

The #EndSARS protest in Nigeria and political force of image production and circulation on social media

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Abstract

For many years, the unit of the Nigeria Police Force, Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was accused of violent crimes and violation of human rights of citizens. Between October and November 2020, multitude of Nigerian youths took to the streets to demand for abolition of SARS, thus #EndSARS protest. Photography was at the heart of the social movement. Employing digital methods including compositional analysis and audience interpretation, this paper examines a selection of #EndSARS-related photographs and their accompanying comments retrieved from social media. I investigate the modes of creating the images and how they produce political effects. I argue that the use of images in the #EndSARS protest illuminates the rising conviction among Nigerians that photography can aid in the transformation of their precarious living conditions. These include the use of the camera in the conventional sense of framing the fleeting world. Others are digital editing of photographs, staged production and appropriation of images that may have no connection with the protests. Then, I analyse as political act the sense of obligation with which the images are produced and circulated. These lines of enquiry contribute to the emerging work on how photography and social media are converging to transform the political sphere.

Introduction

On Saturday, 3 October 2020, 22-year old Joshua Ambrose was allegedly shot dead by a team of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Ughelli, Delta State of Nigeria on the allegation that he was a "yahoo boy" (internet fraudster). Special Anti-Robbery Squad is a unit of the Nigerian Police Force created in 1992 to deal with robbery, abduction, car theft and other related crimes. The report of the killing came in the form of a video in which we see the hand of a man in a moving car seemingly filming the fleeting scene in front of him, comprising other moving vehicles including a black Police car and a white Lexus SUV, as well as pedestrians. He is apparently stirring the wheel with the other hand outside the frame. Prince Nicholas Makolomi making the video is not visible in the picture, but his voice is heard along with that of the driver. They are screaming in Nigerian pidgin English:

Na follow we dey follow them o; them dey run! They don kill the boy o! Who get that Lexus wey dey front don die o, for front of Wetland Hotel Ughelli¹.

What they are reporting is that the police officers shot the man and zoomed off in

his Lexus SUV. The Nigerian Police later denied some aspects of the report. It claimed that the Police personnel involved were not of SARS but of the Safe Delta squad inaugurated in December 2019 by the Delta State Police Command to check crime in the state. Another claim is that Joshua Ambrose was not shot, but that he jumped out of the car. He did not die but was taken to the hospital (Toromade, 2020). Nevertheless, the Police did not provide any image to substantiate its claim in what developed as a pictorial event. Again, the argument it makes is not perceptible in the video which is the only "evidence" available to the public.

In a short while, the video went viral in the cyberspace. Other images derived from it – stills and edited videos – were also widely circulated on social media and other online platforms. In the course of their dissemination, they generated and have continued to generate comments that not only condemn the violence against Joshua Ambrose but reflect the long-standing frustration about police brutality in Nigeria. Special Anti-Robbery Squad especially has been accused of human right violation including extortion, torture,

¹ Culled from YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k23woCSuQ48>.

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rape and extrajudicial killings (Akinyetun, 2021). The video of alleged killing of Joshua Ambrose stirred up the pent-up anger against the Police and the networked Nigerians demanded for disbandment of SARS, thus, #EndSARS.

In a couple of days, the online struggle had metamorphosed into a huge street protest in which multitude of youths came out in different Nigerian cities to engage in the collective fight against police violence. The movement was on the other hand an opportunity to bring the Nigerian government to account for its failure to deliver on the promise of socio economic transformation in a democratic political system. Relating to the latter, in a Facebook post Odugu (2020) remarks that "the issues cut deeper than SARS." #EndSARS was the tipping point of accumulated distress occasioned by decades of leadership failure, political corruption, poverty and inequality, infrastructural paucity, ethnic and religious prejudice. With respect to the beginning of the protest, its mode of expansion and in terms of the associated forms of political articulation, images are central to #EndSARS. This visuality reflects the fast growing public perception of photography in Nigeria as capable of bringing socio-political change through its

critique of democracy. Some of the images derive their political force from the nature of the photographed events or from the alteration of their visual elements. Other images are staged representations and repurposing of those created and disseminated in other unrelated contexts. The sense of responsibility with which the images are produced and circulated produce its own political effect.

These engagements with #EndSARS are important, after all, it was an image that triggered the 2020 protests in the first place. In the next three sections of this paper, I examine how production and circulation of images (precisely photographs and videos) produced political force that sustained the protest. The visual materials are read along with the comments they have generated on their sites of circulation which especially include Facebook and Nairaland (a locally popular social media site in Nigeria). I begin with analysis of the sense of obligation that drives the visual practices. Then I look at digital image editing and appropriation of disparate photographs as political tools. The last section focuses on how politically-charged performances become images in their own right and take

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up iconic status that allow them to sustain the protest indefinitely on the minds of viewers of the images.

Methods

Digital methods were employed in this study to account for its entanglement with virtual resources. The studied phenomenon, a civil movement, was partly a virtual event, and the data examined in relation to it are digital, along with their components – emoticons, comments, hyperlinks, shares – all organised according to the affordances of digital technology. Social media sites, blogs and newspaper websites are the key online platforms on which #EndSARS-related images have continued to circulate. In thinking about photography and online civil struggle, it is important to consider the compositionality of the image, but also who sees it, its re-circulation and the user comments it elicits. The activist charge of the visual practices is embedded in these elements. Consequently, the images examined here are those which by virtue of their contents, sites of circulation and accompanying comments reflect strong political undertaking in relation to #EndSARS. Most of them were retrieved from Facebook and the home-grown platform called Nairaland, given that they are among the most widely used social

media sites by Nigerians. Again, they are user-friendly in terms of commenting and re-circulation. To this end, the images were downloaded along with comments. For some of the images, I followed the links to other online platforms from where they were shared on Facebook or Nairaland. As Rose (2016) notes, digital methods ask questions about production, circulation and response to and ethical concerns about digital objects. These elements are crucial to the argument developed in this paper and informed selection of tools of visual analysis which include compositional interpretation and audiencing. Compositional analysis concerns examination of how the photographed event is organised within the frame, whether it is an edited image or not. While the activist attributes of some of the images are decipherable from the way the visual elements of the picture are composed, others make sense through the response to them as they travel. This aspect of the visual data is addressed through audiencing as a method of analysis.

Literature review

It is important to examine #EndSARS and images given that while the movement turned out to be more far-reaching than any other one in Nigeria since the return

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of democracy in 1999, visibility has become an important element of politics and civil mobilisation in the country. Since the end of the 2000s, the activist ways in which many Nigerians use images on social media give a sense of conviction that there is something about photography that can be exploited for transformation of a failed democracy.

In the last nine months, some scholarly work has been done around the #EndSARS protest but its visual element has not been well explored. The scanty existing literature in this regard includes Ojemola and Ayo-Obiremi's (2021) examination of humorous memes as a mode of youth participation in critical national events of 2019-2020. They use election, COVID-19 crisis and the #EndSARS protests as cases and analyse a set of three photographs and a screenshot of typewritten texts in the section that deals with #EndSARS. It opens up a discussion around how images portray the youths' level of understanding of the cause they were pursuing and the protesters' moral justification for attacking and even killing police officials in return for their brutality. A look at memes in relation to #EndSARS presents an opportunity to engage with the complex ways in which images played out in the movement. But since the protests

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are just a part and not the only case examined in the paper, there is no room to tear the images apart, to bring out their centrality in the protests.

While the literature on the visual dimension of #EndSARS is scanty, the body of work in other aspects of the movement is expanding. Some scholars explore the technological underpinnings of the mobilisation of the protest especially the deployment of social media (Obadare, 2021; Ugochukwu & Nwolu, 2021; Dambo et al. 2021). The #EndSARS hashtag began trending on Twitter in 2017; so, since then, the agitation to scrap SARS continued to build up on social media until 3 October 2020 when a video of the alleged killing by a team from the same unit of the Nigerian police began to circulate on social media. The protest raged online and a few days later, it materialised in the physical world with multitude of youths taking to the street.

Meanwhile, there is an approach to analysis of #EndSARS that treats police brutality as symptomatic of state oppression and other harsh living conditions that the government has failed to address. These include insecurity, poverty, political corruption and much more. There is a widespread perception of

colonialism as the root of the crises in colonised societies such as Nigeria. The British for instance compromised democracy in Nigeria in the late 1950s when the country had its first election (Ikediugwu, 2021). Orabueze, Ukaogo, David-Ojukwu, Eze, & Orabueze (2021) argue that while the colonial hangover is undeniable, we cannot continue to bemoan the legacies of colonialism. Nigeria can be transformed like other ex-colonies such as China and India, not necessarily through protest, but by government's exercise of political will to lead the transformation process. #EndSARS could not bring the expected revolution. So, in some literature, the protest is portrayed as a failure. In Usman, Bashiru, & Auwal's (2020) view, for such a movement to succeed, "the organizers should take a stock of the political environments in order to identify the local power matrix with considerable level of influence as well as the normative and cultural inclinations of the target publics to which they address their action" (p. 120).

Rather than accomplish any revolutionary end, the #EndSARS movement helped to advance the image of precarity which corruption, insurgency, banditry and other forms of violence have given Nigeria. The

negative image is an impediment to foreign investment and international tourism and has impact on how the foreign policies of other countries affect Nigeria. As Ayozie (2020) puts it, the #EndSARS movement "has dented Nigeria's image;" so, rebranding the country is imperative to restore international confidence and to "instil patriotism, loyalty, trust and discipline among Nigerians" (p. 68).

Political sense of commitment

In a country where unemployment, infrastructural paucity, inflation and general high cost of living impinge on economic opportunities, the youths commit their meagre resources to civil struggle. Visual production is at the heart of the struggle and they invest their resources and ingenuity in it. For most young people in Nigeria, internet-enabled smart phone is a must-have. Beyond voice telephony services, the device gives one some level of visibility in a connected world in which images play a key role. It also allows one to share moments of happiness and of sadness. The mere sight of members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad is frustrating for many Nigerians due to the squad's association with intimidation and violence against civilians. Such brutal exercise of power and in fact

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other markers of failure on the part of the ruling class are the key subjects of the "ubiquitous camera." The notion of ubiquitous camera "speaks to the pervasive presence of mobile and portable devices that have the capacity to take photographs and support interpersonal sharing of images across a range of digital platforms" (Agbo, 2019 p. 288). The camera is used purposefully and at times surreptitiously to expose the duplicities and acts of oppression by state functionaries.

In the earlier-described video of the police violence in Ughelli that triggered the #EndSARS protest, we notice the sense of commitment that organises the use of the ubiquitous camera. The man partly pictured in the video shares his attentiveness between controlling the car he is driving and the camera he is using to capture the scene in front of him. However, it is not certain what image emerged from that exertion given that what went viral is the video in which he is caught by another individual (Prince Nicholas Makolomi) behind him in the car. In any case, both individuals shared the same sense of obligation, to record what they witnessed. Circulation usually comes after recording, because the ultimate goal

in the context of political use of the camera in Nigeria and elsewhere is to expose acts of injustice. Many pictures with activist undertone that are circulated on social media are most often imbued with the persuasion to re-circulate them. There is something inherently transformative about public knowledge of exposed acts of injustice. Hayes (2009) examines the concept of "exposure" with reference to the photographic practices among black South African photographers in the 1980s. They believed that to fit their work into the context of anti-apartheid struggle, they were under obligation to *expose* the violence of apartheid.

The Nigeria Police and its brutality have long been under surveillance by aggrieved Nigerians. So, once the alleged killing in Ughelli was recorded with the camera, the image was put up in the public domain of social media. Due to the ban of Twitter in Nigeria, the original video shared on the platform by Prince Nicholas Makolomi is no longer accessible. However, the screenshot of the video shortly after it was uploaded on Twitter is available online (figure 1). The video was accompanied by the text: "What is happening in this Ughelli, how can police take a boy car and kill him and starts running with the car what will you call this, save delta 009 and

others." Considering the phrasing of the comment, it appears to have been done hurriedly. But this does not detract from



the political effect of the post and the eyewitness context of its production. In fact, the hurriedness speaks to the sense of urgency that drove Makolomi's action in relation to the video. He must have told himself: "This image needs to go out there immediately."

Figure 1: Screenshot of the video in which Prince Nicholas Makolomi reported the alleged shooting of a young man by SARS personnel in Ughelli.²

That commitment was reiterated when Makolomi was arrested by the Police few days later, precisely on 5 October 2020. In an interview, he says: "I honestly did it as a concerned citizen on the actions of some policemen... Despite my ordeal and my subsequent release, I do not have any regret for my actions because Nigeria has to be great again and what I did was what every citizen will do" (Brisibe, 2020). The viewing and re-circulation of the video began straightaway, affirming that sense of urgency. The screenshot of the video shown in figure 1 was taken only 8 minutes after it was uploaded and within that short period, it was shared and viewed by three and seven users respectively. In few days, it went viral and provoked the #EndSARS protest.

² The image was accessed via Google search. The Twitter page on which it was originally shared (<https://twitter.com/kesterkings1/status/1312451291298160641/video/1>) is not accessible due to the ban of the social media site in Nigeria.

Retrieval date: 20 March 2021.

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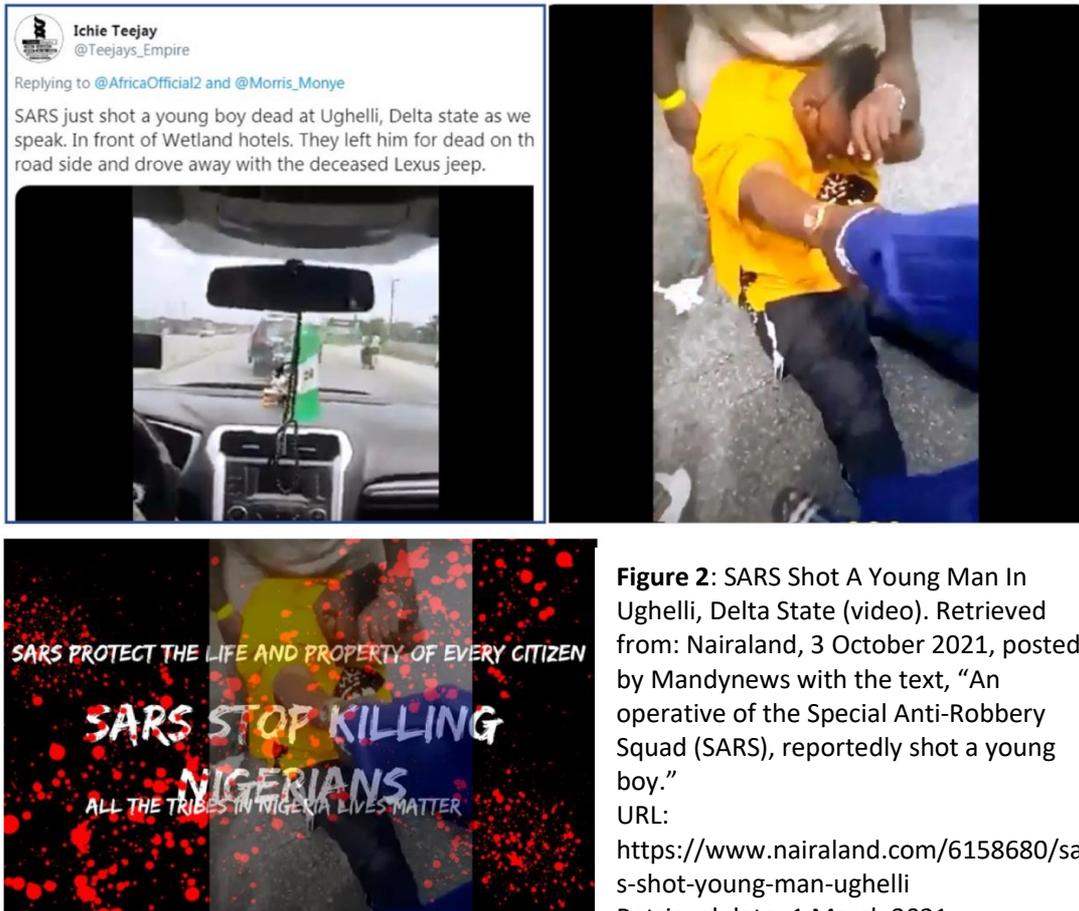


Figure 2: SARS Shot A Young Man In Ughelli, Delta State (video). Retrieved from: Nairaland, 3 October 2021, posted by Mandynews with the text, “An operative of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), reportedly shot a young boy.”
 URL: <https://www.nairaland.com/6158680/sars-shot-young-man-ughelli>
 Retrieval date: 1 March 2021.

Visual editing

As the video continued to travel online, it was transformed immensely. In the tradition of Nigerian digital visual culture where the line between still photography and video is blurred, the video was turned into still pictures in the course of its circulation. The three still images in figure 2 are frames from an edited video that

combines the one shared by Makolomi and other visual elements. The first picture (top left) shows a screenshot of Makolomi’s video shared on Twitter with a comment by another user of the platform, Ichie Teejay. In the second picture (top right), as the alleged murderers of Joshua Ambrose dropped his body and zoomed off, passers-by came to his rescue, but sadly, as

alleged, he could not survive. The last image (lower left) comes with more obvious marker of visual transformation where some inscriptions and splashes of red colour are superimposed on the frame of the rescue effort of Joshua. The inscriptions read: "SARS protect the life and property of every citizen. SARS stop killing Nigerians. All the tribes in Nigeria lives matter."

Those words encapsulate the concerns and demands of the protesters, and the intervention on the image shows that the visual practices that drive online activism in Nigeria are characterised by a lot of digital editing. Through editing techniques which include photomontage, collage, appendage of texts, turning videos into stills and vice-



versa, variations of images often imbued with political force are produced from one.

Figure 3: Blood-stained Nigerian flags, Buhari's portrait and evocation of Lekki Tollgate massacre.³

³ Retrieved from: Facebook, 21 October 2020, posted by MC-Obo Sure, with the text, "Composition of Nigeria Bad Government."

URL:https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=135648771624090&id=10374673481429

4. Retrieval date: 20 March 2021.

The metaphor of blood-stained Nigerian flag (explicated in more details in the next section) was reproduced through editing. The photographs in figure 3 illustrate the earlier-mentioned approaches to editing the images produced and circulated in the context of the #EndSARS protest. By means of image transforming and sharing applications, different photographs are brought together to produce certain ways of seeing that raise political critique. Drawn from film theory, this method called "montage" by Eisenstein (1949) is rooted in the principle that images taken at different times and on unconnected occasions could have some intrinsic connection at visual or connotative levels.

In the top left photograph in figure 3, the blood-stained flag is accompanied by the inscription: "On this day 20-10-20, the Nigerian flag was stained with the blood of the innocent protesters #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria." It was the day soldiers shot into the crowd of protesters at the Lekki Tollgate and killed many. The inscription sounds like a historical record engraved in stone for future generations to meet it. To bring out that sense of public history, a similar message is delivered in the form of

billboard in the lower left image. In the top right picture, three identical Nigerian flags whose supposed blood stain looks more fictitious than the other are placed side by side. They appear to have been created digitally. The lower right segment of the picture plane is filled with Nigerian map rendered in green colour and in front of it is a child crying with the mouth wide open and whose facial expression takes after the crying emoji on the centre of the picture. These are all visual codes of a nation in a mournful state. The crying child has been circulated on the internet for many years but is infused into the visual representation of #EndSARS because it casts light on the new reality in Nigeria. It does not matter if it originally has nothing to do with #EndSARS. The Mexico-based photographer, Pedro Meyer works within the domain of documentary, a genre classically predicated on neutral pursuit of a subject with the camera to expose what is possibly knowable about it. But he does not consider production of his photographs completed until he transforms them through digital editing. He argues strongly that it is through editing that "real reality" is brought out (Meyer, 1995).

When a photograph is transformed in the manner Meyer does, it makes particular meanings to viewers within the context of the culture in which it is produced. The lower right picture in figure 3 is the portrait of Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari digitally rendered like a screen print in black and white. Here he is said to be "wanted," a term which could evoke meanings that could be antithetical – to be endeared to people so that they yearn to see you or to have a criminal record so you are trailed to be arrested and brought to book. For many of the #EndSARS protesters, the President was on the top list of wanted criminals. His government is no less than what Ihekwe (2020) calls "totalitarianism in democracy." The level of economic hardship, insecurity and marginalisation, all of which have led to secessionist agitations in some regions of the country, is higher in his government than any other one since 1999. The protest had lasted for nearly three weeks before President Buhari considered addressing the protesters. Given the loss of trust in his administration and the anger against him, the #EndSARS protesters would possibly kill him had he made his 22 October 2020 speech in a public space where he would be accessible to the angry youths. The

killing of the President was indeed carried out in the form of performance, an analysis developed in the last segment of the body of this paper.

Visual appropriations

The appropriation or re-purposing of photographs as examined here entails using them in a context that differs markedly from the original. But many would consider it misleading to insert a photograph into an event that has no connection with it. This perception is rooted in the foundational understanding of photography as neutral representation of the world such as found in the work of Talbot (1844). Later, the truth claim of photography began to be challenged. With the writings of scholars like Sontag (1977), we are made not to think of photography as "truth" but as a medium that creates new realities and empowers people.

During the #EndSARS protest, photo appropriation allowed Nigerians to share the perception of what Nigeria was at the moment and to heighten the frustration that would sustain the protest. Consider the photograph in figure 4. It shows the profile view of a man carrying a body wrapped in blood-stained Nigerian flag but whose hand is dangling as if lifeless. Other sources indicate that the body is

that of a woman. The photograph is found on many online platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. On 23 October, International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) shared it on its Facebook page. It was posted as a link

to an article on ICIR's website and was accompanied by the comment: "A photo of a man carrying a woman wrapped in a blood-stained Nigeria flag has been shared repeatedly on social media as one of the victims of Lekki Toll Gate incident."



Figure 4: A man carrying a body wrapped in a blood-stained Nigeria flag.⁴

⁴ Retrieved from: Facebook, 23 October 2020, posted by International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), with the text, "A man carrying a woman wrapped in a blood-stained Nigeria flag." URL: <https://web.facebook.com/TheICIR/posts/3368682036579824>. Retrieval date: 4 March 2021.

The Lekki Tollgate to which the photograph is linked is a significant site in the story of the #EndSARS protest. On 13 October 2020, the unarmed protesters in Lagos moved to the tollgate, thereby disrupting the traffic and collection of toll. They were unarmed and only carried the Nigerian flag with them. They also stationed waste bins to avoid littering the surrounding. On 20 October 2020, soldiers arrived in the scene. To demonstrate that they were peaceful, the protesters knelt down, waved the Nigerian

flag and recited the national anthem. Sadly, the security forces fired into the crowd and killed many of the young people. The blood of citizens who were only peacefully demanding for a better country for all stained the flag. The bloodbath which became the turning point of the protest ignited international public outrage. That day was branded "Black Tuesday," a day that the Nigerian state murdered its citizens that it was meant to protect.

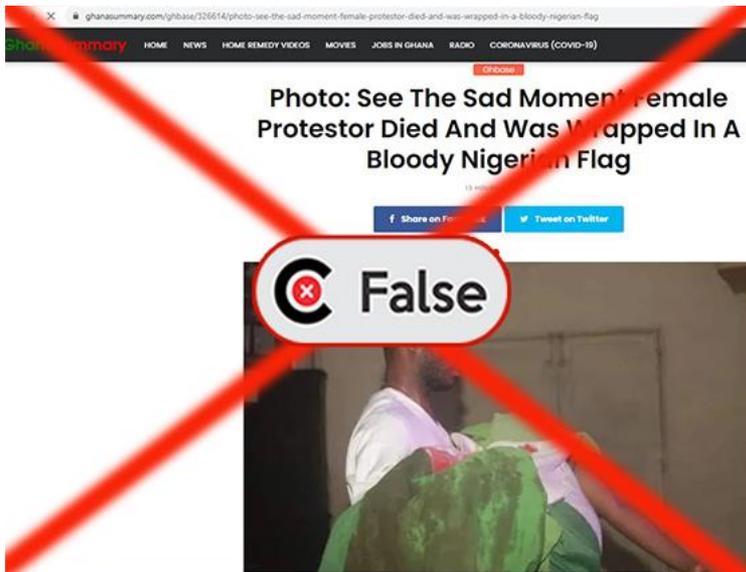


Figure 5: The photo of a man carrying a body wrapped in a blood-stained Nigeria flag has no connection with #EndSARS. Retrieved from ICIR, 23 October 2020. It is one of the images accompanying the article: "The photo of a man carrying a woman wrapped in blood stained Nigerian flag is not from Lekki toll gate incident" ⁵

⁵ Niyi Oyedeji URL: <https://www.icirnigeria.org/the-photo-of-a-man-carrying-a-woman-wrapped-in-blood-stained-nigerian-flag-is-not-from-lekki-toll-gate-incident/?fbclid=IwAR0tVKLDN-IKByH4fquDODyYuDpNQZaUI4Eay0i73TViEwIJ1QBJgSwylao>.
Retrieval date: 4 March 2021.

If you follow the image in figure 4 to ICIR's website from where it was shared on Facebook, you find Niyi Oyedeji's article that explains the dissociation between the photograph and #EndSARS. The disconnection is marked with the word "false" superimposed on the photograph as shown in figure 5. Oyedeji (2020) writes that the photograph was originally taken on 1 October (nearly three weeks before the Lekki Tollgate incident) during a stage drama performance in Uyo by the Akwa Ibom State branch of Nigeria Christian Corpers Fellowship (NCCF). On Facebook, the photograph is controversial. Having apparently followed it to Oyedeji's article to learn about its provenance, most of the users in their comments condemn it as a photographic dissemination of fake news. On the other hand, some of the commentators do not dismiss the photograph for the mere reason that it was not taken at Lekki Tollgate. For instance, Agboola (2020) says: "That it happened in a drama does not mean it did not happen in real life." Similarly, Anjorin (2020) comments: "Yes, there are lots of fake stories flying around. But the truth is that soldiers actually came to Lekki tollgate and opened fire on innocent protesters at night. There is enough evidence on this despite the Federal

government moves to cover up on it." Agboola and Anjorin stand for those who understand the power of visual appropriation as a tool in the civil struggle. In an article published in *This Day* newspaper, Adeniyi (2020) brilliantly sums up the idea of appropriation by saying that blood-stained flag is only a symbolic sign of the Lekki Tollgate massacre. One may not be sure of what exactly happened, "but it really doesn't matter... To be shot by soldiers (with or without a flag) while protesting is a stain on the conscience of any nation." The blood-stained flag as a metaphoric sign was not only used in the context of appropriation. It was also important in photographic performances which, like other uses of photography in the protest, was intended to make some impact.

Performing the image

The visual component of the #EndSARS movement illuminates how photographic practices bring people together in the quest to improve their living condition. The protest constituted events that became images, some iconic, others symbolic and generative. Working within the discipline of photography, Azoulay (2012) writes about *eventness* of the medium in two specific ways. While "the event of photography" is the endless encounter

that ensues in relation to the image or the camera, "the photographed event" is the aspect of the encounter caught in the frame. During the #EndSARS movement, both facets of eventness produced strong political critique. The reading of related photographs as performance can be approached in two ways. Some emerged through the conventional process of freezing the fleeting world, but in their composition came out with some theatricality that heightened their political force and made them iconic. Others were strictly performed for the camera.

The image of Aisha Yesufu (figure 6) elucidates the first category of analysis. She appears in her grey-blue hijab with the fringe of her colourful gown shown between that of the hijab and her sneakers. A bag is hung under her left arm while the right arm with clenched fist is raised up. She wears a facemask like most of the people bearing placards behind her.

The photograph was taken on 10 October 2020 by Abuja-based photographer, Victor Odiba, during the #EndSARS protest in Abuja which Aisha co-convened. Although the photograph is one in a series showing Aisha along with other protesters in different poses including kneeling and standing, it is not clear if it was a performance for the camera. Nonetheless, Aisha's pose – legs standing stable at ease, fist clenched and raised in solidarity and eyes looking defiant – is theatrical in every sense. No sooner had the photograph been uploaded to the internet than it went viral. It quickly became one of the iconic images of the #EndSARS protest and was reproduced in a variety of formats and circulated widely on the internet. One remarkable instance of its circulation is its juxtaposition with the America's Statue of Liberty. Again, in 2021, Emmanuel Omoregie, a visual art student of University of Benin made a statue of Aisha in the pose portrayed in the photograph, to appreciate her role in the protest.



Figure 6: Aisha Yesufu the activist. Retrieved from: Facebook, 11 October 2020, posted by Anaedo Voice with the text, "Her name is Aisha Yesufu! #EndSARS."⁶

It is noteworthy that the iconicity of antecedent, personality and background. Aisha's photograph derives from her She is a co-convener of the

⁶ URL: <https://web.facebook.com/anaedogossip/posts/654505418455210>.

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#BringBackOurGirls campaign organised to demand for the rescue of the school girls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents in April 2014. As a famous activist who has been vocal on conventional and social media in her critique of the failures of the state, when Aisha joined the #EndSARS movement, many were drawn in to join. Meyer (1995, p. 185) notes that "celebrities carry spotlight with them...By virtue of presence, the celebrity can bring media and public attention to a cause that would otherwise be neglected." Aisha stands for the celebrity figure which was available to drive the protests in different cities. The street protest ended in November 2020 but with the iconic images such as Aisha Yesufu's and the internet, #EndSARS continues.

The other aspect of theatricality of visual production in the protest involves performing for the camera. One of such performances involves the protesters' use of Nigerian flag and the portraits of the Nigerian state functionaries. The blood-stained flag that emerged from the shooting at Lekki Tollgate was taken up as a prop in the performance. It became the symbol of Nigerian government's crackdown on the protest, refusal to listen to the demands of the youths and the inclination to sustain state oppression.

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Again, by staining the flag with the blood of citizens, the Nigerian government had desecrated the national symbol. The angry youths sought to bring attention to the crime by parading flags soaked in blood. Youths deployed performative photography to keep reminding the world of the state crime symbolised by the blood-stained flag even long after the #EndSARS street protest. For instance, in the 2021 Miss Africa Russia Pageant in Moscow, Chiamaka Udeh performed with blood-stained Nigerian flag. In early 2021 when Comedian Bovi (Abovi Ugboma) co-hosted the fourteenth edition of the Hip Hop World Magazine's Headies music award, he appeared in a dress made of blood-stained Nigerian flag. The photographs of these instances are all over the internet. The effect of this photographic performance is that the #EndSARS protest is sustained in that way irrespective of some critics' contention that the national symbol is being desecrated more.

In another instance, such symbolic performances were used during the protest to imagine catastrophic end of the Nigerian political elites who have failed as leaders. In the understanding that photography has the capacity to heal or harm (Behrend, 2003), portraits of

President Buhari and other top politicians were stained with red and circulated online as a way to imagine them as victims of the Lekki Tollgate massacre that produced the blood-stained flag. The climax of it all was that the protesters made a casket for the President and used his portraits to stand in for his body. That way, the youths declared him dead.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, I have analysed the production and dissemination of images during the #EndSARS protest as political acts that intensified the social movement and in a broader sense illuminate how visual practices contribute to the transformation of Africa's political sphere. The belief in this political strength of the image is demonstrated by the sense of duty with which it is created and distributed. There is a huge investment of creativity and resources in the visual practices which are in some cases pursued under difficult conditions. Then, following the production

of the image, it could be edited, for instance by transforming its format or integrating it with others which may have no connection with it. A photograph can also be assigned to an entirely different event to enable a particular form of political articulation. These can definitely be read as fabrication, but through that process, the "real reality" of society is brought to the fore. Again, through photographic performance, the #EndSARS protesters extended the temporality and geography of the movement. They imagined annihilation of the political elites whose failure in their duties as leaders motivated the agitation in the first place. The nuances of the visuality of #EndSARS are worth giving attention because they are indicative of the high expectation on images to drive the revolution being fomented in many postcolonial African states.

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