

## Reminiscence on #EndSARS Protests of 2020 in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Every misfortune of the black man, particularly in Africa, has been blamed on the Europeans because of Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and colonization of different parts of Africa. However, the present study on the #EndSARS protests that rocked Nigeria between October and November 2020 has proven that Africans, particularly Nigerians, should bear the burden of their problems and not point accusing fingers on foreigners. The study uses historical theoretical framework and qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to find out that the protest has an affinity, albeit in a milder degree, to the various agitations, including Boko Haram that have levied wars on the country. The corruption-riddled Nigeria and the re-enslavement and re-colonization of the citizens by the leaders have fired resistance in the youths of the country and it concludes that the only way the protest and agitations would stop is when the fundamental causes are addressed.

**Keywords:** #EndSARS, protests, enslavement, colonization

### 1. Introduction

Nigerians and the international community watched with awe as the most populous Black Country on the face of the earth, Nigeria, came to the precipice of a revolution or a civil war. It was obvious that the #ENDSARS protests that rocked Nigeria from October to November, 2020, went with violence, brutality and criminality, but Nigeria was not a stranger to those vices that were witnessed during the one-month protests. It is not an over-statement to say that Nigeria is another metaphor for corruption, violence, criminality and brutal killings. However, what was strange about the #ENDSARS protests was that the Nigerian youths, particularly those from Southern part of Nigeria, rose in unison to demand for an end to internal re-enslavement, re-colonization, and a better living condition for all Nigerians, and a humane country devoid of brutalities, oppression and dehumanization of its citizens, particularly the youths, the weak and the vulnerable.

However, if anyone – politician, public officer, member of the armed forces, businessman, etc – thinks that the peaceful protests that later turned violent had ended, such a person is living in a dream-world. What happened barely some weeks ago was a push by a new generation of Nigerians born between 1980 and 2000 to break the yoke and burden of slavery and colonization that cage them. They attempted to break away from the inglorious past and present of the black man and woman; they wanted to break away from the mentality of the enslaved; they wanted to break away from the mindset of the colonized. It is a generation that is intolerant of bondage or

the caging of their freedom. It is a new generation that would return force and violence with force and violence. It should be made clear, in all honesty, that the #ENDSARS protests should NEVER be seen to be organized against ONLY the SARS unit of the Nigeria Police Force or against the entire force itself or against the government of President Muhammad Buhari. The protests were an indictment of the older generations of Nigerians and our ancestors, particularly the disempowered and ordinary citizens who had endured and continue to endure centuries of brutalities, barbarities, savageries, cruelties, blood-thirstiness and endless corruptions that have characterized Nigeria from the time of its recorded history and the from the time its constituents existed as independent empires. The #ENDSARS protests were engineered and prosecuted by a new generation of Nigerians who were intolerant of the enslaved and the colonized mindsets of the past and would stop at NOTHING to realize their vision and quest for freedom, instead of blaming strangers – Europeans and others – for their woes and burden. But before we continue to examine the #ENDSARS protests that happened only some weeks ago, there is the need to review the centuries of the inglorious past that led us to where the country is today.

## 2. The Past Generations with the Mentality of Slaves

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We would have fancied ourselves the first men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories (Joseph Conrad, 1995).

The above quotation is from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899, in which he described derogatorily the African continent and its people as barbarians, savages, crude, coarse, rustic, crusty, inhuman, cannibals that are marooned in a dark, prehistoric and accursed continent. This disparaging imagery which the novelist fore-grounded to describe the continent and its people gave rise to Chinua Achebe writing back at the Empire in 1958, with the publication of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe described *Heart of Darkness* as part of "malignant fictions" (2009: 109), and "virulent fictions" (111) that is not only superstitious and "emanate from a sick imagination", but it is "like the canons of orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition" (114). Besides, he said that "Holders of such fictions [including Joseph Conrad] are like lunatics, for while a sane person might act a play now and again, a mad man lives it permanently" (112). It is obvious that Chinua Achebe did not only criticize the novelist and his novel for his etiolated and dismal representation of Africa and its people, but in his seminal and canonical text, *Things Fall Apart*, he tried to teach his "readers that their past with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" ("The Novelist as Teacher", 45).

But then, what past was Chinua Achebe referring to in his rebuttal of Joseph Conrad's representation of Africa as a dark continent and an "accursed inheritance" and its people as primitive and barbaric cannibals? There is no doubt that he was referring to slavery and slave trade, that infamous business in black lives that took place for five hundred years, until the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 25 March, 1807. Even though with this act, slave trade did not stop in Africa

until another one hundred years. Within this period, it is estimated by the historian, Patrick Manning, that between twenty-two to twenty-five million black Africans were taken from Africa as slaves in chains and scattered all over the world, particularly in the United States and the Americas (cited in Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). African's humanity is questioned where African rulers levied wars on other tribes in order to sell prisoners of war to European slave traders, and some rulers exploited their "own subjects and captured them for sale" (Rodney, 91). The millions of able-bodied Africans and children sold into slavery were only for trifles for European poorly-manufactured goods of pots, pans, bangles, mirrors, etc. And millions of those slaves sold to them came from Igbo land and its environs. However, without the complicity of certain Africans, the infamous slave trade that dehumanized Africans and still leaves its blemishes on the conscience of every African up to this generation and future generations would not have been possible. Therefore, the major burden of trans-Atlantic slave trade that depopulated the continent lies on Africans that bound their relations and neighbours in chains and sold them off to strangers. Reflecting on the ugliness of slavery and slave trade, the American sociologist, human rights activist and historian, W.E.B. Du Bois states:

Indeed the characteristic of our age is the contact of European civilization with the world's underdeveloped peoples. Whatever we may say of the results of such contact in the past, it certainly forms a chapter in human action not pleasant to look back upon. War, murder, slavery, extermination and debauchery, this has again and again been the result of carrying civilization and the blessed gospel to the isles of the sea and the heathen without the law (1976).

It is to be noted that those past generations, particularly the docile citizens had the mentality of the slaves and accepted slavery without resistance, and some of them worked with the slave traders to ensure steady supplies of African slaves to the European slave traders. It took the effort of white abolitionists and ex-black slaves like William Wilberforce, Benjamin Rush, Moses Brown, Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Hay, Olaudah Equiano, David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sojourner Trust, Harriet Tubman, and John Brown to end slavery. The effort to end slavery and slave trade in Africa, therefore, did not emanate from Africa, even though Africans were the people sold into slavery, and they participated actively in the nefarious trade. Therefore, the major burden of that trade lies with them as they offered in contract to sell their people, and the European slave dealers who needed cheap labour for their sugar and tobacco plantations accepted their offer and paid them off.

### **3. The past generations with the mentality of the colonized**

As if slavery and slave trade which the Europeans and their African compradors engaged in for more than five centuries that depleted the human and material resources of Africa were not enough, at the twilight of the end of slave trade, another deplorable exploitations of Africans and their resources began in the form of European colonization of countries of Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia. A historian, Richard Dowden, claims that the European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 that, "Africa's nation states were formed by foreigners, lines drawn by Europeans on maps of places they had often never been to" (2009: 3). Not only that the consent of Africans was not sought at the carving out of their territories, they created the perpetual anomaly of mapping together strange bedfellows, like the tribes in Nigeria, that would never work together and blend as a nation because of geographical, linguistic, historical, religious and cultural differences among them. And this is the reason Abubakar Tafawa Balewa claims in 1948, that from the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard, that "Nigeria's unity is only a British invention" (cited

in Martin Meredith, 8), and Obafemi Awolowo re-echoes the same sentiment within the same period when he states that, “Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression” (cited in Martin Meredith, 8). Nigeria, therefore, with the yoking together of more than 250 ethnic groups with their ethnic and religious rivalries, conflicts and distrust for one another lack “a common conception of nationhood” (Richard Dowden, 2009: 3).

However, the British unification of the ethnic groups in Nigeria into one entity was not for altruistic reasons. It is for the maximum exploitations of the country by British Empire. The human and material resources of the country were roguishly stolen from the country and a minimal leftover was for its development. Walter Rodney, a prominent historian, a political activist, and an outstanding academic claims that, “For the first three decades of colonization, hardly anything was done that could remotely be termed as service to the African people” (2009: 247). African countries, including Nigeria, had its natural resources like gold, groundnuts, cocoa, diamond, iron ore, rubber, palm oil, ivory, petroleum, elephant tusks, etc., pillaged in the unequal relationship of the colonized and the colonizers. This exploitative situation forces the French philosopher and political activist, Jean-Paul Sartre, to state that, “You know too well enough that we are exploiters.... This was not without excellent result as witness our palaces, our cathedrals and our great industrial cities...” (1981: 21).

Nigeria was under British colonization for a hundred years, a debilitating order that gave so little and took so much. But then, this long period of time would not have been possible if not that there was the consent of the colonized to colonization. There was the indictment and connivance of Nigerian apologists to colonization, who like other Africans during the slave trade connived and collaborated with European slave traders to sell Africans who labored in the sugar and tobacco plantations in the new world.

#### **4. The past generations with the mentality of the re-enslaved and re-colonized**

As the British brought down their Union Jack for Nigerians to hoist the Nigerian flag, Britain handed power to the Nigerian colonial collaborators. The Nigerian leaders from the time of independence on October 1, 1960, have maintained the structure and legacies of colonization, which the West Indian psychologist and social philosopher, Franz Fanon, maintains:

The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesman of the settler and his rule of oppression (1981: 29).

There was no difference between the British colonizers and the Nigerian leaders that took over the rein of power from them in 1960 to the present time. The only difference is in their skin colours, the texture of their hair and the shades of their pupils. The Nigerian leaders are worse than their British counterparts as they embezzled so much funds that there was no clear line between their private bank accounts and the national treasury. It was described as “an orgy of power being turned into profit” (Martin Meredith, 2006:174). They did not only enrich themselves and their political parties, but they also designed economic institutions in order to perpetuate their power at the expense of the vast majority of the people in society (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). However, the euphoria of independence turned into disillusionment for the people as the deplorable conditions of post-independent African countries, including Nigeria, have shown that they are in “deep trouble, sometimes a deeper trouble than the worst imposed during the colonial years... (Basil Davidson, 2000: 9).

Nigeria's deep trouble after independence came in the forms of ethnic and religious rivalries, distrust and monumental corruption that arose among the people in the constituting entities that make up the country. Less than six years into independence, young military officers of the Nigerian army led by Major Kaduna Chukwuma Nzeogwu carried out a coup d'état that led to the death of the then Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and some other prominent political leaders from Northern Nigeria. It was followed by a counter-coup the same year, 1966, that led to the death of the then military head of state, General Aguiyi Ironsi, and some military and political leaders of Igbo ethnic group, and eventually the massacre of the Igbo in the Northern part of Nigeria, particularly Eastern Nigeria, which was led by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu seceded from Nigeria, and what followed was a bloody civil war, which was claimed to be an ethnic cleansing, a pogrom and a genocide hatched and carried out against the Igbo by other ethnic groups with the collaboration of Britain, United States of America, Russia, etc. It was estimated that between 2-3 million Igbo people, particularly children, lost their lives through blockade, starvation and shelling of the cities and hinterlands of Igbo land by the Federal troops. Dan Jacobs describes the grim situation in Biafra in *The Brutality of Nations*, where he unveiled the graphic descriptions of the inhuman situation in the editorial of *Washington Post* of 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1969, thus:

One word now describes the policy of Nigerian military government towards secessionist Biafra: genocide. It is ugly and extreme but it is the only word which fits Nigeria's decision to stop the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other relief agencies from flying food to Biafra (1987).

Though Chinua Achebe in his book, *There Was a Country*, lamented that despite the pogrom and massacre of the Igbo in the three-year-old war that took place from 1967-1970, which indicted the Federal Military Government led by General Yakubu Gowon, that "Not a single person has been punished for those crimes" (2012: 82). The atrocities of the war seem to be forgotten, because nobody is asking questions about the death of three million people in Biafra, but the ghost of the past still haunts Nigeria today through the many killings and bloodshed by ethnic militias going on in all parts of the country.

From 1970 when the war ended and up until today, Nigeria has witnessed tremendous levels of corruption, both by military and civilian leaders. Though Nigeria is the largest producer of crude oil and liquefied natural gas in Africa and one of the highest producers in the world as it "produces about 2 million barrels per day between 2015 and 2019" (William Carpenter, 2020), Nigeria is classified by World Bank, Bretton Woods Institutions and the International Monetary Funds as one of the poorest countries in the world. Nigeria's former military and civilian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, claimed in 2002 that Africa's political leaders had stolen about one hundred and forty billion dollars from their countries (cited in Duncan Clarke, 2010: 526). Also, the former military head of state of Nigeria, late General Sani Abacha, is believed to have stolen up to three billion dollars from the Nigerian treasury. Just very recently, it was reported by *NaijaNews* that a British parliamentarian, Tom Tugendhat, on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2020, alleged that General Yakubu Gowon stole half of Central Bank of Nigeria as he fled into exile to United Kingdom after the coup d'état that removed him as the military head of state in 1975. It is not only the presidents – military and civilian – that are indicted in the orgies and debilitating looting of public funds; there is no exception to the rule that Richard Dowden claims that:

All institutions – the civil service, the law, hospitals, schools, the army, police, business, the academia – had become so corrupt that although Nigeria looks like a functioning state, it is just a shell. It still holds the shape of a nation state from the outside, but within, corruption has become the institution.... Corruption does kill Nigeria (2009: 451).

Therefore, the generations from the time of the end of British colonization to the end of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War are also indicted in the ugliness that is Nigeria today for keeping silent in the face of evil, and they bear the major burden of the crises of that era.

### **5. The birth of a generation that cherishes its freedom**

Indeed, Nigeria has all the indices of a failed state – for the educational and health sectors, etc. – are down and operating very below international standards. The governments at all levels fail to provide social amenities to the citizens; there are hyper-inflations in the country; there is no rule of law but, most importantly, the country has slid into a state of anarchy that characterizes every failed state. The only things that are constant in the country include lack of accountable governments, whose “ceaseless effort and attention”, according to the Singaporean president, Lee Kuan Yew, can transform the country from a third world to the first world. Besides, the liberal democracy that “restrain and regularize the exercise of power through law and a system of checks and balances” (Francis Fukuyama, 2012: 4) is lacking, even after the transition from military to civilian government in 1999 till today. The type of governments in Nigeria at all levels – federal, state and local governments – are governments that Thomas Carothers describes as operating in the “gray zone”, which are governments that are “neither fully authoritarian nor meaningfully democratic” (2002: 5). Another thing that has remained changeless in the country is the monumental corruption and drain of public funds, which has completely destroyed the economy and created unemployment for teeming millions of young Nigerians that graduate from post-primary schools, colleges, poly-techniques and universities, every year. There are also the constant threats of war and bloodbath from ethnic militias resounding in all nooks and crannies of the country. It, therefore, becomes obvious that it is within this time of violence, economic deprivations and extreme poverty that “extremists of all kinds – particularly religious zealots and other political mischief makers – find a foothold to recruit supporters and sympathizers to help them launch terrorists attacks and wreak havoc in the lives of ordinary citizens” (R. Borum cited in Chinua Achebe, 2012: 250). And part of the extremists which the Nigerian state had hatched and produced are the Boko Haram terrorists that have waged a ceaseless war in Northern Nigeria, particularly the North-East of the country, since 2009, when the Nigeria Police Force extra-judicially skilled its leader, Mohammed Yusufu. Since his extrajudicial killing, his followers have violently engaged the Nigerian military and police, attacked villages, burnt houses and farmlands and abducted women and girls. They have also carried out beheadings of Nigerians and foreigners. Moreover, in the South-South, so many militant groups had sprung up and engaged the Nigerian government and the military for the oil explorations and exploitations in the region that have devastated their means of livelihood, polluted the waters and lands through oil spillages and gas flaring and inflicted various sicknesses on the people. In the South-East, the proscribed Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) are demanding for the independence of Biafra, and the Yoruba ethnic group and the Odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC) are also agitating for the separation of the South-West from the rest of the country. It is within this conundrum, the crises-riddled Nigeria, which has all the indices of a failed state that the government uses force to maintain its rule, but it evidently “teaches the oppressed to use force to oppose it” (Nelson Mandela, 2013: 198). Unfortunately for the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, which was misadvised, there is a new generation of Nigerians, who would never follow the footsteps of other past generations of Nigerians with the mentalities and mindsets of the enslaved and/or colonized. It is a generation born between 1980 and 2000, who would never accept to be “confirmed slaves that would tighten the chains of slavery around their necks and those of their children” (Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1961: 51) like their parents and ancestors. It is

the generation that carried out the #EndSARS protests that rocked the country to its very foundation for almost a month, between October and November, 2020.

But it is on record that the youths that are under thirty-five years had witnessed the perennial crises that have hugged this country like a second skin for decades. But it is obvious that they are man-made, caused by leaders that are brutish, maintained by a savage military and police forces, and reinforced by an indolent and docile populace, whose sentiments run along ethnic, nepotistic and religious divides. This generation, therefore, in the twenty-first century globalization with its advantages of scientific, technological, engineering and communication-driven world, could see the civilizations in other parts of the world with the touch of a button within seconds. And it dawned on them that, indeed, “The image Africa [including Nigeria] conjures up in most people’s mind is the Dark Continent, the heart of darkness, a place of horrific savagery; inhumanity” (Richard Dowden, 2009: 2), and they have also experienced the reality of the brutish life that is part and parcel of every Nigerian youth, except if any of his parents is wealthy or in power.

After a hundred years of Joseph Conrad’s vivid description of Africa as a primitive continent inhabited by crude and primitive cannibals in his canonical and epochal novel, *Heart of Darkness*, a Western historian Richard Dowden, has re-echoed the same view about Africa and Africans. It is without doubt that the state of Nigeria is a metaphor for the description of Africa that Conrad and Dowden had in mind. It is a country where, after sixty years of independence, there is no decolonization of the country and the people’s mind. What happened within those six decades was that the various governments – whether military or civilian – took over the exalted seat of the British colonizers, and turned around to re-enslave and re-colonize the people. With the re-colonization of Nigerians by Nigerians, the new colonizers work to “decivilize the colonized, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word” Aime Cesaire (1972: 13). But in the case of this new radically-different generation of young Nigerian men and women, they could not wait endlessly for centuries, like their parents and ancestors, who refused to remove the chains of slavery and bondage, and to decolonize their minds from ruthless legacies of the new Nigerian enslavers and re-colonizers. The new generation can no longer endure patiently and watch what the late Palestinian writer and critic, Edward Said, claimed that “colonization is a fate with lasting, indeed, grotesquely unfair results” (1989: 207). Or would they wait unendingly, like the past generations of Nigerians that endured slavery and colonization, because of what the Tunisian-born anti-colonial revolutionary, Albert Memmi, emphasized, “the colonized live for a long time before we see that really new man” (1968: 85).

This new generation of technology-driven but brutalized Nigerians set out to decolonize themselves from the vice-like and the deadly grip of the Nigerian men and women that have the mentality of slavers and colonizers. These are men that use ill-trained, ill-equipped and poorly remunerated police men and soldiers to crush the people, particularly the youths. One particular unit of the Nigeria Police Force, Special Anti-Robbery Squad, wore the face of the monstrous and specialized in the extrajudicial killings of both purported suspects and innocent Nigerian youths. The unit had been purportedly disbanded three times – 2014, 2015 and 2017 – by various governments; yet, those in power still found it necessary for them to use it to rein in their opponents, critics and disenfranchised Nigerians, who are already cowed down by the vagaries of life in the country. Life in Nigeria, therefore, becomes too hellish and neurotic for the youths that either one is kidnapped by gangsters that operate freely, or one is gunned down by armed robbers, bandits, herdsmen and security men and women that have found a safe haven in the failed country to do whatever they like. Nigeria has totally failed this present generation of its youths, like the past

generations that were enslaved and colonized. This is a generation that has witnessed horrors of, “abject poverty, abuse of power, torture and death” (Mosab Hassan Yousef, 2012: 111). Some of them join the sizzling conundrums of mayhem in Nigeria and turned to criminal acts as means for their livelihood. For in the opinion of the former governor of Kano State and the present senator, representing Kano Central in the Nigerian Senate, Nigeria’s Middle Belt, which is a flashpoint for farmers/herders clashes that always lead to wanton destructions of lives and property, “youths from farming and herding communities take advantage of the growing insecurity, fear and cyclical attacks to loot villages, engage in high way robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain, causing lots of pains and despair” (Ibrahim Shekarau, 2019: 3).

From the above statement, it is obvious that the irony of the situation in the country is that there is a plethora of security outfits in the country, more than anywhere in the world. And they are all armed to their teeth; yet, they cannot secure lives and property of the law-abiding citizens. The only people they provide security for are those that are in power and the wealthy citizens. However, it has become a routine for the security men and women who could not arrest the criminals that terrorize the country, like the kidnappers of the 344 Kankara boys in Katsina State or the butchers of 78 rice farmers in Borno State, to resort to the slaughter of law-abiding and innocent Nigerians, particularly the youths. It is in this chaos that Special Anti-Robbery Squad, that is notorious for extra-judicial killings of Nigerian youths, once again, in its habitual display of arrogance, dragged out a young man from his car, shot and killed him on the spot and drove away with his flashy car in broad daylight, before witnesses, on 3 October, 2020. In this era of technology-driven world, those present videoed the heinous crime scene and uploaded it on the social media platforms. And with many people viewing the video of the atrocious act, which was one of many of its kind, Nigerian youths all over the world and other sympathetic youths in other countries, demanded that SARS must be disbanded. They organized themselves into peaceful groups of protesters, with the hashtag and slogan of #ENDSARS; they demonstrated all over the country, particularly in the whole of Southern Nigeria. The government of President Muhammadu Buhari, being ill-advised, did not heed to the call of the youths to disband SARS and did not see the wisdom in the statement of the Late Ghanaian diplomat, and the 7th Secretary-General of the United Nations, that:

These popular uprisings show that democratic aspirations of people cannot be contained and that human rights are not luxury; let alone a plot from outside. Wherever people live, they want their voice to be heard, their rights respected, and to have a say in how they are governed. They yearn for decent jobs, opportunity and a secure future for their children. They believe that the rule of law must apply to everyone, no matter how powerful (2013: 111).

On 11th October, 2020, the governments and political leaders all over the country became aware that the dam that held the oceanic waters had broken, and there would be a deluge. Belatedly, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, through his Twitter handle proscribed SARS. The following day, he announced to Nigerians and to the world that the dreaded and deadly Special Anti-Robbery Squad had been replaced by Special Weapon Tactical Team (SWAT). The youths who were already on the streets, demonstrating peacefully, refused to accept the new apparition in the name of SWAT. The country that does not have any value for human lives, particularly the lives of its citizens for centuries, called in the army to demobilize and disperse the #ENDSARS protesters that were having a vigil at Lekki Tollgate in Lagos on Tuesday, 20th October, 2020. It was around 6:45pm that those unarmed and harmless Nigerian youths, who were protesting the end of SARS, an end to police brutality, a better living condition for Nigerians that soldiers and policemen fired live bullets in their gatherings and killed many of them.



However, the death of many of their comrades in that incident did not deter them, because they had already discarded the slavish and colonized mentalities and mindsets of the past generations, and are ready to emancipate themselves and the future generations from the iron-grip of enslaving oligarchy. They continued their demonstrations, spurred on by the light of freedom they could see at the end of the centuries of darkness that had engulfed the country and Africa. Encouraged by their fearlessness and courage in the face of danger from police and military armoured vehicles, other young protesters joined the demonstrations. However, after the Lekki Tollgate shootings, other youths who had been derogatorily called hoodlums, a term this researcher refrained from using in this study, because they are Nigerians who have been disempowered and put at the margins of life in the country, hijacked the peaceful demonstrations and turned them into riots, burnt down police stations and government and private property, looted banks, burnt vehicles and television stations, killed police officers that shot at them and killed their members, etc. They also discovered and looted the Covid-19 food palliatives stored in government warehouses for several months without distributing them to the poor and vulnerable groups they were meant for. Some of them were also ruthlessly shot and killed when carrying the food items in the warehouses. Obviously, the international community watched with horror at the drama that was unfolding in the country, a drama that had been played for many times and for several centuries. Most Nigerians in Diaspora could not withstand the horrors going on in the country and marched in the cities of United States, Zurich, London, Paris, New Zealand, Berlin, Toronto, Belgium, Czech Republic, Indonesia, etc., and called for an end to SARS, police brutality and good governance in Nigeria. Notable foreign leaders like Senator Hillary Clinton, the Bishop of Canterbury and the Formula 1 legend, Lewis Hamilton, and others, condemned the attacks on unarmed young Nigerian protesters, who were demonstrating for their guaranteed freedoms and rights as the citizens of Nigeria and to end re-enslavement and re-colonization of citizens with the assistance of the police and the armed forces.

The #ENDSARS protests had ended a month ago, but its tremor is still felt within and outside the country. Despite the falsehoods, half-truths and outright denials that have always characterized Nigerian government officialdoms, the truth remains that there has risen a bold generation of Nigerians that can no longer tolerate the gun-barrel approach to governance and the brutality of those that are paid from government coffers to protect lives and property. The truth also remains, like the usual habit of denials in the country, nobody knows till today the number of youths wasted in the protests. The Nigerian leaders who were involved in the genocide at Lekki Tollgate in Lagos still trade accusations and counter-accusations on such mundane things like who invited the army and police that fired live bullets into the crowd of protesters; who were the soldiers that committed such dastardly act; who demobilized the CCTV cameras and switched off the lights at the Lekki Tollgate that evening of Tuesday, 20th October, 2020; who were the sponsors of the #EndSARS protests. Though the various state governments had set up judicial panels of inquiry into police brutalities in the 36 states of the federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, the unanswered questions of what happened at the Lekki Tollgate on 20th October, 2020, would continue to haunt Nigeria and foreground the country as one that still wallows in barbarism, primitivism and savagery, sixty years after Britain had purportedly decolonized it and almost two hundred years after Europe had ended its nefarious trade in human beings in Nigeria and the whole of Africa.

## **6. Solutions to the problems to future #EndSARS protests**

The generation of Nigerians who carried out the #EndSARS protests is a generation that would never accommodate the slavish and colonized mentalities and mindsets of their parents and ancestors of the past generations, who bore the burden and brunt of enslavement and the colonization, from either the European or Nigerian leaders. The #ENDSARS protests were not only against the police, whose brutality against the youths of this country was legendary and which sparked off the embers of revolutionary spirit in the brutalized and dehumanized. The #ENDSARS protesters were also against the military, who despite the several operations that included Operation Python Dance, Operation Lafiya Dole, Operation Crocodile Smile, Operation Delta Safe, Operation Safe Haven, etc., have not succeeded in extinguishing the rampaging forces of Boko Haram terrorists in the North-East of Nigeria, particularly in Borno State, for more than a decade. They have not also succeeded in pushing back the armed bandits that terrorize Zamfara and Katsina States, in the Northwest, or put to an end the incessant farmers/herders conflagrations in the North Central States; yet, they fired into the assembly of unarmed Nigerian youths, holding the Nigerian flags, in contravention of the Four Geneva Conventions that comprise four treaties, and three additional protocols, that established the standards of International Law for humanitarian treatment in wars, which, "...defined the basic rights of wartime prisoners (civilians and military personnel), established protections for the civilians in and around warzone" (*Wikipedia, 2020*). Even though Lekki Tollgate could not be described as a war zone, the Nigerian army rained live bullets into the thousands of youths that gathered there to demand for an end to their lives being cut short by the police and other armed forces in Nigeria. It is very important to establish that such an act puts the quality and sanity of our soldiers in doubt, like those of the members of the Nigeria Police Force, particularly the SARS unit. In the civilized world, even before World War I, personality tests were conducted for the military and other security personnel. At this point in time, it is suggested that there is the need to carry out personality tests on all our security operatives, particularly before their employments into various security outfits, instead of depending on nepotistic tendencies. This is because:

It is not enough to know that a person is high or low in such factors as the speed of calculation, memory, range of knowledge, and abstract thinking. To make full use of information about a person's mental abilities, one must know how that person uses these abilities (*Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009: 334*).

With what happened at Lekki Tollgate on the evening of Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, where grown up men pumped live bullets into a crowd of peaceful protesters, is the time for the country to carry out very quickly the clinical testing of the personality of our security men, without any exception whatsoever. These tests would ultimately show "the relatively stable and distinctive patterns of behavior that characterize an individual and his or her reactions to the environment" (*Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009: 334*).

The #ENDSARS protests were also against the generations that have kept silent in the face of the hunting down and the slaughter of innocent Nigerians, particularly the youths. They were the generations that disappointed the future leaders of this country, and had forced the toddlers to troop out empty-handed to defend themselves against the bullets from the armored tanks of the army and the police. Every adult Nigerian citizen – whether businessman, judge, teacher, doctor, engineer, etc. – should note the advice of the late civil rights lawyer and philanthropist to his colleagues:

We as lawyers must advance the welfare of our people and when it is assaulted, we owe a duty to our calling and to our profession to direct the people and to advance their cause, which in the instant case is their welfare (*Gani Fawehinmi, 2013: 68*).

This advice by the legal luminary is for each and every Nigerian adult who keeps silent in the face of brutality, savagery and barbarism. This is the time for the country to be saved from the genocide and bloodletting that are glaring at its face.

It is further submitted that if this country would not break up under the weight of the brutality, degradation, primitivism, savagery and barbarism that swirl around it, our generation must put our hands and heads together to dispel the coming genocide and bloodshed that loom large in the country. The recent #ENDSARS protests that engulfed the country in October to November, 2020, were just a harbinger of what would happen in future, if the situation continues unabated, as the present generation that executed the protests would never accept, without resistance, the slavish and colonized mentalities and mindsets of the past generations. And for us to do that, we must insist that the governments, the security agencies in the country, and everyone else, must uphold the provision of Article 3 of *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, which state that, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. The same provision is in Article 6 of *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 1966, which provides, “Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life”. Also, *African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights*, 1981, tows the same line in its Article 4, “Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right”. This same provision has been domesticated under the municipal law, *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999, in Chapter IV, Section 33, Subsection (1), “Every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence which he has been found guilty in Nigeria”.

We should also note that there is the urgent need for the National Assembly to review further the *Nigeria Police Act, 2020*, signed into law by the president on September 16, 2020, and which repealed *Police Act, Cap P. 19, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria*, 2004. Though the present police act is a significant improvement on the repealed act by its express provisions of Section 32 that, “A person shall not be arrested merely on a civil wrong or breach of contract and Section 36 that, “A person shall not be arrested in place of a suspect”. These express provisions intended to stop the lawlessness and brutality that characterize the operations of the force where they arrest, detain, and eliminate extra-judicially arrested and detained individuals over, for instance, dispute over land and other property, or where they arrest and detain relations and friends of suspects in lieu of the suspects indefinitely in police stations without bringing them to court. At times, such detainees die in suspicious circumstances in police custody.

Despite the recorded improvements of the new act over the repealed one, which had been pointed out, the provisions of sections 24, 25 and 28 of the repealed act on the powers of the police to arrest without warrant and to search and detain suspects which were also included, without fetters on such powers, in the new *Nigeria Police Act, 2020*, could also be abused like they were under the *Police Act, Cap P. 19, 2004*. It should be noted that section 38 (1) (d) of the *Nigeria Police Act, 2020*, provides among other things that:

A police officer may, without an order of court and without a warrant, arrest a suspect...“in whose possession anything is found which may reasonably be suspected to be stolen property or who may reasonably be suspected of having committed an offence with reference to the thing.

And also in its section 49, subsection 2(a), the act further provides:

A police officer may detain and search any person or vehicle where reasonable grounds for suspicion exist that the person being suspected is having in his possession; or conveying in any manner anything which he has reason to believe have been stolen or otherwise unlawfully obtained.

With due respect, it must be observed that these two provisions that existed in the repealed act had been abused severally by the men and women in the Nigeria Police Force, because the provisions left the power to arrest and detain a person at their discretion. It gave them such powers to raid places like drinking bars, restaurants, etc. and to search vehicles driven by young Nigerians and to also search their phones, laptops, etc. It was in the process of such a search on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2020, that they killed a young man and made away with his vehicle. It was that singular act, among other acts of such nature, which started the #ENDSARS protests.

Apart from the lacunas in the provisions of the *Nigeria Police Act, 2020*, which would definitely be abused by some police officers, there is also the need to reform the force, retrain and remunerate police officers according to international standards and practices. The Nigeria Police Force, like other security personnel in the country, needs to be trained on human and fundamental freedoms and rights of the citizens. They should also be trained on the rule of law as a pillar of democratic governance. However, the pittance Nigerian policemen and women are paid is very discouraging. An efficient police force needs men and women who are paid well, who dress well, and who carry themselves with confidence. A haggard-looking, and hungry police officers, carrying guns on the highways, at times, intoxicated with alcohol and hard drugs, are not different from armed robbers and are not the best image for the country's security operatives. There is also the need for the Police Service Commission to ensure the lives of police men and women in Nigeria are covered by insurance companies as they operate in an anarchical society, where, at times, they are killed without compensations given to their families. Again, the houses where they live at police barracks and their offices in police stations also leave much to be desired and there is no way a country that allows its policemen and women to live, and operate in squalor and slums would expect anything good from them.

Besides, the people in positions of power in the country should eschew the corrupt practices that have given this country a negative image in the comity of nations, and deplete the resources of Nigeria. A situation where a public office holder drains all the monies in the accounts of the office he or she is holding and transfers the loot to foreign banks or invests in foreign countries or sends his or her children to study in other countries leaves much to be desired. Such people should note that the #ENDSARS protests also included them as they create monumental unemployment for the youths and make it impossible for them to live a meaningful life.

The governments at all levels should as much as possible ensure that schools are open, except when they are on vacations. There is no doubt that the students of Nigerian universities made up 70% of the #EndSARS protesters who were on the streets between October and November, 2020. Those were students who would have been busy with their academic work in their various institutions, but for the fact that their lecturers were on strike for several months. Some of the protesters were also members of National Youth Service Corps who would have been at their various orientation camps or at their places of primary assignments throughout the federation, but for the lockdown as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. Those were already aggrieved with the government and would have taken part in the aborted peaceful demonstration, which was organized by Nigeria Labour Congress, to protest the unprecedented hike in petroleum products some weeks earlier. The #EndSARS protests, therefore, provided an avenue for them to vent out their bottled rage against the government and the institutions they felt that were their problem.

It is also not an over-statement that the country still pretends that it is fighting terrorists and would never negotiate with them. Billions of naira of tax payers' money had been sunk into fighting the so-called terrorists and other agitators and nothing worthwhile had been achieved. The money would have been used in providing employment for the teeming millions of Nigerian youths that are unemployed, and for the provisions of other critical infrastructures for the country. The government needs to get the assistance of international negotiators to help it to implore the rampaging youths to sheath their swords and embrace peace. But before that could be achieved, the underlying causes of the agitations and strife need to be honestly addressed by the government. It is obvious that #EndSARS protests and other ethnic militias, including the dreaded Boko Haram, sprung up from the same source: the rejection of enslavement and colonization of man by another man. Until these warring forces are peacefully called to order, thousands of Nigerians would be slaughtered, millions of citizens internally displaced or sent to refugee camps, property worth billions of naira destroyed in the endless and ruthless guerrilla warfare, and billions of naira spent on fighting insurgency; yet, successive governments would engage the militants for decades without winning the war.

And finally, the youths that engaged in the #ENDSARS protests should also search themselves and their conscience. By the violent and criminal activities, like armed robbery, ritual murders, cultism, thuggery, kidnappings, cyber crimes, rape, banditry, etc., some of them engage in make it impossible for them to, in all honesty, sever themselves from the vices and indictments of the past generations they want to free themselves from their burden. Surely, they may not have the mentality of the enslaved and the colonized, but some of them have criminal mentality and mindset. And the only way they can succeed in freeing the country and Africa from its centuries-old bondage and barbarism is to, first of all, to free themselves from the stigma of violence and criminality.

## **7. Conclusion**

Having examined extensively the #ENDSARS protests and a review of the gamut of the slavery and colonial history of Nigeria and Africa, it is obvious that the protests were not against the police and the government in power alone. They were protests against several generations and ancestors of Nigerians for centuries of criminality, violence, bloodletting, barbarism, savagery that have characterized Nigeria and the countries and empires of Africa that force the white man to label Africa perpetually as a dark continent, a crude continent and a continent without hope. The protesters had started a journey, but the journey could yield fruit if, and only if, they disengage themselves from the vestiges of violence and criminality that have taken over their generation. It is only then could they truly be seen as freedom fighters, who defend the rights and freedoms of every Nigerian, particularly the defenseless, the weak, the marginalized, the oppressed, the dehumanized, the brutalized and the vulnerable. It is only then could also they be seen as true heroes that removed the blemish of past generations of Nigerians and Africans and would not be indicted by future generations of Nigerians, yet unborn, for having the mentalities and mindsets of the enslaved and the colonized like the generations before them that perpetually blame the white man for their self-inflicted burden.

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