

EXPLORING AND EVALUATING THE INTRICACIES IN THE PRESS COVERAGE DURING ENDSARS PROTEST IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of Media Coverage during the EndSARS protest in Nigeria and thereby traced the origin of police brutality to colonial legacy. The historical method of description and analysis were deployed in the research. The study depended on secondary and primary sources of information. The secondary sources are books, journals, periodicals and government publications while the primary sources are newspapers, oral sources derived from fieldwork when knowledgeable persons were interviewed, and classified documents from the National Archives, Ibadan, Nigeria. The paper investigates the colonial origin of police brutality which is the remote cause of EndSARS as well as the immediate causes of EndSARS; the implication of press coverage and EndSARS on Nigeria society. Findings indicate that imperial police were brutal in nature. At independence, violence and human rights abuse by the police continued. EndSARS, a violent protest of October 2020 became peoples' response to police brutality which by implication, meant breakdown of law and order. The press engaged in guardianship role as a check on the abuse of power by SARS operatives while acting as an agent of mobilisation and co-ordination. EndSARS protest was carried out through various means including social media handles. The solution is youth engagement, restructuring of NPF, teaching of morality and policing /journalism with human-face. The author recommends legislative safeguard against discriminatory, derogatory press coverage/reportage on government agencies/institutions.

Keywords: Colonial Legacy, Press Censorship, Police Brutality, Public Relations, Impact.

Introduction

Press in Merriam Webster dictionary is "The people (such as reporters and photographers) who work for newspapers, magazines, and so on. The Press in Nigeria as in every other country in the world are relatively free to report any matter of security and national interest and make publications to that effect. Reports on EndSARS protests as it were was made possible by the right of newspapers, magazine reporters and journalists to report news without being harassed/controlled by government. This is because of the prevalence of a system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions in Nigeria, that is, democratic governance. Colonialism led to the emergence of poor institutions in Africa as a result of the exploitative apparatus set up by the colonialists. Colonialism produced a brutal and uncivil police force with poor human rights credentials. Fawole (2003, p.160), observed that the Nigeria Police Force in the colonial era was completely British officered while the rank and file police-men were local mercenaries employed to suppress rebellion against colonial rule, for conquest, subjugation and pacification of the people and the colonies.

Postcolonial police, a successor of the imperial police, continued in that pattern; this explains the origin of police brutality and human rights abuse as a colonial heritage. Akali (2014, p.136) wrote “the postcolonial Nigeria Police did not witness any fundamental change except that its colonial controllers were changed. But the ideological interest they represent and modus operandi bears the hallmark of its anti-people disposition”

Statement of the Problem

There is a question on how peaceful was the protest in Nigeria. The question is derived from the fact that protest could be peaceful, violent, peaceful at inception but latter on turn violent. The second question is did press coverage of EndSARS protests spread lies and exaggeration that fueled the protest resulting in violent protest? The third question is on the mobilisation, funding and leadership role played by the Nigerian press at this time through *the man behind the scenes*. Fourthly, the scope of the press coverage of the protest. Some amateur writers tend to miss it here by naming the EndSARS protest a nationwide protest. Finally, the implication of censored media reportage on the EndSARS protest on Nigeria society.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on the Broken Windows Theory (BWT) which suggests that lawlessness grows in a society when societies begin to tolerate relatively minor violations of public order and deliberate efforts needed to crack down on these menace are not in place. Using the analogy of a broken window, Akinyemi (2021) explains that “a crack in a building that is left the unrepaired project to other members of the society that no one cares and so breaking more windows will not result in official sanction; so also minor crimes that if not properly handled cumulate into a menace”. The theory emphasises that the failure of the criminal justice system necessitated the establishment of various policing agents to fill in the gap and close the vacuum created by the failed giant (NPF). It also emphasises the fact that the corrupt and cruel criminal justice system and its attendant court/police-civilian face-off led to violent protests that the police could not contain. Despite the shortcomings and critiques, this theory was accepted as a theoretical guide for the study due to its relevance to the topic under review.

Background to the Study

Imperial policing saw the use of local government police forces and native authority police forces as well as federal police forces to violently suppress restiveness, tax defaulters and opposition to British rule in Nigeria. After Independence, the postcolonial Nigeria Police did not witness any fundamental change except that its colonial controllers (high echelon Mainly British officers) were changed. But the ideological interest (pro-British) they represent and modus operandi bears the hallmark of its anti-people disposition. Police were not seen as a unifying institution because they did not provide too many social services and were not seen as a symbol of the nation. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) like every other police unit and contingent within the state, is one of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) units saddled with the responsibility of fighting crime in the country; especially armed robbery, banditry and kidnapping.

Recently, members of the public perceive the press as the watchdog of society and their information/monitoring roles are viewed as crucial for democracy and good governance. This study aims to identify why and how the media (print and electronic) are critical sectors in

shaping the country and influencing government decisions as well as the reaction of members of the public over an incident of public concern in the country.

For the conventional print and electronic media to contribute effectively to enthrone good democratic governance, they must apply the basic principles of patriotism, accountability, transparency and objectivity in the discharge of their constitutional duties and uphold the sanctity of truth and fairness at all times. It is on record that “the Federal Ministry of Information alongside journalists from various media houses engage in a tour to inspect activities of public servant’s example police and works of Public administrators” (Bellver and Kaufman 2005). This could uphold the responsibility, fairness and accountability of the police institution to members of the public.

The conventional media, however, is a link in the accountability chain between the law enforcement agents, the government and the governed, providing basic information for the citizens. Citizens’ voices and choices are aired through the media; this helps in policy formulation and implementation. Take, for instance, the idea of replacing Federal-SARS with SWAT which was rejected by all citizens. Through media coverage, during the EndSARS protest, all citizens were able to know if the government failed to protect the interests of the masses. Failure of government means that the political office holders and controllers failed to manage the economy, police and other social institutions. With the high rate of abuse of office by police and other public officials, Ogundiya (2010) opined that “the problem of Nigerian development is both a symptom and consequence of the absence of good governance”. Good governance connotes the exercise of power responsively and responsibly.

The press, a public-spirited press, with trained intelligence can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a shame and mockery (Mordi 2018). The power to mould, sharpen, reshape and repackage the future of Nigeria was in the hands of the journalists and reporters; it can make or break, unite and scatter a country by the way and manner it functions, by the news or information it disseminates to members of the public. It played an influential and visible role in Nigeria during the EndSARS protest through the social media handle after the government banned Television, Radio and newspaper publications on protest movements. At this point, the military and police were busy clamping down on all forms of protest, protesters, and hoodlums who hijacked the hitherto peaceful protest just as it did in the colonial era. The colonial administrators used imperial police to clamp down on protesters and suppress workers' strikes and protests in 1937, 1945, and 1947; the Aba women riots in 1929 and many others. Nigeria police arrested, detained, prosecuted and even openly fired or shot rubber bullets or missiles at the protesters with canisters and live ammunition.

The media is constitutionally allowed to interpret public issues or issues of national concern. The media interpreted the replacement of Federal-SARS with SWART as pouring a new wine into an old wine jar. The media is the agenda setter of public discourse, hence its special role in covering the EndSARS protest and the end-bad-government protest of August 2024. The traditional media in the 2020s provided complete, well-analysed and full-of-fact news and opinion to the public on EndSARS protests which is an issue of public concern or interest then. It highlighted corrupt practices by the Nigeria Police, the poor salary structure of the police, lack of supervision on Federal-SARS, irresponsibility of police operatives such as alcoholism, hard drugs and poor equipment of the police and other factors limiting the

Nigeria Police Force. The media went further to gather viable solutions to the problems of the police.

Because of the foregoing, the traditional print and electronic media was seen to have the capacity to allow and facilitate regular checks on police and assessment of the personality of the Nigeria police leader then; the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mohammed Abubakar Adamu. It was reported by the journalist and policing analysts, that in the wake of, or during EndSARS protest of October through November 2020, IGP Mohammed Adamu did not encourage officers and men of the police force to apply Police Force Order 237 which explains laws guiding the use of firearms. Instead, he demoralized policemen, hence the killing of officers and men of the force and their inability to gallantly defend themselves. The IGP gave a strict order to police men not to shoot or fire at the protesters to avoid killing Nigerian citizens. No wonder the protesters turned aggressive, violent and courageously bashed into police stations, killed police officers and men, burnt down police formations and left them untouched.

Through media coverage of EndSARS protest, the weakness of NPF, military brutality and her denial of her actions as well as the insensitivity of the police leader at this time was exposed. This may give birth to future protests/hostility or revolution as well as more attacks on police while the political leadership of the country continues using police to clamp down all uprisings and protests/opposition against bad leadership and autocratic regime/administration.

Brief History of the Nigeria Police Force

In the police colleges established in Ikeja, Enugu (1932) and Kaduna (1922) special attention is paid to the physical/moral development of recruits and the promotion of team spirit (NAI, CSO 1937, p.8) to perform paramilitary duties. Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is a product of or say brainchild of the British colonial government. Its origin dates back to 1861, following the annexation of Lagos. Although various nationalities that make up present-day Nigeria had their local ways of policing before the advent of the British colonialists, such arrangements were based on a part-time basis. Most of these police were not paid formal salaries; they got their rewards from gifts and gratifications in an informal way and they were natives of the area they policed. The British Consul Foot charged with the administration of Lagos established a consular Guard in Lagos by the Police Act of 1861 to maintain law and order. In 1861, the 30-member consular Guard in Lagos was renamed the Hausa Guard. His successor, consul Mc Caskey in 1862 increased it to 100. By 1863, there were 600 men in the nominal role of police. By 1960, police officers and men in Nigeria were 12000. Niger Coast Constabulary was established in Lokoja in 1886, Oil Rivers Constabulary in Calabar in 1888 (NAI, NAK Makprof 750, Vol.1, 1947). Lagos Police Force merged with Southern Nigeria police in 1906. Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria police were all merged to give birth to a unified police force (the Nigeria Police Force) in 1930. According to Nwelene (interviewed 20/05/2023) “the Hausa guards became known as Hausa constabulary and its men were mainly drawn from among the Hausa ethnic group. The constabulary performed both military and police duties”.

On the other hand, according to Yahaya (2021, p.105), “the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was created in late 1992 by former police commissioner Simeon Danladi Midenda.

The major reason of creating this unit was to fight the emerging criminal acts such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry and the host of others...”

Causes of EndSARS Protest

Federal-SARS was able to tackle banditry, armed robbery and kidnapping to an extent. However, due to the politicisation of policing, people began to use them as bodyguards to intimidate, suppress, over-detain and harass people. Federal-SARS tortures people, mercilessly, extorts, over-detain, dehumanises, beats, kills and jails people who are not forthcoming with their obnoxious demands. It was also discovered that most Federal-SARS personnel lacked orientation on human rights-based policing and human relations which is a big gap the Nigeria Police Force could have covered through in-service training (training and re-training program) or by re-orienting them. Ogbette (2018) observed that “SARS personnel are often intoxicated while on duty, wielding sophisticated guns”. From the study, one could say that if pro-active institutional control measures were put in place, disbandment of Federal SARS would not be necessary.

Yahaya (2021, p.111) averred that “on 14th August 2018 the Acting President of Nigeria Yemi Osinbanjo ordered the overhaul of SARS following the reports of human rights violations”. He ordered the inspector general of police, Ibrahim Kpotun Idris to reform SARS and investigate alleged claims of human rights violations of citizens. However, because of this, Idris renamed the unit – Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad, appointed someone else to head the unit and created human rights desk officers to receive complaints from civilians and check reports.

Due to the Lekki Massacre, the Nigeria factor or joblessness of many youths, and inappropriate media presentation of events in Nigeria, protests warmed up in the middle of 2020. Protesters defied the 24-hour curfew in Lagos imposed by the government firstly because of the factors stated above, and secondly because they were angry about the killing of their colleagues, relatives and friends at Lekki Toll Gate on Tuesday 20th October, 2020. Before the Lekki Massacre, on the 4th of October, 2020, SARS operatives were said to have shot dead a man, pulled him out of his Lexus SUV and made away with it at Ughelli, Delta State. The youths which constitute a greater part of the mob cried out and reporters/journalists criticised the action of Federal-SARS operatives. As a result of the incident, the Federal Government of Nigeria through IGP Mohammed Abubakar Adamu announced that both state and federal SARS would be disbanded on 11th October 2020.

The law on the use of firearm

Amnesty International (2009, pp. 22-23) explains the UN Basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials, Nigeria’s constitution and the Nigeria Police Force Order 237 explain it better. It explains that firearms cannot be used unless there exists a grave or imminent threat of death or serious injury. Principle 9 of the UN basic principle reads thus:

Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving a great threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, intentional

lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable to protect life.

Amnesty International (2009) went further to explain much wider grounds for the use of force and lethal weapons than is permissible under international law and standards as provided by Nigeria's constitution and Nigeria Police Force Order 237. To her

Section 33 of Nigeria's constitution, which guarantees the right to life, also permits an overly broad exception for deprivation of life. Under this section, when force is used to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained, any consequent killing does not constitute a deprivation of life.

Section 3 (d) and 3(e) of Police Force Order 237 permit police officers to shoot suspects and detainees who attempt to escape or avoid arrest. Under section 3 of police force order 237, the police are allowed to use a firearm to arrest a person who takes to flight in order to avoid arrest provided the offence is such that the accused may be punished with death or imprisonment for 7 years or more. Escaping custody or resisting arrest is punishable with 7 years imprisonment under Nigerian legislation. As such, the constitution and police force order 237 allow police officers to shoot with impunity anyone who flees. The only limitation on the use of force in police force order 237 is that firearms must only be used as a last resort and if there are no other means of effecting the suspect's arrest and the circumstances are such that his subsequent arrest is unlikely.

With the above in mind, one can picture why extrajudicial killings persist and why police officers use Force Order 237 and the Nigeria constitution as a cover-up for their use of lethal weapons, and go unpunished.

Brief Organisational Structure of the Nigeria Police

The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria did not have any effect on the police. It was in 1930 that the Northern Nigeria police force and Southern Nigeria police force were merged to give birth to a unified police known as the Nigeria Police Force with headquarters in Lagos and the creation of the office of Inspector General of Police (IGP) to oversee the administration and command of the force. In 1943, the Northern and Western region of Nigeria established their regional police forces. 1930 also witnessed the enforcement of decree number 4 of 1916 which empowered the chiefs and kings (Native Authorities) to enforce laws and protect lives and properties by recruiting, training and arming natives to do so. This means the establishment of Local Government and Native Authority Police Force. They operated side by side with NPF and Regional Police Force until 1968 when they were disbanded. In 1970, all personnel of the defunct police forces were completely absorbed into the central police (NPF) signaling the beginning of the over-centralised police structure of Nigeria today. With the creation of Abuja as Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in 1976, the headquarters of NPF shifted from Lagos to Abuja. Currently, the force headquarters is located at Shehu Shagari Way, (FCT). Since 1976, Nigeria's police force has been undergoing a series of structural changes and developments such as promotion, creation of a women's wing of the force, establishment of departments such as the Nigeria Police Public Relations Department (NPPRD), Criminal Investigation Department (CID); zonal, state and area commands; divisions and outposts; special branches like Special

Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), DRAGONS, Rapid Response Squad (RRS), Eagle Net Squad, State Anti-Cult Units (SACU), Police Mobile Force (PMF); Railway police; Dog section; Marine Police; Inter-Pol; Traffic Warden; IPPIS, Police Service Commission (PSC), Police Monitoring Team (PMT) and many others to checkmate its public relations and consequently upsurge of crime in the country (Alade 2017, p.129).

Loopholes in the Police: A Causative Factor for Endsars

The Nigeria Police Force is organised into thirty-seven (37) commands inclusive of the force headquarters. Each of the 36 states and the federal capital territory (FCT) headed by a Commissioner of Police (CP) is served by a command of the force. The force headquarters annex (FHQ) is the office of the Inspector General of Police (IGP). The Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) is the head of each zonal command which Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) is the head of each area command within each state. There are six departments in the force which perform the task of the force. The six departments are: Administration and Finance, research and planning, works and Logistics, operations, Criminal Intelligence Investigation Department (CIID) and Training. However, each of the department is under the leadership of an amiable Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIGP). The 37 police commands are however subdivided or grouped into twelve zonal commands. Each zonal headquarters is under the command of a gallant Assistant Inspector General (AIGP) while highly placed commissioners of Police (CP) are in charge of state commands (Crawshaw 1999, p.10). The entire force is under the command of IGP. The Police staff college and police academy are headed by AIGPs. The police colleges and police training schools are headed by the Commissioner of Police (Thomas 2008, p.237). The country was divided into twelve administrative zonal commands. The state commands are divided into a number of police area commands and police divisions headed by the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) and Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) respectively.

A close look at the recruitment and training requirements and procedure, one can blame brutality and incivility of the rank and file to the poor recruitment and training curriculum, mode and duration which lacked the vitae of human-right based policing and inter-group relations. Recruit – constables were not trained to observe human rights-based policing. It was observed that ‘human – rights-based policing’ as a topic remains absent in the police training curriculum. There are three entry levels into the NPF. These are the constable, cadet inspectorate cadre and cadet assistant superintendent of police (ASP) levels which is the highest administrative cadre. The first is the beginning level for recruits; appointed with a secondary school certificate. The second is intermediates employed with National Diploma/National Certificate of Education (ND/NCE) and must be trained for twelve months; at any of the police colleges in Nigeria – Enugu, Ikeja, Maidugury and Kaduna. The third is the Superior Police Officer (SPO) rank are trained at the Police Academy, Wudil Kano. An applicant here must possess a Bachelor's degree or Higher National Diploma (B.Sc/HND) in any course of study. Here, physical stature and stamina alone are required or considered in the selection/screening process because strength and promotion of team spirit were the aims of training. The psychological, emotional and background study of the candidate misses out here. That is to say that ex-convicts, people connected to criminal offences, dismissed military and police officers, wanted persons, and people with questionable character sometimes find their way into NPF in most cases. These are the set of policemen that end up brutalising, abusing and violating the human rights of members of the

public with impunity. There was an attempt to reform SARS by the acting president of Nigeria in 2018.

Loopholes in Press Publication which led to EndSARS.

Umar and Baba-Isa (2021, p.5) observed that the media is often driven by the profit motive or commercial considerations thus it loses the capacity to function as a vehicle for advancing freedom and democracy and instead becomes a means of livelihood and propaganda for press barons. The press at this time was used by criminal-minded elites to stir up civil unrest, incite violence against the Nigerian police and end up vandalising private and public assets owned by their political opponents and unpopular government agents and institutions. Force Public Relations Department (NPPRD) was established by IGP Salam Kam to establish and maintain communication with the members of the public because it was observed that social media and the press could not be trusted. The force headquarters public relations officer (FPRO) CP Frank Mba during ENDSARS protests was the mouthpiece officer or spokesperson for the entire Nigeria police. An ACP, DCP or CP or put differently, commissioners rank only can occupy this position or office.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) at the zonal and state levels is an officer in the rank of Deputy Superintend of Police DSP and ASP respectively. In other words, it is an office reserved for superintendents of police (Supols). According to (The Evidence Act of 1945, Laws of Federation of Nigeria, 2004, p.5) their “duties include but are not limited to publication of list of wanted persons, missing person, stolen vehicles, dark spots, security tips and organization of press briefings to parade arrested criminal suspects”. It also issues press releases and bulletins, writes lecture articles, and publishes photographs and advertisements through the press and electronic media in order to keep the public constantly informed of police activities. It produces informative posters, flyers and booklets, police calendars, diaries, greeting cards, magazines and newsletters. NPPRD is peopled by general duty police operatives and not public relations professionals and is under administrative department. Any police officer can be posted to work in NPPRD irrespective of his or her educational / background or professional training. Against this backdrop, one can argue that the NPPRD is full of armature insensitive, inexperienced, and less informed personnel, hence their inability to control information resulting in the the eventual collapse of the system and EndSARS protest. It is true that the EndSARS protest took place in South – East, South – South, South – West and parts of the Middle-Belt geo-political zones in Nigeria; between October 4th and November 20th, 2020. It started as a peaceful protest in Ughelli, Delta State but turned bloody after the Lekki Massacre.

Colonial Origin of Police Brutality

According to Asenime (2014), “colonial police force was used to violently suppress worker’s strike (1945, 1947,1949) and women’s riot (1929-1930; 1949) as well as communal riots in Kano (1953) and Tiv land (1959-1960) resulting in deaths and destruction of property”. Successive police forces and government officials frequently deployed the police in likewise manner. To Chidi (Interviewed 23/03/2023), “in the olden days, members of colonial police forces were accused of ‘looting, stealing and generally taking advantage of their positions. The initial police forces were notoriously repressive, lawless and corrupt. Of course, they were meant to use as much force as possible in their relations with members of the public”, that way, the economic goals of the coloniser would not be easily thwarted. To Ohamadike

(interviewed 20/05/2023), “no radical changes have been made since Nigeria’s independence to transform the Nigeria police into a lawful and respected law enforcement institution”.

The Police were not seen as a service organisation for indigenes of the country because of the use to which the colonial administrators the police were harassing and arresting tax defaulters brutalising trade unionists and other nationalists, and torturing persons accused of criminal offences. People were not willing to have anything to do with police in colonial Nigeria up to recent times. From the beginning, a serious communication gap was built between the people and the police and this mutual distrust continued to grow wider. People could threaten unwary and troublesome children with police presence. This culminates in the remote cause of the EndSARS protest in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the kind of picture of the police painted here by the traditional print and electronic media and members of the public generally created serious problems for the police/public relations and public perception of the police in crime prevention.

The Missing Link in Press-Police Partnership

Police is at the forefront in the criminal justice system followed by the court, prisons and the press. In contemporary Nigeria, the police are an enviable institution in the minds of social problems. The unenviable trend is the way and manner members of the public and the press relate with the police as such denying them information that would aid in crime control and prevention in contemporary society.

The Lekki Massacre, the Aba Women Riot, the general strike of 1945 and many others saw the use of police to quell uprisings. Nevertheless, the media coverage has it all recorded for future reference. Alade (2017) noted that:

Many persons have fallen victim to gunshot or bullet wounds arising from legal or illegal actions of law enforcement agents and unlawful activities of criminals. This however resulted in the loss of lives of citizens. Sometimes breadwinners of families and innocent citizens are affected.

The press did not encourage the police to apply the criminal code/law, the constitution and common sense in handling the mob. However, Crawshaw (1999), stated that “... the primary legal bases for policing in any country are the national constitution and laws of the country”. The press and police boss did not encourage policemen during EndSARS protest to apply discretion and Force Order 237 which spelt out when a police man is to make use of his firearm. The police should have been given the opportunity to defend themselves during EndSARS protest and not die miserably like the way they died. Thomas (2008) opined that;

No matter how perfect a criminal law appears to be on paper, its effective enforcement depends on the caliber or personalities of the law enforcement agents, especially the police. When the morale of police officers are low or weak, they tend to run away from the enemy.

No matter the circumstances which entitle or impel a person to hold a gun, the “Evidence Act” explains that the right or intention to shoot whether legal or illegal, must be exercised to protect and respect the right of others who should not be victims of gunshots in their society.

Just as Nigerians were beginning to put behind them the tragic death of Jimoh Isiaq and over 20 others who were gunned down by the police during the protest, soldiers also on late Tuesday opened fire on unarmed protesters in Lagos as they defied curfew orders to continue the nationwide protest. Uzoezie Children, the CEO of The Afritraveller described the EndSARS protest thus:

Tuesday's massacre in Lagos was the height of wickedness, apathy, insensitivity, irrationality and unreasonableness on the part of the Nigerian government. It is a denial of rights to the citizens of our dear country.

Emotions were stretched to their limits as soldiers opened fire on the unarmed peaceful protesters while they held the Nigerian flag and sang the national anthem at Lekki toll gate. Police brutality is traced to the colonial era. "Police is your friend" has been the motto of NPF since its establishment in 1930. The Federal-SARS unit founded in 1992 to fight crimes, metamorphosed or changed into a hydra-headed plague.

It has been observed that the police rank-and-file are grossly undertrained and ridiculously underpaid and are not well motivated. President Obasanjo writing on the human development agenda posits that:

Human development may not necessarily mean uniform human progress but it must indicate desirable and reasonable progress, fulfillment and satisfaction for almost all persons living in the country at a given time.

Chidi (interview cited) an eyewitness of the Lekki massacre says "Two protesters were armed with cut-to-size locally made guns and had threatened to shoot the soldiers should they make any move to disturb their much-valued protest, hence they provoked soldiers". Another oral source (Ohamadike, interview cited) says, the soldiers acted on an order given to them by their superior authority- maybe the president of the federation. However, this is in line with the fact that the police and military are regimented organisations. They take order and directives from the boss, the executive arm of government. The control of the police and military rests on the president of the country.

Nigeria Poverty and Youth Joblessness Factor for EndSARS

Nigeria is blessed with rich natural resources but years of colonisation, military rule, police brutality, corruption, and mismanagement of public funds left the country underdeveloped and its people severely impoverished. Over 70% of the population are living on less than \$1 a day, high rate of unemployment among the youths, poor salary structure for civil and public servants, high level of illiteracy among the young people, high infant and maternal mortality rate, low life expectancy, high HIV, malaria infection rate, high percentage of the population living in slums in unsanitary conditions with poor access to clean water and so on. The future looks bleak indeed. This condition of living prepared the ground for jobless youths to participate in violent protest (EndSARS).

Implications of EndSARS on Nigeria Society

According to an online source, some of the damages done by protesters include:

Setting on fire the headquarters of Television Continental,
TVC, Lagos concession company LCC at Lekki, Lagos BRT

Terminals at Oyingbo, Corporate Head Office of Nigeria Port Authority NPA and Palace of the Oba of Lagos HRH Rilwan Akiolu II, among others.

As a result of insecurity in Nigeria, the National Examination Council NECO rescheduled papers of the ongoing 2020 Senior secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) from October to November (Rogers 2018, p.5). This was followed by the killing of police, the army, civil defense and road safety and every other government agency or 'uniform men' personnel on the road as well as the burning down of police formations nationwide. Policing is a hazardous and tedious exercise, hence, a policeman must be intelligent, resourceful, smart, friendly, courteous, fearless or brave and assiduous at duty. The organisation must provide the wherewithal for the job. Police-public relations at this point due to brutality and human rights abuse were based on suspicion and hatred. Opone (2010, p.125) summed it up that internally, group relations were based mostly on mutual suspicion, a carry-over from the colonial state.

Information reaching us says that President Muhammadu Buhari was not interested in Lagos State Governor – Babajide Sanwo-Olu's proposal for compensation to families of police operatives who lost their lives during EndSARS protest. In the same vein, governors of all states affected by the protest were not concerned or willing to compensate the families of anyone affected during the protest. Repair and or replacement of properties damaged or lost during the protest would amount to trillions of Naira. This accounts for state governments' indifference to EndSARS damages.

The media coverage at this time has it that the masses complained bitterly, and protested openly against police brutality and an end to or disbandment of SARS. Despite the disbandment of SARS, in line with the demands of the protesters, the protest continued with increasing momentum. One is not out of place to state here that at this point in time, the peaceful protest has been hijacked by hoodlums, miscreants and unknown gunmen. The deputy editor of Vanguard, Charles Kumolu noted that:

The Federal Government through the police decided to create a SWAT team. Nigeria does not have the capacity yet for a SWAT team. Copying the name and telling us it is a replacement for SARS is not acceptable. This by interpretation means the government's effort to cajole members of the public.

The demands of the public were simple and clearly stated below:

1. Establishment of community and state police.
2. Better welfare for officers.
3. A public apology from the government.
4. The compensation package for families of those killed unjustly by SARS. The demand was not an end to police but a reform of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). The youths will not have any reason to protest again if the government keeps doing well; and if social vices such as unlawful arrest, extra-judicial killing, godfatherism, harassment, theft, extortion, rape, torture and murder are removed or mitigated.

Police brutality is not limited to Nigeria alone. It is prevalent in other countries of the world. Police brutality in the United States upholds a white supremacist racial order. Police brutality in Nigeria upholds who ever is paying the policing forces – the regime in power. Just as the color line is still the fundamental dividing line of the societies of the Americas,

religious divides, ethnic caste and economic divides are fundamental to understanding social differences in other parts of the world (Tamar 2020, p.12). The EnsSARS protest which began with a focus on police brutality extended to other dimensions of corruption, human rights abuse, and underdevelopment in Nigeria and ended bad governance.

Editorial Board of the Nigeria Police Force

The editorial board of the Nigeria Police Force from time immemorial is the public relations unit headed by the police public relations officer (PPRO). In the events that preceded EndSARS, which eventually led to the protest, Police Public Relations Department had failed in their constitutional duties of being the police editorial team, police press and mouthpiece of the police force in Nigeria. In 1891, a British colonial official and administrator acting consul George Annesley, assembled, trained and equipped or armed a small group of men to serve as their mouthpiece or to help them relay messages to the community leaders; subdue chief in the upper Cross River region who were seen as obstacles to the expansion of British economic power.

Implications of Press Coverage of EndSARS in Nigeria Society

EndSARS protest is post-colonial 21st-century resistance just like the Enugu colliery Strike of 1949 an anti-colonial resistance which met with a quasi-military policing force deployed to subjugate citizens. According to Tamar (2020, p.12):

On the social media handle, Facebook precisely the video report of the killing of one Daniel Chibuike, a River State-born 20-year-old musician in the Elelenwo area of Port Harcourt that went viral fueled protests and demonstrations more.

Even after Femi Hamzat had addressed the protestants who encamped overnight at Alausa in October 9, 2020 they were still not satisfied nor happy, another faction of protesters equally encamped Louis Edet House (Nigeria Police Force Headquarters) Abuja until they were addressed by the police boss IGP Mohammed Adamu who allayed their fears and promised they (peaceful protesters) would be protected by the police. Mordi (2018) was right when he opined that:

...scholars have tended to adopt the position foreshadowed by the press that politicians should be held solely responsible for the failure of democratic governance during the period.

The press according to Mordi (2018) facilitates “the flow of information about public events to all citizens and the exposure of politicians and government to the public gaze and critique” it thereby engages in guardianship role as a check on the abuse of power by SARS operatives while acting as an agent of mobilisation and coordination. EndSARS protest was carried out through various means including social media handles. The press, however, have not told us who sponsored the EndSARS protest, and what the sponsors’ stood to gain.

Babaleye et al observed that “One popular channel used by the polity to address pertinent political issues is the social media. However, traditional media is the focus of this research. Babaleye (2020,p.16) rightly states that “the social media which are a fall out of the new media – the internet consist of such platforms as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and many others under which citizens post messages on issues of popular interest and national concern, terrorism, insurgency, economic mismanagement poor governance, police brutality which are key factors affecting the society today”. Social media shouldn’t be relied

upon because contents are user-generated and do not go through scrutiny as is the practice in traditional media.

Solutions to the Menace of EndSARS and Uncensored Press Reportage

Umar (2021, p.7) posits that social media are used for free for all criticism platforms to the key players and other stakeholders in Nigeria's fragile democracy. In order to curb the abuse of social media, the national assembly began debates on the introduction of a bill stipulating the death penalty as punishment for perpetrators of fake news aimed at denigrating high-ranking political office holders in the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. Odesola (2020, p.7) was of the view that the proposed bill has received round condemnation, it is however evidence of the pain being afflicted by negative and destructive reports on social media against politicians, clergymen, business tycoons, police, government institutions and department *et cetera*. To Lambo (2020, p.9) "the use of abusive words, deliberate falsehood without any respect for the ethics of journalism practice is a major problem that Nigeria government is contending with under the democratic rule".

On this note, the author recommends the establishment of a unit of police force charged with the responsibility of monitoring cyberspace. Legislation stating jail term of up to 2 years or more for citizens that may post defamatory, derogatory, denigrating information on social and conventional media handles or publish the same in traditional media (print and electronic media). Other solutions may include efforts at police image building; government sponsorship of policies and programs of the police public relations department; and public sensitization program. Finally, the government should embark on poverty alleviation and youth engagement program in other to get the idle youths employed or actively engaged in economic activity.

Conclusion

The EndSARS movement is a protest that did not comply with due process, ethics and norms of civilized people's protest. The protest is not only for brutality, and disbandment of SARS but reformation of the entire NPF and other warm attitudes of the government against Nigerian youths and national concerns. The erroneous assumption that youths in all works of life were directly involved in the protest is a mere paper generalisation and has been discarded. Findings from research tend to suggest that, it's only the unengaged, idle and jobless youths that were mobilised, sponsored and used to champion the course of the protest by the men behind the scene yet to be identified and arrested by police detectives... Shortsighted government policy failed to properly integrate the youths' needs. The public confidence should be resuscitated towards the NPF, to prevent future reoccurrence. The relationship between NPF and Nigerian youths is on the verge of deterioration. The poor, warm attitude of the government agencies and departments and police brutality and extortion against the citizenry are responsible for the civil unrest and EndSARS protest. Hence the adoption by unemployed, disengaged youths of violence as means of expression of anger and grievances.

Contributions to Knowledge

The essence of any research is to add to the existing body of knowledge. This research work has made the following contributions to knowledge: that despite pervading problems and consequent challenges, there is a prospect for the sustenance of good media coverage and reportage and effective policing of Nigeria in the present democratic dispensation. To achieve

this, there must be good governance concerning police reform as a strategy for effective policing. Secondly, enhance police–public relations. Thirdly, the establishment of special constabulary policemen drawn from within the community to serve as spies conveying surveillance – information to the police. Fourthly, good wages/welfare packages for the rank and file. That is the constables, corporals and sergeants. Again, the inclusion of human rights-based policing awareness and public relations to the training curriculum of recruit–constables in police training schools (PTS) and police colleges. Finally, appointment by merit for IGPs and In-service combat training on marksmanship, and tactical maneuvers for all officers and men of NPF. Good coverage and reportage by the press and NPPRD is a good solution to end the menace of press coverage of EndSARS. In conclusion, it is believed that this study will serve as a guide to policy makers; a resource material to researchers, teachers and students alike.

Recommendations

- ❖ Reformation of NPF and dismissal of bad eggs in the force. Umar and Baba recommended – the establishment of a committee to look into complaints of misconduct presented against any policeman. The police service commission [PSC] should strengthen the Police Monitoring Team (PMT).
- ❖ The youths (unengaged youths) should go for skill acquisition training and embrace entrepreneurship on small and medium scale enterprises.
- ❖ Morality should be taught in schools, churches and media broadcasts to prevent youth engagement in drugs, violence and anti-social behaviors such as involvement in violent protest and criminality.

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