the lower rungs of the social ladder, they also lack the economic means or political clout to pursue redress. One of the more telling aspects of #EndSARS was the lamentation by a section of protesters about being accosted or shaken down by the police for the "crime" of being poorly dressed. Considering that police recruits are mostly drawn from the same part of the social pool, police violence appears to be mainly an intra-class phenomenon.

Nigerians' response to this excess of violence is to seek security in its privatization. Most private entities outsource their security to various para-military units, and those individuals who can afford it often surround themselves with multiple "orderlies" and bodyguards. But the most telling dimension of privatized violence is when Big Men (and Women) outsource their personal protection to the state, which is subsequently undermined in its statutory duty of assuring public safety.

According to official figures, some 150,000 police officers out of the total workforce of 400,000 are attached to private individuals and companies, mostly as part of the ever-growing personal entourages of politicians and the upper middle class. These include both officially assigned security details and police moonlighting on their time off.

On the whole, violence involving the police, while often brutal, is hardly exceptional. It testifies to a troubling banality of incivility, whereby Nigerians treat one another shabbily and expect discourtesy as a matter of course in their quotidian interactions, whether formal or informal. Although there is no justification for violence by police against those they are meant to protect, it should be acknowledged that the police more or less treat citizens they encounter the same way most Nigerians in positions of power treat their subordinates. The only difference—a crucial one—is that the police are armed and their use of violence is, in principle, legitimate.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT, SOCIAL INFLUENCERS

If #EndSARS offers an opportunity to reflect on police brutality within a broader economy of violence in Nigeria, it is also an important moment to consider transformations in the character and capacity of civil society. Of the many placards displayed by the protesters, the one bearing the message "We Have No Leaders" stands out because of its unintended double entendre. On the one hand, the protester hoisting the placard probably meant to express Nigerians' frustration with the shenani- gans of the political class at various levels in the country. It is not unusual for a group of Nigerians, seeing no end to the daily spectacle of bad gover- nance, to sigh exasperatedly, "We have no leaders."

At the same time, the placard may have been intended to convey the message that the protests had no leaders, meaning that they were spontane- ous, uncoordinated, and hence not directed by figures who might be co-opted or, in Nigerian parlance, "settled" by the state.

For precisely this reason, many of the protesters were eager to insist that they had no leaders.

To say that #EndSARS had no leaders in this latter sense is both true and untrue. It is true, for instance, that much of the uprising was driven by the communicative e´lan of social media, which so far has proved too nimble for many African gov- ernments still steeped in the logic of the analog era. Although there is a unit in the presidency dedicated to digital and new media (headed by a former journalist well-grounded in that ecology), the Buhari administration failed to develop a coherent message or rebuttal to the protests on any of its social media platforms. This prompted condemnation that Buhari's so-called social media outreach was mere posturing, just like his predecessor Goodluck Jonathan's.

At any rate, to the extent that the movement had leadership at all, it was dispersed along various nodes on social media. In terms of eluding the grasp of the state and spreading messages in real time with minimum friction, this was a boon. But it proved more problematic when the largely peaceful protests turned increasingly violent— banks and the private property of certain political leaders were razed, prisons were stormed to release inmates, and policemen were subjected to random attacks. The need arose to coordinate ef- forts and separate the wheat of legitimate protesters from the chaff of those whose sole intent was to cause mayhem.

That being said, it is not technically true that #End-SARS had no leaders, though the movement did appear to have entered a rudderless phase after the Buhari administration agreed to disband SARS. Globally speaking, it seems typical for protests in the age of social media to be labeled as leaderless, and to some extent #EndSARS was merely being shoehorned into a preexisting categorization. It is not this apparent leaderlessness, but rather the sociological profile of its leaders, however informally organized they were, that is notable for the morphology of Nigerian civil society.

When the protesters presented their list of demands to the inspector general of police, Mohammed Adamu, on October 12, they were represented by 28-year-old David Adeleke, a popular singer known as Davido. Like most en- tertainers and celebrities of his generation, Davido is active on social media, commanding large fol- lowings on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram— but this was the first time that he was putting his body on the line. The emergence of Davido and other celebrity-entertainers (such as Folarin Fala- na, aka Falz, and Debo Adebayo, aka Mr Macaroni) as symbolic spearheads of the protests points to deeper transformations in the Nigerian civil sphere.

In the first place, the rise of celebrity- entertainers as leading political actors reflects their outsized influence due in part to the power of social media, and consequently the inundation of most areas of social life, including politics, by popular entertainment. It is not a coincidence that the most popular politicians in contempo- rary Nigeria are those who are active on social media, and whose political performances imitate the style of entertainers. Former Representative Patrick Obahiagbon and former Senator Dino Melaye are two good examples. Despite no longer being in office, and with their political prospects uncertain, both continue to enjoy cult followings of fans who see them as sources of pure entertain- ment. Davido's emergence as a spokesperson for #EndSARS epitomizes this commingling of enter- tainment and politics.

The rise of the celebrity activist is also a function of the vacuum created by the decline of both the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) and the National Asso- ciation of Nigerian Students (NANS) as poles of progres- sive politics. If #EndSARS was reminiscent of the 1989 anti-SAP riots in its intensity, it should be noted that the latter were spearheaded by NANS, at the time arguably at the peak of its political influence.

Shaken by the ferocity of the riots, the military regime led by Ibrahim Babangida took measures that ensured the end of NANS as an effective social force. The NLC had a similar experience of being suppressed by the military, after reaching the height of its power as part of the Campaign for Democracy coalition in 1993, though the seeds of its decline had been planted well before then.

Both organizations have played an increasingly negligible role in overall civic mobilization over the course of the Fourth Republic since the return to democracy in 1999, featuring even less in most protests over this period. So it comes as no sur- prise that hardly any of the celebrity activists emerged from or belonged to any known political, student, or labor organization. In the heyday of NANS, its local chapters provided a training ground for debate and acquisition of organizational skills. The new generation of celebrity activists, leverag- ing the nascent politicization of online fame, seems grounded in nothing other than enthusiasm and popular notions of "social justice." In any case, the reliance on social media would seem to preclude the need for the kinds of skills normally acquired within the echelons of students' or work- ers' organizations and often required for offline, on-the-ground mobilization.

No matter their pedigree, there can be no doubt that the celebrity activists represent a new generation with different inclinations and, even more important, a different style than its predecessors. More than anything, #EndSARS seemed like its breakout performance.

OTHER VOICES

Two other features of the protests are worth highlighting. The first is the role of women and an increasingly assertive LGBT community. Aisha Yesufu, who first came to public attention as a co-convener of the Bring Back Our Girls protests after Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls in 2014, continued to model her unique brand of socially conservative and politically radical feminism.

Her "Lady Liberty" pose was the iconic image of the 2020 protests. But it was the new Feminist Coalition that stole the limelight as the organizational vehicle for a renewed emphasis on the gender dimension of violence.

Comprising professional women from upper social strata, the Coalition was formed in July 2020, proclaiming a "mission to champion equal- ity for women in Nigerian society with a core focus on education, financial freedom and representa- tion in public office." The Feminist Coalition (and by implication #EndSARS) received a massive publicity and financial boost from a most unex- pected quarter on October 14, when Jack Dorsey, co-founder and chief executive of Twitter, called for donations to the Coalition and suggested they be made in Bitcoin—no doubt to circumvent the Nigerian authorities, who had started to monitor and obstruct inflows to the group's bank account.

Protests by the LGBT community over state vio- lence allegedly directed against them for nothing other than their sexuality did not receive as much coverage in the Nigerian media. Many other pro- testers were uneasy at the prospect of their "political" message being "redirected" or "diluted." Yet placards bearing messages like "Nigerian Queer Lives Matter," "LGBT Lives Matter," and "Na Gay I Gay I No Kill Person" ("I'm just gay, not a murderer") were an important, if incongruous, element of the visual album of #EndSARS. As dissenters within a broader current of dissent, the increased visibility of the LGBT community speaks to its growing determination to challenge the rules about what it means to be a Nigerian citizen, signaling future battles along the axes of sexuality and identity within a civil society that is historically prone to division and rancor.

Another important aspect of the movement— and a further illustration of strains within the broader civil society—is that, not unlike most pro- tests in recent Nigerian history, they were geographically circumscribed.

The #EndSARS protests took place largely in towns and cities in the southern part of the country, with the north mostly playing the role of spectator. Northerners' relative unease with #EndSARS, which had been bubbling under the surface from the start, blew open on October 20, when the conservative North- ern Elders Forum (NEF) issued a statement calling for a halt to the protests on the grounds that they had "registered tremendous success" and were in danger of being hijacked by criminal elements.

While the Forum may have been right in denouncing increasing acts of lawlessness by a sec- tion of the protesters (at this point, groups and individuals in other parts of the country were issu- ing similar statements), it is instructive that this was its first and only intervention. Not only did the NEF never acknowledge the legitimacy of the pro- testers' grievances, but its eagerness to condemn them at the first opportunity reveals a discomfort that goes to the heart of a division between civil and political societies in the north and south. If civil society in the south always seems to be in a state of permanent agitation (which may have to do with the education gap and skewed distribu- tion of the media), its northern counterpart can seem permanently reposeful until piqued by per- ceived religious injury. #EndSARS, for all its scale and ferocity, was just one more reminder of the vastness of this chasm, and of the deeper Christian–Muslim fault line that is foundational to Nigerian politics.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

When the Babangida regime established SARS in 1992, ostensibly in response to the rising inci- dence of armed robbery in the country, the special police unit received a skeptical welcome—partic- ularly among those who feared that it might even- tually be used as an instrument of political pacification by the military state.

The fear was jus- tified, given Babangida's infamous boast about "expertise in the management of violence," and his regime's earlier, unsuccessful attempt in 1989 to establish a National Guard.

SARS typified Babangida's approach to gover- nance. For reasons having to do partly with his determination to consolidate resources and set up a parallel power base, and partly with his obses- sion with "action" and quick fixes, Babangida in- vested heavily in the creation of numerous overlapping agencies and special operations out- fits. There was a familiar pattern to the results: success in the early stages, followed by an all- too-predictable reversion to the norm, after which the agency or operation in question took its inev- itable place in the administrative discard bin. The Nigerian state is a veritable graveyard of such abandoned agencies.

Yet SARS endured well into the democratic era, even reincarnating after at least one campaign to eliminate it. This may well be an indication of how it satisfied an even deeper impulse in the state: the need to discipline, preferably using the kind of force that properly belongs in a state of emergency. But it is not only the state that has recourse to such "operations." This is the term used by everyday citizens to describe the activities of armed robbers and sundry paramilitary and vigilante groups. In either case, there is a common suggestion of some- thing irregular, probably illegal, but definitely disagreeable.

Using #EndSARS as a critical lens, one detects an extant pattern and an emergent trend in Niger- ian politics and society. The pattern is the history and ubiquity of violence: police brutality is part of a broader configuration in which violence is cen- tral to interactions between state and society, among actors within civil society, and between different arms of law enforcement. The trend is the rise of new civil society actors against the back- drop of the attenuation and dwindling authority of old civic actors and institutions like trade unions and student organizations. In this light, #EndSARS may come to be seen as the moment when a new generation of leaders—young, wedded to different rules of engagement, and untutored in the ideolog- ical playbook of the previous generation—took over the reins.

But for now, in the ambiguous aftermath of the protests, there are more questions than answers: What happens when a social movement falls under the sway of celebrities and social influencers? What becomes of civil society when the boundaries between politics and popular entertainment grow so hazy as to make them practically indistinguish- able? What do these forms of inorganic civil society mean for Nigerian democracy? Are "hit-and-run" social movements more relevant to this age than civil society groups that grow organically—and organize with long-term aims and deeper roots in society? What does #EndSARS's overall hostility to the LGBT community portend for the radical possi- bilities of civil society struggles in Nigeria?

These questions are not just academic; nor are they exclusive to the Nigerian situation. On the contrary, given the broad consistency with emer- gent patterns elsewhere, they have global implica- tions for civil society, social movements, and democratic politics.

Verissimo, Jumoke and Yékú, James, eds. Sọ̀rọ̀sókè: An #EndSARS Anthology. Ibadan: Noirledge, 2022. Xvii +110.

Reviewed by Tobi Idowu*

The utter absurdity that characterises postcolonial nations like Nigeria has often imposed the imperative of social commitment on literary artists. In Sọ̀rọ̀sókè: An Anthology of #EndSARS Poems, an edited collection by Nigerian poets Jumoke Verissimo and James Yékú, this imperative is at once clear and foregrounded in the poems that serve to memorialize the #EndSARS protests that broke out in late 2020. #EndSARS was a watershed moment for many young Nigerians, who had in prior years been derided by government lackeys for what state actors framed as empty noise on digital space that could not have real life consequences. Despite government brutal intervention, #EndSARS demonstrated the increasing meeting point between social media and social activism, where Twitter became an effective virtual meeting point and transcontinental rallying ground to organize arguably Africa's largest demonstrations against police brutality.

The poems in Sọ̀rọ̀sókè reveal the amoral jungle postcolonial Nigeria has become owing to a leadership that did not hesitate to unleash state terror on young citizens for daring to ask for a better country. Each of the poems collected in the anthology captures different degrees of callous irritation that springboard Nigeria's government's brutal responses to young citizens' genuine demands that elected political leaders should redress an oppressive system in which police brutality is its most potent index.

One of the poems in the anthology, "Nigeria Will Not End Me" by Jumoke Verissimo, rhetorically signifies the reason for the apparent daredevilry that informed the #EndSARS' protests. The persona wonders, How could we not have known that our land drinks only young blood? It is precisely a frustration with the knowledge that Nigeria has been turned to a beastly cavernous field where "dreams, diligence" and "everything sinks here" that necessitated the protest in the first place.

Several poems in the anthology similarly focus on this absurdity, including "Elegy for Those Murdered at Lekki," "Soldierman Strong," "Blood-Spangled Banner," "Red, White and Green," and "The Scent of Revolution," all of which vividly capture the unconscionable stratagems employed by the government to violently end the protest which ultimately climaxed in the 20.10.20 massacre at Lekki. As Rasaq Malik writes in "Ode to Endsars," Lekki is where people singing a dirge/ for the missing, for those whose last/prayers are heard through the sound/of bullets.

A recurrent trope in Sọ̀rọ̀sókè is the depiction of wanton disregard for, and desecration of, national emblems by government agencies, long believed to embody the values placed on those emblems. One of such is the evocation of blood of protesters that literally was splattered on the white part of the Nigerian flag.

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The blood-stained flag becomes a useful metaphorical tool to question the patriotism of the Soldierman (as evident in the poem by Tayo Bello), ostensibly the nonpareil defender of the flag, but who would not hesitate to desecrate it by spilling the blood of his compatriots, who held on to that same flag and were "singing the words written to mock their hope." In one of the most moving poetic renditions of the morbid turn of events at Lekki, the poet persona in Prince Ohwavworhua's "The Scent of Revolution, laments:

> My heart bleeds for a country
> Where the blood of the innocent and unharmed
> protesters
> Is being spilled and splashed
> On our once revered green and white
> camouflage
> By those who should protect our rights.

Not satisfied with making untimely martyrs of its young citizens, the Nigerian government has since been scheming to erase and distort the memories of the murdered protesters. How did the government hope to turn the reality viewed and documented by the digital edition of this print anthology in real time by thousands into some ludicrously conceived fiction? Ndubisi Martins, like the epilogue in Tade Ipadeola's epilogue in the anthology, captures this reality as:

> denials flagged through the dailies: a city of
> blood,
> trail of blood, mopped for the morning
> must not see the black eyes of night.
> Days later, months after, tribunals, tributary
> sessions after sessions; double-edged blames
> and lies change cloaks, lies loud and truth tarry
> on the sidelines.

Furthermore, in Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike's poem "Who is Counting?" we see a depiction of the government's puerile effort to fiddle with the number of casualties. This poem, with its syntactic juggling, testifies to the absurdity of government's efforts to undermine the intensity of people's anger and shock of the massacre at Lekki:

> at Lekki Toll Gate 56 people shot
> died people army people bullets –
> was it a memorial or a bloodbath?

If events since the protests show anything, it is that in order achieve its sinister objectives of obfuscating fact, government always works in cahoots with unscrupulous individuals that have ostensibly derived moral legitimacy through purporting to stand with the people's cause in the past. These individuals, including the eponymous subject of the poem "Ifo Omata" would refuse to live up to their name but "rather become a double-faced sword." Those individuals are "those who have been employed/to sabotage the revolution" for seats in the corridor of power (Prince Ohwavworhua 42). We learn in the poems in this anthology that the job of these state agents is one of propaganda, as their job remit is both to derail the social movement and to enable governmental distortion of memories—of the actual protests and of those who lost their lives.

But the anthology precisely works against this attempted erasure. By bringing together Nigerian poets to document the memories of the #EndSARS heroes, the editors promote a literary activism that harkens to the social commitment for which African writers are renowned. Across poems of varying length, wrought in vivid, sometimes shocking metaphors, this anthology reflects the disturbing tragedy instigated by the state on young citizens who dared to show concern and question their nation's freefall into anomie.

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